Put Those Dirty Rumours to Bed: A Discourse Analysis of Masculinity and Femininity in *Maxim* Magazine

by

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B.A., McGill University, 2004

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FÜLFEILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Society, Culture and Politics of Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

October 2007

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ABSTRACT

Whereas a great deal of attention has been paid to how femininity is constructed in magazines read by teen girls, little research has focused on how femininity and masculinity are constructed in magazines read by teen boys. Since in North America there is not a general interest magazine marketed specifically to teen boys, if teen boys are interested in reading articles that address topics such as relationships, romance, and sex, they must choose from one of the general interest magazines marketed to men. Using poststructuralism and critical discourse analysis, I analyse discourses of masculinity and femininity in the advice columns of Maxim magazine, the most popular men’s general interest magazine among teen boys in the United States.

My analysis documents that femininity and masculinity are predominantly associated with being sexually active. However, femininity is also associated with being faceless, without identity, and having little knowledge of one’s own body. Conversely, masculinity is associated with having a natural intuition regarding a woman’s body and sexual desires, a natural predisposition to objectifying women and engaging in pornography, and having little concern for practicing safe sex. Additionally, I argue that there is a great deal of irony in Maxim which relies on subtly promoting entrenched stereotypes of men and women which may or may not be taken seriously by teen boy readers. I conclude that girl zines attest to the use of critical media education as an avenue through which girls and boys can explore alternate modes of masculinity and femininity and argue that there is a need to involve boys in further research that focuses on representations of masculinity and femininity in popular media texts.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Michelle Stack for patiently guiding me through the thesis-writing process, and my committee members Dr. Dawn Currie and Dr. Deirdre Kelly for their challenging and thoughtful feedback. I am also very appreciative of the support of my parents Diana and Ed without whom the completion of this degree would have been much more difficult, and I am grateful for my brothers Bryan and Jacob without whom this topic may not have been brought to my attention and been pursued with such passion. Lastly I thank Aaron for his steadfast patience and love and for encouraging me to persevere and keep perspective during challenging moments.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It has been estimated that the American magazine industry has a shared teen readership of over 25 million. Well known publications such as *Teen People*, *CosmoGirl*, and *Teen Vogue* and the lesser known *MH-18* all emerged between 1998 and 2000. According to *Advertising Age* magazine’s 2006 report of the top 300 magazines in the U.S., there was a 5.2% growth in gross revenue between 2004 and 2005 (Morrison, 2006). While researchers have paid much attention to magazines read by and marketed to teen girls over the last two decades, there has been little research inquiry focused on magazines that teen boys read.

Research involving magazines read by teen boys may have been largely ignored because while investigators have an array of general interest teen girl magazines to choose from, there is not a single general interest magazine marketed specifically to teen boys in North America. Since a large quantity of content within general interest magazines focuses on how to behave within the parameters of heterosexual relationships, one explanation for the lack of such a magazine for teen boys is that there is a “wider cultural assumption that the management of sexual behaviour remains the primary responsibility of women” (Tinknell, Chambers, Van Loon, & Hudson, 2003, p. 48). Yet one is mistaken in assuming that teen boys lack an interest in magazines. Mediamark Research Inc. reported that in 2006 *Game Informer*, *Official U.S. Play Station*, and *Sports Illustrated* each had teen boy readerships over two million. However, if teen boys want to read a magazine with articles that address topics such as relationships, romance, and sex, they must choose one of the popular men’s general interest magazines such as *FHM* (*For Him Magazine*), *Loaded* or *Maxim* (Tinknell et al., 2003).
Purpose Of The Study

Within poststructuralist as well as other sociological theories, masculinity and femininity are thought of as constructed, rather than essential, categories. The meanings attributed to masculinity and femininity vary culturally and historically. Poststructuralism understands that there are different ways of talking about and understanding masculinity and femininity, and these different ways and understandings are given the term “discourse.” Different discourses of masculinity and femininity exist and these discourses are in competition with one another. Many discourses are at play in the textual and pictorial content of a magazine, and a reader is able to negotiate his or her discursive position in relation to the multiple forms of discourses that are available (Davies, 1989, p. 4). Despite growing readership and audience statistics, little is known about the discourses of masculinity and femininity in the general interest magazines that teen boys read. The purpose of my research is to examine discourses of masculinity and femininity in the advice columns of Maxim magazine.

Motivation/Location

My interest in this topic stems from my academic training in cultural studies. It was in this arena that I was first introduced to critically analyzing popular culture texts and the theory that language enables us to construct many different meanings out of one signifier.1 Through my more recent training in Educational Studies I have felt challenged to seek some avenue through which critical discussions regarding popular culture could

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1 Signifier is a term that was introduced by Saussure (1857-1913) in which a sign is composed of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The relationship between the two is arbitrary. A heart is a signifier and a signified could be love. More than one meaning can be attributed to a signifier. For example, the signifier ‘woman’ can signify a multitude of meanings.
be facilitated with youth. My decision to analyze both masculine and feminine discourses, and not just one of the two, is twofold. First, I am convinced that discourses of masculinity and femininity are intricately tied to one another because the language that is making possible one world for one is simultaneously making possible or limiting the construction of one world for the other. Second, because I am hopeful that one day my findings will assist me in engaging in discussions with youth about the different discourses in popular media, I felt it important that my research account for both masculine and feminine discourses. The possibility of constructing new masculine discourses cannot lie entirely with boys, nor can the possibility of constructing new feminine discourses lie entirely with girls. I hope that perhaps this research will illustrate the further conversations and questions that need to be asked regarding how to approach critical analysis in a way that speaks to the necessity of discussing the consequences of particular discourses while simultaneously not condemning the pleasure that youth and adults experience from the popular culture artifacts in which such discourses are located.

Through analyzing the current discourses of masculinity and femininity in *Maxim* magazine, the most widely read men’s general interest magazine among teen boys, I hope to identify and problematize the “fixed truths” about men and women in the sections of *Maxim* that feature advice regarding relationships, romance and sex to males. Dominant discourses are often disguised as common sense knowledge, which is why they continue to circulate and strengthen unequal power relations in society. It is not only until one has examined the competing discourses of masculinity and femininity that are present in this particular magazine material that one can suggest how to go about articulating alternate modes of femininity and masculinity.
Research Question and Methodology

I have included in the appendices a table from Mediamark Research Inc. illustrating readership numbers for popular teen magazines in 2006 in the U.S. This report defines “teen” as one between the ages of 12 and 17. The magazines with the largest teen male readerships are at the top of the table while the magazines with the lower teen male readerships are towards the bottom of the table. Maxim magazine is reported to have a teen male readership of 599,000 (Mediamark Research Inc., 2006). I selected Maxim to be my source of data because, though it is not the most widely read magazine by teen males, it is the most widely read magazine that features advice regarding relationships, romance, and sex to males. I chose the advice columns of Maxim as my focus because they are a regular feature of Maxim and they consistently provide advice regarding relationships with women and, therefore, contain discourses of femininity.

My analysis includes six issues of Maxim magazine: December 2006, January 2007, February 2007, April 2007, May 2007 and June 2007. I could not include March 2007 because it had gone missing from the Vancouver Public Library. There were two advice sections in each issue. The first advice section, titled “The Answers” averages about four pages and is composed of questions that readers have written in and the magazine’s response to them, a small question and answer column titled “Dr. Maxim,” and often the definitions to three words that the magazine has invented. The second

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2 After the December 2006 issue the title “The Eye” was replaced with the title “The Answers.” As this is the new title Maxim uses for the first advice section I will also adopt this term when referring to the first advice section for the sake of simplicity.
advice section is made up of one page devoted to sex advice written from the perspective of sex expert Sari Locker.

Since I am interested in how masculinity and femininity are represented in the magazine in relation to one another, I limited my analysis to content that in some way referred to both masculinity and femininity, or in this case, both men and women. For example, the question “How do I fix a wound if I’m camping and s.o.l.?” (“The Answers,” 2007, January, p. 16) was excluded from my analysis because it made no mention of women or femininity whereas the question “Are girls with tats freakier in bed?” (p. 17) was included because this question refers to sexual relations between men and women and therefore contains elements of both masculinity and femininity. Likewise, photos accompanying questions that made reference to both masculinity and femininity were included whereas photos that accompanied questions regarding only masculinity (there were never questions that referred to only femininity and not masculinity) such as “Did Johnny Cash serve time in prison?” (“The Eye,” 2006, December, p. 18) were excluded from the analysis.

My theoretical framework draws from poststructuralism. Poststructuralism is helpful to my research because of the way that it understands the concept of discourse. As Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) explain, one cannot just match up theory and methodology, instead the two must be considered as intertwined. I use Weedon’s (1987/1997) book Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory to inform my understanding of poststructuralism in regard to concepts such as subjectivity, language, and discourse. In chapter two I draw from both Weedon (19987/1997) and Davies (1989;
1993) as I expand on the significance of this theory to my research and how it informs my research question.

Weedon (1987/1997) focuses on a specific type of poststructuralism that she calls "feminist poststructuralism." Since feminist poststructuralism emphasizes how gender relates to more general poststructuralism concepts of power and discourse, Weedon (1987/1997) believes that this type of poststructuralism best meets feminist needs. She makes the distinction between subjectivity as understood by humanists and subjectivity as understood by poststructuralists. Humanism, Weedon (1987/1997) says, "implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject" (p. 21). Poststructuralism, on the other hand, understands the subject to be "a site of disunity and conflict" (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 21). Within poststructuralism, one's subjectivity is understood as constructed; it is socially produced rather than genetically determined. Along with subjectivity, language is a very important element to poststructuralism because, according to poststructuralism, rather than reflecting a pre-existing reality language actually constitutes one's social reality. Weedon (1987/1997) explains that, for feminist poststructuralism, language both constitutes us as thinking subjects and enables us to transform, and give meaning to, the world. Our subjectivity is constantly being "reconstituted in discourse every time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 32).

I will draw from Henry and Tator (2002), and Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), in my explanation of critical discourse analysis and how this particular methodology will be undertaken in reference to my research. I find Henry and Tator's (2002) definition of critical discourse quite helpful. They define CDA (critical discourse analysis) as, "a type of research that mainly studies how social power, dominance, and inequality are
produced, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political arenas of society" (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 72). The focus of CDA, according to Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), "is accordingly both the discursive practices which construct representations of the world, social subjects and social relations, including power relations, and the role that these discursive practices play in furthering the interests of particular social groups" (p.63).

What is of little interest to me, as one engaging in poststructuralism, is whether I consider the advice that I analyse to be true or false. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) draw from Foucault as they explain, in reference to CDA, “instead of asking whether something is true or false, one should analyse the discursive processes through which discourses are constructed in ways that give the impression that they represent true or false pictures of reality” (p. 14). The researcher must be of the impression that “reality can never be reached outside discourses and so it is discourse itself that has become the object of analysis” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 21). As the researcher in this investigation, I do however have an obligation as a discourse analyst to examine taken-for-granted assumptions and then to acknowledge possible social, political, and economical consequences of such assumptions. Fiske (1996) illustrates how power and discourse are connected when he explains that, “to make sense of the world is to exert power over it, and to circulate that sense socially is to exert power over those who use that sense as a way of coping with their daily lives” (p. 3). So it is not so much a question of what is true and what is false but how taken-for-granted truths or common sense knowledge function as a social practice. For example, if a text is found to discursively position women as less intelligent as men, the investigator must take into
account the social, political, and economical consequences of the particular discourse (Fairclough, 1995b).

Discourse

Since Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) largely base their application of CDA on Fairclough’s approach, I will take the time here to discuss Fairclough’s understanding of CDA as presented in his book *Media Discourse* (1995b). Fairclough (1995b) explains that, “discourse analysis is concerned with practices as well as texts, and with both discourse practices and sociocultural practices” (p. 16). CDA involves analysing both how texts and visual images are produced in media institutions and received by audiences. Fairclough (1995b) points out that texts do not have unitary meanings but are, instead, “quite variously interpreted by different audiences and audience members” (p. 16).

A critical approach to discourse analysis recognizes that one’s use of language is bound up with causes and effects that one is not necessarily aware of (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Fairclough, 1995b, p. 54), such as various power relations. CDA involves connecting the use of language to the exercise of power. It involves examining how text and visuals of any kind contribute to the shaping of identities, relations and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1995b, p. 55).

Magazines are made up of text and visuals that offer competing discourses of masculinity and femininity to readers. Unlike socialization theory which suggests that the reader is “socialized” through reading magazines, poststructuralism understands that the reader engages in a process of “meaning-making” (Kearney, 2006, p. 94), and navigates his or her way through multiple discourses, accepting some and resisting
others. The study by Radway (1984) on how women reappropriate romance novels provides a helpful illustration to Kearney’s (1996) concept of “meaning-making.” Since romance novels generally end with a beautiful heroine happily united with her hero and, “recommend the usual sexual division of labor that dictates that women take charge of the domestic and purely personal spheres of human endeavor” (Radway, 1984, p. 123), one may draw the conclusion that avid readers of such novels are consistently accepting traditional discourses of femininity. However, Radway (1984) found that romance novels often feature the heroine as having great independence and tomboyish qualities, such as a tendency to swear, or with an unusual job, such as being an anthropologist or virtuoso pianist. These characteristics challenge traditional gender stereotypes, explains Radway (1984). This study demonstrates that within the over-arching patriarchal discourse of most romance novels, women can make meanings that permit them to experience independence and free will.

Just as there are many discourses at play in romance novels, there are many discourses at play in the advice columns of Maxim. However, not all of the discourses can be considered equal. The Gramscian term “hegemony” refers to a discourse that is dominant. According to Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), when using the term hegemony in reference to discourse, hegemony is understood as “the dominance of one particular perspective” (p. 7). Davies (1989) argues that we are all members of a society that celebrates “hegemonic (dominant, powerful) masculinity” (p. 14). She defines hegemonic masculinity as “an idea of masculinity...that we generally refer to when we go along with those generalizations that make all men not only superior in terms of strength and power to women but also opposite to women” (Davies, 1989, p. 14). Unlike
masculinity, asserts Connell (1987), “There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is dominant among men” (p. 183). The practice of hegemonic discourses contributes to the reproduction of certain power relations in society. Through discourse analysis one can explore not only various and contradictory discourses at play, one can also suggest alternate discourses and how access to these discourses may be initiated.

Questions For Critical Discourse Analysis

In this section I outline the specific questions that guide my examination of the textual and visual content within the advice columns of Maxim magazine.

Text

As previously mentioned, one can discover how discourses are activated textually and how particular interpretations are supported over others by applying specific linguistic tools to the text (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). Here I will elaborate on the particular concepts that guide my analysis of the textual elements within the advice columns. I took into account what had been omitted and what had been selected for presentation. Henry and Tator (2002) explain that examining what information is being left out or included can give insight into how an outlet is “constructing” a story (p. 75). I also took into account how text and pictures interconnect in creating discourses. I looked at the interdiscursivity of the text (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 82). Fairclough (1995a) refers to interdiscursivity as “an endless combination and recombination of genres and discourses” (p. 134). Such combinations are “limited and constrained by the state of hegemonic relations and hegemonic struggle” (Fairclough, 1995a, p.134). Consequently, are different discourses of femininity simultaneously being articulated together in the advice columns? Is there a dominant discourse of masculinity circulating that is limiting
the possibility for other discourses of masculinity? I examined the transitivity of the text. How are events and processes connected with subjects and objects? (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 83). The following sentence is an example of a sentence structure that presents an event as a natural phenomenon without a responsible agent: “50 nurses were sacked yesterday” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 83). I also took into account the modality of a text. The modality of a text refers to the speaker’s degree of affinity to her statement. When the speaker completely commits herself to a statement, and therefore presents this claim of knowledge as incontrovertible, she is engaging in “truth” modality (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 84). The media often engages in truth modality. A second type of modality is “permission” modality (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 84). The speaker, in this instance, gives the receiver permission to do something, for example, to kiss on the first date.

Pictures

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) point out that a common feature among various approaches to critical discourse analysis is that, “discourse encompasses not only written and spoken language but also visual images” (p. 61). The presence of visual images can be compared to that of forensic evidence at a crime scene (Hartley, 1992). Just as forensic evidence provides clues to the search for truth at a crime scene, visual images can be understood as “mute witnesses” that can be “coaxed into telling a story” (Hartley, 1992, p. 30). Hartley (1992) explains that, “Pictures of all kind are aesthetic, textual works, capable of personal appreciation and individual interpretation, but at the same time they are institutionally produced, circulated within an economy, and used both socially and culturally” (p. 28).
Visual images have a tendency to be viewed by some as less reliable sites of discursive knowledge than printed text. There is the widespread assumption, asserts Hartley (1992), that while pictures can be misleading, print tells the truth. Lists, tables, and numbers are generally seen by society as more reliable forms of knowledge than “glossy” pictures. Yet visual images are essential to my analysis and it is important that I take into consideration how visual images are used to reinforce or contradict discourses within the print content of the advice columns. When analyzing specifically how visual images function discursively, I will pay attention to how femininity and masculinity are made visual, how race is made visible, how images are dispersed throughout the print material, and what different types of images are featured. For instance, are the images mainly photos or are they computer generated? Are women and men featured side-by-side in the images? How are women and men physically positioned in the images? What types of objects or backgrounds are included in the images?

