

**DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMININITY IN A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN
WOMEN'S MAGAZINE: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH**

by

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DECLARATION

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I declare that **DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMININITY IN A CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S MAGAZINE: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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With great appreciation, I thank my supervisor Professor Eduard Fourie for his unfaltering patience and continuous motivation.

To my parents, thank you for your continuous and never-ending support, encouragement, and love. I am truly blessed to have you as my parents.

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Finally, to all my friends who have supported me over the years, I am grateful to have such wonderful individuals in my life.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, the researcher presents the findings of a discourse analytic enquiry on the construction of femininity within a contemporary South African magazine. It is argued that gender is a social construction and that women's magazines provide a channel through which discourse of femininity reaches women. These discourses in women's magazines are often narrow and stereotypical in nature which may limit the development of women's feminine gender identities.

A discourse analytic approach was utilised to reveal the different discourses of femininity within a contemporary women's magazines, *Cosmopolitan*, as well as to indicate how they may contribute to the construction of femininity. From the magazine, relationship-focused articles were selected, from which three predominant discourses of femininity were identified which includes femininity as heterosexual, nurturing, and managerial.

An important finding is that competing discourses of empowerment and traditional femininity were evident. This points to the highly complex ways in which gender, specifically femininity, is constructed in the magazine under study.

Key terms

Femininity, gender, social construction, discourse analysis, Discursive psychology, contemporary women's magazines, media, gender negotiation, discourses of femininity

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I introduce the study by contextualising it in terms of a thorough discussion of the background of magazines and gender, based on recent literature, to indicate how it relates to different viewpoints on the social construction of gender. The chapter is structured as follows: First, I identify the main aim of the study; second, I identify the methodological approach followed to reach the objectives of the study; third, I present a brief discussion of the methodological approach followed in the study, including a summary of the discursive framework on which the analysis was based; fourth, I outline the sampling method utilised; fifth, a systematic discussion of the data analysis process follows; and, lastly, I examine the ethical concerns considered for the purpose of the study.

General introduction

It has been argued that popular media is central to the formation and continuation of various discourses, which play an essential role in creating and maintaining discourses that shape current gender ideologies (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006) and that the media, including magazines, play a significant role in constituting this process, rather than simply reflecting or representing such differences, which are also reflected through active consumption of such media text (Benwell, 2002). Gender, which relates to femininity and masculinity, may be seen as a social construct reified through stylised repetition of acts which are actively constituted and re-informed through the media, with specific reference to magazines (Benwell, 2002).

Current research on portrayals of sexuality in women's magazines suggests that there exists a focus on the sexual differences between men and women (Menard & Kleinplatz, 2008). Women's magazines provide different and conflicting messages about gender and sex roles. Where it is encouraged to be sexually appealing, emphasis is placed on the importance of romantic relationships, and instructions are given on how to please men (Taylor, 2005). Simultaneously, from a social constructionist approach, these discourses of gender do not merely reflect, but constitute and construct the social world (Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003).

However, although magazines aim to present femininity as a stable and unambiguous construct, it is argued that gender cannot be viewed as monolithic or as an unchanging category (Benwell, 2002), but, rather, as a constantly changing and negotiable social construct (Ahl, 2004). This section contextualises this specifically, in terms of the relationship between women's magazines and gender, as well as social constructionism and gender.

Women's magazines and gender

Women's magazines function as an authoritative text of femininity (Blood, 2005), where magazine discourses present highly seductive images and text communicating cultural expectations of women's roles (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). From this, it is construed that messages within women's magazines may be seen as not reflecting the social world, but rather as a means of perpetuating social myths of gender (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Therefore, it may be argued that magazines provide a vehicle which not only reflects norms of femininity, but also produces such norms.

Social constructionism and gender

Social constructionism assumes that all knowledge is socially constructed, that knowing is mediated through social interactions, where knowledge is viewed, not as something that occurs within an individual's mind, but rather as a result of these social interactions (Ahl, 2004; Nagar, 2002). One of the main posits of social constructionism is that it is interested in investigating how people know what they know, and continuously questioning taken-for-granted knowledge (Nagar, 2002). Therefore, social constructionism views people's values and beliefs as being socially constructed, context specific and co-created, in relation to a certain time and place (Ahl, 2004). According to social constructionism, reality can only be constructed in relation to others. This was probably best described by Nagar (2002, p. 5): 'Since social constructionism sees meaning and beliefs as arising from social interaction, it would follow that people from different social or cultural environments would view the world differently, they would have different realities. Furthermore, social constructionism emphasises the importance of language in the creation of reality, because perception can only evolve within a cradle of communication.'

The resurgence of feminism in the 1970s challenged the androcentric view of the world that dominated for a long period of time (Jackson & Scott, 2002). The main focus of feminism is to counter the assumption that existing differences between women and men are a natural order of life. Jackson and Scott (2002, p. 1) state in this regard that 'the concept of gender was adopted to emphasise the social construction of masculinity and femininity, and the social ordering of relations between women and men'.

Based on the above and for the purpose of this study, gender is defined as a hierarchical separation between men and women, rooted in both social institutions and social practices, where gender is seen as a social structural phenomenon which is produced, negotiated and sustained by everyday interaction (Jackson & Scott, 2002). Furthermore, it is contended that the inhabited world is ordered by gender, yet gender is also embodied and lived by women and men, in local, specific, biographical contexts and is experienced as central to individual identities (Jackson & Scott, 2002). Gender, therefore, comprises the social division and cultural distinction between women and men, as well as the characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity. In addition, it is argued that gender cannot be isolated from the wider

social relations in which it is ingrained, since gender overlaps with other social divisions and inequalities, such as class, race and sexuality, and that the meanings of femininity and masculinity vary within and across societies (Jackson & Scott, 2002). Therefore, bodies and identities become gendered through a constant performance of gender where, for example, to be feminine means to perform femininity.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

In the past, studies about women and media took one of two forms, namely: (i) content analysis of the media, mostly television programming and magazines, or (ii) investigation of the effects of media messages, mostly portrayed by television programmes or magazines, on the audience's perception of social reality (Fung & Ma, 2000). This led to many researchers expressing their concern, as it was argued that repeated exposure to media ideals and stereotyped sexual roles could constrain young women's developing beliefs about femininity and sexuality (Ward, 2004). In addition, research has shown that media depictions of women as sex objects are linked to young people's notions of women as sex objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Therefore, the manner in which femininity is constructed within the media could have implications for women's healthy development of notions of femininity and gender identity.

The main aim of this study is to address these gaps and limitations of existing studies by exploring the discourse practices and strategies, as well as themes and ideologies of femininity, within contemporary women's magazines. The study is, therefore, interested in examining how women's magazines construct femininity through discourse which differs from most previous studies in the literature.

METHODOLOGY

The majority of research conducted on magazines has been in the form of content analysis (Ward, 2004). Content analysis refers to a variety of methods used to analyse text by means of quantitative techniques which measure certain aspects of the media text (Carter & Steiner, 2004). Content analyses mainly focus on the images and portrayal of women by analysing the content presented in the media text (Fung & Ma, 2000). The notion that the media act or should act as a reflection or mirror of society has been widely contested by many media scholars as being naïve and damaging to our understanding of media/gender relations. It has been argued that, rather than reflecting reality, the media is involved in producing and constructing particular versions of reality, in order to make them 'real' and persuasive (Gill, 2007).

In an attempt to address the limitations and gaps in existing studies, it was decided to focus on women's magazines, to provide new insight and build upon existing knowledge of the construction of femininity in contemporary women's magazines. For the purpose of this study, a discourse analytic approach was utilised to reveal the different discourses within women's magazines and indicate how they may

contribute to the construction of femininity. This section presents a brief discussion of this approach, the sampling method, as well as the ethical considerations of the study.

A discursive framework for analysis

Within the domain of a discursive approach to psychology, language is presented as not reflecting psychological or social reality, but rather as constructing it (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 2000). Discourse analysis is a method which emphasises the fact that social reality is linguistically constructed with the purpose of understanding social life and interaction from the study of social texts, thereby highlighting the link between discourse analysis and a social constructionist approach to research (Breakwell et al., 2000).

A social constructionist perspective assumes a critical approach towards 'taken-for-granted ways' in which we understand the world and ourselves, such as the categories we use to interpret the world. These categories correspond to 'real objective' entities (Ahl, 2004). This understanding of the world is seen as constructed through various social processes, specifically linguistic interactions, which are culturally and historically specific. The premise of language as constructive tool forms the core assumption of discourse analysis. This method of analysis cannot be separated from its epistemology, such as its core assumptions of the bases or possibilities of knowledge (Breakwell et al., 2000).

The language user is viewed as selecting from a range of linguistic available resources and using these resources to construct a version of events, although not necessarily in an intentional way (Litosseliti, 2002). Although people may not be able to articulate the constructive process in which they engage, it does not mean that it does not exist. This merely emphasises the extent to which the constructive use of language is a taken-for-granted aspect of social life (Breakwell et al., 2000).

Discourse analysis, conversely, does not use language as a means of gaining access to people's psychological and social worlds, but rather focuses on the public and collective reality which is constructed through language use. It examines how people use language to construct versions of their worlds and what they benefit from these constructions (Breakwell et al., 2000).

This type of analysis has developed over recent years within the fields of sociology and social psychology, and provides a method for exploring how subjectivities, events and experiences are constituted in language (Blood, 2005). Discourse analysis follows the premise that linguistic material assumes an action orientation, where language is used to perform social functions such as justifying, questioning and accusation. This is achieved through a variety of rhetorical strategies.

Key tasks that a discourse analyst performs are: to identify *what* functions are being performed by the linguistic material being analysed; and to consider *how* these functions are being performed. This involves investigating what discourses are shared across texts and what constructions of the world the material can be seen as advocating, rather than focusing on the details of how utterances relate to the conversational sequence to which they belong, and the interactional work accomplished by these utterances and sequences. With the emphasis on the socially constructed nature of reality, discourse analysis is able to point to the constructed nature, and implications, of problematic discourse and indicate that alternative discourses could be constructed in their place (Breakwell et al., 2000).

Gill (2007) divides discourse analysis in terms of four main themes or pillars, namely: a concern with discourse itself; a view of language as constructive and constructed; an emphasis on discourse as a form of action; and the belief in the rhetorical organisation of discourse. For the purposes of this study, these four pillars will be applied as follows:

- First, the discourse itself is taken as topic. The term, 'discourse', refers to all forms of talk and text, specifically, in this case, within a contemporary women's magazine. Here, the discourse analyst is concerned with the text itself, rather than viewing the text as a means of achieving some reality that lies behind the discourse. This means that the discourse analyst is interested in the content and organisation of the text, rather than viewing the discourse as a pathway to some other reality to be found.
- The second theme of discourse analysis is that language is constructive. This highlights three facets of the approach. First, it is based on the fact that discourse is built or produced out of pre-existing linguistic resources. Second, it draws attention to the fact that the assembling of an account involves a choice or selection from a number of various possibilities, which suggests that it is possible to describe the simplest account in multiple ways. Third, the notion of construction highlights the fact that we deal with the world in terms of constructions, not in a direct or unmediated way, but in a very real sense that there are various kinds of constructs of our world. This fundamentally constructionist assumption will, therefore, be used to highlight the link of discourse analysis of women's magazines to post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches, in the broad sense.
- The third feature highlights discourse as a social practice, where discourse is concerned with an action or function orientation. In other words, language in women's magazines will be viewed as a practice in its own right, where people make use of discourse (or language) to achieve something, for example, to cast blame or to present themselves in a positive light, based on

gender and, more specifically, femininity. Gill (2007, p. 60) states, 'To highlight this is to underline the fact that discourse does not occur in a social vacuum and it is oriented to specific interpretive contexts.'

