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‘Most of Us Guys are Raring to Go Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere’: Male and Female Sexuality in *Cleo* and *Cosmo*

Panteá Farvid · Virginia Braun

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Abstract Women’s magazines are a popular site for analysis of socio-cultural messages about gender, sex, and sexuality. We analyzed six consecutive issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* to identify the ways in which they construct and represent male and female sexuality. Overall, male sexuality was prioritised, ‘real’ heterosex was depicted as penetrative, and orgasm was given precedence. Two main accounts of male and female sexuality were identified. *Men’s need for (great) sex* positioned men as easily aroused and sexually satisfied, but women as needing to develop ‘great’ sexual skills to keep their men from ‘straying.’ Accounts of *pleasure, performance, and the male ego* represented men as concerned about women’s pleasure, about their own sexual performance and as sensitive about suggested sexual ‘inadequacies.’ We discuss the implications of these constructions for women’s gendered (sexual) subjectivity, sexual practices, and identities.

Keywords Women’s magazines · Heterosexuality · Male/female sexuality · Sex · Gender

Women’s magazines provide an abundance of readily available advice regarding sex and sexual practice, and, as such, they are a popular site for feminist analyses of socio-cultural messages about sex and sexuality, as well as about femininity, and, more recently, about masculinity. In the present study, we continued and expanded the feminist academic interest in cultural messages about sex and

sexuality. We focused on two popular women’s lifestyle magazines, *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan* (*Cosmo*), and on the constructions of male and female sexuality contained within them. A critical focus on masculinities (and indeed male sexualities) fits within recent theorising of masculinity as constructed, and thus as deconstructable (e.g., Potts, 2002), and with feminist interest in this area (e.g., Gardiner, 2002; Ramazanoglu, 1992; Robinson, 2003). Here we discuss how these magazines construct female sexuality through their depiction of male and female sexuality, as male and female sexuality were intricately linked in most accounts. Specifically, we consider the implications of these representations of (hetero)sexuality for women, as women are the target audience of such magazines.

Reading Women’s Magazines

Over the last three decades, a considerable amount of feminist research has been carried out on women’s magazines (e.g., Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, & Hebron, 1991; Dermarest & Garner, 1992; Gadsden, 2000; Hermes, 1995; Krassas, Blauwkamp, & Wesselink, 2001; Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; McCracken, 1993; McMahan, 1990; Peirce, 1997; Triage, 1999; Winship, 1987). The majority of this work has analysed the content of women’s magazines and their representations of women’s identity (e.g., Dermarest & Garner, 1992; Johnston & Swanson, 2003). For example, researchers have examined how women are represented with regard to sexual health and sexuality (e.g., Durham, 1996), weight and body image (e.g., Cusumano & Thompson, 1997), how these representations are situated within particular socio-cultural contexts, and how they may reinforce particular gender(ed) ideologies (e.g., Ballaster et al., 1991; Damon-Moore, 1994; Scanlon, 1995; Triage, 1999).

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Most previous researchers have been critical of women's magazines, maintaining that they portray a simplified version of the world to their readers—a world where everything is reduced to gender oppositions (Eggins & Iedema, 1997); where there are no social class, racial, or political differences (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003); and where Western ideals of beauty (i.e., young, White, thin) are prioritised, as is heterosexuality (Jackson, 1996; McLoughlin, 2000). Others maintain that we need look no further than the huge business of dieting, the cosmetic and fashion industry, and the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery to propose that the idealised (and unrealistic) representations of beauty in women's magazines may be damaging to women's development, health and self-esteem (Bordo, 1993; Wolf, 1991).

In addition, many researchers have argued that women are continuously portrayed as sex objects within women's magazines (Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990). However, since the so-called sexual revolution, women's magazines have openly described and celebrated an 'active' female sexuality; *Cosmo*, in particular, has pushed the notion of 'egalitarian' and 'emancipated' sex (Ussher, 1997) and constructed the 'fun, fearless female' (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003, p. 462) as the embodiment of a desirable feminine sexuality. Despite some changes in the representation of sexuality, many feminists have continued to critique the ongoing relentless focus on heterosexual relationships and the limited perspective in the coverage of sex and sexual practices in women's magazines (Gauntlett, 2002). The sexual acts that are represented are found to be only mildly transgressive, and still based on traditional gender roles (Caldas-Coulthard, 1996), although this has recently been 'masked' by the representation of women as 'daring and dangerous through sex' (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003 p. 455). In addition, women's magazines usually emphasise sexual difference, 'advocate understanding and compromise from both parties as a resolution to sexual conflict' (Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 143), and often reiterate dominant gender ideologies and discourses (McMahon, 1990).

An ongoing debate exists regarding feminist moral positioning in relation to magazine consumption (Currie, 1999): Should women's magazines be viewed as the oppressive 'purveyor of pernicious ideology to be condemned' or as a legitimate avenue for 'women-centred pleasure' to be embraced (Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 4; Currie, 1999). Traditionally, feminist critiques of mainstream media (including magazines) portray the media as 'ideologically manipulative' (Gough-Yates, 2003, p. 7) in the sense that they project messages about the nature of femininity that serve to legitimate and naturalise patriarchal domination. Women's magazines are seen to be very limited in scope: primarily about beauty, fashion, and

'how to get a man.' Not only have previous researchers frequently found and reported an obsession with men in women's magazines (e.g., McMahon, 1990; Wray & Steele, 2002), but the magazines are regularly seen as reinforcing the idea that a man is the route to happiness and that, if women are 'good enough,' the right man will 'come along and sweep them off their feet—ideally into wedded bliss' (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 190).¹

However, as problematic as they appear to be through such critical analysis, women's magazines sell widely all over the world and are easily accessible to many women. They appeal to women both visually and emotionally by offering colourful advertising and fashion spreads, as well as information and support about women's everyday lives (Ferguson, 1983; Winship, 1987; Wolf, 1991). McMahon (1990) has suggested that one of the reasons readers get 'hooked' on lifestyle magazines such as *Cosmo* is that they often provide (temporary) solutions to social and personal conflicts. Although many feminists continue to argue that women's magazines offer up oppressive imagery, others have challenged oppression as a *necessary* outcome of such representation. Winship (1987) was one of the first to dismiss the idea that women's magazines are only about patriarchal oppression. Although she critically analyzed the content of women's magazines (e.g., *Women's Own*, *Cosmopolitan*) and their contradictions and identified their limitations (of reinforcing dominant ideologies), Winship also highlighted the magazines' appeal to women and their potential for change.

So although women's magazines may be seen as a 'bit of fun' or even as helpful to some women, feminists maintain that these magazine's represent only a partial view of the world. It is argued that the reality represented is largely based on the interests of advertisers and masculine desires that sexualise women's submissiveness and objectification

¹ The focus of this article is women's magazines, but it is important to note that analyses of a particular genre of adolescent girls' magazines (such as *Teen*, *Seventeen*), which have also been studied for over three decades (e.g., Carpenter, 1998; Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Frazer, 1987; Kehily, 1999; McRobbie, 1978; Schlenker, Caron, & Halteman, 1998; Willemsen, 1998), have yielded similar findings, such as a relentless focus on boys, fashion, and beauty (Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Willemsen, 1998). One difference is that these magazines tend to promote an 'emphasised femininity' (Kaplan & Cole, 2003) and to focus on attracting boys' attention (often through one's looks) and how to get a boyfriend (Wray & Steele, 2002). Women's magazines, in contrast, tend to be more explicitly about sex (McMahon, 1990), albeit often framed within the context of a (monogamous) relationship. It would seem that adolescents' magazines teach girls how to become heterosexually 'feminine,' and women's magazines advise on how femininity should be moulded, sexualised, and practiced as one gets older. So women's and adolescent girls' magazines are somewhat distinct in prioritising different aspects of heterosexuality, which are related to the target age groups of the magazines' consumers but operate within a similar ideological framework.