**Critical Discourse Analysis Questions**

Taking into account the aforementioned textual and visual elements, my discourse analysis of masculinity and femininity in the advice columns of *Maxim* magazine will culminate with the following questions:

1. What has been omitted, what has been selected for presentation?
2. How do text and pictures interconnect in creating new discourses?
3. Do headlines grab attention?
4. How do discourses contradict one another?
5. How do discourses reinforce one another?
6. Are generalizations being made? What is the purpose of generalizations?
7. To what effect are metaphors used?

8. What elements of transitivity are in the text?

9. What elements of modality are in the text?

10. Are quotations used? What is their purpose?

**Ethics**

Throughout the research process I must be self-conscious of the inquiries and conclusions I am making as the author of my research. The text that I have chosen to analyze is from a magazine that is widely circulated. In contrast to the vast number of readers of *Maxim*, in this discourse analysis it is only my interpretation, my voice, and my gaze that is given authority. As I attempt to shed light on different discourses of masculinity and femininity that are circulating in the magazine, I exert power (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 73). The practice of recording my observations and making known my analysis and findings places me in a position of privilege and authority. Privilege because this research represents my own interpretations and understandings of discourses of masculinity and femininity in the advice columns of *Maxim*, and authority because this work has the potential to be circulated as academic research.

Researchers, within the fields of both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, must acknowledge that one always takes a particular position in regards to one’s research. This position, explains Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), will inevitably play a part in what is included and excluded in the research process as well as what findings are presented in the conclusion. A researcher’s position can be thought of as the particular lens through which one perceives the world. This lens is influenced by a variety of factors. The most commonly cited ones are one’s race, gender, and class. I am
conducting my research from the position of an educated, middle-class white woman. I consider myself a feminist. My involvement in the magazine publishing industry is limited to that of a reader of magazines. I am an outsider to this industry, just like most other researchers in this arena.

In their discussion regarding the critical aspect of discourse research, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) emphasize the importance of making results accessible to those on whom the research is focused. Many youth may have very little interest in engaging in conversations with me about discourses of masculinity and femininity if my research comes across as condemning and judgmental. Henry and Tator (2002) explain that when one undertakes the method of discourse analysis the focus cannot be on which statements are "right" or "wrong," rather the task of the analyst is to explore patterns in the statements and theorize what consequences different discourses may have on society. Additionally, one must be conscious of not predicting how her own CDA questions will be answered based on the way she frames her questions. At the same time, the researcher has a right to make her own judgments in regards to her analysis. A key aspect of CDA is to closely examine existing power relations so that these relations can be better understood and changed. Examining power relations requires the researcher not to be neutral but to exercise judgment when particular discourses, such as sexist or racist discourses, are found within the text.

A common response of magazine editors and readers to the academic interrogation of their magazines is that these Other People (academics) over-analyse the harmless fun involved in reading such magazines (Jackson, Stevenson, & Brooks, 2001). Previous research into the arena of men's general interest magazines has declared the
magazines to be “dumb” and “soft porn” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 166). Gauntlett (2002) argues these conclusions are usually drawn by pro-feminist and left-wing writers who have been too quick to judge the magazines. It seems that Gauntlett (2002) is of the impression that feminist researchers have little time for investigating men’s magazines because many view such magazines as shallow. However, many feminist researchers who have focused on girls’ and women’s magazines would agree that there is a great deal of shallow content in these magazines as well. Perhaps it is not because researchers judge girls’ and women’s magazines to be less shallow than men’s magazines but instead because women’s, and more recently, girls’ general interest magazines have been around longer than men’s general interest magazines. As further discussed in chapter four, the men’s general interest magazine market did not begin to take off until the 1990s. My interest in this topic is largely due to the fact that so little attention had been paid to men’s general interest magazines despite their huge circulation and audience numbers. When I discovered that *Maxim* had such a large teen boy following, I could not ignore my conviction that a discourse analysis of this material was necessary and that I had an ethical obligation to contribute to a significant gap in the research literature.

**Thesis Structure**

My thesis is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter I have outlined my research question, my motivation for this study, my methodology and the questions that will guide my data analysis of both the printed text and visual images, and my ethical considerations. In chapter two I expand on poststructuralism in relation to concepts of masculinity and femininity. In chapter three I review what previous studies have to say regarding constructions of masculinity and femininity in popular teen girl magazines. In
chapter four I situate Maxim magazine by briefly reviewing the history of men’s magazines and discuss discourses of masculinity in men’s general interest magazines. In chapter five I discuss my findings and in chapter six I discuss the implications of my findings.
CHAPTER TWO: POSTSTRUCTURALISM THEORY/DISCOURSE

In chapter one, along with stating my research question, my rational for this research and my use of CDA methodology, I outlined the basic elements of poststructuralism that form my theoretical framework. In this chapter I elaborate on specific concepts of poststructuralism that are pertinent to my critical discourse analysis of masculinity and femininity in the advice columns of Maxim magazine. Though some of these concepts are not exclusive to poststructuralism, overall, poststructuralism offers a useful framework for my research question. The following chapter contains a review of the literature as it relates to my research.

Poststructuralism does not accept that masculinity or femininity is natural. Along with other sociological approaches, poststructuralism acknowledges that institutions such as the family, the school, religion, and the media ascribe certain meanings to masculinity and femininity. The first step to broadening how one talks about and represents masculinity and femininity is to gain an understanding of how present meanings regarding masculinity and femininity are circulated in society and how they function to maintain certain relations of power. For instance, if one is interested in theorizing alongside with youth alternative ways of thinking, talking, and representing masculinity and femininity, one needs to better understand the current discourses of masculinity and femininity at work in the lives of youth. Popular culture texts, in particular, are appealing to researchers interested in media education. Popular texts are sites where discourses are articulated, and they are texts that many youth would consider relevant to their lives.
Theorizing Masculinity and Femininity

Though socialization theory and poststructuralism both acknowledge that magazine content, as an element of mass media, has the potential to shape readers' perceptions of themselves and the world, there is a subtle difference in regards to how socialization theory and poststructuralism understand how readers process and make sense of such content. Socialization theory views mass media as an “agency of socialization” (Connell, 1987, p. 34). According to socialization theory, magazines assign and prescribe behaviours and actions to readers. Within socialization theory, acquisition of gender is dependent on the “roles” promoted by agencies of socialization such as the mass media, families, and schools. In regards to this theory Davies (1993) explains, “there is no room in this model for the child as active agent, the child as theorist,” nor is there “acknowledgement of the child as implicated in the construction and maintenance of the social world through the very act of recognizing it and through learning its discursive practices” (p. 5).

Poststructuralism understands that agencies such as the mass media present multiple and contradictory messages regarding masculinity and femininity. Rather than assuming that one particular discourse of masculinity or femininity will be favoured over others, poststructuralism assumes that the meanings people derive from such discourses will also be multiple and contradictory (Kearney, 2006). Radway’s (1984) research on reading romance novels brings clarity to this point. Her research illustrates that the women in her study who were avid readers of romance novels simultaneously incorporated conflicting values and experiences, such as identifying with the heroine’s desire to be loved by a man and yet also with her tenacity and independence. Gee (2004)
explains that how one assembles situated meanings is always relative to one’s “socioculturally defined experiences in the world” (p. 67). In other words, one’s life experience, personal circumstances, and beliefs will play a role how one makes meaning out of discourses of masculinity and femininity circulating in the mass media.

Masculinity and Femininity as Sites of Discursive Struggle

Chris Weedon (1987/1997) writes, “the nature of femininity and masculinity is one of the key sites of discursive struggle for the individual” (p. 94). At the center of the struggle is the assumption that certain characteristics are more “natural” for girls and women to embody, and other characteristics are more “natural” for boys and men to embody. Weedon (1987/1997) explains, “The appeal to the ‘natural’ is one of the most powerful aspects of common sense thinking, but it is a way of understanding social relations which denies history and the possibility of change for the future” (p. 3). It is “common sense” that tells us that women are better suited to the service industries while men are better suited to managerial roles (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 2). As mentioned in the introduction, Weedon (1987/1997) is referring to a specific version of poststructuralism called feminist poststructuralism. She acknowledges that not all questions asked by feminists will be compatible with this discursive framework in which gender is emphasized along with poststructuralism concepts of language, meaning, and subjectivity. I have found the assumptions underlying Weedon’s (1987/1997) feminist poststructuralism to be very useful to my research and will now take the opportunity to elaborate on these assumptions.

First, language is not gender-neutral. Language is always either challenging, or affirming, the “status quo” (Weedon, 1987/1997). As has been mentioned, according to
poststructuralism, one's subjectivity is constantly in flux; it is precarious and contradictory (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 32). Weedon (1987/1997) explains that, “feminist poststructuralism insists that the individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity” (p. 32). Instead of being socialized into the social world, each person “actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence as if they were their own” explains Davies (1989, p. 13).

Weedon (1987/1997) uses the term “discursive fields” to give an example of how we are the site of a range of discourses (p. 34). Discursive fields consist of “competing ways of giving meaning to the world” and as examples of discursive fields Weedon (1987/1997) lists the political system, family, and the church (p. 34). Each discursive field offers to us its own “singular reality of experience,” in other words, a particular way of perceiving the world (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 38). When analysing discourse it is important to question the social origins of a particular discourse and the implications of a particular discourse. When a politician wants to encourage support for a particular policy, he or she may choose to use language from the political system. Magazine advertisements, in contrast, engage in discourses that encourage consumerism. It is sometimes hard to separate a political discourse from an economic one. Political discourse, for example, draws on discourses of family, community and economics in an attempt to create common sense. Therefore, two or more discourses may be strategically chosen at times to encourage a particular representation. Is the discourse located within a secular or religious field? Has one been chosen over the other because certain values are to be read more as common sense than the other? Applying this concept to my research, one could argue that within advice columns in women’s and men’s magazines there are
elements from a number of discursive fields, which contribute to the range of discourses that may be present.

Gauntlett (2002) declares that while masculinity is seen as the "state of being a man," (p. 9) femininity is not necessarily seen as the "state of being a woman" (p. 10). This is because the term femininity is commonly associated with female stereotypes from the past (Gauntlett, 2002). Gauntlett (2002) argues that traditional characteristics of femininity such as passivity and reticence are being replaced by girls who are outperforming boys in school, and who view the Barbie doll as a "girly" toy (p. 10). Rather than regarding femininity as a core value, Gauntlett (2002) explains, women regard femininity as containing a spectrum of characteristics. At different times, and for different reasons, a woman may emphasize a particular element of femininity over another to achieve a particular goal. I am not invoking Butler's notion of performativity in which she states that one does not make a choice of whether or not to give a particular performance because all identity is performance (Gauntlett, 2002); instead I am clarifying Gauntlett's (2002) notion that women are aware of the different characteristics and traits society attributes to femininity, and while a woman may not regard being "feminine" as a personal core value, she may call attention to a specific "feminine" characteristics as it suits her in a particular situation.

Gauntlett (2002) discusses research with British working class women that found while subjects sought the "respectability" which was associated with the "feminine" role, they did not want to be associated with stereotypical characteristics such as passivity and weakness (Skeggs, 1997, as cited in Gauntlett, 2002, p. 11). The subjects felt that engaging in stereotypical discourses of femininity may or may not be economically
beneficial during a job interview and therefore would “do femininity” if and when it was necessary (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 12).

In regards to Gauntlett’s (2002) arguments, perhaps new discourses and new stereotypes of femininity are being produced today that differ from what he defines as traditional characteristics of femininity. However, new discourses of femininity do not automatically transpire to equal power relations in society. Since discourses of femininity are constructed, one must continually analyse what it means to “do femininity.” I do not agree with Gauntlett (2002) that femininity is a dated and “fluffy” concept that is increasingly irrelevant (p. 12).

Magazines can be thought of as spaces in which “different forms of masculinity and femininity are emerging and competing for public attention” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 145). Through their focus groups, Jackson et al. (2001) found that men “made sense of” and negotiated discourses of masculinity in different ways. In one of their focus groups, an 18-year-old reader explained that men’s general interest magazines were “excellent toilet literature. They’re trash though” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 114). In a different focus group of the same study, a Sheffield disabled man explained that the magazines offered a form of masculinity that was “not sexist, not racist but interested in drinking, getting drunk,” while a Sheffield postgraduate belonging to a different focus group described the masculinity in the magazines as “being a boy, liking your beer, but also being quite aware, do you know what I mean? It’s OK to be a bit of a lad …[but] you can have your politics and respect women” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 118). For the focus group of Islington professionals the magazines gave a man permission to “be the man you want to be …you know, whether I want to start screwing around or whatever … it’s OK to be
actually who I am” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 118). As the quotes reveal, femininity and masculinity are constantly in process (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 96).

**Discourse/Power**

Weedon (1987/1997) explains that discourses consistently “fail to acknowledge that they are but possible versions of meaning rather than ‘truth’ itself and that they represent particular interests” (p. 94). Weedon (1987/1997) argues that poststructuralism equips feminist researchers who are concerned with the way in which women are positioned in society and how they “are both governed by and resist specific forms of power” (p. 71). Language is of crucial concern because of its connection with “common sense knowledge” (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 74). Weedon (1987/1997) explains that the power of common sense knowledge comes from its claim to be “natural” and “obvious” (p. 74). It is through this medium of common sense that fixed truths are expressed about the world and society. To illustrate how the circulation of “fixed” characteristics can prove detrimental, Weedon (1987/1997) gives the example of a woman stuck in an abusive relationship. If this woman is under the impression that unrestrained aggression is a “natural” characteristic of masculinity, she may understand domestic violence as acceptable and be less inclined to leave her abusive relationship.

Just because one discourse does not control society does not mean that all discourse is equal (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 74). In regards to the dominant discourses that occupy the mainstream, Fiske (1996) explains that these discourses “serve dominant social interests, for they are the products of the history that has secured their domination” (p. 5). As Weedon (1987/1997) explains, “discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power” (p. 40).
Strategizing how to disrupt dominant discourses that enable one group while simultaneously disabling another group begins with identifying how such discourses are articulated (Weedon, 1987/1997, p. 121). Norman Fairclough emphasizes that when analysing discourses we must ask the following questions: “what are the ideological, political, and social consequences of the discursive practice?” and, “does the discursive practice conceal and strengthen unequal power relations in society, or does it challenge power positions by representing reality and social relations in a new way?” (as cited in Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 87).

In this chapter I have summarized the concepts from poststructuralism that form the theoretical framework for my critical discourse analysis of masculinity and femininity in Maxim. The proceeding two chapters focus on research that has been conducted thus far in the realm of teen magazines and men’s general interest magazines.
CHAPTER THREE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY
IN TEEN GIRL MAGAZINES

Introduction

In chapter two I discussed how my research approaches the concepts of masculinity and femininity, subjectivity, discourse and power within my poststructuralism framework. In this chapter I critically review previous research on general interest teen girl magazines. As will be made evident, little research has been conducted regarding boys and the magazines they read. Due to this gap in the literature I have had to bring together studies focusing on general interest teen girl magazines with studies that focus on general interest men’s magazines, which I discuss in the following chapter. Since all the magazines that I will be discussing in this chapter are categorized as “general interest magazines” from now on I will use the term “teen girl magazines” when referring to general interest magazines created for teen girls.

I begin this chapter by introducing studies that examine how femininity is represented in teen girl magazines (McRobbie, 1982; Peirce, 1990) and how girls’ happiness, success and acceptance are discursively constructed around their ability to attract boys (Evans, Rutberg, Sather & Turner, 1991). These studies contextualize my research question because they bring to light discourses of femininity in magazines read by girls. Such findings will be a useful contrast to my findings of discourses of femininity in a general interest magazine read by teen boys.

Next I take into account research that has included the voices and opinions of teen girls. Currie (1997) focuses on how girls “take up” or resist certain discourses of femininity while Duke and Kreshel (1998) seek to better understand how teen girls
interpret what they read. This research is significant because it provides insight to the process through which readers actively engage in making meaning out of discourses. A similar study involving teen boys could not be found in the literature. The findings of these two studies provide helpful information regarding how teen boys may engage in the meaning-making process (Kearney, 2006) in regards to the many different discourses offered to them in the advice sections of Maxim.

