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GLOBALIZED GIRLHOOD
The teachings of femininity in
Cosmopolitan and *True Love*
A case study

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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

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

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 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 Khnel Investments (Pty) Ltd (also 50%) 3. *Cosmopolitan* was first

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[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 finding s and offers concluding remarks.

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.

CONTENTS

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 re fers 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 magazin es 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).

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

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 '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 sections and features in every

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[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".

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.

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

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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".

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.

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

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

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

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 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. 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

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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 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".

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.

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

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[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.

"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 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 mercy of the advertising and entertainment industries. However, the later emergence of

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[9] The informal tone of television talk shows could be regarded as an instance of the 'conversationalization' of public discourse (Foucault, 1994).

[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).

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:

DESCRIPTION; Text analysis of text object. This first stage is concerned with the form and properties of a text.
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.
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).

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.

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

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[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".

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 regula r 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.

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

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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)".

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]

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).

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[3] Both terms were introduced in the theory chapter

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':

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[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).

[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).

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 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

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[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.

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 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 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

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[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.

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

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[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.

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 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 wer e 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 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

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[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.

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

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

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,

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

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

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 conne cted 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 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.

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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.

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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