(Bordo, 1993; Durham, 1996; McCracken, 1993; Winship, 1987). Contained within women's magazines are a myriad of articles and columns, alongside the advertising, that purport to offer women advice on how to behave, or what products to buy, in order to attract and maintain relationships with men (Durham, 1996; Ferguson, 1983; McCracken, 1993; Winship, 1987). Although we do not focus on it further here, the relationship between advertising and editorial and other content of these magazines is potentially complex, contradictory, and worth consideration (e.g., see Baker, 2005; Ballaster et al., 1991; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Frith, Shaw, & Chen, 2005; Lindner, 2004).

The research we have discussed thus far has primarily used content- or representation-focused approaches (e.g., Ballaster et al., 1991; Krassas et al., 2001; McMahon, 1990; Peirce, 1997). More recently, audience ethnography approaches (e.g., Boynton, 1999; Hermes, 1995; McCleneghan, 2003; Winship, 1987), which explore the ways readers make sense of magazines, have been used in an effort to present a more comprehensive analysis of women's magazines. Audience ethnography examines the meanings that readers take from women's magazines (e.g., Boynton, 1999; Hermes, 1995; Kalof, 1999). Such studies demonstrate that although particular gendered ideologies may be prioritised within women's magazines, readers interpret these in complex ways (e.g., women discussing sexually explicit material in 'top shelf' magazines aimed at heterosexual women have been reported to do so in mixed and varied ways; see Boynton, 1999). The portrayed ideas are not simply 'automatically' absorbed by the readers—readers also offer critiques of particular representations (e.g., the representations of beauty in popular magazines; see Kalof, 1999).

Given the variety in which readers may engage with the portrayals in women's magazines, questions have been raised regarding the validity of analyses that focus on the text in the absence of readers' interpretations. For instance, Hermes (1995) suggested that the texts alone are not that important, and that women's magazines are not meaningful when analysed outside of the context of the readers' daily lives. Others, however, have argued that, although it is clearly problematic to suggest that magazine representations are directly embraced by readers, our social realities and 'social identities *are* constructed through language' (McLoughlin, 2000, p. 95, emphasis added). Magazines necessarily provide a space for, and contribute to, (societal and individual) discourses of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality (McRobbie, 1996), and the critical analysis of magazine texts is one important mode of inquiry into their social construction. We must also recognise that (different) masculinities, femininities, and sexualities are not constructed as equal, and are not equally available to all people, as some sexualities are dominant and some subordinate in society. Magazines can contribute to the

availability and relative positionings of their different forms.

Theorising Sex and Sexuality

The theoretical position taken in the present study is social constructionism (e.g., Tiefer, 1995); 'human sexuality' is seen as a social and historical construct, and 'a product of many influences and social interventions,' which does not exist outside of our interpretations and understanding of sexual practices (Weeks, 1986, p. 31). This means that 'what counts as sex; where, when, and with whom one has sex; as well as the meanings attributed to, and the experiences of, sex' (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003, p. 237) are all socially and culturally produced. This approach problematises the notion that 'sex is a natural act' (Tiefer, 1995). Instead, sexuality is seen to be shaped by language, discourse(s), and other representational practices, and these are 'seen to enable, and limit the possibilities of, material discursive practices' (Braun et al., 2003, p. 238). Discourses about sex are the means by which people come to understand sexuality and to produce/experience their sexual behaviour (Duncombe & Marsden, 1996). Dominant (and subordinated) discourses of sex and sexuality are also implicated in the construction of individual subjectivities and identities.

Discourses and representations of sex and sexuality abound, and the media are a key site for the (re)production and contestation of discourses about sex and sexuality (Holmberg, 1998). The West can currently be seen as a predominantly 'liberal' pro-(hetero)sex environment for both women and men. Here 'the societal message is that you *have* to be sexual, you have to *want* to be sexual, you have to be *good* at being sexual, and you have to be *normally* sexual' (Tiefer, 1995, p. 129, emphasis added). However, historically, prevailing discourses about sexuality have made clear (and largely dichotomous) distinctions about what constitutes 'male' and 'female' sexuality.

Dominant discourses have constructed male sexuality as driven by a strong biological 'need' for (coital) sex for its own sake (Weeks, 1986)—what Hollway (1989) identified as a 'male sexual drive' discourse. Male sexuality has been framed in opposition to female sexuality, with a strong emphasis on the man's sexual ability, performance, and competence (Kilmartin, 1999). Primacy has been given to the penis, erection, and orgasm (Tiefer, 1995). It has been argued that this 'masculine' model of sexuality is the most prevalent understanding of 'generic' sexuality, and it is still how sexuality is broadly understood (Jackson, 1984; Kilmartin, 1999). The notion of male sexuality as (inherently) performance-oriented has been challenged by many (e.g., Kilmartin, 1999; Seidler, 1989; Tiefer, 1995). As sex

is linked to masculine accomplishment, self-esteem, and identity, possibilities of sexual inadequacy become linked to masculine inadequacy.

Women have not been generally understood to be as ‘naturally’ sexual as men (Roberts, Kippax, Waldby, & Crawford, 1995). Traditionally, ‘female sexuality’ has been defined as passive, responsive to men’s sexual needs, and closely associated with reproduction (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999; Weeks, 1986). Jackson (1984) contended that female sexuality has been characterised as ‘both different and the same as male sexuality; on the one hand, less easily aroused, more emotional, and more diffuse, while, on the other hand, stemming from the same biological drive’ (p. 49). Jackson claimed that accounts of *difference* work to position female sexuality as complementing male sexuality and that accounts of *similarity* legitimate prevailing forms of male sexuality. Since ‘sexual liberation,’ the constructions of (female) (hetero)sexuality have been somewhat altered, as intimacy, agency, and mutual pleasure for both partners in sexual encounters has been emphasised (Jackson, 1984). What Hollway (1989) identified as a ‘permissive discourse’ around heterosex has become prevalent, as have notions of reciprocity within heterosex (Braun et al., 2003; Gilfoyle, Wilson, & Brown, 1992). Despite such shifts, notions of sexual difference between women and men remain.

Previous research on heterosexual relationships has indicated that beliefs and understandings about male and female sexuality impact women’s sexuality (Meadows, 1997). These understandings are seen to result from a range of messages that emanate from the ‘cultural and institutional contexts in which a person is located’ (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thompson, 1992, p. 3,) and from expectations of, and experiences of, pressures from men (Meadows, 1997). Thus it appears that ‘the cultural values and social practices of heterosexuality today still divert much of women’s agency, energy and identity toward meeting men’s “needs,”’ rather than their own (Holland, Ramazanoglu, & Thompson, 1996, p. 146; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thompson, 1998, see also, Fine 1988; Lees, 1993; Thompson, 1990).