I then discuss research that analyses the ways that teen magazines position boys and girls in the context of romantic relationships. Carpenter (1998) found in Seventeen magazine that women are more often constructed as objects rather than agents of sexual desire. Willemsen (1998) compared relationship advice from a teen boy magazine with a teen girl magazine. This study, conducted in the Netherlands, found that the two magazines vastly differed in how they discussed heterosexual relationships. My findings may be helpful in understanding whether or not the same can be said for general interest magazines in North America. I conclude this chapter with discussing some alternative teen magazine publications based in the US and Canada. I then discuss Gonick (2001, 1997) and Norton's (2001) comments regarding how alternative teen magazines can be made more attractive and accessible to young female readers. The findings of Gonick (2001, 1997) and Norton (2001) are significant in that they contribute to a better understanding of how one can go about exploring new discourses with adolescents.

Constructions of Femininity in Teen Girl Magazines

Angela McRobbie's (1982) study of Jackie, Britain's longest selling teen magazine at the time of her research, was the first study to investigate how a magazine marketed specifically to girls constructs teenage femininity. In this particular study,
McRobbie (1982) views pop music and pop culture as activities that youth reappropriate into expressive outlets (p. 267). She explains, "youth subvert the original meaning by bestowing additional implied connotations to the object(s) thereby extending the range of its signifying power" (p. 267). Yet McRobbie (1982) was not satisfied with applying this claim to teen girl magazines because she was unconvinced that readers had the same ability to undermine and negate the meanings in a magazine like Jackie (p. 267). Instead, McRobbie (1982) uses Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony to argue that the magazine is a privileged "site" that seeks the consent of its reader.

McRobbie’s (1982) rationale for her research is driven by her assumption that women’s and girls’ magazines provide a feminine culture for their readers by shaping and defining a woman’s world from childhood to old age (p. 265). She argues that these magazines spell out the roles each woman must embody at each stage of her life. McRobbie (1982) uses both qualitative content analysis and semiological study to examine meanings around female adolescence. She found that, similar to women’s magazines, Jackie "assumes a common definition of womanhood or girlhood," by obscuring differences such as class amongst women (McRobbie, 1982, p. 265). McRobbie (1982) also found that in Jackie girls are largely represented within the context of romantic situations and are depicted as being competitive with other girls for the attention of boys. Therefore, the discourse of femininity in Jackie is constructed around a girl’s ability to “get” a boy.

In her conclusion McRobbie (1982) acknowledges the need to better understand how girls “take up” magazines. Indeed, her impression of the way Jackie is taken up by readers can be discouraging as it assumes little agency on the part of the reader, and this
is a common critique of her initial study of Jackie. Yet McRobbie (1982) does touch on the need to involve girls in “deconstructing” the many meanings in magazines, and she presents the idea of involving girls in the production of an alternative magazine for girls, as well as encouraging them to produce their own music and their own fashions (p. 282).

Kate Peirce (1990) examines Seventeen, America’s equivalent of Jackie, with the purpose of analysing how Seventeen constructs and reinforces traditional ideologies related to femininity, with particular emphasis on years during the feminist movement. Peirce (1990) uses socialization theory to inform her research and argues that magazines are one of many media sources from which women and girls “learn” their roles in the world. She is interested in analysing the feminist messages in Seventeen magazine because she believes that social events (such as the feminist movement) are a result of the media’s agenda. Peirce (1990) refers to the argument that, “The agenda-setting function of the media posits that if an issue is at the forefront of media coverage, it is at the forefront of the audience’s thoughts” (McComb & Shaw, 1972, as cited in Peirce, 1990, p. 493).

According to this theory, there is a direct link between the display of feminist issues in a magazine and the feminist activities of its readers. In a telephone interview with the managing editor of Seventeen, Peirce (1990) was told that the purpose of Seventeen was to “inform, entertain, and give teenage girls all the information they need to make sound choices in their lives” (p. 497). The magazine’s emphasis on fashion and beauty was to help readers feel good about themselves. Using the method of content analysis, Peirce (1990) differentiated articles that featured “traditional” messages from articles that featured “feminist” messages. Traditional messages were classified by
Peirce (1990) as those that emphasized one’s looks, ability to look after their home and children, and attract a man. Feminist messages were classified as those that emphasized taking care of oneself, independence, and finding one’s identity and fulfillment outside the confines of a romantic relationship. During the years 1961, 1972 and 1985, Peirce (1990) found that 60% of the magazine’s content was devoted to subjects such as beauty, fashion, cooking and decorating, and that no monthly columns represented a “feminist” point of view. From these findings Peirce (1990) concludes that Seventeen reinforces traditional ideologies of femininity and womanhood. She comments that she doubts this is the information that girls need to make “informed choices” about their lives and feel good about themselves. The discourse of femininity in this study emphasizes girls’ looks and domestic abilities rather than girls’ minds.

This study is relevant to my research topic because it reveals how beauty, fashion and domesticity are represented as characteristics that are essential to women. Femininity is not constructed around one’s ability to be independent and attractive on her own terms, but is constructed around one’s ability to be attractive on society’s terms, which emphasizes both one’s looks and romantic capabilities. Peirce’s (1990) study is significant to my research because, similar to McRobbie’s (1982) study of Jackie, Peirce’s (1990) study sheds light onto the discourses of femininity that have dominated Seventeen magazine over a period of 24 years.

Evans et al. (1991) are interested in identifying the relationship between magazine content and adolescent identity achievement. Evans et al. (1991) base their rationale for this study on theories of consumer psychology and adolescent socialization, and argue that magazines are relevant to adolescent education. The purpose of their study is to
examine the "social messages and value implications that adolescents may derive from magazine content," and to "exploit popular magazines for broader educational purposes" (Evans et al., p. 101). Ten issues of Sassy, Seventeen, and Young Miss between 1988 and 1989 were content coded. Identity themes were found overwhelmingly within the context of articles related to dating and heterosexuality, which, according to Evans et al. (1991), may function to restrict readers from conceiving their identity outside of heterosexual romantic parameters.

Though the theme of self-improvement was dominant in all three publications, the means to self-improvement was dictated through fashion and beautification, rather than through aesthetic or athletic pursuits. Happiness was considered to be an important value and yet it was depicted as achievable by means of attracting males. This article is significant to further study of discourses of masculinity and femininity because it reveals that boys and men are represented strategically to inform narrow definitions of how girls can achieve success, happiness and acceptance. It is therefore worthwhile to critically analyse discourses of masculinity as well as discourses of femininity in magazines read by teen boys and examine how these discourses construct ideals such as success, happiness, and acceptance.

This study by Evans et al. (1991) is also important because it bases its analysis not only on printed text but also on advertisements and photos. As I have mentioned, my critical discourse analysis will consider both textual and visual aspects of the advice columns. In the advertising space of the magazines studied, Evans et al. (1991) found that 15% to 20% of content was categorized as relating to "beauty," 7% to 12% was categorized as relating to "fashion/clothing," 6% to 8% was classified as relating to
“music/entertainment,” 3% to 5% was classified as relating to “hygiene/health,” and 3% to 5% was classified as “other” (p. 108). In regard to race, less than 10% of photos featured non-white people. In regard to gender, approximately 70% of photos featured females and 30% featured males. Although my results will not be directly comparable because I am not using the method of content analysis nor am I including any content outside of the advice columns, the research of Evans et al. (1991) is useful because it shows a vast discrepancy in the representations of whites to non-whites and women to men in magazines read by teen girls. Whether or not Maxim also contains similar discrepancies and how these discrepancies construct particular discourses will be taken up in my critical discourse analysis.

Teen Girls’ Thoughts on Discourses of Femininity in the Magazines They Read

Currie (1997) takes up the challenge to better understand how girls “read” particular feminine discourses in popular teen magazines. Forty-eight girls aged 13 to 17 years old made up the sample for her study. Interviewers and participants explored the advertisements in an issue of Seventeen together, as well as an additional magazine chosen by the participant. Currie (1997) chose to focus on ads for two reasons. Firstly, they take up half of all magazine page space and secondly, the pictures that are featured within the advertisements may have “more impact than words because they are easier for readers to understand” (Dyer, 1982, as cited in Currie, 1997, p. 465). Currie (1997) grounds her study in the theory that women’s magazines are “social texts” that are “engaged in struggles surrounding what it means in our society ‘to be a woman’” (p. 454). As social texts, the magazines affix certain meanings to femininity. These meanings, Currie (1997) argues, because they are largely based on fashion and beauty
products, are driven by patriarchal and capital interests (p. 461). In this way the magazines function as vehicles of power through their participation in the subordination of women.

Currie (1997) found that, rather than passively accepting all images presented to them, the girls actively selected the images they enjoyed and rejected others. She explains that the girls’ lived experience served as a basis for whether or not they rejected certain images. If girls did not have lived experiences that contradicted certain representations of femininity, they would tend to accept these representations. The representations of women that the readers rejected tended to be those that were categorized by Currie (1990) as “less-traditional” representations of women.

An example of a “less-traditional” and more liberating representation of femininity was a Bisou Bisou fashion ad that had a model wearing a fancy dress who was positioned as though she was breastfeeding the naked baby that she held in her arms. Currie (1990) explains that the girls’ comments regarding this image were particularly harsh. Readers rejected the image on the basis that the model did not look the motherly type, it was “too realistic” to be displayed in a magazine, and it looked “cheap.” Because the girls were too young to experience motherhood (and in many cases romantic relationships), when women were represented in reference to these themes, the readers tended to accept ideologically driven representations of femininity on the basis that they were more “realistic” (Currie, 1997, p. 470). This acceptance of images deemed “realistic” is driven by the girls’ “search for the ‘truth’ of teenagerhood” (Currie, 1997, p. 470). This search finds girls according truth status to images considered to be consistent over those containing play or subversive irony (Currie, 1997, p. 470).
Currie’s (1997) research can be contrasted with research on men’s general interest magazines that found that men were largely aware of the magazines’ use of irony and that this was actually a large part of the magazines’ appeal (Gauntlett, 2002; Jackson et al., 2001). For instance, the sexist tone of the editorial content in men’s general interest magazines is thought to be regarded by many men as “ironic” because to be sexist and openly display the view that women are not equal to men is obviously dated and uncool (Gauntlett, 2002; Jackson et al., 2001). The factors influencing the range of ways ironic magazine content may be taken up by boys has yet to be investigated, and is beyond the scope of my research question. David Beers (2001) differentiates between two types of irony: detached irony and engaged irony. He describes detached irony as a low-grade irony found in television shows such as *Seinfeld* and *David Letterman*. It takes a smartass stance of “moral relativism and self-absorption,” is shallow and callous, and requires that one separate one’s heart from one’s mind (Beers, 2001, pp. 1, 2). Engaged irony, on the other hand, involves engaging oneself in the grave purpose at hand and taking responsibility for seeing it through (Beers, 2001, p. 3). Unlike detached irony explains Beers (2001), engaged irony requires care, commitment, and sensitivity on behalf of the ironist.

The absence of a general interest teen boy magazine makes it difficult to conduct a study that mirrors Currie’s (1997) study. General interest men’s magazines may not be viewed by teen boys as social texts that address what it means to become a teenage boy. Yet might the magazines be read as how to become a man? And to what extent do young readers recognize the irony factor? Perhaps they are even more aware of it than the older readers. Part of the rationale for my study is based on my assumption that once we have
a better idea of the different discourses that are present in magazines read by teen boys
we will be much better equipped to further investigate how teen boys negotiate and make
meaning out of such discourses.

comment that though the amount of research on teen girls and the magazines they read is
growing, the voices of girls themselves have not been accorded a privileged position
are interested in how girls understand the mediated images of femininity in the magazines
they read and how the discourses of femininity in these magazines play out in readers’
self-concepts (p. 48). The authors gave a group of 12 and 13 year olds who were avid
readers of Seventeen, Sassy, YM or Teen money to buy a magazine of their choice. Each
participant went through her magazine with an interviewer who asked specific questions
but gave the participant authority. Duke and Kreshel (1998) found that the girls heavily
relied on the reports dictated by boys that provided information on how to get boys’
approval, and what a girl’s role should be in a romantic relationship. The girls in this
study were more inclined to actively take up discourses of femininity that were linked to
boys’ preferences. Especially for girls who had limited knowledge of boys, reports by
boys within the magazine functioned as significant sites of information.

Three findings from Duke and Kreshel’s (1998) study are particularly relevant to
my research question. First, they found that the magazines encouraged a discourse of
passive femininity through the technique of positioning boys’ reports and voices as the
ultimate authority on romantic relationships. The second major finding is that the
dominant notion of femininity that the readers drew from the text was one centered on the
feminine physique (Duke & Kreshel, 1998, p. 57). Though they recognized that the models in the magazines represented unrealistic ideals of beauty, the girls also faulted themselves for “falling short of them” (p. 66). Third, Duke and Kreshel (1998) conclude that young teen girls are ill equipped to critically analyze the images in the magazines that they read and the gender roles that are reinforced within the magazines. Duke and Kreshel (1998) explain that future research must be undertaken that helps us understand how to encourage girls to read these texts more critically.

**Gender Specific Relationship Advice in Teen Magazines**

Carpenter (1998) conducted a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 244 articles on sexuality and romance from *Seventeen* magazine from 1974 to 1994. Her study is based on the assumptions that representations of sexual behavior in media may have lasting effects on teens, and more specifically, that discrepancies between cultural scripts and lived-experiences may have negative real-life consequences on teens. Carpenter (1998) argues that there has been a lack of research investigating sexual scripts prescribed by popular media. She argues that in these scripts men are generally depicted as sexual actors and women as the objects of male sexuality. Carpenter (1998) found that, between the years of 1974 and 1994, though there was a slight increase in content that depicted women as agents that experienced sexual desire (rather than objects of sexual desire), editors continue to favor traditional scripts that depict women as objects of sexual desire. This study draws attention to the need to analyse how girls are represented in magazines read by boys (such as *Maxim*) and how such representations discursively construct male sexuality. It is also a useful benchmark to which I can compare my findings of whether discourses of femininity in *Maxim* reinforce the sexually passive
discourses in *Seventeen* or whether they contradict these discourses by associating femininity with sexual agency.

Framing his study in socialization theory, Willemsen (1998) investigates whether or not content related to sex and relationships in teen magazines is gender specific. The publication of *Webber* in 1994, the Netherlands’ first general interest teen boy magazine, made this comparison possible. Six issues of *Yes* (the Netherlands’ equivalent to *Seventeen*) and six issues of *Webber* were examined. Fashion and beauty were found to be the most important topics in the girl magazine and celebrities and hobbies were the most important topics in the boy magazine, with fashion coming third. Articles on love, sex, and relationships were of fourth importance in the boys’ magazines and of seventh importance in the girls’ magazine.

What is additionally interesting is that the articles in each magazine vastly differed in how they spoke of love, sex, and relationships. The study found that *Yes* discussed relationships in reference to love, while *Webber’s* discussion of relationships centered on sex, with love presented in negative terms. Whereas *Yes* articles featured girls’ main problem as catching and keeping a guy, *Webber* articles featured boys’ main problem as “how can I dump her afterwards?” (Willemsen, 1998, p. 859). Though previous research in the Netherlands shows that boys and girls have similar thoughts and values in regards to relationships (Du Bois-Raymond, Peters, & Ravesloot, 1994; van Zessen & Sandfort, 1991, both as cited in Willemsen, 1998, p. 959), the magazines themselves propagate very different values.

Willemsen’s (1998) findings as they relate to the magazines’ visual content are also significant to my research question. Both *Yes* and *Webber* predominantly feature
female models on their cover pages. While the cover pages of Yes presented a discourse of femininity associated with beauty and decency, Webber posed models in such a way as to construct femininity as that which is considered desirable and sexy in the eye of the male “voyeur” (Willemsen, 1998, p. 860). Though the specific quantity of textual and visual content may have been comparable in Yes and Webber, the two magazines employ very different discourses of masculinity and femininity. Willemsen (1998) concludes that both girls and boys are “socialized into traditional gender roles through teenage magazines” (p. 860) which, he argues, has the effect of perpetuating the gender gap and keeping traditional discourses of femininity and masculinity alive (p. 861). According to poststructuralist theory, not all youth will read magazines the same way because one’s reading is related to one’s location in reference to race, gender, ethnicity, age, ability, and sexuality, among other factors. Willemsen’s (1998) argument that the discourses of femininity and masculinity in Yes and Webber perpetuate the gender gap is problematic from a poststructuralism perspective that assumes we do not know how these discourses are taken up by readers. Yet Willemsen’s (1998) study does point to the importance of better understanding how power relations are reinforced or subverted within the circulation of such discourses.

