GLOBALIZED GIRLHOOD : The teachings of femininity in *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* – a case study

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own, unaided work, except for the acknowledged supervision and referenced citations.

Deidre Donnelly January 2002

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a comparative case study of two South African women's magazines, *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love.* The comparison is based on the fact that *Cosmopolitan* is an international magazine brand which is largely read by white women in this country, while *True Love* is a local publication produced for, and consumed by, black South African women. The case study makes use of both text and audience analysis. The text analysis begins as a genre study, in an attempt to 'denaturalize' the magazine form, and includes an intertextual analysis of the magazines and their secondary texts, or brand extensions. The magazine genre is considered from a cultural studies perspective and in the light of feminist media criticism. A reception analysis, informed by focus group research, provides the audience analysis component of this case study.

Primarily, this thesis is concerned with the reception of women's magazines by teenage girls. It interrogates the assumption that, in the absence of a local 'teen' magazine industry and western rite-of-passage ritual, women's magazines serve as cultural developmental markers and informal educational devices in the passage from girlhood to adulthood. This study adopts a poststructuralist view on the self as socially constructed within discourse. In this view, the media serve as resources for identity construction and negotiation. Gender, a particular discourse organized around the constructs of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', is inscribed in the subject along with other discourses, such as those of race, class and ethnicity. Women's magazines, which provide an example of a 'women's genre', give 'femininity' a material form. Their glossy visual appeal is illustrative of the commodity fetishism associated with advanced capitalism and their continuing success demonstrates how consumption, identity and desire are intimately connected within postmodern consumer culture. Above all, this thesis recognizes that women's magazines are discursive sites-of-struggle which need to be considered from a position which is neither purely condemning nor purely celebratory, but finds instead a balance between 'creativity' and 'constraint'. Both the text-based and audience-centred components of this study draw on strands of discourse analysis. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) of Norman Fairclough informs the thesis as a whole but is applied specifically to the text analysis. The concept of 'interpretive repertoires' proposed by theorists who use discourse analysis in social psychology (DASP) is applied to the analysis of focus group material.

INTRODUCTION

This study takes a gender related approach to the study of youth and the media by focusing on the relationship between media consumption practices and gender identity in teenage girls specifically. My central concern is the relationship between gender, media and culture. The main aim of the research is to examine the relationship between consumption and identity, based on the assumption that "consumption practices and aspirations [have become] central to the social construction of identity, within the analytical model of postmodernity" (Bocock 1993: 79).

My understanding of the relationship between consumption and identity is based on an awareness of commercial culture as "an everyday spectacle which is available for symbolic interpretation and aesthetic investment" (Murray 1998: iii), while identity is understood as "an active set of performances which show to others, and to the person himself, the kind of person he desires to be taken to be" (Bocock 1993: 94). The media consumption practices of young South African girls are of concern, considering specifically the effects of globalisation and global cultural influences on local identities. The acknowledged intertextuality of media forms informs my analysis of television and magazines – an analysis which focuses on the relationship between media consumption and gender identity. This study takes the form of an intertextual analysis and case study, combining both text based and audience centered analysis. The primary focus, however, is on media reception and the way in which teenage girls actively make sense of everyday media messages. This focus is based on the belief that "methods of making sense are the key to any kind of explanation of the self, as people's sense of themselves is in fact a conglomerate of these methods, produced through talk and theorizing"(Potter & Wetherall, 1987: 102).

Identities are social and cultural and are constituted within the "network of meaning structures" that exist at any historical moment (Coullie, 1991: 9). These meaning structures, or ways of constituting reality, are discourses – large groups of statements which impose ways of looking at the world (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998). Discourses, which circulate in all forms of social interaction and cultural production, offer

subject positions and "help constitute us as social subjects" (Storey, 1999: 79). Identity is thus constructed from the interaction of various discourses and is always in the process of becoming, "a moving towards rather than an arrival" (Barker, 1999: 3). Identities are incomplete discursive constructions which are "as much about the future as the past" (Storey, 1999: 3). This understanding allows Barker (1997: 165) to define identities as "discursive-performative texts". The media serves as a resource in the process of identity construction because "identity work increasingly draws its resources from a range of social practices which involve absent others and necessarily engage with the social imaginary" (Barker, 1999: 4).

Identity is constituted within the available subject positions provided by the discursive system (Coullie, 1991). Within any given period, different discourses compete for subjectivity and the social subject is thus constituted as "a particular configuration of subject positions" (Fairclough, 1989: 102). Subject positions are specific to discourse types and, because identities are never fixed but always in a process of becoming, the individual can occupy a range of subject positions over a lifetime (Fairclough, 1989). Gender is a particular discourse which is inscribed in the subject (along with other discourses such as class, ethnicity and sexuality) and provides certain socially constructed subject positions. Indeed, "it is within discourses that we are offered subject positions which convey notions of what it is to be a man or a woman and which constitute our masculinity and femininity" (Pease, 2000: 35). Gender, which refers to those attributes and codes of conduct assigned to each sex within a specific social context, becomes a "seemingly 'natural' or inevitable part of our identity and for that matter often a problematic one" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 33).

Discourses, which are found in the institutions responsible for the socialization of the child, function by the authority of what is 'natural' or 'normal' (Weedon, 1987: 98). It is when discourses have become naturalized and part of common sense that their ideological underpinnings are most powerful: "naturalization, then, is the most formidable weapon in the armoury of power, and therefore a significant focus of struggle" (Fairclough, 1989: 105). The focus on consumer magazines forms part of the larger feminist concern to re-evaluate popular cultural forms of expression which occupy a denigrated status due to gender based categories assigned to them. The academic derision of the magazine form has been addressed by several theorists, who have

recognized that the popularity of the form requires that magazines be 'denaturalised' and studied as 'cultural tools' (Laden, 1997), since they function as sites where meanings are contested and made (Beetham, 1996). For the purposes of this paper, which attempts to explore the relationship between consumption and identity in young girls, magazines are understood as 'meta-commodities' – commodities which serve as vehicles for the dissemination of other commodities (Beetham, 1996:2). In terms of gender identity, my concern is to explore the possibility of self-transformation and self-improvement which women's magazines, specifically, suggest. This concern stems from the recognition that "whether or not people have 'real' access to the options [magazines] evoke, or whether they are able to afford them…their cultural force lies in their organizational or motivational/aspirational cogency" (Laden, 2000: 11).

Women's magazines are highly contradictory and ambivalent forms. Their juxtaposition of feminist discourses with more traditional discourses of femininity is a source of constant tension. Academic analyses of women's magazines have, variously, and at different stages, regarded the genre as either a source of oppression or potential liberation. It is largely the attention given to the topic of self-improvement, particularly with reference to physical appearance that "contradicts and then undermines the overall prowoman fare" in contemporary women's magazines (Wolf, 1990: 69). The highly sexualized images of ultra-thin fashion models which adorn the pages of women's magazines reflect how, "in western societies the slim and well-trained body is an object of admiration and sign of self-control" (Thesander, 1997: 14). Women's magazines have thus been strongly associated with the development of eating disorders in teenage girls. Of real concern is the fact that many women, specifically those living within western industrialised countries, regularly experience feelings of body dissatisfaction. Wolf (1990) cites an American study in which 33 000 American women said they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal. Women's magazines have long been representative of women's mass culture. Therefore "the extreme contradictions between the positive and negative elements of the magazine's message provoke extreme reactions in women" (Wolf, 1990: 70).

Studies on magazines and popular culture in general have tended to treat media forms as separate by isolating specific texts, rather than addressing the intertextuality of media (Hermes, 1995). Intertextuality refers to the fact that the media are "continually

cross-referencing from one medium to another, and the same 'message', story or type of narrative can be found in very different media forms and genres""(McQuail, 1994: 238). This cross-referencing is particularly evident in the way in which the print and televisual media inform each other (McQuail, 1994). It is for this reason that this study considers the way in which women's magazines and television support, reinforce or contradict each other in terms of genres, themes and meanings. Discourse analysis, being centrally concerned with language and context, typically involves intertextual analysis because it "crucially mediates the connection between language and social context" (Fairclough, 1992: 195). Intertextual analysis thus provides "a way to incorporate external context in the sense of larger societal discourses and texts" (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 135).

The role of television in identity and image aspiration cannot be ignored since television is believed to be "a leading resource for the construction of identity projects" (Barker, 1999: 3). Magazines and television will be compared briefly in terms of postmodern intertextuality; they are both heterogeneous forms, displaying a mix of genres and media (Beetham, 1996; Barker 1999). Both magazines and television are highly visual mediums which are implicated in postmodern consumer culture. Above all, both forms are tied in to everyday routines (Hermes, 1995).

Cultural studies conceives of culture as "meanings in negotiation found in all kinds of 'texts', across different sites and institutions and throughout everyday life" (Payne, 1997: 125). Cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field which frequently draws upon disparate bodies of theoretical work in order to address a specific problem or situation. This study is approached within a cultural studies framework and draws on the wider field of feminist media studies. My understanding of the subject as constituted within discourse is informed by poststructuralism, and I make use of methods from two strands of discourse analysis – discourse analysis in social psychology (DASP) and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The study will be contextual, and will therefore include certain postcolonial themes relating to the effects of global forces on social and cultural identities. Since my focus is on media consumption and audience reception of the

media, my approach will be largely qualitative and ethnographic, using focus groups to gain insight into the ways in which teenage girls interpret popular media forms[1].

The South African magazine industry

There is strong competition in the magazine market between the two main magazine publishers, National Magazines (the parent company being publishing giant Nasionale Pers) and Republican Press (part of main publishing competitor Perskor). National Magazines, once the propaganda arm of the apartheid government, now caters for all South African readers and has a 60% market share. Independent Newspapers and Times Media also moved strongly into the magazine market in the 1990's. Caxton/CTP (owned by Independent Newspapers) publishes various magazines and Thomson Publications (a division of Times Media) is one of the biggest publishers of technical and business-to-business magazines (Claasen, 1998). Although these four large companies dominate magazine publishing in South Africa, there are also many small niche publishers, such as Ramsay Son & Parker, the foremost niche publisher in the country.

Consumer magazines generate more than 60% of advertising revenue and are thus the most important division of magazine publishing. Table one (included at the end of this chapter) depicts the top twenty consumer magazines in South Africa for the January to June 2000 period and indicates that the three largest mass circulation magazines are the general interest type titles, *Huisgenoot*, *You* and *Reader's Digest*. The leading magazines with a predominantly black readership are *Bona*, *Drum* and *True Love*. *Reader's Digest* is the best known international general interest consumer magazine sold in South Africa. The South African magazine publishing industry has recently experienced tremendous growth and the number of magazine titles has grown from 639 in 1994 to 1050 in 1999. Of these, 55% are professional or trade publications with the rest being consumer magazines. New niche markets have opened up, such as the men's magazine market and the décor, lifestyle and travel market. The women's magazine market is considered saturated, since several international women's magazines were launched in South Africa during the 1990's. The annual turnover in the magazine industry (including imports) is estimated at R2 billion, while the advertising

[1] Although the focus group transcripts are not included in this thesis, copies are available on request.

revenue in 1999 was R1.2 billion (of a total of R7.9 billion across all media) (www.wesgro.co.za).

In South Africa it is generally women, students and people under 35 who read magazines more than any other group (Claasen, 1998). According to the All Media and Product Survey figures for 2000, the largest percentage of magazine readers are youths between the ages of 16-24. This age group makes up 34% of magazine readers and reads magazines more than they read newspapers (whether daily, weekly or community). During 1996, Natmags, a division of publishing giant Nasionale Pers, commissioned the independent Bureau of Markets and Media (BMM) to conduct a research survey into teenage market. The study included black and white participants between the ages of 13 and 24 and made use of both questionnaires and interviews. The results showed that, under 'interests and activities', 60.1 percent of white participants enjoyed reading magazines and 74.7% of the black participants chose reading magazines as a leisure activity.

South Africa has very few successful magazine publications directed at teenagers specifically. The most successful and fastest growing youth publication is *Studentlife* (*SL*), which is directed at tertiary level students. The magazine's focus on club culture and its non-gender specific emphasis means that it is not suited to the purposes of this study, which is concerned to explore the way in which discourses of gender are articulated in gender exclusive magazines and how these are interpreted by teenage girls. The two magazines under study, *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* are the highest selling English women's magazine titles in South Africa (see table of ABC circulation figures). Although these publications are not directly targeted at teenage readers, it is my belief that these publications are the most familiar to black and white teenage girls in South Africa, in the absence of any teenage specific titles[2].

Cosmopolitan, launched in South Africa in 1984, is owned by Jane Raphaely and Associates (Pty) Ltd, which consists of two companies, Nasionale Pers (who own 50%) and Raphaely Kηhnel Investments (Pty) Ltd (also 50%)[3]. *Cosmopolitan* was first

[2] This belief was confirmed by participants of this study (see analysis chapter)
[3] Jane Raphaely, former Editor of *Fair Lady*, extended her publishing concerns in 1988 when she lauched the new-look *Femina* magazine. She did this under the company name of Associated Magazines which was a joint venture between Raphaely and the other major magazine publisher, Republican Press.

launched in America in 1965 and has come to typify the new generation of 'liberated' young women's magazines that emerged alongside second-wave feminism (Macdonald, 1995: 87). The international *Cosmopolitan* brand is known for its "aspirational, individualist, can-do-tone" and up-beat modes of address (Wolf, 1990: 69). *True Love* is one of the fastest growing magazines in South Africa and is the biggest selling English-language women's glossy magazine in the country. The magazine is the only glossy magazine which appeals to specifically black women. *True Love* underwent a major re-launch in 1995 with the aim of attracting a younger readership. Since the re-launch, the magazine has achieved a dramatic increase in sales and readership. From October 1999 to October 2000, *True Love* saw a 22% increase in sales and a 39% increase in readership.

This thesis continues as follows:

CHAPTER TWO provides the theoretical background to this study by locating the women's magazine genre within the fields of cultural studies and feminist media studies.

CHAPTER THREE explains my choice of methodology, with specific emphasis on discourse analysis and the theory of intertextuality.

CHAPTER FOUR, the content analysis Chapter, includes a genre study, intertextual analysis and critical discourse analysis of the media texts under study. Graphs and illustrative material are included at the end of this Chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE provides a reception analysis, based on the focus group results. Theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter three are applied to the focus group results.

CHAPTER SIX, the conclusion, provides a summary of the research findings and offers concluding remarks.

ABC CIRCULATION FIGURES

(January - June 2000 Total net sales)

TITLE	FREQUENCY	JAN-JUN 2000
Huisgenoot	Weekly	395 371
You	Weekly	246 846
Reader's Digest (SA)	Monthly	208 538
Bona & Thandi	Monthly	183 266
Sarie	Fortnightly	147 956
Woman's Value	Monthly	143 763
Drum	Weekly	125 758
Car	Monthly	111 482
TV Plus	Monthly	109 253
True Love	Monthly	106 538
Cosmopolitan	Monthly	105 920
Rooi Rose	Fortnightly	105 365
Fair Lady	Fortnightly	101 732
Getaway	Monthly	99 010
SA Garden & Home	Monthly	89 015
Essentials	Monthly	86 824
People	Fortnightly	82 080
Femina	Monthly	78 815
Men's Health	Monthly	73 721
Your Family	Monthly	73 571

THEORY CHAPTER

This study, which is above all concerned with the relationship between media consumption and gender identity, is approached using text analysis and qualitative reception-analysis. Reception analysis is concerned with the everyday contexts of media reception and recognizes that audience members are actively involved in meaning making. Meanings are made from the everyday consumption of naturalized media forms. Feminist research efforts have sought to 'denaturalize' media texts deemed 'feminine' which have been denigrated and sidelined as 'women's genres'. Research into the women's magazine genre initially took the form of ideological and text-based analyses but, more recently, has become reader-centric in its attempts to establish the role that these texts play in the construction of gender identities. Gender identities are formed around the constructs of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and women's magazines reveal certain contradictions within the discourse of femininity. Other discourses and media texts serve as resources for identity construction and the individual draws upon the various discourses and subject positions articulated through and offered by the entire 'media ensemble' (Bausinger, 1984: 345).

The 'turn to the audience' in Cultural and Media Studies

The interdisciplinary, or 'post-disciplinary' (Payne, 1997) field of cultural studies stands in opposition to the canonical academic distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture, choosing instead to study culture as "a product of everyday life" (Mosco, 1996:250). Cultural studies concerns itself with the critical analysis of culture. Culture is a site-of-struggle, where meanings are contested and negotiated. Thus, culture is defined as "the site of negotiation, conflict, innovation, and resistance within the social relations of societies dominated by power and fractured by divisions of gender, class and race" (Payne, 1997: 125).

Cultural studies is concerned with the meanings articulated through and taken from forms of cultural communication, often focusing on the representation of collective identities, such as those based on nationality, gender and ethnicity (Van Zoonen, 1994). In contrast to the more macrosocial and political economic understandings of power,

cultural studies recognizes that power can be "local and intersubjective and accessible through observable techniques" (Mosco, 1996: 253). Cultural studies is involved in the study of everyday life, since it is ultimately at the level of the specific, the local and contextual that meanings are made. The influence of the women's movement on cultural studies is evident in the centrality of patriarchy and gender inequality in cultural studies analysis. There has been a "successful and inspiring alliance between feminist and cultural studies", both of which developed out of Marxist theory and are linked to progressive political movements outside of the academy (Van Zoonen, 1994: 6). A central theme of feminist cultural analysis concerns the tension between the pleasures of popular culture and the political aims of feminism.

Since the early eighties, the fields of feminist, media and cultural studies have developed growing interests in media audiences. Reception analysis is the result of a turn towards a more social-cultural approach to the study of media audiences, an approach which departs from structural audience measurement techniques and the behaviourist media effects tradition (McQuail, 1994). Media critics now recognize the importance of the interactive relationship between the audience and the text. Instead of conceptualizing the audience as "a passive, undifferentiated mass" (Killborn, 1992: 67), the contemporary concept of an audience acknowledges the audience's active role in meaning making and is careful not to homogenize, but to be aware of audience diversity instead. The central tenet of audience reception analysis is that audiences are active in constructing meaning from media messages. Reception analysis thus affirms the "power of the audience" (McQuail, 1994: 53). Attention is shifted from the text, usually central to studies of media content, to the contexts of reception. The associated methods of media research are largely qualitative and ethnographic, and applied to studies of the reception of television and women's magazines (Baehr & Gray, 1996). Viewer/reader diversity is recognized, as is the fact that media messages are 'polysemic' - capable of having multiple meanings. There is thus potential for 'differential decoding' of media messages according to the audience member's social position, knowledge and experience. However, audience members often belong to 'interpretative communities', sharing similar experiences and discursive frameworks with other audience members.

The concept of an 'interpretative community' was introduced by American literary critic Stanley Fish (1980), who argued that the literary community was divided into

different 'interpretative communities' with their own interests and 'interpretative assumptions'. These communities provide contexts for reception and the different assumptions underlying each 'interpretative community' result in differences in interpretation (Allen, 1987). Janice Radway's (1984) influential study on popular romance novels, for instance, argued that romance readers form an 'interpretative community' and was an early example of the new interest in audiences and their contexts of reception.

One of the first media scholars to argue for an approach that takes cognizance of the everyday contexts of media reception was Herman Bausinger (1984). Bausinger argued that any meaningful study of the media should proceed from an awareness of the fact that media use is a collective process that occurs in the context of family and friends and is an integral part of the routines of everyday life. Media texts should not be considered in isolation but should be seen as part of the 'media ensemble' which people encounter on a daily basis. Significantly, Bausinger also proposed that media use be seen as a parergic (subsidiary) or secondary activity because "as a rule, the media are not used completely, nor with full concentration" (1984: 345). Since Bausinger's proposition, daily life has become a major concern in contemporary cultural and feminist theory owing to the awareness that cultural consumption occurs in the midst of everyday routines.

One of the forerunners of reception theory is Stuart Hall whose 'encoding/decoding' model of mass communication provides one of the foundations of the cultural studies approach to cultural consumption. Hall's (1980) dynamic model responds to Laswell's linear communication model (McQuail, 1994) by charting the various stages or 'moments' through which any media message passes in the process of meaning production. The first stage occurs at the level of the media institution where communicators 'encode' media texts with meaning. These encoded meanings result from the surrounding frameworks of meaning held by the media institution, which are usually in keeping with the status quo and are likely to conform to the dominant power structures of the time (McQuail, 1994). In this way, messages are encoded in a way that directs the reader/viewer to a certain 'preferred reading'. The second stage is the level of the text, while the third stage occurs at the level of the audience. The moment of

audience decoding is when the encoded structure is interpreted according to the audience member's own experience and frameworks of knowledge.

Certain 'misunderstandings' or 'distortions' may result from a lack of equivalence between the two sides of production – there may be asymmetry between the moments of encoding and decoding (Van Zoonen, 1994). These misunderstandings are the result of polysemy in the encoded text (a text may be more 'open' or 'closed' to interpretation based on the type or amount of 'preferred meanings' present) and are also the result of differences in the reader's frame of reference (McQuail, 1994). Hall proposed three hypothetical reading positions that result in differing interpretations of meaning. The first is the 'dominant-hegemonic' reading position. Viewers in this position are operating within the dominant code and decode the message as it is has been encoded, by accepting the 'preferred reading'. The second reading position is the 'negotiated' one. A viewer operating within this code would acknowledge the 'preferred reading' but would negotiate its meanings in terms of his/her own situated conditions. This position, which offers only limited challenge to what is hegemonically encoded in the text, is likely to be adopted by the majority of the audience. The third reading position is the 'oppositional' one, where the viewer rejects the dominant definitions contained in the 'preferred reading'. The oppositional reader recognizes the 'preferred' code but chooses to decode the message according to an alternative frame of reference (Storey, 1999).

Another forerunner of reception analysis is David Morley, who tested Hall's 'encoding/decoding' model in his 1980 study *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding.* When testing whether audience interpretations corresponded to their socio-cultural background, Morley found that this was only sometimes the case, and many other cases compelled him to acknowledge that audience decodings are not determined by socio-cultural position alone. Morley was ultimately constrained by Hall's three hypothetical reading positions since they were not nuanced enough to account for the contradictions in audience interpretations (Moores, 1997). Morley proposed a more genre-based model instead and also made reference to the different competencies of the audience members. Morley noted that it was not necessarily a viewer's social position alone which determined interpretation but that interpretation was more a result of the different discourses available to the viewer. However, since social class does to a

large extent determine a person's access to different discourse types, social position still plays a part in audience interpretation of media messages (Storey, 1999).

Hall and du Gay (1997) have since extended the 'encoding/decoding' model with the notion of the 'cultural circuit'. This view holds that "meanings are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes and practices (the cultural circuit)" (du Gay, 1997: 10). The 'circuit of culture' refers to five key sites, all inextricably linked, through which cultural meaning is produced and exchanged: regulation, production, representation, consumption and identity. Meaning-making processes operating in any one site are always partially dependent on the meaning-making processes occurring in other sites for their effect (du Gay, 1997). Thus, meaning-making does not occur in terms of the transmission model, which posits that meaning is sent from the sphere of production and ends in the sphere of consumption. The 'circuit of culture' recognizes that the process of consumption in turn effects the process of production, and so on.

The connection between social class and cultural consumption was elaborated upon by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* The term 'cultural capital' describes "the unequal distribution of cultural practices, values and competencies characteristic of capitalist societies" (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 73). Bourdieu thus extends a class analysis to an analysis of cultural consumption, arguing that just as some social groups have more economic capital and therefore greater material power, so do those groups have greater cultural power and correspondingly greater symbolic power (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994). For Bourdieu, capital is not only economic but also includes symbolic capital, such as prestige, status and authority, and cultural capital, which refers to culturally valued taste and consumption patterns (Laden, 2000).

The socio-cultural approach to the study of media audiences outlined above needs to be seen in contrast to the earlier tradition of media effects to which it responds. The effects approach began with the study into wartime propaganda conducted by members of the Frankfurt School who were influenced by the work of behavioural scientists at the time. 'Media effects' refers to the supposed direct effects of media messages on individuals. This approach is also referred to as the 'hypodermic needle'

model – evoking images of intoxication, addiction and helpless victims at the mercy of an all-powerful media. The one-way effects model emphasizes what the media *do to* the audience, the results of which are assumed to be negative (O'Sullivan, 1994).

The early transmission model has long been refuted as studies have shown that media effects are mediated by other intervening variables such as age, gender and education (Van Zoonen, 1994). The communication process is now better understood and effects claims are undermined by the understanding that media signals and messages are rarely received as they are sent. Rather, media messages are polysemic and are altered by the prevalence of 'noise', and, more significantly, the receiver brings his/her own frames of reference to the process of meaning making (McQuail, 1994). Indeed, "the rejection by researchers of this notion of powerful direct effect is almost as old as the idea itself" (McQuail, 1994: 45). However, it remains true that "the entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects, yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects" (McQuail, 1994: 327). The media effects approach has been replaced by approaches which analyze "the media's role in longer-term processes of social and cultural reproduction, and the determination and construction of meanings" (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 101).

At the opposite pole to the media effects school was the 'uses and gratifications' approach, which was concerned with what the audience did *with* the media, rather than what the media did *to* the audience. This approach suggested that audience members were motivated to use the media to satisfy certain individual needs and were thus motivated to use the media in different ways. This approach differed vastly from the media effects tradition in its conceptualization of the audience as active. McQuail *et al.* (1972) offered a typology of media-person interactions which suggested that the media provide gratifications for various needs. Specifically, the media fulfill the needs for *diversion* (by providing a form of 'escape', emotional release and relaxation); *personal relationships* (by providing a sense of companionship and providing topics for conversation); *personal identity* (by allowing individuals to explore or confirm their sense of self) and *surveillance* (by satisfying the need for information about the world) (McQuail *et al.*, 1972 cited in O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994). In turn, this approach was criticized for focusing too much on individual psychological differences between media consumers

while neglecting more socially driven needs and cultural contexts of media use. The approach also failed to consider possible limits to audience activity, such as the limits posed by the 'closed' nature of texts which favour a fixed 'preferred reading'. Van Zoonen (1994) also points out that the 'uses and gratifications' approach was also a somewhat mechanistic functional model in that it suggested that the individual audience member would consciously and rationally identify a need within themselves and seek to gratify this need through selective media use.

Closely related to the 'uses and gratifications' approach are more contemporary theories of 'media pleasure'. In a recent article, O'Connor and Klaus (2000) examined the position that the concept of pleasure has held in reception analysis. They identify the two distinct and separate paths taken within reception analysis. The first path, which they refer to as the 'public knowledge' path, explores issues of media ideology and is concerned with the media's informational task and their role in promoting active citizenship. The second path is the 'popular culture' project which typically explores the pleasures of fictional media genres. Knowledge of the rules of a specific genre, its textual characteristics and intertextual possibilities, is a significant source of audience pleasure.

The main reason listed for the separate development of these two traditions of research is the fact that the 'encoding/decoding' model was difficult to apply to fictional genres, since the model was developed with more 'closed' actuality texts, such as the news, in mind. Richard Dyer (1977) was one the first to bring the two traditions into closer dialogue by applying the decoding model to fictional genres. Dyer suggested six possible 'preferred readings' of the film *Victim* based on audience enjoyment, in addition to responses to its ideological meanings (O'Connor & Klaus, 2000). Dyer's 1981 study on popular entertainment argued that the enjoyment of entertainment was based on people's utopian sensibilities and that the ideals that entertainment presents are of the kind that can only be met by capitalism. So, while entertainment seems to offer an alternative 'escape' from the reality of capitalism, the escape is typically of the kind that can only be provided by capitalism. Above all, O'Connor and Klaus argue that the two traditions, the projects of 'public knowledge' and 'popular culture', need to be brought closer together at the theoretical and empirical level because "emotion and cognition,

entertainment and information, pleasure and ideology, fact and fiction all seem to be intimately linked in the process of sensemaking" (2000: 381).

This idea of linkages between different kinds of knowledge finds most complete expression in the concept of intertextuality which acknowledges the inherent interconnectedness of different forms of cultural expression. The intertextuality of media texts was emphasized by Bausinger (1984) who, as mentioned, argued that any meaningful study of the media needs to take different media into consideration, since media texts form part of the 'media ensemble'. Intertextuality is a feature of the media and different media forms "serve as sources for each other in unchartable combinations and permutations" (McQuail, 1994: 223). Media texts also stand in relation to other cultural experiences and become significant only "when they are located within the social relationships which produce and consume them" (Strinati, 1995: 108). In the process of media consumption, the reader/viewer brings his or her own intertextual knowledge to bear on the text so that every media text is understood in relation to the other texts which the reader/viewer has interpreted.

John Fiske (1987) has developed the theory of intertextuality further, in relation to television specifically. Fiske distinguishes between two kinds of intertextuality: vertical intertextuality and horizontal intertextuality. Horizontal intertextuality refers to the relationships between primary texts linked along the axes of genre, content or character. Although intertextual relations of content can cross genre boundaries, genre still organizes intertextual relations. Generic conventions not only link texts to other texts within that generic type, but also serve as links between the text, producers and audiences. Vertical intertextuality refers to the relationship between a primary text and outside or secondary texts which refer explicitly to it, serving to promote and circulate certain meanings about the primary text to which it refers. Fiske uses the example of the television programme and the gossip columns or promotional material which refer to it. Vertical intertextuality demonstrates how "reading relations and social relations reproduce each other" (1987:108). This study provides an example of horizontal intertextuality, in the form of a comparison of *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love,* and a comparison between *The Cosmo Show* and its magazine namesake. Vertical intertextuality is demonstrated in the analysis of the magazines' brand extensions (see *Chapter Four: Content Analysis*).

Gender, the media and the feminized body

Gender is a social and cultural construct, rather than a biological given. Gender is a signifying system that allows for the cultural differentiation of male from female. Gender, then, refers to those attributes and codes of conduct assigned to each sex within a specific social context. The internalization of such pervasive gender-related ideologies results in gendered behaviour which reinforces those ideologies by appearing 'natural'. Gender is socially constructed and is not a fixed category. Rather, gender is an unstable site-of-struggle, subject to continuous negotiation (Van Zoonen, 1994). Van Zoonen's (1994: 4) understanding of gender is particularly useful:

> [gender is] a particular discourse, that is, a set of overlapping and often contradictory cultural descriptions and prescriptions referring to sexual difference which arises from and regulates particular economic, technological and other non-discursive contexts.

Gender-related media research does not form a unified body of work and although there is an extensive amount of research into gender and the media, there is no dominant theory or method used. Rather, there is a tendency towards a methodological eclecticism and a number of shared concerns (McQuail, 1994). The central concern behind gender-related media research lies in the belief that the media serves an important "social learning function" in that it acts as an agent of socialization (McQuail, 1994: 309). Socialization is the process whereby people come to learn social values, norms and expectations and are thus "made social" (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 290). As mentioned, the assumption behind media studies in general is that the media has an influencing effect and, although the results of media effects research are inconclusive, "it cannot be doubted that the media profoundly influence people's attitudes and outlooks" (Giddens, 1989: 79). The inconclusive results are attributed to the fact that socialization is such a long-term process, not necessarily confined to childhood, and to the fact that the media interacts with other agents (McQuail, 1994: 360). The media is believed to influence children's expectations and aspirations, as well as shape social behaviour, through presenting children with pictures of life and adult experiences prior to actual experience. For feminist media scholars, the implication of the media in gender constructions is of particular concern. Feminist scholars are

concerned with the differential way in which 'masculinity' and 'femininity' have been encoded into media texts and with the perpetuation of patriarchal ideologies.

Feminist studies on film and television tend to focus on the representations of women disseminated by these media; the notion of a 'female gaze' and a feminine spectatorial position and the impact of televisual texts on subject formation. Feminist scholars have been particularly concerned with how gender differences are signified through media representations. Early feminist studies, which usually took advantage of content analysis techniques, examined the media's role in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes through the depiction of women in a limited range of gender specific roles. Representations carry ideological burdens and are believed to make manifest existing social inequalities and societal beliefs. Advertising, specifically, has come under investigation owing to its constant preoccupation with gender which it uses for its signifying power (Van Zoonen, 1994). However, content analyses of gender representations have been criticized for focusing too much attention on manifest content at the expense of latent meanings, and in this way failing to tackle the underlying sexist ideology which certain stereotypical representations suggest (McQuail, 1994). It is also worth noting that " a range of distinctions such as medium type, genre, formats, target audience etc., differently determine particular representations of gender" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 67). Another area of concern has been the role of the media in gender construction and how media texts 'position' the female subject. Current gender related media studies, however, focus on the audience and the contexts of media reception, taking care not to universalize by considering variables other than gender. This study makes its own, more 'qualitative' content analysis of women's magazines and includes an analysis of how these magazines are received by South African teenage girls. It thus makes use of both text-based and audience-centered research.

Historically, women have been associated with mass culture and the media has been criticized "in language that evokes contempt for those qualities that patriarchal societies ascribe to femininity" (Spigel, 1992: 64). Suggestions of audience passivity, pervasive media penetration, consumption and escape have served to further strengthen the separation of 'high' and 'low' forms of cultural expression. Women are further associated with specific kinds of media outputs, with certain genres being deemed 'feminine' and labelled as 'women's genres'. Feminist critics took notice of the gender

specific categorizations of popular media forms because these forms were hierarchically organized in such a way that cultural forms considered 'feminine' were denigrated and accorded a lesser cultural value. The concept of genre was initially used to divide types or forms of literature with identifiable characteristics into distinct categories and name these categories in order to indicate differences. This concept of genre has been extended and is used to divide and name various kinds of cultural production, not literature exclusively. Popular cultural forms are also classified into different genres allowing them to become "the object of 'serious' scholarly discourse" (Allen, 1989: 46).

Naming a particular genre a 'women's' form leads to various common sense assumptions. Firstly, it implies that it is a genre produced *by* and *for* women. This is usually not the case except, for instance, for the women's magazine. The fact that women's magazines are usually produced by a team of women serves to add a sense of an 'imagined community' for the readers and contributes to the 'ritual' experiential elements of the reading process. Secondly, since the audience is understood as being made up of women, it is assumed that the features of that form – its themes, for instance – are specifically 'feminine' (as opposed to 'masculine'). Lastly, and more problematically, the terms 'women's genre' and 'feminine' imply 'lesser' within the (still) male dominated sphere of cultural production and tend to homogenize women as an audience.

The popularity of these specific forms with their (overwhelmingly) female audience suggests that certain 'needs' are being met. Ambercrombie and Longhurst (1998), in the introduction to their work on audiences, summarize the findings of Ann Gray's research into women's use of video (1992) in order to demonstrate the existence of gender specific preferences concerning narrative themes. According to Gray, women prefer themes which are romantic, familial, domestic and emotional. Gray's findings allow Ambercrombie and Longhurst to conclude that "it is fair to say that gender thematic preferences are closely linked to particular film and television genres" (1992: 143). Dorothy Hobson (1982) is then cited as supporting this notion of gender specific preferences in her study of *Crossroads* which showed how women welcomed the soap genre as a form of resistance to masculine control, since it provided women with their own 'space'. There are two different perspectives to the concept of the 'gendered' audience. The first approach, associated with film studies, conceives of a 'psychological

audience'. The text is believed to offer individual spectators either a masculine or feminine subject position which the spectator then adopts. In this way, "the text 'reads' them" (Baehr & Gray, 1996: 123). The other perspective adopts the sociological emphasis of media studies when it conceives of the 'social audience'. This approach believes that audience members bring their own already constituted maleness or femaleness to bear on a text. These distinctions are problematic in that neither is "sufficient in themselves to explore the whole complexity of text, subject and context and the ways in which they intersect" (Baehr & Gray, 1996: 124). Most feminist research on the relationship between gender and genre has studied the soap opera television form. Soap opera is perhaps the genre most defined as 'feminine' and in this way can be viewed as the televisual equivalent of the women's magazine (Baehr & Gray, 1996: 60).

The introduction of the term 'gender' – as opposed to the more biologically specific 'sex' – greatly furthered twentieth century theoretical attempts at dislocating notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. The longstanding debate surrounding whether or not certain dispositions and behavioural traits are innately specific to men or women has been replaced by an awareness that such characteristics are in fact socially determined. The concepts of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are implicated in the social construction of gender. 'Masculinity' and 'femininity' have tended to be set up as binary opposites, with certain terms and characteristics being commonly associated with the 'masculine' or 'feminine' state. Thus, 'masculinity' describes the subjectivity and characteristics of men and has come to be associated with the public, with production, with assertiveness and power. 'Femininity', on the other hand, is associated with the private, with consumption, with passivity and powerlessness. However, because 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are socially and culturally determined, their meanings are a constant site of discursive struggle (Weedon, 1987). Both 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are naturalized and maintained through the internalization and adoption of gendered subject positions. Of specific interest here is the nature of 'femininity' which is "perhaps given its most concrete expression in the construction of feminine ideals and the moulding of the physical form" (Thesander, 1997: 174).

Media content is saturated with representations of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' which is why media reception is one of the key sites in which the construction of gender identity is assumed to take place (Van Zoonen, 1994). The media convey images and

discourses which offer subject positions. Such discourses "work on the basis of consent by offering 'obvious' or 'natural' ways of being and forms of pleasure which go with them" (Weedon, 1897: 100). Van Zoonen (1994: 124) describes the process of feminization in particular as "never-ending" and suggests that the media offer women "fantasy modes" to "try out different subjectivities without the risks involved in real life". In her analysis of *Women's magazines and the cult of femininity*, Marjorie Ferguson (1983) argues that women's magazines are crucially involved in shaping the characteristics of femininity, described as "a state, a condition, a craft, and an art form which comprise a set of practices and beliefs" (Ferguson, 1983: 1). Ferguson's thesis (based on her ten years of experience as a journalist in the magazine industry) draws an analogy between Durkheim's concept of a religious cult and the relationship between women's magazines and their readers. The magazine editors fulfill the roles of high priestesses, while the readers are the cult's devotees. Within this analogy, women's magazines are the oracles responsible for the creation and maintenance of the 'cult of femininity'. Women's magazines create a 'cult of femininity' through the process of socialization, by teaching 'young initiates' the rituals involved in becoming feminine. The assumption is that 'femininity' has to be taught and constantly improved upon. 'Femininity' involves a process of "continuing education" and is "a lifelong commitment" (Ferguson, 1983: 8). The women's magazine thus serves as a vehicle for the ritualistic expression of a common identity based on gender.

Ferguson also highlights the way in which women's magazines make the connection between femininity and the consumption of specific products. Advertising combines with the other elements of the women's magazine genre to provide "a very potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity, and a particular female worldview of the desirable, the possible, the purchasable" (1983: 2). Wolf (1990: 177) connects 'femininity' construction and consumerism more directly: " 'femininity' is a code for femaleness plus whatever a society happens to be selling". It is most obviously through the adornment of the body with purchasable clothing that men and women are most easily differentiated and 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are connoted. In some cases, the socially constructed nature of the concept of 'femininity' is exposed through such adornment practices, as was the case with the 'power-dressing' trend of the 1980's (Entwistle, 2000). As more women entered the business professions they were simultaneously required to look

'professional' and yet remain 'feminine'[1]. Since ideas about 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are tied not just to sex difference but also to sexuality "there is a close relationship between the gendered codes of dress and ideas about sexuality" (Entwistle, 2000: 142). This conflation of sex, gender and sexuality is naturalized and encourages the adoption of gender prescriptions. Indeed, as Simone de Beauvoir is quoted in Thesander (1997: 174) as saying: "the woman who does not conform to the concept of femininity devalues herself sexually and hence socially, since sexual values are an integral feature of society" (de Beauvoir, 1949: 692).

The body constitutes the 'environment of the self' and is thus inseparable from the self (Entwistle, 2000). The presentation of the self is linked to identity and, in the present age, the fashion and advertising industries further ensure that self-identity is defined in terms of one's physical appearance (Negrin, 2000). Therefore, in contemporary society

> whether through fashion, diet, make-up, cosmetic surgery, reflexology, aromatherapy, detailed and obsessive shaping of the body in gymnasia, potions for internal and external application to nourish, shape and defoliate, the body has become the most fertile ground for the cultivation of self (Hawkes, 1996:117).

Dress in particular functions in the 'presentation of self' to society and conveys a sense of the wearer's attitudes, values and (sub-) cultural group (Entwistle, 2000). Clothing not only distinguishes between 'men' and 'women' but provides symbolic expression of how a particular culture defines 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in a broader sense (Polhemus, 1996). Historically, the adornment and customization of the body has always been more integral to definitions of 'femininity' than 'masculinity'. According to Macdonald (1995: 194), "it is not the body, but the codifying of the body into structures of appearance, that culturally shapes and moulds what it means to be 'feminine'".

Today, a significant emphasis is on bodily perfection, with the incessant stream of photographic images redefining femininity in terms of unattainable beauty ideals. Increasingly, everyday women are dissatisfied with themselves and their inability to

[1] Wolf (1990) details specific cases in which female employees have lost their jobs because of aspects related to their clothing and physical appearance.

'control' or 'master' their own body. Disturbingly, studies show that women describe themselves in ways which unrealistically distort their bodies negatively, while men's self-descriptions unrealistically distort their bodies positively (Wolf, 1990: 94). The body has always been central to feminine identity and, when women decorate and adorn the body, they are participating in "a system of meaning-creation" – the same system employed in advertising and media forms (Macdonald, 1996: 192). Women's magazines are particularly involved in 'inviting' women to enter into this system of meaning-creation. Critics are divided into those who view the relationship between women and appearance rituals in negative terms, as a form of oppression, and those who view such rituals in a more celebratory light. Wolf (1990: 10) is perhaps most outspoken in her criticism of 'the beauty myth' which is "a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement". Wolf's deliberately provocative thesis was a well-timed response to the body worshipping of the 1980's and has made a significant contribution to the advancement of feminist studies in its attempts to explain why such extreme beauty ideals abound. However, Wolf's (1990: 13) contention that 'the beauty myth' is used by "men's institutions" to undermine women's advancement has been criticized for being too conspiratorial and narrow an understanding (Macdonald, 1996). Such a view regards the slender body ideal as a male invention, designed to disempower women by encouraging them to partake in excessive dieting and slimming fads. Macdonald (1996: 198) points out, however, that the slender body ideal is an unlikely male invention, given male preference for 'voluptuous' women. Macdonald also mentions the fact that it was two women designers who were responsible for introducing the 'thin look'.

Conversely, the more positive view celebrates the capacity for choice when it comes to appearance styles. In this view, the ability of women to 'play' with their appearance is seen as a form of liberation because the self is exposed as 'masquerade'. However, as Negrin (2000: 98) points out, in today's postmodern culture where "the cult of appearances has become ubiquitous, such a project loses radicality". Negrin argues that the celebratory approach adopted by some poststructuralist theorists fails to question the reduction of self-identity to an image which one is able to construct through the purchasing of certain commodities. By failing to challenge the reduction of the self to physical appearance, the celebratory approach "deflects attention away from other sources of identity formation" (Ibid: 93). Similarly, Macdonald (1996: 200) says that the

dislocation which actually exists between 'image' and identity makes it difficult for women to attain the physical ideal "merely by 'putting on a face' or by 'dressing up'". Negrin (2000) also contends that women's preoccupation with their appearance can be read as a compensatory mechanism which is symptomatic of women's relatively disempowered position in society. The experimentation with appearance is less challenging than attempts at economic and political equality: "while this [playful experimentation] is liberating in freeing image for self-expression, it masks less happily the gap between the image and women's continuing socio-economic struggles" (Macdonald, 1996: 199).