As noted above, women’s magazines are a major source of (sexual) information for adolescent girls and (young) women. However, although there has been extensive feminist research on the representations of femininity and female sexuality within women’s magazines, analysis of information about men in women’s magazines has been scarce. We moved beyond a focus on what these magazines tell female readers about their own, and other women’s, sexuality to what the magazines impart regarding male sexuality. This focus on men not only fits within recent academic interest in men, masculinities, and male sexualities in general (e.g., Connell, 1995; Edley & Wetherell,

1995, 1997; Kimmel & Messner, 2001), but also with analysis about men and masculinity in media representations (e.g., Krassas, Blauwkamp, & Wesselink, 2003; Vigorito & Curry, 1998).

In the present study, we focused on the discursive constructions of male sexuality evident in *Cleo* and *Cosmo*. The focus on men is particularly relevant because, in a heteronormative world, male and female sexualities are constructed simultaneously. Therefore, although previous examinations of constructions of femininity/female sexuality in magazines have been useful, they are only partially complete, as female (hetero)sexuality is also constructed through the magazines’ accounts of male (hetero)sexuality. Our analysis of male heterosexuality necessarily involves an analysis of female heterosexuality as well. As women are the intended consumers of these accounts of male (and female) sexuality, we particularly considered the potential implications of such representations in terms of the production of (possible, sexual) identities, subjectivities, and practice for women, but also explored the potential impact these representations may have in terms of women’s expectations of male sexuality. Although we identified common and recurrent constructions of male, and female, sexuality within the magazines, and their likely implications, it is important to recognise that these accounts are potentially engaged in a variety of ways by different readers.

Materials and Methods

The Sample

The data came from six sequential issues of *Cleo* and *Cosmo* (January–June 2002). These two magazines are very similar in content and scope, and they target largely the same demographic (18–34 year old women, although they are read by girls as young as 14). *Cosmo* is the most widely read women’s lifestyle magazine globally (McCleneghan, 2003), and *Cleo* is an Australasian magazine very similar to *Cosmo*. New Zealand readers are offered the New Zealand edition of *Cleo* and the Australian edition of *Cosmo*. In New Zealand, each magazine has virtually identical national readership figures, but *Cleo* is marginally higher (ACNeilsen, 2005). Six sequential issues of each magazine were chosen, as we wished to focus on the constructions prevalent in a particular cultural moment, as opposed to identifying changes and trends that may have occurred over a longer period of time.

Procedure

Data were analysed using a thematic approach (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Singer & Hunter, 1999). The magazines were thoroughly read by the first author, and any part (e.g., article,

column, except advertisements) that contained content that made *any* reference to male sexuality was selected as data. Selection of data and coding was conducted by the first author, in consultation with the second author. Selection resulted in a large data set: 200 pages from *Cosmo* and 199 pages from *Cleo*. Data were coded into themes through a process of repeated reading, which resulted in the initial identification of a number of patterned representations of male sexuality. Initial themes were reworked and refined, in consultation with the second author, and in relation to the whole data set as the analysis progressed, and further sub-themes were coded and identified.

The thematic analysis was informed by feminist post-structuralist theories of language (e.g., Gavey, 1997; Weedon, 1997). Language is viewed not as merely ‘reflecting’ social practices, but rather as constitutive and a social relation in itself (Weedon, 1997). In this framework, language can be understood in terms of a loop: Language is productive and produces meanings, but it also gets its meanings from the social practices that it names. Thus texts are constitutive of the society in which they are produced, and discourses produce possibilities for identity constructions that can manifest in material practices: ‘Language and discourse constitute meaning, and hence, particular discursive resources enable and constrain people’s choices for how to be and act in the social world’ (Braun et al., 2003, p. 241). Feminist poststructuralist analysis of written text typically includes an ‘analysis of the socially constructed nature of human behaviour, deconstruction of the assumptions within language and the processes of producing subjectivities’ (Gavey, 1997, p.62).

Data were interrogated for the assumptions they rely on and reproduce and the possibilities they offer for subjectivity and practice for women (and men). We present the results of our analysis, grounded in a close-reading of the data, which identifies possible limitations for women’s sexual subjectivity. However, in line with our theoretical position, it is important to note that, as magazines are situated within a broader social, cultural, political, and historical context, there is room for diverse interpretation (Gough-Yates, 2003), and we do not claim ours as a final or only possible reading of the data. We include illustrative extracts discussed in relation to each theme. Where data are presented, the extracts will include information about: source (*Cleo* or *Cosmo*), month of publication, title of article, and sex of author: **F** (female) or **M** (male). When square brackets appear within the extracts (i.e., [...]), this indicates omission of unrelated text.

Results and Discussion

The magazines’ representations of sex and sexuality continued to be ‘relentlessly heterosexual’ (Jackson, 1996;

McLoughlin, 2000); however, the data were characterised by multiple, competing, and contradictory accounts of male and female sexuality. The depiction of *female* (hetero) sexuality was ostensibly an ‘empowered’ one, as there were representations of young women as sexually active and independent with the right to desire sex and experience sexual pleasure. In this sense, the magazines can be seen as sexually liberal and as offering an image of sexual agency for women. However, concurrent with this, women were overwhelmingly represented as wanting/needing men in their lives and ultimately seeking (monogamous) long-term *relationships* with men; this was often situated as the desired outcome from a new date/sexual encounter:

Does he have staying power? Single-girl tips to suss him out on the first date. He’s gorgeous-looking, funny and he seems so, so sweet. But how good are his long-term relationship prospects? (*Cosmo*, February, *Guy spy*, **F**).

Want to make your boy-meets-girl story an unforgettable one? Then it’s time to try a girl-meets-boy approach. Take the risk and you just might be rewarded with a great relationship (*Cleo*, June, *How to make the first move*, **M**).

Women were constantly depicted as ultimately looking for their ‘Mr Right’ (who was presumed to exist for all women):

We ended up going back to my flat and spent the most incredible night together. I really thought he was going to be “it”—The One (*Cosmo*, January, *You love him, he loves speed: Are drugs damaging your life together?*, **F**).

Kelly must realise that she won’t meet Mr Right out on the town (*Cosmo*, May, *Are you in a dating drought?*, **F**).

These extracts represent women as in pursuit of a loving, long-term, monogamous heterosexual relationship with ‘The One,’ an outcome implicitly framed as women’s ultimate desire. Within such accounts, men were implicitly located as the underlying source of women’s fulfilment, security, and happiness. The magazines rarely considered a woman’s life without a man. According to these magazines, a ‘Mr. Right’ exists for each woman to find, and happiness ultimately comes to those who find *and* ‘keep’ him. So, within *Cosmo* and *Cleo*, women were represented as inherently bound to a heterosexual imperative, where desire and success in the heterosexual world are closely associated with finding and keeping ‘Mr Right.’ Women were thus situated as *needing* men. Men were rarely represented as ‘needing’ women in the same manner, and their presumed full autonomy and independence was something women

implicitly still do not possess, nor should they desire it. This reliance on, and reiteration of, traditional notions of gender difference (i.e., independent man, dependant woman) was prevalent throughout the magazines in various ways.

The depiction of female sexuality is only part of the story a (female) reader may take from these magazines, as, given their heterosexual orientation, female sexuality always exists in relation to its ‘target’—male sexuality. Overall, the magazines could be described as being ‘obsessed’ with male sexuality; male sexuality was the topic of many articles and other items, but was also a central focus in accounts of female sexuality, which was frequently oriented toward producing men’s sexual pleasure. So although these magazines are ostensibly ‘women-centred,’ male sexuality was prioritised in a range of ways.