**Alternative Magazines**

For the purpose of this section, I define “alternative magazines” as those magazines that are considered to be non-commercial and that often feature content submitted by youth. I begin this section by outlining some North American alternative teen magazines and conclude this section with a discussion of Norton (2002) and Gonick’s (1997, 2001) experiences with these types of texts.
Teen Voices is an American alternative magazine. It has existed for 13 years and is published monthly. Much of its material is posted on its website www.teenvoices.com. On its website Teen Voices declares that it is a magazine written by, for, and about teenage and young adult women. It is published by Women Express Inc., an organization created in 1988 by two women with the intent of “furthering social and economic justice by empowering teenage and young adult women” (Women Express Inc., 2003). The organization believes that social change can be brought about in the lives of young women through their own creations of writing and art. Content focuses on politics, health, well-being, youth activism, and has a feminist slant. Readers’ submissions of poetry, non-fiction, and art are also featured in every issue. The magazine reports a print readership of 50,000 and estimates six million annual hits of its Teen Voices website. Though the magazine does not reveal whether its readership is dominated by girls, it does attest that 99% of the 2000 teens around the world that submit editorial content are girls. This is not surprising since even though the magazine’s title does not refer to girls specifically, its content and mission statement reveals that it is geared exclusively to girls rather than boys.

Blue Jean Magazine was founded in 1995 by Sherry Handel, a publishing consultant. The purpose of this magazine was to showcase articles written by teen girls. Blue Jean Magazine was published in the United States from 1996 to 1998. It did not contain advertisements. The magazine posted articles on its website www.bluejeanonline.com from 1999 to 2004. A selection of articles from Blue Jean Magazine is assembled in Handel’s (2001) book Blue Jean: what young women are thinking, saying, and doing.

New Moon is an alternative magazine created by girls aged 8 to 14 and is advertising free. It is published bi-monthly. On its website it promotes itself both to young girls and to adults who may be interested in using the magazine as a teaching
resource. It has been in circulation for 13 years. Its website states that it features fiction, poetry, artwork, and articles about the lives of girls and women around the world. Unlike *Teen Voices* magazine, *New Moon* does not have an online version of the magazine, instead its website is meant to provide information about how to attain a hard copy of *New Moon*. It is available internationally and boasts that it receives submissions from girls around the globe.

**Canadian-Based Alternative Magazines**

*Reluctant Hero* [sic] is published quarterly and is written by Canadian girls for Canadian girls. An editorial committee made up of 50 girls determines its content. It does not have its own website and therefore is not as accessible as *Teen Voices* or *New Moon*. *Shameless* magazine promotes itself as a Canadian magazine for “girls who get it.” It is published three times a year and describes itself as a magazine that reaches out to those who are often ignored by mainstream media. It was launched in 2004 and is produced by volunteers who receive input from their teen advisory board. It is grassroots-based and does contain advertising. Its self-described feminist content ranges from profiles of inspiring women to sports, technology, politics, crafts, health and sexuality, and advice.

*Redwire* magazine published its first issue in 1997. It has quarterly issues and distributes 11,000 copies across Canada to various centres, institutions and individual subscribers. Its specific mandate is to provide Native youth a voice although it makes known that it wants to promote culture, art, education and awareness for all people. Native youth can subscribe to the magazine for free and are involved in all levels of the
magazine’s production, which is geared towards inspiring creativity, motivation, and action in Native youth. This magazine does contain some advertising.

**Reading Alternative Teen Magazines**

Marnina Gonick (1997; 2001) documents her experience in which she sought out to engage teen girls in the creation of a magazine that could be considered “alternative” in that it was to serve as “a vehicle for the exploration and expression of the girls’ own sense of their relationships with the school, their families, communities and place in the world” (1997, p. 70). Her project was to work with girls to produce a magazine that contained topics that were important to them. When the girls informed Gonick (1997) that they wanted to focus their production around fashion, make-up tips, entertainment and surveys, Gonick (1997) brought out some copies of *New Moon*, hoping that this magazine could be considered as a model for what the girls could include in their own magazine. The girls were completely uninterested in such a magazine. Thus began Gonick’s journey of engaging with girls in conversations regarding the magazines they liked to read.

After taking the time to read the magazines with the girls (recording their spontaneous conversations as well as their answers to her probing questions) she concludes that, “The task of generating new story lines that have the power to disrupt and displace the old is extremely complex” (Gonick, 1997, p. 84). Even if one reads the same story after they have learned how to read it critically, the discourses that enabled for the first reading of the story will still compete for the reader’s subjectivity because these discourses do not completely disappear. Gonick (2001) suggests that in order for alternative teen magazines to attract readers, they may need to include multiple
discourses, some of which may allow girls to invest in conventional “expressions of femininity” (p. 169).

Bonny Norton (2001) writes of her own research into teen magazines after her daughter started buying them. On her journey she came across Teen Voices and Reluctant Hero. Norton (2001) comments that although both Teen Voices and Reluctant Hero “offer broader perspectives on the lives of young women than other teen magazines” (p. 296) they often make the assumption, as do commercial magazines, that the self is an essential and coherent entity. Norton (2001) argues that alternative magazines need to take a more poststructuralist interpretation of the self and instead present the self as “multiple, changing, and a site of struggle” (p. 299). This perspective would allow the magazines to discuss the “self” as conflicted, rather than unified, and would displace conversations about “finding oneself” with conversations about being comfortable with “multiple selves” (Norton, 2001, p. 299). Norton advises that if the magazines were to assume a poststructuralist theory of the self, readers would be less focused on deciding which self they identify with most (for example either the musician, the athlete or skater girl) and would instead take up the position of multiple selves (of being a musician, athlete and a skater girl).

I included the reflections of Gonick (1997; 2001) and Norton (2001) because they illustrate the difficulties involved in creating new “spaces for negotiation” (McRobbie, 1994, as cited in Norton, 2001, p. 299), when the old discourses/spaces are so entrenched. Yet, drawing from their experiences, Gonick (1997, 2001) and Norton (2001) also suggest how these difficulties can be embraced. Rather than completely ignore old discourses in the construction of new discourses one should perhaps consider what makes
the old discourses attractive and pleasurable. In my concluding chapter I discuss how girls resist traditional discourses of masculinity and femininity through writing teen zines. In this chapter I have reviewed numerous studies regarding teen girl magazines. The following chapter focuses on men's magazines and the men's magazine market.
CHAPTER FOUR: MEN'S MAGAZINES

I led up to this chapter by exploring various studies relating to teen girl magazines. In the proceeding chapter five I will discuss my findings of discourses of masculinity and femininity in the advice columns of Maxim. The focus of this chapter is on the men's magazine market. I begin by briefly outlining how men's general interest magazines were introduced in the UK and then in the U.S. No longer is the genre of general interest magazines reserved for women. I then go on to discuss research that illustrates how magazines read by men construct masculinity. Breazeale's (1994) analysis of Esquire during its early years is entertaining as it reveals how the magazine's construction of femininity and masculinity was driven by the need to position men as consumers. Alexander (2003) links constructions of masculinity to the marketing of clothes, cars, and fitness in Men's Health magazine. I then refer to the research of Vigorito and Curry (1998) who compare representations of men in magazines read by women with representations of men in magazines read by men. Their findings indicate that different discourses of masculinity dominate each magazine. This study is significant to my own research which will shed light on whether the dominant discourses of femininity in a magazine primarily read by boys and men contradict the dominant discourses of femininity in teen girl magazines as recorded by previous researchers (McRobbie, 1982; Peirce, 1990; Currie, 1997; Carpenter, 1998).

Also of interest to my research is the work of Jackson et al. (2001) and Gauntlett (2002) who discuss current dominant discourses of masculinity in men's general interest magazines and the use of irony by these magazines. Jackson et al. (2001) give insight into how magazines such as Maxim project masculinity as something fixed by biology.
Jackson et al. (2001) also reflect on two dominant discourses of masculinity that have been featured in the magazines, the “New Man” discourse and the “New Lad” discourse. Gauntlett argues that, while at first glance many men’s magazines may come across as sexist, there is much more than meets the eye. Gauntlett is convinced that a major reason these magazines appeal to readers is because the readers are aware that masculinity is a constructed, rather than a fixed, concept. He goes on to illustrate how men’s general interest magazines use irony to discuss topics that otherwise would causes readers to feel embarrassed and self-conscious.

**History of Men’s Magazines**

The earliest magazines for men are said to have developed in the late seventeenth century alongside newspapers (Jackson et al., 2001). Even though some magazines were aimed explicitly at men, magazines soon came to be regarded as a genre of text associated with women. To differentiate themselves from the “feminine” magazine market, magazines for men focused on interests such as cars, fishing, electronics or pornography. In the 1960s and 1970s, publishers were aware that the men’s magazine market was considerably narrow when compared to the women’s magazine market and yet they were unsure of how to go about introducing a magazine to men that paralleled women’s general interest magazines (Gauntlett, 2002; Jackson et al., 2001).

*Arena,* published in 1986, was the first general interest magazine in the UK marketed to men (Gauntlett, 2002). It focused on up-market fashion and style for men (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 155). *GQ* magazine was launched two years later in 1988. Both magazines had modest circulation numbers, signaling to publishers that there was a market demand for general interest men’s magazines. *For Him Magazine* published its
first issue in 1985. However it changed its name to *FHM* and revamped its look and content based on the extraordinary initial success of *Loaded* magazine, which was launched in the UK in 1994. *FHM* began to out sell *Loaded* in 1996. *Maxim* and *Men's Health* were both published in the UK in 1995, although the U.S. had been publishing *Men's Health* since 1987. In 1997 the U.S. launched its own version of *Maxim*. *Maxim*'s large and instantaneous following was evident as it out sold *GQ* and *Esquire* at a ratio of three to one and sold twice as many copies as *Rolling Stone* magazine.

In the years between the 1980s and 1990s, the men’s magazine market became the fastest growing of all consumer magazine markets (Key Note, 1996, as cited in Jackson et al., 2001, p. 28). Between 1991 and 1996 there was a 400% growth in the men’s lifestyle magazine market (Mintel Market Intelligence, 1997, as cited in Jackson et al., 2001, p. 29). The magazines conceived during this period are often referred to as “laddish” magazines (Tincknell et al., 2003; Gauntlett, 2002; Jackson et al., 2001) due to a particular kind of “homosociality”\(^3\) in the magazines which emphasizes an intense bond between men and “necessarily excludes and problematises women” (Tinknell et al., 2003, p. 61).

The laddish version of masculinity (also known as the New Lad version of masculinity) developed in the mid-to-late 1990s and displaced the media’s New Man version of masculinity of the 1980s and early 1990s. Whereas the New Man version of masculinity is described as being 25 years or older, white, hetero, and with a professional occupation, New Lad masculinity was characterized by behaviour such as “drinking to excess, adopting a predatory attitude towards women and a fear of commitment”

\(^3\) Tinknell et al. (2003) derive their definition of homosociality from Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick (1985).
(Jackson et al., 2001, p. 20). The New Man is slightly older in age and is a much softer and sensitive version of masculinity than is the more recent laddish form of masculinity. In comparison, laddish masculinity was less focused on up-scale fashion and more on “birds, booze, and football” (Tincknell et al., 2003, p. 50).

**Constructing Masculinity**

*Esquire* magazine, premiering in 1933, was one of the first magazines in America to be marketed exclusively to men. It was never, however, considered to fit the label of a “general interest” magazine. During the Depression the influx of women into the workforce provided men with more leisure time than ever before, and *Esquire* was formed with the intention of encouraging men to associate leisure with consumption (Breazeale, 1994). Since consumption was commonly associated with women and domesticity, *Esquire* had to reshape masculinity and femininity in order to convince readers that men were naturally suited to consumption. In his examination of *Esquire* between 1933 and 1946, Breazeale (1994) found that the magazine constructed men as having superior taste over women in everything from fashion to cooking. Women were presented as man-hating, prudish, and without taste, and these characteristics were constructed as “biological” and “essential” to their gender. Breazeale’s (1994) analysis reveals that the discourse of masculinity in *Esquire* magazine over this time period relied on promoting a very specific discourse of femininity in which women were criticized for their poor tastes and consumer habits. Women were the “foil against which a superior male taste could be positioned” (Breazeale, 1994, p. 8). This is the basis for Breazeale’s (1994) claim that even though *Esquire* was a men’s magazine, it was, to an extent, a
magazine about women because it was so focused on representing the feminine in a particular way (p. 10).

Here also lies the motivation for how women were positioned visually in the magazine, explains Breazeale (1994). Since Esquire was encouraging men to be interested in food, décor, and fashion, the editors felt that they needed to exaggerate the "heterosexuality" of the magazine in order to ensure that it was never confused as a magazine for homosexuals (Breazeale, 1994, p. 10). To compensate for this homophobia, they made sure to always visually represent women as objects of male desire. "It had to be unequivocally clear," explains Breazeale (1994), "that women were the natural objects of its readership's desire" (p. 10). Femininity was therefore used as a signifier for heterosexual masculinity. Breazeale's (1994) study is significant to my research because it supports my rationale for examining feminine and masculine discourses in context with each other. Esquire magazine's incentive for its specific discourse of femininity was to reassure male heterosexual readers that they could embody characteristics that were previously associated with women and yet maintain their superior and sophisticated gender status.

**Marketing Masculinity as a Brand**

Alexander (2003) is interested in documenting constructions of masculinity in which the male identity is based on consumption rather than production (p. 536). More specifically, she is curious as to how popular culture is involved in shaping this consumption-based discourse of masculinity within a postmodern consumer society. Alexander (2003) acknowledges that ideals of masculinity change over time and are influenced by intervening factors such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality age and
religion. She argues that while much research has focused on the link between media and ideal forms of femininity, less attention has been paid to how masculinity is intentionally constructed by the media (Alexander, 2003, p. 540).

Alexander (2003) content coded 10 issues of *Men's Health* magazine and divided her analysis into four areas of investigation: front covers, cover stories and features, "Ask Men's Health," and advertisements. Not surprisingly, her "coding" revealed that masculinity was largely associated with consumerism. Yet unlike *Esquire*, which defined consumption as an essential masculine quality, Alexander (2003) found that *Men's Health* constructed masculinity as something that could be bought, as that which could be achieved by means of consumption. Masculinity was presented as a "brand" that one could acquire through developing a hard body and buying a nice car and fashionable clothes (Alexander, 2003, p. 551). In her analysis of the cover photos she discovered that whiteness was also positioned as a significant characteristic of masculinity. However this characteristic was never referred to in the textual content because, unlike clothes and cars, whiteness is not something a man can buy.

Unlike Breazeale (1994), Alexander (2003) fails to take into account how this particular discourse of masculinity is framed in reference to discourses of femininity throughout the magazine content. It is difficult to believe that representations of women or discussions about women would be absent in *Men's Health* magazine. What role do women play in these specific representations of men? Are men encouraged to "buy" this particular brand of masculinity because women find it attractive? Or are women not elevated to the status that men and boys are in magazines read by teen girls? Perhaps women are not a worthy "foil" (as Breazeale (1994) would say), against which men
should modify their looks and behavior. While Alexander’s (2003) research contributes to a significant gap in the literature involving the construction of masculinity in men’s magazines, my critique is that her research would have been enhanced if she took into account constructions of femininity as well.

Contradictory Discourses

Vigorito and Curry (1998) took a different approach to examining how men are represented in popular magazines. They were interested in examining contradictions that exist between representations of men in magazines primarily read by men with representations of men in magazines primarily read by women. For their data they obtained audience characteristics from Simmons Market Research Bureau and content-coded a cross-section of 83 popular magazines for that same year. They found that magazines with mainly male readerships feature men as dominant, cool, in control and largely in occupational roles (these roles changed depending on the class of readership to which the magazine was marketed). In magazines read by women men are featured most prominently as nurturing and as the provider.

The study’s findings signify that magazines read by women and magazines read by men contain different discourses of masculinity. According to Vigorito and Curry (1998), these discourses may function to create contrary expectations in men and women readers regarding the role of men in relationships. Vigorito and Curry (1998) explain, “Men are likely to come away from reading their magazines with traditional identities reinforced, while women are likely to come away from reading their magazines with more nurturing visions of men in their minds” (p. 150). These findings suggest that I can expect that the discourses of femininity in Maxim may contradict the discourses of
femininity in teen girl magazines. Since the authors are working from a socialization perspective, they are particularly concerned with the discrepancies in how men are portrayed in magazines. Conversely, my own research is interested in the relationship between power and discourse and how language and text are used to construct particular discourses.