- Finally, discourse analysis views talk and text as rhetorically organised whereby social life is characterised by conflict of various types of discourse. Most discourse is involved in establishing one account of the world in the light of an opposite version. This is especially obvious where politicians actively attempt to persuade people to their viewpoint of the world. However, this is argued to be also true of discourse and will, therefore, be explored in the women's magazine in this study.

Sampling

All spoken and written material can be conceptualised as text subjected to discourse analysis, where discourses are identified through the examination of text (Breakwell et al., 2000). Traditional sampling approaches within psychology emphasise the need for securing large and representative samples. Within discourse analysis, if interview material or text is used as source material, there is no need for a large sample (Breakwell et al., 2000).

It is important, however, to gather sufficient text to determine the variety of discursive forms that are commonly used when speaking or writing about the research topic. This may be possible from an analysis of relatively little text, especially where common discursive forms are under consideration or where sufficient text has been gathered, but the addition of larger samples of data adds to the analytic task, without adding significant value to the analytic outcome. In cases where the analysis is purely exploratory and the analyst has little idea, in advance, of what the analytic focus may be, larger samples of data may be required (Breakwell et al., 2000).

For the purposes of the study, due to the ease of availability a purposive sample was intentionally selected from *Cosmopolitan*, which is currently the most read contemporary women's magazine in South Africa, with a readership of 1 070 000 comprising 3,1% of the total South African population (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2009). Only relationship-focused articles were chosen, as it is argued that these types of articles correlate mostly to aspects of the feminine self and feminine practices. Articles were chosen from *Cosmopolitan* over a time period of 14 months, ranging from March 2010 to May 2011, in order to obtain a sufficient, yet relevant, amount of text. In total, ten articles were identified as relevant to the study. In the next section, I briefly summarise the data analysis of the text as it applied to the study.

Data analysis

Currently, there is no rigid set of formal procedures to guide the process of discourse analysis, and that discourse analysis should rather be seen as scholarship than a strict adherence to methodology. Although widely acknowledged in the field of sociology, within the field of psychology and media studies, few studies have attempted to make use of discourse analysis and in an attempt to address the void in the literature; this study adopts a discourse analytic approach to determine its applicability to this field of study. Subsequently, based on this approach, the emphasis is placed on the careful reading and interpretation of the text, with such interpretation being validated to linguistic evidence within the text.

The present approach, therefore, requires the suspension of belief of taken for granted knowledge which is produced through the use of language. This involves seeing linguistics not merely as reflecting underlying psychological and social realities, but as constructing and legitimising a version of an event. The development of an analytic mentality of craft skills acquired through practical experience is a crucial constituent in this analysis. As discourse analysis holds a radically different epistemology than the more traditional approaches in psychological research, it is not surprising that it has a very unique way of proceeding methodologically (Breakwell et al., 2000).

From the loose ten-stage approach suggested by Potter and Wetherell (in Breakwell et al., 2000), seven determinants were selected that are relevant to this study. These are:

- Coding of the text
- Identifying the functions of the text, *what* and *how*
- Situating the discourse in the broader cultural and political context
- Searching for alternative versions of the topic under discussion
- Identifying the discursive features within the text
- Considering variability and consistency within the text
- Subject positioning.

These seven aspects of the data analysis process are depicted in Figure 1 on the next page and then discussed:

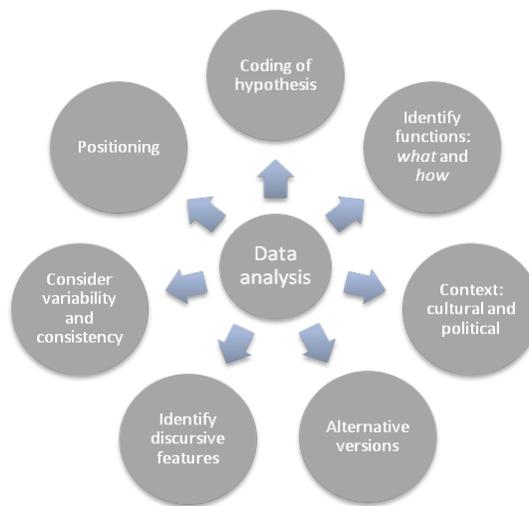


Figure 1: Data analysis of the text

- The process commences with what is known as coding, which refers to the process of examining the text closely. If the research focus has been identified in advance, instances of the research focus will be identified at this point. This makes it possible to become aware of less obvious, yet valuable lines of inquiry. The coding is more complex if the research focus has not been determined in advance, where it is necessary to read and re-read the text identifying recurrent discursive patterns shared by the accounts under analysis. This stage includes hypothesis development, revision and discarding, if the linguistic evidence needed is not forthcoming. Furthermore, sensitivity is required to the way in which language is used, where hypotheses about which discourses are brought into play in the text are formulated and reformulated. The analyst should remain open to alternative readings of the text and the need to reject hypotheses that are not supported by the text (Breakwell et al., 2000). Due to the explorative nature of this study, the text was read and re-read continuously, in order to identify recurring themes and patterns.
- For the next stage of analysis, it was considered a useful strategy to read the text, being attentive and mindful of what its functions might be, seeing that any text is action orientated and designed to fulfil certain functions. For example, when someone asks you to perform a certain task such as washing dishes, they may not phrase it as a command or order: 'Do the washing up,' but as a question to which the expected answer would be 'Yes,' for example, 'Would you like to do the dishes?' For this study, the question asked was, 'What function is this text fulfilling and how is it fulfilling it?' Identifying the functions of language is often not a straightforward process, as these functions are usually not explicit.

- Third, a useful starting point for identifying discursive functions is to look at the discursive context, since it is difficult to derive function from a limited section of text. Various functions may be performed and revisited throughout the text. It is, therefore, necessary to take into account and be familiar with what precedes and follows a particular extract to obtain clues about its function. Consequently, during the process of analysis, attention to broader contextual concerns was essential. These concerns are cultural trends, and political and social issues that the text alludes to, specifically the politics and broader societal issues in relation to femininity.
- The fourth strategy for analysis is the examination of the text, taking into consideration the version of events it may be designed to counteract. Alternative versions may either be implicit in the text or explicit and counteracted. For this study, I explored various alternative versions and analysed how the text addressed the function of legitimising each version constructed in the text.
- During the fifth stage of analysis, it is beneficial to be aware of the ways in which various discursive features are described in discourse analytic and conversational analytic literature, as these are frequently employed to perform specific rhetorical functions. I was able to examine the text by identifying these features and being attentive to the functions they perform, for example, the use of terms such as 'always', 'never', 'nobody' and 'everyone' may represent what is known as 'extreme case formulations'. These 'extreme case formulations' take the position being advocated within the text to its extreme, thereby helping to make this position more persuasive.
- The next step for exposing the functions of discourse is the study of variability in any discourse. If we were to analyse the discourse of different people regarding a particular topic, we would expect variation, based on whether individuals viewed the topic in a positive or a negative light. In addition, variation also occurs within one individual's discourse, depending on the purposes of the discourse. Mainstream approaches have been critiqued for their search for individual consistency and for minimising, or explaining away, intra-individual differences. In contrast, discourse analysis actively seeks out such variation. As variability becomes apparent from the different functions the discourse may be performing, the nature of the variation may provide an indication of what these functions are. Therefore, the process of discourse analysis in this study involved both the search for consistency in the identification of discourse, and variability in the analysis of discursive function.
- The final feature that may be determined in the text used in this study is positioning. This concept is derived from the Davies and Harre (1990) tradition of discourse analysis (not Potter and

Wetherell), and represents a discursive interpretation of the social psychological concept of identity. When an individual is constructed through discourse, they are attributed a particular subject position within that discourse, which invokes a set of images, metaphors and obligations concerning the kind of response that may be made. In their linguistic response to that positioning, the individual can accept it and execute the obligations of their position, or resist it. The person can also position themselves within a discourse and the audience can either accept or reject this positioning.

Ethical consideration

In view of the fact that the nature of the study is to focus on available text within a contemporary women's magazine, ethical concerns were limited, as human participation was absent from the study. Therefore, physical or emotional harm to individuals was isolated. However, for the purpose of this study, my own subjective nature, as the researcher, was acknowledged. This was identified and indicated during the course of the study.

Another consideration for the study included copyright infringement of the articles obtained from the magazines in the study. Therefore, I contacted the editors of a number of magazines, which fall into the genre of contemporary women's magazines, to gain permission to include the name of the magazine in the title of my study, in order to promote transparency of the research process. However, permission was denied and, consequently, I did not obtain the requested permission from the magazines. To date, I am not aware of other studies that have obtained permission for the analysis of magazine content, as such content is known to be public domain knowledge. Consequently, I decided to only include samples of the text for discussion of the findings and not to include the entire articles in the publication of the study.

CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on highlighting the need for the study, based on a substantiated overview of the focus of existing studies and subsequent gaps. It has been argued that most portrayals of sexuality in women's magazines suggest a focus on the sexual differences between men and women, and provide different, and conflicting, messages about gender and sex roles. I also argued that, from a social constructionist approach, these discourses of gender do not merely reflect, but also constitute and construct the social world. To contribute to this limited and under-researched field, this study set out to indicate how discourse analysis may be used to explore how discourses within women's magazines construct femininity and contextualise it, in terms of the relationship between women's magazines and gender, as well as social constructionism and gender. The main thrust emphasised was the need to examine the construct of femininity through women's magazines. It is argued that this study sets itself

apart from other studies which, up to now, did not explore discourse practices, strategies, themes and ideologies of femininity within contemporary magazines.

In the next chapter, the key concepts relevant to this study will be defined, followed by a comprehensive theoretical discussion to provide a thorough understanding of the developments, different perspectives and underlying theoretical principles that constitute gender, concluding with the main theoretical assumptions of the social constructionist theory which underpins this study.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, the purpose of the study was described as twofold: the first objective is to address the gaps and limitation of existing studies in exploring discourse in women's magazines, while the second objective is to explore how women's magazines construct femininity. The purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical background to the study by, first, providing a clear understanding and elaboration of the general relevant concepts that will be referred to in the study; second, providing a comprehensive discussion of the underlying theoretical developments pertaining to gender and gender development, including biological theories, psychological theories and cultural theories; and, third, delineating the theoretical assumptions of social constructionism, the main theory underpinning this study.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section focuses on defining the key terminology as it applies to and is used for the purpose of this study. The terms, 'sex', 'gender', 'gender role' and 'femininity' are important and relevant for an understanding of the study. The definitions provided below will be relevant and applicable throughout the study.

Sex

The term, 'sex' is understood to be a biological category, referring to what is 'natural' and cannot be changed (Richardson, 2008). According to Basow (1992), sex refers to a biological term, based on sex organs and genes, either female or male. For the purpose of this study, sex is defined as the biological categories of male or female as they are determined by sex organs and genes.

Gender

According to DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007), 'gender' may be defined as an attribute relating to an individual's self-identity. It is the extent to which a person associates her or himself with the feminine or masculine or both, as prescribed by society. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) define gender as a system that categorises people into women and men, which is institutionalised by social practices and in which social relations of inequality are based on that difference. According to Connell (1995, p. 71), masculinity and femininity refer to 'a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality and culture'. For the purpose of this study, gender refers to the extent that an individual associates her or himself with the categories of either female or male, as they are culturally and socially described by society.