Men occupied contradictory positions in *Cosmo* and *Cleo*: They were the target of women’s desires, and thus the magazines were largely ‘pro men.’ However, simultaneously, men were depicted in more negative ways, as the source of much stress, anxiety, and even trauma for women. Another key positioning of men was as a voice of (experiential) authority (see Kitzinger, 1994) in the magazines. Here (ostensibly) ‘real’ men’s contributions and views implicitly worked to offer access to the ‘truth(s)’ of men’s experience and (sexual) preferences to a ‘naïve’ female readership (see Machin & Thornborrow, 2003). Men’s voices provided accounts of how women ideally should behave, dress, and engage in sexual practices. In line with previous research (Gadsden, 2000), male authors generally ‘helped women *understand* their male partners and provided ways in which women could *please* their heterosexual mates’ (p. 51, emphasis added).

For instance, women were instructed regularly on how to produce a sexual experience that was enjoyable for men; men’s voices provided ‘advice’ on how women should please them sexually:

Another technique that many males adore but are reluctant to express is having their partner maintain eye contact during oral sex (*Cleo*, May, *7 ways to get him up!*M).

Please look at me while you’re giving me a head job. There’s nothing like having a beautiful woman going down on you and holding your gaze while she does it (*Cleo*, March, *21 ways to make a naked man shiver!* M).

Such advice (by men) situates the female readership as simultaneously potentially unknowing and as needing to know about (the mysteries of) male sexuality. This ‘advice’ works to shape ideas about what ‘real’ men’s sexual preferences are and in what sexual activities (and how)

women should be engaged. In those extracts that portray men as ‘adoring’ eye contact during fellatio, the magazines not only encourage women to engage in this sexual activity (if they want to please their male partner), but to engage in it in a particular way. Wood (1994) has suggested that one of the dominant representations of women in the mass media is that they exist to satisfy men’s sexual fantasies, and Wood’s claim was supported by our data. In *Cleo* and *Cosmo*, women were encouraged to be as ‘sexual’ as possible, but primarily in ways that made them available to satisfy men’s purported (and reported) sexual fantasies and desires (which, from a constructionist perspective, are ‘produced’ and not ‘natural’). Although providing men with sexual pleasure may bring pleasure and power to women, ‘women are also [positioned as] naïve and vulnerable...relying on the reaction of men for their self-image and power’ (Machin & Thornborrow, 2003, p. 464). Therefore, the constant reiteration of ‘how to give men pleasure’ potentially promotes an insecure sexuality for women.

The magazines also commonly portrayed women’s ‘atypical’ sexual behaviour as particularly desired by men:

What’s the most important moment during sex? “When she starts talking dirty or takes the initiative and gets into a position that’s neither missionary nor her on top. It means she has an adventurous streak.”—Malcom, 31 (*Cleo*, May, *7 ways to get him up!*, M).

Such sexual activities were implicitly positioned as ‘unusual’: not what would generally be expected; found only in ‘adventurous’ women. Thus they work simultaneously to position women *in general* as not sexually adventurous, and men *as* adventurous and desiring (uncommon) sexually adventurous women. Women were persistently encouraged to cater to men’s sexual needs and desires in a relationship or sexual encounter and to become/embody *his* fantasy. Thus, in line with previous research on heterosexual relationships (e.g., Crawford, Kippax, & Waldby, 1994), the prevailing version of heterosexual relationships/sex represented in the magazines was male-orientated.

Within *Cosmo* and *Cleo*, women were (still) represented as judged and selected as sexual partners based on their appearance. Male voices also provided views on this:

On a first date: “A woman should wear something that makes me want to sleep with her, but not something that makes me think 1000 men probably have. It’s a fine line.” Steve, 27 (*Cosmo*, May, *What makes a great date?*M).

Here female sexuality, and femininity, was linked to physical appearance, as it often has been (Travis, Meginnis, & Bardari, 2000). Comments such as the one above subtly

set up criteria for ‘attractive’ and ‘appropriate’ femininity based on certain levels of apparent sexuality. It has been argued that ‘the conflation of physical appearance and sexuality is detrimental to women on individual, interpersonal, and systemic levels and that it ultimately sustains gender-based oppression’ (Travis et al., 2000, p. 237). This extract nicely demonstrates the continued existence of a ‘tightrope of femininity’ for women, which produces/polices women’s behaviour (see Lees, 1993, 1998). The following observation regarding women’s magazines directly applies to our analysis of *Cosmo* and *Cleo*:

If men can define women’s gender roles and sexuality in a woman’s magazine, women have not been successful in claiming a social space free from male dominance. In these magazines, males have the right and the privilege to define notions of femininity and confine female sexuality to the heterosexual couple. Male authors were allowed to exist as authority figures, reinforcing stereotypical gender ideologies. (Gadsden, 2000, p. 56)

Overall, there was a lack of diversity in the representations of sexual activities; ‘real’ heterosex was still constructed primarily as penetrative, ‘sexual pleasure’ achieved only through orgasm, and ‘mutual orgasm’ the ‘the holy grail of intercourse’ (*Cosmo*, May, *Help him to read your mind [and body] in bed*, F). Women were not only encouraged to embrace sexuality as identified above, but female sexuality itself was represented as centred or based on these notions. Jackson and Scott (2001) referred to this as a ‘linear rationalised process’ (p. 104) within heterosexual encounters; ‘A series of stages to be gone through before the final output: foreplay leading to coitus culminating in orgasm’ (Jackson & Scott, 1997, p. 560). Women’s sexual pleasure (orgasm) was situated as necessary based on reciprocity and the permissive discourse (Braun et al., 2003), but as difficult (if not impossible) to achieve, particularly via coitus. The magazines did not depict ‘oral sex’ or ‘masturbation’ for women as ways of achieving this orgasmic pleasure as legitimate as coitus. However, women have reported masturbation or oral sex ‘as more or at least as sexually pleasurable, in terms of orgasm, as intercourse’ (Gavey, McPhillips, & Braun, 1999, p.63, emphasis in original). The magazine’s prioritised (traditional) ‘masculine’ sexuality and male sexual desires, and perpetuated gendered constructions of heterosexuality and heterosex.

Men’s Needs for (Great) Sex

When you feel like having sex, just tell men. Most of us guys are raring to go anytime, anyplace, anywhere (*Cosmo*, May, *77 things to do to a naked man*, M).

Within the magazines, sex was represented as very important to men, as something that men are willing and able to engage in ‘anytime,’ something that men (always) want. In the extract above, the phrase ‘most of us guys’ positions a continual readiness for sex as common and normative for *men*, as ‘just the way guys are,’ and locates men within a ‘male sexual drive’ discourse (Hollway, 1989). In line with men’s reported strong sexual readiness, it was common for the penis to be represented as ‘having a mind of its own’ and as controlling men:

[B]eing male, I find that sometimes your groin can take over and it’s only after the deed is actually done that you regret sleeping with the particular girl’ (*Cosmo*, January, *We ask men answer: Is there ever a bad time for having sex?*M).

