Representations of women in women's magazines

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Abstract

Women's magazines as a popular form of entertainment are among the media products that have been criticised for misrepresenting women. These popular magazines are often condemned for their failure to represent women in a positive light although they claim to target women as their market. The objective of this research is to assess and analyse representations of women in selected women's magazines. Because women's magazines are part of popular culture, which is not only concerned with the production process but also takes into consideration the needs of the readers, the research seeks to find out whether these magazines meet the expectations of its readers. The study is a combination of qualitative analysis, which looks at the frequency and the manner in which women are represented, with a qualitative interpretation of women's roles within those representations. The issue of representations of women in women's magazines is a very complex one as magazines, like other cultural texts are open to multiple interpretations. Consequently, multiple conclusions have been reached and the outcome of the study is therefore a series of three conclusions based on feature articles, advertisements and at a theoretical level.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Women's magazines form part of popular culture, which is not only concerned with the production process but also takes into consideration the needs of the readers. The aim of this research is to analyse the representations of women in selected women's magazines. In particular, this research focuses on the social construction and cultural representation of women in terms of whether they are represented as glamorous sex objects or independent women who are in control of their sexuality.

The research seeks to find out whether these magazines resonate with the desires and aspirations of its readers. The study combines a quantitative analysis, which looks at the frequency and the manner in which women are represented, with a qualitative interpretation of women's roles within those representations.

The magazines that have been selected are two; monthly South African commercially produced women's magazines, *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan*. Women's magazines are one of the many structures that are concerned with producing representations of women. Because these magazines are commercially driven, advertising plays an important role in the kind of content they deliver. *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* are glossy A4 size magazines. They use predominantly colour photos and visual stimuli. This goes along with their character as beauty and glamour focused-magazines.

1.1 Representation

According to Richard Dyer's typography (in Lacey, 1998: 131), re-presentation is described as consisting essentially of media language as well as the conventions, which

are used to represent the world to the audience. According to Lacey (1998:143), representations are usually a product of institutions, whether large broadcasting organisations or small independent companies. Lacey argues that media organisations and not the audience or readers get to see or even discuss the modes of representation used by media practitioners.

Fiske (1994:265) describes representation as the social process of representing. It is the social process of making sense within all available signifying systems. The term therefore refers both to the process and to the product of making signs stand for particular meanings. In this study the term will be used as both a process and as products.

There are certain conventions that are used to represent the world. Media texts cannot show reality as it is; by their nature they mediate reality (Lacey 1998:95). According to Lacey, representations are the result of conventions produced at a particular time and place, and determined by the dominant ideology.

Margaret Marshment says that representation is a political process and involves the power to make meanings of both the world and one's place within it (in Richardson and Robinson, 1993:123) She goes on to point out that:

> There are structures that are concerned with producing representations of women from primary school reading schemes to Hollywood films, from advertising to opera, from game shows to art galleries, women are depicted in ways that define what it means to be a woman in this society, what women are like (naturally), what they ought to be like, what they are capable of, what roles they play in society and how they differ from men.

According to Nick Lacey "representations consist essentially of media language, the conventions which are used to represent the world to the audience (readers)", using certain symbols to express this (1998:132). Because representation involves embodying particular aspects of life, certain objects and individuals carry certain connotations. Stereotypes are social constructs and as such are a type of media representation. Lacey (1998) argues that this is due to the fact that stereotypes have their origin in the social world and they are mostly used by individuals about people or peoples.

In its various forms, Lacey (1998) argues that the media is one of the main sources of information and it is likely that it has a crucial influence in audience perceptions. Because stereotypes have their basis in the material conditions and social practices of society, they serve to naturalise the power relationships in society, they have a hegemonic function, hence women are often stereotyped as subservient to men (Lacey 1998:139). This implies that women may be represented in a way that suits the views of those who are involved in the production process as well as the owners in the manner that they think will be profitable for them.

As noted by Gaye Tuchman, recent work on the media has tried to locate facts with which to demonstrate the apparent political attack on sexism in the media, its origins and impact (1979:11). Tuchman states that according "…to media researchers, the media do not represent women who are viable role models, and therefore the media's irrational role models when internalised, prevent and impede female accomplishments" (1979:11). As a result of this the media also encourage readers to define women in terms of the way men perceive them (as sex objects) or in the context of the family (as wives and mothers).

Tuchman (1979) states that some researchers have implied that the media offer a deleterious portrait of women because few women hold positions of responsibility within the media. Croteau and Hoynes also argue that the creation and production of media images is also in male hands. "Women are generally not in positions of control and perhaps as a result are less likely than men to be prominently featured in media products" (1997:148).

Magazines are very specifically associated with femininity and women's culture, although men do read magazines. According to Judith Williamson "in our society women stand for the side of life that seems to be outside history, the side that stands for personal relationships, love and sex". This has almost become a tradition as these aspects of life seem to become women's areas whereas they are, broadly speaking, the arena of mass culture (1986:101). Mass culture is mediated culture that is primarily produced commercially in large quantities for consumption by the masses:

> In its classical usage, … the term 'mass' implied that the audience created by the new media was socially undifferentiated, lacking any clear divisions along class, sex or race lines (Bennett 1982: 30).

Mass culture therefore emphasises the aspects of production and consumption as the defining characteristics of mediated culture (Bennett: 1982). Much of mass culture takes place or is consumed in the feminine spheres of leisure, family, or personal life and the home and it also focuses on these as the subject matter of its representations. Williamson (1986:103) says:

One of the most important aspects of femininity in mass culture is not what they reveal but what they conceal. If woman means love and sex, what woman does not mean in general currency is work, class and politics.

This seems to say that women have one thing in common, a concern about how they look, how they can please men and how they can look after their families in an even better way. This approach ignores those women who are determined professionals, who can be more than just partners and mothers. Hence Ballaster et al. argue that women are constructed as a homogenous group in women's magazines and this is achieved by the invocation of its supposedly natural opposite, men (1991:88).

Ballaster et al. (1991) however, argue that the femininity we are invited to acquire in the process of consuming magazines is neither single nor simple. The model of femininity extended by the magazine to the reader is highly multiple in nature. The woman who is addressed by the magazine text is addressed first and foremost as a consumer of the message(s) of the text and of the commodities that it presents as essential to her becoming or construction.

However this is not to say that serious matters of politics such as rape, incest and abuse are not covered in women's magazines. But the main question around this issue is how such issues are represented and how seriously the magazines take them. This, however, can be determined by several issues, such as choices in the production process as influenced by the editorial policy of the magazine and the political economy of the magazine. As commercial products magazines do not only seek to please the readers but the advertisers as well because this is where they get most of their revenue from.

It is therefore important to note that women's magazines are mostly shaped by a consumer culture geared to selling and making a profit from commodities, and whose sales are boosted through the medium of advertising. Winship maintains that "…as commodities, women's magazines do not only sell their weekly and monthly wares by advertising proper but also by the advertisement of their own covers" (1987: 9).

For magazines it is imperative to attract consumers. This is done by using the most eye-catching pictures and headlines. As Winship puts it, the business of magazines is a venture involved in two disparate but intimately linked selling operations: one to women, the other to advertisers (1987:38). Consequently, the advertisements used in women's magazines are structured in a way that affords the reader to dream. They play to the unfulfilled desires that it generates.

Cover images and sell lines also reveal a lot about the nature of women's magazines. The woman's face, which is their hallmark, is usually white, young, smoothly attractive, immaculately groomed and usually smiling or looking seductive. The image represented in these magazines affirms and sells these qualities of white skin, youth, beauty, charm and sexuality as valuable attributes of femininity. Women's magazines herald mostly the consumer options. The visual fictions around consumption are peculiarly addressed to women. Due to this any achievement of individuality has a somewhat hollow ring, barely registering on a higher masculine scale of individuality (Winship 1987). The outcome in many articles tends to be about unwarranted optimism about the position of women and what is possible for individual women to accomplish.

The aspects that have been discussed above are very important in relation to the research question. The analysis seeks to establish whether women are in fact being

represented as sexual objects or whether this representation is simply a way of fulfilling their desires, thus by encouraging the reader to be who they want to be and therefore in control of their lives. Being in control in this context means being able to manage ones life comfortably, without seeking validation or approval from anyone.

The content of the magazines both in the form of advertisements and feature articles will be the main focus in the study as it is where representations are prevalent and where messages are conveyed.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The object of this study is to focus more on the product (media content) as opposed to its production and consumption because the study seeks to assess how women's magazines as a cultural product represent women. A number of theoretical approaches focus on the production and consumption of the media content as a cultural product of the media industry, while others focus more on the economic organisation of the media industries. According to McQuail, media institutions have developed gradually around the key activities of publication and wide dissemination of information and culture (1994:11).

Murdock and Golding describe public communications systems as "part of the cultural industries, which manufacture goods that play a very important role in organising the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world" (1996:11). Some of the defining features of the media include production and distribution of content as well as consumption.

While this is the case, it is important to note that "the focus on the political economy of the media is an important one. This is because it sets out to reveal how different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations that are produced and made available to the public" (Murdock and Golding: 1996:11). The editorial process does not only involve pleasing the reader but advertisers as well, because production and distribution takes place within

a specific economic system where content is often influenced by the economic status of the media particularly advertising.

The debates on media representations of women revolve around the way women are portrayed in the media, particularly in those media genres which are not only popular but also target women as an audience. Due to their popularity women's magazines can be influential because their readers can relate to and identify themselves with the representations (Winship 1987:7).

Cultural Studies, particularly the critical strand of cultural studies, will be adopted as the theoretical framework that can explain how commercially produced magazines represent women. "The critical strand of cultural studies is one which is multidisciplinary and combines political, social theory and research, and cultural criticisms in its project which, aims at a critique of domination and social transformation" (Kellner 1997:103). Secondary to this, insights from feminist theories will also be used because they have a bearing on the critical cultural studies approach to media representations of women.

As noted by Agger, "…the project of feminist literary and cultural studies has been central on the feminist agenda, defining a host of interpretive and critical activities for feminist academics" (1992:114). Van Zoonen maintains that feminist concerns have gained more ground in the field of cultural studies (1991:34). According to Van Zoonen (1991) many innovative studies about women's genres such as soap operas, romance novels and women's magazines and their audiences, have informed and have been informed by this approach.

2.1 The Critical Strand of Cultural Studies

The critical strand of Cultural Studies focuses not only on cultural production in commercial contexts but also on culturally coded representations of society and issues of the consumption of media content (Murdock and Golding 1997:133). Critical cultural studies conceptualises commercially produced mass media products that attract audiences in large numbers and resonate with the feelings, ideas, desires and wishes of the audience as popular culture (Murdock and Golding 1997:133). According to Kellner cultural studies insists that culture must be investigated within the social relations and system through which it is produced and consumed, and that analysis of culture is thus intimately bound up with the study of society, politics and economics (1997:103).

As noted by Kellner, some earlier presentations of British Cultural Studies stressed the importance of a multidisciplinary approach, whereby the study of culture would be analysed in terms of the political economy, the process of production and distribution, as well as textual products and reception by the audience (1997:103). Because texts are products of institutions, " discourse (as regulated ways of speaking/practice) offers speaking persons (media institutions) subject positions from which to make sense of the world, while 'subjecting' speakers to the rules and discipline of those discourses" (Barker: 2000: 236).

2.2 Feminist approaches

Feminist critics are mostly dedicated to exposing male hegemony in culture as well as opening space for women to make culture (Agger 1992:114). Agger argues that the representation of women, their sexuality and sexual identity, in cultural works is

obviously important for feminists who are concerned with raising consciousness about the social construction of gender. According to Agger (1992) the representation of women's and men's appropriate gender identities and sexual preferences in mass culture is a crucial feminist topic where feminists reject hard and fast gender identity differentiations as well as the dominant heterosexism in our culture at large.