Gender role

According to Eagly (2009), 'gender roles' may be defined as the shared beliefs of individuals, which are based on their socially identified sex and gender. In addition, these gender role beliefs may be both descriptive and prescriptive, as they indicate what women and men usually do that is stereotypical of their sex, and what they are supposed to do. Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, and King (2004) define gender as the attitudes and beliefs, regarding the proper roles of women and men, in other words, how the appropriateness of behaviours, and characteristics, of women and men is judged. Consequently, gender role is explained as the shared attitudes, and beliefs, with which behaviours and characteristics are judged, or seen as appropriate for women and men.

Femininity

From Schippers (2007), 'femininity' may be understood as having three components: it is a social location that individuals, regardless of gender, can move through by performance; it is a set of practices pertaining to behaviours and characteristics associated with what it means to be 'feminine'; and should these set of practices be adopted by women or men, they would have cultural and social results. It is, therefore, argued that femininity is a position that an individual performs through, by the collective embodiment of behaviours and characteristics associated with the concept of being feminine.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER FROM A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Over the years, several major theories have emerged to explain gender development, with each theory differing on several important dimensions. Current approaches to understanding gender and sex in communication generally fall into three areas, namely, biological (empirical worldview), psychological (empirical worldview/critical worldview) and cultural (interpretative and/or critical worldviews) (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Lippa, 2005). This section provides a summary of the development of theoretical perspectives of gender, based on a succinct review of existing relevant literature through a discussion of the biological theories, psychological approaches and critical cultural perspectives as context for the theoretical underpinnings, and explains how it relates to gender, specifically.

Biological theories

Due to the simplistic and elementary viewpoint of the biological theories, a very brief synopsis is provided to indicate cognisance thereof. Biological theories of gender presuppose that there exist innate differences between females and males (Lippa, 2005). In other words, gender is something that resides within us, in which we are born either as female or male. Although scholars from this biological determinist paradigm agree that psychological or cultural factors may influence gender, they mainly ascribe gender differences to biological aspects, where the most prominent focus has been given to chromosomes, hormones, genitalia and brain development (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). It is clear

that the relevance of these theories to this study is limited, as they provide a dominant focus on biological, rather than psychological and critical cultural influences on gender. The argument in this study is rather that, although gender is biologically determined, various other factors impact on females and males, and that more recent approaches are more relevant to the purpose of this study.

Psychological approaches

Psychological approaches are mostly concerned with how one's identity is shaped and becomes gendered by means of early childhood experiences (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). These perspectives do not necessarily claim that culture and biology have no influence on one's gender, but rather attempt to link one's sex to gendered personalities resulting from influences of close relationships (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the following psychological approaches, namely psychoanalysis, social learning and cognitive development are discussed.

Psychoanalysis

Sigmund Freud is best known for his contribution to the psychoanalytic movement through his research on gender identity formation. Freud's theory is based on the assumption that children developed gendered identities based on their perception of sex differences in biological genitalia (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Freud has received wide criticism for his masculine bias and misunderstanding of the woman's psyche, for example, the rejection of his theory that women experience 'penis envy' (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). His emphasis is on masculinity development and he argues that, for normal development, boys have to experience intense hatred towards their fathers and, consequently, they identify with their fathers to compensate for the conflict they experience. By identifying with their fathers, they are able to break their dependence on their mothers and are then able to become fully masculine (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007).

Feminist psychologist Chodorow (1978) built on Freud's theory, but with a difference. She attributed most of the influence of early childhood experiences to the mother as primary caretaker. According to Chodorow (1978), the mother, as a gendered person, interacts with girl and boy children according to her gender. As a result, mothers treat girl children differently to boy children and, in effect, form distinctive relationships. Simultaneously, the child experiences internal conflict in her or his attempt to form a separate identity from the mother. As the mother and girl child share obvious similarities, girl children resolve their inner conflict by identifying with their mothers and, as a result, emulate feminine gender identities. In contrast, the mother encourages more independence in boys, earlier on, and is less intimate in her interaction with boys, in comparison with girl children. In addition, the boy recognises that he is different from the mother in basic ways. To resolve his inner conflict, he then rejects the mother as part of

his gender identity formation, developing an identity of independence and activity, which contributes to him finding relationships potentially smothering.

From the above, it is apparent that psychoanalytic theory is mainly focused around how bodily and emotional experiences during infancy, and early childhood, develop into unconscious representation of the ways in which men and women live out their lives as male or female, or masculine or feminine, within culture specifications. These earlier psychological perspectives are limited in the way they essentialise gender. It is argued that the way in which a child responds to gender development is not universal for all girls and boys, but rather develops in highly idiosyncratic and individual ways (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). These earlier theories also only account for heterosexual gender identity formation, which excludes homosexuality or bisexuality, as well as cross-cultural gender variations (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). In addition, these theories do not take into consideration the increase in children who are raised solely by their fathers as primary caretaker (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Criticism has also been levelled at these theories, because they are often used to justify casting blame on the mother for children's psychological problems (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Even when a mother is the primary caretaker, children are still exposed to various other external factors which influence their gender identity formation (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). As a result of this criticism, social learning theory developed from this approach to try and provide a better understanding of gender identity formation.

Social learning

Social learning theories include a wide spectrum of different assumptions, mostly hypotheses that explain human behaviour as learnt processes whereby individuals observe, learn and imitate socially acceptable behaviour, which is then reinforced by social rewards. Whereas biological theories assume that differences between women and men exist as a result of innate differences, social learning theories presuppose that general learning principles can be applied to understand human behaviour (Archer & Lloyd, 2002; Lippa, 2005). It may be said that central to social learning theories is the fact that gender is a result of processes of observation, learning and imitation.

One of the most recognised social learning theories was originally developed by Mischel (1966) and later modified by Bandura (1977). Social learning theory examines the process of socialisation whereby children internalise many identities and norms of behaviour, which include gender development (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). According to Bandura (1977, p. 3):

People are repeatedly confronted with situations with which they must deal in one way or another. Some of the responses that they try prove unsuccessful, while others produce more favourable effects. Through this process of differential reinforcement, successful

modes of behaviour are eventually selected from exploratory activities, while ineffectual ones are discarded.

The basic premise of social learning theory is then that socialisation is a passive process in which children observe and imitate others, and which is reinforced by receiving rewards for gender-appropriate behaviour. Males and females are rewarded for different sets of behaviour, for which the reward or incentive given differs according to the sex of the performer (Bandura, 1977; Mischel, 1966). As Mischel (1966, p. 57) describes:

Sex typing as the process by which the individual acquires sex-typed behaviour patterns: first he learns to *discriminate* between the sex-typed behavior patterns, then to *generalize* from these specific learning experiences to new situations, and finally to *perform* sex-typed behaviors. In addition, the sex typing process includes direct and vicarious conditioning of a multitude of stimuli that acquire differential value and elicit different emotional and attitudinal responses from the sexes. Statements about “appropriate” sex typing involve inferences about the extent to which the individual performs behaviors that are considered to be typical of his own sex, and the degree to which these behaviors have acquired value to him.

In summary, the principles of social learning of gender include the acquisition of behaviour through observational learning and the imitation of role models, where socially approved patterns of behaviour are either encouraged by patterns of rewards and positive reinforcement, or discouraged by negative reinforcement. Learnt patterns of response tend to generalise to situations other than those in which they were learnt, the extent of generalisation being a function of the degree of similarity between the original learning situation and the novel set of cues. When considering gender, girls and boys acquire a set of learnt behaviours in which they imitate the behaviours of role models, such as parents or same-sex individuals. These behaviours are then reinforced by the rewarding of gender-appropriate behaviour, where girls are mostly rewarded for being polite, neat, emotionally expressive and well behaved, and boys for being independent, emotionally controlled and participating in physical activity (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). These rewards or reinforcement of gender-appropriate behaviours are consistent with social norms of gender and occur throughout an individual's lifetime (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007).

In comparison with psychoanalysis, social learning theory is able to explain the role of interpersonal influences and can be directly observed and tested (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). However, it tends to dichotomise gender/sex and does not account for why some boys and girls refuse to conform to cultural expectations (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Social learning theories assume that the

learning of gender is a passive activity, where girls and boys behave according to the conditioning, incentives and social models that they are exposed to (Lippa, 2005). However, social learning theories do not account for the fact that gender is also something that occurs within our minds and the environment (Lippa, 2005). Therefore, cognitive approaches built on these theories have attempted to explain this process in terms of gender development. A discussion of such cognitive approaches follows.

Cognitive development theory

Cognitive approaches share some similarities to psychoanalysis and social learning theories, in that they explain gender identity development as a mental process and note that individuals tend to behave according to the established gender norms (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Cognitive approaches to gender development assume that whatever information exists within the social world will only influence or impact behaviour, if a basic level of understanding is present (Archer & Lloyd, 2002). In other words, an understanding of gender categories and concepts precedes the preferences and choices of gender-typed behaviour of individuals.

According to Kohlberg (1966, p. 82), cognitive development theory encompasses that 'basic sexual attitudes are not patterned directly by either biological instincts or arbitrary cultural norms, but by the child's cognitive organisation of his social world along sex-role dimensions'. It is, therefore, argued that children's conceptions of gender are a critical component in motivating them to adopt and behave in feminine and masculine ways (Lippa, 2005). These gender conceptions develop in congruence with children's more general levels of mental development, for example, most children can correctly identify their sex between the ages of two and three years (Lippa, 2005). This requires that children acquire stable gender categories, that is, the understanding that people can be categorised as either female or male (Lippa, 2005).

At about the same time in their development, children acquire other kinds of object constancy as well, such as the knowledge that classes of objects, for example, cats and tables, have stable, enduring qualities (Lippa, 2005). Cognitive development theory, therefore, suggests that once the constructs of gender, which are mostly stereotypical in nature, have been learnt and the child realises that these categories are constant and fixed, she or he will be able to identify her or himself as either female or male by comparing similarities with the gender constructs (Kohlberg, 1966). Thereafter, the child is able to identify the gender of others, based on how much she or he observes them to be similar or different from themselves (Kohlberg, 1966).

Based on Kohlberg's cognitive analysis of gender, Bem (1981) extended this theory and proposed the gender schema theory (Bem, 1993). According to this approach, people learn various concepts and

symbols related to gender from their cultures. For example, flowers and the moon are associated with femininity, whereas the sun and jackhammers are seen as masculine (Lippa, 2005). The term 'schema' is widely used in various areas in psychology and refers to hypothetical mental structures which select, organise and act on information from the outside world (Archer & Lloyd, 2002). Subsequently, it is proposed that gender schemas refer to organised knowledge and beliefs about gender, and, once individuals have attained such gender schemas, they are able to perceive their own behaviours and those of others by filtering them through those schemas.

Based on the discussion of the above theoretical approaches, it may be observed that these psychological approaches focus mainly on early gender development and are limited in their application in the broader context. The main critique against these approaches is that they limit the understanding of gender development as the basis for assumptions regarding the individual, essentially because they indicate that gender development mostly results from internal processes of gender acquisition. Given that critical cultural approaches to gender argue that these approaches to gender development do not account for broader, societal factors that may impose on gender and gender identity development, I subsequently discuss the critical cultural approaches to gender, which include feminist gender theory and social constructionism. These approaches form the main theoretical foundation of this study.