**Discourses of Masculinity in New Man and “Laddish” Magazines**

In their book *Making Sense of Men's Magazines*, Jackson et al. (2001) examine dominant discourses of masculinity in popular men's general interest magazines. The perspective they assume is that masculinity is, “a discursive construction that assumes different forms in different places and at different times” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 12). Each new form of masculinity struggles to become the “true” form of masculinity, the one that becomes widely adopted as common sense, thanks to the power of the press (Jackson et al., p. 45). Jackson et al. (2001) are particularly interested in the explanation that the explosion of the men’s magazine market in the 1990s saw the media fixate on the view that masculinity was “in crisis.” The magazines were so popular, the media attested, because men were going through a masculinity crisis. Jackson et al. (2001) collected over 200 articles and press cuttings from newspapers, magazines, and the Internet in their study of how the media represented general interest men’s magazines and the discourses of masculinity within them.

A theme throughout articles that fixated on the idea that men were experiencing a masculinity crisis was that two new forms of masculinity had emerged: the New Man and the New Lad. As previously stated, the New Man was the man to whom the men’s magazines of the 1980s were catering, and was also the dominant version of masculinity
constructed in and by the magazines. Part of the New Man’s masculinity crisis was blamed on his girlfriend who was “discovering feminism.” This man was interested in fashion and was, “soft yet strong, sensitive yet sexy, cool yet caring” (Jackson et al., p. 33). The media criticized this version of masculinity, commenting that the New Man’s interest in fashion and his physical appearance rendered him both weak and undesirable to women. Putting time and energy into one’s appearance was discussed in the media as a trait that is unattractive to women, as though women are only attracted to men who give off the vibe that their appearance is a result of natural causes rather than some thought out plan. *Arena* and *GQ* are the most well known British magazines whose content was largely based on the New Man discourse of masculinity.

The New Lad is thought to have displaced the New Man as the New Lad was the type of man to whom more recent magazines such as *Loaded*, *FHM*, and *Maxim* were catering to, and therefore constructing, in their magazine content. Jackson et al. (2001) characterize the New Lad as one who abhors the idea of marriage and celebrates his independence through excessive drinking, spending, and male bonding. Laddish magazines present the New Lad discourse of masculinity as that which is authentically masculine and present the New Man discourse as a cultural construction (Jackson et al., 2001).

The magazines’ use of this discourse is significant because, since the magazines project the idea that masculinity is fixed by biology, the New Lad discourse becomes the binary against which women are positioned (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 85). Therefore the New Lad discourse also implicates how women are represented. Editors attribute the half-naked images of women on the magazines’ covers to the idea that a man’s sexuality
is “natural.” Men are naturally attracted to women, argue the editors, and therefore displaying half-naked women on the magazines’ cover pages is merely “sexual” rather than “sexist” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 70). This process of naturalizing sexuality, argues Jackson et al. (2001), “obscures the extent to which lad culture in general and magazines like Loaded in particular are not merely reflecting a ‘natural’ masculinity but helping to construct it” (p. 70). I chose to include this study in my review of the literature because it gives a sense of how magazines such as Maxim project a certain form of masculinity as the true and natural form of masculinity.

David Gauntlett (2002) goes beyond Jackson et al. (2001) to questioning how the New Lad functions discursively to narrow or expand positions of subjectivity taken up by readers. He begins his book Media, Gender and Identity, by stating:

Many of the academic books on ‘masculinity’ are disappointing, as they dwell on archetypes from the past, and have little to say about the real lives of modern men; whereas top-selling magazines and popular self-help books – and, to a lesser but significant extent, TV shows and movies – are full of information about being a man in the here-and-now (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 7).

Gauntlett (2002) believes that many people have commented on the repercussions of previously dominant discourses of masculinity without attempting to fully understand them.

Gauntlett (2002) agrees with Jackson et al. (2001) that laddish magazines strategically employ irony to cover up men’s insecurities and confusion. The irony is used as “a defensive shield: the writers anticipate that many men may reject serious articles on relationships, or advice about sex, health or cooking, and so douse their pieces
with humour, silliness, and irony” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 167). The “protective layer” of irony allows an editor to cover topics in a way that invites the reader to laugh along with them without having to admit that they want, or even need, information on such topics. Gauntlett (2002) argues that the readers know that women are as good as men, and this is actually half of the appeal of the magazines’ put-downs of women. Sexist jokes are seen as funny, explains Gauntlett (2002), because the readers know that in this day and age, there is no basis for the claim that men are better than women.

Gauntlett (2002) disagrees with Jackson et al. (2001) who argue that the irony in the magazines succeeds in concealing the idea that the laddish discourse of masculinity is entirely constructed. Rather it is because readers know that masculinity is constructed, rather than innate, that they flock to laddish magazines, explains Gauntlett (2002). Men are aware that constructs of masculinity change over time, and they read magazines to help them figure out “how to be a man today” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 170). Gauntlett (2002) believes that men’s general interest magazines are very similar to women’s general interest magazines. Women’s magazines focus on representing women as independent and celebrate semi-naked attractive images of men. Men’s magazines also represent men as independent and celebrate semi-naked images of women. Gauntlett (2002) concludes that laddish magazines’ attempt to represent men and women as “different species” is really an “imperfect attempt to find positions for the ideals of ‘women’ and ‘men’ in a world where it’s pretty obvious that the sexes are much more the same than they are different” (p. 176). Gauntlett’s (2002) discussion of irony, along with Beers’ (2001) descriptions of detached and engaged irony, is helpful to my research question because it
challenges me to analyze how advice columns use irony in constructing discourses of masculinity and femininity.

I find it fitting to end this discussion with a quote from a reader of laddish magazines:

At school we always read the problem pages in the girls' copies of Just Seventeen, for a laugh we would say, though actually we were curious about the sex advice too. It's good to have problem pages in a men's magazine – we obviously need it really! (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 178).

This section concludes my review of the literature as it relates to my research topic of analysing discourses of masculinity and femininity in a magazine that is widely read by teen boys. The following chapter documents my CDA findings and the proceeding chapter will feature a discussion of the implications of my findings.
CHAPTER FIVE: PUT THOSE DIRTY RUMORS TO BED

This chapter discusses how femininity and masculinity are discursively positioned in the advice columns of Maxim magazine. These findings are based on my critical discourse analysis of both textual and pictorial content. My findings have been informed by my examination of what information has been included and omitted, how text and pictorial content are combined to contribute to a more general discourse, how femininity and masculinity are made visual, how race is made visible, degrees of interdiscursivity, transitivity, and modality, use of headlines and quotations, and the presence of generalizations and metaphors. In discussing these findings I also articulate the specific elements of CDA that informed such findings. In chapter six I focus on the implications of my findings as the second step of CDA – examining the social practice of the text.

As discussed in chapter one, my findings have been taken from the advice columns of six recent issues of Maxim. In each issue there are two advice columns. The first column, “The Answers” is a general advice section that responds to questions readers have sent in. There is no specific author. The second advice column is written by Sari Locker and focuses on sex advice. While this column usually uses readers’ questions as a platform to discuss a certain topic, often the advice is not based on questions readers have sent in.

I begin this chapter with how femininity is discursively positioned in the advice columns. As I discuss, women are predominantly positioned as sexual partners. Yet there are other less dominant discourses. Femininity is also likened to being faceless and without identity and having little knowledge of one’s body. Within the advice columns

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4 Locker, 2007, April, p. 76.
there are discourses of femininity that compete with and contradict one another as well. At times, women are also presented as emotional beings and relational partners. I then discuss how the dominant discourse of masculinity is that men are sexually active. Other less dominant discourses of masculinity involve men being positioned as intuitively knowledgeable about a woman’s body, and as naturally predisposed to both the objectification of women and engaging in pornographic activities. I also discuss how masculinity is disassociated from safe sex. I then discuss the theme of heteronormative masculinity and femininity that is prevalent throughout Maxim and most general interest magazines. Lastly, I conclude with Maxim’s use of irony.

**Discourses of Femininity**

**Positioning the Feminine as Sexually Active**

A dominant discourse circulated in Maxim is that femininity is associated with sexual activity. Rather than presenting women as sexually passive, as in teen girl magazines (Duke & Kreshel, 1998), Maxim predominantly positions women as sexual partners. Unlike teen girl magazines whose discourses of femininity are dominated by a woman’s fashion sense, domestic abilities or ability to attract a boyfriend (Peirce, 1990; Duke & Kreshel, 1998; McRobbie, 1982), discourses of femininity in Maxim do not reflect these qualities. In fact, there were no discussions in the advice columns relating to a woman’s fashion sense or domestic capabilities. Additionally, constructions of femininity in Maxim rarely related to romantic relationships. Whereas teen girl magazines have been found to largely construct femininity in respect to heterosexual romance, Maxim chooses to construct femininity in respect to heterosexual sexuality. To be feminine, then, according to Maxim is to engage in sexual relations with men.
This discourse in which women are positioned primarily as sexual partners is articulated through the way women are referred to both visually and textually in the advice columns. In the first advice section, questions having to do with women tend to focus on women's sexual habits. For example the question, "Are girls with tats freakier in bed? ("The Answers," 2007, January, p. 13) refers to women with tattoos as more sexually adventurous, while the question, "Are girls on vacation really more sexed up?" ("The Answers," 2007, February, p. 20) refers to women on vacation as sexually promiscuous. The second advice section also confines its references to women within the parameters of sexual activity. The photos in this section accompanying such advice always feature a young woman in lingerie, which, combined with the text, contributes to a discourse in which femininity is conceived within the parameters of one's sexual actions.

The use of generalizations and truth and permission modality also contribute to this discourse in which femininity is largely confined to a woman's sexual activity. In her column Locker refers to women as an essential category and engages in a high degree of truth modality. Women are spoken of as, in bed and otherwise, a homogenous entity. Through such generalizations, the common sense notion that Locker's advice is applicable to all is strengthened along with the notion that a woman's femininity is measured by her sexual activity. In reference to truth modality, when referring to women Locker articulates her advice as incontrovertible knowledge rather than something that is of her opinion. By not premising her advice with "I think," or "my research has found" she fails to acknowledge that the advice she presents to readers is subjective. Even though the term "advice" can be synonymous with the term "suggestion" or "opinion"
(which arguably connotes the notion of subjectivity in a more obvious way), when issued in the form of statements by someone who is referenced as an expert, the advice is presented as factual truth. Consequentially, the discourse of femininity as that which engages in sexual activity is strengthened to the degree that it seems common sense.

Positioning Locker as an “expert” further legitimizes her statements. A black and white photo of Locker is included in each of her columns as well as a list of the three universities at which she was educated (see appendix B). Her Ph.D. credentials are written in bold under her photo. This emphasis on her education and her doctorate positions Locker as an expert on the topic of sex. The reader is not made aware of what field of study her degrees are in; however, her website lists a Ph.D. and M.A. in developmental psychology and an M.Sc. in human sexuality education. Duke and Kreshel (1998) note that girls pay particular attention to advice dictated by boys in magazines. Such findings argue that advice coming from the opposite sex holds great weight by readers. Just as teen girls give great authority to boys’ voices in magazines, male readers of Maxim may give similar authority status to Locker’s voice. Including a photo of Locker further legitimizes her advice as truthful and reliable because it is a visual reminder of her gender. Locker is therefore positioned as a “sex expert” both because of her doctorate credentials and her identity as a woman.

Naturalizing Femininity

Within the realm of sexual engagement, femininity is largely associated with a women’s biology. Instead of constructing femininity in relation to particular emotional, spiritual or mental predispositions, femininity is constructed as located within women’s sexual predispositions. By locating a woman’s sexuality within her biology and
disassociating it from any other factors, women are positioned as universally the same sexually due to the biological makeup of their bodies. This discourse is largely constructed through the use of quotations from experts and by including terms that one commonly associates with science and evidential facts. An example of such quotes are: “Shoot for the week immediately after her period: Thanks to heightened testosterone levels... this is when her sex drive surges” (Locker, 2007, February, p. 58) and, “According to a study in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, positive female body image leads to a higher desire for sex” (Locker, 2007, May, p. 72).

The subtitle of one of Locker’s advice column’s is “Better Sex Through Science: Sari Locker, Ph.D. feeds your need for hot knowledge” (Locker, 2006, December, p. 76). This title positions science as a key to a better sex life. The advice that follows is advice that relates to the physical aspect of sex. By constructing a woman’s sexual pleasure strictly around physical positions and actions, a woman’s sexuality is naturalized. The common sense notion is put forth that all women function the same sexually because they all share the same biology. This essentializing of women enables for the column to position itself as providing advice that can be applied to all sexual encounters a man has with a woman. Locker supports her scientific claims by including terms like “polls,” “interviews,” and “percentage” which are commonly associated with numerical evidence. Even though details regarding these polls, interviews, or statistics are not provided, the very presence of such terms lends authority to their relating statements. Locker’s frequent use of scientific terms also further legitimizes her generalizations.

In both advice columns, femininity is not related to a women’s emotional, domestic or fashionable state or her particular profession. Constructing femininity as that
which is located in sexual activity and disassociated from emotions, romance, or relationships results in discursively positioning sexual relations as independent of these factors. Women are constructed as sexual beings but not emotional or spiritual beings. Their identity is conceived of only within sexual parameters. Unlike teen girl magazines that position acceptance and contentment as achievable through physical beautification, *Maxim* positions acceptance and contentment as that which is achieved through being sexually active and attractive.

**Femininity Without Identity**

An additional discourse is circulated in *Maxim* in which women are faceless and without identity. In the first advice section, three out of five photos had women’s faces omitted. Readers could not see the faces either because the photos were cropped at the neck or the woman’s face was turned away from the camera. I had expected that the women would be wearing very little, and this is indeed the case, but I had not anticipated that their faces would not be revealed. I believe that one’s face plays a large part in representing one’s individuality. Our faces set us apart from one another. Choosing to omit women’s faces is not dissimilar to choosing not to recognize a women’s identity or individuality. This discourse is also constructed textually. To illustrate this point I will refer to one of the vocabulary words that is featured in this section. The word is “stripchat” and it describes an incident in which a man accidentally engages in conversation with his stripper and learns that she is a mother. He is horrified and, “so turned off that she might as well have just stood up and kicked me in the nuts” (“The Answers,” 2007, February, p. 20). The man much preferred to believe that the woman’s

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5 “The Answers” advice section frequently includes a small subsection that describes words writers of *Maxim* have thought up.
identity was confined to her stripper profession. In this text learning about a woman’s identity as she exists outside the bedroom is positioned as unfavorable and unattractive to men. The combination of the visual images with textual references contribute to a more general discourse in which women are positioned as faceless and devoid of identity.

**Competing and Contradictory Discourses**

To summarize, I have explored how femininity is constructed as being sexually active, is naturalized, and positioned as faceless and one-dimensional. However I found that there were discourses present in the magazine that also competed with or even contradicted the aforementioned discourses of femininity. Whereas a significant element of CDA is to identify how particular discourses are reinforced, it is also important to take into account how these same discourses are also contradicted within the text or how they co-exist in competition with other discourses. It can be a much more challenging task to identify competing and contradictory discourses than to identify dominant discourses.

To begin, I found that within *Maxim* the discourse of women as sexual actors competes with the discourse of women as sexual objects. Women are positioned both as sexual agents and sexual objects and these discourses are in competition with one another. I chose to describe these two discourses as in competition with one another rather than as contradictory to each other because I do not believe that positioning a woman as sexually active excludes the potential for her to be positioned as a sexual object. For example, I argue that a photo can both objectify a woman and position her as having sexual agency. Yet whether a woman’s sexual agency is positioned as being independent or dependent on men is another question. I have previously illustrated how
I found women to be positioned as sexual actors. I will now explore how women are positioned as sexual objects.

Photos of women, rather than men, accompany Sari Locker’s sex advice. This came as no surprise to me, and I wondered why it was that I took it for granted. Why did it seem highly predictable that advice regarding sexual relations between men and women only featured photos of women? Men are absent from all photos in Locker’s column and are also never the focal point of a photo in the first advice column. If men and women are both constructed as sexual actors, why are men excluded from all photos? The absence of men in visual images combined with photos of women in lingerie give the impression that women are to be looked at and men are not. Being a woman, then, is in this way associated with being objectified by men. Women are regarded as both sexual actors and objects whereas men are positioned as sexual actors. How the discourse of women as sexual objects facilitates a discourse of men as those who objectify women will be discussed in a following section focusing on discourses of masculinity.

Another finding was that the construction of women as one-dimensional sexual creatures was contradicted on one occasion with the positioning of women as emotional beings. This discourse also acknowledges that women spend time outside of the bedroom and engage in non-sexual activities. This is also one of two occasions in “The Answers” section where the photo accompanying the text features a woman wearing clothes rather than a bikini or lingerie. The question beside this photo of a young woman holding her hand against her face reads, “What can I do to get a woman to stop crying?” (“The Answers,” 2007, May, p. 22). This question is unlike the rest of the questions that are in some way related to a woman’s sexual habits. I found it to be contradictory to other
discourses of femininity that disassociated woman from her emotional state. This question acknowledges that women are emotional beings and perhaps multi-faceted beings. However it is focused on suppressing the emotional by advising men on how to stop women from crying.