Although a "celebratory, academic postmodernism" might find it "unfashionable – and highly 'totalizing' – to talk about the grip of culture on the body" (Bordo, 1996: 44), the reality is that "sovereignty over the body is easier to assert rhetorically than to establish in practice" (Macdonald, 1996: 193). In order to understand the relationship between patriarchy and women's physical appearance in a way that goes beyond purely 'positive' or 'negative' evaluations, theorists have turned to Foucault's conception of power. Poststructuralist historian and philosopher Michel Foucault conceived of power as a dynamic of noncentralized forces, rather than something that is centralized in the state or with power elites (Pease, 2000). Foucault rejected the traditional understandings of power which relied on dichotomies, such as the categories of 'oppressed' and 'oppressor', because they failed to explain how "power is manifested and constituted subjectively" (Pease, 2000: 32). Foucault stressed that wherever there is power, there is resistance to power and that the play of power is conducted through discourse. The metaphor of the 'battle' is used to describe this process of negotiation for power that occurs between different discourses in all spheres of society (Bordo, 1996). The dominant groups in society have the power to impose specific knowledges, disciplines and values on dominated groups, thus controlling what is known and how it is known, yet despite this structural power, forms of local knowledge and personal power are possible (Ashcroft, 1998).

The self is socially constructed within discourse. Discourses are responsible for constructing subjectivity because they "set limits to our experience of ourselves, others and our surroundings" and make subject positions available (Van Zoonen, 1994: 32). Within any historical period, different discourses compete for subjectivity and the subject

thus comprises numerous and often contradictory discourses, but always framed within the discourse that dominates at the time (Ashcroft, 1998). The position is clearly far from simple, however, and Foucault's understanding of the way in which discourses are internalized has been used to explain the way in which subordinated groups may in fact *contribute* to the perpetuation of their subordination by internalizing the discourse which is used to justify their subordination. Susan Bordo (1996), for instance, provides the example of how women may contribute to the perpetuation of female subordination by taking pleasure in and perhaps feeling empowered by the sexualization of the female form. However, this is not to say that women have power "in the production and reproduction of sexist culture" (Bordo, 1996: 46). The concept of 'internalization', then, suggests that the oppressed may in fact 'collude' with the oppressor (Pease, 2000).

Foucault used the structure of the 'panopticon' as the metaphor for modern society (1977). The 'panopticon' is used to describe the way in which discipline is exercised through institutional surveillance, which aims to control behaviour and does so through the establishment of the 'mindful' body, responsible for monitoring its own behaviour. The body becomes the focus of power and is 'disciplined' in a way which promotes self-control. However, since the body is within discourse, and competing discourses are at play within all levels of society, the body itself can be viewed as a 'battleground' for opposing forces (Bordo, 1996). Macdonald (1996: 201) applies Foucault's account of the disciplined body to an analysis of women's magazines and the practice of femininity: "the contradictory impulses to pamper and indulge oneself, and yet submit to regimes that at times emulate torture, find an echo in Foucault's theory of the body as a central location in the contest for power". Foucault's later work on the 'ethics of the self' gives an account of a more active subject who works consciously towards self-improvement (Foucault, 1985 & 1988) – an account which echoes the current self-help trend reflected in women's magazines. Although Foucault's conception of the body has been criticized for paying too little attention to the actual material body, it is still useful for "understanding the structuring influences on the body and the way in which bodies acquire meaning in particular contexts" (Entwistle, 2000: 39).

The concept of 'internalization' has been criticized for offering a form of victim-blame in its suggestion that the 'oppressed' collude with their 'oppressors' in the perpetuation of their oppression (Pease, 2000). Feminist critics have taken issue with

poststructuralist understanding of the subject as being produced through discourse, since this robs the subject of any agency and undermines the entire feminist project. By suggesting that the subject is a construction, a site for the negotiation of competing discourses, poststructuralism suggests that there is no essential 'subject' who is oppressed and in need of liberation (Charles, 1996). Others, however, argue that the rejection of the subject/object dualism is vital for feminism to overcome the associations of inferiority that accompany that which is labelled 'feminine' in western thought (Hekman, 1990 cited in Charles, 1996: 9). The adoption or rejection of poststructuralism by feminist researchers is dependant on "whether one wants, speaking as a feminist, to deconstruct or to inhabit the category of 'woman' " (Barret, 1991 cited in Charles, 1996: 9). Charles settles the antagonism between poststructuralism and feminism by saying that "it is immaterial whether identity is essential or socially constructed if it provides a basis for political action" and by reminding us that "feminist politics both arises from socially constructed identities and is a means of their transformation"(1996: 10).

Women's Interest Consumer Magazines

Historical Background

Women's magazines, like soap operas and other so-called 'women's genres', are frequently denigrated and treated with scorn within academia and society in general. This denigration often results from the 'high' and 'low' distinctions which are still ascribed to different forms of cultural production and stems form the belief that magazine readers are unable to asses the text properly (Hermes, 1995). However, late twentieth century academic study began to recognize that the 'taken-for-granted' aspect of this naturalized form is precisely what renders it meaningful and worthy of academic consideration. Women's magazines are modern and popular cultural forms which form part of the average woman's monthly consumption. Women's periodicals are cultural texts where meanings, about femininity specifically, are contested and made. They are culturally significant because they "[work] at the intersection of these different economies – of money, public discourse and individual desire" (Beetham, 1996: 2).

Margaret Beetham's (1996) comprehensive study, *Domesticity and Desire in the Women's Magazine: 1800-1914,* works from the recognition that magazines are the products of a specific material and cultural history and that "understanding that history

should enable us to locate ourselves politically and theoretically as [twenty first century] readers" (1996: preface). Beetham uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining the case study with the chronological narrative, to examine the development of the magazine as a 'feminized space' and the way in which the meaning of femininity was articulated in and through the magazine during the nineteenth century. Beetham reveals how the development of the magazine publishing tradition is intertwined with the changing meaning of womanhood by demonstrating how the early women's magazine "sought to bring into being the woman it addressed as gendered, sexual and embodied" (Beetham, 1996:4).

The inclusion of fashion plates depicting the clothed and adorned female body brought the potentially sexual female body into the centre of the lady's magazine. The discourse of fashion defined femininity as something to be desired. The corset, for instance, became an eroticized object in that it both represented and concealed the sexuality which it sought to suppress (1996: 86). Beetham maintains that the corset can be viewed as a symbol of social restraint which reveals the nineteenth century anxiety to control female sexuality and maintain sexual difference itself. The way in which the fashion engravings linked the female form with the pleasure of looking became "endemic in the culture and central to the tradition of the women's magazine" (Beetham, 1996: 148). However, at the same time, the female body was depicted as imperfect and "inevitably sick" (Beetham, 1996: 41). This created a central paradox which defined femininity as "at once artful as natural, self-made as given, desired object and desiring self" (Beetham, 1996: 79). Product advertisements promised to heal this rift between the ideal and imperfect body and, in this way, "femininity both defined and was defined by its likeness to the commodities with which it became associated" (Beetham, 1996: 148).

Sources of oppression and liberation: The ambivalence of women's magazines

Early analyses of women's magazines typically cast them in negative terms as ideologically oppressive forms. Angela McRobbie's (1981) analysis of the teen magazine *Jackie* is the most frequently cited example of this early research which dismissed women's magazines as "superficial-cum-repressive forms" (Murray, 1998: 93). McRobbie identified four 'connotative codes' present in the magazine: the code of romance; the code of personal/ domestic life; the code of fashion and beauty and the code of pop music. These codes were said to work implicitly, at the level of culture, to

win consent to the dominant order in terms of femininity, leisure and consumption (Van Zoonen, 1994: 25). McRobbie's interpretation provides a good example of an ideological analysis of popular culture, but subsequently has been criticized for its conception of the magazine as providing "a monolithic ideological construction of adolescent femininity" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 26). The most notable response to McRobbie's study came from Elizabeth Frazer (1987). Frazer objected to the theoretical and ethereal concept of ideology which cultural researchers such as McRobbie supported, saying that "its existence is only and always inferred; we can never examine it directly" (1996: 1367). Frazer's own focus group research suggested that teenage girls were, in fact, self-reflexive readers who were not 'in the grip of' ideology, as suggested by McRobbie and others.

An area of central concern has been the way in which magazines rely on gender stereotypes and myths of femininity and the implications of these representations for the socialization of readers. The commercial nature of magazines lies at the heart of such concerns which regard magazines as essentially corrupt and corrupting, promoting capitalist and patriarchal values which are in keeping with the status quo. The idea of gender-specific appeals has also been questioned in relation to the categorization of these texts as 'women's interest' – a categorization which rests on certain gender binarisms and assumptions which homogenize women as a group. Women's magazines are exposed as playing on (and encouraging) deep-seated anxieties and insecurities related to physical appearance by constructing women's bodies as 'problem-sites' in need of constant improvement (Beetham, 1996; McRobbie, 1981). Beetham (1996: 150) referred to this as the "natural but" of feminine beauty and McRobbie (1981) highlighted the importance placed on "beautification" as "the ideal hobby" in *Jackie* (McRobbie, 1981 in McCracken, 1996: 100). Above all, the early criticisms directed at women's magazines conceived of magazine readers as vulnerable to the magazine's ideological impetus, as passive "escapists complicit in their own banality-cum-blindness" (Murray, 1998: 96).

More recently, however, feminist re-evaluations of popular cultural forms have approached these 'women's genres' from postmodern and audience-centered positions. Positive evaluations of women's magazines have resulted which foreground the role of women's magazines in serving as 'feminized spaces' (Beetham, 1996). In this view, women's magazines offer a privileged and safe space in which to explore the female self

(Craik, 1993). Women's magazines, like other 'feminized spaces', are believed to be capable of challenging oppressive models of femininity (Beetham, 1996). In particular, women's magazines are praised for popularizing feminist ideologies by providing a "mix of feminism and femininity" (Friedan, 1991:66, cited in Craik, 1993: 54). Consumer magazines for women are also praised for their fundamental practicality and capacity for entertainment - "women's magazines offer readers a smorgasbord of identifications, practical skills, objects of desire, and competing sources of prestigious imitation" (Craik, 1993: 54). Understandably, this approach also views the magazine reader in a less condemning and more positive light. Women are capable of being active, self-reflexive and 'resisting readers' (Beetham, 1996; Frazer, 1996; Hermes, 1995).

However, women's magazines need to be recognized as deeply contradictory forms which offer various inconsistent and conflicting messages. Naomi Wolf, for instance, describes women's magazines as oppressive of women but acknowledges that they are representative of women's mass culture (1990). The contradictory and ambivalent nature of women's magazines suggests that they are sites-of-struggle where meanings are contested and made. The alternating discourses of feminism and femininity contained within contemporary women's magazines suggest that the concepts of womanhood and femininity are fluid and subject to negotiation. The magazine reading experience is correspondingly ambivalent and is said "to embody repeated negotiations between 'closure' and 'open-endedness'" (Murray, 1994 : 66). Magazine readers experience and exhibit contradictory feelings and views on women's magazines which is often a source of tension (Hermes, 1995; Murray, 1998; Dell, 1999)[2]. Women's magazines incite excitement and disappointment, pleasure and anxiety.

The characteristics of the magazine commodity

As with all generic forms of popular culture, magazines are marked by a combination of uniformity and novelty. Magazines conform to certain generic expectations. They are published with predictable regularity, they contain certain

[2] Naomi Wolf (1990: 62) recalls a woman saying that she bought women's magazines as "a form of self-abuse" because they gave her "a weird mixture of anticipation and dread, a sort of stirred-up euphoria". The woman then told of the self-loathing that typically followed magazine reading and said that she was "ashamed to admit that [she] read them every month". Such a sentiment is also expressed by columnist Sharon Dell (1999) in an article titled "why do I always fall for this stuff?". Dell describes the feelings of disappointment and sense of being "oddly cheated" by the magazines "empty promises". Similarly, Murray (1998: 95) reads women's magazines with "varieties of irritation and enjoyment".

sections and features in every issue and they frequently cover the same topics. At the same time, magazines trade in novelty and being 'up to date' and have to secure their non-subscription readership anew each month[3]. The magazine is a fractured and heterogeneous form which mixes media and genres (Beetham, 1996; Murray, 1998). Magazines are highly commodified forms. They are 'meta-commodities' – commodities in themselves and also sites used for the dissemination of other commodities (Beetham, 1996; Laden, 2000). Magazines are themselves products of the print industry which function to advertise other products and, at the same time, they are cultural products which circulate societal beliefs. Beetham (1996) charts the history of the magazine as 'meta-commodity' and describes how the magazine was centrally involved in linking the desirability of commodities to their visibility. Beetham also describes how the "move from reading to shopping became increasingly central to the genre" because the magazine positioned its readers as consumers and "gave entry into a world of commodities" (1996: 8). The link between feminine gender identity and consumption has strengthened ever since, and women's magazines remain deeply involved in consumer culture.

As mentioned previously, in relation to Ferguson's (1983) study, women's magazines offer a site for the communication of a shared identity based on gender. Women's magazines are perceived as offering a ritualistic 'feminized space' which offers readers a sense of belonging and thus forms an 'imagined community'. Although women's magazines are intimate forms which routinely deal with personal and 'private' subject matters, "like watching television, reading magazines is rarely an absolutely private affair" (McRobbie, 1981: 117). Readers identify with the 'imagined community' which a magazine constructs and, when reading in public or displaying their magazine of choice, readers publicly identify themselves with that particular magazine brand (McCracken, 1996). Hermes' (1995) analysis of women's magazines and the 'interpretative repertoires' readers use to explain and make sense of their magazine reading found that gossip magazines were most clearly described as offering a sense of community. Hermes maintains that gossip serves an unconscious need to belong and offers readers a temporary sense of power by providing them with 'inside information' on the lives of the rich and famous.

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[3] Beetham (1996: 14) refers to this combination of sameness and difference as the magazine's "double relationship to time". The magazine is said to provide a "deep structure which ties entertainment and individual pleasure into the calendar".

A longstanding feature of the women's magazine is its emphasis on love and romance, which has been the source of criticism. Again, Margaret Beetham offers insight into the origins of this generic feature:

> 'love and marriage' dominated periodical fiction...[which] assumed a universal femininity marked by the desire to be desired, and by the inevitable suffering this involved. Magazine stories dealt with this paradox, familiar from gothic fiction, that love was central to femininity but attaining it was fraught with disaster and danger (Beetham, 1996: 22).

Eva Illouz (1991) provides a more contemporary analysis of the way in which the theme of love is represented in women's magazines. Illouz's research analyzes the way in which the public sphere interacts with and shapes private emotions by using data obtained from women's magazines because "part of their traditional stock and trade is the codification and interpretation of romantic relationships" (1991: 232)[4]. The magazine data allows Illouz to demonstrate how the apparently private emotion of romantic love is shaped by the public discourses of late capitalism. Illouz's findings are significant in light of the fact that the theme of love relationships was the most prevalent theme in the *Cosmopolitan* sample used in this study (see 'Feature Categories' in *Chapter Four: Content Analysis*).

Firstly, Illouz identifies three rhetorical orientations employed in the articles concerned with the topic of love relationships. The first category refers to the prescriptive articles which typically take the "how to..." form. The second type of love related article is the normative article, which is concerned with morality and romance standards. The third rhetorical category is the analytical category which examines the social and psychological meaning of love. Related to these categories are three main themes: the difficulty of finding a date; identifying whether or not he is suitable and the difficulty of maintaining romance within a marriage. Illouz also identifies three metaphors invoked to explain and construct love. The metaphor of love as "all consuming force" (whether a *burning* or *magnetic* one) is the most common. The second metaphor is that of magic, where love is depicted as an entity in itself – a force unto its own. The third metaphor is

of love as hard work where effort replaces magic and "the language of market exchange [is] transposed to intimate interpersonal relationships" (1991: 237).

The article highlights how the 'therapeutic ethos', which is found in the magazine form, encourages a 'rational' attitude to the self by "promoting self-reflexive and formal modes of reasoning" (1991: 240) (refer to the description of the 'Self-Help' feature category in *Chapter Four*). Illouz suggests that in Foucauldian terms, this could be seen as a way of disciplining women to "become their own panopticon". Alternatively, a Habermasian understanding of the self-reflexivity promoted by the therapeutic ethos would view the effects as self-liberating and potentially emancipatory (Illouz, 1991: 246). Above all, Illouz shows how the romantic discourse found in women's magazines has undergone changes: the male-connoted languages of reason, instrumentality and the market have entered the traditionally 'female' sphere of emotions (Illouz, 1991: 245). The conclusion made is that transporting these male-connoted languages of the market into the personal sphere of emotions "may have contributed to extending their power in the communicative and intersubjective domains which, in order to remain meaningful, ought to retain their autonomy from these spheres" (Illouz, 1991: 246).

Women's magazines are aspirational devices which present the reader with utopian lifestyle images and practical tips which provide the reader with an opportunity to fantasize about an 'ideal self'. In this way, women's magazines can be said to provide readers with 'moments of empowerment' by offering fantasies which may, in fact, strengthen particular identities (Hermes, 1995). Women's magazines promise to correct the central paradox of femininity which defines femininity as innate and yet still to be acquired and improved upon – "the promise of self-transformation is endemic in the form" (Beetham, 1996: 16). This promise appeals directly to the reader's sense of identity and women's magazines have been central to the definition, establishment and maintenance of western female identity (Hermes, 1995; Murray, 1998). It is both the 'taken-for-granted' and 'aspirational' qualities of women's magazines which point to their cultural significance.

Joke Hermes (1995) elaborates upon these 'moments of empowerment'. Hermes (1995: 1), a self-described postmodern feminist, adopts a self-reflexive and reader-

[4] The specific magazines analyzed are *Cosmopolitan* and *Woman*.

centric approach to the study of women's magazines. Hermes is concerned to make the relationship between the researcher and reader more equal by adopting "a more postmodern view, in which respect rather than concern – or, for that matter, celebration, a term often seen as the hallmark of a postmodern perspective – would have a central place". It is through self-reflexivity that a researcher can be both appreciative and critical of the magazine form. Hermes identifies the 'interpretative repertoires' readers use when discussing magazines in order to find out how women's magazines contribute to the construction of feminine identity (refer to the 'interpretive repertoires' used by the participants in this study, discussed in *Chapter Five: Analysis*). Hermes found that, in fact, readers did not have much to say on the subject of women's magazines. This suggested that "the practice of reading women's magazines apparently does not call for reflection or involvement of a readily communicable kind" (Hermes, 1995: 12). Initial disappointment was replaced by the conviction that cultural and media studies have been beset by "the fallacy of meaningfulness" – the unwarranted assumption that all popular media use is significant (Hermes, 1995: 16). Instead, Hermes contends that media use needs to be seen in the context of the everyday. Like watching television, for instance, "magazines may also have the reassuring character of a much repeated, well-known activity that does not ask us to concentrate or to think" (Hermes, 1995: 16).

Hermes' findings highlight the routine and everyday nature of much media use and caution the media researcher not to approach the research process with preconceived ideas which overestimate the significance of everyday media use. In order to chart the cultural references used when readers reflect upon the act of reading magazines, Hermes made use of 'repertoire' analysis. The concept of 'interpretative repertoires' was first introduced by social psychologists Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherall (1987), and will be further elaborated upon in the *methodology* and *analysis* Chapters of this thesis. Repertoire analysis is grounded in poststructuralism and discourse analysis, but, unlike discourse analysis, repertoire analysis conceives of the social subject as an active and creative language user (Hermes, 1995). The repertoires used to explain magazine reading revolved around certain fantasies, leading Hermes to assert that "as a genre, magazines are multi-piece invitations to invest in temporary and imaginary identities" (1995: 64).

Studies of South African magazines

Significantly, Hermes (1995: 151) also maintains that "reading women's magazines should also be understood and described as a series of locally and historically specific practices that change with time and according to context, within the constraints of the dominant order". The most notable research conducted into South African magazines comes from Sonja Laden (1997; 2000) and Sally-Ann Murray (1994; 1998). Laden has examined seven consumer magazines[5] intended for black South Africans to "shed light on the role of these magazines in the dynamics of cultural change in South Africa" (1997: 121). Laden (2000) argues for a 'cultural economy' approach (which draws on Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic capital as a particular embodiment of economic capital) over a more macrosocial political economy approach to the study of South African socio-cultural history. Such an approach allows Laden to "give voice to 'unofficial' versions of South Africa's modern-day socio-cultural history" (2000: 5). Laden views consumer magazines as 'cultural tools' which promote and assist in societal change. Laden identifies two primary dispositions which are common to all the magazines in question and are more overtly present than in consumer magazines intended for white South Africans. The magazines are more evidently didactic and aspirational and in this way serve as informal educational devices and modeling-apparatuses. The aspirational function of these magazines is especially significant because:

> whether or not people have 'real' access to the options they evoke, or whether they are able to afford them...their cultural force lies in their organizational or motivational/aspirational cogency, i.e. in the ways they strategically prefigure and engender new social options for vast numbers of people (Laden, 2000: 11).

The significance attributed to these magazines rests on a central connection between (cultural) consumption and identity. Laden (2000: 10) defines consumer culture in terms of "devising new ways of doing things in life, and accessing new resources and sets of strategies directed at the social (as well as individual) production of selfhood". So, in the context of South Africa, consumer magazines can suggest new lifestyle options and 'ways of being' during times of socio-cultural change. Laden gives

[5] Laden (2000) studied the following magazines: *Drum, Bona, True Love, Pace, Thandi, Tribute* and *Ebony South Africa.*

the example of *True Love* magazine as providing a site for "the integration of traditional thought patterns with newly-emerging urban 'ways of knowing'" (Laden, 2000: 12).

Sally-Ann Murray (1998) offers a self-reflexive and context-specific examination of South African consumer culture, exploring specifically the complex meanings which could be ascribed to malls, magazines and sites of 'themed' leisure. Murray's analysis of South African consumer culture attempts to "theorize the shifting interrelations of regional and national, local and global, discipline-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge (1998: iii). Central to this project is an awareness that the consumption or enjoyment of these cultural 'texts' is an active process which is often experienced in contradictory or ambivalent ways. Commercial culture should not be viewed in purely 'oppressive' or 'celebratory' terms because people's involvement in commercial culture may be "emotional as well as cognitive, sensuous as well as critical, mundane as well as exceptional, since individuals come to commodity culture with a range of longings, dreams, fears and sedimented allegiances"(Murray, 1998:iii). Murray's comprehensive and detailed analysis of women's magazines draws on a close reading of the magazine text and on reader responses to the form in order to give attention to "the complicated interanimations between text, audience and contexts of reception" (1998: 84). Murray's analysis considers to what extent women's magazines can be viewed as 'open' or 'closed' discourses and charts both the negative and positive theoretical evaluations of the form.

Murray's (1998: iii) assertion that people are "at once citizens and consumers" bridges the gap between the 'popular culture project' and the 'public knowledge project' – the two reception studies approaches to the study of 'pleasure' (O'Connor and Klaus, 2000). This assertion is also related to Hermes' (2000) notion of 'cultural citizenship'. This formulation acknowledges that "reading popular texts both ties us to the rules and structures of societal power and offers reflection on them. This dual process of actively becoming part of and taking part in cultural practice is an aspect of citizenship" (2000; 354).

Women's magazines, sexuality and teenage readers

Women's magazines are widely perceived as informal educational devices which have "displaced a tradition of direct instruction by mothers and older women" (Beetham,

1996: 66). These texts, then, provide a form of popular education by "reproducing skills and knowledges across generations and different cultural groups" (Craik, 1993: 55). It is for this reason that women's magazines frequently come under attack for providing knowledge of an explicitly sexually kind. In Britain especially, debates have centered around the emphasis on sex in magazines aimed at the adolescent and teen market. South Africa does not have a teenage magazine industry, but this is not to say that teenage girls are not reading magazines. It is my belief that teenage girls are likely to read the 'adult' titles, specifically those that are the 'youngest' in aesthetics and tone, as a way of 'looking ahead' to an ideal, older self. A similar belief existed during the nineteenth century, when 'the transgressive daughter', who, it was anticipated, would be reading the magazine, came to stand for the entire readership. Even then, there was widespread anxiety over girls access to knowledge of a sexual nature, so such content was deliberately excluded from women's publications and readers were addressed as if young and inexperienced.

British magazines aimed at teenage girls came under attack during the 1990's for their perceived overemphasis on sexuality. McRobbie (1996) has noted that in magazines for girls, sexuality has replaced romance as the ideological focus and is evident in the increase in outspoken and explicit sexual representations within them. During the 1990's, academics, newspaper journalists and members of parliament all entered into debates around the possibly detrimental effects of such sexual content on the socialization of British girls (Gough-Yates, 2000). The concern was that these magazines would promote more 'masculine' and 'forward' (and hence 'deviant') sexual attitudes and gender identities among girls. For instance, in November of 1997, the Social Affairs Unit (an independent British think tank) published a report titled *The British Woman Today.* The report was compiled from the qualitative analyses of eleven women's magazine titles, conducted by twelve academics. The results of the report, which were published and commented upon in several newspapers, were critical of British women's magazines which were regarded as highly irresponsible in their frank approach sexuality. The SAU report drew up a composite picture of the typical 'Magazine Woman' - she was free from the responsibilities of motherhood, she lived a life of "tawdry" indulgences and was 'masculine' in her "predatory and aggressive" approach to sex (Gough-Yates, 2000: 229). However, as Gough-Yates contends, such

criticisms fail to consider the broader debates around femininity, morality, youth and sexuality in contemporary British society.

Gough-Yates cites Robert Bocock's (1997) study on British morality and media regulation which describes how politicians of the 1980's and 1990's have called for a return to 'Victorian values' and have used the signifier of 'the family' as a rationale for their actions. During the 1990's, public debates around morality frequently cited the media as being responsible for shifting moralities and influencing behaviour. In February of 1996, Conservative MP Peter Luff called for the Periodicals (Protection of Children) Bill which would require that the publishers of young women's magazines display an age suitability warning on their front covers, in the same way that videos are classified according to age restrictions. The Bill was opposed, despite initially receiving widespread parliamentary support. The main opponent of the Bill was Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes. Hughes argued that such a Bill would be counter-productive because the proposed age ratings would result in a greater off-limits appeal to younger girls. Also, the age ratings would be impossibly difficult to enforce and monitor (Gough-Yates, 2000: 232-233). However, the bad press that the magazine industry had received resulted in action being taken by publishers and the Periodical Publishers association (PPA). They agreed to tone down the content of young women's magazines and established a voluntary Code of Conduct for magazine publishers. An arbitration panel was set up to deal with any complaints directed at the 'teen' magazine titles.

The conclusion made by Gough-Yates (2000) is that these magazines reflect broader social changes and shifts in morality. Magazine publishers maintain, for instance, that they are merely satisfying consumer demands. Mention is also made of the positive role young women's magazines can play in providing girls with quality information and informal sexual education. In sum, Gough-Yates claims that "the ethical framework within which women's magazines function enables producers to provide information and respond, within commercial parameters, to the demands of young women in contemporary society" (2000: 243).

A recent ethnographic study, conducted by Mary Jane Kehily (1999), examined the magazine reading practices of British girls between the ages of eleven and sixteen. Kehily was concerned to explore the ways in which magazines aimed at the adolescent

female market serve as cultural resources for teaching and learning about issues of sexuality. Kehily found her female respondents to be critical readers who perceived magazines as cultural markers in an "externally constructed developmental process demarcated by age and gender"(1999: 85). Magazines were seen to play a role in the process of moving from girlhood through adolescence and into womanhood. The year long focus group sessions showed that young people frequently referred to popular cultural forms as frameworks to discuss issues of sexuality. Students would frequently juxtapose their own experiences with examples from the media. Kehily's findings will be considered in relation to the findings of this study, which is concerned with the reception of women's magazines by local teenage girls.

Kehily's study locates magazine reading within the context of the school environment, where magazines are used as a supplement to formal education methods in certain classes and are read with friends between classes and during breaks. For adolescent girls, the school environment provides the context for the mutually constitutive acts of magazine reading and identity work (1999: 77). Kehily cites an example from McRobbie's (1981) influential study, where the act of reading *Jackie* in the cloakrooms instead of attending class was interpreted by McRobbie as a form of resistance to the imposed structure of the school day. Also cited is Walkerdine (1990), for revealing how magazines can serve reactionary purposes when girls choose to 'learn' femininity instead of schoolwork. Learned sexuality, when it takes the form of gender displays which challenge teachers and boys, can be used by girls to disrupt classroom power relations (Kehily, 1999: 81). Adolescent magazine reading is a shared experience which is framed within peer group relations. Within the school environment specifically, young girls read magazines within the social context of friendship groups.

With regards to sexual learning, Kehily found that magazines were more likely to be used as a resource for sexual learning by girls than boys[6]. This kind of sexual learning was strongly mediated by friendship groups. Girls reacted to sexual content with a group sensibility, collectively deciding which subjects were acceptable and which were 'over the top'. In general, Kehily found girls of this age group to be discerning and self-regulating readers who did not favour overly sexual magazine content. Despite the

general aversion to material of an explicit nature, the girls did recognize that magazines can and do serve as useful information sources. Kehily concludes that friendship groups, and the collective magazine reading which they partake in, serve as key sites for the production of school-based femininities and sex-gender identities (1999: 83).

Television, Postmodernity and Youth

Television is a global phenomenon with high levels of television viewing occurring in both modernized and developing countries (Mersham, 1998). It is a postmodern and highly intertextual media form, which is "typically shared, domestic and public" (McQuail, 1994: 26). Television consumption occurs within social and cultural relationships and can serve certain social functions. For instance, James Lull (1982) has provided a typology of the social uses of television which explains the way in which television structures interpersonal communication within the context of the family. The 'structural' function of television refers to the way in which television is integrated into daily life, serving, for instance, as a form of companionship for some, a 'mood elevator' for others or simply as 'background noise'. The 'relational' function is the use of television in talk, for instance to stimulate discussion or to illustrate opinions. Television can also be used for either 'affiliation or avoidance' – it can provide a means of avoiding interpersonal communication or, conversely, can contribute to family communication. The contribution of television to the process of socialization is referred to as the 'social learning' function. The 'competence/dominance' function refers to televisions informational role, which allows the viewer to enact the role of 'opinion leader' or person who is 'first with the news' (McQuail, 1994: 309).

Watching television is a largely social process which occurs within the domestic context and forms part of the rhythms of daily life. In *Make Room for TV*, Lynn Spigel (1992) describes how the television set was first introduced into the domestic context. Television was constructed as a pivotal household object around which family life should occur. This 'product-as-centre' motif depicted the television as integral to American family life. Television still remains primarily a means of family entertainment[7].

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[6] Kehily questioned boys about consumer magazine titles specifically and did not consider the possibility that other material, such as pornographic material, might alternatively serve as resources for learning about sexuality and, if so, what the implications of such divergent sexual learning sources might be.

[7] Mersham (1998: 211) illustrates this point by referring to a BBC study which was conducted to determine whether families could live without television for a year. Despite the fact that they were being paid as an

Family dynamics and power relations influence the way in which television, typically a shared medium, is consumed. Several media scholars have conducted audience ethnographies into the influence of gender dynamics on television viewing within the context of the family (Gray, 1987; Hobson, 1980; Morley; 1986). Gender was found to affect programme choice, the amount and style of viewing and control over instruments such as the VCR and remote control (Van Zoonen, 1994). The differences in television habits were found to replicate the differences in social position occupied by men and women within the domestic context. Men regarded television viewing as a form of relaxation and way to 'unwind' after work. Women, generally homemakers, organized their television viewing around household chores and seldom watched without simultaneously performing household tasks or without feeling an element of guilt.

Magazines and television are "such standard parts of our lives that their status is almost unquestioned" (Hermes, 1995: 15). Reading magazines and watching television are often secondary activities which are tied in to everyday routines. Television is also marked by segmentation and repetition, much like the magazine form. Spigel's (1992) historical analysis of television reveals the early connections between the two forms. Women's magazines served as key sites for popular debates on television and its relationship to family life. For this reason, Spigel argues that the women's magazines of the time serve as sources of historical evidence, which reveal how society may have experienced the arrival of television. Women's magazines allowed for the negotiation of rules and practices for watching television in the home. Early television advertisements looked to the popular magazine form and followed the same language conventions and discursive rules found in women's magazines. Advertisers also adjusted their sales messages in response to concerns raised in women's magazines and used similar kinds of representations (Spigel, 1992:7). The relationship between the two forms was in many ways a symbiotic one and was not purely based on competition. For example, magazines entered into cross-promotional campaigns with the television industry and not only debated the role of television but also featured advertisements for television within their pages.

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incentive to not watch television, participant families began to drop out of the study almost immediately. The family who were able to hold out for the longest were only able to do so for five months. Researchers claimed that the participants had suffered from "withdrawal symptoms".

Like most forms of contemporary cultural production, television is a highly commercialized medium. At worst, it is said to 'deliver audiences to advertisers', meaning that it turns the phenomenon of mass viewing into a commodity that can be sold to advertisers (Smythe, 1981). The economic nature of broadcasting thus results in the audience being viewed as a commodity. Television is also an advertising vehicle for the sale of other products. It is thus 'centrifugal' - unlike film, which is 'centripetal' -. in that it directs viewers outwards "into the 'real' world of commodities and services" (Allen, 1987: 97).

Television is both public and private in that it connects the individual to the outside world and brings the public sphere into the private sphere (Moores, 1997). Television is implicated in identity construction and globalization: "[it]...is an increasingly globalized set of institutions and cultural flows providing proliferating resources (representations) for identity construction" (Barker, 1999: 33). The multiplying resources provided by globalization allow for the formation of hybrid identities, as Barker (1997) illustrated in a study on the use of soap opera as a resource in identity work among teenage girls[8]. A television genre which is becoming increasingly popular and is perhaps replacing soap opera as television's most significant 'women's genre' and 'imagined community' is the television talk show. Television 'talk' or 'chat' shows simulate intimacy ('chat') through a public medium (television 'show'), and in this way "straddle public and private discourse" (Macdonald, 1995: 51). Talk shows simulate the give and take of two-way interpersonal communication and are thus a form of "para-social interaction" (Horton Wohl, 1997: 247). A level of intimacy, which is achieved through the use of a conversational tone and a direct mode of address, marks the para-social relationship[9]. Talk show hosts are personas who 'play' themselves and act as "perfect listeners" (Kozloff, 1987: 58). In so doing, they achieve a level of intimacy with a large audience and offer a continuing relationship with an 'imagined community' who share a history of past experiences (Horton & Wohl, 1997: 248).

The television form is characteristic of postmodernity. Postmodernity is informed by numerous cultural, social and artistic influences and is thus difficult to define. Some

[8] Barker's (1997) was concerned with the production of multiple, hybrid identities amongst British Asian and Afro-Caribbean girls. Respondents drew upon soap operas in their discursive self-constructions.
[9] The informal tone of television talk shows could be regarded as an instance of the 'conversationalization' of public discourse (Foucault, 1994).

view the postmodern era as a more radical extension of modernism while others view it as the antithesis of modernism. Within postmodernity, the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture are collapsed and less importance is placed on nationalistic and canonical artistic forms. Postmodernity is associated with popular culture and contemporary cultural concerns. The central features of postmodernity include a stylistic eclecticism, where different styles, codes and references to the past are playfully combined and juxtaposed. Other features of postmodernity are a tendency towards pastiche/bricolage, parody and irony (Sarup, 1994). Above all, the most defining feature of postmodernity is the salience of the image and the resulting emphasis on surfaces and style (Strinati, 1995)[10]. The essentially visual medium of television, with its incessant flow of decontextualized images, is understandably defined as 'postmodern'. Barker (1999: 56) elaborates on the features of television which categorize it as postmodern: there is a regular blurring of the boundaries of genre, style and history; it is composed of bricolage techniques such as montage and cross-cutting; there is a prevalence of paradox and ambiguity in the form and it displays an aesthetic self-consciousness.

Postmodernity, consumption and identity

Postmodernity is closely linked to contemporary consumer culture and consumption is a major characteristic of postmodernity: "consumption as a major social process, and consumerism as an ideology [are] important features of the 'postmodern'" (Bocock, 1994: 78). The ideology of consumerism is a property of modern capitalism and has "served to legitimate capitalism in the eyes of millions of ordinary people" (Bocock, 1994: 2). As stated by Fairclough (1989: 199), consumerism involves a "shift in ideological focus from economic production to economic consumption, and an unprecedented level of impingement by the economy on people's lives". Early mass culture research conducted by the Frankfurt School during the inter-war period argued that mass production was leading to the commodification of culture, marked by product standardization and 'Americanization' (Mackay, 1997). The rise in consumption as leisure activity was thought to increase the potential for large-scale ideological control of society. This early 'mass culture critique' regarded consumers as passive 'dupes', at the

[10] Douglas Kellner (1992), however, warns against considering postmodern texts as purely superficial and concerned only with surface. Kellner is critical of postmodern cultural theory which fails to recognize that postmodern texts are "saturated with ideology and polysemic meanings" and argues that "ideology critique continues to be an important and indispensable weapon in our cultural arsenal" (1992: 147).

mercy of the advertising and entertainment industries. However, the later emergence of subculture theory, mainly from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, rejected this view with the recognition that "young consumers were active, creative and critical in their appropriation and transformation of material artifacts" (Mackay, 1997: 6). However, the 'pleasures of consumption' approach, which is the extreme variant of this more positive view, can be just as one-sided as the 'mass culture critique'. For this reason, there needs to be an understanding of consumption which finds "a balance between creativity and constraint" (Mackay, 1997: 10), just as there needs to be an understanding of women's magazines as ambiguous – both oppressive and liberatory.

Consumption as a process is not only about meeting basic needs but is increasingly understood as responding to certain emotional or unconscious human desires. These desires, which are socially and culturally learned, "play a central role in the way consumers construct social identities" (Bocock, 1994: 108). The link between consumption practices and desires is primarily maintained and provided through the use of images and visual representations. Cultural studies understandings of consumption recognize that consumption includes the consumption of signs and signifying practices. Within postmodern society, people increasingly consume images and signs 'for their own sake' (Strinati, 1995). Modern consumption depends upon advertising – "the most visible practice, and discourse, of consumerism" (Fairclough, 1989: 200). Advertising exploits the signifying power of images to create an association between certain products and desirable traits and lifestyles. Advertising invites people to 'join' these lifestyles and, in this way, ideologically constructs "consumption communities" (Fairclough, 1989:206). The ideological 'work' of advertising is in providing subject positions within such 'consumption communities' (Fairclough, 1989: 206). Thus, consumption becomes entwined with an individual's sense of identity. While in the past, identity was determined by one's occupation and processes of production, within postmodernity, identity "revolves around leisure, centred on looks, images and consumption" (Kellner, 1992: 153).

Postmodern consumer culture is becoming globalized. Worldwide concerns about the 'Americanization' and 'commoditization' of culture are raised specifically with reference to the youth, because youth culture has always been closely intertwined with

popular (media) culture. The media provide resources for identity construction, a process which is perhaps most heightened and deliberate among adolescent and teenage youths. Gender identities, specifically, are constructed and expressed by drawing on cultural definitions of gender, as expressed through popular culture. Femininity, the cultural expression of female gender identity, exists as "the product of a highly charged consumer culture which...provides subject positions for girls and personal identities for them through consumption" (McRobbie, 1993: 422). Sites of consumer culture, in the form of malls, have long served as places of leisure for adolescent and teenage girls and expressions of consumer culture, in the form of appearance styles and fashion, have long been "arenas for female cultural production and knowledge" (Lewis, 1987:78). Lewis (1987) suggests that knowledge about style and fashion trends is a form of private communication between girls (much like sports talk is for men). Style imitation and fashion sense becomes an expression of "textual competency" within their specific 'consumption community'.

Media consumption practices serve as sources for identity construction. For aspirant youths, the media provide insight into the world of adulthood towards which they are moving in their identity development. Warranted concern stems from the belief that children and adolescents are perhaps less able to 'deconstruct' media messages than adults and might therefore be unconsciously influenced during the process of identity development. Adolescence is a particularly significant time of development when "awareness of other's evaluations of self are heightened" (Dittmar, 2000: 1). Appearance is a highly salient aspect of adolescent identity and body image has a major influence on an adolescent's self-esteem (Dittmar, 2000). Unattainable cultural ideals of appearance might adversely affect members of this vulnerable age group if they do not match up to these ideals. Since adolescence is a crucial moment in a person's psychosexual development, concerns about the effect of media images and cultural body ideals on the development of a healthy identity and self-concept in girls are indeed warranted. The extreme objectification of the female body in the mass media "prepares adolescent girls for internalizing the object of gaze" and the effect is that "appearance is far more important than it should be to girls" (Polce-Lynch, 1998).

This Chapter situated the women's magazine genre in relation to the fields of feminist cultural and media studies. For the purposes of this locally specific case study,

the theoretical background outlined above introduced certain concepts, concerns and approaches to be applied to the qualitative research process. This study is partly an ethnographic reception analysis, concerned with the way in which teenage girls 'decode' women's magazines, and whether or not they experience women's magazines as ambivalent forms. Central to this project is an inquiry into whether or not women's magazines are seen as sources for identity construction, sexual learning and empowerment (or disempowerment). My focus group research will try to establish whether South African girls identify with the subject positions offered by women's magazines and whether or not they feel a sense of belonging to an 'imagined community' (or 'consumption community'). This study recognizes that media texts are intertextual and that media texts are consumed in relation to the 'media ensemble' (Bausinger, 1984). Other postmodern media forms are considered alongside the magazine genre, as resources used in identity construction. Within postmodern society, identity is closely linked to appearance and I am interested in finding out how this emphasis on physical appearance is experienced by teenage girls.

METHODOLOGY

My adoption of an **interpretative** framework is indicative of the larger "turn to more 'qualitative' research, whether into culture, discourse or the ethnography of mass media use" within cultural studies (McQuail, 1994: 47). Qualitative research is interpretative, since the researchers' involvement in the sense-making process is central – hence the interchangeability of the terms 'qualitative' and 'interpretative'. The various different strands of interpretative research, including ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, all share an emphasis on "the everyday interpretative and signifying practices of human beings, the meanings that people give to their actions, and the way these meanings direct their actions" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 134). Since the interpretative method is concerned with the practical and everyday lived experience of ordinary people, it is ideally suited to the needs of media scholars like myself, concerned with everyday media consumption. There is recognition of the need to understand common sense, since common sense beliefs contain the meanings people use when engaging in routine social interactions (Neuman, 1997). In this instance, this points to the fact that the 'taken-for-granted' nature of women's magazines specifically needs to be challenged by 'estranged' reading positions (Janks, 1997).