In that extract, the author depicted ‘genital control’ as a distinctive characteristic that is inherent in men. The responsibility for certain actions (later deemed ‘regrettable’) was represented as falling on the groin (penis), which, presumably, is gratification-focused and *needs* sex. In such accounts, the penis is constructed as ‘extrinsic to the self’ (Kilmartin, 1999, p. 180); this can function to represent male sexuality as not only needy/driven, but also as uncontrollable, which potentially shifts the responsibility of certain sexual actions (such as infidelity/cheating) away from the man. Potts (2001) has commented that this inside/outside distinction with regard to the penis works to constitute a ‘hegemonic masculine subjectivity’ where ‘men tend to distance themselves from the [sexual] behaviours of their bodies’ and thus ‘they may also exonerate themselves from responsibility in sexual matters’ (p. 154), including inappropriate, risky, or even coercive sexual practices.

These magazines also worked on, and reiterated, the underlying assumption that women desire (or should desire) men as sexual partners, boyfriends, and, eventually husbands: modern rendering of what Hollway (1989) referred to as the ‘have/hold’ discourse. As men’s sexuality was located in a ‘male sexual drive’ discourse, once in a relationship, (great) heterosex was represented as vital for a ‘healthy’ relationship and to ensure men’s fidelity (through sexual fulfilment). A distinction was made between good and great sex:

In the male world, bad sex is a contradiction [...] As long as men are concerned, there’s no such thing as an uneventful erotic experience. There is however a significant difference between good sex and *great* sex—the kind that is so carnally explosive that your relationship is irrevocably enhanced by it (*Cleo*, May, *7 ways to get him up!* p. 49, M).

The notion of the ‘male world’ constructs men as different from women and invokes an implicit contrast case, the ‘female world.’ ‘Bad sex’ was represented as inconceivable in ‘the male world,’ but implicitly not so in ‘the female world.’ Men are represented as sexual connoisseurs who can distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘great’ sex. ‘Great’ sex was represented as enhancing a relationship in ways that could not then be changed or reversed. This positions ‘great’ heterosexual as a goal to strive for, not only for its own erotic sake, but in an *instrumental* sense (Vanwesenbeeck, 1997) because it has the ‘function’ of ‘enhancing’ (or even instigating) a heterosexual relationship.

According to such accounts, the ability to provide ‘great’ sex to men is key in fulfilling both men’s sexual needs and women’s relational (as well as, perhaps, their sexual) desires.

If you want to feature in his mind 24-7, leave an impression where it counts [...]. Personality matters, but it is no secret that men love women who are not only good in bed, but who enjoy it too. And we know this because carnal cowgirls have boyfriends, lovers, and hubbies who keep coming back for more. All you need to do is leave him craving a repeat performance (*Cleo*, June, *Gothca: Secrets of girls who made it through the first six months*, p. 55, **F**).

Here, a memorable sexual performance was depicted as more important than personality in terms of retaining a man’s interest. Men were positioned as *loving* women who are ‘good’ in bed and who also enjoy sex. Being ‘good’ in bed is clearly framed around his sexual desires and pleasures; her enjoyment of sex is secondary. So being great at sex, or being the best sexual encounter he had ever had, was thus portrayed as the way to ‘keep your man’:

Want him to think you’re the best he’s ever had? Invent a sex trick and watch him go off [...]. If there is one absolute must-have when it comes to claiming great in-bed status, it’s a signature move—a completely original manoeuvre that’ll make him never want any other woman, ever, ever, again (*Cosmo*, January, *How other women blow his mind*, **F**).

According to such extracts, one way to keep ‘your man’ satisfied (and thus faithful) was to please him sexually by ‘inventing’ an original ‘sex trick’ or ‘signature move’ so that he has no excuse to ‘stray.’ This frames sexuality as ‘work’ for women, as a talent or ability to be developed. The idea of a signature move invokes a particularly mechanistic, non-interpersonal view of sexuality, where pleasure is understood as ‘generic,’ a signature move would ostensibly be pleasurable for any/all men, regardless of their individual sexual preferences. So, ‘great’ sex is not only removed from the particularities of any one interpersonal/relational context, but women are subtly set up for

failure, because, how many “unique” sexual moves could there possibly be?

The magazines portrayed men as liking sex (anytime), but women as having to work on sex and to compete with other women with whom he has had sex, as well as women with whom he might *potentially* have sex (or even just consider having sex with) in the future in order to be memorable and ensure his fidelity. This situation sets women up as competing with each other for men’s attention and (lasting) affection via their sexual technique, which reiterates the sociocultural importance placed on ‘the relationship’ to women’s subjectivity, and ‘sex’ to men’s subjectivity (e.g., see the widely criticised/discredited work of John Gray, 1992, 1995, which emphasises these supposed ‘differences,’ see Potts, 1998, for a critique).

The common reference to great sex as stopping men from cheating indicates another common theme in the magazines’ accounts that is linked strongly to a ‘male sexual drive’ discourse (Hollway, 1989)—that of all men are (potential) cheaters. This representation of men as actual or potential cheaters was prevalent:

Real men confess: the results are in and the stats don’t lie. 44% of men claim they wouldn’t cheat on their girlfriends, 90% of men who take a lie detector test in infidelity are found guilty, 90% of women who take the same test are found to have remained monogamous, 54% of men have cheated on their partners, 21% would forgive their partners one-night stand, compared to 16% of women (*Cosmo*, January, *Guy talk: Is there any man totally cheat-proof?*, **M**).

Here, the reality depicted was that 54% of men *have* cheated, whereas 44% *claim* they would not. The use of ‘claim’ works to undermine the veracity of such ‘claims,’ thus effectively suggesting that these men might also *really* be (potential) cheaters, they just would not admit to it. Cheating (and not admitting to it) was depicted as the way (most) men are, which works to construct men’s cheating as a normative concern for all heterosexual women. It also works implicitly to situate women in opposition to men—as normatively *not* cheaters; thus (cheating) men are considered to be a strange species to be explained and understood.

A ‘male sexual drive’ discourse was frequently evident in explanations (and justifications) for men’s ‘unfaithful’ behaviour. The main reasons provided for why men might cheat were: to end a relationship they wanted to leave; a high sex drive; and a lack of sexual satisfaction in their current relationship. The latter two drew extensively on a drive discourse. Framed within this, ‘opportunity’ was presented as a reason for cheating:

Another reason [...] is if it’s an opportunity he can’t refuse [...] if a sexy woman wants to sleep with a guy,

it seems to fly in the face of fate not to take that chance [...]. It's a brutal truth, but if sex is handed out on a plate with no strings attached, it's a rare boyfriend who will refuse it [...]. Men are only immune from temptation when they are genuinely and utterly in love (*Cosmo*, January, *Guy talk: Is there any man truly cheat-proof*, **M**).

Such accounts invoked a 'male sexual drive' discourse through reference to a man who could/would not refuse an opportunity for 'no strings attached' sex. Phrases like 'no strings attached' or 'bind-free, mind-free bonk' (*Cleo*, February, *Sex by numbers: What can numerology reveal about your sexual personality*, **F**) framed this type of sex as 'free sex' in opposition to other kinds of (relationship) sex with conditions or obligations involved (which, on a 'purely' sexual level, were subtly positioned as less appealing to men). Representations of men's supposed constant sexual readiness and their capacity to be unfaithful can potentially function to produce feelings of insecurity in a woman regarding the (constant) potential infidelity of her male partner.