Feminist critics interpret the formal features of mass cultural forms addressed to women not only in terms of the meaning and construction of signification. They also interpret them in terms of the way that different textual forms resonate or not with female desire, with the shape and texture of women' lives, with women's pleasure (Mattelart 1986:35). According to Agger, one of the most lasting contributions of the feminist movement has been to transvalue the ways in which men and women are represented in culture, including ways in which women and men are read in cultural texts and documents (1992:120). Feminist criticisms have given a new way of viewing women in culture, subverting the normative ways in which they are represented as sex objects, housewives and helpmates (Agger 1997:20).

2.3 Popular Culture

The term popular culture can be explained with reference to its production, content and consumption. Bennett (1982:114) identifies four available uses of the term popular culture. He says that the popular is what many like and do; the popular is what is outside the sphere of high culture. The popular equates with mass implying manipulation and passive consumption and the popular might be what is done by those who do it, rooted in the creative impulses of the people (1982: 114).

According to McGuigan, there has always been a tension between what is called popular culture and mass culture (1997:139). It is important to note that the concepts popular culture and mass culture both refer to mediated culture. They both look at cultural industries as a commercial activity whereby the cultural products are produced in large quantities. However, each has a different approach to an understanding of media content. Mass culture emphasises the aspects of production and consumption as the defining characteristics of mediated culture, while popular culture emphasises the same aspects as mass culture as well as the product itself (content), but differently in that the readers and their interests are the centre of focus. The interests, aspirations and the dreams of the readers take precedence.

Popular culture is all activity that touches and represents people's lives and raises their understanding and consciousness about what is happening around them to a certain extent since it is commercially produced, as opposed to mass culture, which addresses the readers as a passive mob. According to Fiske, popular culture is made by various formations of subordinated people out of the resources; both discursive and material that are provided by the social system that disempowers them (1989a: 1). Fiske (1989) maintains that if the cultural commodities or texts do not contain resources, out of which the people can make their own meanings of their social relations and identities, they will be rejected and will fail in the market place. He argues that the meanings of popular culture exist through circulation within societies, not in their texts. The texts, which are crucial in this process, need not be understood by themselves but in their relationship with other texts and with social life, for that is how their circulation is ensured:

Popular texts are inadequate in themselves, they are never self-sufficient

structures of meanings… they are provokers of meanings and pleasure; they are

completed only when taken up by people and inserted into their everyday culture.

The people make popular culture at the interface between everyday life and the

consumption of the products of cultural industries (Fiske 1989a: 6).

The aim of the productivity, according to Fiske (1989), is to produce meanings that are relevant to everyday life. He argues that relevance is central to popular culture. It minimises the difference between text and life, between aesthetic and the everyday that is so central to a process and practice based culture (such as the popular) rather than a text or performance based one (such as the bourgeois one).

Fiske contends that only the people can produce relevance, for only they can know which texts enable them to make the meanings that will function in their everyday lives. He describes relevance as the intersection between the textual and the social. It is therefore a site of struggle, for relevancies are dispersed, and as divergent as the social situation of the people. Popular text, therefore, has to work against its differences to find a commonality between divergent social groups in order to maximise its consumption and profitability.

According to McGuigan, in the folkish sense, popular culture was seen as produced by people, as actively made by them and expressing their distinctive social experiences, attitudes and values (1997:139). In contrast to popular culture, mass culture was seen as media manipulation of popular taste and the passive consumption of commodified culture.

The unsatisfactory binary opposition between popular culture and mass culture was more fully deconstructed later, however, by a revaluation of the subordinate term consumption. From this point of view, consumption was no longer to be seen as the passive moment in cultural circulation but instead, active and nodal, involving a popular appropriation of commodities and differential interpretation of texts (McGuigan 1997:138).

McGuigan (1997:139) argues that during the 1980's the widespread drift towards an exclusively consumptionist mode of analysis in cultural studies was focused upon the interpretation of routine and popular consuming practices. This led to the comparative neglect to the detriment of critical forms of in-depth explanations that were concerned with the material conditions of cultural production, such as the political economy of culture.

In relation to the above, the critical question then is how popular media texts represent the experiences, wishes, dreams and aspirations of their audiences in such ways that they resonate with their audiences. This question is pertinent because popular media representations of particular phenomena are influenced and shaped by commercial imperatives as well as the need to satisfy audience wants and needs (Winship 1987:39). This has several implications since the business of magazines is one that involves pleasing both the readers as well as the advertisers:

> Although many companies can claim that the editorial product is everything magazines cannot avoid the dictates of a market in which the need to win advertising revenue as well as the readers is paramount and the necessity to yoke the readers to what they buy is constant pressure (Winship 1987:39).

2.3.1 Women's Magazines as Popular Culture

According to Mattelart, magazines, like most romance fiction novels or popular culture products, have always been a site for an exclusively feminine discourse and in order to achieve and sustain their enormous readership, such texts must address at some level experience, aspirations and contradictions that are real for their women readers (1986:36). This has involved seeing the consumers of these products as active, never passive, but also as highly constructed and relatively limited in the choices, which can be exercised in the act of leisure consumption (Mattelart 1986:41).

Mattelart (1986) also comments on the congruence between the repetitive, open-ended forms of women's popular media (soap opera and the magazines in particular) and the cyclical nature of women's lives. She argues that women's genres must certainly express lived cultures with a variety of creative and interpretive dimensions. "They are as much a culture from above as one from below, a construction of the leisure industries and the consumer market" (Mattelart 1986:42). They need to address the everyday concerns and aspirations of their target market. These issues need to be addressed in such a way that the readers can relate and are able to identify with them.

According to Philips and Tomlinson, the changing context of forms of popular consumption has vital consequences for people's sense of identity (1990:24). Popular culture is not just the reflection of the time; it is its very consciousness. How meanings are made in popular culture, values accepted or challenged, pleasures packaged and cultures commodified – these are the challenging questions, which make the study of leisure and popular culture a very serious business. Philips and Tomlinson argue that of

all cultural commodities, magazines as well as books are mostly consumed in the private sphere (1990:25).

However, while the act of reading has always been and by its nature must remain, a private and largely domestic activity, the ideas and fantasies that popular fictional texts can provide insights into wider cultural aspirations and anxieties still exist. By virtue of their popularity, bestsellers and widely read authors clearly touch a cultural nerve that goes beyond the individual reader. The wider question however is whether in the end these popular texts are able to address the aspirations, wishes and dreams of every individual reader and most importantly how this is achieved.

2.4 How women are represented

Women's magazines have developed into a cultural phenomenon that has been receiving great attention from feminists and some media theorists. This is mainly because of the ways in which women are represented in the magazines. According to Van Zoonen (1994) a number of approaches characterise the interest in these magazines. As noted by feminists:

> … the media-created woman is (1) wife, mother, housekeeper for men, (2) a sex object used to sell products to men, (3) a person trying to be beautiful for men (Van Zoonen 1994:66).

What this means is that the media, particularly women's magazines, provide images that advise and instruct women on how to be a perfect mother, lover and glamorous accessory. This pertains more to their sexuality than their intellectual capacity (Van Zoonen 1994:66). These approaches suggest that magazines position women in relation

to subordination, passivity and sexual availability. According to McRobbie, "women and girls' magazines not only fail the women they claim to represent; they actively damage them, constructing injured and subordinate subjectivities" (1996:173).

Croteau and Hoynes have noted that there is a fundamental inequality in the frequency of the appearance of women and men (1997:147). Men are most likely to appear in lead roles while women appear mostly as housewives or sexual objects. According to Croteau and Hoynes the inequality that women still face in society as a whole is clearly reflected in the unequal treatment women receive in the media (1997:148). Some of this unequal treatment, such as that in sexist advertising and degrading pornography, is straightforward and easy to spot, as are some of the stereotypical roles that writers still create for women in television.

Ballaster et al. argue that many researchers and analysts have been struck by the intimate tone employed to address the reader, the cosy vocation of a known commonality between women (1991:87-88). Despite status, wealth, class and race distinctions, the magazines assume a shared experience between women. It is not only the publishers and the editors who use this inclusive voice. A crucial feature of women's magazines is the reader's contributions in the form of letters and true-life stories. The voice of the readers in all these contexts resonates with exactly the same register of intimacy as that of the professional producers of the magazines.

According to Matterlart a certain amount of duality is also prevalent in the western magazines:

> The editorials in these magazines may evince some kind of progressive intention,
> conforming to a mildly liberal image of women in their treatment of permissive

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morality. But in the same issue the fiction will portray the woman in the most

conventional light imaginable: passive, dependent, prone to a sugary sweet view

of life (1986:18).

However McRobbie maintains that there is another aspect to the representations, which

suggests that for some women the celebration of sexuality symbolises liberation:

The celebration of sexuality does not only provide the frame for women's

magazines in the 90's but also sets the tone, defines the pace, and shapes the

whole environment of the magazine (McRobbie 1996:177).

Coverage on sexuality has taken the highest position in magazines although fashion and

beauty still make up the content of women's magazines. According to McRobbie,

"everything in this 'new world' of magazines is simultaneously inflated, exaggerated and

also presented with a hint of self-parody". The woman of the 90's possesses sexual

confidence that enables her to be in control of her sexuality. The widespread sense of

parody and irony in the presentation of this sexual material in the magazines also implies

a certain detachment or ironic distance from old stakes of sexuality for girls. They are far

removed from romantic abandon and there is instead a determination to meet their male

counterparts on equal grounds.

McRobbie (1996) maintains that this celebration of sexuality does not only sell the

magazines, but also marks a new moment in the construction of female sexual identities.

It suggests new forms of sexual conduct; it proposes boldness in behavior. The girl who

knows what to expect is in a better position to make the right choices. In some ways,

within the limits of their own codifications the magazines have extended the possibilities

of what it is to be a woman. Magazine discourse brings into being new female subjects

through their construction or representation of women as certain kinds of subjects or people:

> The changes which can be seen in these magazines in the 1990's articulate a commitment to the production of the norms of female beauty through invocation of an assumed, universalistic feminine culture devoted to fashion and the body. They also carry a transition of what it is to be a young woman today (McRobbie 1996:178).

Beetham argues that magazines are not only commodities for the print industry but have also become a crucial site for the advertising and sale of other commodities (1996:2). Magazines are therefore, deeply involved in capitalist production and consumption as well as circulation in the cultural economy of collective meanings and construction of an identity for the individual reader as a gendered and sexual being. According to Beetham (1996:2), the woman's magazine works at the intersection of these different economies of money, public discourse and individual desire. The magazines position women as purchasers and readers of texts (1996:4). According to Myra MacDonald the media's interest in attracting women as readers or viewers was often motivated by their perceived commercial value as consumers (1995:11).

Advertising has played a visible role in the way women are represented in the media. It appears to operate through a focus on gender and sexuality. Women dominate in commercials for cosmetics and personal hygiene, while men on the other hand dominate in advertisements representing high status activities and are represented as purchasers of high status items such as cars:

Advertising has also been singled out as one of the most disturbing cultural products since its early stages of development. As a cultural form advertising displays preoccupation with gender that is hardly matched in any other genre (Van Zoonen 1994:71).

The goods, which women are predominantly represented as purchasers of in advertisements, relate primarily to the domestic environment, their bodies and cosmetic products and hardly relate to their intellectual capacity. Hence magazines as a commercially produced cultural form, are part of an economic system by which gender difference is given meanings. They essentially exist as commodities and as the means for advertisements of other commodities. Advertisers conceive of women as primary consumers:

> The woman who is addressed by the magazine text is addressed first and foremost as a consumer, of the message of the text, and of the commodities, which it presents as essential to the business of her becoming or construction (Baehr et al., 1996:90).

In these magazines women are bound to be concerned with consumption. Their recognition as consumers takes precedence over their status as professionals and citizens.