The interpretative approach views social life as based on social interactions and socially constructed meaning systems and, like discourse analysis, believes multiple realities are possible. The study of meaningful social action is validated by the knowledge that people create flexible systems of meaning through social interaction (Neuman, 1997). Social action is considered meaningful if people attach subjective meaning to that action, allowing media consumption and identity construction to be considered as 'socially meaningful action'. In sum, the interpretative approach aims "to understand the everyday meanings and interpretations people ascribe to their surroundings and the acts that arise from these interpretations" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 134). The focus is on human interactions, meaning construction and social context.

One of the defining features of qualitative research is self-reflexivity, which makes explicit the researchers role in the research process. Qualitative research

does not claim to be wholly 'objective', but, instead, acknowledges the researcher's position and uses this subjectivity "as a resource, not a problem" (Parker, 1994: 13). Qualitative researchers are expected to monitor their role and influence during the research process, acknowledging the impact of their values and subject position.

This study takes a gender-related approach to the subject of youth and the media by focusing on the relationship between media consumption practices and gender identity in girls specifically. The distinctive features of **feminist** research are not to be found in research methods but in underlying assumptions and research concerns. Feminist research starts from the recognition that society is pervasively patriarchal and that patriarchal ideology has pervaded all forms of cultural production (Abrams, 1988). Feminist research foregrounds the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender', and "generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences" (Harding, 1987: 7). However, aspects of the methodology undertaken here are associated with contemporary feminist media studies – self-reflexivity based on an awareness of my own gender identity; the use of multiple methods, including the case study; and the interdisciplinary crossing of academic boundaries (Neuman, 1997).

This study makes use of **triangulation**, based on the definition of triangulation given by Van Zoonen (1994), Hermes (1995) and Neuman (1997). According to this definition, the triangulation principle, used by both quantitative and qualitative researchers alike, refers to the act of using multiple methods of data collection and/or multiple methods of analysis (Van Zoonen, 1994). The idea is that by looking at something from different angles, one can overcome the potential weaknesses of individual methods thus enhancing the quality and value of research (Van Zoonen, 1994). McQuail (1994:280), for instance, supports this logic when he suggests that both qualitative and quantitative analysis are "necessary in some degree for an adequate study of content". In *Reading Women's Magazines*, Joke Hermes (1995: 207) mentions triangulation as one of four strategies employed for quality control because, she maintains, triangulation is understood to be of paramount importance "when attempting to transfer theory generated on the basis of a particular set of data to other settings or other (but related) problems". Van Zoonen (1994), who maintains that interpretative research should, ideally, take advantage of triangulation, rather than rely on a single source of data, gives a similar recognition of

the importance of triangulation. Triangulation is used by feminist researchers since it allows for the use of multiple methods and research techniques said to characterise feminist research (Neuman, 1997). The triangulation principle is, therefore, well suited to the study of gender, culture and media which, in principle, is theoretically and methodologically interdisciplinary (Van Zoonen, 1994).

My specific use of triangulation is in terms of both method and theory. Triangulation of theory, when a researcher uses multiple theoretical perspectives in planning and interpretation, is apparent in my use of various strands of cultural studies, feminist media research, discourse analysis and social psychology. Similarly, my study includes both 'text' and 'audience-based' analysis. Hermes (1995) maintains that checking for differences between groups of readers and between magazine subgenres, as is my intention with the *Cosmopolitan/True Love* comparative case study, is also a form of triangulation.

Since I am looking at the intertextuality of the print and broadcast media, I feel it necessary to include some form of **content analysis**, since content analysis provides a researcher with quantitative techniques to compare content across many texts (Neuman, 1997). However, an awareness of the valid criticisms levelled at the traditional content analysis approach leads me to consider this form of quantitative analysis as only an entry point, or supplement, to more qualitative analysis of latent content. Although I agree with McQuail when he argues that the results of content analysis are "based on a form of 'reading' of content which no actual 'reader' would ever, under natural circumstances, undertake" (1994: 277), I believe that a 'qualitative' form of content analysis (of themes etc) is necessary (as a starting point) for the comparative case study I am undertaking. The key to qualitative analysis of content, according to McQuail, is to be aware of generic codes and conventions, since these "indicate at a higher level what is going on in the text" (1994: 276).

My more 'qualitative' content analysis will differ from content analysis in the traditional sense. I will not be making a transactional analysis, and will not be using the elaborate measurement and coding systems which have come to characterise the traditional content analysis approach (Neuman, 1997). I will compare the two magazines under study in terms of aesthetic codes, thematic content and information focus. By counting how much of the magazine is given to different sections, and how

many articles belong to certain thematic categories, I will be able to compare the magazines in terms of information focus and chief concerns. Fifteen thematic categories were identified by myself and are used to compare *Cosmopolitan* to *True Love*, and to compare *Cosmopolitan* to *The Cosmo Show.*

My approach will be largely qualitative and **ethnographic**, using the focus group method to gain insight into the ways in which teenage girls interpret popular media forms. Within media studies, the concept of ethnography is often signalled by other terms such as reception analysis, interpretative media studies and qualitative audience research (Van Zoonen, 1994). The labels may differ, but, for media scholars, the concept remains the same: the concern is with the audiences active production of meaning in everyday life and the importance of daily life and social context is recognised. The new ethnographically influenced audience research attempts to understand the meaning of popular culture by asking members of the audience (now understood to be active producers of meaning rather than passive receivers of media messages) about their interpretations and use of the media (Van Zoonen, 1994). As Shaun Moores (1997: 228) succinctly puts it

> Reception ethnographers are trying to produce rich and detailed accounts of broadcast media consumption which are sensitive to the dynamics of interpretation, taste, power – sensitive, in other words, to the qualitative aspects of reception or 'the politics of the living room'.

I will make use of focus groups as my main source of qualitative data. Five focus groups will be conducted, with four participants in each group. The participants will be urban, highly literate girls between 15-20, belonging to the higher income bracket and therefore likely to consume both consumer magazines and television. Television excerpts will be shown during the focus group sessions and magazines leafed through, to stimulate discussion. Questions will be asked about the consumption of media in general; consumption of magazines and television; specific excerpts shown; central themes. The advantage of conducting group interviews is that everyday, social interpretative practices are reconstructed more realistically than is the case with one-on-one interviews (Van Zoonen, 1994). But, as Joke Hermes (1995) discovered, there is the disadvantage that respondents are often too eager to please and less likely to disagree with the dominant opinion in the group.

In light of the criticisms levelled at audience studies which claim to be ethnographic, I must stress that my approach is not attempting to fit all the requirements of ethnography proper, but, in its qualitative interest in a specific audience, it is, indeed, ethnographically oriented. As Seiter *et. al* correctly point out in *Turning it on*, "while ethnographies are based on long-term and in-depth fieldwork, most television audience studies have involved only brief periods of contact, in some cases less than one hour, with the informants" (1996: 141). It must be stated that interviewing *is one form* of ethnographic research. Although interviewing might not be as ethnographically valid as participant observation, it is still a highly useful research tool in its own right. It has been said, for instance, that "the interview is the main road to multiple realities" (Stake, 1995: 64). Another criticism concerns the fact that most audience studies conducted on 'women's genres' such as romance and melodrama use overwhelmingly white samples. My sample is, admittedly, not fully representative of South African youth since consumer magazines are a relatively elite popular form and are assumed to be read by urban and higher income groups displaying a high level of (media) literacy.

Discourse analysis

I will make use of discourse analysis to analyse both the text and audience aspects of my research. I will be using the critical discourse analysis (CDA) advocated by Norman Fairclough for the analysis of the chosen media texts, together with the concept of 'interpretive repertoires' put forward by discourse analysts from the field of social psychology. Discourse analysis (DA) is appropriate for the analysis of interview material since it is strongly focused on talk and pays attention, also, to the *style* of talk: what has been said, how it has been said, paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices etc. (Van Zoonen, 1994). This attention to the details of speech stems from the view that talk is a form of social action which does more than simply describe a person's feelings, experience and so forth. The constructed nature of talk is highlighted with the recognition that participants construct their talk for different audiences, purposes and occasions and, in this way, people are understood to be "simultaneously the products and producers of discourse" (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 24).

Discourse analysis, influenced by social constructivism, maintains that just as

talk is produced for different situations, so too are the identities it constructs (Wood & Kroger, 2000), resulting in a multiplicity of self-constructions with different social and interpersonal functions (Potter & Wetherall, 1987). Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherall (1987) outline how discourse analysis moves away from psychological approaches which view the self as a fully formed entity, to focus on the methods of constructing the self, suggesting that "methods of making sense are the key to any kind of explanation of the self, as people's sense of themselves is in fact a conglomeration of these methods, produced through talk and theorizing" (p 102). Talk is produced according to the occasion, situation or societal context, as are the identities it constructs (Wood & Kroger, 2000). DA recognises the importance of context in people's self-constructions because "as members of a society we are constituted in and by the available discourses and that they speak through us" (Janks, 1997).

The relationship between context, or situation, and identity is illustrated in a study by Karla D. Scott (2000) into the multiple identities expressed in back women's communicative (and code-switching) behaviour. The study explores the use of two discourse markers – 'girl' and 'look' – employed by the black women interviewed in discussions about their language use across cultural borders. Scott finds that "these two words mark a way of seeing self and other in the context of the interaction" (2000: 245). 'Girl' is used among black women as a mark of solidarity while 'look' is used to signal distance between black women and black men, or in predominantly white situations. The study confirms that language is a marker of identity and, for Scott, that black women understand the role that language plays in the negotiation of identities across cultural worlds (2000: 246). This study shows that "different lexical selections can signal different discourses" (Janks, 1997: 335), and, since most texts are, in fact, hybrids, this is not uncommon. Since talk and the identities it constructs are context specific, variability in accounts is expected. Like most discourse analysts, Joke Hermes (1995) welcomed such variability, saying "respondents are rarely aware of the contradiction in their discourse, which, in turn, allows the discourse analyst to reconstruct the different and contradictory views people hold in everyday life" (p 204).

To organise her interview analysis, Hermes focused on the 'repertoires' employed by her respondents when constructing different subjectivities for themselves during discussions about their magazine reading. This concept of

'interpretive repertoires' was introduced by social psychologists Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherall (1987) to describe recurrently used systems of terms for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomenon (Potter & Wetherall, 1987:149). These systems of terms are often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence and are often organised around one or more central metaphors. Interpretive repertoires are general resources for discourse construction and action available in a society at any given time (Wood & Kroger, 2000). In other words, within everyday reasoning, people will draw on the available repertoires or 'practical ideologies' as much as possible (Hermes, 1995: 204). Hermes' own understanding of repertoires as "a storehouse of possible understandings, legitimations, and evaluations that can be brought to bear on any number of subjects" (1995: 204), seems fitting when applying repertoires to the discussion of the magazine form: the word 'magazine' is borrowed from Arabic, in which it means 'storehouse' (Foges, 1999: 7). The magazine is now understood to be a collection of diverse elements, a 'storehouse' of information. In identifying repertoires, it is helpful to consider that metaphor is one of the defining characteristics of repertoires, which are usually organised around central metaphors or figures of speech (tropes) (Potter & Wetherall, 1987: 149). My own use of repertoire analysis takes off from Hermes' suggestion that checking whether the repertoires identified by herself could be transferred or generalised across different cases or settings would test their validity. The transcripts from my own focus groups will be read with the purpose of identifying whether my specific sample draw on the same repertoires identified by Hermes, or whether South African youth draws on different discursive resources for use in their self-constructions.

The application of DA to textual analysis requires that the researcher look at how the discourse is structured and ordered to perform certain functions and effects. This involves the comparison and identification of patterns in content and structure (Wood & Kroger, 2000). The general purpose of a discourse analysis of interview material is to identify the "range of self images in ordinary talk...how these images are used and to what end, and thus what they achieve for the speaker immediately, interpersonally, and in terms of wider social implications" (Potter & Wetherall, 1987: 109).

Critical Discourse Analysis

In addition to the use of an aspect of discourse analysis in social psychology (DASP), I find it useful to look to critical discourse analysis (CDA), the branch of discourse analysis which emphasises the relationship between discourse and power, and involves itself in social and cultural critique (Janks, 1997). The theorist most closely associated with CDA is Norman Fairclough, whose aim is to link linguistic analysis to broader social analysis, since discourse is "socially shaped and socially shaping" (Fairclough, 1993 cited in Wood & Kroger, 2000: 206). The analysis of the linkages between discourse, ideology and power is made possible through the use of Fairclough's three part analytical framework. The aim of the three-part framework is

> to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice (Wood & Kroger, 2000: 206)

So the CDA model is made up of three interrelated kinds of analysis, which correspond to three interrelated dimensions of discourse. Below is a summary of Fairclough's three-part model, or three-step process:

1) DESCRIPTION; Text analysis of text object. This first stage is concerned with the form and properties of a text.
2) INTERPRETATION; Processing analysis of the processes by which the object is produced and received. This stage is concerned with the situational and intertextual context, and sees the text as the product of a process of production and as a resource in the process of interpretation.
3) EXPLANATION; Social analysis of the socio-historical conditions that govern the processes of production and consumption. This stage is concerned with power relations, and issues of hegemony and ideology.

(Janks, 1997; Fairclough, 1989; Wood & Kroger, 2000)

Fairclough (1989) also identifies three 'levels' of social organisation relating to the social conditions of production and interpretation involved in discourse. These three levels correspond to the three stages of critical discourse analysis outlined above. There is "the level of the social situation, or the immediate social environment

in which the discourse occurs", which I address in looking at the everyday context in which media consumption occurs. There is "the level of the social institution which constitutes a wider matrix for the discourse", which I take to mean the level of the 'media ensemble', the institutions and media forms which are related, intertextually and otherwise. And then the level of society as a whole (increasingly globalised South Africa) (Fairclough, 1989: 25).

For the first stage, the descriptive analysis of the text, Fairclough offers a detailed checklist to assist researchers in asking the right questions of the text. He considers, for instance, features such as lexicalisation, the use of active and passive voice, the use of modality and polarity etc. (Janks, 1997). The detailed linguistic attention of Fairclough's textual analyses has led to the belief that his approach is "somewhat unrealistic in practice" and to the suggestion that one "draw selectively on the elements of Fairclough's approach (Wood & Kroger, 2000). I will focus on only a selected number of the points that Fairclough includes in his checklist, looking specifically at thematic structure, mood and information focus. This choice seems in keeping with Fairclough's own admission that "text analysis is correspondingly only a part of discourse analysis, which also includes analysis of productive and interpretative processes" (1989: 24). The identification of discourses in texts is enabled by an analysis of collocations in texts. Collocational relations, or patterns of co-occurrence between words, may signal configurations of discourses (Fairclough, 1995).

Since CDA is concerned with discourse and power relations, it is, of course, concerned with ideology. Most important is the recognition that "ideology is at its most powerful when it is invisible, when discourses have been naturalised and become part of our everyday common sense" (Janks, 1997). So CDA seeks to identify the different discourses at play within a text, and what these suggest about the dominant ideology in a society. Hilary Janks' study of a magazine advertisement, used to demonstrate the three-part CDA framework, suggests, for instance, that hybridity (of pre-transformation and post-transformation discourses) was a feature of South African discourse in the 1990's (1997: 341). Janks also maintains that in a time of change, new discourses become available and offer members of that society new subject positions. On the subject of ideology, Fairclough cites Althusser for his recognition that ideology is, in one way or another, to do with positioning subjects. He

goes on to say that the (particularly constraining) naturalisation of subject positions means that naturalisation is "the most formidable weapon in the armoury of power, and therefore a significant focus of struggle (Fairclough, 1989: 105).

Intertextuality

The case study undertaken here links the analysis of different media forms through the concept of intertextuality, referring to the fact that all texts exist in relation to preceding texts and that all texts are produced and consumed in relation to others. Media texts are highly intertextual. The study of intertextuality, however, relies heavily on the study of genres because, as John Fiske (1987: 109) points out, "despite the ease with which intertextual relations cross genre boundaries, genre still organises intertextual relations in particularly influential ways". Genre works to promote and organise intertextual relations (Fiske, 1987). My study is an intertextual analysis across a range of media genres.

Fairclough (1992: 126) defines genre as not only a particular text type adhering to certain codes and conventions but also " a particular process of producing, distributing and consuming texts". Fairclough's understanding of genre is closely bound to his concept of 'discourse types' – configurations of genres and discourses which may involve complex structures of several genres and discourses or may be modelled on single genres and discourses (Fairclough, 1995). Intertextual analysis should include the study of genres and the identification of the discourses drawn upon to construct the topics and subject matter associated with those genres (Fairclough, 1995). The analysis of 'discourse types' allows one to uncover these compatibilities and incompatibilities between genres and discourses. It is useful, at this point, to identify how the study of intertextuality, genre and discourse types fits into the CDA three-part model. Intertextual analysis serves as a bridge between step one, description/text analysis, and step two, interpretation/processing analysis. Genre, similarly, "cuts across the distinction between 'description' and 'interpretation'" (Fairclough, 1992: 126). The analysis of 'discourse types', however, cuts across all three: textual analysis, analysis of discourse practice and socio-cultural analysis.

Mention is often made of the two main 'dimensions' of intertextual relations. Fiske (1987) makes detailed reference to 'horizontal' and 'vertical' intertextuality in his study of *Television Culture*. Although Fiske uses the terms in relation to the study

of television specifically, the terms can successfully be applied to the media texts studied here. 'Horizontal' intertextual relations are those between primary texts which are usually explicitly linked along the axes of either genre, content or character (Fiske, 1987). Genre, significantly, is the most widely discussed form of horizontal intertextuality. My analysis of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and *True Love* is an example of horizontal intertextuality, as is my comparison of *The Cosmo Show* with the *Cosmopolitan* magazine. 'Vertical' intertextuality refers to the relationship between a primary text and the secondary texts which refer explicitly to it (Fiske, 1987). I would suggest that the *The Cosmo Club*, the *Cosmopolitan* adverts and accessories are all examples of secondary texts which "work to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text" (Fiske, 1987: 117), and thus demonstrate vertical intertextuality. The tertiary texts occur at the level of the viewer, and are therefore the most crucial stage of this circulation. My focus group research provides the tertiary texts for this intertextual analysis. As discussed, my intertextual analysis rests on an acknowledgement of the role of genre in such an analysis. I include reference to the compositional structure, codes and conventions that define genre since these are the bridges between texts, allowing for intertextual play, and are what link producers and audiences (Fiske, 1987).

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis being undertaken in this research requires that some form of content analysis be conducted. My analysis does not claim to adhere to the requirements of content analysis in the traditional sense but, rather, fulfills the requirements of the first part of the Critical Discourse Analysis framework, namely that of text analysis and description, occasionally moving into steps two and three – interpretation and explanation. I begin with an analysis of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, since it serves as an example of international magazine genre requirements, and then move on to compare *True Love* magazine, as a local example of the magazine genre. The comparison begins as a descriptive one, based on observations of brand differences as articulated through the typical magazine components such as covers, titles and tone. The magazines are then compared in terms of the amount of content given over to features, regulars etc. and according to the subject matter of the feature articles. The feature articles are placed into subject categories, chosen by myself, allowing for comparison. The present Chapter also includes an intertextual analysis, firstly in the form of a comparison between *Cosmopolitan* magazine and *The Cosmo Show* , and then between *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* (both provide examples of horizontal intertextuality). The Chapter then moves on to discuss the implications of outside ventures and brand extensions (vertical intertextuality).

COSMOPOLITAN

Cosmopolitan magazine has been published in South Africa since 1984 and forms part of the global *Cosmopolitan* brand synonymous with fashion, sex and feminine street savvy. The South African *Cosmopolitan* thus belongs to the "international extended family of *Cosmo*'s around the world" (Ferguson, 1983:36) and is modelled on the American edition which was first launched in America in 1965. The All Media Product Survey (AMPS) figures indicate that in 1999, *Cosmopolitan* South Africa had a readership of 740 000. The ABC circulation figures for January to June 2000 place the magazine 11th in South Africa (just after *True Love* at number 10) with a figure of 105 920 (see graph included in *Chapter One: Introduction*). *Cosmopolitan* magazine

"pioneered a new line in sexual openness and emotional direction" (Ferguson, 1983:36) and is still characterized by its upfront and confident approach to the topic of sexuality in particular. The tone is cheeky and cheerful, with the reader being addressed personally, "in a warm, witty and spirited way" (www.naspers.co.za/mags/cosmo.html).

The tone implies carefree youth and, on the *Cosmopolitan* page of the publisher Naspers' website, the typical reader is described as "a woman in her freedom years and in a phase in her life when time and money are her own" (www.naspers.co.za/mags/cosmo.html). Thus, the intended, or 'implied', reader is probably twenty-something, upwardly mobile and, as yet, free from the responsibilities of motherhood. The intended reader typifies the magazine's target market and is distinct from the actual reader, who may or may not fit the target market criteria. The concept of the 'implied' reader is borrowed from narrative theory (developed by Wolfgang Iser, 1978) and refers to the imaginary reader that the text seems to be adressing. A reader enters a text as the 'implied' reader (O'Sullivan *et al,* 1994). On the same webpage the magazine's success is attributed to its continual addressing of the topics most relevant to the reader's lives – "relationships, careers, lifestyles".

Consumer magazines are known to narrate to the reader a certain kind of lifestyle - modern ways of living within consumer culture and closely bound with the consumption of certain products. Lifestyles are conveyed chiefly through the use of carefully styled photographic images adorning each page. In this way, a middle-class audience is assumed, or, as Sonja Laden (2000) explains, an audience who, although not necessarily middle-class in terms of income, is middle-class in terms of their lifestyle aspirations. My use of the term 'middle-class' takes more than just wealth and occupation into account. I adopt the understanding held by Laden (2000), in her analysis of consumer magazines for black South Africans. According to Laden (2000: 8), who is herself influenced by Bourdieu, the term 'middle-class' refers to "upwardly mobile lifestyle preferences and social practices manifested by increasing numbers of black South Africans who may not necessarily qualify statistically for admission to this socio-economic stratum". So, those who display middle-class dispositions and aspirations, but who, in socio-economic terms, would be classified as 'working-class', are included in this definition. Middle-class "aspirations and dispositions" refer to typically middle-class values, such as striving for cultural capital and social esteem, and taking part in leisure

pursuits which signal a 'middle-class' lifestyle (Laden, 2000: 8).

However, this is not to say that the targeted reader is the only actual reader of *Cosmopolitan* magazine – crossover readership does occur (McCracken, 1996:97). Many younger girls and older women read *Cosmopolitan*, with many mothers, for instance, buying a copy which is then read by their teenage daughters[1]. The pass-on readership of women's magazines is not to be ignored (Hermes, 1995). It was on this assumption that I chose to look at this magazine in relation to the participant sample. It is my estimation that girls between 15-20 choose to read *Cosmopolitan* over a more teenage-specific magazine (such as *Blush* magazine in this country[2]) because it is one step ahead of their age group. They are looking ahead to their lives as young women and have outgrown the pop star pin-up adolescent stage catered for by teen magazines. Also, South Africa does not have the thriving teen magazine industry that exists in America and the UK (where teenage girls could opt for the*CosmoGirl* magazine instead), so *Cosmopolitan* is the closest to their aspirational lifestyle, and possibly, because it is intended for older girls, the 'coolest' choice[3]. Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron (1996: 89) support this claim with the observation that "it is a commonplace that *Jackie*, although addressed to girls in their late teens is largely read by eleven- to thirteen-year-olds". Publishers and editors are said to be aware of the 'aspirational' role of their magazines, and in the case of teenagers, the aspiration is to be older (Ballaster *et al*, 1996). This view is further corroborated by Helen Gurley Brown, founding editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, in a statement made during an interview with *The Guardian* in 1977 where she explained that "*Cosmopolitan* is every girl's sophisticated older sister" (Ferguson, 1983:37).

The **title**, *Cosmopolitan*, itself refers to the global success of the brand, which "attests to the successful marketing of a globe-girdling ideology of womanhood – the cult of femininity for export" (Ferguson, 1983:36). The magazine is an example of the way in which western commercial understandings of femininity have travelled successfully and

[1] This was confirmed by participants in the focus groups (discussed in *Chapter Five: Analysis*).
[2] The *Blush* magazine, which was the only South African magazine aimed at the teen market, was shut down during the course of this research.
[3] This assumption was also confirmed during the course of focus group research, and is further discussed in *Chapter Five: Analysis.*

been adopted elsewhere in culturally diverse countries. The title, with its reference to the brand's international success, appeals to the reader on the level of the 'global sisterhood' myth and to the need for the 'modern, liberated' woman to be well-travelled and up-to-date on international trends. This enables an imaginative connection with like-minded women in all the countries and cities of the world[4]. Women's magazines offer the promise of "a solidarity as wide as half the human race" (Wolf, 1990: 77). The magazine's **slogan**, '*Anything I can do, I can do better*', typifies what contemporary women's magazines encourage in readers. The slogan is both affirmatory - recognizing women's capabilities, independence and self-sufficiency in the 'I can do' part of the statement – and aspirational, claiming confidence in a woman's ability for self-improvement and advancement, in the phrase 'I can do better'. The positioning statement is also a play on the challenge "anything you can do, I can do better", made popular by the song from the musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, now part of the social unconscious which is understood to be an allusion to the battle between the sexes. However, changing the statement to "Anything *I* can do, *I* can do better" moves the focus away from a battle between the sexes in which women have to take on masculine pursuits in order to achieve equality or recognition. The statement moves away from a focus on 'the other' (men), to a focus on the self. Rather than compete with other men (or women), the modern reader of women's magazines is encouraged to compete with and improve on the self. The emphasis here is away from the collective and onto the individual. However, this emphasis on self-perfection is not entirely new, as Marjorie Ferguson points out. Ferguson's (1983:9) study revealed that the setting of universally high performance standards is one of the most visible features of women's magazines and that "their message is more than 'you can do it'; it is one of 'you can do it better – with a little help from us'".

Magazine **covers** are treated very seriously by the editors and publishers of monthly glossies, which have to compete with a range of similar titles (Foges, 1999). The covers of women's magazines all follow the same formula, fulfilling readers' generic expectations. Readers expect a certain degree of familiarity and sameness while, at the same time, a certain amount of novelty and newness (in terms of content) needs to be

[4] One gets a sense of the different stereotypes – the New Yorker (as televisually typified by glamorous and independent columnist Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*); the Londoner and the South African (who, to live the *Cosmopolitan* lifestyle, would work for a trendy advertising agency in the very cosmopolitan city, Cape Town).

promised each month. The different features making up the magazine cover together convey in an instant the identity or 'personality' of the magazine (Foges, 1999). The colours used, the treatment of cover lines and, in the case of women's magazines, the choice of model – all position the magazine in relation to those around it and appeal to different kinds of identities and lifestyles. So, "while the cover's encodings of genre are primarily designed to sell magazines, they offer readers ideological positionalities as well" (McCracken, 1996: 99).

The *Cosmopolitan* magazine covers are well co-ordinated and eye-catching in terms of colours - most frequently pastels, sorbets and brights. The most common colours used as background on the covers of the sample in question were turquoise, orange and pink. Such bold and youthful colours used on such slick and glossy covers give *Cosmopolitan* an almost edible and irresistibly 'girlie' appearance, reminiscent of the packaging of *Barbie* doll and her accessories[5]. The women featured on the covers (models, actresses or singers) are predominantly white (11 of the 13 issues examined featured white models) and are all, of course, 'Hollywood beautiful'. The women's name is featured in small print on the cover alongside the label "Coverstar". Most of the cover models are international celebrities, and if a local cover girl is used it is one of South Africa's top models, such as Beneatha Hunter or Teresa De Klerk. As Ellen McCracken points out (1996), *Cosmopolitan* uses an upper body or three quarter shot of the model, as opposed to the usual head and shoulders or close-up of the face, allowing for the exposure of more attention-grabbing skin.

The cover lines are in keeping with the intimate, confident and upfront attitude of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. As with other well-known magazine brands, the letterforms making up the *Cosmopolitan* title are instantly identifiable. A magazine's masthead – which can be viewed as the magazine's signature – can become so familiar that it achieves an almost iconic status, allowing for a certain amount of flexibility and artistic license when it comes to cover designs (Foges, 1999). Many of the *Cosmopolitan* issues feature the title partly obscured by the model's head, since it is assumed that potential readers will be able to fill in the blanks after only a glance at the familiar narrow font. Similarly, the December 1999 edition featured the title 'Cosmillenium' instead of *Cosmopolitan* on its novelty foldout cover, but, since the text was written in the

characteristic *Cosmopolitan* font, the quasi-pun may have gone unnoticed by many. The *Cosmopolitan* coverlines are attention grabbing due to their size and to the extensive use of uppercase letters and exclamation marks (eg. 'TURN A BLUE DAY INTO A PAINT-THE-TOWN-RED DAY!'[6], August 2000). Single quotation marks are used to indicate real-life stories, which is suggestive of the sensationalist gossip magazines more common in the USA and UK (eg. 'I didn't know I was pregnant until I had my baby', April 2000). Magazines like this, which "breathlessly announce" their contents are selling themselves to the public as a bargain, offering 'all this and more' (Foges, 1999;24). At the same time, *Cosmopolitan* magazine is also known for its quick-witted and quirky copy which can be very smart and charming. Although it is not positioned as the most intelligent or sophisticated women's magazine title, *Cosmopolitan* is streetwise and sassy. The *Cosmopolitan* copy writing style, which makes extensive use of alliteration and punning, forms part of the flirtatious yet straight-talking '*Cosmo*-girl' image.

The **contents page** is also highly visual and well designed in terms of colour co-ordination and the use of font details to mark out the different content categories. There are six categories dividing up the magazine content, which I will briefly outline. A significant number of smaller inserts fall under the **'Regulars'** heading in magazines, typically reviews, society pages and opinion columns. A staple ingredient is the editor's column, which is accompanied by a photograph and signature – adding a degree of familiarity. The *Cosmopolitan* editor's page is headed with the phrase 'Our *COSMO* world', once again alluding to the global family to which the local magazine belongs and allowing the reader to feel a sense of sharedness and connectedness with women the world over. Ferguson (1983) devotes a considerable part of her study to the role played by the editors of women's magazines, highlighting the editorial (and social) power editors have in defining and promulgating 'the cult of femininity'. Significantly, the editor of *Cosmopolitan* is Vanessa Raphaely, daughter of the hugely successful Jane Raphaely, a name long associated with women's magazines in South Africa. In terms of Ferguson's thesis (1983), Vanessa Raphaely has been trained and groomed to eventually replace her mother in her role as *the* High Priestess of the South African women's magazine sect. The **'Regulars'** section also features the '*COSMO* movers' spread which pays tribute and gives publicity to local achievers, men and women, who are making a name

[5] *Barbie* was referred to by participants in discussions on *The Cosmo Show* presenters.
[6] Capital letters are used in the same way that they were employed on the original *Cosmopolitan* cover.

for themselves in their chosen fields. Named "South Africa's shining self-starters", these local role models are also entered into an annual '*Cosmopolitan* Mover of the Year' competition. The '**Regulars**' section also contains the 'Insider' section (reviews, celebrity gossip and events listings); the monthly columns ('Upfront Man', 'Upfront Woman' and 'PS'); the letters page ('Dear *COSMO*'); 'Next month in *COSMO*' (a mock cover advertising the highlights of next month's issue) and 'Reporter' (photojournalism - some serious, some bizarre). In all, the **'Regulars'** section makes up approximately 10% of each issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

The '**Beauty & Fashion**' section, which accounted for 18% of the sample's content (**Fig. 1A**), was second only to the features (22%) in terms of content space. This is traditionally the domain most covered on the pages of women's magazines. According to Ferguson (1983: 42), the goddess being worshipped by the 'cult of femininity' is, in fact, the Self. It is for this reason that beautification rituals are seen as mandatory, since followers have a certain "*duty* to beauty". Fashion trends are usually sourced from international catwalks and foreign celebrities ('Star Trends') and the nearest local versions advertised ('Budget Fashion', 'Fashion that Works')[7]. *Cosmopolitan* also features two fashion editorials, which are purely photographic fashion spreads. These are of a high standard and are fairly conceptual, meaning they are concerned with conveying an aesthetic idea, or central theme (which usually relies on an archetype), rather than depicting practical outfits as they would be worn in everyday life. The fashion editorial pages of women's magazines provide a contemporary example of the way in which representations of women are often used to convey qualities and meanings of a symbolic kind. Fashion spreads are, therefore, testimony to "the ease with which women become the bearers of meanings beyond themselves: standing for justice, architecture, liberty, peace, warfare, or the downfall of humanity" (Macdonald, 1995: 32). The '**Food & Décor**' section is usually only four pages long and accounts for just 2% of the total content and is, presumably, not the main concern of the magazine readership.

The next category listed on the Contents page is titled '***COSMO* Helps**'. Here, the use of the magazine's byname works like personification to reinforce the magazine's

[7] Danielle (16), one of the focus group participants, described how magazines present foreign fashions and local variations, in a way which displayed a high level of familiarity with the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, in particular (see *Chapter Five* following)

position of authority and claim the 'big sister' role mentioned earlier[8]. The byname '*COSMO*' works to signify all that the magazine represents and its use and easy recognition is proof of the long established success of the brand. The '***COSMO* Helps**' section includes the 'Agony Aunt' page; the stockists' list; the 'Bulletin Board' (work related information) and the 'Need to Know' feature, which offers practical advice on subjects like "what to do after a rape" (August 2000) to "How to buy a home" (May 2000). '*COSMO*' thus claims to give advice of both a practical and emotional kind. The '**Body & Soul**' section (3%), as the title suggests, is concerned with subjects related to physical and mental health. A page labelled 'Mind Health' deals with emotional and psychological health while 'You are what you eat' deals with nutritional information. The title is also indicative of the focus placed on self-control in women's magazines (refer to Foucault's concept of 'the mindful body', discussed in *Chapter Two: Theory)*. Lastly, category number six is the '**Features**' section which takes up the largest amount of space (22%, see **Fig. 1A**). The features will be considered in more detail in the 'Feature categories' section of this Chapter.

Also included on the *Cosmopolitan* contents page is a cordoned off text block titled 'On Our Cover'. In this block are the details about the crew involved in the cover shoot (the photographer and stylist and make-up artist). Significantly, the text goes on to describe how to "re-create her look " and lists the specific brands of products used by the make-up artist for the shoot. The details which follow, when deconstructed, have much to say about what women's magazines promise to their female readers. The model's 'look' is disassembled and described in terms of 'Her skin', 'Her eyes', 'Her lips', 'Her dress' and, even, 'Her scent'. This information block serves as an invitation to 'be the *Cosmo* Cover girl' by implying that the tools listed will aspirationally allow the user to become the image. The inclusion of 'Her scent' suggests that the two-dimensional image can be 'brought to life' into a three-dimensional reality. The styled front cover image refers to a quality, an attitude, a character type - a feminine persona. What this particular example suggests is that (an) identity can be constructed, literally, and different images tried on. This reflects the postmodern reduction of self-identity to an image which one is able to construct through the purchasing of certain commodities (Negrin, 2000). It also

[8] One participant, Thandi used the byname *Cosmo* in exactly this way – as representative of the particular brand of postfeminism which the magazine advocates. Thandi used the nickname with the efect of personification, to refer to the magazine's claim to authority (see discussion in *Chapter Five*)

demonstrates how popular culture works at the level of myth by appealing to fantasies based on certain archetypes, in this case, the feminine goddess (the use of photography creating a plethora of variants). The process of (re)production is bizarrely circular: the model is a person objectified; the object is then personified.

The magazine is structured with most of the shorter, regular items situated at the front and the back of the magazine, with the features and fashion and beauty segments in the middle. According to Foges (1999: 82) it is "standard practice" for the supplementaries (the shorter items other than features – usually news or listings) to be situated at the front and back of the magazine, with the features sandwiched in between, in order to create an overall sense of balance. The early pages are crammed with bits of bite-sized information accompanied by many snapshots and design details to distinguish one news item from the next. The various bits of information act like textual and visual soundbites and can be quite overwhelming. Perhaps the reason for putting all the visuals and entertainment information in the front is to lure the reader in and encourage further reading - to ease the reader into the more serious task of reading longer articles, since it is well known in the magazine industry that the first third of the magazine is the most popular (Foges, 1999). Perhaps there is more need to satisfy the readers' expectations in the first third, to convince them that the magazine's cost was money well-spent. What is interesting is that the horoscopes and letters pages are at the back of the *Cosmopolitan*. One can only assume that this is to have the reader wade through the magazine (and the articles) first in order to get to the horoscopes (much like grocery store design tactics, which encourage the shopper to stroll through the store in a roundabout way in order to reach the essential items, with the intention of enticing them to buy the other non-essential items found along the way).

Discussions and questions concerned with *Cosmopolitan's* **structure** imply that that the magazine is read from front to back, as one does when reading a book. This is not always the case with magazine reading, where a linear pattern need not apply[9]. Although magazine staff do structure the magazine keeping 'front' and 'back' in mind, they are well aware that reading habits need not conform to the beginning to end

[9] Buhle (21), for instance, said she reads *True Love* from the back to the front, because she likes to start with the letters, horoscopes and sex-related information typically situated at the back of the magazine.

pattern. This is why the contents page serves a useful function in allowing the magazine reader to orient herself during her reading experience (Foges, 2000).

Feature Categories

In order to enable the comparison of content between *Cosmopolitan* and *True love* magazines, and across the print and televisual mediums, I have decided on a number of thematic categories. These category choices were based on my analysis of the *Cosmopolitan* sample, since the magazine provides a standardized example of the women's magazine genre. My category choices were also based on my own awareness of the genre, informed by years of regular magazine reading. Fifteen categories were chosen, three of which (travel; fashion and competitions) are not necessarily feature subjects or themes but are typical magazine components which are placed in the *Cosmopolitan* features section, as outlined in the contents page. The fifteen categories, which will be explained shortly, are depicted in **Fig. 1B** (and thereafter in **Fig.1C** and **Fig.2B**). The choice of categories is not a wholly neutral process and, as researcher, I acknowledge that my choices were largely subjective – especially when considering the nature of the magazine genre, where there is much overlap of categories and themes (Ferguson, 1983). The categories, which will each be dealt with respectively, are:

Love relationships; Self-Help; Health; Celebrities; Sex; Social Issues; Real Life; Beauty; Self-Knowledge; Esoteric; Workplace; Relationship (other); Competitions; Fashion and Travel.

1) **Love relationships:** The theme of romantic love still remains a significant one on the pages of women's magazines. This accounted for the largest amount of feature space – 14% of the *Cosmopolitan* features from October 1999 to October 2000 dealt with the topic of love relationships. The typical feature falling under this category is "Do you connect on the 7 levels of love?" (June 2000) and the more practically oriented articles, like "4 Common Couple fights...fixed!" (January 2000). The reason for the focus on love relationships is most likely to do with the age and lifestage of the reader – young and single and, therefore, contemplating the topic of marriage while currently involved in semi-committed relationships. In other words, she is playing 'the relationship game' and might be needing tools to help her to find her

ideal partner. Increasingly, however, *Cosmopolitan* is focusing on the benefits of independence and 'celebrating being single' is becoming a more featured theme. The August 2000 issue, for instance, featured an article titled 'The myth of happily ever after". This tendency is obviously a reflection of the times where, thanks to the success of feminism, women are no longer solely defined by marital status and marriage is no longer a woman's only life goal. Or perhaps this is still a normative ideal – a feminist inspired attitude which is still being encouraged, in a world where the real benefits of feminism are not experienced equally by all. The "myth of happily ever after' article is also an example of the way in which "the contradiction between 'ideal romance' and 'realist workings of a relationship' is endlessly commented upon and explained" in women's magazines (Illouz, 1991: 240) (see *Chapter Two: Theory*, for a discussion of Illouz's article, which illustrates how the theme of romantic love is approached in women's magazines).

2) **Self-Help:** This is a very broad and pervasive topic in the women's magazine genre which deals with issues such as overcoming addictions, identifying emotional blocks or correcting self-defeating behaviour. Deleen Wilson (2000: 57) defines self-help as "the conscious, reasoning part of your internal self, your actions or your situation. It is self-improvement by yourself, though normally with the help of an external aid...[that] primarily focuses on changing your own behaviour, feelings, skills, cognition (thoughts) or previously unconscious processes". Although the past few years have seen a tremendous growth in the self-help industry, the theme of self-help is not new to women's magazines. Ferguson (1983) noted the emergence of the dominant theme of self-help in the 1979-1980 sample of her 7-year study. The two components of the self-help theme, "Overcoming Misfortune" and "Achieving Perfection", together accounted for 47% of the dominant themes. For Ferguson, the "Achieving Perfection" component of the self-help theme demonstrated that "learning to be a woman still involves teaching yourself to improve on your standards of femininity and achieve a better performance in all your womanly roles" (1983: 99). In the *Cosmopolitan* sample studied, the self-help theme was featured in 13% of the articles, with typical examples being "Bad choices and how to stop making them" (April 2000) and "Could Hypnotherapy work for you?" (March 2000). Such articles are typically earmarked as 'Lifeskills', 'Mind Matters' or 'Psyche'.

3) **Health:** The subject of health is becoming increasingly important in women's magazines and reflects the growing trend towards more health-conscious living. The focus on nutrition, fitness and mind-health are indeed healthier and preferable to the images of super skinny supermodels which have been blamed for indirectly promoting eating disorders or feelings of inadequacy in young girls. At times, however, this focus seems a little obsessive and is still typical of the value of self-control, the value most frequently promulgated by the women's magazines of the 1970's (Ferguson, 1983). The self-control promoted by women's magazines serves as proof of modern day panopticism (see the reference to Foucault in*Chapter Two). Cosmopolitan* does have a section devoted to health (titled 'Body & Soul'), but the 'health' theme nevertheless accounts for 10% of the features in the sample (the same as 'Sex' and 'Celebrities'). The articles are typically labelled 'Looking Good', 'Body & Soul', and, sometimes more specifically, 'Body Image'. One such article, titled "The body hell we share" (November 1999), deals with the topic of cellulite – represented as the ultimate challenge to physical perfection. Coverlines that claim to have the cure for cellulite will undoubtedly guarantee an increase in sales. The inclusion of the "we" in the title is also inclusive and is part of the sisterhood myth which reassures women that they are not alone with their insecurities and bodily imperfections. Talk show host Oprah Winfrey's honest admissions on the topic of her own battle with her weight have endeared her to her viewers and, similarly, *Cosmopolitan* editor Vanessa Raphaely regularly refers to her own weight issues in her column. Wolf (1990: 75) maintains that "the [beauty] myth that drives women apart also binds them together" and that "commiserating about the myth is as good as a baby to bring strange women into pleasant contact".