Critical cultural approaches

Central to critical theories is the principle that knowledge is socially constructed. According to this perspective, created meanings and understanding are contextual and bound by the specific practices in which they are produced (Krantz, 2001). For the purpose of this study, the feminist gender theory and social constructionism will be discussed as they directly relate to the main aim of the study.

Feminist gender theory

Biological and psychological approaches to gender have been extensively criticised by feminist scholars for their essentialist explanations of gender. According to feminist approaches, gender is socially and culturally defined, in that it is connected to social, economic and cultural status, and power in society (Richardson, 2008). From a feminist standpoint, female development is shaped and maintained by the socio-cultural context of patriarchy (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006).

Feminist theories assume that gender is a socially constructed concept, and that there are distinct gender identities and gender roles (Hines, 2008). Feminist scholars are concerned with power relations in operation at both micro and macro levels, to understand how gender inequalities are constructed. Although various feminist schools of thought exist, central to all these schools is the fact that gender

inequalities are constructed, maintained and reproduced by power distributions across social relations (Ferguson et al., 1984; Hines, 2008).

Feminist theorists, therefore, posit that cultural practices and ideologies pertaining to femininity reflect a gendered power structure, in which women are subordinates to men; where it is desired of women to successfully enact the prescriptive set of normative feminine behaviours (Cole & Zucker, 2007). These continual present ideals are disseminated through social engagements and cultural institutions, such as mass media, schools, voluntary associations and families, resulting in women engaging with these feminine ideals as they construct and perform gender (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Consequently, it is argued that, based on unequal power distributions and ideological forces within society, whereby men mostly hold the power position, gender development is mostly based on subordination to men. For this reason, this perspective suggests that appropriate gender behaviour is adopted through acceptable cultural and societal norms of feminine behaviour, and practices, which are produced by the institutions of mostly patriarchal power (Butler, 1988).

Social constructionism

Linking in with feminist theories, social constructionism emphasises that our constructions of discourse are shaped by the modes in which we exchange our perceptions and descriptions of reality (Gergen & Davis, 1997). According to this theory, knowledge is a product of social interchange, whereby agreeing to the reality of these truths, we essentially construct that reality (Gergen & Davis, 1997). The foundational underpinning of social construction is, therefore, that there is no knowing the nature of reality with certainty. This is explained clearly in the following statement by Gergen and Davis (1997, p. 38):

From this perspective, so-called knowledge does not reflect the discovery of a free-standing reality, existing apart from the knower and revealed by careful application of procedures. Rather, what we purport to know, what we see as truth, is a construction, a best understanding, based upon and inextricably intertwined with the context within which it is created.

Central tenets of social constructionism

Social constructions assume that meaning is not passively available, but rather constructed through interaction with others and culture (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Social constructions are, therefore, concerned with how people come to understand the world around them and how they come to define 'reality' (Beal, 1996; Ridgeway, 1991). Social constructionist approaches differ from other perspectives, in that they assert that people actively construct their perceptions and make use of culture as a guide to do so (Beal, 1996). There is no single feature whereby a social constructionist position may be identified, but

rather, such a position is based on one of the core assumptions, as identified by Gergen (1985), which I discuss next.

- A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge and critique of objective observation

Social constructionism encourages a critical stance towards taken-for-granted ways in which we understand the world and ourselves (Gergen, 1985, 2009). There are various different ways in which the world may be understood, but one's understanding of the world does not necessarily reflect an absolute reality which is experienced in the same way by all people (Beal, 1996; Gergen, 2009). Different views of the world obviously result in different experiences of reality, which are equally 'real' to the people that believe in them. For example, different cultures have many different understandings of the world. There are cultures that favour a logical and orderly world, and other cultures that favour a world governed by spirits. To all these different cultures, this is a 'real' experience and understanding of reality (Beal, 1996).

Social constructionism challenges the notion that reality can be mapped by objective observation in any direct or decontextualised manner (Gergen, 1985). Rather, social constructionism calls for suspending belief of conventional truths, as these theoretical assumptions of the world are based on constructed categories which do not necessarily refer to real divisions.

- Historical and cultural specificity

'Reality' is not universally experienced by all people simultaneously, as different cultures have different understandings of the world (Pines, 2001). Social constructionists assume that the way in which the world is understood is a product of social and historical interactions in society (Gergen, 1985). Consequently, the way we understand the world, through aspects such as categories and constructs, for example, gender, is based on our cultural and historical background, whereby we actively construct our constructions of reality, guided by our culture (Burr, 2003; Pines, 2001). For example, should we understand the world in terms of gender, it will be dependent on the time period and place in which it is experienced. Understanding of the world is, therefore, determined by a period in history or a specific culture.

- Understanding is constructed and maintained by social processes

Social constructionist approaches posit that common understanding of the world is constructed by the interactions people have among themselves (Gergen, 1985). Through daily social interactions, such as communication, negotiation, conflict and rhetoric, our knowledge is fabricated and maintained (Burr,

2003; Gergen, 1985). This emphasises the importance of social interaction, especially language, for the viewpoint of social constructionism (Burr, 2003).

- Social action

Postmodern approaches, inspired by the work of Butler (1990, 1997), in particular, refer to gender as performance, where it is understood that gender is continuously being produced through our everyday practices and social interactions. In addition, gender should be understood in terms of cultural context, as different cultures define gender differently. In other words, we can't assume that gender as a concept is universal. Instead, we need to develop an approach to gender that allows us to theorise about both cultural variation and historical change towards gaining a better understanding of gender relations.

A social constructionist view of gender and a discourse analytic approach

As indicated previously, gender refers to something which is not inherent to the person, but exists in interactions which are socially construed as gender. Gender is, therefore, not a free-standing phenomenon existing in isolation internally within individuals, but rather an agreement that exists in social interchange (Gergen & Davis, 1997). From this point of view, gender is defined from the meanings we have agreed to attribute to a particular class of transactions between individuals and environmental contexts (Gergen & Davis, 1997).

From a social constructionist stance, people think and behave in certain ways, not as a result of their role identities or psychological traits, but as a consequence of adopting concepts about femininity and masculinity from their culture (Courtenay, 2000). People participate actively in sustaining and reproducing their roles, where gender is not inherent in the individual, but resides in social transactions deemed as gendered (Crawford, 1995). In addition, gender doesn't represent dichotic categories, i.e. female and male, but rather a set of socially constructed relationships, created and maintained through people's actions and interactions. This is clear in the following statement by Courtenay (2000, p.5): 'The daily activities that men and women engage in, and their gendered cognitions, are a form of currency in transactions that are continually enacted in the demonstration of gender' Consequently, gender is seen as a social construct, constructed by multiple beliefs, meanings and dominant norms, also referred to as social discourses, which originated from cultural and political institutions (Piran & Cormier, 2005).

Based on the preceding discussion and for the purpose of this study, a social constructionist position is assumed, as it is argued that this approach is the most suitable and relevant in the quest for understanding the construction of femininity within a contemporary women's magazine. The main reason

for this is based on the argument that social constructionism proposes that gender is a social construct which is embedded within social interaction, transaction and discourses.

CONCLUSION

First, this chapter distinguishes between the way sex and gender is defined, and proposes definitions of the key concepts relevant to this study. Second, this chapter delineates the major theories which shaped the way we view and approach gender studies by discussing the main biological theories, psychological theories and critical approaches. The discussion indicates that biological theories assume that gender is biological in nature, inherent in an individual, based on genetics, anatomy and genitalia; psychological theories, such as psychoanalysis, social learning theories and cognitive development theories, emphasise that gender is developed mainly in childhood; and critical theories illustrate how people construct their realities by means of power and social interaction.

This section then discusses the theories on which social constructionism is based, namely: (i) a criticism of taken-for-granted-knowledge; (ii) knowledge is rooted in history and culture; (iii) understanding is produced and reproduced by social processes; and (iv) that we draw from our knowledge and understanding of our social world to behave a certain way, such as how to perform gender. It then indicates that, from a constructionist point of view, gender is constructed by social processes, such as cultural and historical backgrounds, from which people adopt concepts of femininity and masculinity. The study finally draws on a constructionist viewpoint, whereby gender is seen as a social construct or social discourse, with its origin in cultural and political institutions. Emphasis is placed on the relevance of constructionism for the aim of this study, namely, to examine the ways in which femininity is constructed by contemporary women's magazines and how feminine subjectivities are constituted in the text; and to identify cultural resources drawn on in these constructions.

Building on this, the next chapter focuses on a theoretical discussion of media and gender, and the underlying theoretical notions on how the media portray gender, with a specific focus on women's contemporary magazines. Then it discusses the role of magazines as a source for the study of gender discourses and contributes to key debates on the issue.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter provided the theoretical background to the study, indicating the specific theory of interest and relevance to this study, namely, the social constructionist viewpoint, where gender is perceived in terms of a social construct or social discourse. In order to relate this perspective to the broader context of the study, this chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on media and gender, specifically focusing on how the media portrays *gender*.

Upon a review of the literature on media and gender, and as an introduction to the research paradigm and method, this chapter is structured in terms of four major considerations. First, I discuss the role that women's magazines play as a media platform within society and how various stereotypical gender norms are formulated. Second, I explain magazines as an important source for studying discourse regarding gender. Third, I consider the case of women's magazines by examining current literature on the portrayal of gender in contemporary women's magazines. Lastly, I conclude by reviewing key debates that emerged from the study of media and gender, with specific reference to women's magazines as an important consideration for analysis.

MEDIA AND GENDER

From an early stage of life, individuals acquire patterns of gender through a life-long process of acculturation, to the extent that they are mostly unaware of the decisions they make regarding the specific gender they perform (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Markle, 2008). Benwell (2002) states that gender is not merely an early result of an infant's exposure to patriarchal values which then become ingrained during adulthood, but is instead a continuous ongoing reaffirming process. Accordingly, gender has to be constantly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing gender acts, in accordance with the socially acceptable norm (Benwell, 2002). These arguments are supported by Taylor (2005, p. 153) who states:

Although certain aspects of sexuality and sexual behaviour are physiological in nature, the consideration of what is arousing, what behaviours and which partners are appropriate, when and in what contexts sexual behaviours can be carried out, and what the emotional, social and psychological meanings of these various factors are, must be learned.

Therefore, Taylor (2005) argues that these learnt concepts about gender seem to emphasise the different roles (and priorities) for men and women in society. These roles include stereotypical notions, where men are expected to behave in certain ways, where they assertively seek out sex, and attach importance, and

value, to sexual frequency and variety; and women are expected to behave in certain ways, where they are sexual gatekeepers, recipients of men's attention, and only value sex as part of a committed, romantic heterosexual relationship. These stereotypical expectations of sexual roles are often realised, and empirical investigations have consistently observed these stereotypes in the sexual behaviour, attitudes and reactions to sexual stimuli of women and men (Taylor, 2005). Furthermore, even if such constructedness of sex and gender were not acknowledged, ideological discourses within society would constrain individuals from doing otherwise. Gender is the result of multiple discourses that inform people's daily actions and interactions (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006).

The media plays a big role in constituting this process of gender role acculturation, rather than simply reflecting or representing such differences of gender roles (Benwell, 2002). Del-Teso-Craviotto (2006) argues that the mass media are central to the formation and continuation of various discourses, which play an essential role in creating and maintaining discourses that shape current gender ideologies. The media constitute and reinforce this, specifically in terms of gender, which relates to femininity and masculinity as a social construct reified through stylised repetition of acts (Benwell, 2002).