2.5 Advertising and popular women's magazines

Popular commercially produced magazines get most of their revenue from advertising and commercial sponsorships and to a much lesser extent from sales, which make them open to market pressures (Winship 1987:39). They form part of an economic system where they cannot avoid the dictates of a market in which the need to win advertising

revenue as well as readers is paramount. These magazines essentially exist as commodities and as the means for advertisements of other commodities.

Kellner contends that it is important to locate analysis of cultural texts within their system of production and distribution often referred to as the political economy of culture (1997:104). He says the references to 'political' and 'economy' calls attention to the fact that the production and distribution of culture takes place within a specific economic system, constituted by relations between the state, the economy, social institutions and their concomitant practices. Thus political economy encompasses economics and politics and the relations between them and other dimensions of society and culture.

According to Kellner, political economy highlights that capitalist societies are organised according to a dominant mode of production that structures institutions and practices according to the logic of commodification and capital accumulation so that cultural production is profit and market oriented (1997:104). It does not only refer solely to economics but to the relations between economic, political and other dimensions of social reality. The term political economy thus links culture to its political and economic context and opens up cultural studies to history and politics (Kellner 1997:105). Kellner argues that forces of production such as media technologies and creative practice are deployed according to dominant relations to production. The system of production often determines what sort of artifacts will be produced, what structural limits there will be as to what can and cannot be said and shown, and what sort of audience expectations and usage the texts may generate.

As much as it is important to generate content that will appeal to the targeted reader, it is also crucial that the editorial content of the magazine appeals to the consumers as seen

through the eye of the advertisers. All of this has to be done within the confines and terms guiding the editorial process of that magazine. According to Winship (1987), those market pressures have closely shaped not only the range of magazines available but also, in highly significant ways, the contents of any given magazine. For instance, the content of the magazines is mostly in tandem with the advertisements. Because magazines are involved mostly with promoting lifestyle, beauty, class etc, their advertisements are mainly on the products that can help readers achieve these. Ellen McCracken (1996:99) argues that:

> the photographic text of a magazine cover also extends meaning to the material inside. Usually a concrete representation of an idealised model of physical beauty, the cover photo whets the consumer's appetite for what is to follow. As a pleasurable visual representation, it invites us to enjoy further pleasure by consuming the magazine's contents visually flipping through the pictures page by page. At the same time, it leads us necessarily to the verbal texts in the magazine, through which we will be given specific instructions for attaining the model of ideal beauty, which can only be attained through consumerism.

According to Mattelart, women's magazines address a fairly consistent and defined public (1986:21). Such magazines circulate in accordance with market laws and are usually controlled by publishing groups, answerable only to themselves and the public. Matterlart (1986) maintains that the ideology professed by a magazine is invariably the result of its market positioning.

2.6 Women's magazines as cultural texts

In order to understand the notion of cultural texts it is important to look at two important concepts that may be helpful towards an understanding of what cultural texts are. These are text and message. According to Fiske the two terms refer to a signifying structure composed of signs and codes that are essential to communication. Although used interchangeably the two terms differ. Text usually refers to a message that has a physical existence of its own, independent of the reader or receiver and thus composed of representational codes. Text derives from the linguistic school and is used in cultural studies. It thus implies a definition that is central to the generation and exchange of meaning. The term message is mostly used by those working in the school of communication, by sociologists and is used with the simple definition of what is transmitted (1994:317).

Media content as constructed cultural texts have semiotic richness embedded in them. The producers of such texts are aware of all this and attempt to exploit this for their commercial interests. "In their marketing and advertising strategies, producers of cultural texts attempt to target specific social groups and thus to give their product sub culturally specific inflections of the more communal meanings" (Fiske (1989b: 5). Thus the issues that are addressed in women's magazines for instance may be the kind of concerns that many women out there are faced with. This is therefore a way of saying that one is not alone in their struggle. There are people who are sharing her experiences. The impression given is that of sharing hard living and knowing that one is not alone. The magazines in themselves become cultural forms where women's concerns are laid at table for discussion, sharing as well as coming up with possible solutions. The meanings that are

inherent in the messages produced in the magazines differ according to certain individuals:

> All meanings are ultimately intertextual, no one text, no one advertisement can ever bear the full meanings … for this can only exist in that ill defined cultural space between the texts that precedes the texts that both draw upon it and contribute to it, which exists only in constant circulation among texts and society (Fiske 1989b: 6).

Like all other commodities, media texts as cultural products are given certain brand names that compete among each other for specific segments of the market. The producers try to identify social differences and then to construct equivalent difference in the product so that social differentiation and product differentiation become mapped on each other. Advertising is therefore used in an attempt to give meanings to the products whose differences will enable people in the targeted social formation to recognise that they are being spoken to, or even to recognize their social identity and values in the product. The different messages that are conveyed in different media content (magazines) are created as much by advertising as by any differences in the messages or the content itself. Women's magazines for instance speak to market segmentation using a socially locatable accent to speak a common language.

According to Fiske, a number of important theoretical issues underlie the difference between a user of a cultural resource and a consumer of a commodity (1989b: 11). He says there are a number of ways of understanding commodities and their role in society. In the economic sphere they ensure the generation and circulation of wealth, and they can vary from basic necessities of life to inessential luxuries, and by extension, can include

non-material objects. They also serve two types of functions, the material and the cultural. The material function of media content is to provide information and entertainment while the cultural function is concerned with the meanings and values that are inherent in the content. Media content can be used by those who consume it to construct meanings of self, of social identity and social relations. Describing media content as a commodity emphasises its role in the circulation of wealth and tends to downplay its separate, but related role in circulation of meaning.

On account of the arguments that have been presented above, it is important to note that women's magazines as a cultural phenomenon, need not only be understood and evaluated in terms of their cultural capacity. In order to appreciate the problematic nature of media representations of women it is necessary to take into consideration the importance of economic structures because they also play a role when deciding on what can or cannot sell the magazine.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The methodological approach in this study is predominantly qualitative. A qualitative paradigm has been chosen because an analysis of media content as representations rather than a reflection of social reality requires in-depth textual analysis. It is important to note that there is a difference between a reflection and a representation of social reality. Reflection of social reality involves equating significance of particular occurrences solely with frequency, whereas representation involves a close look at the language being used and what it is used to symbolise and also the structure of the text (Deacon et al., 1999).

According to Fiske, there are two manifestations to the reflection theory that are relevant to communication (1994:262). The first is the principle that media representations and discourses reflect an already existing and self-evident reality that exists independently of its representation in discourse including those of the media. The second type of reflection theory focuses on the assumption that cultural and communicative practices and forms are reflections of the economic base of society in question. Contrary to the notion of reflection, Fairclough argues that media texts do not merely mirror realities as it is sometimes assumed but they constitute versions of reality in ways which, depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who produce them (1995:103).

Because media texts are constructed texts, the magazines' content will not be assessed and analysed in terms of how they 'reflect' the status of women in society but in terms of how they 'represent' them. Fiske describes representation as the social process of putting

into concrete forms an abstract ideological concept. It is a process of making sense within all available signifying systems (1994:265).

Qualitative content analysis was used because it conceptualises media content as constructed texts from where meanings can be generated. What this means is that the magazines were analysed in terms of the representations that are prevalent in them. This included looking at the codes of address. However quantitative content analysis was used as a stepping-stone towards qualitative content analysis. As Deacon et al. argue, quantitative and qualitative content analysis should not be seen as opposites but rather should be used in a complementary manner (1999:17). Thus the techniques that were used in this study are sampling and a combination of quantitative content and in-depth textual analysis, using semiotic methods. Sampling was used as a technique in the selection and narrowing of the type of content to be analysed.

3.1 Sampling

Sampling in this study concerns the mapping of some general dimensions of content, which does not necessarily require a focus on a particular time frame. Neuman describes sampling as a process of systematically selecting cases for inclusion in a research project (1997:201). With relevance to this study, cases are described as the unit of analysis, which was selected from a larger pool of the content of the magazines or the universe.

In sampling the researcher first selects from a total universe a sample of information to obtain a smaller set of cases and then use random assignment to divide the smaller set into groups, which form the unit of analysis. 1997 to 1999 was chosen as the period from which the texts that have been analysed were selected. Thirty-six magazines were

selected from a universe of seventy-two. This is an equivalent of half the number of magazines published in the three-year period in South Africa. This period has been divided further by selecting every other month from each year. This helped in establishing the trends that are prevalent in the magazines.

Purposive or judgmental sampling was used. It is very helpful when selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind. According to Neuman, this is usually used in an exploratory kind of research. One of the situations where purposive sampling is used is when the researcher uses it to select unique cases that are very informative (1997:206).

Sampling helps the researcher to draw inferences from the sample to the population. The researcher observes variables using the units in the sample (Neuman 1997:201). The sample serves to represent the universe/population, as researchers are not really interested in samples but in making inferences to the population. Although the study involves looking at a smaller subset instead of the entire pool, the main object of the study was to analyse a smaller sample of the magazines that was possible to generalise to the universe or pool. If done well, sampling allows the researcher to measure variables on the smaller set of cases but generalise results accurately to all cases (Neuman 1997: 202).

3.2 Survey

Surveys produce quantitative information about the social world and describe features of people or the social world (Neuman 1997). Due to the amount of material that was available in the chosen universe for qualitative analysis, it was appropriate to conduct a survey in order to narrow down the topics that were looked at when analysing the texts.

Specific topics that were analysed in-depth were identified using a survey instrument. This was done by identifying the topics that appeared more often than others.

3.3 Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is a technique used for gathering and analysing the content of texts and how they are combined. Content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated (Deacon et al., 1999). In quantitative content analysis the researcher uses objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text. There is also qualitative content analysis, which is favoured mainly by feminist researchers and others adopting a more critical and interpretative approach. The critical and interpretative approach seeks to explore the ways in which language and images are organised and presented and how these two elements are combined and used in a complementary fashion. This involves exploring the meanings that are embedded in the representations as opposed to looking at the frequency of particular themes as a reflection of particular phenomena:

> Qualitative content analysis allows the reader to probe into and discover content in a different way from the ordinary way of reading a book or watching a television program (Neuman 1997:273).

3.3.1 Quantitative Content analysis

Using quantitative content analysis, charts were used in order to categorise the content that was analysed. This involved looking at the content vertically, in terms of how often certain themes; issues and images appeared in the magazines. This assisted in identifying

trends and patterns that were inherent in the representations as well as documenting objective quantitative results because quantitative content analysis yields repeatable, precise results about the text. According to Deacon et al. (1999:133), this is the value of quantitative content analysis:

> If you are dealing with media content across a longitudinal time frame, you need a systematic procedure to establish both what is relatively constant and what might change across the frame. Otherwise what basis will you have for using words like 'often', 'recurrent, 'few'…(Deacon et al., 1999:133)

Using quantitative content analysis, the content was analysed in terms of the frequency, direction, intensity, and space. Neuman (1997) describes frequency as a way of counting whether or not something occurs and if it occurs, how often i.e. how often articles addressing women's issues appear in women's magazines as compared to articles about beauty and sexuality? The direction of the content was also taken into account. This involves noting the direction of messages in the content along some continuum, either positive or negative i.e. acknowledging women making progress or expressing/implying denial of women's capabilities, supporting or opposing i.e. whether the content reflects a positive or negative perspective on how women are represented in women's magazines or the media at large. The intensity or the power of the messages that are conveyed in the magazines was also taken into consideration. According to Neuman intensity is the strength or power of a message in a direction (1997:275). This will also be reflected in the size of a text message or the amount of space or volume allocated to it.

Manifest coding was also used as a way of establishing the trends and the patterns that are prevalent in the texts that were analysed. Manifest coding involves coding the visible,

surface content in a text (1997:275). Although this is a very reliable way of establishing patterns in that it says what is present, it does not really take into account the connotations of words and phrases. This is why the use of latent coding (also called semantic analysis) was very important in this study because it looks for the underlying, implicit meaning in the content of a text.