4) **Celebrities:** A typical feature of glossy magazines is the preoccupation with the lives of the rich and famous. Celebrities are representative of a glamorous lifestyle and so offer a form of escapism or an opportunity to identifiy with an 'imagined community'. This category is also important enough to the genre to warrant its own sub-section, the 'Insider', part of the magazine's Regulars, but still had 10% of features. The September 2000 issue featured an article cleverly titled "Twinkle, twinkle (much too) little stars" which covered the topic of severely underweight celebrities. Since the 1980's, when the topic of anorexia and bulimia put the spotlight on the fashion, entertainment and media industries, there has been a need for those industries to

occasionally exercise some form of social responsibility and publicly admonish those celebrities providing unhealthy role models. Indeed, Wolf (1990) suggests that criticism of the beauty myth is found in women's magazines more often than anywhere else. This article provides an example of this and, like the articles which encourage bonding over our shared imperfections (i.e. "the body hell we share"), it is somewhat ambiguously situated between pages laden with images of similarly skinny and cellulite-free actresses and models. This ambiguous tendency was noted and commented upon by the participants during the focus group sessions (see *Chapter Five*).

5) **Sex:** The topic of sex is a staple ingredient of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Each issue is guaranteed to carry an article on the subject which, after 25 years, is proving to be an inexhaustible one. The association of *Cosmopolitan* with sex is well known by all, including the makers of the local magazine, as the following article title (March 2000) reveals: "25 Sex Tips from the experts; So you thought we'd told you everything you should know? Well there's more...". The way in which the subject is dealt with is obviously dependant on context, as Ferguson demonstrated in her 1983 study, which revealed that the more religious and conservative a country was, the more conservative was the approach to sex in that country's *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Recently, sex has been given a new-age spin, as witnessed in the article in which the writer claimed that "Shiatsu gave me my best orgasm ever" (May 2000) and in the article titled "Are you twisted, sister? Try the *COSMO* sutra 2" (October 2000) – a follow up to a hugely popular article on Kama Sutra sex positions. In the sample studied, sex, like the topics of health and celebrities, accounted for 10% of the article space. Although this category did not feature as much as that of Love Relationships, it remains the most memorable category and, as the focus groups confirmed, it is the category most associated with *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

6) **Social Issue:** These articles are the ones which could most clearly be labelled feminist in that they investigate social and political gender inequalities and are most forthright in advocating women's rights. These articles, which are usually labelled 'SA report' or 'controversy', account for 6% of the feature space. Typical features would be those dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace ("Sex-Pest control", May 2000), and the topic of rape ("Behind the date-rape controversy", April 2000). Articles

dealing with more general social issues and controversies of the day also fall under this heading.

7) **Real-life:** These are the stories about how ordinary women found strength in the face of adversity. They are usually about personal tragedy and take the form of the 'It happened to me' story, though they are typically labelled 'From the Heart' in the *Cosmopolitan*. Real-life stories share obvious similarities with the television talk-show genre and are becoming increasingly popular as more people become interested in true-life accounts which show how ordinary people can inspire (see *Chapter Five: Analysis*, for a discussion on the 'psychologization' of society, which is related to Foucault's concept of 'the confession'). According to Ferguson these features, known in the trade as T-O-T's (triumph over tragedy stories), have long been part of the magazine formula (1983:98). I chose to include in this category the stories about local achievers and role models. Real-life stories also accounted for 6% of feature space.

8) **Beauty:** Beauty, another taken-for-granted magazine theme, has its own section, so does not always feature among the articles. Longer articles devoted to a beauty-related subject do, however, fall under the features section and so accounted for 5% of the feature categories. One example was the article that asked "Are you ready for your close-up?" (September 2000: 138), and went on to describe how to "buff, pluck, blend & polish yourself to perfection". Such an article, which is very common in women's magazines, supports Ferguson's claim that the 'Be More Beautiful' motif "offers an archetypal example of women's magazine messages presenting the desirable as though it were attainable" (1983:58).

9) **Self-Knowledge:** This category is very closely associated with the self-help category but is less about how to improve oneself and more about the first step in the self-help process: identifying the problem. These articles are about self-analysis and problem identification and they frequently take the form of a quiz or set of multiple choice questions that enable the readers to position themselves as belonging to a type. Ferguson identified a theme which corresponds to this category which she called "the female state mysterious" (1983:57). She explains the three variants of this category: the first presents the female as being very different to the male; the second

version presents the female as unpredictable and threatening and the third variant of the 'female state mysterious' category "involves a woman's choice of a particular female typification or 'style' as her own" (1983:57). The article used to illustrate this third variant, "What Kind of girl are you really?", is typical of the features falling into the self-knowledge category. Eva Illouz (1991: 240) explains the relationship between the self-help category (equivalent to what she terms the "therapeutic ethos") and the self-knowledge category when she states that "by promoting self-reflexive and formal modes of reasoning, the therapeutic ethos instills a 'rational' attitude toward the self". A more recent example is the article titled "Who is the real, *real* you?" which encourages the reader to "learn more about your life, love and everything else with *Cosmo's* six new-you tests" (June 2000). The 'life, love and everything else' in the article title is, incidentally, an intertextual reference to a trendy British TV series about three thirty-something couples that was showing at the time. Apart from such light-hearted features, this category also includes articles dealing with the diagnosis of psychological disorders and attitudinal or cognitive problems ("Are you afraid of being happy? October 2000). This category accounted for 4% of *Cosmopolitan* articles.

10) **Esoterica:** Although articles dealing with esoteric issues accounted for only 3% of content, they are becoming more prevalent and are distinctive enough to warrant having a category devoted to the theme. There is an increasing interest in new-age spirituality and non-western philosophical beliefs in society in general and esoteric or new-age topics are now being given more space in the popular media. I have included the horoscope pages under this category, even though they have featured in women's magazines for many years and are not an example of recent new-age inserts. Examples of esoteric features are "*Cosmo*'s DIY guide to Palmistry" (August 2000) and "Play *Cosmo*'s Love Tarot" (November 1999) – a particular example of how the category of love relationships has blended with the esoteric category. In a more self-reflexive vein, the July 2000 issue featured an article on "women addicted to esoterica".

11) **Workplace:** Although work-related information is most often dealt with in the "Bulletin Board' section of the magazine, there are still articles devoted to the subject under the features section (3%). The articles are often about practical advice related

to, for instance, the presentation of one's curriculum vitae and interview skills. An example of this category is: "Office paranoia rehab – do you spend your working hours convinced everyone's out to get you?" (September 2000).

12) **Relationship (other):** These were articles dealing with relationships other than that of heterosexual love. There were only a few of these in the *Cosmopolitan* sample (2%), dealing with the relationships between family members or friends. In typical *Cosmopolitan* style, one such article was given a self-analysis and self-help slant: "your siblings and your psyche" (November 1999).

13) **Competitions:** Expected of magazines, and often used to justify their cost, competitions took up 8% of *Cosmopolitan* feature space.

14) **Fashion:** Well covered on the fashion pages but only occasionally the topic of a *Cosmopolitan* feature, fashion articles accounted for 3% of feature space within the year sampled.

15) **Travel:** Not featured in each *Cosmopolitan* issue but usually a feature more important in general interest or otherwise niche magazines, travel also took up 3%.

These fifteen categories form the basis of my comparative analysis and will be used to compare *The Cosmo Show* to *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and to compare *True Love* magazine to the *Cosmopolitan*. I will be checking specifically for whether the same thematic categories are present in *True Love* and *The Cosmo Show*, and whether the categories are given the same amount of focus in terms of percentage value.

COSMOPOLITAN BRAND EXTENSIONS[10]

The *Cosmopolitan* is an Established Global Brand (Gifton, 2000; 103), with magazines expressing the same attitude and displaying the same characteristics in countries worldwide. However, the opening up of the market to other global magazine

[10] As the name implies, the term 'brand extension' refers to the move by an established brand into another venture or product category. The Virgin brand provides the best example – the brand began with the record company but the Virgin brand extensions include refreshments, an airline and healthclubs.

brands since the 1990's has meant that *Cosmopolitan* South Africa has had to adapt in light of the competition. The past two years have seen new attempts by the magazine's marketers to ensure that the *Cosmopolitan* brand can " 'refresh' and renew itself to retain its position" (Gifton, 2000: xiv). The result provides a good example of integrated marketing communication – the synergistic marketing tool that ensures consistency of message across all elements of the promotional mix (van der Walt, 1989). This leads to a stronger brand image, which is the perception of the brand and associations held in consumer memory (de Klerk, 1998). In the case of the *Cosmopolitan* brand, it has meant a move out of the print medium and into the televisual and virtual mediums, and also into the merchandising of non-media products. In so doing, the *Cosmopolitan* brand is anticipating "the blurring and category-leaping brand marketplace of the future" (Gifton, 2000: 104).

What is of interest here is the blurring of generic boundaries as marketers make use of the "media ensemble" (Bausinger, 1984: 349), using one medium in order to advertise another. So, the magazine - a 'meta-commodity' that enables the advertising and, therefore, the selling of other commodities (Beetham, 1996) - is now itself being advertised through other media. In this way, women's magazines – already a "blurred genre" (Geetz, 1983) – adapt to the intensive commodification of the postmodern world, where "producer, product and consumer are brought together as co-participants in a lifestyle, a community of consumption" (Fairclough, 1992: 211). What follows next is a descriptive and quantitative analysis of the *Cosmopolitan* brand extensions, in terms of observable characteristics and of more intangible attitudinal and 'lifestyle' characteristics.

THE COSMO SHOW

The televisual equivalent of *Cosmopolitan* magazine was produced by some of the magazine staff together with print and TV journalists. The idea to start such a show was a very workable one: the magazine genre is highly intertextual, allowing for such a transition, and the television equivalent of the magazine – the magazine programme – is already a popular television format and is, therefore, a safe option. However, translating such a well-established brand into another medium into another is not unproblematic. My concern is not so much to assess the success of the show as a magazine programme, but to consider the effects, if any, on the *Cosmopolitan* brand identity which is so closely

bound to the print magazine form. The show aired on the pay channel, M-NET, at 10 o'clock on a Monday night and ran from the 4th of September 2000 to February 2001. Like the costly glossy itself then, the show was not meant to be consumed by all economic sectors.

The show's introductory visuals are a clever translation of the typical women's magazine **cover**. The introductory sequence is made up of various still images of blonde *Cosmopolitan* covergirl Michelle Cowley (used on the cover of the October 2000 issue) in what looks like a seaside flat at different times of the day, wearing different outfits to match the hour. The effect of rapidly juxtaposing the still scenes, as cartoonists are well aware, is to bring the image to life. So, by using a recognizable *Cosmopolitan* model, and the recognizable *Cosmopolitan* font, with the familiar colours of turquoise and white predominating, the suggestion is that the two-dimensional cover of the print magazine is about to be made three-dimensional through the medium of television. The last image (of the model posing towards the viewer in typical covergirl style) lifts up, like a page, from the bottom right corner to allow for the introduction of the show's contents. The introduction acts much like the magazine **contents page** and incorporates styling similar to the elements of contemporary magazine design which have, in fact, been influenced by more recent web design. On the topic of the relationship between contemporary magazine design and new media, editorial designer Roger Black has said that "working in print without having an understanding of the web is analogous to designing magazines in the 1970's without understanding television" (Foges, 1999:141).

The two female presenters are both extremely beautiful, slim and well spoken. Michelle McKlein, an Ex-Miss Universe and founder of the Michelle McKlein Children's Trust is also an M-NET continuity presenter.She is accompanied by Natalie Becker, a highly poised and articulate model. The show is presented in 'intimate' surroundings such as couches or coffee bars, where the female presenters fuss over the third presenter, male model and television presenter Marius Roberts. At times their interactions are stilted and contrived and it is clear that the presenters themselves are not responsible for the scripted dialogue. The wooden interactions heighten the uncertain positionality of the presenters. By 'positionality' I mean narratorial position. The use of the term allows one to question, in this instance, the personae the presenters are adopting and who they are supposed to 'speak for'.

If the presenters merely introduced the show's segments in a more natural kind of way, they would adequately fulfill the role of TV presenters, but the scripted dialogue makes it unclear. Are the presenters puppets for an outside authority – perhaps the same authority assumed to be lurking behind the glossy tomes, the high priestesses of the cult of femininity? Do they represent typical '*Cosmo*-girls' or do they epitomize what '*Cosmo*-girls' should aspire to? The presenters shift between presenting and acting out their scripts and so shift between different subject positions, thereby undermining any official *Cosmopolitan* authorial voice. The 'authorial voice' is a reference to the concept of the 'implied author' and to the wise female authority figure that some have felt to be behind the pages of women's magazines (Ferguson, 1983). The 'implied' author (as distinguished from the extra-textual actual author) is the reader's imaginary conception of the author. The authorial personality is 'implied' in the text, and is the subtotal of the values in the text. In terms of Hall's encoding/decoding model, the authorial voice guides the reader to the texts 'preferred' meaning (O'Sullivan *et al.,*1994).

The decision to include a male presenter in the 'feminized' space one would expect from the show is also puzzling. He could be seen to represent the 'male confidant' but, clearly, some of his stereotypically male comments are meant to identify him as 'the typical male'. For example, when Natalie Becker introduces designer David West who "designs for all shapes and sizes", Marius assumes that he must be an underwear designer. The assumption encourages Natalie to respond with the "you jocks are all the same" line which, although more suited to an American audience, points to the fact that Marius may represent the implied male presence communicated through the pages of women's magazines[11]. The implied male presence emerges in the opening visuals too, and is shown being fed by the blonde model described previously. At times his masculine presence seems entirely inappropriate, for instance in the insert on self-defense for women, a very serious subject for women - in this country especially. Although his body is useful for the female self-defense instructor to demonstrate where the sensitive spots are on an attacker's body, his lighthearted approach (he says he is afraid to ask where the target areas are and overdramatically cringes upon mention of the groin area, in an attempt to evoke amusement) is unsuited to the topic. This scene generalizes men and blurs the necessary distinction between the 'other' female viewers may know affectionately (whose ways may cause his '*Cosmo*-girl' to sigh and roll her

eyes) and the 'other' who is her potential attacker. This is not to say that intimates are not potential attackers, but that the response that Marius' ill-timed performance encourages is incompatible with the serious subject, a subject too serious to be treated with carelessness.

Marius' ambiguous positionality could be seen as indicative of the way in which the hegemonic concept of (white) masculinity has shifted in South Africa, and as a demonstration of the fact that masculinity is not a fixed, essential identity (Morrel, 2001). Marius' uncertain position reveals how different, and competing, discourses on masculinity are currently in circulation. Also of significance here is the distinction between maleness and masculinity which is clarified by John Fiske (1987: 261). Fiske explains that while maleness is a fact of nature, "masculinity is a cultural constraint that gives meaning to maleness, by opposing it to femininity". So perhaps it is only in relation to the post-feminist *Cosmopolitan* brand of femininity that Marius' masculinity is so contradictory. Indeed, the positioning of Marius says much about the kind of man allowed to enter the private space of the '*Cosmo*-girl'. He should, of course, be firmly heterosexual and desiring of women. He should exhibit a certain male silliness of the kind that confirms his belonging to an essentially 'simpler' breed. He should also be able to spend quality time talking with 'the girls' and he should also be very well-built and good looking. These traits, portrayed as 'male' in *The Cosmo Show*, combine traditional discourses of masculinity with the concept of the 'new' man. This 'new-age man' is supportive of women's advancement, is more sensitive ('in touch with his feelings') than more traditional men, and befriends women as equals. The fact that Marius is physically attractive is also, perhaps, proof of the increasing "construction of male bodies as objects of voyeuristic pleasure" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 88)[12].

Print to televisual translations, most often from book into film, are usually considered unsuccessful and it must be noted that translating one taken-for-granted medium into another will probably always meet with certain criticisms. The biggest difficulty in this case - the case of a specific women's magazine - is that something essentially private, easy to put down and only partially controlled by the time frames of

[11] The implied male presence is discussed by McCracken (1996: 98).
[12] This was supported by focus group participants who thought he was "hot", but "like a dumb blonde in a guy".

periodical publishing (Hermes, 1995), is now being made public during one specific timeslot, by means of an especially ephemeral medium. So far, I have noted the effectiveness of the shows visual styling and the occasional ineffectiveness of the presenter dynamic. Another important consideration is that of **tone**, since the tone of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine largely conveys the '*Cosmo* attitude' so definitive of the brand. Tone is created in the magazine mainly through the use of witty and bold text, implying a clever and straight-talking woman. In the show, the presenters' dialogue and the voiceovers during the inserts are used much like the magazine's text. Generally, the *Cosmopolitan* attitude is well conveyed, but concerns to convey '*Cosmo*' witticisms through dialogue and voice-overs are often responsible for the wooden and contrived feel of the show. As most good speechmakers know, something that is cleverly written will not necessarily have the same effect when read aloud – in this case the result is at times too deliberately clever. Episode 7, for example, features an insert on shoe trends. The voiceover declares that "sandals are bikini's for the feet" and that "nailpolish is for feet what perfume is for the body". The presenter responsible for this particular voiceover, Natalie Becker, then goes on to pronounce that "foot fashion is where [her] sole lies". Although the attitude might best be described as tongue-in-cheek, the overall effect may not be charming to the viewer, who might cringe at the attempts to be amusing in each insert.

Another example of where the print to television crossover of *Cosmopolitan's* characteristically clever copy results in voiceovers that seem too deliberate occurs in episode 8. The insert promotes *Flashpoints* hair extensions and, in this way, it functions much like the advertorials we see on the pages of women's magazines. Foges (2000: 97) fittingly describes advertorials as "adverts dressed up as editorials...giving readers the impression that the product has been endorsed by the magazine". The advertisement is made into an insert accompanied by the voice of the second female presenter (and Ex-Miss Universe) Michelle McKlein. The voice over, in a mocking tone, accompanies shots of women who have had (or are in the process of having) these hair extensions applied. Michelle says, melodramatically:

> A few hours before the shoot, these girls had short, thin hair – misery! The redhead was depressed; the brunette broody and the Jane Mansfield lookalike jaded. But they went from bad hair days to best hair *days of their lives* [a

reference to the soap opera of the same name]...

Once the extensions have been completed, we are told that "reunited with the hair you should have had – had fate not dealt you such a cruel blow-dry – you're ready to take on the world in just three hours" and are then introduced to the blonde-haired participant, in order to ask "does it hurt? Does it drift off into your Chardonnay? And other pressing questions". Back in print, these lines are quite humorous: they make fun of the rituals of femininity by employing the melodramatic tone often used to deride feminine frivolities. What the shoe and hair examples suggest is that the transitory nature of the television medium, and the fact that it is a medium also used to transmit more public and newsworthy information, means that the wording seems to have to justify the inclusion of such superficial matters. In comparison, in a magazine, a fashion editorial or section on shoe trends can stand by itself, with only the name of the outlet and price to accompany it, television cannot leave such visuals to stand alone. The still images in magazines can be perused for whatever length of time and with varied frequency, whereas moving images by their very ephemerality seem to require a running commentary, or story in order to effect connectedness. So when the subject and images are of sandals or hair extensions, perhaps it would have been better to rapidly juxtapose various still images (as in the show's introduction) and use music as accompaniment.

The *Cosmo Show* categories

I chose to compare the thematic concerns of the magazine with the show by using the same categories initially derived form analysis of the magazine, and by treating the show's inserts much like the magazine's features. The results of this comparison can be seen in **Fig. 1C** and will be discussed below. The overwhelming focus of the show was on fashion and celebrities (44% together) which, although not the largest category featured in the magazine articles, make up a significant part of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in general. The fashion and celebrity focus is also what one would expect from a magazine programme, especially one bearing the '*Cosmo*' title. Most episodes featured an insert on a fashion designer, an eligible bachelor or hunk, and a self-help or new-age theme – concerns obviously considered to be the currently most definitive of the print magazine genre. The travel category did not feature much in the show, and is replaced by the **review** – a common feature of magazine programmes.

Fashion: Fashion inserts took up 22% of the sample. Most of these inserts focused on a specific local designer (like Abigail Betz, Marion & Lindie and David West), while others covered certain fashion events, for example the insert on the New York fashion week.
Celebrities: In this category I situated not only the Hollywood celebrities interviewed (Bai Ling; Tyra Banks), but also the local celebrity sportsmen and the rolemodels, who, through their media exposure, have reached semi-celebrity status. Episode 1, for example, featured the coverage of a glittering local charity event attended by all the "whose who in the South African zoo" and episode 2 featured a 'Hollywood Gossip' insert (this was shown to the focus groups and is discussed in*Chapter Five: Analysis*). Celebrity inserts, like Fashion, also accounted for 22% of all inserts.
Real-Life (10%): Clearly, the real-life stories were adapted from the magazine feature formula. They typically moved from the person who was the subject of the story to a professional's advice or opinion, and so also involved an element of self-help. In episode 4, for instance, an insert on alcoholism began with a woman giving an intimate retelling of the details of her marriage (and wedding night) to an alcoholic. Next, a counsellor defined 'what it is to be an alcoholic' followed by details of "the 12-step plan", with numbers of counselling and rehabilitation centres displayed on screen. Other 'real-life' topics were: surviving mastectomies as a result of breast cancer, long-distance relationships and on being attacked.
Health (7%): Health featured fairly often, as was the case with the print magazine, where health features made up 10% of article space (this in spite of the fact that the magazine devotes a separate section to health-related topics). Some inserts dealt with forms of exercise (yoga in episode 4 and kata box in episode 16), while others reflected attempts to correct the bad behaviours developed during the body worshipping of the 1980's (skin cancer information in episode 10 and nutrition inserts in episodes 10 and 13).
Beauty (6%): Beauty featured to about the same extent as in the magazine. The inserts took the form of the makeover – a magazine favourite. In episode 9, stylist Hannon Bothma transformed a legal secretary into a 'coverstar' – her made up image was then inserted into that month's *Cosmopolitan* cover (January 2000), replacing model Monica Miller. Once again, the implication was that with the right tools and the right amount of effort (or with the right make-up professional), anything is possible. In episodes 14 and 15, the same stylist goes a step further and magically transforms two girls into celebrity

lookalikes (Mariah Carey and Courtney Cox). This is becoming common in both *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love*: readers are transformed not just into a new improved version of themselves, but into the celebrity they most closely resemble.

Review (6%): As expected, the magazine show featured movie reviews of the latest releases.

Esoteric (5%): The show reflected the trend towards new-age interests with inserts on clairvoyance (episode 10), numerology (episode 4) and Wicca (episode 12).

Love Relationships (5%): This topic was given a considerably smaller emphasis in the show, whereas the magazine articles most often dealt with this theme (14%). Perhaps owing to the public nature of the television medium, or perhaps due to the generic requirements of a magazine programme, this topic hardly featured at all, except in the form of a Q and A with people on the street. In episode 12, for instance, passers by were asked, "what should a woman never ask a man?", which met with a range of stereotypical responses such as "what are you thinking?" and "am I the only woman in your life?".

Self-Help (5%): Although only a few inserts were classified as belonging to self-help, many of the real-life inserts included a self-help component, like the insert on alcoholism referred to earlier. There were four inserts that were purely self-help focused since they approached topics of psychological importance specifically. Episode 1 featured an insert on "why people see therapists" while episodes 9,11 and 16 dealt with obsessive compulsive disorder, panic attacks and phobias, respectively.

Sex (4%): Like love relationships, this category also featured less than in the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and no doubt for the same reasons related to the more public and more general nature of the television medium and audience. Where sex did feature explicitly it took the form of the "astroscope sex position" – an astrological slant on sexuality that focused on a shot of plasticine figurines in the sex position supposedly most favoured by people falling under that particular star sign. The plasticine figures were first shown as part of a 'sex zodiac' feature in the February 2000 issue of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and were obviously considered popular and appropriate enough for use on the TV show.

Competitions (4%): Although the competitions were not as much of a feature of the show as they are part of magazines in general, the competitions featured on the show were novel enough to merit a mention. The first competition was for a shopping spree, revealing the extent to which shopping has become the ultimate leisure activity in

postmodern consumer society. Another insert showed the winner of a competition in the *Cosmopolitan* magazine receive her unusual prize – a chance to fly in a fighter jet.
Social Issue (2%): This category did not feature nearly as much as in the magazine (6%), probably because stories of very serious social concern might dampen the upbeat attitude and entertainment value of the show. Two inserts which did qualify for this category – which usually examines gender related social issues – were on women and alcohol (the effects on a woman; how much is legally permissible when driving) and on women DJ's (what it is like to enter such a male dominated industry).
Relationship (other) (1%): Again, not a topic of great concern to the show, as was the case in the magazine sample. Episode 9 did feature a story on so-called "faghags" (female confidantes to gay men).
Work (1%): Obviously not the focus of the series, the workplace category was only represented by one insert on the advertising industry (episode 5). The focus then shifted to work issues in general. Text appeared onscreen giving eight self-evident job-tips to viewers, one instructing the viewer to "talk over job offers with your partner" and another advising the viewer to "never stop learning".

Apart from thematic parallels, some inserts were translated from the magazine to the show more directly. Episode 2, for instance, featured an insert depicting the 'Zest' models performing exercises on a Mauritian beach. The 'Zest' is the seasonal health and beauty supplement that accompanies the magazine, and has recently prided itself on using non-professional reader models who – despite being non-models – have very model-like bodily proportions. A typical 'Zest' feature would depict the models on location demonstrating the correct steps involved in certain toning exercises. By portraying a glamorized behind-the-scenes look at how "the perfect move for a bikini backside" is done, the step-by-step exercise formula is successfully adapted to the smallscreen[13]. The crucial difference, however, is that (unless one makes use of a VCR) the insert does not have that cut-out-and-keep quality that contributes to magazines' supposed practicality (Hermes, 1995).

The filming of photographic shoots is becoming increasingly common (the filming of the shoot for the *Sports Illustrated* Calendar is a recent example), and was recently used by the *Cosmopolitan* to further market their Lingerie issue (2001). The shoot,

sponsored by Magnum ice cream, was filmed and shown during a much-publicized M-NET timeslot and was further accompanied by a *Cosmopolitan Lingerie* website. The filming of models seductively moving from one pose into the next in an endlessly eroticised depiction of the perfect female form suggests that this is a perfectly 'natural' way for a woman to behave and does not expose the process of production as one of 'construction'. Instead, it adds to the objectification and eroticization of models whose bodies are representative of the smallest minority of women, thereby reinforcing the beauty ideal that undermines the average woman's development of sexual confidence and a healthy body image. Although such displays could be read as proof of the potential for women to use their sexuality to their own advantage, in a 'counter-discursive' fashion (Entwistle, 2000), the effects of portraying only super-slim young models as sexually desirable and powerful could be very harmful to the majority of women. The movement of the model from one suggestive pose into the next confirms Van Zoonen's (1994: 87) observation that the fashion and lingerie photography in women's magazines is no longer merely concerned to display new merchandise but "has taken over many of the codes formerly restricted to soft core pornography". The *Cosmopolitan Lingerie* television feature was clearly meant for a male audience and, as a woman, my distanced viewing of the feature was, for me, a concrete example of "the longstanding mismatch between men's fantasies about women's bodies, and women's resistance to having their femininity and their sexuality defined through masculine discourses" (Macdonald, 1995: 163)[14].

The *Cosmopolitan* Sexiest Sportsmen 2000 and 2001Calendars, which depict elegant head-and-shoulders shots of local sports heroes, provided a lot of material for *The Cosmo Show*. Some of the sportsmen featured were filmed on the shoot and interviewed for the show (Breyton Paulse, Corne Krige and Llewelyn Herbert), and viewers were encouraged to vote for the sexiest sportsman for 2001 during episode 12, with the competition and announcement of the winner being shown during episode 15. *Cosmopolitan* led the way with the calendar supplement and brand extension, and other women's magazines (like *Marie Claire* and, recently, *True Love*) have followed suit with calendars of their own. The *Cosmopolitan* also features an annual spread of local male

[13] Participants were not surprised at this insert and had expected as much from *The Cosmo Show*.
[14] My distanced viewing position could also be seen as proof of the fact that "in western society to be looked at is the fate of women, while the act of looking is reserved for men" and, significantly, "even if women do the looking they do not seem to do it through their own eyes" (Van Zoonen, 1994: 87).

soap stars 'in the buff' - another of its tongue-in-cheek attempts to reverse the gender norm by unashamedly objectifying the male form. Another direct crossover from the magazine to the show was the interviewing, in a mock contest, of some of *Cosmopolitan*'s Most Eligible bachelors depicted in the February 2001 issue. Other stories featured in both a magazine edition and a television insert were: the use of the date-rape drug Rohypnol as a recreational drug by girls (October 2000; episode missed); the practice of the Wicca, the European pagan belief system referred to as 'the old religion' (February 2001; episode 12); and the story of food editor, Justine Drake, who overcame bulimia after hiding it for years (February 2000; episode missed).

At times, the translation of the magazine brand into the television medium served to alienate the viewer from the 'naturalized' magazine form and highlighted aspects of the role that women's magazines actually play in society. It was during the self-reflexive inserts on the fashion industry that magazines' involvement in consumer culture, through the promulgation of the beauty myth (Wolf, 1990), was revealed. Episode 3, for instance, featured an insert on cover models and, to demonstrate the tricks-of-the-trade enabled through DTP software, a pregnant woman was digitally transformed into a svelte *Cosmopolitan* coverstar. This insert, like the star makeovers performed by Hannon Bothma, served to reassure the reader that covergirls are ordinary people and that, with a little help, they 'could be me or you'. At the same time, however, they reveal the magazines' morally questionable involvement in creating these idealized and perfected images that are held up for admiration and possible emulation. Similarly, episode 7 asked why there are so few black models on the covers of South African magazines, which leads to interviews with local magazine editors and discussions on why this is the case. By allowing editors to talk about "the market" and "sales" in relation to the magazine cover, viewers are exposed to an aspect of the production process which demystifies magazines and, perhaps, makes too explicit the involvement of magazines in consumer culture, as an industry where readers are in fact market statistics, not purely members of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983: 15). The inclusion of the male presenter also served to emphasize the role of women's magazines in society. When Michelle corrected Marius' use of the term 'babes' by saying that they [those featured] are "women...awesome women", *Cosmopolitan*'s feminist project is made transparent. Once again, the rehearsed nature of this dialogue serves to underestimate and alienate the viewer, who, if she were a '*Cosmo*' reader, would no doubt like to be seen as *both*

'babe' and 'woman'.

Overall, in my opinion and in the opinion of the focus group participants, *The Cosmo Show* was a fairly good television magazine programme, featuring all the necessary generic requirements (reviews, interviews, lifestyle topics). The show could clearly be identified as an adaptation of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine brand (in terms of colours, people and places depicted, emphasis on fashion, celebrities and real-life stories). At times the intention to depict a '*Cosmo*'-type lifestyle was a little too honestly acknowledged, as was the case in episode 12, when presenter Natalie Becker welcomed the viewers to the show 'for another great line-up of life – *Cosmo* style!". And occasionally, the gender views conveyed through the *Cosmopolitan*- inspired attitude seemed a little outdated. This was especially true in episode 14, when Natalie ended the show by saying: "Thanks for joining us and if you're single, good luck with finding Mr. Right". But perhaps the emphasis on love relationship themes in the *Cosmopolitan* magazine articles (14%) should indicate that such an understanding of the *Cosmopolitan* reader is to be expected. *Cosmopolitan* magazine is still largely focused on heterosexual love relationships and features like the *Cosmopolitan* Eligible Bachelors and those still traditionally concerned with catching a man ("Why *any* woman can have a boyfriend" October 2000) are in contrast with those which urge women to be independent and 'celebrate being single'. This ambivalent attitude to the theme of romantic love is another of the genre's central paradoxes.

The moments where the adaptation of the women's magazine formula were clearly less successful were: the presenters' interactions; the inserts devoted to 'gossip'; the inserts too overtly didactic and the inserts dealing with sexually intimate topics. Although gossip, long recognized as a typical feature of women's magazines, may serve certain unconscious needs related to the establishment of an 'imagined' community (Hermes 1995: 120), it seemed inappropriate within this context. Perhaps, once again, this is to do with televisions being a mass medium used to convey a range of different genres and public information. The gossip inserts in episode 1; 3 and 4 depicted still images of Hollywood celebrities like Sylvester Stallone, Drew Barrymore and Meg Ryan that remain onscreen while the voiceover 'dishes the dirt'. Like the foot fashion insert discussed previously, the still image seems out of place if it remains on the television screen too long, since viewers have come to expect a constant stream of images to

match the audio elements, and vice-versa. The presenters acknowledge the triviality of the inserts when introducing the and, in the process, make statements that seem to underestimate the viewer. In episode 2, Michelle introduces the gossip section (which follows an insert on two successful South African women and an interview with actress Bai Ling), saying, "From women who really make a difference, to gossip that doesn't" to which Marius responds with "okay, Mich, but be honest – you're dying to hear". And in episode 3, Marius follows the gossip insert by saying that "at least you'll have something to gossip about tomorrow at work".

Even less successful were the inserts that were too overtly instructional. Most notable was an insert on how to pack a travel suitcase effectively (featured in episode 9). The insert not only advised the viewer on what to pack (suggesting that the '*Cosmo*-girl' should always come fully prepared), but also on how to pack, with specific instructions to "stick broeks into boots and tangas into toes". Another insert, in episode 10, claimed to bring the viewer "the ultimate beach, survival and beauty kit" by advising on what to pack for a day on the beach and suggesting that the viewer "use that cellphone to make an indecent proposal". As a viewer, I would imagine that this kind of instructive and patronizing segment, when coming from the presenters (who do not replace the invisible authority imagined lurking behind the glossy magazines) can only inspire irritation or a rebellious dismissal from the audience. In magazines themselves, didactic segments have a cut-out-and-keep quality, or one can skip the page if necessary– on television, one feels compelled to sit through the 'lesson' coming from an unstable authority.

The moments dealing with issues of a sexual nature were particularly uncomfortable and similarly unsuccessful. Apart form the astroscope positions mentioned earlier, which focused on nude plasticine figures in various sexual positions for quite a length of time, an interview with rugby player Corne Krige and his girlfriend in episode 1 serves as a good example. After showing the couple in various poses of intimacy, the interviewer asked questions about where they met etc. The presenter/interviewer then asked them for their kissing tips which, judging from their bashful inability to respond, was a very inappropriate question to pose to a clearly reticent Afrikaans couple. Text then appeared onscreen which read: "The *Cosmo* Tip: Try the upside-down kiss – upside-down, top lip to bottom lip". Perhaps the producers should have assumed that the sexually liberated aspect of the *Cosmopolitan* brand

image is entrenched enough and that the (by now) sexually liberated *Cosmopolitan* reader might not be in need of such basic advice.

Other *Cosmopolitan* Brand Extensions

The other *Cosmopolitan* brand extensions, which will be discussed next, provide examples of vertical intertextuality, whereas *The Cosmo Show* was an example of horizontal intertextuality (Fiske, 1987). In addition to the show, the *Cosmopolitan* brand has been conveyed through television adverts, merchandise and virtual media forms.

The Television Adverts

The success of the *Cosmopolitan* television adverts, highlighted by the fact that other magazines (*You, Femina* and *Marie Claire*) have responded with television adverts of their own, testifies to *Cosmopolitan*'s status as a 'leader brand' (Foges, 2000). The reason behind the ad campaign, according to the agency responsible, Bester Burke, was to increase the *Cosmopolitan* brand and "extend it into another dimension" (MagFocus[15], 1999). In order to convey the *Cosmopolitan* attitude and reach the audience targeted, the adverts were aired during the Ally McBeal timeslot, because it was believed that the programme had the same "attitude, personality and 'joie de vivre' that epitomizes the Cosmo woman" (MagFocus, 1999). The adverts themselves broke new ground: they commented on the plot of the specific episode and therefore changed accordingly each week. The magazine cover of the month would be shown, with the covergirl 'responding' in a way appropriate to the incidents of the episode, followed by the sound of a woman laughing mischievously in the background. So, for instance, during the episode that centered on the character John Cage's pet frog, a digitally animated frog 'jumped' on the covergirl, Elle McPhearson. The adverts, once again, brought the '*Cosmo* girl' (as typified by the cover girl) to life.

However, the jerky manner in which the model's body was made to move, and the comically startled expression which animated her face, served, in a way, to degrade the covergirl image by making a mockery of her. The adverts seem to be responding to

the deep-seated resentment that the typical *Cosmopolitan* reader has for the idealized female image that she is constantly exposed to[16]. A similar resentment is described by Naomi Wolf (1997) in reference to the games she and her and her friends played with *Barbie* dolls as children:

> We were fixated on *Barbie*, but we also despised her. The secret game in countless American basements and playrooms involved (and still does, I am told) little girls doing bad things to *Barbie*. Sometimes we would make her take positions that were ludicrous or that looked painful. Other times, we would pop her head off the rounded stump of her neck (Wolf, 1997: 29).

The Ally McBeal *Cosmopolitan* adverts were considered a huge success and, more recently, in a parallel development outside of this study period, *Cosmopolitan* adverts featured during the *Big Brother* timeslots on the pay channel M-NET. The adverts referred to the individuals and incidents in the house and responded, specifically, to the gender dynamics within the house. On a specific 'eviction Sunday', for instance, the competition was between Brad (the brutish alpha male) and Margaret (a flirtatious and confident 23 year-old). The competition, so far, had seen men nominated alongside women, with the South African public voting in favour of the men on both of the previous evictions. The female housemates were beginning to feel that the reasons for the eventual evictions were definitely gender-related and Margaret felt pressured to change the pattern that had been established thus far. On eviction Sunday (7th October 2001), it was in fact Brad who had to leave the house, with Margaret emerging victorious. During the adbreak which followed this announcement, the *Cosmopolitan* ad was aired. The advert featured text that read "Bye, bye Bru" (a reference to the South African slang term used frequently by Brad, which the media had picked up on), followed by a recording of Margaret's distinctive laugh (which Brad himself had commented upon during the week), in place of the mischievous giggle usually used. That month's cover was then shown, with the focus falling on one of the coverlines, (co-incidentally) "how to be the ultimate survivor", a reference to the Survivor series synonymous with the reality TV genre. The coverline was also making a reference to the song by all-girl group

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[15] *MagFocus* is the title of the now defunct local trade publication devoted to the subject of magazine publishing in South Africa.

[16] This kind of resentment was exhibited by focus group participants.

Destiny's Child, whose combination of sex-appeal and assertiveness is representative of the same postmodern brand of feminism that is advocated in the pages of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

The Internet

The South African *Cosmopolitan* website is another reproduction of the coverpage, but with no access to any of the articles featured. It is not interactive, because it is obviously hoped that the viewer will actually go out and buy the printed edition. The website does, however, allow one to subscribe to be a member of the *Cosmo Club* (C-Club), which means a member will receive a C-Mail every two weeks, with information of the type (astrological, health and beauty etc.) they asked for on the subscription form. The C-Mails always feature an appeal for any 'It happened to me' type stories and for any comments. In this way, they widen the magazine's ability to establish a sense of community among its readers and lives up to one editor's description of women's magazines as clubs (Wolf, 1990:74).

Other Merchandise

The commercial spin-offs of the *Cosmopolitan* brand are the hair accessories, the *Cosmopolitan* diary and the millenium special edition *Cosmopolitan* book. The hair accessories, labelled '*Cosmic Options*' or '*Cosmopolitan Hair*', can be purchased from major chainstores like Pick'nPay and Game and are sold on a plastic backing which bears the image of model Beneatha Hunter, with the characteristic *Cosmopolitan* font being partly obscured by her head – a replica of the typical magazine cover. The colours, font and model in typical pose identify the plastic, furry or sparkly accessories as belonging to the '*Cosmo*' brand. The diary can be ordered through an order form in the magazine itself, and, since it displays the *Cosmopolitan* title on an elegant black leather cover, it is positioned as the perfect accessory for the independent '*Cosmo* career girl'.

Towards the end of 1999, *Cosmopolitan* launched a special millenium edition of a book, modelled on the magazine and titled *Cosmopolitan's guide to coping with the millenium*. The book was compiled by *Cosmopolitan* editor Vanessa Raphaely and *Shape* editor Heather Parker (previously the deputy editor of *Cosmopolitan,* currently editor of the *Zest* supplement and largely responsible for *The Cosmo Show*). It featured

a cover styled very much like the typical *Cosmopolitan* magazine cover (model in pose; characteristic font; coverlines – see copy included at the end of this Chapter). The coverlines attempted to sell the magazine to the reader through promising to provide "Your strategy for: Life, Sex, Love, Friends, Sanity and...er...Sex". The cover also displayed the "Horoscopes: The year ahead" coverline expected from women's magazines at the beginning of a New Year.

The book was not a huge sell-out and, judging by the fact that I bought my own copy (among a stack of many) from a factory bookshop in 2001, the idea to produce a *Cosmopolitan* book was a commercially unwise one. The main reason for the failure of the book in my opinion is the fact that it does not contain a single picture. The whole book consists of text alone, under the conventional chapter headings one would expect from a novel. Without the pictures, there is no invitation to read the articles, which are written in the style of women's magazine features. Without the pictures, the reader does not have the same navigational 'markers' and feels overwhelmed by the pages of text, which are unexpected of the magazine genre. Although the page layout and choice of font has clearly been influenced by magazine trends, the absence of accompanying images disregards the fact that "in consumer magazines the two [text and pictures] usually enjoy equal weight, so that one might say that a magazine, unlike a newspaper perhaps, is as much about image as it is about words", which means that "the two must always, to a greater or lesser degree, work together" (Foges, 2000: 106).

The motivation behind the book, according to the explanation given by Vanessa Raphaely and Heather Parker in the book's introduction, came from the fact that many *Cosmopolitan* readers store previous issues and many readers phone in with requests for back issues:

> because the unique truth about *COSMO* is that your life will come back to the subjects we cover. There will always be times when, we know, *COSMO* is the only magazine which deals with exactly what's going on. Fallen in love? Fallen out of love? Feeling blue? This is our territory – and we've got you in mind. So, we thought, why not use the best of *COSMO* in a book at this millenium time in our lives when, heaven knows, everyone needs a bit of inspiration and some great ideas for facing up to what comes next? (Raphaely & Parker, 1999:

Introduction page).

On the positive side, some of the book's articles are highly relevant within the contemporary South African context ("We're still stuck with Saturday night apartheid", "50 ways to be safer in SA", "Could you have lifestyle rivalry?"). Also, some of the articles featured provide the reader with an amalgam of *Cosmopolitan's* more informative subjects ("So what's bothering you? These are the 10 QUESTIONS most commonly asked of therapists" and "Your intimate sex questions answered"). Perhaps the absence of pictures and over-reliance on self-help articles points to the fact that the compilers of this book, the *Cosmopolitan* editors, have overestimated their advice-giving role. With the plethora of self-help and popular psychology books available (most of which have been written by 'experts'), a self-help book authored by the editors of *Cosmopolitan*, retailing at the same price as the other self-help books, is not likely to be seen as an attractive offer. Although the advice within the pages of women's magazines seems to come from an invisible and credible authorial source, it is advice of a common-sense and practical kind, and belongs firmly within the pages of a woman's magazine, where its author is not always assumed to be the editor, but, rather, an older, nameless source of feminine wisdom. By placing the names and photographs of the two compilers on the book cover, alongside the book covers of therapists, healers and self-help gurus, the *Cosmopolitan* advice loses credibility. Also, at a more basic level, the cost was not justified for a book that does not have the same entertainment value as its magazine namesake, and is marketed as a time-specific novelty, which means it does not have a long shelf life.