The mass media depictions of women and men are often traditional gender stereotypes (Döring & Pöschl, 2006), in various forms of media, including television (Arima, 2003; Desmond & Danilewicz, 2010; Fung & Ma, 2000), print (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008), music videos (Wallis, 2011) and video games (Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, 2007; Dietz, 1998). The mass media have often been scrutinised for their traditional and narrow depictions of women and men, which emphasise the differences between what it means to be a woman and a man. The distinction between women and men, based on different psychological traits (women are emotional and sensitive, and men are rational and competent) and physiological characteristics (women are slender and men are muscular), as well as fields of action (for women, the household, family and fashion; for men, paid work, sports and technology), have been widely criticised by feminist scholars (Döring & Pöschl, 2006).

Furthermore, stereotypical gender depictions in the mass media have been recognised as defining social expectations and serving to educate the audience on what is socially acceptable and unacceptable (Döring & Pöschl, 2006). Stereotypes portrayed in the media, therefore, support rigid gender roles, restricting the options for development of women and men. Such traditional gender roles are also limiting, as the roles portrayed are hierarchical and patriarchal, where men are more often presented in a higher position, and women are presented in passive and lowly roles (Döring & Pöschl, 2006).

Various studies have focused on gender stereotyping and the marginalisation of women within the media. One such study conducted by Koivula (1999) investigated televised depictions of women and men

participating in sport over a one-year period. The author found that men and women were differently covered in televised sports news, with women receiving significantly less coverage than men, even when considering the statistics and figures regarding the proportion of women's participation in sports. Additionally, televised media sports coverage reinforces constructions of divisions along lines of gender and reproduces traditional expectations regarding femininity and masculinity (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Huffman, Tuggle, & Rosengard, 2004; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993; Tuggle, 1997).

Baker (2005) argues that it is important to study the portrayal of women's sexuality in the media, as sexuality is fundamentally related to gender inequality. In addition to gender stereotypical depictions, women are often portrayed as sex objects. For example, Lin (2008) demonstrated that, although both men and women are portrayed as sensual beings, women are mostly presented as sex objects.

Although feminist studies of the media are predominantly critical towards women's representation in the media, it has been found that, in some cases, the media are also empowering women. One such example is a study conducted by Arthurs (2003), which found that progressive television shows allow for a critical feminist discourse that embraces and promotes women's rights to sexual assertiveness, and pleasure, as well as validating women's friendship and culture.

In this section, I have discussed the mass media as a central source of various discourses on gender which shape cultural values on gender roles and expectations. I have broadly discussed the manner in which the mass media formulate and perpetuate stereotypical gender norms. The following section will specifically focus on the role of women's magazines in society as an important source of information on gender roles and expectations.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN SOCIETY

With the introduction of new media and technologies, magazines have remained popular among audiences and form a major part of the media landscape (Gill, 2007). The importance of magazines as a focus for analysis should not be underestimated, as magazines share a number of important features. According to Gill (2007), women's magazines address their audience in an intimate manner as equals and friends; are mostly structured around shared pleasures and labours of femininity; are continuously constructed in opposition to masculinity by focusing on the attributes women share; are structured around implicit exclusions related to age, race, sexuality and class; and have an individual orientation with an emphasis on personal solutions, as opposed to a collective social view.

Magazines also play a crucial role in formulating gender in culture and are an important source of information on changing gender roles (Innes, 2004). Various researchers have highlighted the central role of the media in constructing and perpetuating stereotypical notions of gender, which serve to maintain an ideology of dichotomous sex differences (Speer, 2001). For example, Ferguson (1983) argued a few decades ago already that women's magazines collectively make up a social institution which functions as a platform that cultivates and sustains a cult of femininity. She argued that this promotion of femininity within women's magazines does not merely reflect the female role in society, but simultaneously serves as a source of definitions and socialisation into these roles (Ferguson, 1983).

In addition to the various similarities shared by women's magazines, ideologies of femininity within women's magazines, moreover, differ from magazine to magazine, depending on the genre of these magazines (Gill, 2007). There is a significant difference between the femininity constructed within *Women Magazine* by means of, for example, themes surrounding nation and traditions, the pleasures and challenges of homemaking, and success as a wife and mother, and the femininity constructed within *Cosmopolitan*, which focuses on sexual relationships, beauty and career success (Gill, 2007).

Whitehead and Kurz (2008) argue that women's magazines rely on dominant social and cultural 'common sense' assumptions, which include the 'natural' inferiority of women and superiority of masculine traits, which they use to their advantage. According to Whitehead and Kurz (2008, p. 356), 'These magazines then use this advantage to dictate socially what "femininity" is, and by constantly renegotiating a "perfect" femininity, are successful in ensuring consumption of their magazines.'

MAGAZINES AS A SOURCE FOR STUDYING GENDER DISCOURSES

Although magazines aim to present femininity as a stable and unambiguous construct, it is argued that gender cannot be viewed as monolithic or as an unchanging category, as it is a constantly changing and negotiable social construct (Ahl, 2004; Benwell, 2002). This section contextualises this argument, specifically, in terms of the relationship between women's magazines and gender. It is argued that women's magazines are an ideal source for examining discourses of femininity, as they function as an authoritative text of femininity (Blood, 2005). Magazine discourses present highly seductive images and text communicating cultural expectations of women's roles (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Therefore, magazines are seen as a valuable source for studying gender discourses, specifically of femininity, as they share the following characteristics:

Magazines as a medium for reflecting and shaping women's ideas

It is construed that messages within women's magazines may be seen as not only reflecting the social world, but also functioning as a platform for perpetuating social myths of gender (Johnston & Swanson, 2003). Magazines do not merely attribute masculinity or femininity to actors within the text or even the passive unresisting 'ideal' reader: the very format and rationale of magazines encourages, and even relies on, an active dialogue and a positive affiliation by readers (Benwell, 2002). For this reason, magazines serve as a means of reflecting and shaping women's conception of femininity, such as what it means to be female and what is appropriate behaviour for women.

Magazines are pervasive and widespread

As women's magazines are widely read, they are presented with the opportunity to convince millions of individuals that the views expressed by them are just, fair and truthful (Innes, 2004). Since women's magazines as a form of mass media reach such a large audience, they may play an important role in creating and maintaining discourses, since they are accessible to a large number of people or, as stated by Del-Teso-Craviotto (2006, p. 2006): 'The ideological force of certain discourse depends, to a certain extent, on their availability as resources from which people can draw to construct their own identities.' In other words, women's magazines hold the power to alter the way in which gender is constituted and perceived in society, where they are able to change what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behaviour for women (Innes, 2004).

Magazines offer cultural leadership

Sengupta (2006) further suggests that women's magazines exercise a 'cultural leadership' in that they shape images and definitions of femininity that are designed to inform the reader's understanding of womanhood, collectively comprising a social institution which fosters and maintains a culture of femininity. Simply identifying women as a separate market implies that there is a single definition of what it means to be a woman. Therefore, women's magazines can assist women in attaining this ideal by prescribing to numerous self-improvement tasks (Sengupta, 2006).

In addition, a linguistic examination conducted by Del-Teso-Craviotto (2006) revealed that women's magazines employ linguistic techniques to address women in casual and familiar language, aimed at presenting themselves as women's friends. As a result of women's magazines providing a platform for reflecting and shaping women's perceptions, their pervasive nature and the cultural leadership they offer women, various studies have attempted to understand the relationship between magazines and gender. In the next section, I discuss the literature on women's magazines and gender by examining the various methodological approaches and findings of these studies, and the implications that they have on the current study.

THE CASE OF CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

According to Gill (2009), women's magazines have received a vast amount of attention over the past four decades, whereby scholarly research undertook mostly a feminist-orientated approach to magazines as a primary site or source of cultural ideas about women, men and gender relations. Studies on magazines have focused mainly on advertisements and editorial content in magazines, audience research and discursive analysis to understand gender portrayal in magazines. The concepts and aspects derived from these studies are discussed in this section, in terms of the following:

Magazine advertisements and the portrayal of gender

The reinforcement of the portrayal of gender in magazine advertisements is based on the argument that the reality represented in magazines is mainly based on the interest of advertisers which presents masculine desires, thereby sexualising submissiveness and objectification of women. A large proportion of research on magazines and the portrayal of gender has focused on reviews of advertisements, emphasising the fact that women are mostly portrayed as sex objects. For example, Krassas, Blauwkamp, and Wesselink (2001) concluded that images in magazines targeted at both men and women, reflect the 'male gaze' and promote the idea that women should primarily concern themselves with attracting and sexually satisfying men.

The majority of research on advertisements in magazines is based on the analysis framework developed by Goffman (1974), referred to as frame analysis. This technique for analysis focuses on hands, eyes, knees, facial expression, head posture, relative sizes, positioning and placing, head-eye aversion, as well as finger-biting and sucking as features for communicating gender relations (Lindner, 2004). The results of studies which employed frame analysis as a research technique, indicated that overall, advertisements in magazines, especially those targeted at women and men (Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004), as well as adolescent girls (Nam, Lee, & Hwang, 2011), depict women in stereotypical ways.

A further reinforcing argument is that women are also differently portrayed, based on the type of audience of the magazine and the race of the models used in advertisements. For example, recent cross-cultural investigations of advertisements in women's magazines have shown that women are consistently portrayed as sex objects, with a greater emphasis on sexuality in Western countries and submissiveness in Asian countries (Jung & Lee, 2009; Nelson & Paek, 2005; Sengupta, 2006). Baker (2005) found that white women are significantly more objectified than black women, especially in advertisements in men's magazines, with great emphasis placed on the physical attractiveness of white women.

Despite current women's empowerment movements, some studies have concluded that stereotypical depictions of women in magazines have, in some instances, only shown a slight decrease over time (Lindner, 2004). In fact, most studies evidenced that magazine advertising is increasingly portraying women as sex objects by the growing use of sexually explicit dressing and nudity (Thompson, 2000), as well as intimate contact (Reichert & Carpenter, 2004).

It was also found that magazines with a strict policy against sexist advertising have increasingly included sexualised advertising portraying women as sexual objects (Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990). More recent investigations found evidence of a greater diversity of roles portrayed in advertising, which include representations of women holding sexual agency, being sexually empowered and not being exclusively heterosexual. Gill (2008) argues that a positive shift is prevalent in modern representations of women as active, intelligent and sexually powerful, towards a discourse of 'power femininity'. However, it should also be considered that these alternative representations, in some instances, are embedded in traditional mainstream film and pornography, for example, the hot lesbian or the violent women punishing men, and may rather function as techniques of discipline and regulation (Gill, 2008).

In spite of these arguments, it is important to realise that the majority of magazine advertisement research focused predominantly on the analysis of photos rather than text. Seeing that most women purchase magazines with the aim of reading the published articles, an understanding of the text becomes important to gain a comprehensive view of the portrayal of women in magazines. In addition, Krassas et al. (2001) state that, although advertisements implicitly advise and instruct their audience on the correct and acceptable ways to look and act, magazine features do so more explicitly.

Gender and analysis of magazine content

Over the last three decades, numerous feminist studies have been conducted on women's magazines, with the focus shifting towards the analysis of magazine content. Content analysis of magazines identified in the literature focused, inter alia, on headline analysis of covers (Davalos, Davalos, & Layton, 2007), content analysis of photos used in articles (Kim & Lennon, 2006), and content analysis of texts of editorial articles (McKay & Bonner, 2002), as well as a combination of these methods (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004).