3.3.2 Qualitative Content analysis

Because the media produce immense volumes of text and images, this makes it almost impossible to analyse all media coverage of a subject, area or issue. In-depth analysis of media content as constructed texts calls for a selection of small rather than large samples of texts. The aim is to produce thick descriptions of how meaning is organised (Deacon et al., 1999:17).

According to Alasuutari, meaning and the mediation of social life through meanings is one of the most important things in cultural studies (1995:26). Citing from empirical sociological research, Alasuutari describes the concept of meaning, as often referring to the symbolism that is associated with specific objects or activities. He argues that preoccupation with the symbolism of certain activity or object tends to draw one's attention to deviations from everyday routine, to morally loaded and controversial questions:

> … in its analysis of deviance and deviant phenomena, cultural studies aims to uncover the way in which the everyday and social life are mediated through meaning (Alasuutari 1995:27).

The first step in the analysis involved a quantitative survey of the contents of the selected sample of magazines. The objective of the quantitative content analysis was to provide a general overview of the content by counting the recurrence of particular representations of women in editorial and advertising content.

Once this was completed, in-depth textual analysis of specifically chosen texts identified from the quantitative content analysis was employed. It is from these texts that conclusions to the question of how and through what language the magazines represent women were generated.

3.4 Semiotics

Semiotics was used as a basic tool in analysing content. Semiotics is the study of the social production of meaning from sign systems (Deacon et al., 1999:136). Signs are a system of communication characterised by the presence of a physical form; they must refer to something other than itself and must be used and recognised by people as signs (O'Sullivan et al., 1994). Lacey argues that it is also important to acknowledge the polysemy of signs because not all signs are arbitrary in nature (1998:58). This is very important in media studies because the polysemy of signs emphasises that signs can carry more than one meaning and are open to many interpretations depending on the time, place and the class or occupation of the reader (O'Sullivan et al., 1994). According to Morley a message is always capable of producing more than one meaning or interpretation and can never be reduced simply to one ultimate meaning (1992:83). This form of analysis may be linked to some of the insights derived from the uses and

gratifications approach as to the different possible uses or interpretations, which different people may make of any one message.

The in-depth textual analysis, using semiotics therefore focused on feature articles and advertisements. Features were chosen because they are researched texts, which focus mostly on particular topics that are dealt with at length and in-depth. The topics highlight specific issues that in turn constitute the editorial identity of a magazine. Advertisements were also interesting to analyse because they have latitude as persuasive communication to use particular language and images. They address audiences as consumers and relate to aspirations, lifestyles and the construction of identities often within the confines of consumption and consumerism (Leiss et al., 1990).

3.4.1 Textual analysis of features

According to Tolson (1996:xii) the way the mediated world impinges on our experience is through our consumption of media texts. He argues that textual analysis does not only focus on vocabulary and semantics, the sound system (phonology) and writing system, but it also includes analysis of textual organisation above the sentence, including the ways in which sentences are connected together as well as the organisation of the overall structure of an article. Because the analysis of texts is concerned with both their meanings and their forms, the articles were analysed in terms of their particular representations and recontextualisations of social practice, in terms of particular constructions of the writer and reader identities. For example, what the writer highlights or ignores, in terms of the particular construction of the relationship between writer and reader.

According to Deacon et al. (1999:141) media texts have certain identities, which are governed by the codes and conventions they are constructed in relation to:

> When analysing texts or programmes we also have to look at the assumptions that lie behind the content. There will be assumptions made about the audience and these assumptions need to be made visible if we are to understand the implicit messages which a programme/text may transmit over and above what is explicitly said in it (Morley 1992:84).

The mode of address was also important in this study. It was therefore a necessity to look at how the articles address the reader, as this helped in establishing what kind of the relationship the writer has with the reader and whether the writer appeals to a certain audience. As stated by Morley, we need to be concerned with the modes in which the programme/texts address the audience/readers and with how these modes of address construct our relation to the content of the text, requiring us to take up different positions in relation to them (1992:83).

He stresses the need to make explicit the assumptions that are being made as these are the grounds on which the programme/text stands, the taken for granted framework from which particular things are said. Therefore it is important to take into account the issue of whether the programme/text resonates with the audience or readers. Once this is understood, the task of analysis is to deconstruct not only individual signs, but also sign systems or codes, to show how meaning is created.

According to Fairclough, media texts do not merely mirror realities but they constitute versions of reality in ways which depend on the social positions and interests and

objectives of those who produce them (1995:103). He argues that these are done through choices that are made at various levels in the process of producing texts:

> The analysis of representational processes in a text therefore comes down to an account of what choices are made, what is included and what is excluded, what is made explicit or left implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgounded, what is thematised and what is unthematised, what process types and categories are drawn upon to represent events… (Fairclough 1995:104).

Fairclough (1995) argues that there are two major aspects of representation in texts. The first has to do with the structuring propositions, the second with the combination and sequencing of propositions. The first is concerned with how events and relationships and situations are represented, what motivates one set of choices over the other. The second aspect is concerned with the combination and sequencing of propositions.

However, before engaging in analysis of what is in the text, one needs to attend to the question of what is excluded from it (Fairclough (1995:105). In order to achieve this two important concepts in semiotic analysis, were used, i.e. denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the manifest content of a set of signs that can be said to be objectively there. Connotation on the other hand constitutes the latent content of what a written text may be said to signify and works at a more subjective level of perception (Cook 1992:99). Many connotations such as the way women are represented in society have reached the status of a social consensus. According to Lacey (1998:59) some signs carry particularly powerful connotations, which are perceived as myths:

> Unsurprisingly, analysis of representation is mainly analysis of what is there in the text. But it is also important to be sensitive to absences from the text, to

things, which might have been there but are not or things pertaining to a given area of social practice but not in others. Any text is a combination of explicit meanings, what is actually said and implicit meanings, what is left unsaid but taken as given, as presupposed (Fairclough 1995:105).

This is why it is important to note that meaning cannot exist in individual signs because of their arbitrary nature and the fact that meaning is derived from their context. The two concepts were useful in understanding the meanings conveyed in the articles and how these meanings connect with particular social myths as influenced by social or cultural life:

…even if our aim is to search for the supposedly non-linguistic social realities purportedly present in the text, our raw material is inevitably the words and written documents or spoken by interview (Lacey 1998:55).

According to Lacey, one of the great strengths of a semiotic approach is that the reader is encouraged to look at familiar objects and ideas in a fashion that makes them appear strange, nothing is taken for granted. Although this is conceptually difficult one is able to look deep into the meanings that are being conveyed through the text (Lacey 1997:56).

In considering the process of how meaning is generated in communications, Morley employs two distinct modes of analysis to analyse two distinct types of constraints on the production of meaning (1992:75). These are (a) internal structures and mechanisms of the text/message, which invite certain readings and block others. (b) the cultural background of the reader or viewer which has to be studied sociologically.

Morley (1992) argues that there is no such thing as an innocent text or programme that can claim to provide only entertainment rather than messages about society:

Even though the explicit nature of the programme may seem to be of a rather trivial nature, it may well be that a number of very important messages about social attitudes and values are built into the texture (Morley 1992:82.)

According to Morley (1992) programmes/texts communicate more than their explicit content, they also contain implicit messages through implications, assumptions or connotations. He argues that in order to understand this level of latent or implicit communication we need to go beyond commonsense observation. It is at this point that we are able to confront a set of questions about how we can construct a method of analysis that will enable the researchers to understand these more complex levels of communication, hence the use of semiotics.

3.4.2 Analysis of advertisements

Although the main focus of discourse analysis is on language, language is not its only concern. It is important to note that advertisements are a combination of both images and language and therefore should be analysed as such, without ignoring either of the two. According to Leiss et al. the relationship between images and text is a complementary one, the text explains the visual and it sometimes work as a key to the visual (1990:199).

Cook maintains that pictures do far more than carry a story. Some advertisements create powerful and complex messages almost entirely through pictures and are virtually language free (1992:48). This is why the advertisements were analysed in terms of the unconscious depth-messages, their arrangement as well as the meanings that are buried in them.

The advertisements were also analysed in terms of the mode of address, in terms of how directly they appeal to the reader as well as their levels of persuasion. The context and situation in which the images and text are presented to their intended recipient were also be taken into account:

> The semiological approach suggests that the meaning of an advertisement does not float on the surface just waiting to be internalised by the viewer, but it is built out of the ways that different signs are organised and related to each other, both within the advertisement and through external references to wider belief systems (Leiss et al., 1990:201).

This seems to suggest that for advertising, the reader or the viewer has to do some work. Because the meaning is not lying there on the page, one has to make an effort to grasp it. Leiss et al. (1990) argue that there are three steps that are involved when decoding an advertisement. First the meaning of one sign is transferred to another and this can happen in many ways: between persons and objects, between feelings and objects etc. Second, the transfer of significance is not just completed within the advertisement but the readers must make a connection themselves. Third, in order for the transfer to take place, the first object must already have a meaning to be transferred, it must already be significant to the audience.

However, the larger question to this three-step process of analysing images is whether the readers can make the connection and whether their interpretation is the same as that of the encoder. This is very important in this study because advertising works by appeal to referent systems, it generates meaning through a process of connotation and

denotation. Every message contains two or more levels of meaning, what it says explicitly on the surface and what it says implicitly below the surface.

According to Leiss et al., semiology highlights the way that we ourselves take part in the creation of meaning in messages, suggesting that we are not mere bystanders in the advertising process but participants in creating a code that unites the designer and the reader (1990:208). If we are not adequately aware of the relevant referent system we will not be able to decode the message. The important question therefore is what exactly the designers of advertisements rely on in order to make sure that the readers can comprehend the messages that are being conveyed to them.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Features

Introduction

This chapter analyses feature articles, focusing on the themes that are prevalent in the representation of female sexuality. This was done, firstly, by establishing the frequency of particular themes found in the features. This quantitative analysis was followed by a descriptive analysis of the themes. The descriptive analysis of themes was then followed by qualitative analysis of the issues that are being raised in them as well as the discourse applied i.e. in terms of the tone and the language being used.

4.1 Analysis

4.1.1 Descriptive analysis

As noted by Ballaster et al. (1996:92), one of the most striking features of the magazine is its heterogeneity, juxtaposing different genres, mixing print and photography and offering a range of characterised voices. *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan* are A4 size magazines with glossy pages and colourful designs. The way these magazines are designed shows that they represent reality as a world of glamour, style and sophistication.

"*True love*, all a woman needs", this phrase is typical of the way magazines address women not only in terms of the meaning, but also in terms of the way that different textual forms are constructed in such a way that they resonate with female desire. Female desire is also a constructed feature of women's magazines.

Cosmopolitan and *True Love* in particular, portray female desire as involving sexual satisfaction, beauty, subscribing to a certain way of life or possessing some kind of

sophistication that goes with glamour and envy by those who have not reached the stage that they aspire to.

The pertinent question in the analysis of the features therefore centres on the issue of whether these magazines are about exploring women's wishes and aspirations, whether professional or social, without limitations or whether they represent women as glamorous sex objects for men, or both. The magazines sell an image that most women aspire to. The image is that of style and glamour. They make use of lively and colourful photographs that are meant to attract the reader. Bold and explicit headlines are the way to catch the reader's attention. Because headlines are in big fonts and different shades of bright colours, the headlines are hard to miss.

4.1.2 Frequency of themes in the features

The criteria that has been used for the classification of features involved surveying and narrowing down topics that appeared frequently and categorising them according to particular themes and listing those that appeared occasionally and do not fall under any of the chosen themes as general ones.

The themes that were found to appear mostly as features in *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* were those that involved glamour, relationships and travel, while those that rarely appeared, but are pertinent to women's lives, were issues such as rape and abuse. There were also several other topics, which have been classified as general ones since they did not fall under any of the themes mentioned above. However, these topics are not totally misplaced as they are the kind of issues that are important to mothers i.e. ("*The art of*

getting maintenance") (*True Love* November 1997), ("*What your features reveal about your personality")* (*Cosmopolitan* August 1998).