TRUE LOVE

True Love is a glossy women's magazine, which is published in English and read largely by black South African women. Somewhat ironically, it was first published in 1975 as a picture story book aimed at men, and focused mainly on sex scandal stories (Laden, 2000). When censorship laws forced the *True Love* to exclude the sex scandal stories which had been responsible for the magazine's success, the editor, Jim Bailey (also the owner of the *Drum, City Press* together with the *True Love* group) decided to sell the publication to the Nationale Pers. The publication was then rebranded as a

woman's magazine title (Laden, 2000).

The magazine underwent a major post-apartheid re-launch in 1995, under the guidance of editor Khanyisile ('Khanyi') Dhlomo-Mkhize, previously the magazines fashion editor. Dhlomo-Mkhize was already well-known as an SABC newsreader and winner of several beauty pageants when she was appointed *True Love* editor, and had therefore been well groomed for the role (Murray, 1998). Since the July 1995 revamp, circulation and readership figures have steadily increased. Dhlomo-Mkhize attributes this not only to the quality of the feature articles, but also to the fact that each issue comes packaged with either a poster, supplement or product promotion. The magazine was also given a new and uncluttered design and was well promoted by advertising agency Lindsay Smithers-FCB. Above all, the increase in circulation is attributed to the fact that *True Love* is the only glossy magazine of its calibre to address the specific needs of black women in South Africa. This task is taken seriously by Dhlomo-Mhkize, who was quoted in the July/August 1998 issue of *MagFocus* as saying that "at *True Love* we've made it our mission to really understand the black woman of today".

According to the All Media and Product Survey figures for 2000, *True Love* had a readership of 1 636 000 – a significant increase since the AMPS readership figure for 1999, which stood at 954 000 (www.naspers.co.za). The ABC circulation figures[17] for the first part of 2000 (January-June) placed *True Love* at number 10 with a circulation of 106 538 (with the *Cosmopolitan* following at number 11 with a circulation of 105 920). *True Love* - also published by Naspers - is described on the website as "a handbook for upwardly mobile black South African women". In terms of the Living Standards Measurement[18] categories, which are "rapidly becoming the common language of market definition" (Sinclair, 1997: 119), most of the *True Love* readers (29.6%) belong to the LSM 6 group, referred to as the 'emerging market'. The rest belong to the LSM 5 ('young aspirers', 20.4%), LSM 4 ('urbanized singles', 17.6%) and LSM 7 ('established

[17] ABC figures are used in the calculation of advertising rates and are made available by the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa. All the newspapers and magazines of the major publishing groups belong to this body, which in turn is a member of the International Federation of Audit Bureaux of Circulations (Skinner & Von Essen, 1999:162).

[18] The Living Standards Measurement is an all-races measurement devised to group the population into categories according to standard of living. The LSM is a demographic segmentation model used to simplify the complexity of the South African consumer market. LSM categories are made available by the South African Advertising Research Foundation (Skinner & Von Essen, 1999).

affluents', 14.8%) groups. In terms of socio-monitor descriptions[19], most of the *True Love* readership can be classed as ENHANCERS (32.5%), TODAYERS (28.4%) and ACHIEVERS (19.3%). 'Enhancers' have a primary need for self-development, and want to acquire new skills. They are clean living and practical and do not desire stimulants, quick fixes or raw thrills. The 'todayers', however, do enjoy living on the edge and are inclined to be thrill seeking. 'Todayers' are materially aspirational and often have a need to show off to peers by flaunting their possessions. Since few of the readers have any tertiary education (38.3% have 'matric' and 39.3% have 'some matric') and the majority are either unemployed (29.7%) or students (28.6%), it seems fitting that the magazine is positioned as "a lifestyle role model that they [the readers] can aspire to" (www.naspers.co.za/together.html). The overwhelming majority of *True Love* readers are young (with 43.6% belonging to the 16-24 age group and 34.3% belonging to the 25-34 age group), black (96.3%), and, of course, female (60.4%).

True Love magazine describes itself as providing a "lifestyle role model [that readers] can aspire to", which places emphasis on the tendency of magazines to present a particular lifestyle to their readers and make explicit their aspirational role. According to Laden (2000), this aspirational element is one of two primary dispositions common to consumer magazines for black South Africans (the second disposition being the didactic stance adopted). *True Love*, like other magazines, and specifically those intended for black South Africans, presents typically middle-class lifestyle images as desirable. This is not surprising considering magazines' involvement in consumer culture, a culture in which leisure and consumption go hand in hand. Hence,

> magazines render meaningful, without necessarily always putting into action, a shared repertoire of everyday experiences, lifestyle options, and social practices best described, from a Western or European standpoint, as typically 'middle-class' or 'bourgeois'" (Laden, 2000:8).

[19] The sociomonitor consumer survey conducted by Market Research Africa segments the market according to the sociographic differences among people. Sociomonitor descriptions segment the market into different value groups (Sinclair, 1997).

The end of Apartheid "provided an opening for the emergence of a black middle-class" in South Africa (Leslie & Foss, 2000:2). The *True Love* re-launch in 1995 would no doubt have adapted to accommodate the new needs of a growing middle-class and, at the same time, would provide a vehicle for advertisers to reach this new and growing market. The editor, Dhlomo-Mkhize, came from a high-profile family and, with her privileged private school education, was representative of the black elite who were most likely to be the first to bridge the race divide and visibly participate in an upwardly-mobile South African economic life. Indeed, "many black media personalities are social celebrities" who, Laden suggests, "use their cultural prestige to actively promote their magazines and the images they convey as a means of reinforcing their own status as established members of an elite bourgeoisie" (1997: 131). And, like other celebrities, they "inspire in the reading public, individual and collective aspirations by suggesting and endorsing new models for social conduct" (1997: 131).

The aspirational role of black magazines in South Africa is important within the post-apartheid context because, by depicting images of black success, they provide "new social options" (Laden, 2000: 11) for black South Africans and allow "South Africa's black middle-class to create, disseminate, and legitimize new definitions of themselves, and hence to revise the cultural categories hitherto ascribed to them" (Laden, 1998:22). So, in the context of the new South Africa, consumer magazines can be viewed as "an experimental medium" (Laden, 1998: 17). In the case of *True Love*, the magazines producers have, perhaps unconsciously, been less committed "to a feminist program than to a broader agenda of socio-semiotic change in South Africa" (Laden, 2000: 17). This view was supported by Dhlomo-Mhkize herself in an interview with *MagFocus* magazine when she claimed that *True Love*

> provides meaningful direction to people who have been afforded hitherto undreamed-of opportunities and possibilities. It gives its readers the advice and answers to deal with the ensuing doubts, confusion and challenges this paradigm shift represents (*MagFocus*, 1998).

The more overtly aspirational and didactic stance of consumer magazines for black South Africans serves a significant post-apartheid social and cultural function, in that it offers practical advice to a group of emerging professionals, more integrated into

the economic and business environments than ever before. Also, by portraying images of black success, the magazines provide readers with new lifestyle options and new means for (material) self-expression, in a way that encourages others to succeed in order to achieve a similar lifestyle and level of economic involvement previously denied them. Others, however, suggest that by emphasizing the values of individualism and consumption through portraying images of black success, consumer magazines perpetuate the myth of the self-made man and undermine the black class struggle that requires structural rather than liberal individualist change (Leslie & Foss, 2000). These images of success are also believed to serve a purely economic function, with glossy consumer magazines "stoking black pride while cultivating a product hungry audience for corporate advertisers" (Leslie & Foss, 2000: 3). Such images may also widen the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' within the black community by "promoting the imitation of the aesthetic values and consumption habits of the white privileged class and the bourgeois aspirations of middle class blacks" (Leslie & Foss, 2000: 9).

If indeed magazine **covers** do try to create an idealized reader- image of the group advertisers seek to reach (Foges, 1999), then *True Love* magazine presents local celebrities who – through being black, successful and South African – are held up as role models for, or perfected versions of, the readers themselves. The covers of all thirteen issues under study featured local black women, mainly television presenters or soap stars, on the cover. These are the media personalities who, like Dhlomo-Mkhize, are not only respected for having achieved a certain amount of fame and professional success, but have become emblematic of black success. They are the social celebrities Laden (1997) credited with "[inspiring] in the reading public, individual and collective aspirations" (Laden, 1997: 131) by serving as "glossy representations of black success" (Leslie & Foss, 2000: 10). Through their high profile careers and glamorous cover photographs, these women are held up as icons and, due to their fame, economic success and association with a western type lifestyle, are held at a distance from the South African majority. However, stories such as the cover stories in *True Love*, which chart the celebrities path to success, remind the public of their distinctly South African upbringing and locate them within local frameworks. The black community's support of these role models suggests that they feel a sense of ownership over and pride in these real-life success stories.

Of course not all fans are supportive and there have been incidents involving obsessive fans. This was the case when local SABC continuity announcer Florence Masebe was followed, ambushed and shot twenty-six times in an attack outside her home. The incident was followed by (apparently) hoax death threats to members of the *Generations* soap opera cast. Since the police have not yet found the perpetrators, or any possible motive, one can only speculate that the attack was committed out of hate to send the message that successful black women risk angering black men, many of whom were gradually emasculated by the inequalities of apartheid. Of the attack, Florence Masebe said that she "could feel all this unbelievable hatred being dished out" (*True Love*, January 2000: 48). This particular incident demonstrates, firstly, the extent to which audiences may become emotionally involved in soap opera plots. Muzi Kuzwayo (2000: 17) has described the power of soaps in South Africa, saying that "people talk about them as if the actors are their scandalous neighbours" and "there have been instances where the local actors have been beaten up in real life for the roles they play in television". Secondly, this incident illustrates how, in the black community, "women [bear] the brunt of these feelings of emasculation and compensatory entitlement" (Morrel, 2001: 28). A recent study by Human Rights Watch on the prevalence of sexual violence in South African schools revealed that the main targets of such attacks are prefects, leaders and achievers, who are perceived to be too arrogant or assertive (2001). This need to 'put a woman in her place' is expressed by a member of the South African Rapist Association, quoted in Morrel (2001: 28), who says: "we rape women who need to be disciplined (those women who behave like snobs)...".

The covers do more than focus on local talent and success as a form of inspiration for local black women. They also allow black women to recognize themselves as they provide them with an image of a 'ideological positionality' that they can identify with and relate to (McCracken, 1996). The covers use the typical head and shoulders shot (instead of the *Cosmopolitan* body shot) and also use many well co-ordinated colours, but are generally more subdued. They are clearly aimed at a more conservative and sophisticated reader as they are noticeably less 'sexy' and more discreet. The covers do not always stick to the formula of using one woman only on the cover, sometimes a couple feature, or a mother and child or even three soap stars together. The coverlines tend to be longer and less witty than those on the *Cosmopolitan,* and they often clearly spell out what is inside, for example "SIX WEEKS IN HELL: 'I was

gang raped, addicted to crack, had a gun pressed to my head and pushed into the streets of Hillbrow'" (September 2000). Fewer exclamation marks are used, but emphasis is always placed on the words 'sex' and 'win', and on the numerical digits used in the titles of the '*Cosmo*'-like articles, such as "15 effective ways to find and keep Mr. Right" (August 2000) and "9 ways to get what you want from a man" (November 1999). One example of the way in which the word 'sex' is highlighted is on the cover of the March 2000 issue, where the word is enlarged to the same size as the cover model's face (and on a cover featuring only a head and shoulders shot, that would mean that the word dominates). The covers usually display a banner on the top right corner which advertises either a competition inside or a free supplement or poster.

The **contents** pages divide the magazine's content into seven categories – features, fashion, beauty, heath, food and décor (décor is only occasionally included), regulars and wins & giveaways. In the *True Love*, the **features** also take up the largest amount of magazine content space (apart from the 34% made up of adverts), with 24% as compared to 20% in the *Cosmopolitan*, but there are generally fewer features in the *True Love*, indicating that the *True Love* features are longer in length. Second in terms of the *True Love* content space were the **regulars**, which took up 20%. As one would expect, the regulars contain items like the editor's column, the reader's letters, the horoscopes etc. The 'spotlight' section of the regulars functions much like *Cosmopolitan's* 'Insider' section, providing Hollywood updates and reviews, but there is a greater emphasis on celebrity gossip, the local social scene and soap plots (there is a page called 'spotlight on soaps' which outlines the plots of *Generations, Days of our lives* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*). The 'spotlight on women' page deals with the plight of women worldwide, giving updates on issues related to women's equality and empowerment.

However, three **regular** items which one would definitely not find in *Cosmopolitan* are worth mentioning for what they suggest about the different readers targeted – the Bridal competition; the *True Love*/ Ellerines kitchen and, during 1999, the *True Love*/ Ellerines Traditional recipe competition. The *True Love*/ Ellerines kitchen is a sponsored venue where workshops are held and product demonstrations given. The page in the magazine covers these events and photographs the participants. Readers are able to sign up for the product demonstrations given by home economists from

different companies (such as Robertson's spices, Anchor yeast and Bokomo foods) or for the personal hygiene and skincare talks given by product consultants from companies such as Lever Ponds and Smith & Nephew. This element of *True Love* magazine suggests that the readership is perhaps more traditional in its interest in home-related industries and perhaps live in either a more patriarchal or working class society where women are more likely to assume traditional gender roles. However, the *True Love* /Ellerines kitchen feature also points to the possibility that home economics presents black women who have not had tertiary qualifications with viable career options, as is suggested by the November 1999 *True Love*/ Ellerines kitchen page, which covered the Home Economics student workshop which was hosted "to give home economics students a strong appreciation of their subject and expose them to several career options" (*True Love*, November 1999: 138).

This feature is also an example of the way in which consumer magazines for black South Africans provide readers with " new social options" (Laden, 1998) and, by reinterpreting notions of westernisation and modernity, are responsible for the urbanization and embourgeoisement of black South Africans (Laden, 1998:5). For instance, the June 2000 issue showed coverage of the *True Love* kitchen International gourmet advanced cookery course, intended to "help readers improve their cooking and entertaining skills". Similarly, the August 2000 issue featured the Kempton Park Ladies Club's Mother's day lunch, where they discussed "issues affecting women and how to entertain with wine and cheese". Clearly, workshops of this nature provide the reader who has a disposable income and bourgeois aspirations with the skills to participate in typically middle-class lifestyle practices. Readers enter these *True Love* kitchen workshops to learn new domestic skills, appear in their favourite magazine and to receive the bonus hampers and free products. *True Love* magazine is, in fact, a very useful form of informal education in that it not only offers informative and thought provoking articles that are likely to interest women specifically, but it provides practical tips of an everyday nature that one might not have had passed down from generations before. 'Dorah's top tips' feature on the page next to the *True Love* kitchen and include cooking tips on, for example, how to avoid weeping when chopping onions, how to keep lettuce fresh etc. Tips such as these, which one would normally find in homemaking magazines, attest to the practical use-value of the magazine. Another practical insert is the 'step-by-step cookery' page which, with its simple instructions, is a perfect example

of the didactic quality of black magazine titles (Laden, 1997).

Another feature in the sample studied which one would not find in *Cosmopolitan* magazine was the *True Love*/ Ellerines Traditional Recipe competition, which ran during 1999. The prize to be awarded to the six winners was R40 000 worth of appliances and pots. This competition was referred to by Laden (2000) as an example of how consumer magazines for black South Africans articulate the relationship between the global and the local in terms of values and lifestyle practices. Indeed, the competition affirms black readers' roots and heritage and some of the recipes hint at the economic hardships experienced by black South Africans under apartheid, for example 'pumpkin peel stir fry', 'liver and vegetable salad' and 'pilchards in samp shell' were three of the winning entries, serving to legitimize African tastes and culinary skills which might not be in keeping with western cuisine trends.

Similarly, the *True* Love/ Sterns Bride of the year competition would not be a likely feature in the pro-independence *Cosmopolitan* magazine which targets the woman "in her freedom years". The competition is a regular feature of the magazine and winning entries enter into the annual final selection for the overall winner. Other 'regular' items worth mention include 'young achievers'; the 'advice centre'; 'your turn'; and 'career info', which will be dealt with respectively. The 'young achievers' page functions like the *Cosmopolitan* 'movers' section in that it profiles the careers of successful people and outlines how they got there. The difference is that the *True Love* focuses on the youth specifically, with three achievers in their late teens or twenties being profiled.

The 'advice centre' is an extension of the 'agony aunt' feature common to women's magazines and the focus is once again on the dispensing of practical advice and knowledge to the (generally female) readership. The double page is headed by text which describes the advice centre as the place "where your sexual, psychological, financial and medical questions can be answered by our expert panel". Sexologist Dr Dee is responsible for the 'sex' column, clinical psychologist Khumo Seopela deals with the 'emotional' issues, financial expert Belinda Beresford deals with questions related to the subject of 'finance' and general practitioner Dr Precious Moloi tackles any concerns over 'health'. The 'Finance' column is a truly valuable component of the advice centre since the absence of any general course on basic banking and finance at school level

means that it is difficult to understand the facts about, for instance, buying on credit, home loans, policies and inflation – all dealt with in the advice centre's finance column. As a reader, I would find this a truly valuable resource. *True Love* seems to be showing a commitment to making black women informed consumers and members of the South African economy. The advice centre is also useful when one considers its ideological significance, in that it compartmentalizes life and its potential problems into these four categories: bodily related health issues, problems related to money (our means of livelihood in this world), mental heath and relationship issues, and matters related to sexual intimacy (usually dealt with by experts in women's magazines).There is also a work related Q and A column on the 'career info' pages.

'Your turn' is the name of an opinion column, situated at the back of the magazine, that is written by a reader and published with their photograph. *True Love* readers can communicate with their magazine through letters, through the 'advice centre', through filling in the coupons that allow entry into the magazine (if one becomes part of one of the *True Love* workshops or is chosen to be included in the 'Real woman, real clothes' or 'a new you'/'hair news' inserts) and can also have their article published under the 'your turn' column[20]. One particularly interesting article was written by reader Yvette Shiri and published in the November 1999 issue. The article, titled "Live and Learn: Let's try to speak English correctly", is a chastisement of the common grammatical and pronunciation mistakes made by second language English speakers – from one black South African to another. Since South Africa has eleven official languages, and the Bantu education system of the Apartheid government gave insufficient instruction on correct English usage, this country exhibits a wide range of dialects and phonetic emphases. However, these different accents are often common to particular groups and are used as a tool for mimicry in racial jokes. It is for this reason that one would not expect such an article to be in a black consumer magazine, since it tackles a subject that is often the source of politically incorrect labeling. The author makes reference to her schooling and the emphasis that was placed on correct English pronunciation by the school principal. Therefore, one can only assume that the author's privileged education warrants such an address, since her level of education puts her in a position to speak with authority on the subject of pronunciation. Still, the article appears

[20] *Cosmopolitan* magazine has an annual short story competition, but does not allow a monthly reader contribution in the form of editorial space.

condescending (and is perhaps indicative of the anglo-centrism one might have found in the 'colonial subject') since few black South Africans do speak with correct pronunciation and those that do (above a certain age) were either educated at private schools or abroad. For instance, the author starts by saying:

> *"Basefiticate!" "Beseitifate!" "Bethsetiticate!"*
> Confused? Actually, those are just a few variations of the word "birth certificate". And a direct result of some still believing that "pronunciation is a matter of opinion, what matters is the meaning".
> Most people don't even bother to check their pronunciation of words like *filim*, instead of film, *menenjer*, instead of manager or *grozeriez*, instead of groceries. In fact, most of our local TV presenters, singers and actors use the words in italics. (Shiri, *True Love*, November 1999: 152)

This article reveals that such judgements exhibit a (perhaps unconscious) social, rather than linguistic, basis (O'Sullivan *et al*, 1994).

The 'career info' pages provide advice and work-related quotes and profile the career of a successful individual. Another feature of the career info section is the "How I started my own business" column, which profiles a successful (usually female) entrepreneur[21].

In sum, the **FIG. 1A** and **2A** reveal that *True Love* magazine uses nearly 10% less magazine space for adverts than *Cosmopolitan,* although this may not be out of choice (see the *True Love* advertisement included and analysed at the end of this Chapter). It contains slightly more features and double the amount of regulars, with a slightly smaller emphasis on fashion and beauty (11% compared to the *Cosmopolitan*'s 18%), and a slightly greater emphasis on food and décor. The magazine is ordered much like the *Cosmopolitan*, with the editor's column and celebrity gossip at the beginning, followed by the fashion and features, moving on to the work related pages and the food and décor sections, ending with coupons, product information and opinion columns ('your turn' and, occasionally, 'the last word').

TRUE LOVE feature categories

A comparison of the *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan* features was approached by using the fifteen feature categories decided on after the initial analysis of the *Cosmopolitan* article themes. The results of this comparison (which can be seen in **FIG. 1B** and **2B**) are discussed below and ranked from highest to lowest in terms of percentage value.

1) **Social Issues:** The vast majority of the *True Love* features highlighted social issues. So much so, that this category (which accounted for 26% of feature space) was placed first, in comparison to the *Cosmopolitan* sample, where social issues were featured 6% of the time, with the category ranking sixth in terms of importance. Nearly half of the articles dealing with social issues were specifically concerned with gender related issues. The rest dealt with issues relevant to South African society and the African community in general. Examples of such articles include "married to a sangoma" (November 1999), "men get raped too" (February 2000) and "can fathers cope alone?" (October 2000).

   Some of the gender related articles were explicitly concerned with feminist and empowerment issues - more so than one would find in *Cosmopolitan*, which tends to employ an assertive post-feminist attitude rather than 'spell out the facts', and is often more concerned with the progress of the individual than the progress of women worldwide. Some of these articles dealt with gender equality and legislative support structures for women, such as "Domestic violence: Know your rights" (November 1999) and "Long walk to freedom: Women's progress report" (December 2000). In another significant article, "African feminism – the myth and facts" (October 1999), Glenda Daniels interrogates whether feminism and African culture are compatible or contradictory, in response to the widely held belief that "the very notion of a liberated African woman is a contradiction in terms. There is a irremediable antagonism between the African woman's identity as an African and as a woman" (Frank, 1982: 492). This belief arises from the fact that during times of racial oppression, race inequality takes precedence as a marker of identity, and is also indicative of the tendency of African cultures to be more patriarchal. There are also those articles that examine the current social situation of women, like the article on the Durban factory

[21] The *True Love* reader-participants found these pages to be particularly useful and inspiring.

that will only employ virgins, using monthly virginity testing as a condition of employment ("Have hymen – will work", March 2000). Other articles describe how women are redefining the roles previously ascribed to them, for instance "there's a girl in the ring" (February 2000), about female boxing, and "women at the wheel" (August 2000), which salutes the women entering the dangerous and male-dominated taxi industry.

The December 1999 issue featured a forty-page sub-section devoted to "the 100 most inspiring black women of the twentieth century" in celebration of the millenium. The women were honoured for their achievements in sport, economics, politics and the arts. Editor Dhlomo-Mkhize described the process of selection as extremely difficult and said, in the introduction to the piece, "one lesson I have learnt from this project is that contrary to popular belief, we are not short of black role models. What we are short of, is platforms like this supplement where the achievements of those who are role model material are acknowledged and applauded" (*True Love*, November 1999: 161).

2) **Celebrities:** 21% of the features were about celebrities or well-known people, with over half of these articles being about local celebrities. The celebrity category was therefore the second most predominant category for the *True Love* sample, whereas the self-help category had placed second in the *Cosmopolitan* sample. The prevalence of this category was largely due to the fact that each issue featured and article on the 'star' on the cover, together with articles on overseas celebrities.

3) **Self-Help:** Although the self-help category placed third for *True Love* as compared to second for the *Cosmopolitan*, the percentage value was the same for this category in both samples (13%). This for me is indicative of the fact that *True Love* belongs firmly to the women's magazine form imported from the west, with its focus on the improvement, control and perfection of the self. An article typical of this category was "choosing happiness" in the January 2000 issue, while "the art of fighting back" (July 2000) advised on self-defense techniques. Typical self-help articles are those which make guarantees of success, by promising to show the reader "how to" achieve particular goals. An example of this kind of article was provided in the June issue of 2000, when six women revealed "how to attract a wealthy man".

4) **Workplace:** This category accounted for 11% of feature space, this despite the fact that the subject is dealt with separately in the 'career info' section of the regulars, discussed earlier. The focus on the workplace is far greater in *True Love* than in *Cosmopolitan*, where the topic only accounted for 3% of article space. A 'workplace' article which can be found in every issue of *True Love* magazine is called "six of the best" which features six black women from a specific career each month. 'Six of the best' has highlighted careers such as farming (January 2000), public relations (November 1999) and interior design (June 2000), once again providing coverage of women who can serve as role models and symbols of what is possible in terms of career success.

5) **Sex:** Interestingly, the *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* samples both featured 10% of sex related articles. Each issue featured at least one article on the topic of sex. Some of the articles took a socially responsible attitude to the subject, for instance the article which promoted the television programme called *S'Camto* (part of the *Love Life* campaign) which involved teenagers talking to teenagers about sex ("Let's talk about sex" May 2000) and another on safe sex ("safe sex-condomise' July 2000). Others conved the assertive attitude of a sexually liberated woman ("sex: teach your man how to satisfy you", October 1999). Some approached the subject with the lighthearted tone common to the *Cosmopolitan* type articles, like the article titled "sex: is he a hero, lazy boy or gentleman in bed? Find out how to handle him..." (August 200), which straddles the 'sex', 'self-knowledge' and 'self-help' categories.

6) **Real Life:** Since *True Love* is a more distinctly local magazine, it should come as no surprise that more real-life stories about local events and local people were featured in this magazine than in *Cosmopolitan* (9% compared to 6%). Examples of the real-life articles are: "double calling" (October 2000), a story about high profile business people who are also sangomas (traditional healers); and an article on families affected by the tragedy that occurred at a Chatsworth nightclub, when rival club owners threw teargas into the poorly ventilated club, killing several underage teenagers in the process (June 2000).

7) **Love relationships:** The figure for the amount of content space devoted to the

subject of love relationships in the *True Love* sample was half that of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine (7% in the *True Love* compared to 14% in the *Cosmopolitan*). I take this to be an indicator of the different ages of the readers targeted – the *True Love* reader could be a teenager or a middle-aged married woman, whereas the *Cosmopolitan* reader is assumed to be 'in her freedom years'. Having said that, however, most of the love related articles did follow *Cosmopolitan* type formulas, with titles such as "Romantic intelligence – 9 ways to please a man" (November 1999) and "lying lover: ways to cope when your lover betrays you with lies" (December 1999). One article, significantly, interrogated five adulterous men on their behaviour and asked whether they would accept this kind of behaviour from their wives in "double standards: men want mistresses, but they don't want their wives to have lovers" (May 2000).

8) **Self-Knowledge:** Only two articles fell into this category, which, again, could be owing to the larger age range of the *True Love* target group. Older women might not respond favourably to these (generally frivolous) type articles. One such article that did appear in *True Love*, however, is a good example of such frivolity. Titled "what lipstick personality are you?" (September 2000), the article described different female character types, as revealed by the shape of their lipstick – one could be, for instance, a 'hard-edged Nancy' or a 'round Betty'.

9) **Esoteric: (1%)** This was not as much of a trend in the *True Love* sample. Only two examples were found: "understanding dreams" (December 1999) and a new year astrology special (January 2000), which readers have come to expect from every women's magazine at the beginning of a new year. A 'mind and spirit' page was introduced into the 'regulars' section in 2000, which straddles the 'health', 'self-help' and 'esoteric' categories.

10) **Travel:** This category hardly featured, with only one percent of article space focused on travel. This is an indication of the fact that this is not a general interest consumer magazine for women, and is not specifically concerned with travel. Perhaps it is also indicative of the apartheid past which denied many black South Africans the luxury of even local travel by preventing them from reaching the financial position necessary and restricted their movement in general. However, the absence of travel inserts is

surprising when one considers the magazine's focus on lifestyle practices and "new social options", since tourism is felt by millions of people to be a measure of their quality of life and a source of compensation for what is lacking in their ordinary lives (Graburn, 1983 in Welgemoed, 1990).

It is important to note that there were five categories derived from the *Cosmopolitan* sample which were not present in the *True Love* magazine articles. There were no articles which could be classified in the 'relationship (other)' category, while the remaining four categories (fashion, beauty, health and competitions) were each in separate sections of the magazine and were not represented in the features section. In short, the *True Love* features were generally more topical, falling under the 'social issue' category and obviously appealing to a wider age group. There were slightly fewer articles dealing with popular psychology topics but the same amount of focus was given to the topic of sex. There was a significantly smaller focus on articles on love relationships. Three categories were given a much greater emphasis in *True Love*, with figures double or more than those for the *Cosmopolitan* –those were celebrities, work and social issues.

True Love Brand Extensions

Whereas *Cosmopolitan*'s brand extensions were commercially driven, concerned with increasing brand awareness and sales, *True Love*'s outside involvements seem to be serving more of a social function, concerned with the education and empowerment of women. *True Love*'s brand extensions are in keeping with the magazine's image as practical helper, informal educator and role model. The difference between the two magazine's outside ventures is perhaps best explained by the surrounding South African magazine market – since *True Love* is the only glossy magazine of its kind to meet the needs of local black women, it has no competition, and is therefore able to be less commercially driven and can serve more socially responsible and constructive functions.

"*True Love* Live"

True Love Live is the name of the magazine's radio show, featured on air every Wednesday morning at 10 o'clock on Metro FM. The show, which is hosted by the magazine's editor, is a talk show which deals with topics featured in *True Love*

magazine. Guest speakers or experts are invited onto the show, and listeners are able to call in to have their say or pose a question to the show's guest. Radio is without a doubt the most effective means to reach the *True Love* target group because, in South Africa, it has far greater reach and accessibility than print media and is more affordable than television (Teer-Tomaselli & de Villiers, 1998). Radio has certain advantages over television that are relevant when considering some of the more serious and intimate subjects that are covered on *True Love Live* - subjects translated from the women's magazine. Because radio is purely auditory, requiring that the listener use a little imagination, it makes more appeals to inner thought processes and is therefore more likely to have a personal impact. In sum, "radio has an ostensible interpersonal directness which is private and intimate" (Teer-Tomaselli & de Villiers, 1998). It is also a highly flexible medium, that allows listeners to carry on with their daily routines and work duties without demanding their complete attention, as is the case with television.

The show's format works much like a television talk show, with a well-known hostess interviewing a guest on behalf of an audience. Editor, newsreader and hostess for *True love Live*, Dhlomo-Mkhize in this instance resembles Oprah Winfrey and local talk show hostess Felicia Mabuza-Suttle[22]. The audience phone-in option functions much like the 'letters to the editor' section of print publications (McLeish, 1994) where the aim is "to allow a democratic expression of view and to create the possibility of community action" (McLeish, 1994: 139). In the sample under study, around 16% of the *True Love* features were translated for discussion on *True Love Live*. Most of the articles translated belonged to the 'social issues' category, followed by 'sex', which was frequently the topic of discussion. Overall, the partnership between Metro FM and the *True Love* magazine serves to further legitimize the magazine's efforts in its role as educative informer and social mediator. The presence of subject experts gives greater authority to the magazine in its role as communicator of reader wishes and conveyor of important information.

The *TRUE LOVE* / Dooleys self-improvement and empowerment workshops

In post-apartheid South Africa, *True Love* magazine prides itself on providing empowerment for black women. The notion of empowerment is a participatory one, in

[22] See *Chapter Five: Analysis* for a discussion on 'the cult of Felicia' – a reference to the tendency of celebrities to use their fame to launch other business ventures, themselves becoming 'brands'.

which previously disempowered people are taught skills that allow them to help themselves. Black South African women were subjected to a double oppression under apartheid, causing Miriam Tlali to write at the time that the situation of the African woman, legally and otherwise, was that of a "perpetual minor" who held a "very demeaned status right down there at the very base of the social pyramid" (1984: 26). It is worth remembering again that in times of race or class oppression, gender equality is usually relegated to the background, since race identity is what binds families together in their oppression. Now that South Africa is a democracy, democratic values in general are being adopted, and black women are able to demand equality on gender grounds as well. Black women are also able to define themselves as women, but need skills, encouragement and empowerment tools to enable them to rise above their previously disadvantaged economic and social position.

True Love magazine, together with Dooleys lemon ale, launched a national self-improvement and empowerment campaign in July 1999. The motivation behind the campaign was explained in the magazine:

> since January 1999, *True Love* has published articles on improving self-esteem, making your dreams a reality and making the most of who you are. We have decided to take this initiative further by launching 13 national self-improvement and empowerment workshops. Together with Dooleys, we aim to help you become a better you (*True Love*, January 2000 :2).

Thirteen workshops were held over the course of a year in hotels and conference centres across the country. Attendance was free but limited to the first 200 entries. Each *True Love* edition published during the period in which the workshops were being held featured a double page spread which gave a 'reportback' (in pictures) on previous workshops and also included details of, and coupons for, upcoming workshops. Apart from having the editor, Dhlomo-Mkhize, and PR co-ordinator Zandi Dlamini present "to answer all your questions concerning *True Love*", the workshops featured guest speakers who gave lectures on different topics. Ipeleng Moloto, MD of her own CCTV company, gave a lecture on the topic of 'how to start your own business'. Tselane Tambo, founder and director of the Tselane Tambo grooming school was on hand to give a presentation on 'making the most of yourself'. *True Love* food editor, Dorah

Sithole, gave a presentation on 'elegant entertaining', and fashion advice was given by image consultant Ceri Gandy. The workshops also featured a product talk and recipe demonstration given by a Dooleys representative.

The reportback page would feature photographs of participants and speakers, a different empowerment related quote each month and information from the sponsors. The copy used in the small advertising space given to the sponsors on the 'reportback' page provides insight into the current social role and commercial function of *True Love* magazine. On the bottom right corner, for instance, text which accompanies the image of a bottle of Dooleys lemon ale reads: "Dooleys lemon ale is the perfect choice of drink for the sophisticated, mature and confidant millenium woman. Dooleys and this woman have a lot in common – they are both naturally refreshing". The brand statement then takes this analogy further and labels Dooleys "the lemon ale that's as naturally refreshing as you are", revealing marketers attempts at reaching a specific target group through linking desirable attributes with a particular product. Another sponsor which advertises its services on the 'self-improvement and empowerment' workshop page is the Asambe travel club which concedes that "a relaxing holiday has always been little more than a dream for the majority of South Africans" and promises to "[bring] this dream within the reach of ordinary working people and their budgets". The marketing of holiday options to black South Africans is one aspect of the post-apartheid promotion of leisure time activities previously denied to the majority. This new concern with 'enjoying the good things in life' is not surprising and is probably the visible demonstration of what is meant by the term 'honeymoon phase'. For those who are now in the financial position to enjoy the kind of lifestyle promoted in this and other magazines, these pursuits are no doubt felt to be deserved after the anti-apartheid struggle. This regenerative attitude is expressed by Jeanette Figueroa in a quote included on one of the 'reportback' page of the October 2000 issue:

> One of the best things you can do for your life is this: BEGIN AGAIN. Begin to forget the baggage you have carried with you for years. The problems that don't matter any more, the tears that cried themselves away, and the worries that are going to wash on the shore of tomorrow's new beginning.

The workshops proved so successful that a second round of workshops, now

simply titled 'self-empowerment workshops', was launched in 2000. This time, however, participants were required to pay a small donation of R10 "in keeping with the philosophy that empowerment is not just about empowering yourself but also those around you" (*True Love*, October 2000:94) – a philosophy that seems to reveal the motivation behind *True Love*'s efforts. The funds raised were to be donated to POWA, the People Opposing Women Abuse, and FAMSA, the Family and Marriage society of South Africa. New speakers were lined up to give talks at the second round of workshops. The speakers were: Thuli Bottoman from FAMSA who gave spoke on 'how to make your relationship successful and fulfilling'; *True Love* financial expert Belinda Beresford on 'how to manage your personal and business finance'; Moshupiadi Ramogayane, from Heil consulting, on 'how to start your own business' and, once again, Tselane Tambo speaking this time on 'how to be a confidant career woman'. Also speaking were two representatives from sponsoring companies – a representative from Asambe travel on 'how to travel successfully' and an Allenby representative giving a talk entitled 'educate yourself for success'.

The *True Love* **website** is a lot more interactive than the *Cosmopolitan* webpage, in that it allows readers to access more information. For instance, readers can pose questions to the sex expert in 'ask Caroline', they can vote for the best *True Love* magazine cover, they can contribute article suggestions (which, if accepted, guarantee the reader R250) and can comment on the magazine in general. Apart from *True Love Live* and the *True Love!* Dooleys self-empowerment workshops, *True Love* is also associated with a cookbook, *Cooking from Cape to Cairo; A Taste of Africa*, which was compiled by their food editor, Dorah Sithole. And in the January 2000 issue, *True Love* launched their own annual bachelors' calendar, featuring "12 young, gorgeous, successful and available men in SA" (Dhlomo-Mkhize, *True Love* January 2000: 8).

Critical Discourse Analysis of *TRUE LOVE* print advertisement

A double page advertisement for *True Love* magazine appeared in the December / January 2000 edition of the *MagFocus* magazine, a trade publication aimed at those in

the magazine publishing and advertising industries. This advert is an example of a secondary text which "[works] to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text" (Fiske, 1987: 117). Only seven advertisements appeared in the forty five page edition, four advertising specific print publications (*FHM, Drum, TV Plus* and *True Love*) and three advertising publishing related services (a trade publication, a postal service and the Naspers email newsletter). The *True Love* advert was the only women's title advertised. The advert provides significant insight into the way in which *True Love* positions itself vis-à-vis the rest of the South African magazine industry.

The copy plays on the metaphors of seduction and romantic love, traditionally associated with women's magazines and suggested by the *True Love* title, in order to make a direct address to those members of the advertising industry assumed to be reading the *MagFocus* magazine. Closer analysis reveals the text to be fraught with ambiguity and laden with sexual politics. The advert's ambiguity of meaning provides an example of how "textual instantiations [sic] capture the clash of discourses and demonstrate ideological forces at work" (Janks, 1997: 335). The text refers to the discourses of pre- and post- transformation and, through revealing the magazine's involvement in consumer culture, serves to highlight how within capitalist society, the discourse of consumerism is closely related to notions of identity. The advert, which is essentially an appeal for advertising revenue, also confirms that "many black media owners complain that they do not have as much advertising support as they should" (Kuzwayo, 2000: 100). This complaint reflects the fact that "from December 1997 to December 1998 black newspapers and magazines received R223.5 million in advertising, and the white media or mainstream newspapers received R1764.9 million" (Kuzwayo, 2000: 100). In the magazine samples studied here, 42% of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine pages were advertisements, compared to 34% for the *True Love*. The main difference, however, was in the type of products advertised. *Cosmopolitan* featured mainly adverts for appearance related products (cosmetics, haircare products and fashion accessories), alcoholic beverages, cars and occasionally insurance. *True Love* also featured adverts for cosmetics and haircare, but the products were generally local and more affordable brands tailored to the specific needs of the black market (such as hair relaxers). *True Love* also featured adverts for educational institutions and adverts for food, household and medical products. The difference obviously lies in the fact that the *True Love* appeals to a larger target market in terms of age and lifestage.

The advert is composed of a head and shoulders shot of *True Love* editor Khanyi Dhlomo-Mkhize on the left side of the double page spread, with the written copy on the right side. The advertisement is sepia toned, giving a romantic and aged quality which alludes to the past. After a brief recognition of the text, the reader's gaze is drawn to the left hand image since it is the visual elements of an advert which are the most striking and usually the most meaning laden. The head and shoulders shot is lit from the bottom left corner. This, together with the sepia toned uppercase serif font of the main text, lends an aura of classicism to the advert – she styled in a way similar to a classic museum piece or bust. Her arms are crossed at the forearms across her chest, with her hands resting gently on her upper arms, in a gesture similar to that used to symbolically indicate 'love' or 'heart'. Her expression is both earnest and demure – her face is angled slightly to the side; her eyes, although looking directly into the camera, are soft; her lips look about ready to move into a shy smile. Dhlomo-Mkhize's perfectly manicured nails and her hair, pulled back in an 'upstyle', together with the classic serif font text, communicate the idea of 'simple elegance'. The *MagFocus* readers would be familiar with Dhlomo-Mkhize as a media personality and would no doubt be aware of the fact that she is the *True Love* editor. What is striking about this particular image of her is that her appearance is played down as she is devoid of any hair accessories, jewellery or obvious make-up. This depiction is very unusual considering her beauty pageant past and contrasts strongly with the way in which she is usually styled in her newsreader, television presenter and editor roles. Stripped of all the material markers which usually signify her status and success, Dhlomo-Mkhize is made to look younger and slightly more vulnerable and approachable – more like a person than a media persona. This deliberate styling choice was no doubt intended to make the reader confront the well-known media personality in her primary subject position – that of black female. Presented in this way, Dhlomo-Mkhize is obviously meant to metonymically represent black women in general rather than the media role model she is usually held to occupy. As a media personality and member of the black elite, Dhlomo-Mkhize is usually held at a distance from the black majority, but here, her image is meant to represent them. The choice of Dhlomo-Mkhize as model confirms Laden's statement that many black media personalities are social personalities who "use their cultural prestige to actively promote their magazines" (1997: 131). Using the editor as the model, making the role-model look more like the reader, also highlights the tensions between the individual and the

community; between western modernity and African tradition. These tensions result from Dhlomo-Mkhize's hybrid identity. She is both western and African, a combination which has been disapproved of in much of the discourses of (post) colonialism.

At the level of the text, this choice of styling functions for the purposes of the advert in that Dhlomo-Mkhize seems to be making a personal appeal to the advertisers as the editor and as the personification of the *True Love* readership. However, this image is reflective of post-colonial discourses around the body, specifically those concerned with the body "as a site for gendered readings of post-colonial subjectivity" (Ashcroft *et al*, 1998: 184). Colonial discourses used references to physical differences between groups to reinforce prejudices against 'other' groups and with long-lasting effects. Postcolonial discourses recognize that although the body is a 'text' which serves as a 'battleground' for conflicting discourses, "it is a specially material text, one that demonstrates how subjectivity, however constructed it may in fact be, is 'felt' as inescapably material and permanent" (Ashcroft *et al*, 1998: 184).