Men were portrayed as only 'immune' from such 'temptation' when they were 'genuinely and utterly in love.' In the extract above 'love' was framed as a (rare) condition, incompatible with cheating and an assurance against it. This old-fashioned rhetoric positions love as something that 'cures all cheating ills.' However, men were also represented as having the capacity to be unfaithful in (presumably loving) long-term relationships, as a lack of sexual satisfaction in their current relationship is another common explanation offered for men's cheating:

"Men only go out looking for sex if they're missing out on something at home" says Clare... (*Cleo*, February, *Women who have been there and done that...tell all!*, **F**).

Here, men's cheating behaviour was portrayed as a response to inadequate 'sexual upkeep' by his female partner. This places sexual fulfilment for *men* as an important part of heterosexual relationships and as a necessary way to keep men from 'straying' (unless, or even if, they are genuinely and utterly in love).

It has been suggested that the construction of men as a homogenous group is achieved mainly by the invocation of its supposed 'natural opposite'—women (Ballaster et al., 1991). So, what about women's infidelity? Women were rarely represented as cheaters, but when women's infidelity was addressed, it was done in much more severe ways, within more elaborate and negative scenarios, and was more condemnable, and less forgivable, than men's cheating behaviour. Women were depicted as more morally culpable for cheating, without the 'excuse' of a sexual

drive. Responsibility for the cheating, in such accounts, lay with the woman, rather than being caused by (sexual or relational) shortcomings on the part of the man on whom she had cheated. Inadequate sexual upkeep by men was never an explanation for women's cheating. Another gender difference was evident in the construction of women as *victims* of their male partner's cheating, but men as seekers of *revenge* for being cheated on by a female partner. Thus the positions conjured up here for women and men were quite different.

These kinds of dichotomous constructions can work to naturalise and normalise perceived behaviour differences between men and women. The gendering of cheating behaviour was part of a broader general construction of men as inherently different from women within the magazines (e.g., in communication style, skills/abilities, and personal characteristics). This construction is reminiscent of the discursive strategies deployed in pop psychology/self-help books by authors such as John Gray (1992, 1995) (i.e., *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* and *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom: A Guide to Lasting Romance and Passion*) and A. Pease and B. Pease (2001, 2004) (i.e., *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps: How We're Different and What to Do About It* and *Why Men Don't Have a Clue and Women Always Need More Shoes: The Ultimate Guide to The Opposite Sex*), to explain and account for men's and women's behaviour. This is not surprising, as both magazines often drew on books such as these (with the authors positioned as 'experts') to provide advice and insights into the mysterious workings of the 'opposite sex.' Here, differences are seen as 'natural,' sometimes complementary, sometimes problematic, but largely as 'the way things are.'

The persistent depictions of these 'natural' gender(ed) differences is an important aspect of the magazines to highlight, as they engage in effectively constructing, perpetuating, and naturalising gendered identities through polarisation and difference (Hollway, 1989). The representations of these supposed difference as 'normal' can camouflage and naturalise mechanisms that may disempower and oppress women by suggesting that gender differences (that frame the nature of femininity/masculinity in ways that are congruent with dominant gender ideology) are 'natural,' unquestionable, and thus potentially 'unchangeable.' Differences are to be accepted, or worked around, rather than resisted or challenged.

In *Cosmo* and *Cleo*, men were constructed as (potentially and actually) desiring sex all the time and as being particularly susceptible to the effects of great sex. Giving great sex was represented in instrumental terms for women, as a way to gain a (desired) relationship and to ensure men's fidelity. The focus on men as potential cheaters also heightens the need for women to develop sexual skills that

men (supposedly) desire to keep them from ‘straying.’ The extent to which cheating was framed as always ‘wrong’ fits within the unquestioned promotion of *monogamous* heterosexual relationships as central to women’s identity and well-being.

Pleasure, Performance, and the ‘Male Ego’

Pleasure and performance were represented as intersecting (and sometimes competing) components of male heterosexuality. Pleasuring a woman sexually was commonly associated with producing a woman’s orgasm, and as indicative of men’s sexual competence and notions of a ‘male ego.’ Orgasm was extensively discussed and depicted as the goal of heterosex for both women and men, and there was an emphasis on it being the main part of ‘pleasure’ during sex. This ‘orgasmic imperative’ (see Potts, 2000) works to re-affirm a traditional model of ‘masculine’ sexuality (as discussed earlier) as the most important one, where sex equals penetration, and coitus culminates in men’s (and sometimes women’s) orgasm. This association is ‘the product of culturally ordered meanings embedded in particular social practices,’ where the ‘meanings of orgasm derive from social, not biological, contexts’ (Jackson & Scott, 2001, p. 105). *Cleo* and *Cosmo* engaged in a gendering of orgasm: men’s orgasm was constructed as unproblematic and automatic—‘realistically a man could come in 2 min if he really wanted to’ (*Cleo*, February, *What men want*, **M**)—whereas women’s orgasm was constructed as complicated and difficult to ‘achieve’—‘every woman seems to have her own cryptic orgasmic code [...] it could literally take me years to get it right’ (*Cosmo*, May, *What makes a great date?*, **M**).

The (difficult) ‘production’ of women’s pleasure by men was closely related to notions of a ‘male ego.’ A male ego was commonly invoked (in relation to heterosex and beyond) to explain men’s ‘tendencies’ or to shed light on their sexual behaviour. Its existence was never questioned. Rather, it was represented as ‘just the way men are.’ Men were again constructed as a homogenous group, with this a general feature:

Guys are much more concerned about their performance in bed than they like to admit...it’s because the male ego is so fragile. He’s terrified that someone else may have satisfied you more[...]. Women are used to soothing the male ego: reassuring him that he is the best we’ve ever had (*Cleo*, March: *Was sex with his ex better?***F**).

This male ego was used to represent men as fragile when it comes to suggested or actual inadequacy regarding their sexual performance. In this extract, the supposed fragility of the male ego was utilised to account for men’s insecurity

about performance. That such information was reiterated through the magazines suggests it as both ‘newsworthy’ for women and as normative for men, thus locating it as a potential issue for all heterosexual women. Women’s role was one of reassurance and support, a role that can be associated with traditional feminine passivity within heterosex (Gavey & McPhillips, 1999). This can also be located within an ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 1983) framework: Women recognise their male sexual partner may be experiencing potential feelings of inadequacy, and thus they seek to relieve this uncertainty by reassuring him that he matches a heterosexual ‘sexual ideal’ and that he is sexually adequate (or better). The focus was thus shifted from woman’s participation or her own pleasure to her worry about the male ego. The idea of a fragile male ego and sexual sensitivity were framed as significant for men (and, by implication, for women):

Despite the bluff and bravado, men are sensitive creatures. This becomes problematic in that most guys also have the innate belief that they are better-than-average lovers—the rest of us assume we’re merely spectacular. If you want to watch a man dissolve before your eyes, tell him his sexual technique could do with some work. Ladies and gentleman—instant impotence (*Cleo*, January: *Good relationship, average sex?***M**).

In that extract, the use of extreme language (e.g., dissolve) constructs the issue as a serious one and the possible act of telling a man his technique may require some work as severe. It further suggests that women should not bring up men’s potential sexual shortcomings directly because no one would want to make a man ‘dissolve.’ Kilmartin (1999) has suggested that (hetero)sex ‘has been a major way for men to demonstrate their masculinity’ (p. 185), and thus feelings of sexual inadequacy can place that masculinity in jeopardy. With sexual performance framed as central to both the male ego and masculinity, the act of commenting on either is positioned as one with serious implications. It also paradoxically positions women as ‘powerful’ and as having the ability to cause ‘sexual anxiety’ by pointing out men’s sexual inadequacies. However, the magazines discouraged this on many levels and advocated ‘subtlety’ and ‘tact’ when it came to any sexual communication.