4.1.3 Definition of themes with relevance to the study

- **Glamour** will be described as physical attractiveness especially cosmetic attractiveness. Cosmetic attractiveness refers to physical appearance that is enhanced by the use of make-up. This theme will therefore encompass stories on celebrities, fashion as well as articles that focus on beautification.

- **A celebrity** is someone who is well known, someone who is renowned for a certain talent that they possess, something that others would appreciate having. Someone who is somehow perceived as a sex symbol, someone who is widely noted for their sexual appeal: e.g. musician, model, artists, television presenters and public figures.

- **Fashion** is a popular or current style of dressing either in terms of clothing or hairstyle. Fashion is usually described in terms of being favoured by 'high society', those who are assumed to be knowledgeable about certain ways of dressing and are on top of the fashion industry.

- **Sexuality** will be used as a theme that encompasses ones sex i.e. male or female and their awareness of that, i.e. what it means to be a woman or man and the myths and representations that are associated with being a man or woman. This term will also therefore be used as way of describing ones sexuality, as well as relationships, in terms of emotional association between men and women and how this is expressed.

- **Sex appeal** refers to sexual attractiveness- whether one is able to arouse interest or draw attention to themselves.

- **Class** refers to the division or order of society. The way people are ranked according to their economic status.

Having used quantitative content analysis to objectively and systematically measure the frequency and length of articles that were analysed, about 90% of the features that appear in the magazines are three pages long, while others are only one page long, whereas others, such as the features on fashion, take as much as twelve pages or more. The term features will be used according to the way it is used in the magazines. It refers both to long or short texts that focus mostly on particular topics that are dealt with at length and in-depth as well as articles that come in the form of advertisements of items such as clothes and swimwear. For instance the November (1999) issue of *Cosmopolitan* carried a feature that was solely composed of pictures with very little text that came in the form of price description of the items that were being advertised as well as the shops that sell them.

In both magazines, approximately 80% of the features are on glamour and sexuality, while about 10% of them concentrate on issues such as rape and abuse. Because quantitative content analysis yields repeatable precise results about the text, the charts below, which were put together using quantitative content analysis, illustrate this by stating the number of articles found on each issue according to the themes. This illustrates how often certain topics or themes appear in each issue of the magazines. Also pertinent to the issue of frequency is length. Length is important in weighing the significance of certain articles over others.

True Love Frequency Chart

Months	Glamour	Relationships	Rape & Abuse	Travel	Other
Nov 1997	5	2	1	0	5
Dec 1998	2	0	1	0	6
July 1999	2	2	0	0	5
Sept 1999	2	4	0	0	3

Chart 1

Cosmopolitan Frequency Chart

Months	Glamour	Relationships	Rape & Abuse	Travel	Other
Aug 1998	2	4	0	1	4
Nov 1998	2	5	0	0	4
Mar 1999	2	6	0	1	9
May 1999	3	8	0	2	5
July 1999	3	6	1	2	7
Nov 1999	3	4	1	2	4
Sept 1999	2	4	0	0	4

Chart 2

4.1.4 The woman represented in the magazine

Cosmopolitan and *True Love* seem to be aware of the fact that their readers both have

emotional and rational needs. However, they seem to take care more of the emotional

side than the rational. Most of their features concentrate on beauty, sexuality, travel and relationships and articles on women's issues such as rape and abuse do not appear as much. *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* were analysed in terms of the ideas that underpin or inform their gender representations and these representations were considered through the depiction of female sexuality and appearance.

The fictional woman depicted in these magazines is a single, heterosexual and young woman who works as a secretary or semi-professional woman with unspecified dreams of becoming a high-powered executive. She is located within the middle class but has aspirations to an upper class location or middle class. Luxury items (defined as costly possessions that give comfort and enjoyment but are not a necessity) are ideal accessories for someone in pursuit of a luxurious life. These occupy her mind, as does the idea of finding a man who can supply her with the economic stability she requires in order to live luxuriously, satisfied and 'happily' ever after. The idea of catching a good man leads the imaginary woman to a primary concern of having an attractive, well groomed appearance, which can aid her in the search for and seduction of the man on whom she has set her sights. The woman depicted in these magazines is a construction built on the idea of transience; a fictional character that eternally aspires to certain ideals yet has not reached her goals.

As stated by McRobbie (1996:189), the articles on beauty celebrate the female body as an object to be worked on and improved in a loving manner. The image that is created through the girl depicted in these magazines is a flexible identity that could be easily changed through peformative tactics, covert strategies and cultural consumption. The idea

of this kind of woman is the predominant form of representation of the ideal woman in the magazines.

There are between two and four features or articles each month that fall under the headings beauty and fashion articles. Within the beauty and fashion section they have titles such as ('*The tan commandments'*) (*Cosmopolitan* September 1999), ('*Be true to your type')* (*True Love* July 1999). These articles offer advice on how to conduct one's social life so that one can look good, thereby embodying the ideal of what it means to be feminine. Here the notion of looking attractive and appealing sexually relates to the media construction of women as a spectacle. The creation of the woman in these magazines refers to what Ballaster et al. (1996) term the perceived homogeneity of the reader. There is a shared version of femininity, moral virtue and lifestyle. This is extended through the form of dress found in the magazines. Ballaster et al. contend that 'many analysts have been struck by the intimate tone employed to address the reader .The cosy vocation of a known commonality between "we women"' (1991:87). The magazine addresses the reader at a more personal level. It starts off by setting up the problem, which might or might not be relevant to the reader's personal life. Then the problem is explored through a combination of knowledge from the experts – psychologists who are also frequent contributors to the magazines, writers and personal testimonies including, often, the author's own. Finally they come up with numbered or labeled strategies of action about what to do in order to solve the problems (Winship 1987:102). The contents of the magazines clearly show the way magazines address the reader at a personal level. In the December 1998 issue of *Cosmopolitan* there are three out of twenty six articles,

which include personal pronouns in their headlines, four out of fourteen in the September 1999 issue.

The criticism that is aimed at the assumed homogeneity however, is that the single voice, with its single personality marginalises others. It is also misleading in creating the perception of a universal version of femininity, moral virtue and lifestyle. This is not to say that the heterosexual girl is the only representation found in the magazines. Lesbian images of women do find their way into the pages of the magazines but according to McRobbie this kind of representation exists as a category in the magazines, as a sign that we live in a more open, multicultural sexually diverse society (1996: 182).

4.1.5 Profile of the readers

As illustrated in the All Media Products Survey (AMPS 1997), the age groups to which these magazines appeal to most are between 16 and 24 with 47,9% of *Cosmopolitan's* readership coming from this age group. For *True Love* it is 41,1% on the same age group. From ages 24-35 *Cosmopolitan* commands 28,7% while *True Love* commands 35,9%. This is evident in the way the reader is addressed. The writer makes use of a personalised language, almost implying that every reader will associate with the messages that are conveyed. This person is, however, construed as an individual or is referred to as an individual who shares or understands the message being conveyed. (*'The millennium and your love life'*), (*Be true to your type) (Cosmopolitan* May 1999, *True Love* July 1999). It is assumed that the readers have a common understanding of the messages conveyed and they either wish or are leading the kind of life expressed in the magazines. It is assumed that the readers who read these magazines can relate to what is being conveyed to them.

However, the truth is that not every woman can afford to buy these or even the lifestyle represented in the magazines. According to Ballaster et al. (1996:88) such inclusivity is patently a lie. Ballaster et al. (1996:88) argue that the ideal or implied reader of most women's magazines is self evidently middle-class, white and heterosexual.

Although *True Love* has been in the industry for only five years as a women's magazine, in the South African context one would argue that black women also have a magazine that they can relate to and possibly identify themselves with, although it is not as fully developed as *Cosmopolitan*. This is evident in the types of issues that they cover in their feature articles. They range from profiles about potential black role models or celebrities who have made it to the top i.e. ("*Tsholo Matseke flying high on Soul City and prime time news on e.tv")* (*True Love* September 1999). Some of the issues addressed relate specifically to black culture i.e. (*'Traditions: should the role of umakoti change?'*) (*True Love* September 1999).

It also appears that both *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* appeal to a readership that has a higher level of education, either at tertiary or high school level. The language used and the level of reasoning has been pitched to that of a mature or knowledgeable person. Someone who knows or has an idea of what they want in life in terms of their career and life in general. The subjects that are referred to in the articles are men and women who are assumed to be of a mature age not girls and boys. The language used in the magazines may not be accessible to anyone. For instance there are terms that may be understandable to someone who has been exposed to university or college life, experiences that one may only be exposed to at university or in a working environment.

This could also be linked to the age of the readers. The target audience of both magazines is that of readers who are living or would like to lead a new kind of life, which is centred around a new image of a modern woman, aspiring to make it to the corporate world. The magazines texts somehow suggests this in that they give suggestions on what approach to take in life and advice on how one can improve the person they are in order to achieve their goals and dreams. The ideology that these magazines subscribe to is that of competitiveness and individual success. They are committed to women winning and with the focus mainly on self-assertion.

Articles such as (*"Be brave! Get the life you want: Here is how to resist the appeal of giving up*") (*Cosmopolitan* March 1999), say it all. ('*…the comfort zone. Very appealing, But are you settling for less than your personal best'?).* These statements refer particularly to someone who has dreams, because certainly if one does not have dreams they are unlikely to be bothered about realising the best in them or enhancing their potential to be an achiever. ("*Aiming for the stars: SA first netball star talks about her dreams")* (*True Love*, September 1999). The dreams do not only end in office careers but those who aspire to become successful sports people are given a reason not to give up.

These magazines can be said to appeal to working women some of whom are single and independent. Although this is the case their content, especially *True Love* does not exclude married women or single mothers altogether. Once in a while these magazines carry features discussing issues of motherhood, fertility (H*ow fertile are you*?) in (*Cosmopolitan* August 1998), tips on how to get maintenance (*The art of getting your maintenance)* in (*True Love* November 1997).

4.2 Textual analysis

4.2.1 The mode of address

The term 'mode of address' refers to the manner in which the reader is addressed by the text through the writer. This involves paying attention particularly to the kind of relationship the writer has with the reader, whether the writer appeals to the readers and what kind of readers the writer appeals to.

The woman who is addressed by the features in the magazine text is addressed first and foremost as a consumer of the message of the text and of the commodities, which it presents as essential to the business of her becoming or construction. This refers to the products that are sold in the magazines as well as the lifestyle that goes with them. The lifestyle cannot simply be achieved through aspiration and admiration but one has to take action, by purchasing the products that will make her realise her dreams. The writers therefore assume that the readers are in need of help for one thing or another.

The manner in which the issues are discussed in the features encourages the reader to use these popular texts as one of the resources to help them realise their dreams. A typical example of this is a feature on ("*visualising love, success and happiness*") in *Cosmopolitan* (September 1999). This feature gives tips that can help one to realise their dreams. The feature article starts as follows: "*So you think Madonna, Meg Ryan and Donna Karan owe their stardom to luck…. All these celebrities admit there's an element to their fortune within everyone's reach.*" This approach assumes that the reader will follow the plan hinted at them and thus suggests that the reader is not passive. The writer invites the reader to be active and take charge of her life.

Because of the personal manner in which the writer engages the reader, the majority of the feature articles focus on the self**.** They advise that everything else including success stems from being a confident and assertive person. A representative example is that of an article on (*"how to learn to like yourself"*) (*Cosmopolitan* September 1999). The focus on the self is later on linked to other people who might be in the same situation as you. The writer assumes that there is commonality between the readers. (**"***You are not alone -even celebrities have self esteem problems…"*) (Cosmopolitan* September 1999)*.