During times of slavery in America, those black people who most resembled white people physically (those who were light-skinned enough to 'pass') were given preferential treatment. In the transition period immediately preceding and following South Africa's first democratic elections, the same could be said for those black South Africans 'western' enough to cross the race divide and therefore enter high profile media positions. Dhlomo-Mkhize's beauty, a beauty accessible to white audiences because of her quite 'western' facial features, and privileged education, revealed in her perfect spoken English, allowed her to enter the public media arena where she has played an important post-transformation role. A significant aspect of the Black Consciousness movement was the rejection of the conformity to western appearance standards, seen as a consequence of the internalization of the racist discourse of colonialism, in favour of appearance styles (such as the Afro) which affirmed a distinctly black identity. Currently, musicians such as Erika Badu and Macy Gray are applauded for their pro-African stance as reflected in their adoption of particular appearance styles. Academic criticism is directed at those forms, such as advertising and women's magazines, that depict black women in terms of western ideals (i.e. models with processed or straight hair and light skin). Leslie and Foss (2000), for instance, undertook a qualitative content analysis to compare the dominant characteristics of *Ebony SA* and *Ebony USA*. They found that

both magazines featured mainly adverts with black models that have the phenotype, hair texture, facial characteristics and skin tones which are closest to those of whites. This was taken as proof of Herman and Chomsky's (1988) conception of the media as propagandist vehicles used to justify the status quo. In an analysis of an advertisement that appeared in *Essence* magazine, Susan Bordo (1996) described how the magazine promotes black pride and self-acceptance, and yet plays upon the consumers feelings of insecurities over the racial characteristics of their bodies. Bordo suggests that "this invitation to cognitive dissonance reveals what *Essence* must grapple with, in every issue, as it tries to keep its message of African American self-acceptance clear and dominant, while submitting to economic necessities on which its survival depends" (1996: 48). Significantly, it is usually within the capitalist contexts of high modernity that individuals feel the need to 'get back to their roots' and affirm an ethnic and communal identity through deliberate emphasis of their symbols of difference.

Increasingly, the emerging black market in South Africa is adopting lifestyle practices which are typically western and middle class and, as globalization and consumerism gain momentum, more people are entering into the western 'image economy', adopting western dress codes and appearance styles. Some might experience this negatively, like Moses Mmutlane, marketer for *The Sowetan* who says (rather conspiratorially) that "the problem is that white marketers want to see themselves in you. They want you to mimic their lifestyle. You must dress like them, eat like them and speak like them, and only then will they think that you are successful" (Kuzwayo, 2000: 130). Others, no doubt, are enjoying the feeling of belonging to the global cultural economy from which they were deliberately excluded under apartheid. Against this backdrop, the deliberate playing down of Dhlomo-Mkhize's appearance can be seen as making a political statement ('I am an African'). However, the descriptive text alongside her image, together with the reader's intertextual knowledge of her public image, identifies her as fully westernized. Thus, the advert's choice of styling for Dhlomo-Mkhize highlights an ideological tension between ideas of sameness and difference within post-apartheid South Africa.

The main copy, in uppercase and large font on the right hand page, reads: 'YOU'LL NEVER SEDUCE ME WITHOUT TRUE LOVE' (*MagFocus*, Dec/Jan 2000: 37). This statement uses the metaphor of seduction, together with the magazine's somewhat

traditional title, to convince the potential advertiser that the only way to reach women from the emerging black market is through *True Love* magazine. The direct address of the text, together with the gaze of the image of Dhlomo-Mkhize alongside, makes this seem like a direct appeal and challenge to the potential advertiser. The word 'seduce' was no doubt chosen by the copywriter as a pun on the magazine title *True Love.* However, the word's psychological and sexual implications are used in this instance to describe the advertising process. This kind of comparison is not new. Seduction implies a kind of deception or manipulation, a controlling of one who has an inherent weakness. At its worst, advertising is felt to 'lure' people to buy and consume, to 'woo' them 'against their will'. The main text also employs the discourse of the women's magazine genre and includes the magazine title to invoke the idea of romantic love traditionally associated with women's magazines. The title is used to reflect the common sense view that women will only (or *should* only) have sex with a partner if there is romantic love between them. Ironically, early criticisms of the media often held women's magazines responsible for promulgating this view that women's sexuality is dependant on emotions inspired by romantic love.

This statement, apart from suggesting to the advertiser that the only way to reach black women is through *True Love* magazine, also relies for effect on certain binary opposites regarding racial and gender stereotypes. Just as Dhlomo-Mkhize is used to represent the 'black woman', so the implied reader is set up as the 'other' – the advertiser, the one with the economic resources - the 'white man'. The reader is textually interpellated into the subject position of the white, male advertiser. The statement implicitly suggests that the implied reader (i.e. white male) has the need to 'seduce' and 'have' her, relying on the stereotype derived from colonial discourse of the black woman as sexualized 'other'. This implied weakness allows the woman to set a condition: "you'll never seduce me without true love". 'True love', in this instance, stands for something seemingly tangible (he alone is not enough to entice her) but since 'true love' refers to an intangible emotional partnership, 'true love' here signals 'respect'. So, the advert plays on the age-old relationship between the vulnerable and needy woman/prostitute and the powerful and needy man/client. However, by setting up a boundary ('you'll *never* seduce me without true love'), the major weakness is made to be his. This weakness, contrasted with the power she has over him, is what will see to it that her demand (for true love) will be met, adding a level of legitimacy and respectability to the transaction,

while masking her own need (the whole aim of the advert is to get advertising revenue). The statement says that black women are not 'easy to get' but are demanding of respect. (Or do they just like 'playing hard to get'? The unstated assumption is that previously, she *was* easy to seduce)

The body of copy, which follows in smaller print, is still in the classic serif font and is made up of short and direct statements. The tone is more assertive and continues to apply the analogy of the heterosexual relationship (a woman seems to be addressing a potential suitor) to the communication between the magazine and the (potential) advertiser. The text is aspirational and forward-looking and it aims to challenge the perceived misconceptions that the readers (advertisers, marketers) have about black women as a market:

> I'm black, female, educated and going places. I'm my own person, earning an above-average salary, with big plans for the future. So please, don't underestimate my intelligence, don't patronize me and don't stereotype me. If you want to reach me, really reach me, advertise in the only South African magazine that is totally dedicated to women like me. You won't regret it (*MagFocus,* December/January 2000: 37).

The assertive and no-nonsense tone of the text, as conveyed through the short and concise sentences, serves as an affirmation of black female identity. The descriptors used, when considered in relation to their absent antonyms, are clearly meant to challenge certain perceived stereotypes and misconceptions held by the implied reader. The opening 'I'm black, female, educated and going places' is a description of both the editor pictured and of the ideal reader she metonymically represents. The 'black' and 'female' are obvious self-descriptions as they are the most immediately registered by the reader. Foregrounding these two signifiers alerts the reader to the fact that they are being employed as a deliberate assertion of a specifically black and female subjectivity. By including 'educated and going places' alongside these obvious classifications, the implication is that being educated and geared for success is as self-evident and 'given' as race and gender categories. Also, the inclusion of the reference to education and success in the first line hints at a naturalised belief that being black and female means being uneducated and 'going nowhere'. Significantly, while the text presents the *True*

Love reader as educated, less than half (38.3%) of the *True Love* readership has finished their high school. This attests to the fact that the magazine is aspirational and that there is usually a discrepancy between a magazine's ideal or implied reader and the actual reader.

The phrase which follows, 'I'm my own person, earning an above-average salary, with big plans for the future', suggests, firstly, that the reader is independent and free from situations of family dependence. This is similar to the kind of freedom advocated by the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and said to define the typical *Cosmopolitan* reader. Here the western individualism advocated by the women's magazine genre is asserted over African traditionalism. The statement also depicts the reader as having a disposable income and future aspirations. These details are presumably included to dispel the unspoken but implied belief that black women are poor, and as a hint to the advertiser that developing a relationship with the reader now may reap future rewards and is in 'his' best interest. The appeal which follows is slightly longer and uses repetition: 'So please, don't underestimate my intelligence, don't patronize me and don't stereotype me'. The listing and use of repetition suggest that being underestimated, patronized and stereotyped is something common to the way in which the addresser (black female/ editor-reader) is treated by, presumably, the addressee (white male/ advertiser-reader). This change in tone and call for respect is signalled by the phrase 'so please'. The phrase suggests that the subject understands that it is her subject position (as a black woman) that has caused her to be underestimated, patronized and stereotyped *and* that the subject position she adopts as an educated and salaried woman provides reason for her *not* to be underestimated, patronized and stereotyped. The allusion to the 'stereotype' could be a reference to the fact that previously, during apartheid, the majority of white South Africans only knew black women in the role of domestic worker. Domestic workers were, and still are, patronized and frequently treated with disrespect. The first two stanzas of the poem "Domestic Workers", written by the 'Thula Baba' collective during apartheid, attests to this history:

> We are called girls. We are called maids.
> It is like we are small.
> It is like we are children.

We are told what to do.
We are told what to say.
We are told what to think.
We are told what to wear. (Lockett, 1990: 324).

The appeal acts as a reference to the pre-transformation history of black women in this country (also signalled by the sepia tone of the advert) and as a condition for any future relationship. The inclusion of 'stereotype' also suggests that black women of today are not happy with the way in which they are represented by the advertiser – as if he himself is also implicated in the stereotypical portrayals of, and disrespect for, black women. The copy then says 'If you want to reach me, really reach me, advertise in the only South African magazine that is totally dedicated to women like me'. The first part of this statement, 'if you want to reach me, really reach me', could be read as a reference to the phrase ' move me' used to describe the expected effects of both romantic love and emotive media genres. The rest of the sentence finally explains the purpose of the advert – to generate advertising revenue. The final phrase, 'you won't regret it', suggests that the advertiser has assumed that black women as a group are a risky target market and implies that the group would, in fact, prove to be loyal purchasers of the products advertised.

The *True Love* advertisement draws on the discourse of romantic love and sexuality so pervasive to the magazine form and applies this to the attempt by magazine/editor to form a market-driven relationship with advertisers. The use of Dhlomo-Mkhize as the advert's model results in her image bearing certain ideological tensions experienced within post-apartheid South Africa. The history of black women in this country is largely responsible for the tensions surrounding the appeal for economic recognition which this advert is ultimately making. The advert suggests that black women as a market are not having their needs met and still feel discriminated against owing to stereotypical beliefs which remain attached to their subject position as black women. This need for economic recognition confirms the idea that consumption, identity and status are intimately connected and suggests that 'empowerment' is measured largely by the symbols of westernization – money represents freedom. The fact that *True Love* is speaking on behalf of all its readers in this regard confirms that consumer magazines for black South Africans are playing a role in the urbanization and

embourgeoisisement of their readers (Laden, 1998). The appeal of the advert is similarly contemplated by Kuzwayo (2000: ix) when he says that "so many marketing opportunities are waiting to be snapped up, if only a company is prepared to study the average day in the average life of a black consumer and research what he or she really wants".

Summary

This Chapter provided the text analysis component of this case study. Using *Cosmopolitan* magazine as a starting point, the Chapter began with a description of the women's magazine as a popular genre. A comparative analysis was then conducted, enabled by the identification of fifteen feature categories. These categories provided the basis for a comparison of, firstly, *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* and, secondly, a comparison of *Cosmopolitan* and its televisual equivalent, *The Cosmo Show.* Also included was an intertextual analysis of the primary texts and their secondary texts and brand extensions.

The results showed that *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* are committed to different feminist agendas. *Cosmopolitan* is chiefly concerned with the maintenance and improvement of the self, and the navigation of heterosexual love relationships. It conveys an assertive, postfeminist attitude and provides an example of how the ideology of feminism has been incorporated into consumer discourses on a global scale (Macdonald, 1995). The *Cosmopolitan* brand of feminism emphasizes "pleasing oneself, freedom and self-sufficiency" (Macdonald, 1995: 91). The magazine is highly aspirational and idealistic, and "superliving" is the target (Macdonald, 1995: 203). *The Cosmo Show* was tailored to suit the television medium, with most inserts focusing on fashion and celebrities. The show enabled a more 'estranged' reading of its magazine namesake and revealed how the concept of authorship is hard to sustain in the transfer of print to televisual mediums (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994).

The *True Love* analysis supported Laden's (1997; 2000) claim that consumer magazines for black South Africans are more overtly aspirational and didactic than those intended for a predominantly white readership. The magazine foregrounds the

achievements of local role models, presents middle-class lifestyle practices as desirable and includes a great deal of practical advice and information. The prevalence of features concerned with social issues, together with the nature of the magazine's brand extensions, reveals the *True Love's* commitment "less to a feminist programme than to a broader agenda of socio-semiotic change in South Africa" (Laden, 2000: 17). This Chapter confirmed, for me, the difficulty involved in attempting an 'estranged' reading of such a familiar and naturalized genre. Description is the first stage of the Critical Discourse Analysis framework (outlined in *Chapter Three: Methodology*) and is used to read a text 'against the grain'. Such a text-based and descriptive analysis is ultimately limited by the fact that

> the textual analysis of magazine material does not involve the presentation of pre-existing, objective or ostensibly descriptive evidence, but a critical re-presentation which is inevitable filtered through the beliefs, positionings and contextualised social identities of the researcher (Murray, 1998: 94).

FIG A) A typical *Cosmopolitan* cover, made up of vibrant and well co-ordinated colours and depicting an upper body shot of a scantily clad model. The attention-grabbing coverlines frequently make use of uppercase letters and exclamation marks.

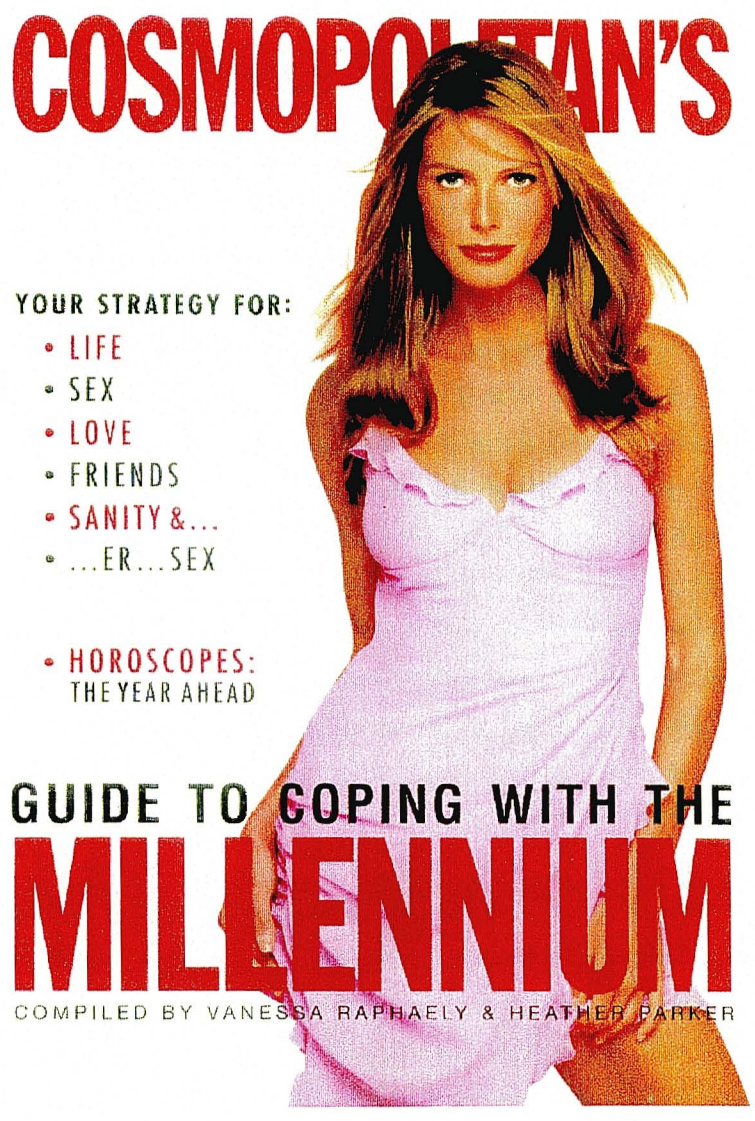


FIG B) The front cover of the *Cosmopolitan Millenium Guide*, clearly styled and designed to resemble the typical *Cosmopolitan* cover.

FIG C) A *True Love* cover featuring, as is typically the case, a local soap star. This particular edition achieved the highest sales ever with 112 000 copies being sold. At a glance, this could possibly be attributed to four things. Firstly, the free poster and 'stew mix' that accompanied the magazine; the inset photograph of Vinoliah Mashego, presenter of popular youth programme *Jam Alley*; the inclusion of two sex-related coverlines and the interesting description of cover star Rosie Motene – "on being black, Jewish and her future in *Generations*".

FIG 1A: COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE CONTENT

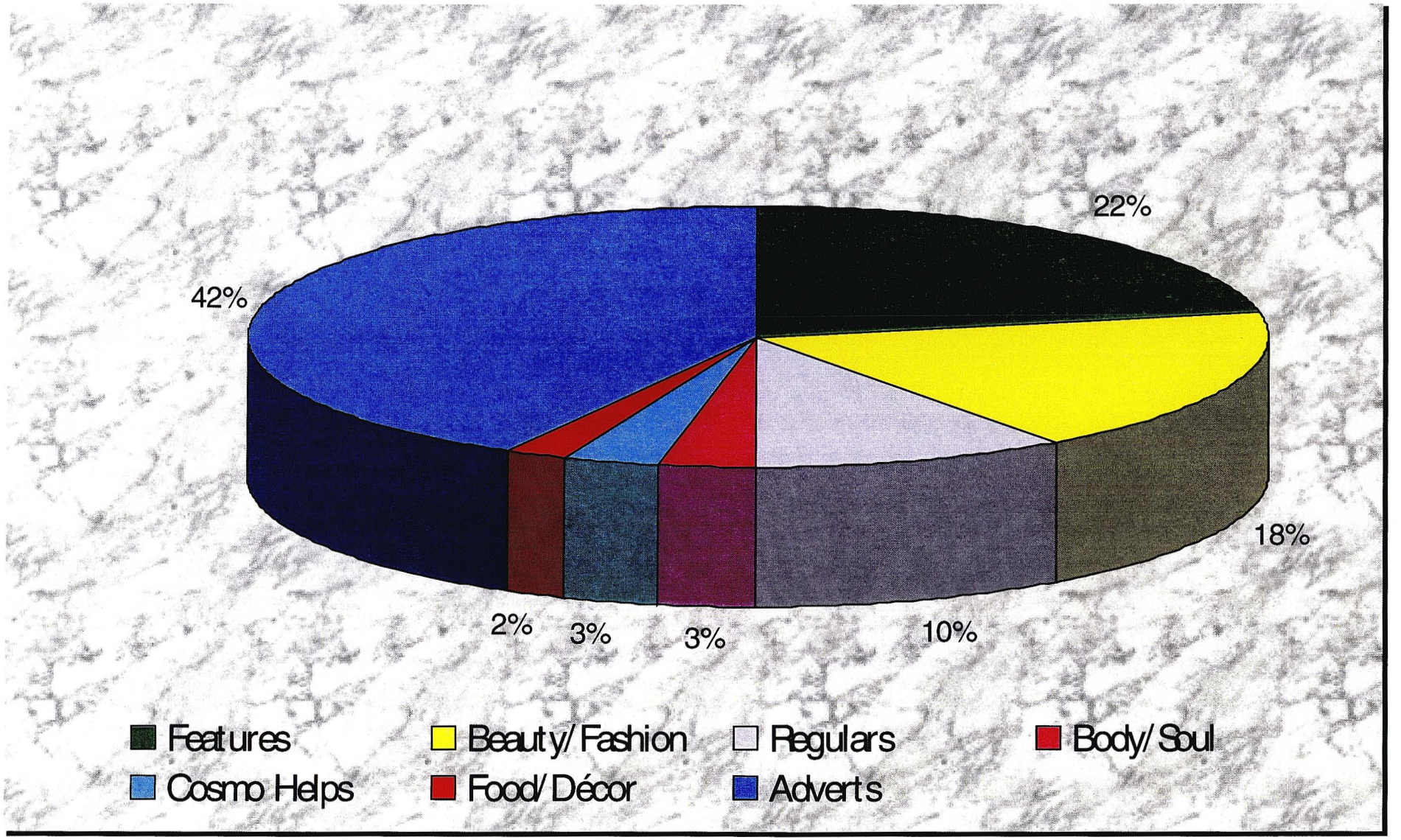


FIG 1B: COSMOPOLITAN FEATURE CATEGORIES

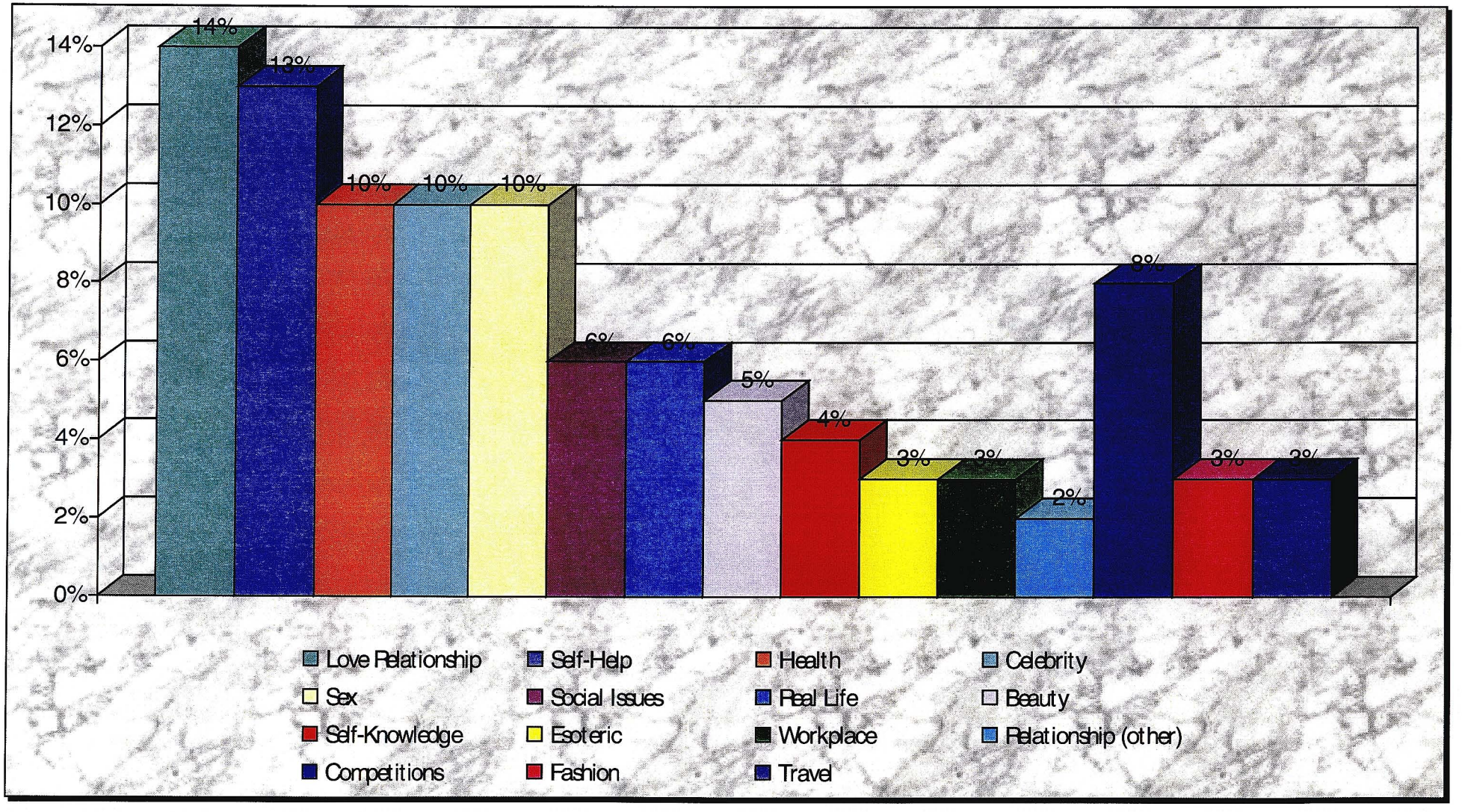


FIG 1C: "THE COSMO SHOW" INSERT CATEGORIES

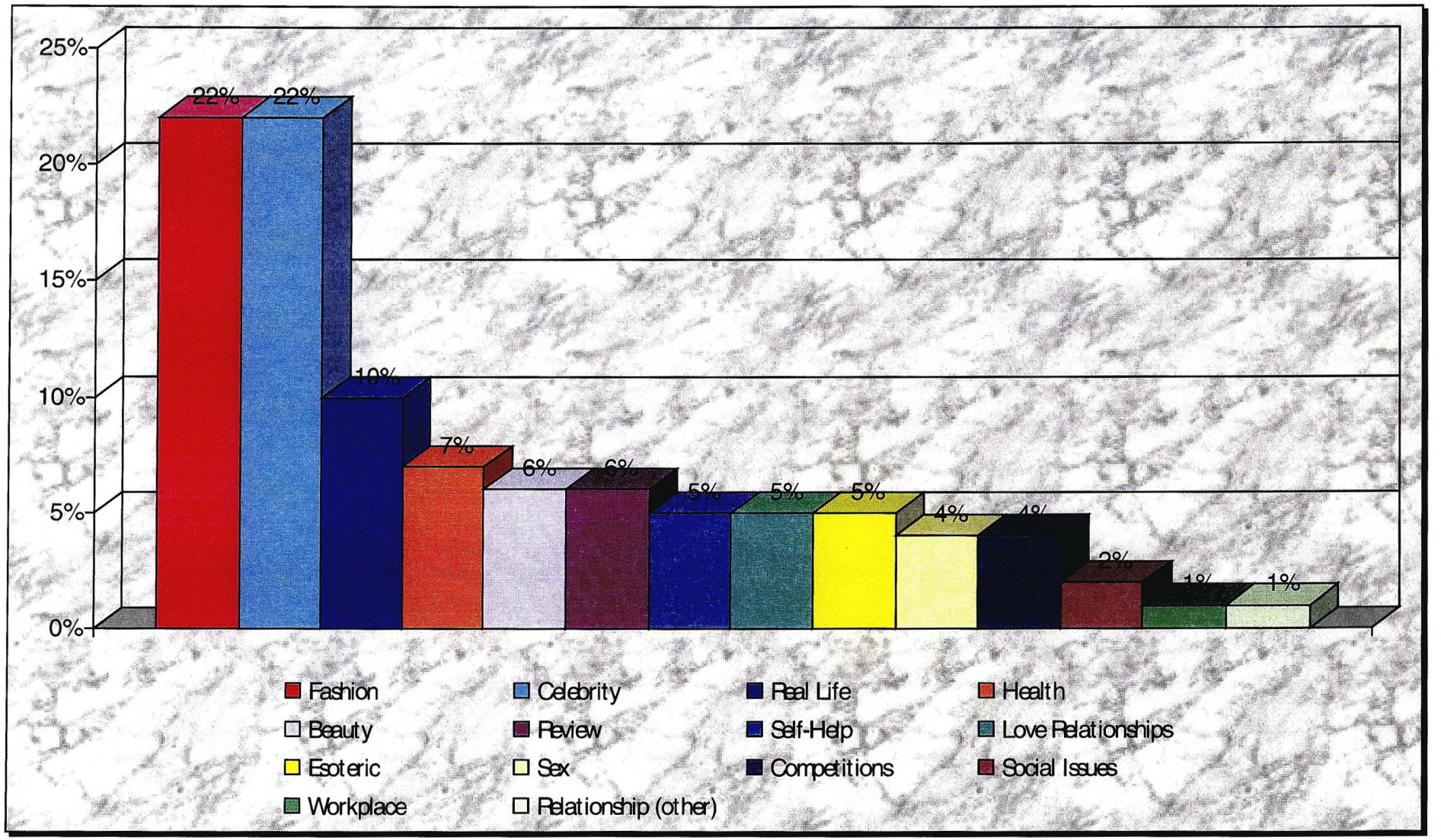


FIG 2B: TRUE LOVE FEATURE CATEGORIES

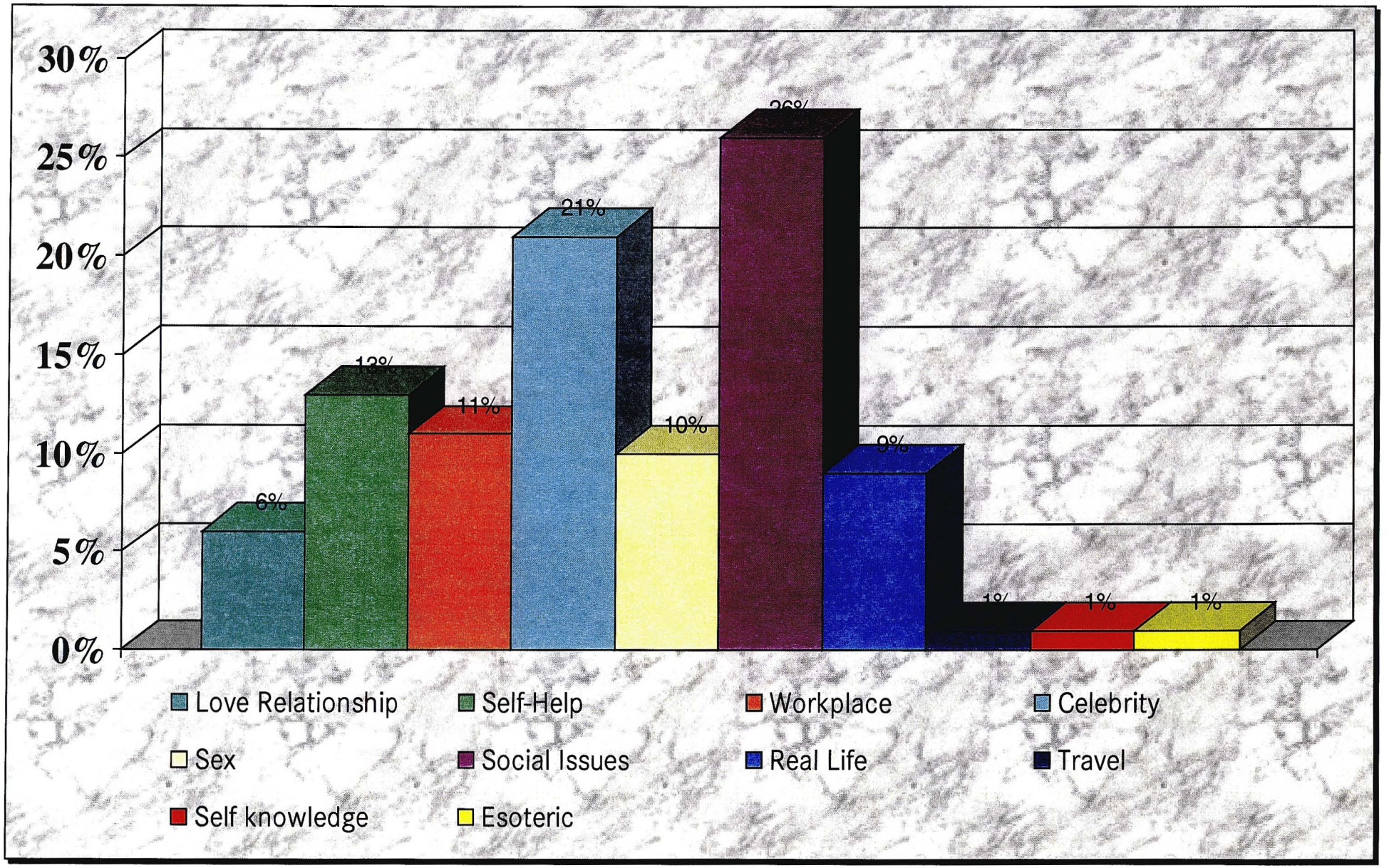
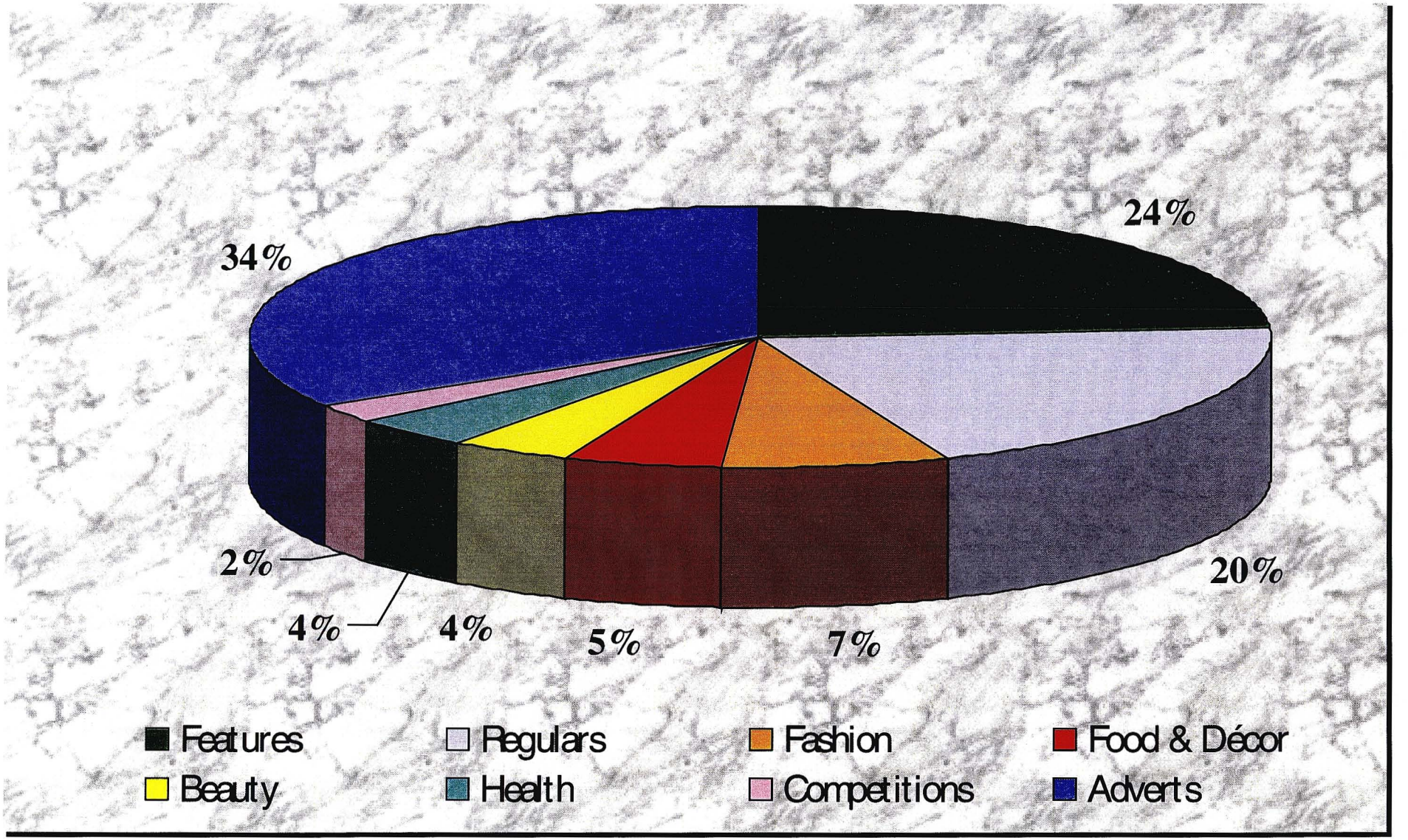


FIG 2A: TRUE LOVE MAGAZINE CONTENT



YOU'LL NEVER SEDUCE ME WITHOUT TRUE LOVE

I'M BLACK, FEMALE, EDUCATED AND GOING PLACES. I'M MY OWN PERSON, EARNING AN ABOVE-AVERAGE SALARY, WITH BIG PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. SO PLEASE, DON'T UNDERESTIMATE MY INTELLIGENCE, DON'T PATRONISE ME AND DON'T STEREOTYPE ME. IF YOU WANT TO REACH ME, REALLY REACH ME, ADVERTISE IN THE ONLY SOUTH AFRICAN MAGAZINE THAT IS TOTALLY DEDICATED TO WOMEN LIKE ME. YOU WON'T REGRET IT.

ALL A WOMAN NEEDS

TRUE LOVE

ANALYSIS

Research Aims

A major aim of this study was to explore the everyday media reception of teenage girls. This was approached using a case study of *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* magazines, and their broadcast media brand extensions – *The Cosmo Show* and *True Love Live*. My own 'qualitative' content analysis of these media texts identified generic features of the women's magazine form and included an intertextual analysis of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and its televisual equivalent. Also included was a detailed analysis of a *True Love* advertisement, or 'secondary' text. However, the largely descriptive content analysis served only as an entry point to this case study which makes use of information obtained from focus group research as its primary data. I am aware of the limitations of such a case study and, specifically, that "qualitative audience researchers...often work with very small samples (as indeed is the case here) from which it is not really possible to generalize, although [they] none the less often do" (Hermes, 2000: 352).

The central concern of this study was to examine the reception of magazines and television by South African teenage girls in order to ascertain if, and how, these forms contribute to their sense of identity. Based on previous academic research into women's magazines (Laden, 1997, 2000; Beetham, 1996; Murray, 1998 and Kehily, 1999 discussed in *Chapter Two: Theory*), I have been concerned to find out whether magazines do indeed serve as aspirational and informal educational devices. Five focus groups were conducted. Each group consisted of between four and eight participants. The sessions lasted approximately an hour and twenty minutes. Participants were given a chance to leaf through copies of *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* magazines, and one pre-recorded episode of *The Cosmo Show* was shown, to stimulate discussion.

The Participants

Three of the five focus groups were conducted with teenage schoolgirls, while the other two involved students from the University of Natal. The participants were generally urban, highly literate and belonged to the higher income bracket, so the

sample was in no way fully representative of the general South African population. Consumer magazines are a relatively elite popular form and are thus not consumed by the entire population. I had planned on using only teenage girls between fifteen and twenty for this study but, when older participants formed part of the two University based groups, I decided to broaden my age sample for comparative purposes. In the end, the participant's ages ranged between fifteen and thirty years old. However, of the twenty-eight participants, twenty-one were twenty years old and below and only seven were older than twenty. The majority of the participants were sixteen years old (seven participants) followed by seventeen year olds (six participants). Most of the participants were white (eighteen in all, making up two thirds of the sample), followed by eight black participants, one Indian participant and one of mixed race.

The groups were semi-structured and began with general questions on media consumption, followed by questions on television and magazines and then moving on to the specific questions related to *Cosmopolitan, True Love* and *The Cosmo Show.* The focus group discussions were very informal and conversational, owing to the popularity and familiarity of the genres in question and, perhaps, to my being close in age to the participants. Therefore, unlike Joke Hermes (1995), I did not feel I had to play any sort of 'role'[1]. Although all of the participants were eager to talk on the subject of women's magazines, two of the groups were dominated by an extroverted leader pair, which tended to silence the quieter group members. A question I asked of each group, and insisted that each member answer, was to list both a positive and a negative feature of women's magazines. This question allowed each person to state her primary position on the topic of women's magazines and usually elicited the longest responses. During some of the focus groups, the consensual tendency to criticize the magazine form marginalized those group members who had identified themselves as regular magazine readers. In such instances I would remind the group of the popularity of the form, asking them to consider why monthly readership figures remained consistently high. The participants would usually refer to their practical use value and to the pleasure they provide.

[1] Hermes (1995: 194-195) describes how, in her interviews with women, she either "enjoyed the grey zone between attention and flirting" or played the role of "the ideal daughter-in-law (kind, attentive, slightly deferential)". She said she "could derive relative power from either role".

Media Consumption

In terms of general media consumption, the first question I asked concerned which media form the participants consumed most often (i.e. "Would you describe yourself as a 'TV person' or a 'print person'?"). Generally, the older participants from the University groups preferred newspapers and magazines to television. Most of the participants used both forms equally and could not describe themselves as 'either/or'. The most popular magazine among the respondents was *Cosmopolitan*, followed by *Elle* magazine and *Marie Claire*. *True Love* was, understandably, only read by the black participants.

When asked whether they prefer to read their favourite magazine in a specific order or in a specific reading environment, two of the respondents said they read magazines while simultaneously being busy with something else. Angela, for instance, said she liked to read while in bed and watching television, while Natalie said she frequently reads magazines while her teacher is teaching the class. Hermes (1995: 34) also found this reading preference among her respondents, causing her to suggest that it is this adaptability and "pickupable quality" (rather than content) that is responsible for magazine's popularity among women. Others, however, approach the reading process with a greater amount of concentration and dedication. Sarina (16) emphatically stated that she likes to read magazines when alone, saying she did not like anyone to be even in the same room as her. The order in which people like to read magazines varies from person to person and publication to publication. Readers of *True Love*, for instance, started either at the back (where all the readers' letters and sex-related information is), like Buhle (21), or at the front, usually with the 'spotlight on soaps' page. The responses to this question confirmed that the magazine reading process is more often haphazard than linear. Lauren (15) said she never reads a magazine from cover to cover and S'the (16) said she also couldn't "stand the tediousness of reading from page to page".

Women's Magazines

Not surprisingly, the participants were all familiar with the magazine genre and when asked "what makes a women's magazine a women's magazine", they cited the fashion, beauty, sex, gossip and love relationship categories. An understanding of the visual nature of the magazine medium was displayed by two of the schoolgirl participants. Buhle describes women's magazines in terms of their pictures, saying, "...to

me, it's visual. Even the cover, the front covers, they always make them done up, so that you want to actually pick them up. Otherwise, you wouldn't even read it". In another group, Paige commented on the pleasure derived from reading magazines saying, "...if you think about it, *Cosmo* or *Elle* are not just a whole lot of printed pages. Then it wouldn't be interesting. You open it up and all these nice bright colours are everywhere". Also mentioned was a general focus on 'women's issues', or 'women's interest' subjects, based on an awareness that magazines are gender specific. Caryn (17) revealed an awareness of the magazine's role in teaching femininity (Ferguson, 1983) when she described how magazines show "...the way to look nice and putting on different make-up and different colours and all these girl things you should know". In a similar vein, men's magazines were believed to provide insight into the workings of masculinity and both Kirsten (22) and Natalie (15) (participants from separate groups) found them more interesting than women's magazines. Kirsten said she read men's magazines like *Men's Health* and *GQ* because they allow one to "think about what it is that's going on in their heads".

All of the schoolgirls interviewed perceived magazines as cultural developmental markers that play a role in the process of moving from girlhood though adolescence and into womanhood (see theory discussion of the ethnographic study conducted by Kehily, 1999). Some said that *Cosmopolitan* is read in the absence of any South African teenage magazine, confirming my own suspicions (mentioned in *Chapter Four: Content Analysis*). Angela (16) said, "when there were teenage magazines, I used to read them. But now there's not very many. So, now I read like *Cosmo* and anything I can really get my hands on that's more fashion". In another group, Paige (16) directly linked the reading of 'adult' (over teenage) magazines with sexual development when she talks about her twelve year old sister:

> As soon as they, I find with my sister, as soon as she starts getting to the age where she is growing up, it's immediately [clicks her fingers] *Cosmo*! There's no in-between stage. She was talking about her friends – it's actually quite scary what they do. I mean, when they go out to parties, they're not just having their first kiss. They're kissing, like, six guys in one night.

Paige complained that there is "no in-between stage", as demarcated by a magazine, in the developmental process. This view echoes calls made by Wolf (1997), Giddens (1993) and Polhemus (1996) who argue that contemporary society lacks a ritualized rite

of passage into adulthood, which would greatly benefit society as a whole because it would grant adolescence a certain amount of coherence and stability.