Textual analysis of editorial content in teenage magazines has received a great deal of attention in the past decade. It has been argued that magazines targeted at adolescent women limit women socially and sexually by serving as guides that offer narrowly defined heterosexual norms and practices (Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998). Many studies focusing on content analysis of teenage magazines have concluded that magazines tend to include polarised gender scripts, for example, action, transport and adventure for boys and beauty, kindness and princesses for girls (Gill, 2007).

Peirce (1993) demonstrated that messages in teen fiction targeted at adolescent girls emphasise the importance of female-male relationships and show that it is inappropriate to act aggressively, that girls are dependent on others to solve their problems, and that there are appropriate male and female professions. An analysis conducted on occupational messages in *Seventeen* magazine shows that men are presented as occupying the majority of the occupational landscape, and holding more diverse and important roles (Massoni, 2004). In addition, males are presented as occupying jobs that require skill and competence, compared to women, who are presented as occupying jobs that require beauty, youth and a desire to serve.

Similarly, studies on women's magazines criticised magazines as providing narrow and constrictive ideals of femininity revolving around fashion, beauty and relationships, which construct and maintain ideological messages serving to normalise unequal gender relations (Gill, 2007). This is mostly seen in the promotion by magazines of the beauty ideal, which is damaging to women's self-esteem and encourages harmful social practices, ranging from dieting to cosmetic surgery (Gill, 2007).

Another criticism of women's magazines is that they are mainly concerned with teaching women to place great value on their appearance, mostly by monitoring their weight and bodies. For example, Davalos et al. (2007) found that women's magazine headlines are primarily concerned with conveying messages that women should be thin, beautiful and attractive to males, and have remained relatively consistent over the past three decades. A study conducted by Aubrey (2010), which examined the headlines of fitness and health magazines, found that, in most cases, these magazines covered themes of body appearance, rather than themes of health and body competence. Similarly, Sypeck, Gray and Ahrens (2004) analysed the size of models used in fashion magazines and found that, over the 50 years prior to the study, models used in magazines had become thinner. They argued that it was done to promote a thin feminine ideal. Similarly, studies have also focused on the editorial content within magazines and found that editorial content promoted weight management and body size as features of the beauty ideal (Fangman, Ogle, Bickle, & Rouner, 2004).

In addition to maintaining gender ideologies, magazines are also class-orientated, racialised and hetero-normative, with white women being mostly overrepresented (Covert & Dixon, 2008; Gill, 2009). Cross-cultural examinations of the visual portrayal of women within fashion spreads, which focus on the analysis of photos in women's magazines, showed that Black women were portrayed in more submissive poses and white women in more sexually explicit poses (Millard & Grant, 2006). Textual analysis of the role of magazines in portraying gender has predominantly focused on content analysis, which examines representations of women and how they reinforce gender ideologies.

However, Kolbe and Burnett (1991) question the reliability of content analysis methods, as they found that these methods often failed to replicate studies and coding methods, and are frequently ineffectual or unreliable. Bell (2004) supports this by stating that content analysis as a methodology, which mostly focuses on determining frequency of occurrences, is of limited value to research, as it is rarely able to support statements of significance, effects or an interpreted meaning of a domain of representation (Bell, 2004).

These methods are also limited to the researcher's analysis and do not account for readers' interpretations of magazine content. Therefore, the validity of content analysis has been critiqued, as it is argued that readers can have multiple and various interpretations, and the analysis cannot be meaningful without the context of the reader.

Audience ethnographic studies on gender in magazines

Audience ethnographic studies on magazines, which focus on examining the meanings readers take from reading magazines, have been utilised to gain an understanding of audience responses and interpretations of magazines (Millard, 2009; Parker, Haytko, & Hermans, 2008; Ytre-Arne, 2011).

For example, Kehily (1999) conducted an audience ethnographic study to explore how school students relate to, utilise and experience issues of sexuality, with the focus on teenage magazines as a space for such negotiation. She found that, not only do young women enjoy reading teenage magazines, but they also view them as cultural markers, offering an opportunity for dialogue which continuously produces, defines and enhances femininities.

In addition, Currie (1997) found that readers ascribed a truth status to the ideological definitions of womanhood, whereby they not only valued the meanings of womanhood, but also naturalised associations of femininity with which they needed to negotiate their real construction of self. In another study conducted by Crane (1999), it was found that, although women were mostly critical of fashion photographs in women's magazines, their responses were influenced by their acceptance of traditional norms of femininity. These studies indicate that readers interpret magazines in complex ways and that representations of femininity cannot be assumed to be automatically accepted and internalised by individuals.

Against this background and, in spite of the fact that audience ethnographic analysis is a useful tool in describing people and cultures, the main criticism against this type of analysis is that it ignores the products of behaviour. Subsequently, Spalding, Zimmerman, Fruhauf, Banning, and Pepin (2010) argue

that, in order to strengthen our understanding of human science, it is necessary to focus on the products of social interaction.

Discourse analysis on gender in magazines

Discourse analytic examination of texts provides an understanding of how multiple writers, and readers, participate to produce meaning and ideology, and how this is perpetuated through repeated use (Gill, 2007). Although it is argued that it cannot be assumed that magazine representations are passively accepted by readers, our social realities and identities are constructed through language (Gill, 2007), as indicated before. Therefore, it is argued that magazines provide a platform for, and contribute to, discourses of gender, specifically in terms of femininity, masculinity and sexuality.

In keeping with this viewpoint, the different gender discourses prevalent in the literature are subsequently reflected on and categorised, in terms of the stances outlined below.

First, Farvid and Braun (2006) found that, within contemporary women's magazines, multiple contradictory accounts exist pertaining to female and male sexuality. Most noticeably, two dominant constructions of female and male sexuality were identified, namely men's need for sex, whereby men are presented as easily aroused and satisfied, and women as having to develop adequate skills to keep their partner satisfied; pleasure; performance; and the male ego, whereby men are concerned with pleasing women, their sexual performance and insecurity about inadequacies.

Second, some studies have identified magazine discourse as normalising the male sex drive, and emphasising women's need to learn how to successfully attract and satisfy men (Durham, 1998; Firminger, 2006; Gadsden, 2000).

Third, a quantifiable number of discourse analysis studies have focused on health, fitness and body image discourse within magazines. One such study examined the construction of body image distortion within magazines and found that discourses on women's health instructed women that body image disturbances were the responsibility of the individual, instead of questioning the dominant cultural ideal of a healthy body (Markula, 2001). Another study conducted by Madden and Chamberlain (2004), focusing on nutritional health messages in women's magazines, found that the combination of multiple discourses operate to disempower women. The authors argued that women were continuously being positioned in opposites as immoral, uneducated, inexpert and ineffective mothers, and physically undesirable, against being healthy eaters, good mothers and attractive individuals. Furthermore, studies focusing on the construction of eating disorders and health, found that anorexia nervosa was constructed as more

feminine and less unattractive than obesity (Ferris, 2003; Whitehead & Kurz, 2008), feeding into the Western beauty ideal of thinness.

Fourth, another study conducted by Tyler (2004) found that lifestyle magazines targeted at both men and women, revolved around a discourse of the management of sexuality and sexual relations in everyday life. Managerial discourses within magazines are argued to instruct individuals that sexual relations should continuously be managed, worked on and improved upon.

Lastly, a few, more recent discourse analytical studies have examined relationship and sexual discourses in women's magazines. For example, Gill (2009) examined sex and relationship advice in women's magazines, and argued that discourse mostly revolved around post-feminist ideas and that feminist, pre-feminist and anti-feminist ideas coexisted in a way which disguised gender ideologies, making these discourses more harmful and difficult to contest.

From these and various other studies conducted in the field of women's magazines and gender, a number of key debates have emerged. In the next section, I briefly discuss these debates as important considerations for the process of analysis of women's magazines, as pertained in the context of this study.

Gender and the media in a South African context

In spite of the immense focus placed on gender and sexuality, and how they are represented within the media, specifically magazines, few of these studies were found to have been conducted within a South African context. Therefore, this section contextualises the main results of studies within the South African context.

The main focus of several studies in local context was on gender role portrayal in popular television programmes. One such paper was presented by Thurman (2008), who argued that Oprah selected stories and histories of individuals, communities, cultures and nations, and adapted them to suit her entertainment need. She had created a generic female biography that ignored political and economic contexts, race, geography and culture, which are integral to understanding the challenges that South African women face and the issues surrounding those women who form Oprah's primary target market. Another study conducted by Motshaathebe (2009) focused on an audience study of gender-role portrayal and stereotypical representation of gender in *Generations*, a locally produced, popular South African soap opera. The study revealed that respondents felt that men were generally being portrayed as more dominant, compared to their female counterparts, and that women were more associated with negative attributes such as greed, jealousy, weak emotions, immaturity and selfishness (Motshaathebe, 2009).

Conversely, a great proportion of academic scholarships on South African magazines investigated the representation of gender and the construction of African gender identities (Clowes, 2001, 2008; Johnson, 2009; Mutongi, 2000). In general, these studies found that, although magazines claimed to be aimed at black people, a racial discourse existed, which reinforced a Western ideal rather than an African ideal of gender identities. One such study analysed advertisements in *Drum* magazine during the period 1951 to 1959 and argued that whiteness was romanticised, whereby the attributes of being white were constructed as the feminine ideal and the goal for black women to attain (Rauwerda, 2007). The main limitation is, therefore, that the majority of these studies focused on magazine content published in the middle of the 20th century, which limits their applicability, as they can be seen as dated.

However, a study conducted by Clowes (1994) on South African women's magazines published between 1960 and 1990, found that discourses of femininity in women's magazines centred on relationships with men, children and families as the primary concern of women, which should take preference to career-driven ambitions. This was confirmed in a more recent study by Sanger (2007), who found that this stereotypical discourse of femininity still remains today, with women still being constructed within a nurturing role. In addition, it was found that women were predominantly constructed as white heterosexuals, which excluded black or lesbian femininities.

The results of two more recent and relevant studies are also prevalent for the purpose of this study. The first is a study that analysed advertisements in popular South African magazines focusing on the gendered portrayal of childhood and found that, although these magazines were produced in a multicultural nation, hegemonic and patriarchal discourse continued to exist (Prinsloo, 2003). The second is a study conducted by Jooste (2007), who found that in sports magazines, women athletes were portrayed in a highly feminised manner which consistently reflected the male gaze and depict women as sex objects.

Other contemporary studies demonstrated that magazines, which specifically target black women, 'purvey gender stereotypes, and prejudices, about women that undermine efforts aimed at the emancipation of black women and the creation of an egalitarian society' (Odhiambo, 2008, p. 76). According to Odhiambo (2008), within South Africa, popular magazines present a vehicle which provides women with reference to empowerment, gender equality and the emancipation of women, yet these ideals are juxtaposed alongside consumerism.

KEY DEBATES TO ADDRESS

'Despite the apparent dissimilarities in analysis of women's magazines, a number of key debates and points of difference have emerged in the literature about them' (Gill, 2009, p. 347). These debates relate to pleasure versus oppression, coherent versus contradictory ideology, and the relationship between feminism and magazines, which are all discussed below.