Indirectly, the writer encourages the reader not to give up on herself or her dreams as there are several other women out there who have the same problems or who share the same aspirations. This comes as some form of group therapy, whereby the writer also highlights that even the celebrities who are mostly perceived as people who lead the most perfect lives also suffer from certain insecurities as every other ordinary woman. The writer therefore constructs some kind of a relationship or friendship between themselves and the reader.

The question however, here is whether the reader recognises the relationship as such. That the writer is trying to reach out to her with the hope of making a difference in her life or whether the reader perceives the writer as her heroine.

4.2.2 What the magazine sells

Cosmopolitan and *True love* sell guidance to readers about how to express themselves and attain a certain freedom. Beauty and all are meant to help women establish and protect their developing self-identity in a world that is hostile or different. Some of the features in the magazines encourage their readers to be in control of their lives as well as

their sexuality, to have courage to leave men behind and take chances, to please themselves instead of pleasing men.

The articles sell the idea that a woman needs to focus on enjoying her own pleasure and independence. Pleasure is one of the key words that are used frequently in the feature articles. In the context of the magazines, pleasure is used in two ways. It is used either as feeling of satisfaction and joy or sensual gratification. The feeling of satisfaction and joy may be coming from realising one's ambitions and ideals. One's ability to conform to some external standard of excellence by pursuing one's own personal best. The feeling of satisfaction and joy may also come from being recognised by others as an achiever. According to Winship (1987), although pleasure feels like an individual and spontaneous expression, it is something that has to be learnt. It depends on being familiar with the cultural codes of what is meant to be pleasurable and on occupying the appropriate social spaces. *True Love* (November 1997) carried a feature on the lives of ("*India's wealthiest women").* This article takes this argument further by suggesting that women have a choice to do what pleases them most. The magazines also sell the idea that through positive articles like that, women can learn more about themselves by exploring their talents and gathering   courage and will from other women achievers out there.

4.2.3 Women taking charge

Pleasure as sensual gratification is used in the context of women aiming to please themselves. They do so by striving towards enhancing their sexual gratification. Pleasing themselves rather than going out of their way to please men.

The features illustrate the notion of liberation of women to suggest that women are represented as subjects in sexuality than objects of men's desire, at the same time representing women's independence as synonymous with heterosexual sex and love. A characteristic example is that of an article on operation orgasm (*Cosmopolitan (March 1999: 132)*. This article talks about how women go for genital makeovers in quest for an orgasm. According to the article these speedy surgical makeovers are meant to snip and tuck muscles so as to increase the orgasm quota. What this connotes is that women have come to realise that their sexual needs are as important as their partners' and they are willing to go out of their way to make sure that they get the pleasure they need if they cannot get it the natural way. Moreover, this also reflects on the independence that women have and/or are seeking in their sexual relationships.

Cosmopolitan and *True Love* claim to have the knowledge that will inform the reader on how to have it all, sex, success, and liberation. The message the magazines convey is that today's woman is or should be less threatened about her sexuality. She can do as she pleases with her body. It is an exploration of one's womanness.

However, the same approach could be looked at from another perspective. That the liberation of women in the magazines may be constructed in the interests of men's sexual desire. It could be argued that if a woman goes for a vaginal nip, (which according to the magazine is described as a procedure that involves suturing the vaginal wall muscles together to create a smaller circumference) they also seek to please their partners who will see them as great in bed. Because texts are often subject to multiple interpretations, the question is whether the writer is aware of such perceptions and that her intended message might not necessarily be interpreted the way she expected.

Contrary to the idea of women pleasing themselves, the same issue of *Cosmopolitan* (March 1999) carries an article on how to discover (*"his sexual hot spots and have the greatest time of your sex life")* This article is about discovering what makes the partner happy. Although women's magazines are meant to be leaving up to the aspirations of their readers, they constantly betray their so called freedom and independence. The article puts the man first. As a woman you are urged to make an effort to discover what makes him happy. How about getting your partner to discover things that make you as a woman happy. Men's sexual desires are put first and yet the writers of such articles are also women and the magazines are supposed to appeal to women.

However, looking at the nature of women's magazines as some form of popular culture, one could argue that the article suggests that women are also represented as actors and are seen as active in the sexual act rather than being passive and being acted upon. That the article also suggests that if you please your man, you are also likely to also get the pleasure you seek. This encourages women to meet their partners on equal ground.

This, on the contrary, also connotes that women have to work hard in order to get sexual pleasure. One of the subjects in the story says: "… I have used what I learnt [then] to turn him on and our sex life has been really hot." (*Cosmopolitan* March 1999).

Personal pleasure in the magazines is also expressed in the form of dress. The trend in skimpy clothes bespeaks a certain body confidence. It is about girls being happy to be girls, to show their curves. It is about saying: I am going to show a little bit of leg or shoulder and have fun because this is who I am. In a sense the magazines disclose some kind of progressive intention conforming to a liberal image of women.

4.2.4 How images represent women

Although the feature articles encourage their readers to be independent and liberal, the photographs that go along with these articles suggest the opposite. The photographic images used in the editorial and in the advertising are polemical in feminist critical analysis of women's magazines. There is a tendency to discuss the phenomena of male gaze in feminist media studies, but this is related more closely to the cinematic gaze than that found in print. However there could be a similarity between the gaze used in cinema and print.

Most photographs in the magazines focus more on women's bodies as sex objects, they heighten the visual pleasure of looking at the human body. One could argue that this is a gendered male gaze, objectifying the women within the pages of the magazine. These photographs take a totally different approach to that illustrated in the features. The women in these pictures appear sexually vulnerable and accessible for sexual pleasure, with the focus mainly on their breasts, eyes and lips. Because media texts do not mirror realities but constitute the versions of reality in ways, which depend on the social positions and interests and objectives of those who reproduce them, the desirability of the model seems to be constructed through class coded signifiers such as exposed cleavage, teased hair, sexy eyes, heavy make up, fancy and suggestive costumes. These symbolisms are associated with how women are perceived, as objects that are there to please men. The article from *Cosmopolitan* (March 1999) illustrates this. *"Discover his sexual Moan zones": Cosmo brings you the complete guide to the seven secret wonders of <u>his</u> world.*

4.2.5 Female sexuality

Some of the features are simply a lot of pages on fashion. These kinds of features present, semi-naked and sexually appealing women as well as women wearing the latest in fashion, with the facial features enhanced through make-up. The clothing items that are advertised in these features are often associated with sexual appeal. This is evident in the way that the models pose. They are usually featured with a sexy appeal with the focus on the eyes and lips. The text that complements these fashion features also stresses sexual attractiveness i.e. ("*Earth Sirens: Exude killer sex appeal in summer's tribal two piece"*) (November 1999). Their style also looks sophisticated and expensive.

What this connotes is that femininity is not a natural order but is achieved through hard labour and expense. This proves the nature of magazines in that they exist as commodities and as a vehicle for advertisements and other commodities. This is because the consumer envies not only the glamorous model in an advertisement but herself as she will be in the future after having purchased the product advertised.

Whatever is advertised to women in these fashion features, be it clothes, careers or contraception, the readers are somehow urged to change themselves into the 'new woman' of the moment. This is, however, only possible through following the guidelines provided in the magazines. This involves adopting whatever definition of liberation or modernity is current and buying whatever signifies that they are clued up on the latest in fashion and lifestyle.

Representations of the new woman are ultimately bound up with the politics of identity, who you are and what class you belong to. The latest look is being sold to those who naturally do not want to be left behind. Although this is not expressed explicitly, this

approach suggests that women can wear sexy underwear and short skirts, because feminism makes them aware that they are equal to men and can liberate themselves from patriarchal domination by doing what pleases them and not necessarily their men. This connotes something not so different from earlier, sexist encodings of women's sexual availability.

Cosmopolitan and *True Love* always carry more than one article on relationships, sex and beauty in each issue. They place emphasis on female sexuality. Articles such as (*'the simple secret of sexual confidence'*) (*Cosmopolitan* August 1998), (*'operation orgasm'*) (*Cosmopolitan* March 1999), (*'Foreplay-the secrets of fore play')* (*True Love* September 1999) invite ordinary women into the sexual revolution and they are offered instruction on the latest sexual protocol. These articles some how put emphasis on sexual equality in the bedroom accompanied by a taste of being liberated. What this means is that women can be in control of their sexuality and can be the ones to take the initiative to please themselves and not wait for men to please them.

Today's woman can transform advertising and magazine images into reality for themselves because they can afford to buy products behind those images. It is a matter of aesthetics and taste and how individual items can contribute to an overall image and lifestyle, with the emphasis on style rather than life. Being a woman involves constantly adjusting one's own image to fit time and place in an ever-changing game of images and the real life is constantly thought through images (Winship 1987).

4.2.6 The discourse of the magazines

Stylistically there is the use of superlatives, questions and imperatives such as (*'Visualise it'*), which McRobbie says is teasing, coaxing but also urgent language (1996:77). The possessive 'your man'' or 'my man' is used often throughout the magazines. Images of sexuality and their messages of underlying femininity appear most prominently. As McRobbie says, sex is regarded now as something to be learnt, rather than something that just happens naturally when a woman is in love with a man. Sexual technique is offered in *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan* as a means to educating a woman in terms of how to please her man and herself. What this connotes is that the woman's happiness is seen as resting on meeting and having a man with whom she is sexually compatible. Consequently, disliking sex is seen or depicted as a deficiency rather than a choice that one could be living comfortably with. This is prevalent in an article from *Cosmopolitan* (September 1999) (" I wish I liked sex more"). A paragraph from the article goes like this: … lack of sexual enjoyment can be remedied, so if you don't have interest, you could be helped and your interest boosted.

Another point of interest that McRobbie raises is that in women's magazines there is a huge expansion of sexual fantasy material for girls and women …in the guise of information, meaning that there is a sexual titillation value found within the guise of education. In the December 1998 issues of both magazines there are six articles out of twenty-six that are sex-related features. In the September 1999 issue there are four articles out of fourteen which are sex related. This does not include regular articles such as 'upfront woman' and 'upfront man'(in *Cosmpolitan*), which deal with specific sex and relationship areas.

This illustrates that the magazine's periodicity, its regular appearance once a month or once a week allows both an open ended (continuing series or features) routine and confirming its readers in a way of life where leisure like work is regulated in time.

Chapter 5

Analysis of Advertisements

Introduction

This chapter attempts to analyse advertisements in terms of their representations of women. This includes looking closely at the messages that are being conveyed directly or indirectly. Advertisements carry multiple messages that are targeted at certain individuals who may either identify with the messages or attempt to relate to them. This sense of identification can be expressed either by wishing or imagining one in the scenario that is being sold to them, which may eventually prompt them to do something about their wishes.

Semiology is used as a guide into understanding and unloading messages that are sent through text as well as visuals. It is a good tool to use when carrying out qualitative analysis since it entails studying the social production of meaning from sign systems. (Fiske: 1990,41). Sign systems of communication are characterised by the presence of a physical form, which must refer to something other than itself and must be used and recognised by people. According to Fiske:

> The message stimulates you to create meaning for yourself that relates in some way to the meaning that is generated in the message. The more we share the same codes, the more we use the same sign systems, the closer 'our two meanings' of the message will approximate to each other (1990: 39)

For instance, a heart shaped picture or drawing symbolises love and this interpretation is understood universally. This may be the reason why advertising plays very well on the use of women as a symbol of beauty because that is almost universal. However, several

other meanings may also arise from the concept of beauty and used to express certain connotations or used to sell something. This may be interpreted as negative representation of women because it is not challenging intellectually. Moreover, women's beauty has been reduced to a means of selling products and thus using the woman as a symbol. In most advertisements, the representations of beauty in women varies from beauty as expressed through her face to beauty as expressed through certain parts of the body. The woman's body is often used as a landmark to draw attention. Sometimes this involves representing women as sex objects especially in advertisements that present women as an incentive to buy the product.