The participants who were familiar with teen magazines, whether through reading the now defunct *Blush* or overseas titles like *Seventeen* and *Sugar,* felt that their 'pop star pin-up' quality made them more suited to adolescents and girls younger than themselves. Marian (16) said she read *Seventeen* when she was fourteen and S'the (16) complained that she always "found the teenage magazines quite boring like the *S17* and that, 'cos they're always talking about men and celebrities and, it's like, who wants to know about their lives, y'know. Who cares?". I asked one group what age would enjoy these [teen] magazines?" and was told that teen magazines are only appropriate until the age of fourteen. Then, said Angela (16), to the amusement of her classmates, "you move on to bigger stuff". The general consensus was that teenagers are developing at a faster rate and are therefore choosing adult titles at a an age younger than that targeted. This view was most clearly articulated by Danielle (16):

> Danielle: I think people are maturing faster than they were. So, *Cosmo's* target market, I feel, the stuff they deal with, would have applied to maybe 18-25 year olds but now...it's just like...
>
> Paige: It's becoming younger
>
> Danielle:...if you look back it was 18-25 but now it's just becoming younger and younger, as younger and younger people are getting more streetwise, you know.

All the *True Love* readers began reading the magazine during their teens, despite the fact that the *True Love* includes elements which make it more suited to an older market. This could be attributed to the fact that *True Love* is the only consumer glossy aimed at black women. Some participants, like Lauren (15) whose "mum will read the *Cosmo*" and Charlize (17) who reads the "old magazines like *Femina* or *Fair Lady*" that her mother buys, did acknowledge that within the family, crossover readership does occur.

In the focus groups which were dominated by people who did not read women's magazines regularly, the magazine readers showed a certain self-consciousness which suggested that awareness of the genre's 'low' status, together with the expense involved, makes magazine reading an almost 'illicit' pleasure – one which shouldn't be too freely admitted. Thobeka (22) said "I don't know If I should talk about magazines...I like the gossip, the agony auntie" and, in another group, Dorothy (18) giggled when she

was the only participant to admit to buying her own magazines. Motivated by a feeling that my first two groups had been dominated by non-magazine readers, who tended to denigrate the form, I asked the next three groups, which were mostly made up of magazine readers, to explain why they continue to read magazines. I phrased the question in terms of the specific pleasures that accompany the magazine reading process. Responses suggested that the magazine is enjoyed as a monthly form of communication which, owing to its sense of novelty, comes with a certain amount of excited anticipation. The following excerpt accurately conveys the enjoyment that comes from the magazine's 'newness':

> Natalie: It smells all new
>
> Sarina: Yes, and I love the perfume smell when you're the first one to open them and you smell something and then you take out one of those creams
>
> Rebecca: And I'm like, "hey, yeah, I got some cream"
>
> Natalie: Or like hair conditioners and stuff
>
> Rebecca: Ja, I don't know...it's just nice, like, the pages, like, open, you can hear the clicking, like the snapping sound. It's like weird.
>
> S'the: I always like to be the first one to see the pictures. I always tear them out [all laugh] I don't like it when someone's seen it before me. Then I like to be the first one to say, "oh my gosh, look at this, this is so..." Then if they've seen it they're like, "I've seen that".
>
> **Deidre: So it's like being the first one to know?**
>
> S'the: Yes, it's like being the first one to read it and see what's in it
>
> Natalie: And there's not fingerprints all over it or tears or coffee stains
>
> S'the: Or when there's a crease. When the pages are creased, I hate that

The enjoyment of the magazine medium is closely tied to its seriality and to its material form. Other participants mentioned the inclusion of bright colours, the mix of content categories and the inherent idealism of the form. Marian (16) also described the feeling of being connected to "the outside world" through finding out "what's happening overseas". In this sense, magazine reading connects readers to a global 'imagined community' (see *Chapter Two: Theory*) and "evokes a global world of possibility" (Miller, 1998: 19 cited in Laden, 1998 :16).

Interpretive repertoires

Joke Hermes (1995) conducted in-depth interviews and group discussions for her study into women's magazines. Hermes organized her material by focusing on the different 'interpretive repertoires' employed by her female participants when making sense of their magazine reading. The concept of 'interpretive repertoires' derives from the use of discourse analysis in social psychology and, as such, the concept rests on the assumption that humans are social beings who are dependant on the discourses available in society for meaning making. In this view, language is seen as constructive and functional, rather than reflective of reality or some 'inner state' (Van Zoonen, 1994). Thus, during everyday reasoning, people make do with available repertoires and choose the repertoires to suit the needs at hand. Repertoire begins with the analysis of interview material in order to identify any recurrent themes and issues. These recurrent themes are taken to be "references to underlying meaning systems, which are called repertoires" (Hermes, 1995: 30). Hermes (1995) found that some repertoires could be applied to popular culture in general while others were more specific to magazine subgenres.

The two most highly descriptive repertoires identified by Hermes (1995) are the 'easily-put-down repertoire' and the 'repertoire of relaxation'. Readers claimed they read magazines for their adaptability, specifically their ability to adapt to a noisy background. Hermes (1995: 36) found that 'relaxation' is a "stop word" which is "highly ideologically loaded" because it seems to serve not only as a description but also as "a defensive means to mark private territory. Like taste, it is someone's personal business". Viewed in this light, the 'repertoire of relaxation' demonstrates how interpretive repertoires are used to explain, justify and legitimize behaviour. The 'relaxation repertoire' also points to the fact that media use is often secondary and is not always considered meaningful. Hermes (1995) found that sometimes her informants did not have much to say on the subject of magazines leading her to question the 'fallacy of meaningfulness' which operates within the field of media studies (see *Chapter Two: Theory*). The following statement expresses themes which belong to the repertoire of 'relaxation':

> Ingrid: You know, I am not reading it for the reason that the magazine is being sold. It's sort of like for the same reason I watch TV – I want to switch off. I don't have to think when I'm reading a magazine like that, you know. That's why I...I page through it, because it doesn't require much brainpower.

The 'repertoire of practical knowledge' stresses the practical uses of magazines. Readers frequently refer to the 'tips' that they 'pick up' from magazine reading and emphasize the practical use-value of magazines in order to legitimize their reading of them. Indeed, "the whole repertoire can be seen as the rational explanation of 'why someone would read women's magazines'" (Hermes, 1995: 40). However, it is often only the *idea* of finding practical information in the form of, say, recipes or patterns that appeals to the readers rather than actually putting such information into practice. The repertoire of 'practical knowledge' thus appeals to the reader's "pragmatic and solution-oriented" fantasy self, who is, for instance, up to date on new products and "able to come up with solutions for virtually anything" (Hermes, 1995: 39).

The 'repertoire of practical knowledge' was frequently invoked by my own informants. Some spoke of making practical use of the more traditionally oriented women's magazines. Thobeka (22) was the only respondent to mention recipes as a practical feature of women's magazines and both Kirsten (22) and Ingrid (18) said they made use of the free patterns that come with the *Value* and *Essentials* magazines. The rest of the respondents who referred to the 'practical' aspect of women's magazines spoke in terms of the different content categories associated with the genre. Seven respondents mentioned reading magazines for their 'beauty and health tips'. Sarina (16) valued the inclusion of beauty product information, Natalie (17) appreciated the tips on "good eating habits" and both Hlengiwe (22) and Nthati (25) said that the beauty sections prompted them to buy women's magazines. Thobeka (22) pointed to her own made-up eyes, saying she learnt the technique from a women's magazine. Even Jalit (20), who said she never reads women's magazines because "they make you feel like crap", confessed to tearing out a page on make-up techniques but said that "that was all I took from the magazine and I have never looked at one again".

Three respondents mentioned the use of work-related information, two of whom referred specifically to the 'career of the month' and 'start your own business' sections of *True Love* magazine. Among this age group, however, 'fashion ideas' were the most frequently cited motivation for buying or reading woman's magazines, perhaps confirming that among young women, awareness of fashion trends and appearance styles is a socially valued form of textual competency (Lewis, 1987). However, some of those who mentioned fashion were quick to argue that they only looked for 'direction'

and 'trends' which they would then adapt to themselves. Buhle (21), for instance, says "I do look at magazines, just for direction, just to see what's, what's in and to get...But then the thing is, um, I wouldn't say that I follow their trends that you see in magazines. I try to adapt them to me, you know, to suit me, my personality". This statement, and others like it, suggests that "young women's readings of the fashion features in women's magazines may take the form of 'bricolage' rather than imitation" (Macdonald, 1995: 214). On the subject of fashion, Danielle (16), an avid magazine collector who wants to enter the magazine field as either a layout designer or journalist, described how women's magazines depict overseas designer trends and direct readers to specific local varieties:

> Danielle: But also, about all the ,like, fashion shoots. You'll find they have like two or three fashion shoots...let's say...let's just say two fashion shoots and one will be like very expensive clothes and that's just supposed to go with...people have an idea of the season's trends and they often shop more artistically and whatever. And then you get the budget sort of fashion ones which you can see, ok, what the clothes look like and you find them at like *Foshini* and *Edgars*.

The suggestion is that people are actively involved in the consumption process and in the 'presentation of self' to society (Goffman, 1971 in Entwistle, 2000). The repertoire of 'practical knowledge' is encapsulated in the reason Debra (19) gives for reading women's magazines: "I look out for beauty tips. There are many tips there. Just how to live. Being a woman. Just tips...I always look out for tips". Respondents generally agreed that they still find magazines informative and, therefore, useful.

The 'repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing', on the other hand, values experience and intuition over reason and is concerned with human emotions and how to deal with them. This repertoire explains women's magazine reading as "a quest for understanding" – understanding being understood as a particular form of knowledge which is based on intimacy between the self and object and involves acceptance and empathy (Hermes, 1995: 44). Readers who make use of this repertoire believe knowledge comes from experience and, therefore, that learning about the experience of other people can empower one to handle any potential future crises. This repertoire addresses the fantasy of being in control and emotionally prepared – "the fantasy is also of being a 'wise woman'" (Hermes, 1995: 45). The use of real life stories and self-help literature in women's magazines is cited under this repertoire. Self-help literature is another genre Hermes (1995) found to be closely connected with this repertoire, which

itself is incorporated intertextually into women's magazines and other forms of popular culture, like television. Self-help literature is "linked to fantasies of a perfect self, stripped of the scars left by problematic relationships...the image of the fighter" (Hermes, 1995: 112). Hermes (1995) suggests that, in the case of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, this repertoire is self-directed and internalized, rather than concerned with others, like family members (as might be the case with magazines aimed at older women).

Although the 'repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing' was cited less often than the repertoire of 'practical knowledge' in respondents' justifications for reading women's magazines, some did say they read magazines as a form of emotional learning and most recognized real-life stories and self-help topics as a positive feature of the genre. Catherine (17) showed an appreciation of the real-life 'triumph over tragedy' (Ferguson, 1983) story when she said: "I think a positive is when you have stories on personal lives, a tragedy or whatever, about a woman conquering breast cancer or something like that. So you get to relate to their stories". Both Caryn (17) and Buhle (21) said they were prompted to read women's magazines because of their "inspirational" and "motivational" stories. The other repertoires identified by Hermes were related to different magazine subgenres (specifically to gossip magazines and feminist magazines) and were thus not directly related to this study. My findings did confirm, however, that readers largely draw upon the repertoires of 'practical' and 'emotional' learning to explain why they read women's magazines. Significantly, Hermes (1995: 204) admits, however, that "not all statements [can] be related to recurrent themes or repertoires".

The positive and negative features of women's magazines

When asked to list a positive feature of women's magazines, the respondents answered in terms of the repertoires listed above and also highlighted the informative, educational and aspirational role of women's magazines. Magazines were believed to be vehicles capable of creating awareness and providing important information. Tessa (16) said the articles were positive because "they create awareness about what is actually out there such as date rape drugs and whatever". The article she referred to was one of the 'social issues' articles that appeared in the *Cosmopolitan* sample studied (see the content analysis section on 'social issues'). In another group, Sarina (16) agreed that "the positive would have to be definitely information and because it's over such a wide range you get knowledge". Like Barker's (1997) assertion that routine talk about soap

opera is part of the everyday life of schools, magazines are also said to feature in the everyday school environment. Natalie (15), who was earlier referred to for reading magazines in class, also mentioned an English project which used magazines as a central resource – a project reflecting the increasing inclusion of media literacy education within the school curriculum. Crawford College, for instance, the private school where one of the present study's focus groups took place, has a monthly subscription to *SL* (*Studentlife*) magazine, which is used as reference material during English lessons.

Related to the repertoire of 'emotional learning' is the aspirational element of the women's magazine genre. *True Love* readers were particularly motivated and inspired by their reading. When asked whether women's magazines are of any social significance and if they would "miss them" if they were not there, Buhle (21) said:

> I guess we would. I feel that they're important and that they contribute to the, um, development and uh…of women. 'Cos, you know, sometimes it's nice to hear about people, like women who are from, uh, I think from underachieved…people who sort of came up late in life, people who had nothing. Um, and those people inspire me.

Rebecca (17) also commended the form for its positive focus on the self and for promoting self-improvement:

> Ja, y'know, like how to improve yourself and also, like the "365 days happy" one [referring to a *Cosmopolitan* article her classmate S'the had just mentioned, titled "Make yourself happy – be happy 365 days of the year"] they often do that kind of thing on "just take time to be with yourself" and that kind of thing.

Another positive feature mentioned was in keeping with the idea that the women's magazine provides a 'feminized space' (Beetham, 1996). Some of the participants appreciated the form for it's exclusivity as a 'women's only' form of popular culture:

> S'the: I think they are very important because it makes you feel like you've got something that's yours. I mean, a man wouldn't read a women's magazine and find it interesting. It's like, something you can relate to. Well, some do you know – you get the explicit pictures and everything [others laugh]. But, like women's health issues and stuff like that, I like it because it's all woman, you know.
>
> **Deidre: It's a woman's space.**
>
> S'the: Ja, a woman's space. There's no room for men.
>
> Lauren: It's like, one of the only places where it's, like, only for you. It's exclusive, ja.

This dialogue reflects the fact that "women's magazines are the only products of popular culture that (unlike romances) change with women's reality, are mostly written by women for women about women's issues, and take women's concerns seriously" (Wolf, 1990: 71). Wolf (1990: 72) contends that women's magazines "have popularized feminist ideas more widely than any other medium" and that, therefore, "the most lightweight women's magazine is a more serious force for women's advancement than the most heavyweight general periodical". This empowerment role ascribed to women's magazines was felt by Dorothy (18), the girl who had been self-conscious about buying herself three magazines per month. Although she acknowledged that women's magazines tend to be "too idealistic", she nevertheless felt that they were more positive than the rest of the group would acknowledge and she attempted to convey how they encourage assertiveness:

> I think it's got a positive side because if you read magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire*, they've got like a...they try to portray an image of the woman being more important now. They've got like, more like...I don't know, like...assertive women, like business articles I've noticed there for women as well. Not so much like...I don't know, like...women in more equal positions. Trying to put the women in more equal positions to men.

Among the negative aspects of women's magazines mentioned by the respondents was the genre's over-reliance on gender stereotypes. Thandi (25) said

> the thing I really resent about women's magazines is that they usually glorify the differences between men and women. I don't think that there are such large differences between what men and women want out of life. They usually tend to portray women as stupid. Like stupid things you have to know, like 'how to trick him into bed' or...

Ingrid (18) also commented on the conflation of the female sex with cultural ideas on femininity, saying that magazines "are very presumptuous because they sort of assume that everyone wants to know how exactly to care for their skin and wants to know how exactly to do their make-up".

Like Dorothy, others also responded negatively to the idealistic portrayals in women's magazines and their perceived over-emphasis on beauty ideals. Caryn (17) said that "the negative is the image that they portray like all the people in the magazines are so pretty and thin and, like, just this perfect image of how a woman's supposed to be". Similarly, Litisha (18) felt that "they portray such an image that you've got to be gorgeous and have a gorgeous body and have a perfect figure". These idealized images

of women were attributed with negatively affecting the reader's mood, or sense of self. When asked to describe their typical feelings or thoughts when looking through a women's magazine, Charlize (17) said she found the experience "depressing, slightly". Jalit (20), whose first comment had been that she did not read women's magazines because "they make you feel like crap", said magazines "make you feel so ugly, you know. Like…you look in here [flipping through the *Cosmopolitan*] – there's not one plump person in here, there's not one ugly face in here. So, like, it says to you basically…you're like "wow, I wish I could be like that"".

Mary Polce-Lynch's (1998) qualitative study into age and gender differences in emotional expression, body image and self-esteem found that a salient theme for adolescents was the relationship between appearance and mood. The study involved students in Grades 5, 8 and 12 and found that late adolescents (in Grade 12) were as strongly affected as the early adolescents had been. Although few participants directly attributed the media with having an effect on their body image, Polce-Lynch (1998: 11) maintains that the media's effects are largely unconscious and, therefore "all the more insidious". Polce-Lynch (1998: 12) argues that the "mass media's telescopic focus on 'air-brushed' body parts and overall appearances probably contributes to the connection between adolescents' perceptions of physical appearance and their inner feelings". Rebecca (17) made a similar statement, during a discussion on the beauty ideals promulgated by women's magazines:

> and everything is airbrushed anyways and so it's not the natural person anyway but people don't think about that when they see that. They just think, "oh my gosh, I wish I could look like that". And there's no possible way. Everyone's different and they don't emphasize that enough in magazines, that you're unique.

Natalie (15) suggested that it is the status of women's magazines as 'authorities' on issues of beauty and physical appearance that may lead to a reader's feeling of inadequacy in comparison to the perfected images displayed on every page. Lauren (15) said the idealized portrayals sent the message that "you're not good enough". S'the (16) agreed, saying "basically they tell you, 'it's not ok to be you. You've got to be this'".

Women's magazines are frequently held responsible for the rise in eating disorders among girls and women mostly because of the use of unnaturally thin models in their idealized representations. As Wolf (1990: 184) pointed out, "a generation ago,

the average model weighed 8 percent less than the average American woman, whereas today she weighs 23 percent less". Even though "it is well established within academic literature that eating disorders have complex psychological, biomedical as well as cultural causes", women's magazines can still be faulted for insufficiently dealing with "the pathology and disorder in the relationship between body and psyche" (Macdonald, 1995: 209). This becomes apparent especially when one considers that it is middle to upper class women who are most at risk, women who are the most likely to read women's magazines (Polce-Lynch, 1998; Macdonald, 1995).

Some researchers have noted that the issue of body image is more salient in private or homogeneous schools (Polce-Lynch, 1998), which seemed to be the case at the all-girls' school where I conducted one of my focus groups. I had been led to the school by two past pupils, one of whom was Ingrid (18)' who said that she knew of at least ten girls at the school who were on diuretics and were also regular dieters. She elaborated: "they sit there at break and they put their diet suppressants in and share tips on "this laxative works better and you should do this before you throw up because it makes you throw up more" [the others laugh]. Honestly". When I asked the participants from this school whether they thought eating disorders were a big problem with young girls they replied as follows:

> Rebecca: Yes, definitely
>
> **Deidre: Weight issues and having to be thin?**
>
> Natalie: Yes, which isn't helped by our beauty magazines either. I think we grow up very quickly.
>
> Rebecca: It's rife in schools.
>
> Angela: It is, ja. A lot, a lot of girls, I mean, in our school especially who are very self-conscious and who have eating disorders or are developing eating disorders and who are very pickish at their food.
>
> Rebecca: And I think that the schools don't understand...or society doesn't pay enough attention to it, y'know. And it's such a serious problem. It's like "oh, okay, well I hope you feel better tomorrow".

However, participants generally showed an understanding of the way in which eating disorders are explained psychologically. Some girls used the terminology associated with eating disorders within the discourse of psychology. Specifically, there

was recognition that a "low self-esteem" contributed to body-dissatisfaction and obsessions with weight. Ingrid (18) and S'the (16), who were not in the same group, both felt that readers who come to the magazine reading experience with a low self-esteem are the ones in danger of being negatively affected by its images and messages:

> Ingrid: On the negative side, I would agree with the whole image thing because a person whose got a weak self-image and whose got a low self-esteem will read a magazine like that and will do stuff like anorexia and bulimia. And, you know, just general self-destructive behaviour does spring...You know, it's not like...it's not the magazines fault but it sort of opens the door to those sorts of things...
>
> S'the: Well, I think you've got to, got to read a magazine with not that intent of trying to be what you see, you know. You've got to be you. You've got to be confident and comfortable with who you are before you even open the magazine because a lot of stuff in that magazine will influence you and could influence you, if you come to it with the wrong mentality.

Danielle (16) showed an even greater understanding of what causes eating disorders, an understanding developed through having a family member suffer from such a condition:

> Danielle: I, I don't think...it [magazines] might aggravate it but at the end of the day, eating disorders and stuff, they're not really about being thin. It's like, a mind control thing. Ok, it's about gaining control. Like my aunt, she's bulimic and anorexic and she's still got eating disorders and problems and stuff. It's not, it's just like a...You use your body in a way to just control the rest of yourself, you know. It's a, it's like a psychological thing.

The heightened awareness of the psychological aspects of eating disorders shown by these teenage girls could be read as proof of the increased interest in and prevalence of popular psychology and self-help topics within society in general. Self-help topics are frequently covered by women's magazines (the 'self-help' feature category was the second most prevalent topic in the *Cosmopolitan* sample – see *Chapter Four: Content Analysis*), and, with the introduction of talk shows to South African television, popular psychology is a regular feature of television too. This increasing trend is indicative of the 'psychologization' of society. According to Wilbraham (1997: 67), "psychologization refers, in a critical way, to the processes of rendering the body, the psyche/self or the relationship visible to the normalizing discursive practices of the institution of psychology". Psychologization involves "reducing ideological notions of social arrangements to individual activities and proclivities" (Wilbraham, 1997: 67). Similarly, Norman Fairclough (1989) considers how, within modern society, individuals

are more likely to seek out professional psychological help. The discourse of therapy, which places the responsibility of managing socially generated ills on the individual thus affected, is increasingly 'colonizing' other orders of discourse. Both Wilbraham (1997) and Fairclough (1989) refer to the work of Michel Foucault, specifically to the concepts of the 'panopticon' and the 'confession'. Both concepts describe the operation of power within modern society, where "the agencies of punishment become part of a pervasive, impersonal system of surveillance and correction which pays an ever-increasing attention to the psychology of the individual" (Sarup, 1994: 67). The 'confession', which can be said to describe the process of therapy, "has become a vital ingredient of social control" (Fairclough, 1989: 226) and confessional procedures have become institutionalized.

Some participants felt that it is not only girls with generally low self-esteem who might be negatively affected by media images, but also girls who are already thin or who are already obsessed with their physical appearance and weight. Buhle (21) said "it is always the skinny ones that are obsessed and they think that just because you are big you must be unhappy" and Natalie (15) said that "they find things to feed their obsession". This assumption was proven in a study conducted by psychologists Stice, Spangler and Stewart Agras (2001). The study, which tested the effects of women's magazines on the body-image of girls between 13 and 17, found that exposure to the thin-ideal images in magazines only had an adverse affect on the adolescents with initially elevated body dissatisfaction[2]. In light of these findings, the psychologists suggested that the continued correlation between magazine models and teenage eating disorders was perhaps due to the fact that high-risk individuals seek out the thin-ideal images for inspiration and dieting tips. However, the authors warned against discounting previous studies which had found that exposure to thin models in fashion magazines led to increased body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls, saying that the media do reflect the cultural pressure to be slim. According to Stice, Spangler and Stewart Agras (2001), forty-one percent of adolescent females report that women's magazines are their most important source of information on dieting and health.

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[2] Dittmar's (2000: 14) study also found that, for girls "there seems to be a 'similarity effect' for thinness, in the sense that lighter girls express a greater preference for thinness, and heavier girls less (i.e. suggesting that they have a heavier ideal)".

There are, of course, cultural differences in body ideals and, within the context of multi-cultural South Africa, I was interested to find out whether media globalization is resulting in pressure to adapt to the western slender ideal. On the subject of fashion, Nthati (25) said she appreciated the fact that *True Love* features pictures of large women. I then asked the all black group how they felt about the western obsession with thinness, to which they replied:

> Nthati: Hmmm. Nearly every magazine is about losing weight, getting thin. Some of us are just not going to lose weight. So, I'm…
>
> **Deidre: Is this a problem?**
>
> Nthati: No, no, I'm very comfortable. I mean, I am happy with the way I am.
>
> Lindiwe: But it's nice when you see that *True Love* is also addressing that..
>
> Nthati: Because there are so many African women who are big, you know.

Ntathi's self-acceptance confirms that "for non-white women, the comparative lack of model images has produced a curious freedom" (Macdonald, 1995: 198). Polce-Lynch (1998: 11) refers to previous studies which have included evidence that beauty ideals tend to affect blacks and whites differently and, specifically, "that African-American women are better at resisting cultural messages of physical attractiveness". Possible reasons listed for this were that African culture historically valued full-figured women and that African-American men judge a woman's weight less negatively than Caucasian men (Polce-Lynch, 1998).

However, Nthati, being a twenty-five year old mother, may have 'out-grown' such concerns or may be less affected than the present teenagers, who have had greater global media exposure since a younger age. When I asked another group whether black girls were becoming more weight conscious, the answer was yes and S'the (16) illustrated her response with a reference to the past:

> S'the: Like back in the day, a black woman was born…you know you look at your mothers and your grandmothers, big was beautiful, big was acceptable, totally and you know…
>
> Rebecca: Big was beautiful, it was the same with white girls.
>
> S'the: And even with, even with the men, they didn't look, look for the thinnest one… it's just you. It was you that they valued. And now it's like all this exposure to the world and liposuction and all these different things, and people are like, "oh my gosh, I don't

> want to be like my mother, I don't want to be fat. No, I've got to stay slim to be acceptable in the world today".

The implication is that increasing modernity and the globalization of the media is resulting in a more westernized definition of beauty. In another group, Buhle (21) said she believed that "the pressure is on, on the younger generation to stay slim and thin, the western way or ideal". She also made reference to an interaction she had had with her grandmother, which revealed a disappointment with the erosion of traditional beauty ideals:

> Buhle: I think it's society, even now. There was a time when, I, um, got angry with my grandmother because she commented on my weight and I couldn't understand how she could be saying these things. She's supposed to be an African woman, why do you say I'm getting fat?

Beauty ideals are closely associated with sexual desirability and social acceptability. In discussions about beauty ideals, some of the participants turned to the question of what men (as potential partners) look for, in terms of body size, in women. Ingrid (18) said, for instance:

> Ingrid:...I'm friends with a lot of guys because I don't really get on with girls my age because they are like [brings forearms up in a 'limp-wristed' gesture and makes the sound of a high-pitched whine]. Most of them say that those chicks are hot or whatever but they prefer having a girl that they can take out, take to Spur and she'll eat a bit more than a greek salad, y'know. Like a girlfriend they can take to McDonald's and she won't have a heart attack because now she's counting calories twenty-four/seven.

In another group, the discussion turned to whether or not girls are more obsessed with their weight in the context of an all-girls' school and S'the (16) also spoke about the way male counterparts react to weight obsession:

> S'the: I think that's why, that's why it's more concentrated in a girls' school. With guys you get along with, I mean, you know, if you get along with guys and you talk to them, they will actually tell you, "why are you drinking water, when you are clean? You are not thirsty you don't need that. And why do you only carry apples to school. That's ridiculous. You need to feed yourself, you know". And that will actually tell you, you know, that, oh my gosh, that's not all there is to...That's why I think it's better if it was a co-ed school.

Some of her classmates disagreed, saying that 'guys' are, in fact, quite critical of a girl's body size and appearance:

> Natalie: We did have one guy in this school who came here for the drama project [everyone laughs]. And, yes, you put a magazine in front of him – and this is like, a

> cover girl – and he'll say, "Their eyebrows are too small. The eyes are too big. The nose is too wide", you know. And you're like, "oh my gosh", you know.
>
> Rebecca: Exactly, so typical.

These observations correspond with the findings of the study conducted by Helga Dittmar (2000) into English adolescents' images of ideal bodies. Dittmar found that adolescent boys placed more importance on a thin body in their ideal woman than girls did in their image of an ideal woman. Boys also routinely expressed a certain contradiction: the ideal woman should be thin but, at the same time, she should be curvaceous and voluptuous.

In discussing the positive and negative features of women's magazines, some girls expressed their experience of magazines as being contradictory forms. In particular, the combination of feminism and femininity and the juxtaposition of the themes of self-acceptance and self-improvement were said to be a source of tension. For instance:

> Dorothy: Also, I think that they contradict themselves 'cos they spend how many articles saying that you shouldn't worry about your body and accept yourself the way you are, and then put all these people…
>
> Ingrid: They spend half the magazine telling you not to worry about your body and the other half shows you how to improve yourself. It's not how to improve your self-image but how to improve your looks.

Ingrid (18) also commented on the paradoxical combination of world issues with feminine trivia:

> Ingrid: *Marie Claire* does try to do the brain thing now and then but they're still in progress probably. They ruin It by putting the make-up specials after the Tibetan war crimes [others laugh]. It's just like, you read this whole sad story and you turn over the page and it's like 'Spring colours for 1999', and you're like…

Jenna (17) also commented on how "if you read them properly and carefully, they say that you don't have to be perfect and things like that. They always give these slight reassurances". Danielle (16) felt that the positive feature of women's magazines is their attempts at "pushing the boundaries" of gender prescriptions. At the same time, she listed the negative feature of women's magazines as being that "the same sort of boundary-pushing articles are still made for a certain stereotype of what a woman is supposed to be…they try to be groundbreaking, but only relative to the same old stereotype". Danielle objects to the feminine subject position which is assumed to be

occupied by the reader. The post-feminist woman represented in women's magazines is itself a media stereotype which is implicitly set in opposition to the traditional woman. Fairclough (1989: 39) describes how social subjects are constrained within subject positions, but, he says, "it is only through being so constrained that they are made able to act as social agents...being constrained is a precondition for being enabled".

The topic of sex

The participants all showed a heightened awareness of the media's over-reliance on sexual topics and imagery and, like the teenage participants in Kehily's (1999) study on whether teenage magazines serve as resources for sexual learning, they were discerning readers who generally objected to overtly sexual content (see the section on 'teen' magazines in *Chapter Two: Theory*, for a discussion of Kehily's findings). Sarina (16) was the first to bring the subject of sex up among her group, saying, "what I find about magazines and TV lately, is they've all gone like sort of sexually and everything is about sex". Classmate S'the (16) also noted that sex is a feature of every women's magazine. Rebecca (17), Lauren (15) and Charlize (17) spoke of the economic motive behind the emphasis on sex. Charlize spoke of how the media are laden with sexual imagery:

> Charlize: It's everywhere. From books, TV. At certain times, it's even on radio. You can tell by the way that a woman speaks – the way she portrays herself just vocally. You can tell that they are trying to portray this beautiful, sexy, you know, luscious woman who all the men are forging after. It's just...It basically just comes down to sex appeal. And you attract...you can attract anyone by using sex appeal. Look at adverts, any advertisement, you just add a little sex appeal and everyone's watching, you know.

Similarly, Rebecca said that "everything has a sexual connotation now and, but, that is what sells". Later on, the girls in Rebecca's group noticed how the word 'sex' is always highlighted on the magazine's front cover. Lauren (15) suggested that "they know that sex does sell. So, if they don't have sex on their cover, they're scared that it's not going to sell. They have to include something, even if it's small, y'know".

Some participants objected to the prevalence of images of "half-naked women", especially when used on the magazine covers. The argument, articulated by Natalie (15), was that "it's a women's magazine, nobody wants to see that". Lauren (15) and Rebecca (17) also felt that such images were inappropriate. Some commented that such sexualized depictions of the female body are making women's magazines more like

men's magazines. Danielle (16) thought that "*Cosmo's* become sort of like a female 'male magazine' by using such tricks of the whole, you know, sensationalist sex-oriented stuff". When the discussion came up in another group, Natalie (15) said that although both men's magazines and women's magazines may display similarly sexualized images of women, "because they're in completely different contexts, they're taken in a different way". A comment made by Charlize (17) in an earlier focus group elaborates on this:

> **Deidre: Now from your knowledge of women's magazines, what would you say the definition of a woman's magazine is?**
>
> Charlize: [looking at the pile of magazines on the table] Half-naked women in swimsuits [the others laugh]. Which is sad because it is the definition of a men's magazine as well.
>
> **Deidre: Hmm...half-naked women?**
>
> Charlize: Ja, basically, magazines that are aimed at people our age are of half-naked women [others agree]. Because with women's magazines, it's "you want to look like this, envy me", and with men's magazines it's "you want a girlfriend like this, envy her".

Susan Bordo (1996: 55) made a similar observation in relation to a Madonna music video, saying "many men and women may experience the primary reality of the video as the elicitation of desire *for* that perfect body; women, however, may also be gripped by the desire (very likely impossible to achieve) to *become* the perfect body".

In one group, the discussion about the use of the same kinds of posed images on the covers of both women's and men's magazine led to a moment of awkwardness between myself and one participant. After complaining, as a group, about the over-reliance on images of "half-naked women", Rebecca (17) pragmatically stated that "everything has a sexual connotation now and...but that is what sells". I agreed, saying that "we ourselves buy that magazine". What I meant was that, as self-confessed magazine readers, the magazine formula still manages to secure our readership, even while this formula includes the use of sexualized and revealing images of women. Rebecca interpreted my comment differently and responded, in a manner so abrupt and emphatic that it could only be described as defensive, "I don't buy them for the chick on the front, sorry! Sorry – it doesn't interest me". Rebecca thought I was saying that, as a reader, I was drawn to the magazine form purely by, and for, the image of the "half-naked" model on the cover. She objected to my use of the inclusive "we", and 'drew a line' between us, based on the assumption that I buy the magazine "for the chick on the

front". It is interesting to note her use of the derogatory label "chick". Rebecca appeared to be the most articulate and 'bookish' of this group, yet she chose to use slang terminology, allowing her to take on a slightly masculine persona when defining herself as a reader interested in the articles only. Rebecca may have been responding to the homosexual implications of looking at the magazine images of the female form. Indeed, women's magazines reflect the "recent celebration of lesbian chic" in the mainstream media (Hawks, 1996: 142). Hawks (1996: 142) describes how "first in movies, then in music, in historical dramas and soap operas, and finally fashion and advertising, the 'love affair with lesbianism' has been flourishing". However, far from being subversive to the hegemony of heterosexuality, treating lesbianism as a trendy side issue and commercializing it as 'style' diffuses its subversive potentials (Hawks, 1996; Macdonald, 1995).

Like the participants in Kehily's study (1999), the participants in the present study showed a general aversion to material of an explicit nature but, at the same time, they recognized that magazines can and do serve as useful sources for sexual information. The issue of *Cosmopolitan* which had appeared just prior to the focus group discussions featured an insert which compared the shapes of different vegetables to penises. Unsurprisingly, the participants were critical and highly disapproving of this particular insert. Marian (16) made reference to the article when explaining why she stopped reading *Cosmopolitan.* Paige (16) described how the insert proved to be a source of embarrassment for her:

> Paige: My cousin's boyfriend [giggles]...found that article that you were talking about, about the vegetables from *Cosmo* last month. We really hid it from him. We put the *Zest* [health & beauty supplement] on top because the *Zest* is a really nice part of it – I always buy it if there is a *Zest* – and he found it and he said "Aw! You guys think *we're* so bad just because we read *FHM* and look at what *you* read!". And we were like, "Ah, no!" [all laugh].

Women's magazines in general, and *Cosmopolitan* specifically, were accused of giving inaccurate portrayals of female sexuality. Paige (16) and Marian (16), both from the group conducted at the costly private school, said the following:

> Paige: I agree on the whole stereotypical thing. You tend to get, especially *Cosmo* tends to make out like everybody sleeps around. And like, while you single, like get as much sex as you can. It's not related to... It's stereotyping. There's actually only probably 25% of people who are and 75% who aren't. So, it's not really relative...

> Marian: Um, I think a positive is that it's entertaining to read. Like the fashion and all that. And then a negative is that, uh, like exactly what Paige said. Like, like, they assume that everybody has one-night stands and stuff. What percentage of you have one-night stands? What percentage of you do this? I was like quite shocked, you know. I am like quite sheltered with all of that kind of stuff, where all of us come from [referring to herself and her classmates], you know. So, it does send out like negative messages.

Later on, in a discussion stimulated by the question "if *Cosmopolitan* were a woman, what kind of a woman would she be", the same group referred to the inaccurate depiction of female sexuality. The sexual confidence and assertiveness depicted in magazines is said to betray certain gender differences:

> Danielle: I think they're aiming towards a very independent woman. But then they try and gain that independence through their sexuality and stuff, which I don't think many independent women really do.
>
> Marian: It's not true because they try to have this whole thing that like women can control sex and stuff, but meanwhile it's like, like the men who are always going to be dominant over that factor. I don't know how to explain it.
>
> Paige: Ja, because women are emotionally, um...
>
> Marian: Ja, it's not about, for most women it's about the whole like the pleasure and physical. It's about emotions, I think. They try to act like "Oh, no! It's not about the emotions."
>
> Danielle: Like some of their articles about sex and stuff are relevant and some of the stuff they say are like true but I don't see why they have this need to make sex its like focal point because it's really not. I mean in anybody's average life, ok yes everybody knows that people have sex and stuff [Giggles]. But it's not like, for any person, it's not like this central like focus. Unless you're like this 14-year-old boy, it's like, you know, hormones and stuff.

However, some participants did express an appreciation for the sex-related articles in women's magazines, even when their peers disagreed. As a final comment, Buhle (21) mentioned that she thought it strange that none of the group had mentioned reading magazines for sex tips, saying that she read *Cosmopolitan* for that specific reason "every now and then". In another group, Debra (19) felt that sex-related articles served a purpose, saying "some people really need to know about how to use a man". She maintained that "sometimes you don't talk to each other and find out some facts and in one or the other way you need to know. It helps us". Two other participants said they found the sex-related articles "interesting" and "important". This appreciation for 'sex tips' is perhaps confirmation that

> while in traditional romantic narratives, the woman searching for the ideal man relied on 'her virginity for barter', the new sensuous woman engaging on the same quest 'must display a wide repertoire of sexual technique as her best exchangeable commodity' (Brunt, 1982: 158, cited in Macdonald, 1995: 167).

Reading 'against the grain': being outside of 'imagined communities'[3]

During two of the focus groups, participants expressed an objection to the magazines' unspoken claim to speak as an 'authority'. It was particularly those participants who had expressed a sense of belonging to a subculture which separated them from mainstream youth, and those who explicitly defined themselves as non-magazine readers, who were dismissive of the magazine as 'authority'. Kirsten (22) who does read magazines, referred to the way in which magazines are seen as sources with credibility and authority, saying "because it's in black and white, all of us take it to be like the bible". Thandi (25), who was generally scornful of the magazine genre, responded to the comment made by fellow group member Debra (referred to above), saying "but I don't want to know what *Cosmo* says about how I'm supposed to treat my partner". Her use of the diminutive "*Cosmo*" has the effect of personification, illustrating how a reader may choose to read 'against the grain' in an almost rebellious gesture towards a supposed authority.

Charlize (17) and Ingrid (18) were a friendship pair who clearly defined themselves according to a subcultural identity. Their appearance (pants, sneakers, facial piercings) made this quite clear, and they also made a point of distancing themselves from more conservative and mainstream youth culture. Charlize and Ingrid frequently used the term "them" and "they" when talking on the subject of women's magazines, in an anti-establishment manner. Their subcultural identity meant that they did not occupy the feminine subject position offered by women's magazines. The following excerpt illustrates how the use of the term "they" has the effect of 'revealing' the production process, which is given a calculated quality:

> Ingrid: You see, because they have to be, like, politically correct because you're not allowed to sort of call women 'bimbos' anymore. So they have to put in something that requires brainpower. But, ja...it ends up looking rather shallow [referring to the juxtaposition of social issues and beauty subjects in women's magazines]

[3] Both terms were introduced in the theory chapter

Charlize also objected to the way in which women's magazines instruct readers in the feminine art of beautification: "one important thing they have in there is 'This is how you apply your eyeshadow properly". Just in case you didn't know. Thank you for telling us". This kind of comment reflects the tendency, noted by critics, for women to delight in mocking and parodying the generic characteristics of the women's magazine (Murray, 1998). The tendency to mock the magazine genre was also more pronounced among those participants who came from well-educated backgrounds and those who did not describe themselves as 'magazine readers' (Thandi, Rebecca, Ingrid, Charlize, and Danielle). Some of the comments made by these participants confirmed that "irony...in general seems to be the weapon of the 'cultural capitalist'" (Hermes, 1995: 136).

Few participants claimed identification with the 'imagined community' of magazine readers. There could be several reasons for this. Firstly, the non-readers' criticisms tended to silence the magazine readers, who were generally aware of the 'low' status of the genre. Secondly, the magazine readers revealed their own ambivalent responses to the form and showed an awareness of the limitations of the genre in their own mocking and criticism of women's magazines. There was instead a greater tendency towards distancing oneself from an 'imagined community'. Ingrid (18) spoke about her dislike for 'Hollywood gossip' segments in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and distanced herself from the 'imagined community' of gossip readers:

> Ingrid:...you get a lot of people who get, like, really into it. You get to school and you get some really ditzy chicks talking about [adopting a high-pitched voice in imitation] "...and Stallone this and Brad Pitt this, and, he got married to Jennifer Aniston. I don't believe it" It's like, "okay, you have a cool life, I see you have lots to do".
>
> **Deidre: So, would you say you represent not the typical teenage girl**
>
> Ingrid: Well, certainly, if I look at the majority of teenage girls, I don't want to be like that.

In a discussion about what kind of women magazines like the *Cosmopolitan* are targeted at, Paige (16) distanced herself from an 'imagined community' of readers, based on distinctions of class:

> Paige: Do you know what I think it is? It's maybe it's poor people who like want to be what they're not and almost like try hard (Marian agrees)... like how to be... I know that sounds really stupid but...
>
> Marian: It's not.

Paige (16) defines the typical magazine reader as 'aspirant', aiming to move beyond her circumstances.

However, identification with an 'imagined community' of readers was clearly experienced by *True Love* readers. My first three focus groups were largely made up of white South Africans and only two of the participants from those groups were familiar with *True Love*. For this reason, I decided to conduct a focus group made up entirely of *True Love* readers. I posted a few notices on the University noticeboards, making an appeal for *True Love* readers. I was surprised at the immediate response to the notices and at the lengths some respondents went to reach me. There was an eagerness which, to me, was indicative of a sense of pride in belonging to the community of *True Love* readers. This was confirmed during the focus group, when I asked whether a person's magazine choice says something about the reader and, if this were the case, what would the public display of *True Love* say about the reader. Buhle (21) responded without hesitation that such a display would identify the reader as a "liberated woman" who has "ambition and success". The *True Love* readers all remembered when they first started reading the magazine and were regular readers.