The response to this question is very interesting. The response is declared to be written by, “our expert Dr. Jackie Black who in addition to having a Ph.D. is a woman herself” (“The Answers,” 2007, May, p. 22). In this first sentence it has already been established that the proceeding advice should be understood as true and reliable both because it is being communicated from someone who is assigned expert status because of her gender and because of her doctorate credentials. Just as in Sari Locker’s column, in this question the magazine emphasizes the author’s expert status in order to give the impression that what follows is sound advice. Black gives three reasons why a woman would be crying and then one word of advice. She states that a woman would cry either because her feelings are hurt, she is angry, or she is being manipulative. Her word of advice is to sincerely try to talk to the woman, and if that doesn’t work, move on to another woman.

In this specific section of advice a woman is referred to and talked about in a way that is not linked to her sex life. Though this discourse may not be read by some as an empowering alternative to the discourse of femininity rooted in sexual activity, it does acknowledge that there is more to a woman than her sexual activities and that on occasion, if only when they are crying, women wear clothes. It also refers to the idea that women and men may have conversations and engage in non-sexual activities. One may even go so far as to say that the very inclusion of the question acknowledges that men
and women have relationships that extend beyond sexual intercourse. This discourse also contradicts the discourse of masculinity that presents men as naturally knowledgeable about a woman’s body which I discuss in a proceeding section.

On three occasions women were also relationally positioned in regards to men. By this I mean that women were implicated as having relationships with men. There were three questions out of the six issues of *Maxim* that contributed to discursively positioning women as relational partners to men. One question was posed by a man who was concerned about meeting his girlfriend’s father. He wanted advice on what he should talk to this father about. Such a question implies that the man cares about his girlfriend and wants to make a good impression on her family. A man that is only interested in a one-night stand would not have the same concern. This discourse positions women as relational partners and contradicts other discourses that fail to conceive of women in parameters outside of their sexual potential.

The second question in which this discourse is articulated is in a question that asked how a man can know if his girlfriend is cheating. This question also constructs women as relational partners to men because in order to cheat on someone you have to be in an exclusive relationship with that person. The third occasion in which women are positioned as relational partners to men is when a man admits to dating a stripper and asks for advice in regards to “what he is getting into” (“The Answers,” 2007, June, p. 36). This question, even though it essentializes strippers, does refer to the idea that women and men “date.” The term date could signify a variety of activities from going to a movie to eating at a restaurant to renting a hotel room for the night. Though a date may include sexual relations between two people, this is not necessarily its primary function. Dating
someone requires to some extent that one person be involved in another person’s life, and perhaps even invested in that person’s life.

Positioning femininity within a relational context contradicts other discourses that position femininity as exclusive to sexual contexts. That a man may be involved or invested relationally in a woman’s life is a discourse that is contradictory to the more dominant discourse that positions men and women as sexual partners. Women are positioned both as people with whom men have sexual relations and people with whom men engage in exclusive relationships that include dating and meeting one’s family. Yet since the relational discourse is not present in every issue, nor every article, it does not subvert the dominant discourse of women as sexual partners. In the following chapter I will discuss the implications of these findings of discourses of femininity in regards to their social, political and economical practices.

**Discourses of Masculinity**

**Masculinity and Knowledge**

Tinknell et al. (2003) put forth the suggestion that a magazine that provided romantic advice for teen boys did not exist because of a cultural assumption that the management of sexual behaviour is a feminine trait. I found that in *Maxim* sexual behaviour was not relegated to females. Sexual knowledge, experience, and expertise were conversely represented as masculine traits. Though women are positioned as sexual beings, they are presented as having little knowledge of their own bodies’ sexual capabilities or functions. Conversely, men are positioned as having an inherent knowledge of the female body particularly in reference to sex. Men, unlike women, are constructed as having a natural intuition about the opposite sex.
I found this discourse to be articulated textually through the use of generalizations, assumptions, quotations from experts, and the inclusion of terms associated with scientific evidence. A reoccurring theme in the first advice section is to begin answering a reader’s question by professing how an assumption that men have long had about women is in fact “true.” For example, a response may begin with the words, “men have always thought …” (“The Answers,” 2007, January, p. 13). This technique functions to essentialize men and positions all men as sharing the same thoughts in regards to women. Once the text has established the idea that men, because they are men, believe such and such to be true about women, the text then goes on to articulate that this assumption men have about women is indeed not an assumption but is the “truth.” Assumptions are justified as truth through the inclusion of terms that are associated with discourses of science and the inclusion of quotes from an “expert.” These terms such as “polls,” “surveys,” and interviews” are included in order to validate an apparent commonly held assumption men have about women. For instance, in regards to a question asking whether women with tattoos are freakier in bed, the response is as follows:

Men have long believed that if a gal doesn’t care about flouting social norms by having her body permanently painted, she’ll be just as liberal when it’s time to hit the skins. Seems that the guys are onto something, as a Harris Poll found that 42% of inked women feel sexier because of their tattoos, and nearly a third of the tattooed felt more rebellious. (“The Answers,” 2007, January, p. 13).
One does not have details regarding who was in charge of the polling, when it was taken or where. However the mere reference to the poll and the resulting statistical figure gives the text more authority and links men’s intuitive thoughts to scientific evidence.

Another example of text that positions men as naturally intuitive of women is found in a question that asks, “How do I know if my girlfriend’s cheating on me?” (“The Answers,” 2007, April, p. 26). This question, instead of drawing from “scientific evidence” quotes Dr. Jackie Black. Black’s quotes are often strategically placed within the advice columns to drive a particular point. The answer to this particular question begins with Black stating, “The truth is that you will know a lot longer before you will let yourself know what you know” (“The Answers,” 2007, April, p. 26). The use of truth modality is evident with Black’s reference to “the truth.” In other words, the response is that if you think she is cheating on you she is.

Men are also positioned as having a greater degree of sexual knowledge about women than the women themselves. Women’s knowledge about their bodies is positioned as something that is learned rather than something that they are born with. It is a knowledge that develops over time with experience. Sari Locker, the author of the sex advice column, compares such knowledge to a skill that needs to be mastered (Locker, 2006, December, p. 76).

By circulating the idea that all men have a “natural” rather than “learned” knowledge of women, masculinity is associated with sexual knowledge. To be a man is to be not only sexually active but to trust one’s sexual instincts. Femininity is meanwhile associated with sexual inexperience. I believe that masculinity and femininity are constructed in this particular fashion in order to provide male readers reassurance and
confidence. The advice columns, in this way, position themselves as telling men what they already know. I will discuss in the following chapter how this positioning contributes to the magazine column being able to take up content that would otherwise be left out. I believe this discourse is linked to a greater social practice in which topics that may have been considered too embarrassing or intimate are more inclined to be approached and discussed.

**Masculinity as the Objectification of Women**

In “The Answers” section, I found no photos of men accompanying text that was relevant to my analysis. In contrast, in all but one issue there was a photo of a woman. As previously mentioned, the majority of these photos did not feature women’s faces. I did notice however that one particular photo featured men in the background (see appendix C). This photo stood out because in the other photos there was never anyone present in the background. The photo is situated on a beach and while the focus of the photo is three women who look as though they are dancing in bikinis, the reader is aware of men on the beach in the background who are watching these women. What is interesting about this photo is that while the women’s heads have been cropped, the men’s entire bodies are visible. The men are granted faces and these faces are intently focused on the women. Because the women do not have faces they are unable to return the men’s gazes, and in this way are disadvantaged because they are not given equal status. Therefore, to be masculine in this context is to stare at a woman who cannot stare back; to engage in the objectification of women.

Constructing the objectification of women as a prerequisite to being a man is, I believe, foundational to *Maxim*. It provides the common ground on which the magazine
can address its readers. By discursively circulating the notion that men are naturally predisposed to staring at women, *Maxim* is able to present itself as a magazine that provides content for which men are naturally created to want to view. The half-naked images of women plastered throughout the magazine are merely fulfilling a "natural" need of men (Jackson et al., 2001). I argue also that the objectification of women by men is further naturalized in the magazine by the discourse that locates femininity in one's sexual actions. This dominant discourse emphasizes that the photos of scantily clad women are merely representing women in their more "natural" state. These representations are positioned as the "true" representations of women, as if this is how women really are when they relax and let their hair down. Such photos are positioned as simply telling the often hidden "truth" about women. Photos of women in the magazine are positioned as truth guides rather than as items from random photo shoots in which the women are strategically situated in specific poses. By emphasizing that the photos are displaying women in their natural state and that men are naturally predisposed to viewing such photos, the magazine dissociates itself from the idea that it is engaging in objectification.

**Pornography and Masculinity**

The advice columns also discursively position pornography as an activity to which men are naturally predisposed. Both in Locker's column and in "The Answers" column the generalization is made that all men engage in pornography. The discourse is that all men are naturally programmed to engage in pornography. The magazine positions pornography as an entertaining activity and as one that can also enrich one's sex
life. Pornography is positioned both as a “natural” activity of men and, except for one occasion, in a positive light.

The one occasion when pornography was positioned as having possible negative consequences is in “The Answers” advice section in which the following question is featured: “My hard drive is jam-packed. Could I really be addicted to Internet porn?” (Locker, 2007, April, p. 76). Locker’s response to this question is that this happens frequently. She gives three warning signs that signal this “problem.” If you prefer pornography to actual sex, watch porn at work, or if your life is suffering, you may be addicted to porn she explains, and if you can’t stop this addiction you should see a therapist. By reducing the diagnosis of this “addiction” to three vague points, Locker is able to discuss the possible consequences of pornographic engagement in a way that does not condemn pornography, or those who enjoy engaging in it. The discourse is circulated that men are naturally predisposed to engaging in pornography, which is presented as to an extent a healthy activity, and yet a few men may take this “natural predisposition” too far and actually become addicted to it. That pornography is healthy within reason is emphasized in the question that precedes this question. In the preceding question the reader confesses that he finds it difficult to “get off.” Locker suggests that he watch porn while having sex to help with stimulation. In this question pornography is discussed as a possibly enriching agent to one’s sex life.

Based on data collected from surveys, Allen (2004) found that almost three quarters of young men in her sample rated material in pornographic magazines as “very useful” sources of sexual information. Allen’s (2004) study was undertaken with the

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6 Locker does not provide a definition of the term “addiction.”
intention of broadening sex education programmes in New Zealand to include conversations not just based on sexual anatomy but on sexual desire as well. According to Allen (2004), current programmes provide no space for discussions in which young people’s “sexual desire and pleasure can be legitimated, positively integrated and deemed common place” (p. 152). Young people look elsewhere for such conversations and recognition, pornography being one. Yet mainstream pornography offers “denigrating portrayals of women as the objects of male desire rather than the subjects of their own” (Allen, 2004, p. 164). In pornography expressions of male sexuality are limited to exercising power over women (Allen, 2004). Allen’s (2004) arguments as they relate to how men and women are represented in pornography are significant in light of Maxim’s embrace of pornography as both natural and edifying.

To summarize, Maxim presents the common sense notion that all men engage in pornography because they have a natural predisposition towards it. Just as it is natural (and not sexist) for them to gaze at provocative photos of women (or women themselves), it is natural that they frequently watch porn. The dominant discourse circulated is that pornography and the objectification of women is unabashedly legitimized due to men’s naturally predisposition towards it. One is less masculine then, if one does not engage in pornography. The implication of these two discourses is discussed in the following chapter.

Disassociating Masculinity From Responsibility

Along with these discourses of masculinity that naturalize the objectification of women, position all men as having a common, biologically-based knowledge of women, and a natural legitimate tendency to engage in pornography, there is a discourse that
disassociates men from the responsibilities and consequences that result from being sexually active. In a particular column by Locker, the generalization is made that men do not like to wear condoms and are always scheming of ways to get out of wearing them. Referring to "a study" of college women, Locker explains that there was a lower incidence of depression in women who engaged in intercourse without using condoms. She cautions readers who want to use this study to "persuade a woman not to wear a condom" (Locker, 2006, December, p. 76). I found this sentence interesting as it infers that women, not men, wear condoms. The transitivity of this text feminizes the concept of safe sex.

Locker also makes reference to STD's and pregnancies as things that women "contract." The term "contract" is commonly used in reference to disease and has the effect of making pregnancy seem like an unwanted disease to which sexually active women are susceptible. No reference is made to the fact that men are involved in this process. Likewise, no reference is made to the idea that condoms protect men just as much as women and that a woman is only susceptible to an STD if her sexual partner is a carrier of one. The omission of these references construct a discourse in which being a man involves not taking into account the potential ramifications of unsafe sex. Real men, then, apparently are not vulnerable to STDs and are absolved of feeling any responsibility towards a sexual partner who has become pregnant. It is also important to look at what is being omitted from the text. Though Locker's column consistently focuses on sex advice, there is no focus on advice regarding practicing safe sex. That such information

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7 Locker does not provide the name of this particular study nor other details documenting when it was undertaken, by whom, and whether or not it has been published.
8 The more recent politically correct term is sexually transmitted infection (SDI), the term I use in chapter six.
is consistently omitted supports the disassociation between constructs of masculinity in
*Maxim* and safe sex practices.

**Masculinity and Femininity as Heteronormative**

Within the advice pages of *Maxim* masculinity and femininity are constructed
around one’s engagement in sexual relations. What has not yet been discussed is how
heterosexuality is naturalized throughout the magazine content. This is a common theme
throughout general interest magazines and is widely apparent in teen girl magazines’
emphasis on romantic relationships with boys. According to *Maxim*, a woman is
considered feminine if she engages in sexual relationships with men. By making no
mention of homosexual relations, and therefore pretending that they do not exist, *Maxim*
delegitimizes homosexual relations. By locating masculinity and femininity in
heteronormative parameters, *Maxim* presents masculinity and femininity as qualities that
are exclusive to the heterosexual population.

It is fitting here to also mention degrees of intersectionality within the advice
content. As previously stated, there are no photos of men featured in any of the advice
columns. Every one of Locker’s advice columns features a photo of a white woman. In
photos within “The Answers” section it was difficult to determine the race of the different
women as their faces were either cut off or were photographed at obscure angles. These
findings illustrate that to be feminine is to be not only heterosexual, but white as well.
By making no reference to women apart from white women, the characteristic of
“whiteness” is naturalized. Its consistent appearance throughout the columns facilitates a
discourse in which being white is constructed as more natural and desirable (and
therefore preferable) to being non-white.
I Irony

Gauntlett (2002) argues that the use of irony in magazines such as Maxim enables for the discussion of certain topics that otherwise would have been excluded because they are considered too serious or intimate for the magazine. In the literature review we learned that girls tended to dismiss images in teen girl magazines that contained play or subversive irony in their quest for truth (Currie, 1997). As has been made evident in the quotes that I have included in this chapter from Maxim, there is a great deal of irony to be found in the text within the advice columns. I believe that this irony is used strategically to bring up common concerns among many men in a manner in which the reader is encouraged to not be embarrassed but rather is persuaded to laugh along with the text. For instance, irony is used in discussions around impotence, whether it is uncommon for one’s erect penis to be angled, how the removal of a testicle will affect one’s sex drive, in reassuring men if their partner is unable to orgasm during intercourse, and in acknowledging sexual fantasies.

I draw from the work of Hall (1980/2000) to further elaborate on the production of irony in the advice columns of Maxim. Hall (1980/2000) theorized a communications model in which moments of “encoding” and “decoding” are determinate (Hall, 1980/2000, p. 52). On one end of the model a message made up of sign-vehicles is encoded, and on the other end of the model a message is decoded by the receiver. Yet, asserts Hall (1980/2000), the degrees of symmetry between what is encoded and what is decoded may not be the same. Misunderstandings and distortions depend on “relations of equivalence” established between the positions of the encoder-producer and decoder-
receiver (Hall, 1980/2000, p. 54). Relations of equivalence can include factors such as age, race, ethnicity, and gender.

For example, whether or not one understands the dialogue in an episode of The Simpsons to be satiric could depend on one’s age at the time, one’s understanding of American culture, and one’s familiarity with the show. I know many people that have caught glimpse of the show and have been immediately offended but, over time, have come to appreciate the The Simpsons’ use of satire. My reasoning is that the relation of equivalence governing how one understands or misunderstands a message in the advice columns of Maxim may partly depend on one’s familiarity with the magazine’s techniques. I argue that just as The Simpsons use a discourse of satire, Maxim magazine uses a discourse of irony in much of its content.