These ideas rely on, and reproduce, a stereotypically gendered understanding of what it means to be male and female (in general, and in heterosexual encounters):

A guy’s biggest fear is that if he doesn’t know exactly how and when to push every erogenous button on your body, you’ll think he’s some kind of inexperienced geek. “Sometimes with a women, I suspect that

what I'm doing is wrong, but asking her for guidance is like putting my manhood on the chopping block," admits Robert, 25 (*Cosmo*, February, *Guy talk*. **M**).

In the last line, Robert reported that asking a woman for guidance in a sexual encounter (even when he thinks he may be 'doing something wrong') is too risky. For him to admit to a woman during sex that he thinks he may need guidance was represented as problematic for him, arguably because it undermines his expertise and the notion of 'being in control' of the (sexual) situation. Again, the use of extreme language ('a guy's *biggest* fear') positions not knowing exactly how to please a woman sexually as a very serious concern of men. Male sexuality was framed as a trajectory, in which past experience (ideally) leads to the acquisition of sexual skills and knowledge. Inexperience was constructed in negative terms, and 'experience' was framed as (ideally) synonymous with women's sexual pleasure. These accounts can work together to reproduce inexperience as always a potential 'identity' risk for men, and thus any suggestion of men's 'ineptitude' and 'inexperience' as something women should avoid. Women, in that extract, were positioned as *not* telling men what they like sexually, as being the (silent) recipient of men's sexual technique, whether 'good' or 'bad.'

As others have noted, the emphasis on men's 'sexual technique' leaves no room for the man to be anything but 'expert' (Crawford et al., 1994). It was suggested that men should *know* what to do in a sexual encounter; they should be a 'sexpert' (Potts, 1998), and that generic sexual experience was, on the whole, good for improving men's sexual skills. Although pleasuring a woman was portrayed as an important part of male sexuality and masculinity, this pleasure may be as much, or more, about the man's ability to *produce* that pleasure (e.g., see Gilfoyle et al., 1992), as about the women's pleasure per se. For example, Seidler (1989) has argued that, even though the focus may have shifted to making sure a female partner experiences 'pleasure' during (hetero)sex, 'this still reflects back on the male ego' (p. 39). So, women's sexual pleasure can serve a positive identity function for men who have sex with women. This point of critique is perhaps a complex one. We are not suggesting that women experiencing sexual pleasure should serve *no* positive identity functions for men. However, what is notable is the gendering of sexual experience in the magazines, such that women's production of men's pleasure was typically framed in *relationship* terms, whereas men's production of women's pleasure was framed in individualistic masculine *identity* terms.

Although men were repeatedly represented as 'taking pleasure in giving pleasure,' which appears to situate heterosexual within a reciprocity discourse (Braun et al.,

2003), it was the *appearance* of women's sexual pleasure that was depicted as reassuring men about their sexual technique:

Guys love screamers—they make them feel less insecure about their technique. They think, "The louder she yells, the better lover I must be. I'm obviously doing something right to get her so worked up" [...] they're proud of their ability to turn up your volume' (*Cosmo*, March, *Pump up the volume*. **M**).

Men were represented as feeling '*less* insecure' (but still insecure) about their sexual technique when women provided audible signs of pleasure during sex. As women's orgasm does not have clear visible signs (in contrast to ejaculation, which is typically taken as an indication of men's orgasm), audible signs of pleasure (e.g., moaning, screaming) are taken to be key indicators of women's sexual pleasure (Roberts et al., 1995). Roberts et al. (1995) argued that 'the demand for noise indicates...that heterosexuality becomes an economy in which the woman's orgasm is exchanged for the man's work' (p. 528).

However, as this auditory indication is not necessarily based on any 'real' pleasure on the part of the women, the sceptre of faking pleasure is always possible. Faking pleasure or pretending orgasm was frequently addressed in the magazines:

STIFLE THESE SECRETS [...] The time you faked it: We know, we know, every woman says she's pretended to orgasm at least once, and no man thinks that it was with him. We prefer to keep it that way and retain the fantasy that we're super-studs in bed, thanks very much (*Cosmo*, February, *New sex: The surprising things he notices*, **M**).

Faking orgasm was framed as something men did not want to know about. So, although genuine female pleasure was desired, the appearance of orgasm also assured men of their sexual technique. One possible effect of this could be to lead women to fake pleasure in order to satisfy their sexual partner's ego and to enhance men's feelings of sexual competency (see Roberts et al., 1995).

It is important also to consider the ideas and assumptions about 'sexual communication' that operated in many of these accounts. In the early extracts in this section, for example, sex was implicitly, ideally constructed as essentially non-communicative, in that it should just happen, yet produce pleasure for both without any communication necessary as to such things as sexual technique, preferences, and so on. Accounts of a male ego can be seen to work against any discussion of sexual pleasure and desires related to technique. However, the magazines also simulta-

neously advocated sexual communication as *key* in producing great (hetero)sex:

You may have to gently guide him to your erogenous parts [...]. We've said it a thousand times: communication is the basis of any good sex life (*Cleo*, April, *What sizzles and what fizzles about sex?* F).

Here, 'gentle' rather than explicit guidance was encouraged to ensure women's sexual pleasure. Women who desired change in a man's sexual technique were typically encouraged to communicate it with caution:

Teach him the right technique [...] To work on his technique without bruising his manhood say you saw a cool new move in *Cosmo* (*Cosmo*, January, *Did you, um, come? Cosmo's girl guide to getting there.* F).

Here, again, the assumption of a fragile male ego informed the advice given. Across the data, the existence of a male ego was not questioned, nor was it depicted as changeable. Instead, accounts focused on how women should work *around* the male ego and/or how they should work with it. The male ego was not represented as desirable or ideal; it was depicted as just the way things are, a male foible that (heterosexual) women have to live with. Therefore, it was constructed as a reality to be lived with and dealt with by women, rather than by men. One potential impact of this is that although women were encouraged to be (sexually) confident, they were also encouraged not to speak their minds directly and to take a subtle approach in relation to sexual (performance) communication. For instance, there was some advice on how to get a male partner to 'sexually please you' (mainly in *Cosmo*) if you were not sexually satisfied in a relationship. However, these were often laden with instruction on how to do so subtly, without 'bruising his manhood' (e.g., *Private[s] tutor: Teach him how to give you grade-A orgasms every time*, *Cosmo*, March, F; *Help him to read your mind [and body] in bed*, *Cosmo*, May, F). The representation of male sexuality as sensitive to, inherently linked to, and influenced by, a fragile male ego works to position men's feelings of competence as crucial and as a cause for concern in sexual encounters. We argue that through such accounts, these magazines construct of the male ego as something that's ontologically real, potentially limiting women's (and men's) sexual and relational possibilities.