Contradiction versus coherence

One of the central debates about women's magazines has been the extent to which they form a coherent ideology. Some scholars argue that women's magazines repeatedly promote feminine ideals, whereas others argue that they offer contradictory texts and messages (Gill, 2009). The notion of contradiction has become a key to understanding the fragmented nature of ideologies and the inconsistencies between different discourses in magazines (Gill, 2007). For example, Winship (1987) argued that women's magazines did not offer a single coherent ideal of womanhood, but rather produced it through varying ideologies of femininity, spatially separated throughout the magazine to maintain the flow of the magazine. For example, in one section, beautiful skin may be attained through skincare regimes and the application of the correct skincare products, whereas in another section of the magazine, fair skin is attributed to genetics (Gill, 2007).

While contradictory discourses on skincare may not be harmful, in relation to discussions of health, sex, emotional advice and career guidance, they take on a more serious significance (Gill, 2009). For example, encouragement of sexual assertiveness may be juxtaposed with advice to women to be sexually conservative (Gill, 2007, 2009). A study investigating teenage magazines, in which quizzes in these magazines were analysed, found that competing discourses existed and that, although there was a discourse encouraging girls to 'just' be themselves, they were simultaneously advised to change their behaviour to be better girls (Ostermann and Keller-Cohen, 1998).

Sex and relationship topics form a central part of the focus of magazines. According to Gill (2009), discourses within popular contemporary female magazines centre on at least three central themes. First, there is a focus on the sexual pleasing of men, where the responsibility is placed on women. The second discourse emphasises sexual frontierism, where a negative connotation is placed on becoming stuck in a rut. Women are encouraged to resort to new, taboo ideas, such as watching porn together, buying sex toys and trying anal sex to prevent a dull sex life. Third, there exists a post-feminist discourse around sex, whereby women are encouraged to take charge sexually, to enjoy sexual activities. According to Gill (2009), these discourses are frequently in conflict with one another.

Women's magazines and feminism

Debates in this area have revolved around the relationship of women's magazines with feminism, with the central argument focusing on whether women's magazines should be considered feminist or whether they include feminist discourses in an attempt to disguise their stereotypical depiction of women (Gill, 2007). Since the sexual revolution, once contested ideas have become part of the core of women's magazines, which have been informed by feminist notions, for example, the promotion of women's equality in the workplace, having access to reliable contraceptives and celebrating active female sexuality (Gill, 2007). However, regardless of some transformation, many feminist scholars continue to critique the representation of hetero-normative sexuality and hegemonic sexual practices in women's magazines. For example, an analysis conducted by Jackson (2005) indicated that, in women's magazines, relationships were represented as heterosexual and lesbian sexualities were neglected. Although women's magazines advocate liberation and the empowerment of women, they are less transgressive and continue to portray traditional gender roles. It is argued that, by neglecting women's alternative sexualities, women's magazines are constraining women's sexualities, but that this is masked by discourses of being daring and dangerous regarding sexual practices (Gill, 2007).

Furthermore, although it might be argued that perceptions towards women are changing within society, it seems that women's magazines have not embraced these changes at the present time. For example, a study conducted by Davalos et al. (2007) found that magazines showed little change in the period, 1976 to 1996, where the dominant messages appearing on these magazine headlines continued to emphasise the need for women to be thin, beautiful and attractive to their male counterparts. In fact, a comparison of advertisements in magazines from 1983 to 2003 showed that images of women in both men's and women's magazines were significantly becoming more sexually explicit, which indicates a move and trend towards greater incidence of women being portrayed as sex objects (Reichert & Carpenter, 2004).

Women's magazines also place significant focus on sexual differences, whereby women are encouraged to understand their partner's differences, in an attempt to solve sexual conflict. This often emphasises dominant gender ideologies and discourses (Gill, 2007). For example, a study conducted by Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2005) found that women's fitness magazines both reinforced and rejected sexual differences, to varying degrees, and, at the same time, conformed and challenged hegemonic norms. Another study conducted on teenage magazines, aimed at girls, which focused on the representation of occupational messages to young girls, found that the dominant themes in the messages in these magazines were power relations in a gender hierarchy. Men reigned regarding the quantity and quality of the occupational positions they held, holding more jobs, more diverse jobs, more realistic jobs and more important jobs than women in the work world, thereby emphasising stereotypical female jobs and male jobs (Massoni, 2004). If applied to women's magazines, it can be argued that discourses in women's

magazines regarding gender continue to place an emphasis on hegemonic and heterosexual relationships in the present time.

Pleasure of the text versus oppression of the audience

One of the key debates of women's magazines revolves around the conflict between the two ways of analysing magazines, either as vehicles for pleasure or purveyors of oppressive ideology (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) explains that, on the one side of the debate, it is argued that women's magazines, as feminine texts, offer pleasure to women and that this should be embraced. On the other hand, it is argued that magazines offer deeply problematic representations of sexuality, race and class, and that their espousal of oppressive gender ideologies should be rejected or condemned. Notwithstanding, it can be deduced that, although feminists continue to argue that women's magazines are oppressive in nature and should be challenged for their stereotypical representation of women, these magazines continue to be appealing to women, as they provide solutions to social and personal conflicts (Gill, 2007). This supports the aim of this study, which sets out to add to and enhance the body of knowledge based on these debates, especially the viewpoint that, although magazines may be viewed by some feminist scholars as being restrictive and oppressive to women, they provide a valuable platform for analysis, to gain perspective on the various discourses of gender that women are confronted with.

CONCLUSION

Grounded on a sound theoretical foundation, I set out to discuss media and gender, centring on the media's portrayal of gender, particularly with regard to femininity. Specifically, I examined the role of women's magazines within society and the multiple ways in which women's magazines portray and represent stereotypical gender norms. Furthermore, I argued that magazines present a valuable source for studying gender discourses, specifically femininity, for the following reasons: magazines reflect and shape women's ideas on femininity and appropriate behaviour for women, are pervasive and widespread, and offer a cultural leadership which informs women on norms pertaining to womanhood.

This was followed by a discussion on current literature, in which the case of contemporary women's magazines was examined. Specific reference was made to studies on magazine advertisements and the portrayal of gender; gender and editorial content; ethnographic studies on gender; and discourse analysis on gender in magazines, from a South African perspective. I concluded this section by taking key debates that have emerged from media and gender studies as important considerations for analysis, as they pertain to this study, and providing further impetus to the core concept of discourse analysis.

Owing to the fact that discourse analysis is the research method applied in the present study, the next chapter will provide a comprehensive discussion and present a clear understanding of the value of this method in its application.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PARADIGM AND METHOD

INTRODUCTION

Based on the key arguments and debates in the previous chapter, it was concluded that media and gender have emerged as core concepts for the analysis. It was deduced that women's magazines, as a form of media, offer a valuable platform for the analysis of various discourses of gender that women are challenged with. This chapter, therefore, introduces the different approaches to discourse analysis as a research method. It commences with a broad introduction to Foucauldian approaches to discourse and Discursive Psychology, and then outlines the theoretical principles of Discursive Psychology as they apply to discourse analysis, including an explanation of how they were applied in the current study. This is followed by an outline of the process of discourse analysis employed in this study, which includes the procedure and sample, in terms of the research question, sampling, data collecting and building a corpus, coding, the process of analysis, validation and report-writing. The chapter concludes with the role of the researcher during the discourse analytic process and how it was considered in this study.

APPROACHES TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

All spoken and written material can be conceptualised as text subjected to discourse analysis, where discourse is identified through the examination of text (Breakwell et al., 2000). By making use of these resources, people draw from available discourses and reproduce certain discourses (Parker, 1997). Discourse analysis is a fluid concept with no single definition. However, the common thread in all discourse analysis is that it may be loosely defined as the close enquiry of language in use and is best understood by considering it as a research field, rather than a single practice (Taylor, 2001). According to Parker (1997, p. 285):

Discourses describe the aspects of the world in certain ways which comprise of the various ways meaning is expressed through culture and society. In other words, discourse analysis examines dominant discourses which produce a certain world view whereby language, as a social construct, is central to its analysis.

Within a discursive framework, our social world is constituted through constructions of meaning which people produce, maintain and transform through their use of language and interactions (Lämsä & Sintonen, 2001). Parker (1997) highlights two approaches that have emerged from various theoretical traditions, namely, the Foucauldian approach to discourse and Discursive Psychology. Although these theoretical traditions are quite disparate, there are some overlaps and researchers often borrow ideas and move between these frameworks (Parker, 1997). The following section summarises these analytical approaches.

Foucauldian approaches to discourse

Foucauldian approaches to discourse draw on the work of French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (Parker, 1997). Foucault refers to 'archaeology of culture' and 'genealogy of knowledge', which uncover the ways the phenomena came into being, in contrast with psychology's approach to taken-for-granted knowledge (Parker, 1997).

According to this approach, psychological and social phenomena cannot be studied on their own, separated from culture and history, but only within their social context. For this reason, the main problem with traditional methods of enquiry, such as laboratory-based experiments, pertains to studying one issue at a time, focusing on a specific aspect at a time within a certain context, such as memory or prejudice (Parker, 1997). These traditional methods of enquiry assume that the psychologist will be able to determine the 'essence' of the phenomena studied, in order to discover and understand what these phenomena really are (Parker, 1997). Instead, a discourse researcher asks how phenomena came to be the way they are, by understanding power relations and ideologies, and the discourses that constitute them (Parker, 1997). When studying discourse from a Foucauldian point of view, the researcher aims to understand how discourse constitutes phenomena and how discourses are being naturalised and taken for granted, especially in the examination of power relations, which are embedded in history and culture.

Discursive psychology

Primarily drawing on post-structuralist, Foucaultian and linguistic traditions, discursive psychology emerged in the 1980s within the framework of social psychology (Parker, 1997). The development of discursive psychology from discourse analysis was mostly the result of limitations, and critique, of traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods, and mainly influenced by the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987). As opposed to the quantitative research methods which were dominant during this time period, Potter and Wetherell outlined an alternative approach and method for social psychologists. Their approach did not only offer an alternative to quantitative research methods, but also introduced a different method of qualitative enquiry, whereby scientific enquiry could be regarded as procedures to be explained, rather than discoveries to be celebrated (Parker, 1997).

According to Potter and Edwards (2001), discursive psychology refers to the application of ideas from discourse analysis to central topics in social psychology, focusing on the action-orientated and reality-constructing features that discourses are based on. It can, therefore, be argued that discursive psychology is interested in discourse, as it provides a platform for action, understanding and intersubjectivity (Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

Because the main focus of discursive psychology is on language and discourse, it differs from traditional views of psychology (Edley, 2001). Where traditional approaches assume language to be a resource that will reveal what is going on in people's minds, discursive psychology views language as the topic to explore the ways people talk about, or construct, things such as emotions and memories (Edley, 2001).

Discourse analysis critiques traditional psychology by first, treating psychology's assumptions of the mind and behaviour with suspicion. Second, it criticises traditional psychology for misleading people, through the use of language, about place and mental phenomena, which it invariably locates inside individual heads, rather than between people (Parker, 1997). Discursive psychology's fundamental assumption pertains to the way both 'reality' and 'mind' are conceptually constructed by people, through language and through the course of their execution of various practical tasks (Potter & Edwards, 2001). This forms the basis of this study and is discussed in more detail, in terms of the theoretical principles in the next section.

Within discursive psychology, discourse analysis is used to evoke awareness of the ways in which language constructs, and sets up, social identity and social relationships for discourse participants, and how it can frame reality (Ostermann & Keller-Cohen, 1998). From a discursive analytic viewpoint, it is assumed that, the social world is comprised of social actors which, through language and interaction, produce, maintain and transform various meanings of understanding our social world. Therefore, through social interaction, various discourses are produced and reproduced which offer multiple ways of understanding our 'reality'. In the next section, I explain the three theoretical principles of discursive psychology, namely, that discourse is constructed and constructive, action orientated and situated.