As mentioned in the literature review, Beers differentiates between two types of irony: detached irony and engaged irony. Detached irony is less sensitive and less concerned with moving people towards living as politically active citizens than is engaged irony where the goal is to use humour to encourage people to engage in society beyond their individualist worlds. David Letterman is an example of a television show that heavily relies on detached irony while The Daily Show With Jon Stewart is a television show that uses the technique of engaged irony. Based on the discourses of masculinity and femininity that I have documented, I argue that Maxim relies on detached irony. A quote from Time magazine in 1999 supports this argument in its statement in regards to Maxim:

Maxim ... is ironic about its dumbness in the manner of a show like South Park, which is to say that the irony is often barely discernible, white noise for a
generation that like to laugh unapologetically at poo and look at pictures of breasts without feeling that [famous feminist] Patricia Ireland is peeking over anyone’s shoulder (Handy, 1999, as cited in Gauntlett, 2002, p. 162).

So what does this have to do with the encoding and decoding model that Hall (1980/2000) describes? Hall (1980/2000) argues that there are three hypothetical ways that one can “decode” an encoded message. There is the dominant-hegemonic position that reflects “perfectly transparent communication” between encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980/2000, p. 59). There is the negotiated position in which one may have a fair understanding of the meaning that is preferred by the encoder-producer and yet one reserves the right to “make a more negotiated application” of the message (Hall, 1980/2000, p. 60). Third there is the oppositional position in which the viewer decodes the message in a way contrary to the dominant-hegemonic position. I argue that one who understands that the advice columns of *Maxim* are to be read within a discourse of ironic detachment is of the dominant-hegemonic position that Hall (1980/2000) describes.

One of my motivations for undertaking this research was to be better informed of the discourses of masculinity and femininity that are circulated in a magazine that is popular among teen boys. In this chapter I have outlined the specific discourses of masculinity and femininity that revealed themselves through my critical discourse analysis. I have found that both femininity and masculinity are largely positioned in reference to sexual activity. I have also found that at times there are other discourses present that compete with or contradict this dominant discourse. I also argued that there is a great deal of ironic detachment in the magazine’s text. In this next chapter my aim is
to discuss the implications of these findings. This is the second step of CDA, to relate embedded discourses to the larger world at hand.
CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS

The primary goals of my research have been to identify fixed truths about masculinity and femininity that are circulated in issues of Maxim magazine and investigate how dominant discourses regarding masculinity and femininity are disguised as common sense. As Fiske (1996) explains, "discourse is the continuous process of making sense and circulating it socially.... Discourse continues its work silently inside our heads as we make our own sense of our everyday lives" (p. 6). Using critical discourse analysis, I looked at the discursive processes through which particular discourses are constructed as representing true reality (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). My research has been conducted under the assumption that "strategizing how to disrupt discourses begins with identifying how they are articulated" (Weedon, 1987/1999, p. 121). I agree with Fiske's (1996) statement that, "the media are crucial in the social circulation of discourse and thus play a formative role in social and political change" (p. 10).

Rather than representing the world, discourse acts in and upon the world (Fiske, 1996, p. 5). In theorizing the ideological, political, and social consequences of discourse (Fairclough, 1995b) one must take a critical approach to the relationship between power and discourse. In other words, one must connect the use of language to the exercise of power. I argued in the previous chapter that a significant finding was the presence of irony in the text. I begin this chapter with discussing the function of irony in the advice columns. I have drawn a similar conclusion to Gauntlett (2002) who expresses the notion that irony allows for certain discourses to be taken up by the columns that otherwise would have been left out. I then go on to discuss possible economic interests behind
specific representations of masculinity and femininity and the ideological, political, and social consequences of these representations. I then suggest how my findings can be used to think about new discourses of masculinity and femininity within the arena of critical media education.

**Irony**

**Irony as a Protective Shield**

In the previous chapter I argue that there is a great deal of irony to be found in the advice columns. This irony acts as a "protective layer" (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 168) as it shields personal topics from being presented in a more serious mode. This particular use of irony enables men and boys to read about certain issues or topics without being addressed as wanting to read about these issues. Addressing someone in a straightforward manner about certain personal issues in one's life implies that one wants, or needs, such information. By using an ironic and humorous discourse, the reader is able to take up the same information in a way in which the reader's personal insecurities are not confronted directly.

Applying this claim to advice columns in *Maxim* that speak of male fantasies, women's sexual preferences, or biological anomalies, one could conclude that, "many men want articles like this, but do not want others – or even perhaps themselves – to think that they need them" (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 168). Irony, then, can be seen as being used to provide a safe space in which readers can engage in reading about certain issues without feeling as though the article is speaking directly to their own inadequacies and fears. Instead of exposing personal fears or making readers feel transparent, this ironic discourse is used in such a way that it reassures readers of their "normalcy." For
instance, when a personal topic comes up, the magazine frames it as a question that a reader has sent in by responding directly to that person. By framing the response as directed only to the reader who wrote in the question, the magazine does not infer to its vast audience of readers that they are suffering from the same issue or have the same insecurity. Yet, because the response is included in the advice column for all to read, it will be read by the other readers, and in this way they receive the same information and knowledge in an indirect manner. Readers can read about other people’s problems, or lack of knowledge, without having to admit they have similar problems or questions.

By using irony as a tool to lighten up otherwise serious conversations, irony provides a space in which certain fears are acknowledged and legitimized while strategically simultaneously denying the idea that these fears and questions are common to all men. This is what I mean when I state that irony is used to reassure readers that they are “normal.” By reading about other men’s questions, whether one relates to them or not, one may be heartened knowing that perhaps not all men have it all “together.” In the findings chapter of this thesis I discussed how a discourse of masculinity is circulated in these columns in which men are presented as having a “natural intuition” regarding women. Perhaps this discourse is circulated as a way of balancing out questions men or boys write in. By juxtaposing this discourse with irony-laden personal questions such as, “my penis is askew ... Is there something wrong with me?” (Locker, 2007, January, p. 50), the dominant discourse circulated is not that men are insecure and in need of information but rather that in general, men have a really good idea of what is going on, although there are a few men out there (and these are the ones who write in questions)
who need some help. This advice section is for them, not you, but if you want to read along you can.

**Political Implication of Irony**

Gauntlett (2002) argues that today’s magazines for men are “all about” the social construction of masculinity (p. 170). He explains that this is the second function of irony – to provide humour through exaggerating the differences between men and women. Sexist jokes are based on non-sexist assumptions, and the intended humour lies in the readers’ knowledge that women are just as good as men and that sexism is idiotic (Gauntlett, 2002). Those who read the sexism seriously are regarded by other readers as an insignificant minority that are of little concern. Using the UK general interest magazine *Front* as an example, one thirty year old male explains:

> Even if a guy, say, read *Front* and took it literally and ‘learned sexism’ from it, I don’t see why feminists would find that threatening or worrying because what is this guy? He’s nothing, he’s a loser. You don’t get on in the world today by being sexist. People will just think he’s a total twat (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 174).

Gauntlett’s (2002) analysis is drawn from his email correspondence with 20 men from the U.S. and UK who identified themselves as readers of general interest magazines. Most of these men acknowledge the “sexist jokiness” of the magazines’ content but explain that it is fairly harmless because men are assumed to “know better” (Gauntlett, 2002). Yet can these men speak for all men? We know nothing of their location, only that they are avid email users. Would these men have given the same responses had these questions been asked while they were teens?
Jackson et al. (2001) take a slightly different approach to the irony they found in men’s general interest magazines. They explain that irony allows one to have one’s cake and eat it too in that it “allows you to express an unpalatable truth in a disguised form, while claiming it is not what you actually meant” (p. 103). Jackson et al. (2001) argue that there is an excessive use of irony in magazines like *Maxim*. They acknowledge that the use of irony enables readers to receive advice in a comfortable manner in which the reader is free from guilt. This is similar to my argument for irony as a way to reassure and speak to readers in non-threatening way about personal issues. The second function of irony, assert Jackson et al. (2001), is that it acts as “a form of cynicism that seeks to dismiss more political forms of critique that may become aimed at the magazines” (p. 104). Rather, “both the readers and producers of the magazines are joined together in a cynical game whereby no one any longer takes the actual content of the magazines seriously, while simultaneously recognizing that they promote a masculinist culture” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 104). This definition of irony reminds me of Beer’s (2001) definition of detached irony. This type of irony functions as a political force that refuses to “engage with a variety of political and ethical engagements” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 105). A danger of this type of irony, asserts Jackson et al. (2001) is that it can foster in its readers ideologies that reinforce binary representations of men and women.

While Jackson et al. (2001) argue that irony can function to entrench traditional ideologies of masculinity and femininity, Gauntlett (2002) argues that irony points to the social construction of masculinity and femininity and makes fun of such constructions. Gauntlett (2002) takes the stance that readers are well aware and accustomed to this playful use of irony whereas Jackson et al. (2001) are concerned that the magazines’
ironic cynicism functions to reinforce traditional discourses of masculinity. Yet the discourses are much more enabling and complex, asserts Gauntlett (2002), when one realizes that, under the surface of irony, readers are seeking help in topics ranging from their relationships with women to friendships with other men. It is the very use of irony that allows such topics to be discussed in a laddish magazine.

Yet what are readers doing with the jokes, advice, and irony within the magazines? When readers “get” a sexist joke, does it result in them actively resisting sexism in their daily life? Or does it further embed the unequal power relations between men and women that continue to exist? Gauntlett (2002) may be dismissing the ironic content of the magazines as too innocent. When derogatory jokes are repeated over and over, is the result really just a laugh? These jokes involve readers in more than just “getting the point” because their representations have social and political implications. Language is not apolitical or gender-neutral.

As I have mentioned, little academic attention has been paid to how teen boys position themselves discursively when reading magazines. Therefore my knowledge of the various ways in which teen boys internalize the ironic content of Maxim is limited. Yet through this research I am much more aware of the political implications behind different readings. Comparing my findings with the research of Gauntlett (2002) and Jackson et al. (2001) I have a better understanding of how the ironic content can work to possibly shed light on the social construction of masculinity and femininity by promoting the idea that such constructions are merely superficial, and can also potentially promote the idea that masculinity and femininity are essential binary categories. In the following
section I examine what economic interests may lie behind specific representations of masculinity and femininity in *Maxim* magazine.

**Economic Interests of Representations**

This section discusses the magazine’s economic interest in discursively positioning masculinity and femininity as that which is active sexually. Looking at North American popular culture as a whole, sex is commonly used as a marketing tool in the film, music, television, and fashion industry. It is not shocking or out of the ordinary to see lingerie ads on giant city billboards. Rather than such images being inconsistent with one’s perception of “reality,” they have become images that are widely circulated within society. This is not to say that all people are immune to or accepting of such images but rather that they are not deemed to be as out of the ordinary as if they were being suddenly displayed 100 years ago or today in different geographical area.

In the literature review we learn that teen girls tend to accept images within advertisements that they feel are consistent over those containing play or subversive irony (Currie, 1997, p. 470). Though these images were located in ads and not in advice columns, this study sheds light on the relationship between one’s negotiation of a discourse and the truth status accorded to such discourse. The images that the girls deemed unrealistic were not accorded truth status as frequently as those images that were considered to be realistic representations of reality. Representations of men and women as highly sexualized are considered to be more realistic within the realm of popular culture than would be representations of men and women founded on abstinence. To represent abstinence or deemphasize the role of sex between men and women in a men’s general interest magazine would be portraying men and women in discourses that run
contradictory and are inconsistent to those circulated within other popular culture texts. Such discourses would be accorded less truth status by readers. These discourses would arguably not bring economic benefits to the magazine, as both advertisers and readers would favour other texts that circulated dominant discourses consistent with most popular culture texts.

This is not to say that everyone who engages in popular culture is under the impression that men and women who are not sexually active are, by default, less masculine and feminine. Yet those in the industry who are open about their choice to not be sexually active still work hard to promote themselves as “sexy” and in this way continue to use discourses of sex to sell their work. For instance, Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears are two well-known performers who, at one time, openly displayed their personal choice to wait until they were married to have sex. Yet they were also heralded as sex symbols because their music videos, lyrics, and performances were often very provocative. I believe this is one of the reasons both these artists have been so successful. They have been able to engage in a sexually charged discourse while balancing their personas as role models for young girls.

A discussion of the economic interests of representations of masculinity and femininity in Maxim would not be complete without taking into account the relationship between Maxim and the advertisements featured within it. Companies choose to advertise in magazines based on their circulation numbers. In reference to the International Publishing Company (IPC) launch of Loaded, the editor-in-chief Alan Lewis explains, “If I’m totally honest … the whole idea of us starting a men’s magazine was ad-driven. GQ, Arena, and Esquire contained loads of ads that we weren’t getting –
clothes, fragrance, booze, cars, etc.” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 58). In FHM, approximately 45% of its content is advertisements (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 75). Gill Hudson (the editor of Maxim at the time of its launch in 1994), explains:

“It’s the advertisers who have the real control because they just won’t advertise in anything smutty.... We could all be a lot dirtier than we are but you wouldn’t get the advertisers in, so the advertisers ... are in control” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 64).

These quotations from current and former editors of laddish magazines attest to how heavily invested advertisers are in the specific representations of men and women in the magazines that they use for advertising. Chanel and Gucci are two companies that are reluctant to advertise in Maxim due to its highly sexualized content (Jackson et al., 2001).

In response to the comment that laddish magazines at times received backlash from their advertisers, magazine editor Mark Higham replies, “Readers loved the sex content and it doesn’t really matter what advertisers say, if you’ve got the numbers reading your mag [sic] than you can get the advertisers no matter what” (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 63). These comments by Higham and Hudson highlight the tension that exists between magazines and their advertisers. Whereas Hudson believes that the advertisers are in control, Higham argues that whether a company will or will not buy ad space in a given magazine ultimately depends on the circulation figures of that magazine.

In this section I used Spears and Simpson as two examples of how popular culture consistently associates sex with femininity and to argue that Maxim, by engaging in this same discourse, is participating in a similar economic strategy to these two artists. I have also illustrated how magazines rely on advertisers for revenue and how this relationship
may influence a magazine's content, particularly its representations of masculinity and femininity. In the following section I will discuss potential ideological, political, and social consequences of such representations.

**Ideological Consequences**

When examining the consequences of any discourse, one must examine how the circulation of particular representations sustain certain relations of power. In this section I discuss possible ideological consequences of the discourses of femininity and masculinity being circulated as common sense in the advice columns of *Maxim*. How may the discourses illustrated in my findings chapter influence ways of thinking about masculinity and femininity? How do they challenge or reinforce traditional ideologies and relations of power? Neither men nor women are presented with great depth of character in the advice columns. The columns presented sex as the common denominator between men and women.

I have mentioned that in the photos women are often represented as faceless. This further illustrates how femininity is associated with shallow character and is devoid of identity. Women are also represented as highly sexualized. The magazine's association of being highly sexualized with having a displaced identity does not challenge traditional ideologies which depict sex trade workers as being less-than-human individuals embodying a personality that goes no further than their fishnet stockings and high heels. We must consider that sex workers are 120 times more likely than any other demographic group to be beaten, raped, murdered or kidnapped (Smith, 2007). I argue that this particular discourse in *Maxim* does not challenge traditional ideologies regarding representations of highly sexualized women. Although *Maxim* heralds female sexuality,
it is contradictory in that it attaches a stigma to it as well by refusing to acknowledge that such women have faces and identities. As illustrated in the previous chapter, a man was described as “being kicked in the nuts” when he was exposed to his stripper’s identity as a mother. In society, one who is misunderstood as a less legitimate person is often a likely victim of violence. The concept of intersectionality, which is discussed in chapter five, is helpful in understanding how people who do not visibly fit into the constructed categories of “whiteness” or “heterosexual” are often victims of violence, much like highly sexualized women.

In the advice columns men are presented as having more knowledge about a woman’s body than the women themselves. Women are positioned as sexually willing partners who often need a slight nudge of persuasion. In this way men are presented as being the leader in this aspect of the relationship because they are the initiators and the ones with more knowledge. These discourses position men as the dominant figure in the relationship. What is concerning about this ideology is that it reinforces the idea that men are by nature dominant in bed and women are submissive. It dismisses a woman’s choice to not have sex by positioning women as always in need of a little coaxing or nudging to get them in the mood. This discourse is rooted in the “historical assumption that women do not have the right to be sexually self-determining” (Clark & Lewis, 1977, p. 167). In other words, explain Clark and Lewis (1977), a woman’s sexual organs are consistently viewed as the “exclusive property of one man, or the common property of all men” (p. 167).