Men's and women's pleasure and performance and the male ego were thus complexly intertwined in the magazines' representation of male (and female) sexuality. These representations framed contemporary men's (hetero)sexuality as centred on performance, his pleasure, and the production of women's pleasure (i.e., her orgasm). This construction worked to (re)produce a potentially 'fragile' subjectivity for/in men that women readers were encour-

aged to take account of. Although these magazines are ostensibly concerned with women and women's pleasure, and have the capacity to be critical of men, they did not question (ostensibly) problematic behaviour, such as 'men's cheating,' or supposed masculine characteristics, such as the 'male ego.' Instead, women were instructed on how they can work around these (potentially) undesirable, yet unchanging (or unchangeable) masculine ways. Furthermore, the magazines rarely discussed other forms of sexual pleasure that did not involve orgasm. Even with such a focus on orgasm, they did not discuss oral sex for women nearly as often as penetrative sex, as a (potentially 'easier') way to achieve the sought after (women's) orgasm. Not only did the magazines perpetuate a traditional 'masculine' model of sexuality, they uncritically reproduced a wide array of gendered assumptions regarding men and women, relationships, and, indeed, heterosex.

Implications for Female Sexuality, Gender, and Gender Relations

The mass media contribute to the construction of normative (and disruptive) gender roles and sexuality (Gadsden, 2000). Our analysis has shown that earlier feminist critiques of women's magazines (e.g., Machin & Thornborrow, 2003; Peirce, 1997) are equally applicable to more contemporary issues of *Cleo* and *Cosmo*. Although the magazines advocate sexual agency and individual autonomy for women, this could more accurately be identified as *pseudo* liberation and sexual empowerment, particularly when one considers representations of male sexuality in conjunction with representations of female sexuality.

Cleo and *Cosmo* reaffirmed the notion of sexual and general gender difference by constructing male sexuality and female sexuality and women's and men's relationship desires as inherently *different* (despite some overlaps). Male sexuality was framed as purely sexual, with relationships as almost foisted upon men, whereas women were framed as ultimately desiring relationships (as much as, if not more than, just sex). As noted, these constructions mirror the discourses often deployed in pop psychology/self-help books (i.e., Gray, 1992, 1995; A. Pease & B. Pease, 2001, 2004). There, as in much of our data, men and women are positioned as fundamentally and 'naturally' different, as inhabiting different worlds, having different subjectivities, and different needs/desires (e.g., see Potts, 1998). Men need *sex*, and women, although now 'sexual,' still need/want *relationships* with men.

It is worth noting that representations of female sexuality were not as limited as they have been in the past: Women were offered some form of sexual agency. The magazines engaged in the marketing of 'liberated' heterosexuality, where men are objects of *desire* for women. However,

whereas women do not/should not *need* men per se, they should nonetheless *want* a man (imperfect as men are) and want to have a monogamous relationship with him. Women, therefore, remain embedded within a heterosexist imperative, where they should take part in the institution of heterosexuality. Our analysis supports previous research that, although women's magazines may 'recognise women as sexual,' they have not 'abandoned the view that women are primarily sex objects, whose desire is best fulfilled by remaking themselves into commodities that are sexually available to men and designed to attract [and keep] men' (Krassas et al., 2001, p. 768). These magazines, then, can be seen as part of a 'cultural apparatus that purports to assist women to be heterosexually attractive, to be coy, alluring, "sexy," and flirtatious, in order to "find true love" and to "catch a man," and then to maintain his interest' (Overall, 1999, p. 298) through great sex.

These constructions offer competing and contradictory possibilities for male sexuality and female sexuality. Masculinity has been privileged within conventional heterosexuality (e.g., Holland et al., 1998; Philaretou & Allen, 2001), and our analysis supports an ongoing overall privileging of male sexuality in *women's* magazines. In *Cleo* and *Cosmo* men's sexual needs/desires were prioritised. It was largely women, rather than men, who were expected to change (or to mischievously 'guide' men to change their supposedly undesired behaviours) to 'make things work' in a relationship. Women were informed of various things they must do to attract (and keep) men, as well as things they must avoid. We argue that this subtly places women in a precarious position as the 'needy' ones in heterosexual relations. Women are positioned as having sex to offer men, whereas men are positioned as having it all (i.e., sex *and* a relationship) to offer women. Men appeared to have relationships almost beside themselves and their better judgement, whereas a relationship was situated as the ultimate purpose of women's existence.

So, although *Cleo* and *Cosmo* might suggest equality, their accounts belie this argument and suggest an inequality where men have the 'real' power: to go away (i.e., leave a relationship); not to 'have' that particular woman; not to be 'The One.' So in very subtle ways, these highly gendered messages were reproduced, with the potential to be taken-up by women who read the magazines. Our analysis supports Starr's (1999, as cited in Gauntlett, 2002, p. 190) observation that 'for the most part...women's magazines are pushing the same message they were half a century ago: women's existence revolves around landing the right guy' although, as Gauntlett (2002) adds, 'today's technique is great sex rather than great cooking' (p. 190). Although the magazines' content is packaged under the 'liberated woman motif,' they are just pushing another version of the

'snagging and keeping a guy' theme (Starr, 1999, as cited in Gauntlett, 2002, p. 190).

It is important to note that the content of these magazines does not emerge in a social, discursive, or ideological vacuum. Instead, it arises out of, and reflects, contemporary discourses of gender, gender relations, and sexuality. Moreover, although we have not focused on this aspect, it is important also to note that magazine content does not exist independently of commercial interests (Stevens, Maclaran, & Brown, 2003). It has long been argued that women's magazines are mainly a means for advertising and selling products that claim to 'cure' women's feelings of inferiority and inadequacy (e.g., Lindner, 2004). Indeed the content of women's magazines is designed to sell the magazines, but the magazines themselves depend on advertising (rather than their cover prices) for their revenue (Wolf, 1991), and they aim to provide desirable advertising space.

So what might be the outcome of the representations these magazines contain? Although not targeted at them, it is our contention that heterosexual men, as a group and individually, potentially gain from the ways women's magazines represent male *and* female sexuality, as women are encouraged to partake in sexual activities that men (supposedly) desire. However, men's sexual subjectivity was also positioned precariously through these dominant constructions, and women's sexuality was implicitly framed as dependent on men's sexuality and sexual competence. Furthermore, women were not constructed as 'inherently' sexual in the way that men were. Rather, female sexuality was (implicitly) constructed as 'catching up' to (an ever present and pre-existent) male sexuality, which ostensibly constitutes 'real' sexuality. This construction reinforces the notion that sex and sexuality remain, to some extent, largely men's domains (Jackson, 1984). In various ways, then, the magazines ultimately worked to reinforce traditional gendered roles: men as sexual; women as relational.

Through destabilising the unquestioned status of the heterosexist imperative, the prioritisation of a traditional 'masculine' model of sexuality, and representations of 'natural' gender(ed) differences within media representation, we hope to encourage others to question its taken-for-granted nature. We suggest that these magazine's ought to offer an increased focus on more diverse forms of sexualities and pleasures, with a recognition and emphasis on 'women-centred' pleasures and desires, if heterosexuality really is to change to a 'real' egalitarian sexuality. From a constructionist perspective, media such as *Cleo* and *Cosmo* do not represent the *reality* of women's and men's sexual desires, they produce the possibilities, and indeed the 'realities,' of women's (and men's) desires and fantasies, and potentialities for action alongside these. However, as we noted in our introduction, the ways in

which such representations are taken up are also important for understanding the ongoing construction of male and female (hetero)sexuality. Therefore, future researchers in this area may seek to examine how such texts and themes are taken up and engaged in by heterosexual female and male readers and whether/how they are resisted, challenged, or accepted by readers.

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