Advertisers also play on sexuality as a way of representing beauty. Words used in advertisements for beauty products play around this concept so well. Words that are often used include seduction, bliss, romance etc. Because advertisements have latitude as persuasive communication, advertisers tend to play more on sexuality as a way of getting through to their target audience.

80% of advertisements that appear in *True love* and *Cosmopolitan* mostly focus on improving one's beauty and image, through beauty products such as facial creams and hair products and through clothing, jewellery and perfumes. The advertisements promote the means through which one can attain the ideal beauty as represented in the magazines.

These advertisements are constructed in a way that is guaranteed to capture the attention of the reader . This is done either by stating the problems that one may be faced with and then offering solutions, which are illustrated through the use of women as the symbol of beauty.

A woman with flawless skin in the case of skin products, or sex appeal illustrated through a focus on certain parts of the body i.e. eyes, lips, in the case of a perfume and class and sophistication in jewellery. Because advertisements act on the insecurities and anxieties (acne, weight, beauty etc) of the reader, this type of appeal is meant to give a sense of relief to the reader. To make them believe that they too can achieve that kind of beauty and class, status or position because the advertisement promises and illustrates that it can get rid of the problem or can help one achieve the look they are longing for. The woman who suffers from acne for instance is lured into thinking that if they buy the product, their problem will be solved and they can become a much happier person.

However, most advertisements simply give a general description of the product without taking into consideration that the target market is not as homogeneous as the magazines address it. Moreover, not everyone may respond positively to the product. As stated before most of the advertisements that are contained in the magazines deal with beauty. Because such advertisements dominate the magazines, the advertisements that will be analysed below have therefore been chosen from a pool of advertisements, which essentially promote beauty either through beauty products or jewellery. Purposive sampling has therefore been used and inferences to the whole population from the sample will be made.

5.1 Analysis of Advertisements

Advertisements, just like editorial content, also acquire meaning in the interaction between readers and the visual images. They are often strategically placed in relation to editorial material, encouraging readers to notice them. An analysis of the visuals and text on their own is not enough to reconstruct meanings (Hermes 1993).

Advertisements are often a combination of images and language and therefore should be analysed as such. Although readers may recognise the codes of given text and accord it limited associative meaning, they do not always accord it generalised significance, that is a distinct and nameable place in their world views (Hermes: 1993)

The text explaining the visual sometimes works as an introduction to the visual. However, advertisements made up of photographic texts can also tell a full story. It is therefore imperative to look at such advertisements with a deep and critical eye that will allow the reader to unravel the implicit meaning of the message. This involves looking at how directly the advertisement appeals to the reader, the levels of persuasion, context and situation in which images are presented to the intended recipient. How influential is gender in our experiences? What is associated with men/women? How differently are the lives of men and women represented? These questions will help in understanding how women are represented in the magazines.

5.1.1 How the advertisements appeal to the reader

Estee lauder is a brand name that sells beauty products that mostly include make-up. Like most advertisements, the Estee lauder advertisement is typical of many advertisements. It appeared in both *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* because the two magazines are targeted at women and so is the product. The advertisement is spread over two pages. Popular magazines are the perfect medium for these advertisements as they are often characterised by bright colours, glossy paper and bold writing. On one page is a full colour picture where the product is presented (small brown bottle) as well as text that explains it. On the next page is a black and white picture of a woman dressed presentably

in a white outfit that matches with her shoes. The advertisement addresses the reader as an individual. It draws you into the visual image, and it makes you want to become the person represented in it. The advertisement sells an improved product on make up. This connotes the transition that is involved should one choose to use the product. This involves adding colour to one's look. The woman's posture, clothing and facial expression signify sexual confidence and availability. The confident gaze at the viewer invites the approach of the female consumer who in turn might wish to make herself more consumable for men in the same way the model does. While sexual confidence emanates from the image of the model, on the contrary the image renders insignificant the woman's identity or anything else she might achieve beyond attracting men. The signifiers in this text, which are linked by the theme of sexuality, might arguably be categorised as trading on the myths about women that pervade the western culture. That before anything else women must strive to be sexually attractive for the sake of male pleasure. And by privileging particular types of femininity above others, white, thin conventionally beautiful, sexually confident women are confirmed as the most desirable, thereby reinforcing myths about what constitutes desirable femininity. Moreover, the advertisement makes the reader believe that their beauty will definitely be enhanced should they use the product. The advertisement totally ignores the fact that women are different in every respect including skin types and not everyone may respond positively to the product.

   Estee Lauder-double wear make up-great looks are here to stay, is the catch phrase of the advertisement. What the advertisement suggests to the reader is that she may no longer have to worry about looking perfect all day because double-wear *"maintains its*

semimate finish through heat, humidity and activity." This could be directed to a working woman who in her busy working life also does not want to be left behind. A woman who always wants to look perfect and feel good about herself. Perfection in this advertisement connotes attraction. Even the woman represented in the advertisement looks perfect and her skin flawless. The suggestion is that you as a reader can also achieve that perfection. The bottle in which the product comes also looks small, just convenient for one to slip into their bag and that makes it accessible to the person whenever they need it.

Perfection also connotes sexy and admirable. This suggests that the product can and will give the consumer absolute perfection. Although the advertisement promotes make up, it essentially goes beyond that. The make-up cannot just work wonders on a person who does not look after herself. Dressing presentably and looking after yourself is part of the look and the two go together. However, although dressing presentably does not necessarily mean wearing a dress that reveals your cleavage, that is how sexual appeal is described in the magazines. The focus on the eyes and lips sends a message. They have been enhanced with the intention to bring out the beauty and attractiveness in them.

Loreal- because I am worth it - Loreal is also a beauty brand name that sells products ranging from make up products to hair products. The advertisement sells lipstick and this is done through a woman who is nicely made-up, her skin flawless, with her facial features well enhanced. The picture is a close-up with the focus mainly on eyes and lips. The advertisement gives the reader the feeling that they are something. The reader is made to feel like the woman in the advertisement, in fact she is the woman in the advertisement. Because you as a reader know that you are worth the look, the perfection, the sexy look, Loreal can do a lot to enhance what you already have. The advertisement

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implicitly says you have got the look and Loreal will help you enhance and perfect it. There's a sense of control and independence there. However, the advertisement sends a very misleading perception , that of making the reader believe that they can achieve perfect beauty in a short space of time. To begin with, the people who do such advertisements choose their models carefully and as a result the model is young and has the most perfect skin. The advertisement takes for granted the fact that there are people with serious skin problems that cannot just be overcome by covering them up with make up. Advertisements such as these only offer quick solutions without really considering the feelings of their targeted customers. This gives the impression that all they are concerned with is selling the product and beyond that they are not interested.

Tommy girl- a declaration of independence - Tommy girl is a perfume, a sister to Tommy, a perfume for men. The advertisement for Tommy girl depicts a young woman lying on her stomach with her hair loose. She looks youthful and attractive. She has a radiant smile, which suggests how content she is with herself. Like the advertisement says, it is a declaration of her independence, <u>your</u> independence as a reader. This phrase implies that you can do what you want when you want to. The freshness you will get from the perfume will give you confidence, which will in turn give you freedom, because with confidence comes the courage to do what you want and be what you want to be. When one feels good about themselves their spirit is also moved, and that is where you get the confidence from.

Angel - It's like being caressed by a cloud - The advertisement plays on and around sexuality, The choice of words in this advertisement validates this. You can feel like being caressed if you *'slip into the world of delicious, playful seduction. Deliciously*

effervescent, innocently irresistible'. This implicitly suggests to the reader that if they step into the world that is being described in the advertisement then they may end up with the real thing, getting a man that will find them irresistible because of the nice scent. However, there is more to life than just finding a man.

De beers - ... nothing radiates like a diamond - This advertisement's catch phrase sends a very powerful message, that of beauty as expressed through a woman. The set of diamond earrings, amongst other things symbolizes beauty, radiance and happiness. What this advertisement connotes is that you can also be as radiant provided you also wear a pair of diamond earrings or any other accessories made from diamonds. The beautiful woman represented in the advertisement is used as a sign, a symbol of beauty and attractiveness. Like others this advertisement is very persuasive. It invites the reader into a world of "magic" because *'nothing weaves its magic like a diamond'*.

All the advertisements that have been analysed above exploit women as means towards advertising and as sex objects. The advertisers could have easily used men as models, still applying the same concepts. Gender difference is given meaning and as such these advertisements legitimise sexism . The images used are an invitation to male fantasy and as the means for advertisements. They encourage men to associate beauty with sexuality. This confirms the fact that women dominate in commercials for cosmetics and personal hygiene and these goods have no relation to the intellectual capacity of women. However it could also be argued that these images articulate transcendence from class roles to sexual ones.

Chapter 6

Comparison between True Love and Cosmopolitan

Introduction

True Love and *Cosmopolitan* differ in their social positions, target market (and their readership), content, and advertising although they share a major similarity as both women's magazines and glossy magazines.

6.1 Target markets and readership

The two magazines target women of different classes and races as readers.

Although *Cosmopolitan* as a worldwide magazine enjoys a huge readership with its target market mainly white people it also commands a good number of black readers. The magazine was created specifically for a white heterosexual and middle class woman, but black women were acknowledged but not represented as models for emulation (Laurie Ouellette 1999: 367).

True Love caters for the needs of the black women both in the middle and upper classes. *Cosmopolitan* on the other hand is not only for the aspiring woman who wants to conform to the ideals of western beauty but also appeals to the woman who has somehow accomplished what is being touted in the magazines but would like to maintain it.

The price of *Cosmopolitan* is almost double that of *True Love*. *True Love* costs R7, 25 *Cosmopolitan* costs R13,45. The income brackets of the readers who purchase these magazines also differ. According to the Annual Media Products Survey (AMPS 1997), the majority of the readers who buy *Cosmopolitan* fall under the income bracket of R4,

000 a month and above. *True Love* is bought mostly by readers who earn between R1,

500 and R2, 500 followed by those earning between R900 and R1, 399 and then by those

earning less than R500. The number of readers who earn between R6, 000 and R9, 000 is

smaller than the income brackets that have been mentioned above. This could mean that

the black readers who belong in the highest income brackets are being taken away by the

so-called upper class magazines like *Cosmopolitan.* By the South African living

standards measure (LSM) *True Love* is read mostly by those who belong in LSM group 6,

which is the middle class, whereas *Cosmopolitan* is read by those who belong in LSM

group 8 (upper-class). The reader in LSM group 6 is the one who aspires to lead the kind

of life that is represented in the magazines and in LSM group 8 are the readers who

already have the look and the lifestyle but would like to maintain it. The magazines

resonates with their lifestyles. They can therefore afford to follow the suggestions put

before them no matter how costly, whereas the reader who belongs in group six might

have to improvise.

6.2 Content

Although there is a degree of similarity in the issues that the magazines deal with, there

are notable differences. Both magazines cover almost every month, stories on celebrities,

relationships, sexuality and beauty, as shown by charts 1 & 2. Although these are the

most prominent issues in both magazines *True Love* also caters not only for the single

mother but also for the married woman who works as a professional and a housewife.

One prominent feature about *True Love* is that it is a South African magazine. The South

African edition of *Cosmopolitan* on the other hand, supposedly targeted at a South

African readership, does not deal with issues particularly within the South African context. It deals with issues at a more universal level, assuming that their readers are the same irrespective of geographic boundaries. This may be because it enjoys a global status and therefore the issues that it covers especially on beauty are those pertaining to ideal beauty as defined in the western culture. The features for this ideal type of beauty include being skinny, light skinned, tall with long flowing hair. However this ideal kind of beauty is now not only applicable to white women as was intended when the magazine started but is also adopted by black women as well. *True Love,* for instance does not really focus on what may be called 'African beauty' but invariably 'celebrates' the western kind of beauty. Most of their advertisements show models who are light skinned, the dark skinned model is hardly ever used as the model to represent 'ideal beauty'.