The discourse of women as naturally sexually submissive has consequences in regards to rape convictions. In the eyes of the law, one is a victim of rape if one does not
consent to sexual intercourse. The opposite of consent, according to the law, is resistance. Yet it is often extremely challenging for a female rape victim to prove that she did not consent to sexual intercourse. In certain circumstances, a woman may view rape as an alternative to further physical harm or death. In this situation, submitting to rape may be a rational decision undertaken to protect one’s life (Clark & Lewis, 1977). In such a circumstance there may not be a great deal of evidence that the victim has “resisted” the alleged crime, and as a result, her “submission” to rape is interpreted by the justice system as consensual sexual intercourse. Unlike with other crimes such as theft, rape investigations generally refuse to “acknowledge that the relevant issue is the offender’s behaviour rather than the victim’s state of mind” (Clark & Lewis, 1977, p. 164). Therefore, this discourse does not empower women because it does not reinforce that women do know what they want or understand the difference between consensual and non-consensual sexual intercourse. It maintains unequal power relations that consequentially work in favour of rapists and against rape victims.

At one point in the advice columns a woman’s emotional side is brought up in a question regarding how a man can get a woman to stop crying. *Maxim* responded by explaining that a woman cries for one of three reasons: she either wants to get her way and is being manipulative, she is angry, or her feelings are hurt. In this context, positioning emotion as it relates to women is restraining rather than empowering to all women because it essentializes a woman’s tears, and it presents one’s emotional side as being childish in that it relates crying to manipulation. Instead of discussing emotions as genuine, or as a significant and important aspect to being a man or a woman, emotion is discussed as a negative factor common to all women and children. This particular
representation of emotion does not encourage readers to develop or share their emotional side. It supports traditional ideologies of women as emotional beings and men as rational beings, and therefore the common sense notion that some qualities are naturally feminine and others are naturally masculine. Considering that adolescent males are reading this magazine, it is concerning that the magazine may be implying through these discourses that to be a man is to suppress one’s emotions.

Social Consequences

As discussed previously in the section on irony, there is some space made within the advice columns that is focused on acknowledging men’s fears and insecurities in a non-threatening and indirect manner. This space can be viewed as empowering to readers because it gives readers access to other men’s issues and concerns. Even if readers do not share the exact same concerns, their own personal issues and concerns are granted validation in this process because it is acknowledged that it is ok to have personal issues and concerns. Allen (2004) argues that there is little to no space in sex education programs for discussions that validate young people’s sexual desires or recognize young people’s need for sexual knowledge. By reading Maxim, one is perhaps made to feel more “normal” through reading about other people’s problems, whether one shares them or not. The irony that is incorporated into the questions and answers within the advice columns reinforces that this is a safe space for readers in the way that it disassociates the personal element of the advice content from the readers’ lives with its use of detached irony.

When examining the social consequences of the discourses in Maxim, one needs to emphasize the fact that two women (Black and Locker) are representing the voice of
all women in the advice columns. These two women are saying to both men and women that to be sexually active is to be “normal,” and is in fact a measure of masculinity or femininity, that women are similar to commodities in that if you are not satisfied with one, you should go get another, and that practicing safe sex is a feminine quality. I am not arguing that to be sexually active is “abnormal” or should be instead discouraged; rather I am raising awareness to the fact that these are dominating discourses in a magazine that is widely read by adolescent boys. While assumptions cannot be made regarding how teen boys discursively position themselves in regards to these discourses, one can speculate what possible implications these discourses may have socially.

First, if one’s sexual experience is a measure of one’s masculinity, how may that belief influence one’s choice of when one will engage in sexual relations? Will girls or boys who choose to wait until they are older to have sex be regarded as less feminine or less masculine? What are the possible consequences of feminizing safe sex? Will boys see contraceptives as a female responsibility? How will this discourse function to inform or misinform youth of the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)? STIs are still widely associated with women and gay men. In a survey conducted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, only 22% of men who self-identified as heterosexual wore condoms when they had sex with male partners [sic] (Positive Women’s Network, 2006, p. 4). Fifty-five percent of self-identified gay men wore condoms when they had sex with male partners (Positive Women’s Network, 2006, p. 4).

A recent advertisement on television spoke about the spread of human papilloma virus (HPV). This ad was launched under the Merck “Tell Someone” HPV awareness campaign. Merck happened to release the HPV vaccine Gardasil one month after the
commercials were introduced on television. Both men and women can get HPV and pass it on without realizing it. There are over one hundred different types of HPV. Thirteen of these types can lead to cancer of the cervix and approximately 3,700 women will die from cervical cancer in the U.S. in 2007 (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, 2007, p. 1). It has been estimated that over half of sexually active men in the U.S. will have HPV at some point in their lives (Centre for Disease Control, 2006). Presently there is no approved test that can detect HPV in men. In women, HPV is detected through taking a pap smear test.

The “Tell Someone” commercial featured short testimonies of various women explaining how they found out they had HPV and how, if left untreated, HPV can lead to cervical cancer. The sound bite was that if you find out you have HPV you should “tell someone.” There was no mention that men are also carriers of HPV. There was no mention of a new study that demonstrated a 70% reduction in HPV in women when their partner wore a condom (Winer, Lee, Hughes, Adam, Kiviati, & Koutsky, 2006, as cited in Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, 2007, p. 7). Instead, by omitting any reference to sexual relations with men, the commercial locates the virus in women. Yet men are equally involved in the spread of HPV. Why did the commercial not have men encouraging viewers to “tell someone?” Why does the responsibility for spreading this knowledge fall on the shoulders of women? And when will there be a test approved that detects HPV in men? A new HPV vaccine was approved in the U.S. in June 2006 and in Canada in July 2006. To be effective, it has to be introduced prior to one’s exposure to HPV. The American Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that this vaccine be administered to females aged 9 to 26 years old. It is
not licensed to be administered to males though the Obstetrics and Gynecology Journal has recommended that this vaccine also be given to boys (Positive Women’s Network, 2006, p. 5).

Additionally, the finding that the discourses of masculinity and femininity in *Maxim* differ from discourses of masculinity and femininity in magazines read by teen girls needs to be examined in respect to possible social consequences. When Willemsen (1998) compared a popular Netherlands teen girl magazine *Yes* with the Netherlands’ only teen boy magazine *Webber*, he found that the magazines discussed similar topics in very different ways. Whereas *Yes* discussed relationships in reference to love, *Webber* discussed relationships in relation to sex, with love presented in negative terms. In response to how the magazines discursively position heterosexual relationships, Willemsen (1998) notes that boys and girls in the Netherlands have similar thoughts and values when it comes to relationships with each other (Du Bois-Raymond, Peters, & Ravesloot, 1994; van Zessen & Sandfort, 1991, both as cited in Willemsen, 1998, p. 959). Yet the discourses available to girls in *Yes* are not available to boys in *Webber*, and the discourses available to boys in *Webber* are not available to girls in *Yes*.

Relying on the studies cited by Willemsen (1998), one could suggest that perhaps the magazines are not reflecting what girls and boys really believe when it comes to relationships. Perhaps the magazines are not taken seriously at all and instead are read for the humour located in their highly constructed relationship scenarios. However they are read, it is important to note, as did Willemsen (1998), that such magazines are keeping traditional discourses of femininity and masculinity alive. They are not challenging readers to engage in alternate ways of thinking about femininity and
masculinity. Since narrow parameters of masculinity and femininity discursively exist in such magazines, when reading such magazines, there is the question of how these discourses function to influence contradictory expectations or actions between boys and girls in relationships. Though perhaps the privacy offered by an anonymous survey may reveal that in one’s heart one believes girls and boys are more similar than different when it comes to relationships, in the more public realm of school hallways and weekend parties, how does one participate in the socially constructed definitions of masculinity and femininity that are offered by teen magazines and one’s popular culture?

Vigorio and Curry (1998) argue that the contradictions between representations of masculinity in magazines read by men and representations of masculinity in magazines read by women may function to create contradictory expectations in men and women regarding the role of men in relationships. The studies of both Vigorito and Curry (1998) and Willemsen (1998) illustrate that more often than not, magazines read by women and girls contain different discourses of masculinity than do magazines read by boys and men and that magazines read by boys and men contain different discourses of femininity than do magazines read by girls and women. In teen girl magazines femininity is discursively positioned in accordance with one’s fashion choices (Evans et al., 1991), one’s domestic abilities (Peirce, 1990) one’s physique (Duke & Kreshel, 1998) one’s ability to get a man (McRobbie, 1982), or one’s sexual passivity (Carpenter, 1998). In Maxim femininity is discursively positioned in accordance with one’s sexual actions, with having little to no identity, and is naturalized through presenting a woman’s biology as the single influencing factor to her sexuality. To summarize, this research has found that, similar to research focusing on discourses of masculinity (Vigorito & Curry, 1998), contradictory
discourses of femininity exist between magazines read by girls and magazines read by boys.

Political Consequences

We have thus far learned that the advice columns of Maxim position the objectification of women by men as “natural.” To gaze at women is presented as a natural need and desire men that have because they are sexual beings, and therefore the inclusion of photos of women are defended by magazine editors to be “sexual” rather than “sexist” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 70). Since masculinity is the binary against which femininity is positioned, and gazing at half-naked women is positioned as a natural quality of masculinity, being objectified then becomes a natural quality of femininity. The discourse that promotes looking at women as fulfilling an essential need among men is disempowering to women. Women are presented as those who are to be looked at rather than as those who look at others. Their faces are removed so that they cannot return the gaze of those who look at them.

We must take into account the political consequences of such discourses. The objectification of women is not a discourse that challenges traditional ideologies. The discourse of the objectification of women is instead positioned as naturally entrenched and not susceptible to change rather than as something that is socially constructed. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) stress the importance of analysing how discourses are constructed to give the impression that they represent true reality (p. 14). Maxim presents the objectification of woman as that which will never be changed, as that which is foundational to both the identities of men and women. Both men and women and boys and girls are implicated in the process of theorizing new discourses of masculinity and
femininity. One cannot view representations of women and only suggest how to get women and girls involved in creating new discourses so that they may be more politically empowered. One also has to get men and boys involved in this process for they are a vital factor in representing women in ways that challenge existing power relations.

**Critical Media Education**

Analysis which supports the theory that masculine identities are constructed, rather than natural categories, can be linked to “wider efforts to provide alternative political spaces for the critical discussion of what it means to be a young, heterosexual man today” (Jackson et al, 2001, p. 107). Magazines, as well as other popular culture material, are pedagogical resources through which one can engage in articulating new discourses of both masculinity and femininity. The following quote from Davies’ (1993) book *Shards of glass: children reading and writing beyond gendered identities* resonates with me:

> Poststructural feminism … recognizes that masculinities and femininities are constituted in *relation* to each other. They cannot be understood independently of each other, nor does it make sense to make the possibility of change available to girls if it is not also being made available to boys. The burden of change cannot and should not lie entirely with girls (p. x).

Through the avenue of critical media education boys and girls have the opportunity to explore new discourses of masculinity and femininity. Magazines are one of many popular texts that can act as a catalyst for such discussions. Television shows, movies, and video games are additional popular culture texts that can be “excavated as rich pedagogical resources” (Stack & Kelly, 2006, p. 17). Considering over 12 billion
dollars per year is spent on advertising and marketing to children (McChesney, 2002, as cited in Stack & Kelly, 2006, p. 7), and the blurring of lines between advertising and entertainment through the process of vertical integration with each of the Big Seven (AOL/Time Warner, Viacom, Walt Disney, Murdoch’s News Corporation, Vivendi Universal, Sony and Bertelsmann), critical media education is a necessary element of educational curricula. In Canada, CanWest, Bell Canada, Quebecor, Torstar, and Rogers are the five big companies that together control most media outlets (Winter, 2002).

The making of alternative magazines by girls for girls is one way in which youth have used media production to offer alternate discourses of femininity. In these self-published alternatives to commercial magazines (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004), girls are able to share stories in a safe place on topics such as social justice, puberty, incest, self-mutilation, and sexual harassment. Through the sharing of stories readers begin to recognize their personal experiences as part of a bigger political problem (Schilt, 2003), rather than an individual “problem” that exists only behind closed doors in the bedroom.

Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) are interested in learning why and how certain girls “write against gendered stereotypes and cultural norms” in their zines (p. 411). Through their interviews, observations, and questionnaires with adolescent girl zine writers, Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) found that three conditions were necessary for girls to write in the way that they did. First, there was some influential factor motivating them to speak out about certain social injustices particularly as they relate to society’s expectations for

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Vertical integration is a term that refers to a process of cultural production where a product is first constructed out of raw materials and then is publicized and distributed across a range of networks. An example would be the production and distribution of Walt Disney merchandise through networks such as films, tv shows, theme-parks and retail stores.
women and men and the media's perpetuation of gendered roles. Second, the writers needed to feel supported in voicing their concerns. Support was often sustained through peers and parents with liberal views. The girls were generally white and of middle or upper class status, and Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) believed their privileged socioeconomic position also played a significant role in maintaining support for their views. Third, girl zine writers needed to feel that they were being rewarded for their efforts either by admiration felt by peers or through receiving fan mail. Though Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) do not recommend that teachers assign zine writing in the classroom, they do suggest that teachers “promote the ethic of zines” (p. 432) by giving students more freedom in their writing assignments. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) support this argument by noting research that suggests that when in class, students will not write about topics unsanctioned by the school (Moje, 2000, as cited in Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p. 433). Guzzetti and Gamboa’s (2004) findings demonstrate that students can be encouraged to be critical and resistant readers and writers if they are provided with a safe space, feel supported by peers, parents and teachers, and believe that their efforts will somehow be rewarded.

Kearney (2006) provides more insight into conditions that must exist for students to participate in the “meaning-making” process of discourse (p. 94). She is critical of the curricula of organizations such as Girls Inc., arguing that it teaches, “an outdated and reductive understanding of media representations as direct reflections of, and thus direct influences on, reality” (Kearney, 2006, p. 93), rather than encouraging youth to “understand media texts as polysemous or to consider consumers as actively participating

10 Girls Inc. is an international girls advocacy organization that began in England in 1964.
in the meaning-making process” (pp. 93, 94). Kearney (2006) advocates for a type of media education that does not take an oppositional approach to commercial media culture but instead regards media as a significant site of young people’s identity formation and a useful site for developing critical consciousness. As Kelly (2006) explains, “young people do not participate equally in the making of culture in the everyday world or in public spheres, which contributes to their subordination” (p. 35). Print media is just one of many mediums of popular culture that need to undergo critical discourse analysis and one of many means through which new discourses can be articulated.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have, at times, discussed men and women and boys and girls using terms that may give the impression that I believe all men and all boys share the same thoughts, and all women and all girls share the same thoughts. As this is the concluding section of this final chapter, I find it timely to emphasize that I do not believe one can ever make such generalizations. As Fairclough (1995a, 1995b) explains and as Hall (1980/2000) illustrates in his encoding/decoding model, texts do not have unitary meanings but are variously interpreted. Media texts often contain “multiple and often contradictory messages, and thus elicit multiple and often contradictory responses” (Kearney, 2006, p. 120). As Currie (1997) illustrates in her study with teen girls and the magazines they read, one’s lived experience is often a deciding factor of whether one will resist or accept a particular representation.

My intent in this research has been to take a critical approach towards gaining an understanding of how concepts of masculinity and femininity are used as a foil to one another. In *Maxim* magazine, masculinity was often defined as that which is opposite to
femininity, and femininity as that which is opposite to masculinity. However, dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity both centred around being sexually active. A great deal of the content contained irony, which further complicates theorizing how these discourses may be taken up by readers. Men who were willing participants in the research of Gauntlett (2002) and Jackson et al. (2001) stressed that they understood that the ironic content was not meant to be taken seriously, and yet they generally agreed that not all men will read the content in this same way, attesting to the idea that one can be both "vulnerable and savvy" (Bordo, 2003, as quoted in Stack & Kelly, 2006, p. 9) when confronted with media text and images. This research on Maxim illustrates that unequal power relations continue to persist and are deeply embedded within content that is rampant with humour and irony. Traditional discourses of masculinity and femininity are widely prevalent in Maxim though at times they are subtly and discreetly displayed along with irony.

A necessary step to better understand how one can go about articulating new discourses of masculinity and femininity with youth is undertaking research that is focused on the various ways that boys position themselves discursively when reading magazines. In reference to their reasoning for including males in research on alternative definitions of masculinity and femininity, Guzzetti and Gamboa (2004) state that, "males in their oppression of females are themselves oppressed" (p. 414). Kelly (2006) claims that if educational researchers want to learn how they can better prepare youth for producing alternative media, they must invite youth to act as co-researchers. This critical discourse analysis has illustrated the discourses that are being made available to readers
of *Maxim*. The next step is to encourage the participation of teen boys in research focused on understanding how teen boys make meaning out of such discourses.
REFERENCES


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Our sex doc holds degrees from Cornell, Penn, and Columbia.

Sari Locker, Ph.D.
APPENDIX C

The bellybutton-naring contest finalists.