The global and the local

For Thandi (25), who was schooled in England as the daughter of exiled parents, the over-reliance of local magazines on foreign content serves to undermine the credibility of local magazines:

> Thandi: Even magazines, you've got magazines, you read lovely thick British *Cosmo's* and *GQ's*. The South African version is always a rubbishy synthesis of all the other articles that you might have read before in those magazines. And you go, "hey, but this isn't…", and they'll just change the names in the stories to South African names to make it more, you know, sophisticated.

In *Cosmopolitan*, this trend of using content material syndicated from international editions is related to the marketing of the magazine as a 'global brand' (Murray, 1998).

> Danielle: That's the thing about *Elle*, why it's so nice is that it concentrates so much on like local stuff. I know that I can always update that and find something so rad that is happening.

Marian: Like they're not trying to be this international magazine. They're like proud that it's a South African *Elle*.

Danielle: Exactly. Ja, and it really makes it its own magazine. Whereas *Cosmo* tries to be like so international and glamorous and I don't think people are really interested in that.

Paige: Buy an international *Cosmo* if you want to be like that.

Danielle: Exactly.

Deidre: So, people are taking more pride in the local?

Danielle: Definitely.

Although this preference for magazines which position themselves according to a local identity is promising, it was somewhat contradicted by Marian later on. Marian had said that part of the excitement of reading a magazine came from feeling connected to "the outside world...what's happening overseas. Like all the little pictures of the stars and what they're doing"[4]. Marian clearly enjoys feeling connected to the "globe-girdling" cult of femininity advocated by women's magazines (Ferguson, 1983: 36). Hermes (1995: 103) refers to this as the fantasy of the "female *Homo universalis* : someone who keeps up with everything that is interesting, who is 'in' on all that happens". Wolf (1990: 76) describes how "women's magazines cater to that delicious sense of impersonal female solidarity" and sees this as a feature of 'the beauty myth', which, paradoxically, "offers the promise of a solidarity movement, an Internationale"[5]. Marian's statement can also be read as an illustration of the sense of isolation that some white South Africans' feel, many of whom prefer to identify with a global, or European, group sensibility.

Cosmopolitan and *True Love* magazines

The participants were all familiar with *Cosmopolitan* magazine and made reference to it throughout the focus group discussions. In response to the personification question which asked "if *Cosmopolitan* were a woman, what kind of a woman would she be?", respondents typically said she would be self-confident, assertive, pretty and thin. The following excerpt gives a detailed portrait of 'the *Cosmo*-girl':

[4] Hermes (1995) describes how an important aspect of the pleasure in gossip magazine reading is the pleasure of reading about celebrities. This pleasure "is a pleasure both of vicariously enjoying the world of glitter and glamour and of gaining a 'secret' inside knowledge that may confer an imaginary sense of power over the rich and powerful" (Hermes, 1995: 123-124).

> Thandi: They do portray a mid 20's to mid 30's, successful...
>
> Kirsten: ...picture perfect female...
>
> Thandi: who spends lots of money on clothes, takes care of herself who is trying hard to be in a relationship or who is in a relationship. You know, it's that modern girl.
>
> **Deidre: So, it's a modern girl, in a relationship, probably heterosexual?**
>
> Thandi: Mm, yeah. I mean there's always, whenever you read those stories about 'How I beat my eating disorder', they always write, "Sally, aged 25, is a successful accounts executive...". People always have these fabulous jobs and you think how did they get there. Like it's almost by magic. She had a car and a boyfriend and lived in a penthouse in Cape Town when bulimia struck[6].

The magazine itself was considered vibrant and visually stimulating. The *Cosmopolitan* covers were said to be particularly striking (especially since they most often depict images of "half-naked women"). Two participants had stopped reading *Cosmopolitan* when it added the 'Hollywood gossip' segment to its formula. Natalie (15) had a more specific criticism of the magazine:

> Natalie: But, um *Cosmo*, they use models... they don't really, they're not, they aren't that worried about your emotional well-being because, I mean, they don't put stories of, you know, Clinton's wife or something 'cos she stuck through him when he had the affair. They put Kate Moss who's a perfect model six because she bares her breasts at some sort of... any modelling ramp or just because she looks good. But, I mean, you can have a good-looking person who's done something.
>
> **Deidre: So, you think they're focusing on the wrong kind of role models?**
>
> Natalie: Yes, yes. Because, I mean Kate Moss isn't a role model. She was bulimic, she was a drug addict. Um, she promotes bad self-esteem. She's not even that attractive. She's what... like twenty-something? And she's already done all of these things. It's not even a good example but someone who's really, you know, made something of her life and... I don't know, Venus Williams? She hasn't had drugs, she's the number one champion for tennis and she's a good role model and she looks like a nice person, but you don't see her in any beauty magazine.

Time was set aside during the focus group sessions to leaf through the magazines, in order for non-readers to familiarize themselves with the magazines under study. The white participants, all except one, were unfamiliar with *True Love* and were thus approaching the magazine for the very first time. In general, it was observed that the magazine appealed to a wider audience base and was less 'niche', and slightly more

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[5] Wolf's thesis rests on the claim that "we are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth" (1990: 10).

general interest, than *Cosmopolitan.* For the white participants, a noticeable difference was *True Love*'s 'spotlight on soaps' page, which was felt to make the magazine more "gossipy". Two of the *True Love* readers said they start their reading with this section. The inclusion of soap opera updates and information is an example of vertical intertextuality. These updates and publicity features are secondary texts which "work to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text" – the primary text being the soap opera written about (Fiske,1987 :117). *True Love Live*, the radio programme referred to in the *content analysis* Chapter, is also a secondary text which stands in relation to the magazine to which it refers. All of the *True Love* magazine readers were regular listeners of the programme, which worked to influence their own understandings of the *True Love* magazine as an informative and empowering medium. Two of the *True Love* readers had been to *True Love* website, one to enter a competition, the other to write a 'letter to the editor'.

True Love was seen as more 'real' than the very idealistic *Cosmopolitan*, in that it depicted people other than super slim models and gave more practical fashion information. S'the (16), for instance, said "when they show fashion, it's in a constructive way, not in a destructive way. They use anyone to advertise fashion". S'the was no doubt referring to the 'real woman, real clothes' segment of the magazine. Danielle (16) observed more sincere efforts to cultivate self-confidence in *True Love* and less of a concern about physical appearance. Debra (19), a regular reader of *True Love*, suggested that the magazine has a role to play in negotiating the social position which women occupy within democratic South Africa:

> ...our world is changing, we need to know different stuff about different cultures. That is why it is focusing on women. And now that the world is changing, it focuses on the changes like what used to happen in the past and how women need to be treated and stuff and it focuses on South African women and how they're perceived now.

As mentioned previously, *True Love* readers find the magazine "inspiring and educating". Buhle (21) believes this is the magazine's social significance:

> Buhle: I guess we would. I feel that they're important and that they contribute to the, um, development... of women. 'Cos, you know, sometimes it's nice to hear about people, like

[6] Thandi's image of 'the *Cosmo* girl' was very similar to my own, specifically to my suggestion that the South African '*Cosmo* girl' would live in Cape Town (see *Chapter Four: Content Analysis*). The general similarity of response to the question is proof of the strength of the *Cosmopolitan* brand image.

> women who are from, uh, I think from under-achieved... People who sort of come up late in life, people who had nothing. Um, and those people inspire me.

In this way, *True Love's* focus on local role models serves an important aspirational function in that it addresses "the need, expressed specifically by many black students, for a sense of self, for 'coherent' subjectivities and powerful iconographic identities" (Murray, 1994: 66).

All agreed that the two magazines were targeted at different readerships in terms of culture and race. The magazine covers were taken as proof of this, as were the photographic depictions inside the magazine. The *True Love* readers, as black African women, felt alienated from women's magazines other than *True Love*:

> Nthati: It's also about African women.
>
> Lindiwe: Yes.
>
> Nthati: Very much so about African women. I feel like I can relate to it. Like the other magazines are not addressing me.
>
> **Deidre: That's my next question. Do you feel alienated by these other women's magazines?**
>
> Lindiwe: Oh, yeah.
>
> Nthati: They have the general stories in *Cosmopolitan*, like they would have the general stories in *True Love* in terms of beauty tips, fashion, celebrities. It's just that *True Love* is addressing me.

Ingrid (18), the only white participant who was familiar with *True Love* prior to the session, saw the differences as cultural rather than purely racial and saw this as an acceptable form of niche targeting:

> **Ingrid:** I definitely think... I mean, *True Love* is obviously orientated towards the African culture and whatever. It's just that *True Love*, you know, is openly orientated towards the culture. *Cosmopolitan*, you know... It's orientated towards Western culture but it tries to look very politically correct and it, you know, puts all the other cultures, fits them in there somewhere so they can't be criticized. That's one of the major differences that I found. Different cultures are... I mean you shouldn't have to hide the fact that you are orientated towards a certain culture.

Ingrid suggested that magazines such as *True Love* could serve as vehicles for greater cross-cultural understanding within the context of South Africa[7]. As an example, she referred to an article she had read in a past edition of *True Love* which had revealed to her the cultural differences in attitudes towards sex. The article, which was written by a female doctor, had highlighted the dangers surrounding a widespread practice among black South African women. This practice involves women 'drying themselves out', using all manner of household remedies (such as disinfectant and stock cubes), prior to sexual intercourse. This is done to ensure that their partners do not consider them 'loose' upon finding them to be naturally lubricated. Naturally, Ingrid was "very surprised that some things like that still happen in South Africa today". This example led to the following comment:

> Ingrid: Ja, it's interesting, you know, because it reminds you of actually how diverse South Africa really is and how diverse the cultures are because the fact is that black and white are still very separate in South Africa. That just is the fact and you don't actually get to intermingle very often. That's why you still have problems with racism because people don't actually know how the other half lives or $^{1}/_{11}$ th so to speak, you know. But no one really knows how everyone else lives.

True Love was also correctly believed to be targeted at a wider age sample, based on the parenting related adverts and articles found in the magazine. Significantly, some of the *True Love* readers also read *Cosmopolitan*, based on its position as a young women's title. The *True Love* readers were less self-conscious about their reading practices and, for instance, freely admitted to reading magazines for advice on relationships and beauty information.

Other differences, observed by members of the focus groups, between the two magazines concerned the different approaches to fashion; the different subject matters dealt with in the articles and the different kinds of products advertised. The fashion editorials in *True Love* are more practical than conceptual (see the description of *Cosmopolitan's* 'conceptual' editorials in *Chapter Four: Content Analysis*). Some of the *True Love* articles are concerned to explore aspects of traditional African culture and

[7] This potential for women's magazines to act as a bridge to cross cultural divides was illustrated to me in an encounter at a grocery store checkout till, during the data-gathering phase of my study. The black teenage girl behind the checkout till had shown a look of pleasant surprise when she saw my copy of *True Love*. I did not have enough money to pay for all of the items in my basket and considered putting my copy back on the shelf. When she saw that I was short of money and guessed what I was contemplating she looked at me and entreated that I "please buy it", referring to the *True Love* magazine.

would not be likely to be found in *Cosmopolitan*, for instance. Several participants commented on the different kinds of advertisements featured in the two magazines. Ntathi (25) noticed that the products advertised in *Cosmopolitan* were more expensive and used car advertisements as an example. Those previously unfamiliar with *True Love* commented on the magazine's inclusion of advertisements for household products. One group in particular found the inclusion of a plaster sample, attached to an advert for *elastoplast* plasters, particularly amusing. Natalie (15) said "the only time that a *Cosmo* would ever advertise a plaster is if that was what the model was wearing, like, the only thing". However, apart from the differences, both magazines were clearly seen to come from the same genre:

> Thandi: They're exactly the same – both have sex, fashion, beauty, advice on relationships. Exactly the same in both books.

Television

Four of the participants described their consumption of television using the metaphor of addiction. Natalie (15) described herself as "a TV-holic" and the others spoke of being "addicted" to certain television programmes. This shows how the early concerns around the use of the mass media, and television in particular, have become part of common sense understandings of the media. The use of such terminology also acts as a disclaimer, suggesting that because the person is 'addicted', he or she cannot be held entirely accountable for bad behaviour. In this instance the bad behaviour is television viewing. Using the metaphor of addiction is a lighthearted way of avoiding judgement for engaging in something socially frowned upon or thought to be 'bad'. This self-consciousness over admitting to being an avid television viewer echoes the self-consciousness over admitting to regular magazine reading. The genre most favoured by the participants was the situation comedy, followed by soap operas, documentaries, news and 'reality TV'. The specific programmes most frequently cited were *Ally McBeal, Backstage* and *Sex and the City.*

In response to the question of whether there were any characters on television that the participants could relate to or in any way admired, discussions frequently turned to the programme *Sex and the City.* In two cases, the programme was jokingly brought up in response to the above-mentioned question. The immediate laughter that followed suggested that the programme was a self-evident example of who they *should not* relate

to or *should not* admire. During the focus group at the private school, Marian (16) was the first to humorously introduce the programme to the discussion and later explained herself saying "their values and things are so wrong, it's just funny to watch them". Fellow group member Danielle played devil's advocate, questioning the 'double standard' that Marian's criticism revealed:

> Danielle: I don't think they act the wrong way. It's just that...
>
> Marian: Hello, they can't even count how many guys they've had sex with.
>
> Danielle: And what's wrong with that. Guys can do that, why can't girls do that?
>
> Marian: I don't know.
>
> Natalie: But even when guys do it, it's still morally wrong.
>
> Danielle: Morally wrong, according to who?
>
> Marian: According to like religion and so on.

Thandi (25) laughed with a fellow group member at the thought of being able to relate to the characters' lives, so full of "sex and shoes", to their own lives. I then put forward the suggestion, mentioned in the *content analysis* Chapter, that the lead character, Carrie Bradshaw, is in some ways representative of the '*Cosmo*-girl'. Thandi agreed:

> Thandi: She's independent, beautiful, she's very close to her female senses. She's looking for a man, but she is not desperate.

Ingrid (18), another who mentioned *Sex and the City*, described the programme in post-feminist terms:

> Ingrid: I think it's also interesting because programmes like 'Sex and the City' deal a lot with issues that women have these days, especially since the whole emancipation thing and whatever. You watch these programmes and see these women sort of, taking on the lives and careers that men had fifty years ago and how they dealing with it and, you know, the issues that come along with it... the whole, you know, the whole life. It's just interesting.

The programme focuses on the lives of four single, highly fashionable, sexually liberated career girls. It can therefore clearly be related to the *Cosmopolitan* brand of femininity. Significantly, the founding editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Helen Gurley Brown, wrote a book called *Sex and the Single Girl* in 1962 – three years prior to the launch of the first *Cosmopolitan.* The book was written in response to the increasing trend for young,

middle class women to work in cities, and live alone, between graduation and marriage and became a bestseller (Wolf, 1990: 31). *Sex and the City* is making an obvious intertextual reference.

Another notable response to the question of whether the participants can admire or relate to a particular television character or personality came from Thobeka. Thobeka (22) said she greatly admired local talk show host Felicia Mabusa-Suttle. However, Thandi (25) openly disagreed, saying she had an "allergic reaction" every time she watched Felicia. The two formed a sparring pair throughout the remainder of the session, and the topic of Felicia cropped up several times in discussion. Thandi disapproved of Felicia's "fake sincerity" and her blatant emulation of "the Oprah style". She was also highly critical of what she termed "the cult of Felicia", referring to the various projects that Felicia is involved in but specifically to the line of sunglasses launched under the name of *Felicia Eyewear*[8]. Thobeka maintained that Felicia is sincere and used the fact that proceeds from the sales of the eyewear go to charity as proof. For Thobeka, the fact that Felicia has openly acknowledged admiration for Oprah and has said she aspires to be more like her absolves Felicia from any criticism. Thobeka asked "what's wrong with that – even if she does walk in Oprah's footsteps?"[9].

Readings differ according to a person's background, social positioning and cultural capital. It is interesting to note that Thandi was brought up and educated in England as a result of her parents living in exile during apartheid. Felicia Mabusa-Suttle also lived in exile, but she lived in America. Like many who were exiled, Felicia moved back to South Africa after apartheid, as did Thandi's family. Perhaps for Thandi, Felicia's story of exile is no different from any other's and it should not provide a guaranteed platform for success. Or perhaps, being more 'westernized' than black South African Thobeka, Thandi adopts the tenets of individualism so characteristic of modernity while Thobeka displays the respect for leaders which is characteristic of African society. Later in the session, Thobeka refers to another local television programme, *People of the*

[8] The "cult of Felicia" is an example of how people can become brands through harnessing their celebritydom to launch other business brands.

[9] Later on, when Thandi referred to *Cosmopolitan's* use of content material syndicated from overseas editions, Thobeka cried "so then why are you people blaming Felicia if she is just copying or imitating Oprah?". The "you people" obviously refers to those who criticized Felicia, who are also *Cosmopolitan* readers.

South, which is hosted by Dali Tambo, son of the late Oliver Tambo. It is clear that Thobeka is a regular viewer of the programme yet she seems unaware of the programme's name, preferring to refer to it as "the Dali Tambo show':

> Thobeka: But you know what, there's a show - the Dali Tambo show - that has prominent black people or sometimes they have white people. They, they, bring lots of...
>
> Thandi: People of the South?
>
> Thobeka: Yeah, the Dali Tambo show. I don't know if it is People of the South. But there is people there and we get to know where they come from and how they got into the position that they are. I think its giving what the magazines cannot give us.
>
> **Deidre: The depth?**
>
> Thobeka: Ja.

The Cosmo Show

The participants were scornful of the "fake" quality of *The Cosmo Show* . Lindiwe (30) acknowledged that the presenters' dialogue was too scripted and "didn't sound natural". This "fake and put on" aspect undermined the show's credibility, because it was "not convincing" (Lindiwe). The presenters were regarded as typically representative of the *Cosmopolitan* brand. Thandi (25) said they were "definitely *Cosmo* people" and Buhle (21) also felt that their styled looks allowed them to "represent what *Cosmo* is about". Kirsten (22) said that the male presenter, Marius, was a "male version" of the female presenter, Michelle McKlein. Considering that Kirsten had earlier described Michelle McKlein as being "like a Barbie doll", Marius, being the archetypal blonde Adonis, is obviously being compared to Barbie's male counterpart – Ken. In another group, Marian (16) chose to mimic the presenters, saying (in a 'sing-song' voice) "What do you think we should do next? Let's go…". This display adopts the register of child's play and therefore echoes Kirsten's Barbie and Ken analogy. The analogy also echoes my own impression of the presenters as 'puppets' speaking on behalf of either the *Cosmopolitan* magazine or the typical readers (see the *Chapter Four: Content Analysis* for a discussion of the unstable positionality of the presenters). The blonde presenter pair are seen as the ideal representations of masculinity and femininity.

Thobeka (22) did not understand why the producers included a male presenter, saying "it's a woman's magazine…he doesn't fit in". Kirsten (22) suggested that, perhaps, since Marius had previously been voted one of South Africa's sexiest men, he

was being used, on the basis of his sex appeal, to help attract female viewers. This idea was confirmed in another group, when Paige (16) said he was "hot", but "like a dumb blonde in a guy". The second schoolgirl group also commented on Marius' continual use of sexual innuendos and references to girls' bodies. The 'astrological sex position' insert produced giggles and discomfort in every group. Sarina (16) explained the discomfort:

> Sarina: Also, I find with TV, people don't like to watch like sexually orientated inserts because when you watch TV, you don't usually watch alone, you usually watch it with other people and you feel uncomfortable watching stuff like that when other people are around.
>
> **Deidre: Do you think it's too intimate for something that's public?**
>
> Sarina: Hmmm. Like with a magazine, you can read it wherever you want.

This confirms that the magazine, being an adaptable and private form, is more suited to dealing with the topic of sex than television, a more public medium. Participants from another group were more disapproving of the insert, based on the belief that sex should remain a private affair:

> Dorothy: I think it's making it seem so cheap [all agree]. I mean c'mon, you're putting it on TV.
>
> Charlize: Things like that are very personal. It's so open. Sex is not personal - sex is something just to play around with. I find it's not a good message to send out to people these days. [Ingrid agrees]

The insert was also thought to be too deliberate an attempt to be contemporary. Charlize (17) described the producers in authoritative or parental terms, saying "they're trying to prove a point to you, "we're hip and cool" – as parents would say, "with it"".

Overall, however, *The Cosmo Show* was thought to be a good translation of the magazine into television, and, despite the 'fake' presenters, the show was considered enjoyable. Marian (16) asserted a more positive view of the show than her classmates and said "I think everyone's sort of being cynical" and reminded "it's not something to think about. It's entertaining". Others were more disappointed. Paige (16) said: "even I think it's a really cheap programme, I don't think it's classy at all. Even though I am not a fan of *Cosmo*, I still don't think that it does *Cosmo* justice". Similarly, S'the (16) was disappointed at the lack of fashion and glamour, saying she had "a different picture about what *The Cosmo Show* should be or would be".

Summary

The participants displaying a greater amount of 'cultural capital' were generally those who did not define themselves as magazine readers or who defined themselves in terms of a subcultural identity. These participants made perceptive comments about the magazine genre which at times demonstrated how "irony and sarcasm are means to keep things at a distance" (Hermes, 1995: 136). The attitudes of these participants also made apparent how "media readers who have already questioned conventional categories of gender, ethnicity or sexuality in their own practice have at least a chance of being more resistive readers than their conservative peers" (Macdonald, 1995: 220).

In some of the groups, consensual tendencies silenced the opinions of the self-confessed magazine readers, aware of the 'low' status of the genre. However, given the chance, magazine readers themselves expressed mixed feelings about the contradictory tendency of women's magazines to focus on self-acceptance and, at the same time, self-transformation. Although there was recognition that "low self-esteem" was the greatest contributing factor in determining body dissatisfaction, the constant repetition of messages related to physical appearance was considered potentially dangerous. Above all, it was the readers of magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* who expressed irritation at the idealistic magazine form. The *True Love* readers felt proud to be part of the 'imagined community' of *True Love* readers and were inspired by the magazine's aspirational messages.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was concerned with the relationship between gender, media and culture and revealed the longstanding tension that has existed between the pleasures of popular culture and the political aims of feminism (Van Zoonen, 1994). The central focus of this study was on media consumption practices and gender identity in teenage girls. Specifically, this study explored the genre of women's magazines, believed to serve as informal educational devices in the teaching (and learning) of 'femininity', so closely related to female gender identity. In this view, women's magazines are regarded as important sources for 'feminine' identity construction.

This study adopted a poststructuralist understanding of the self as socially constructed within discourse. Since the media absorb, reflect and maintain surrounding/societal discourses, the media serve as resources for identity construction. Gender identities are constructed by drawing on cultural definitions of gender, which are discursively expressed through forms of cultural expression, such as the media. Gender identities are formed around the constructs of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and media content is saturated with contemporary definitions of these constructs. Both 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are naturalized and maintained through the adoption of gendered subject positions. According to Macdonald (1995: 220), the concept of femininity has remained relatively steadfast:

> while in media representations, the myths of femininity have been modified in the course of this century in a variety of ways, what is disturbing is their tenaciousness, or the alacrity with which they have been defensively reinvented, against the cultural and social changes in women's lives. Emphases have changed, playfulness has taken over from seriousness, but the 'mode of femininity' has been tinkered with, not redrafted.

This view becomes understandable upon reading Beetham's (1996) historical analysis of women's magazines, which demonstrates how the nineteenth century

women's periodicals sought to define the femininity of their readers and to address their desire. Women's magazines served as instruction manuals and sites where meanings about femininity were contested and made. Today still, in the absence of any ritualistic rite of passage into adulthood within western society, women's magazines serve as developmental markers and informal educational devices which 'teach' femininity (Wolf, 1997; Ferguson, 1983). Beetham (1996) maintains that women's magazines were centrally involved in linking the desirability of commodities to their visibility and, through the inclusion of fashion, were centrally involved in defining femininity as something to be desired. Women's magazines are visually appealing forms and, with their glossy packaging and gender-specific concerns, they give the intangible concept of femininity a material form. By operating as 'feminized' spaces, women's magazines have been central to the definition, establishment and maintenance of western female identity (Hermes, 1995; Murray, 1998).

In a positive light, women's magazines, being as they are one of the few forms of women's mass culture, provide a space in which to construct and explore the female self. Women's magazines are believed to have popularized feminist ideologies and have thus served a liberatory function (Wolf, 1990). The large-scale popularity of the genre with women readers attests to the pleasure they provide. Van Zoonen (1994: 124) suggests that part of this pleasure derives from the fact that the media offer women "fantasy modes" to "try out different subjectivities without the risks involved in real life". Similarly, Hermes (1995) maintains that women's magazines provide the reader with an opportunity to fantasize about an 'ideal self'. In this way, they are aspirational devices which provide 'moments of empowerment' by offering fantasies which may also strengthen particular identities. Women's magazines also connect the reader to a global imaginary and a particular pleasure involves the sense of belonging to a global - or more specifically local - 'imagined community' of women (Anderson, 1983). The commercial nature of women's magazines - the way in which they display the current trends in terms of clothing, appearance styles and accessories – involves readers in a 'consumption community', which can serve as an "[arena] for female cultural production and knowledge" (Lewis, 1987:78). Above all, women's magazines are regarded positively for providing ordinary women with affirmation, encouraging a form of self-love which can

only be beneficial to women as a group, and for being aspirational devices, encouraging women to be the best they can be.

Typically, however, women's magazines have been viewed in a negative light as ideologically oppressive forms. The pleasure said to be provided by women's magazines is believed to obscure their (patriarchal) ideological underpinnings, said to maintain the capitalist and patriarchal status quo. Women's magazines, like other entertainment forms, provide a form of escape which is typically of the kind that can only be provided by capitalism (Dyer, 1981). The focus on appearance in women's magazines is felt to exemplify the postmodern reduction of self-identity to an image which one is able to construct through the purchasing of commodities (Negrin, 2000). This experimentation with appearance, rather than being purely liberatory, is less challenging than attempts at economic and political equality (Macdonald, 1995). Macdonald (1995: 91) describes how, during the 1980's and 1990's, "consumer discourses in both advertising and the women's monthly magazine press...eagerly absorbed the terminology of self-assertiveness and achievement, transforming feminism's challenging collective programme into atomized acts of individual consumption". Thus, through a process of incorporation, the media have adopted the surface terminology of the counter-discourse of feminism "without taking on board the ideology that underpins it" (Macdonald, 1995: 92). Above all, however, women's magazines are criticized for placing too much emphasis on the attainment of appearance ideals by playing on (and encouraging) deep-seated anxieties related to physical appearance. Foucault's account of the disciplined, or 'mindful', body can be applied to the women's magazine. His later work on the 'ethics of the self', which describes how subjects actively work towards self-improvement, finds parallels in the current self-help trend which is incorporated into women's magazines (Foucault, 1985 & 1988).

However, as Murray (1998) points out, consumer culture cannot be viewed in purely 'oppressive' or 'celebratory' terms, neither can the media 'texts' which form part of it. Consumer culture needs to be understood from a perspective that finds a balance between creativity and constraint (Mackay, 1997). Women's magazines are marked by their ambiguities and they can be viewed, simultaneously, as having 'positive' or 'negative' functions and effects. The central paradox revealed in the women's magazine

genre is the idea that femininity is a given and is yet still to be achieved (Beetham, 1996; Ferguson, 1983). Another is the way in which magazines promote self-love and self-acceptance, and then go on to undermine these messages by encouraging continuous body maintenance and self-improvement. These contradictions and inconsistencies are to be expected "since media absorb the discourses of different social institutions, they present a variety of positions and perspectives that are at times in direct opposition to one another" (Spigel, 1992: 8). Women's magazines can thus be regarded as discursive sites-of-struggle where meanings (about femininity, specifically) are contested and made.

The concept of intertextuality acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness of different forms of cultural expression. The intertextual cross-referencing from one medium to another is particularly evident in the way in which the print and televisual media inform each other (McQuail, 1994). Spigel's (1992) historical analysis reveals the early connections between television and women's periodicals and describes how the relationship between the two forms was in many ways a symbiotic one. Both television viewing and magazine reading can be regarded as 'secondary' activities (Hermes, 1995), and both forms are marked by segmentation, repetition and heterogeneity. Feminist media studies has been greatly furthered by ethnographic analyses of the television soap opera genre. In view of the fact that the women's magazine is considered to be a quintessential 'women's genre', women's magazines can be regarded as the print equivalents of television soap operas. Television and magazines are highly visual forms which are deeply implicated in consumer culture. This visual emphasis is illustrative of the salience of the image within postmodernity. Within today's highly commodified media environment, marketers are making use of the 'media ensemble' to extend one media brand into other mediums[1]. This study included an intertextual analysis of *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* magazines.

The approach to this study involved both a qualitative case study with a form of content analysis, thus combining text and audience analysis. The 'qualitative' content analysis took the form of a genre study and intertextual analysis and served as an entry

[1] For instance, radio station *YFM* has launched a youth/ music magazine titled *Y magazine*; music television channel, *Channel O*, has also launched a music magazine called *'O'*, and the very successful *LoveLife* campaign has made use of television (radio) and print.

point to compare the two magazines under investigation. The genre study, in which I attempted to distance myself from the 'taken-for-granted' magazine genre and adopt an 'estranged' reading position (Janks, 1997), identified the generic codes and conventions of the women's magazine. Genre is the most widely discussed form of horizontal intertextuality. Therefore, the comparison of *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love*, as examples of the same genre, provided an example of horizontal intertextuality (Fiske, 1987). Considerations of secondary texts, in the form of outside ventures and brand extensions (*True Love* self-empowerment workshops, *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* advertisements), served as an example of vertical intertextuality. Tertiary texts, produced by the audience in the form of feedback or conversation, are also examples of vertical intertextuality. The ethnographic data provided through focus group discussions made up the third level of intertextuality, and gave insight into how the primary texts are read.

Discourse analysis includes intertextual analysis because it connects the study of texts to the social context, through incorporating the analysis of larger societal discourses and texts (Wood & Kroger, 2000). The application of discourse analysis to textual analysis requires that the researcher identify how the text is structured and ordered to perform certain functions and effects. This involves the comparison and identification of patterns in content and structure (Wood & Kroger, 2000). This study broadly followed the critical discourse analysis (CDA) model proposed by Norman Fairclough (1989), and made use of the 'interpretive repertoire' concept first proposed by Potter and Wetherall (1987). The *content analysis* Chapter, which identified the properties of the women's magazine genre, served as the descriptive first step of the three-part CDA model. The intertextual analyses provided a link between the first and second step – that of interpretation. The entire study was framed within the post-apartheid South African context, itself affected by the hegemonic influences of global patriarchy and capitalism. An awareness of these socio-historical conditions contributes to the final stage of the three-step process which is concerned with explanation. A more specific example of the how the CDA model is used in text analysis was provided by the analysis of the *True Love* advertisement that appeared in the *MagFocus* trade publication.

The analysis of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, specifically, formed the basis of the content and intertextual analysis. I chose to start with *Cosmopolitan* since it serves as a standardized example of the women's magazine genre. The magazine is perhaps most definitive of 'postfeminism', which "takes the sting out of feminism" (Macdonald, 1995: 100). *Cosmopolitan's* characteristically up-beat tone and witty copy reveals how, within 'postfeminism', "the subjectivities of femininity, presented seriously earlier in the century, are reincarnated towards its end with a twist of humour and a dash of self-conscious parody"(Macdonald, 1995: 100). In order to enable the comparison of *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love*, I chose fifteen thematic categories based on my own generic awareness and on my analysis of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine sample. Within the *Cosmopolitan* sample, the feature categories were in the following order: Love Relationships (14%); Self-Help (13%); Health, Celebrities and Sex (all 10%); Competitions (8%); Social Issues (6%); Real Life (6%); Beauty (5%); Self-Knowledge (4%); Esoteric, Workplace, Fashion and Travel (all 3%); Relationship (other) (2%).

The comparison of *The Cosmo Show* revealed how the concept of authorship is hard to sustain in the transfer of print to televisual mediums (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994). The unstable positionality of the presenters served to undermine the sense of an authority figure responsible for the women's magazine form. Also, the lack of the usual narrative ploys and devices which 'guide' the reader to the preferred meaning meant that the viewer became alienated from the 'naturalized' magazine genre. In terms of insert categories, *The Cosmo Show* focused mainly on Fashion (22%) and Celebrities (22%), and the Review (6%) replaced the Travel category. The *Cosmopolitan* content analysis included references to the magazine's website, television advertisements and merchandise.

True Love magazine is the most widely read English women's glossy magazine in South Africa. Although it appeals to a broader age group than *Cosmopolitan*, the majority of the magazine's readers are black women between the ages of 16 and 24[2]. Laden's (1997; 2000) analysis of consumer magazines intended for black South Africans revealed how magazines aimed at black readers are more overtly aspirational and didactic than magazines intended for white South Africans. *True Love* markets itself as

"a lifestyle role model that [readers] can aspire to" (www.naspers.co.za) and, through its depiction of middle-class lifestyle practices and glossy representations of black success, the magazine functions to present black South Africans with new social options that they can aspire to (Laden, 2000). *True Love* magazine contains fewer advertisements and more features than *Cosmopolitan* and gives more focus to social issues, celebrities and work. The feature category percentages were as follows: Social Issues (26%); Celebrities (21%); Self-Help (13%); Workplace (11%); Real Life (9%); Love Relationship (6%); Self-Knowledge, Esoteric and Travel (all 1%). Five categories derived from the *Cosmopolitan* sample were not present in the *True Love* magazine articles. There were no articles which could be placed in the Relationship (other) category, while the remaining four categories (Fashion, Beauty, Health and Competitions) were each in separate sections of the magazine and were not represented in the features section[3]. The secondary texts, or brand extensions, mentioned – *True Love Live* and the '*True Love*/ Dooley's Self-improvement and Empowerment Workshops' – suggested that *True Love* is committed to the empowerment and development of black South African women.

The *content analysis* Chapter included a critical discourse analysis of a *True Love* advertisement. The advert draws on the discourse of romantic love and sexuality so pervasive to the magazine form in its attempt to attract the attention of potential advertisers. *True Love* editor Khanyi Dhlomo-Mkhize features in the advertisement and metonymically represents the black South African women who are the magazine's readers. The advert includes the discourses of pre-and post-transformation (Janks, 1997) and Dhlomo-Mkhize's hybrid identity reveals tensions between the discourses of western modernity and African tradition. The need for economic recognition that the advert suggests confirms the idea that consumption, identity and status are intimately connected and suggests that 'empowerment' is measured largely in terms of the symbols of westernization. Within post-apartheid South Africa, *True Love*, as an aspirational device, no doubt serves a useful social function. Indeed,

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[2] All of the black *True Love* readers who participated in this study began reading *True Love* during their teens.

[3] *Cosmopolitan* also has its own Beauty, Fashion and Health sections, but occasionally covers these topics in the magazine's features.

> the discourses of 'modernity' that are articulated and rhetoricised in women's magazines – the impulses of futurity which inform the better/ happier/ new and improved registers of this female genre - might be felt by many to have meaningful bearing upon both South Africa's national future and upon their more intimate subjectivities (Murray, 1998: 92).

This study also included an ethnographic reception analysis of women's magazines, with particular reference to *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love.* Discourse analysis takes into consideration the fact that "talk is produced according to the occasion, situation or societal context, as are the identities it constructs" (Wood & Kroger, 2000:9). The potential weakness of focus group research lies in the consensual tendency of group talk and in the self-censoring that may occur in the presence of the interviewer/facilitator. Five focus groups were conducted, two of which involved university students and three of which involved girls of school-going age. The average age of the participants was 16, although seven of the twenty-eight participants were older than twenty. Although most of the *True Love* readers belonged to the older group, all began reading *True Love* as teenagers and have remained loyal readers.

Included in the analysis of the focus group discussions was an identification of the 'interpretive repertoires' used by the participants to explain and legitimize their magazine reading. I intended to check whether the repertoires identified by Joke Hermes (1995), in her comprehensive analysis of women's magazines, could be transferable to the South African context. The 'repertoire of practical knowledge', which provides the most rational explanation for reading women's magazines, was frequently employed by the participants in this study. The participants listed reading magazines for their fashion advice, make-up tips and work related information. Women's magazines were still considered informative and useful. The 'repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing' was used less frequently than the 'repertoire of practical knowledge', but was described as a motivating factor for some participants. This repertoire regards magazine reading as a quest for understanding and is associated with the 'Real-life' and 'Self-Help' feature categories mentioned earlier.

When asked to list a positive feature of women's magazines, participants referred to the pleasure derived form the highly visual nature of the medium and to the idea of the magazine as a gender exclusive and 'feminized space'. The negative feature most frequently listed and discussed was the tendency of magazines to focus on the attainment of physical perfection. However, there was an awareness that magazines alone are not to blame for the prevalence of eating disorders, among teenage girls specifically. The terms employed by some participants were taken as proof of the 'psychologization' of society, where the 'confession' and the 'discourse of therapy' become incorporated into all levels of social life (Wilbraham, 1997; Fairclough, 1989). Some of the younger *True Love* readers felt that the slim ideal had infiltrated the black community. Indeed, Le Grange *et al.* (1998: 253) found that eating disorders were equally prevalent among black South African college students and attributed this to the fact that "black subjects…face new social pressures and expectations by way of 'western syntonic' activities amidst a rapidly changing South Africa".

Like the participants in Kehily's (1999) study, the participants in this study perceived magazines to serve as cultural developmental markers in the passage from adolescence to adulthood. With regard to the treatment of the topic of sex in women's magazines, the participants felt alienated from overtly sexual material and were discerning and self-regulating readers, again, much like Kehily's (1999) participants. However, some were outspoken in their appreciation of sex-related articles which they found to be useful and informative. One of my concerns was to establish whether or not the participants identified with the subject positions offered by women's magazines and if they felt part of the 'imagined community' of magazine readers. Overall, the non-readers and those who identified with a youth subculture distanced themselves from the 'imagined community' of magazine readers and objected to the genre's implicit claim of authority.

In terms of the differences between *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines, the *True Love* readers were proud to be identified as such and found the magazine to be informative and inspiring. The *Cosmopolitan* readers were able to distance themselves from the women's magazine genre, largely as a result of their own ambivalent reactions to the contradictions within the women's magazine form, which are more pronounced in

the idealistic *Cosmopolitan*. *True Love* was felt to provide a more positive role and one participant felt that it could serve as a medium to improve cross-cultural understanding within post-apartheid South Africa. Discussions about television in general revealed a striking similarity between the brand of postfeminism articulated in *Cosmopolitan* magazine and in the television series *Sex and the City*. The participants objected to the insert on sex in *The Cosmo Show* and also remarked on the 'fake' presenter dialogue. The show was nevertheless felt by most to be an adequate television equivalent to *Cosmopolitan* magazine. What the focus groups demonstrated, above all, was that those participants who have a greater amount of 'cultural capital', and are thus more media literate, are better able to deconstruct media messages and adopt more oppositional reading positions.

My focus group sample was not intended to be fully representative of South African youth since consumer magazines are a relatively elite popular form and are assumed to be read by urban and higher income groups displaying a high level of (media) literacy. Future research could build upon the findings of this study by including a greater percentage of *True Love* readers and by including more participants who do identify themselves as members of the 'imagined community' who read women's magazines[4].

Women's magazines are highly repetitive material forms and their enduring success is surprising when one considers how they continually reproduce the same themes and imagery month after month, year after year, and, even, decade after decade. Their continued success can be explained in terms of the context of postmodernity, where identity "revolves around leisure, centred on looks, images and consumption" (Kellner, 1992: 153). They serve as contemporary resources for gender identity construction and as developmental markers which 'teach' femininity to each successive generation. Magazines were involved in linking the desirability of commodities with their visibility and serve as 'meta-commodities' (Beetham, 1996). They are thus desirable as commodities themselves and responsible for creating the desirability of other commodities (Beetham, 1996). Magazines illustrate how the link

[4] Although I suspect that non-magazine readers who have more 'cultural capital' will always tend to dominate because they are able to employ irony, sarcasm and witty criticisms to articulate the contradictions in the magazine form.

between consumption practices and desires is primarily maintained and provided through the use of images and visual representations.

Magazines are highly reliant on images, as the unsuccessful *Cosmopolitan* book demonstrated, and they cater to the postmodern consumption of signs and signifying practices 'for their own sake' (Strinati, 1995). Like television, the periodical is an ephemeral form which is "designed to be thrown away" (Beetham, 1996: 9). This affects its material form and its meaning and explains the frequent repetition of topics and imagery. However, this ephemeral quality contrasts with the magazine's status as authoritative handbook, or gender 'bible'. Many women keep their magazine back issues for future reference, although it is usually only the *idea* of using them for future reference which motivates readers to keep them, rather than actual use. Hermes (1995), for instance, found that many of her reader participants were eager to get rid of their stacks of magazines, without actually having to throw them away. Similarly, the motivation behind the *Cosmopolitan* book, according to compilers Vanessa Raphaely and Heather Parker, was the fact that the *Cosmopolitan* is frequently approached in connection with back issue requests. The magazine form is itself ambivalent: it is both a trivial 'pulp' publication and, at the same time, an extravagant and glossy source of useful information. This leaves magazine readers with a slight dilemma – to throw away their monthly expense like waste paper, or to keep the publication 'just in case'. The 'throwaway' quality of magazines exemplifies the commodified and globalized postmodern world, where the ecological implications of such large-scale consumption are frequently disregarded.

The continued success of women's magazines, and their repetitiveness, can also be read as reflective of the fact that:

> the mapping of 'femininity' (that is appropriate social behaviour) onto female heterosexual desire, and of both onto biological femaleness, far from being natural is only accomplished by powerful social, linguistic and psychological forces. The task is never fully accomplished (Beetham, 1996: 4).

Although the participants in this study did not blame the media directly for causing eating disorders *per se*, they did object to the endless repetition of messages about improving one's physical appearance and to the over-use of ultra-thin and "half-naked" models in women's magazines. Despite making 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' readings (Hall, 1980), readers admitted to feelings of dissatisfaction upon reading these oft repeated messages. This suggested that "it is an illusion to believe that we can escape entirely from the social and aesthetic demands the mass media and the beauty and fashion industries constantly force upon us" (Thesander, 1997: 33).

Spigel's (1992) study showed how the women's periodical survived the introduction of television – testimony to the fundamental adaptibility of the magazine form. Today, the introduction of the World Wide Web provides a challenge to the magazine form and magazines will have to respond by launching online versions of their publications. Webzines, or e-zines, might replace the traditional material magazine form and provide more interactive ways of being part of an 'imagined community'. A large number of webzines aimed at teenage girls are available on the web, many of which are created by teenage girls themselves and many of which are explicitly 'feminist'. This new media environment provides a challenge for the traditional women's magazine. The recent tendency of South African magazine brands, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love*, to branch out into other ventures is based on an awareness that "the great magazine survivors constantly adapt. They make the right moves. In content, in layout or in alliances that take them to the Net, television or radio" (Reg Lascaris, Advertising Agency executive, quoted in *MagFocus*, Dec/Jan 2000: 41).

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