However it is fair to say that *True Love* does cater for the woman with a "fuller figure" (a full rounded body shape, big but not necessarily overweight). They often carry features on how women with 'fuller figure' can dress smartly and presentably. However, this effort is immediately undermined, because the tips that are given are meant for the woman with a fuller figure to achieve the look that will not make her look big. The colours that are suggested to her are supposed to make her look thinner. She does not only have to worry about the colours but about the fabric and must avoid certain types of fabric. She has to pay attention to some detail in the fabric and its texture. For instance a fabric with horizontal lines is a definite no because it will make her look plumpy and short, so says the fashion expert.

So the extent to which women's needs are defined in both magazines differs. For instance *True Love* carries a spotlight column on women's issues ranging from physical

abuse to rape. This is usually just a page. *True Love* does not only address the lonely woman who is in need of beauty and subsequently a man but also the housewife who has to deal with issues such as discovering that her child was raped by her husband. One could say *True Love* is not only a magazine that will only entertain but can also be useful for women who experience problems or difficulties in their marriages for instance. The magazine is therefore both entertaining and useful for women.

This is not to say that *Cosmopolitan* does not carry articles that attempt to advocate women's rights and sexual equality but it does this differently. Cosmopolitan represents today's woman as the assertive type that earns her own salary, owns a car and is pursuing a very good career. The kind of women who can live perfectly without men in their lives (and in fact having a man in their lives would mean trouble), and are in control of their lives. The women who are on a mission to prove to men that they can be in control not only of their lives but their sexuality as well.

The kind of photographs that these magazines carry especially on the front cover differ. *Cosmopolitan* goes for the 'almost naked look' in a full length picture, whereas *True Love* goes more for the conservative head and shoulder picture with the woman dressed in a not so revealing outfit. These differences signify the background of the magazines. *Cosmopolitan* focused on sexuality from its inception and is still heavily marketing that look. For *Cosmopolitan* the saying that sex sells is indeed true. On the other hand *True Love* is still trying to find its feet. It has not really drawn a line between what it strictly advocates. The young , single and sexually active woman is catered for and so is the married woman with marital problems.

Broadly, one could say that both magazines are commercially produced women's magazines. The content acts highly on the insecurities of women. The woman is made to believe that they can become the woman who is represented in the magazine by offering advice on how to be that person. It is clear that the sexy look is the ideal one. Whether you are a single professional or married with children you are still encouraged to acquire the sexy look for your husband. No matter how busy you are with family life the magazines remind you that you have a duty to yourself to have the ideal look.

6.3 Advertising

Like most commercial consumer publications, *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan* are financed predominantly through advertising. Consequently advertisements in these magazines take more space than content. They do not only come in their literal photographic form but also in the form of advertorial features.

An average *Cosmopolitan* edition with about 190 pages carries approximately 40 advertisements, whereas *True Love* with 170 pages carries approximately 30 advertisements in an edition. It is important to note that most advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* are full-page spreads and some even run over two pages.

True Love also carries small adverts i.e. 10cm length. Advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* range from expensive beauty products to expensive accessories such as watches and jewellery in general. The brand names that are advertised in the magazine are not for the ordinary low-income readers and are mostly international brand names. *True Love* on the other hand carries mostly local brand names ranging from beauty products to baby products and advertisements on distance education.

Competitions in *Cosmopolitan* are about trips abroad paid for by sponsors and not about winning kitchen appliances as is the case in *True Love*. This is an indicator of the differences in target markets. The C*osmopolitan* reader does not have to worry about kitchen appliances because she already has them. What would be interesting to her would be to think about going on holiday to some exotic island where she can have her peace.

From the points that have been addressed above it is clear that the two magazines have similarities and differences that are in particular influenced by their history, context and development in terms of class and status. Race and economic status influence their development. Women's issues and needs are defined differently. *Cosmopolitan* concentrates more on the single professional woman while the married professional woman is also the targeted reader in *True Love*.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Introduction

The analysis of both the feature articles and advertisements in this study inform the conclusions that have been made and will be outlined in this chapter. It is important to note however, that in answering the questions to the study more than one conclusion has been reached because the analysis has landed the researcher to a conclusion of multiple findings. The outcome of the study will therefore be a series of three conclusions based on the following:

1) Feature articles

2) Advertisements

3) Theoretical level

As stated by (Winship 1987:38), the business of magazines is a venture involved in two disparate but intimately linked selling operations: one to women, the other to advertisers (Winship 1987:38). What this means is that the magazines serve both the needs of the advertisers and those of the reader interchangeably, to the benefit of both the reader and the advertisers. The extent to which either of the two benefits is an issue on its own.

Cosmopolitan and *True Love* portray an element of women seen as sex objects. They also represent women as independent and in control of their sexuality. However, it is important to note that these two elements are not represented equally. The main focus is on women as sex objects.

7.1 Features: Women seen as independent and in control

Features mostly represent women as people who are independent, in control of their sexuality. The evidence in the study demonstrates that women are not the puppets that earlier forms of feminism think they are represented as. They have choices to make about their professional and social lives including their sexual lives. They are not simply confronted with situations over which they have no choices to make. For instance the target market of these magazines or the implied readers are a group of educated professional women who have dreams and know what they want in life.

The feature articles address the issue of women's sexuality in a manner that encourages the implied reader to be in control. The feature articles give tips on how they can make their men please them and thus validate their status as women. Women are made aware that they can get men to do exactly what they want in a way that satisfies them. That they also have needs and do not always have to succumb to those of men. So by expressing their sexuality in the assertive manner in which features suggest, they are saying that they can be independent and stay in control of their sexuality, they can go out of their way to please themselves and not the other person.

Features address women as active readers. They can make choices about what they want, which may not easily be what the other person likes because people differ and so do their choices. Women can choose who they want to be, who they want to be with, and the right to choose what they want to go for or not in respect to their lifestyle, career paths and sexual relationships. They are not simply lured into buying things or being people that they do not want to be. The writers of the features also disclose some kind of progressive intention conforming to the liberal image of women i.e. how women can stay

in control of their lives and strive to achieve their dreams. They touch a cultural nerve that goes beyond the individual reader and thus providing wider insights into wider cultural aspirations.

7.2 Representation of women in advertisements

Women are portrayed as sex objects in that most advertisements use women's beauty as a way of advertising. The woman's body is represented as a symbol of beauty. Advertisements represent women as helpless beings that can and are used as a means to commercial ends. *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* represent women as influenced by society, that women are objects to be admired and appreciated by men. Women cannot be whole without men on their side both socially and professionally. The way advertisements and feature articles are structured indicate that women are easy to understand and figure out because they are concerned with two goals that complement each other: attaining perfect beauty as a way of getting a man. As the advertisements suggest, the strategy can be used to achieve both ends. Women as consumers buy the appropriate products that will help them achieve what they want, men. While most of the consumerist persuasion comes in the form of direct advertising, most of it is disguised as editorial material that is in the form of feature articles, advice columns or health and fitness tips.

For instance the feature articles that trace the life of celebrities offer the reader a look inside the celebrity's life: what her favourite activities are, which might be similar to the reader's interests. A troublesome analogy begins to emerge. Girls ought to treat the attraction and holding onto a boyfriend with the same consumer savvy that advertisers

deploy in choosing clothing items and beauty products. So while they commodify themselves by donning the right outfits, following hairstyle, eye make-up, lipstick and behavioral tips, they must also commodify the man who will inevitably line up at their doors to invite them over for supper or an evening out. The woman is inevitably reduced into the sexually aware being; someone who is concerned mainly about her looks.

That leads one to the conclusion that advertising has never been a good vehicle for representing women. It has done nothing more than to harm their image and misplace the idea of what it means to be a complete woman. It has never been interested in who women are other than their commercial value. It is also unfortunate that advertising forms such an integral part of popular magazines and the media at large. This leaves one at a dead end since the media cannot do without advertising as they get most of their revenue from it. So, striving to please both the readers and the advertisers is a big challenge for magazines and this implies that as long as magazines still depend highly on advertising chances are that women will still be represented as sex objects and helpless beings.

7.3 Women's magazines as popular culture

It is important to note that magazines as a form of popular culture do not simply impose their content on readers, they deal with issues that their target market can relate to, interests them and identify themselves with.

For instance magazines may advise the reader that getting a boyfriend and keeping one is not just a walk in the mall because it is in the interest of the reader to make sure that she can look after her social and love life properly. So the magazines advise one on

friendships and men, everything 'you' need to know to win at the dating game or to keep healthy relations with loved ones.

The magazines run the quizzes on whether "*your relationship has a future*", how compatible you are with you partner? These allow the reader to rate their relationship or improve what is already there. Whether he is what 'she' wants. Features with titles such as "*Feel like new lovers again- in Just two days.*" These are meant to help the woman analyse her relationship on the basis of how the guy treats her, whether she and the boyfriend have the same interests, whether they make decisions as partners or one partner's feelings and needs take precedence over the other's. The reader needs to ask herself a few questions. By taking these quizzes the reader can therefore decide whether her relationship is just a summer fun fling, or a yearlong liaison. However, it is important to note that the choice is represented in a commercial sense. For the reader to be aware of her choices or alternatives they need to be informed, either by buying a magazine or book that will guide them on their choices. The question here is whether these quick solutions are simply a selling point or are they genuine exercises that can reasonably enable the reader to indulge in a soul searching exercise. Are these reductionist approaches viable in our world where we have such a wide array of multiple realities. Experiences may be deemed similar but the environments within which they occur can be vastly dissimilar. This compromises and actually insults the intelligence of the reader to even claim to have the ability to make relationships work in two days. Case studies of a few relationships can hardly be used as yardsticks and prescriptions towards blissful relationships. Relationships are areas of continuous struggles between two people. The variables that

make or break relationships are so dauntingly great that a guide to a perfect relationship would require a much more considered analysis.

7.4 Difference between features and advertisements

Features and advertisements have both similarities and differences in their representations of women. This is mainly due to the way they are structured.

Advertisements mainly use pictures and some times minimal text. Cosmetic products such as perfumes use women a lot as sex objects and as means to an end for advertising. The impression that they give most of the time is that of fulfilling male sexual fantasy. The woman puts on a nice smelling perfume to attract a man. The pictures used in such advertisements are often of bedroom scenes and the woman is often shown in a seductive mood.

However, there are advertisements that are mainly on how the woman can improve herself for her own happiness. Body and facial skin products are a good example. On the other hand features make use of text more than pictures. They represent the woman as capable because they are mainly a guide to the woman's fantasy. They give the woman the liberty to live their fantasies.

However, commercially, advertisements and features share a similarity in that they both sell something although features are not as direct as advertisements. The feature sells the lifestyle because at the end of the day in order for the woman to live as suggested in the feature, they have to buy products that will help her achieve that.

Therefore both advertisements and features send multiple messages. Women can be independent and choose what they want or not want to do with their lives. At the same time, the woman represented in the magazine is very vulnerable and her sexuality is used as a tool to exude male fantasies. The point made earlier is further developed here. This leads me to the conclusion that the general tendencies of these magazines is therefore to patronise their reader by not offering as an alternative viable female personalities that do not depend so much on the looks as they do on the proficiency as professional career women?

The magazines give the reader mixed messages on what being a woman means. That a woman can be independent but at the same time they can be used as sex objects for commercial purposes. For models for instance, there is more to appearing in an advertisement than just glamour. The main incentive might be getting a salary at the end of the day. Whether the implications of these jobs for women is critically explored to fully understand their ramifications is still an open question. This research has established that the integrity of magazines is too compromised for them to make any difference. They are too enmeshed in the political economy of the media industry to make any worthwhile difference to the cause against negative representations of women in the media. But this does not absolve these magazines from making editorial decisions conscious of these issues. The larger question is how society could develop strategies to build a consciousness around these issues? The mainstream media will probably be sluggish to respond to these challenges. It also seems that popular media cannot be trusted to even start tinkering with issues such as these.

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