Theoretical principles of discursive psychology

Drawing from the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987), three core features of discourse may be identified, regarding the nature of discourse, namely: the notions that discourse is constructed and constructive, action orientated and situated. These aspects will be discussed in the section below.

- Discourse is constructed and constructive

The nature of discourse as being constructed and constructive draws on three aspects of discourse. First, it draws on the fact that discourse is built or produced out of pre-existing linguistic resources such as words, categories, idioms and repertoires (Parker, 1997; Wiggins & Potter, 2008). Second, it draws attention to the fact that these linguistic resources are used in a wide variety of ways which can present different versions of the world (Wiggins & Potter, 2008), where this means that one account of the world can be described in multiple ways. Third, the world is not something that pre-existed before talk, but instead, it is through talk that our versions of the world are constructed (Parker, 1997). In light of this, it is

argued that, by drawing on language and using language in various ways, people construct their own versions of the world. If applied in the case of magazines relating to this study, it is argued that it will suffice that magazines draw on language and discourse to construct, and maintain, a certain subjective view of the world.

- Discourse is action orientated

In contrast to traditional psychology, discourse does not assume that a transparent view into the mind of individuals or the outside world is possible, but rather that language organised within discourse always does things (Parker, 1997). Both our everyday talk and academic descriptions serve as speech acts, by means of which our commentary on current affairs serves certain functions, such as legitimising or challenging, supporting or treating with irony, endorsing or subverting what is being described (Parker, 1997). From a discursive approach, the focus is on what these speech acts do (Parker, 1997). According to Sheriff and Wetherell (2009), a basic assumption of discursive analysis is that discourses and the way they describe phenomena are best understood as being practices that have been designed to accomplish a particular form of action, for example, making an argument persuasive, construing something as factual, and managing personal stake and interests. Discourse, therefore, takes on an action or function orientation. Accordingly, language in women's magazines will be viewed as practice in its own right, where people make use of discourse (or language) to do things. In other words, it is necessary to emphasise that discourse does not occur in isolation, but rather that it is specific to the interpretative context in which it manifests (Sheriff & Wetherell, 2009).'

- Discourse is situated

Discourse is situated in three main areas. First, discourse is situated within a sequential environment within which people understand words and sentences, according to what precedes and follows them (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). Second, discourse is situated within a particular institutional setting, such as a school classroom, church or, in the case of this study, a contemporary women's magazine. Third, discourse is situated rhetorically, where talk and text are organised around particular argumentative structures (Gill, 2007). Mainstream psychology aims to discover consistency of response, or establish a set of items on a questionnaire or test that cohere, in other words, it tends to search for tools that will predict consistently similar results (Parker, 1997). Parker (1997, p. 289) explains it as follows: 'Interpretation in traditional psychological work looks for a single meaning, whether in observational statements or in reports of experience.'

Therefore, most discourse is involved in establishing one account of the world in the light of an opposite version. Sheriff and Wetherell (2009) explain it in that variability in the use of language is a crucial aspect to discourse, as it directs to the different actions or functions of a particular description. This is illustrated

in a study conducted by Madden and Chamberlain (2004), which focused on the nutritional health messages in women's magazines. The results of their study indicated that media texts present a problematic space for women, because discourses offer contradicting possibilities for woman readers. These contradicting possibilities are evidenced by the fact that the study, on the one hand, found that a 'moral citizen' discourse existed within magazines, whereby women's responsibility to control their bodies through self-regulation and self-monitoring was emphasised, and, on the other hand, contradictory to this discourse, that discourses also attempted to undermine women's confidence and ability to make healthy food choices. The latter viewpoint also emphasises the need for women to obtain external advice and expertise, which ultimately leads to disempowering women from having control over their eating habits and bodies. For the purpose of this study, cognisance was, therefore, taken of all these possible situations to ensure that the different or contrasting versions of the world, constructed within magazines, are taken into account.

It can, therefore, be argued that, within a discursive framework, three main characteristics or features of discourse may be identified. These include that discourse is constructed and constructive, it performs a function, and it is situated. In the following section, I explain the process and sampling processes that were used during my discourse analytic examination.

METHOD AND SAMPLE

Discourse analysis draws on the critical orientation of various other traditions within the social sciences (Gill, 2009). As previously discussed, the approach taken for the purpose of this study relies on discourse analysis, drawing mainly on the methodology and approach proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1992), combined with the approach later outlined by Wiggins and Potter (2008). In order to measure the discourses in the object under investigation in this study, the following stages proposed by them were used to access the multiple gender-specific discourses.

Stage 1: Devising a research question

The first stage of the discourse analytic process involved narrowing the broad focus and wider theory of the study down to one or more questions (Taylor, 2001). The research questions were mainly based on my interest in the topic and became more focused as the research study progressed, because the questions were repeatedly refined through close examination of the data.

Guided by my interest in the nature of femininity and how it is constructed within magazines, I asked questions such as: 'How is femininity used within magazines and what functions do they serve?' 'What are the different constructions of femininity and what actions do they involve?' 'What theoretical principles and/or constructs were present and how do they contribute to the existing theoretical features of

discourse?’ Through this process, different explanations could be investigated through further inspection of the data, which is also suggested by Wiggins and Potter (2008).

Stage 2: Sampling

The data source utilised for the purpose of the study consisted of relationship-focused editorial content within women’s magazines. This content was specifically selected, as such editorial features in magazines explicitly advise and instruct women how to look and act, which makes them a valuable source for examining discourses on femininity (Krassas et al., 2001). The study adopted a discursive analytic approach to find out how women’s magazines present text to their readers, by means of a collection of material from one magazine. Currently, the contemporary magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, is the most widely read monthly women’s magazine in South Africa, with a readership of 1 070 000, indicating that about 3,1% of the total South African population read *Cosmopolitan* (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2009). The present study, therefore, defined its population as women’s magazines in South Africa, with the realised sample being that of one women’s magazine. The realised sample, *Cosmopolitan*, was purposively selected for the study, based on its popularity among women and the fact that it was easily available.

Traditional sampling approaches within psychology emphasise the need for securing large and representative samples. Within discourse analysis, if interview material is used as source material, there is no need for a large sample (Breakwell et al., 2000). What is important is to gather sufficient text to determine the variety of discursive forms that are commonly used when speaking or writing about the research topic. This may be possible from an analysis of relatively little text, especially where common discursive forms are under consideration or where sufficient text has been gathered. In addition, although discourse analysis may be executed on a small number of texts, a thorough examination requires that the collection of data is comprised of similar instances or settings (Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

Therefore, 14 consecutive monthly issues of *Cosmopolitan* were selected to account for seasonal differences during the timeframe of March 2010 to May 2011. In addition, the primary aim was to focus on a particular cultural moment, as opposed to identifying trends across time. The sampling also took into account that variability was likely to exist from month to month, while still ensuring that the data comprised similar instances, with specific attention to relationship-focused article features.

Stage 3: Data collection and building a corpus

According to Taylor (2001), it is important to consider what exactly constitutes as data and not to assume that all material is relevant to the research project. Accordingly, material only becomes data through a considered process of selection, which is dependent on the researcher's theoretical assumptions on discourse and the topic of the research (Taylor, 2001). Before the commencement of building the corpus, it is, therefore, necessary to identify the relevant material which will potentially constitute the data for the research study, known as the population or 'universe of discourse'.

The data drawn for the study constituted editorial articles from *Cosmopolitan*, as articles within women's magazines have been argued to play an important role in constructing and reproducing discourses of femininity. Therefore, it was decided to include editorial articles which fall under the category 'relationships', as it is labelled within *Cosmopolitan*. The reason for this is twofold: first, these articles mainly advise women how to think and behave concerning issues of intimacy and relationship activities. Second, relationship articles are mostly the main attracting features of magazines and are usually most prominently featured on their covers. It is, therefore, argued that magazines mostly address issues of femininity within these types of articles. A total of ten articles were identified as relevant to the study and, consequently, selected from the issues of the magazine, ranging from March 2010 to May 2011.

Stage 4: Coding

This process started off by closely examining the text and repeatedly reading through the material to identify recurrent discourse patterns shared by accounts under analysis. This is consistent with Breakwell et al. (2000) who state that, if the research focus were identified in advance, instances of the research focus would be identified at this point. This makes it possible to become aware of less obvious, yet valuable lines of inquiry. Because the process of coding is the precursor to data analysis, it involves sifting through the data corpus for instances of a phenomenon (Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

This stage included hypothesis development, revision and discarding, as linguistic evidence needed for support, proved not to be forthcoming. It was important to approach and analyse the data, paying attention to the way in which language was used, where hypotheses about which discourse was brought into play in the text were formulated and reformulated, as I remained open to alternative readings of the text and the need to reject hypotheses that were not supported by the text (Breakwell et al., 2000).

Stage 5: The process of analysis

During the analysis phase, data were read, while particular attention was given to the way language was used in the articles, for example, the words and phrases selected, and the various ways in which concepts were described and given meaning (Sheriff & Wetherell, 2009). It should, however, be noted that analysis is a continuous process, and should not be separated from the data selection and gathering process, as these processes feed into the analysis phase (Taylor, 2001). In other words, during the analysis process, data selection, data gathering and analysis were approached as a continuous and simultaneous process, while giving attention to language use and the meanings created by the text, especially pertaining to meanings of femininity produced within the text. Throughout the process of analysis, the key theoretical constructs of gender and media outlined in the theoretical chapters, as well as the relevant gender discourses, were considered to provide key theoretical and practical insights into the subject under investigation,

Taylor (2001) suggests that the nature of the analysis is iterative; therefore, the researcher should approach the data in an open-ended and circular fashion. The researcher, therefore, looks for patterns in the data, but is not entirely sure what it will look like or what its significance will be. She must, therefore, approach the data with a certain blind faith, with confidence that there is something there but no certainty about what (Taylor, 2001). Analysing the data, therefore, involved continually examining the data, taking note of any patterns and themes that emerged from the data, yet not settling on these as absolute, but rather continuing the search.

For the purpose of the study, Edley's (2001) three key analytic concepts which are closely linked to the theoretical principles of discursive psychology and the nature of these discourses, namely, that discourse in constructed and constructive, action orientated and situated, were taken into consideration for describing and understanding the construction of gender, namely: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject position.

Interpretative repertoires (more than one way to describe the world)

Interpretative repertoires are relatively coherent ways of talking about objects or events forming the 'building blocks of conversation', which offer a range of linguistic resources that may be drawn upon and utilised during everyday conversation (Edley, 2001). Interpretative repertoires also refer to a register or collection of terms, and metaphors, which are used to describe actions and events (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), as well as to the available linguistic resources that may be drawn upon, shared and understood by people during their everyday social interactions and practices (Xue, 2008). Interpretative repertoires form part of any community's commonsense, which provides a foundation of shared social understanding, for

example, when people talk about things, they draw on terms that have already been provided to them by history (Edley, 2001).

By examining the various ways that people can talk or write about women and femininity, we are able to understand the challenges that exist for the construction of self and others (Edley, 2001). We are, therefore, able to see what is possible to say about women and what, by implication, is not (Edley, 2001). Therefore, for this study, interpretative repertoires were identified by examining the various themes and patterns relating to gender, which produce shared meanings and various understanding of femininity.

Ideological dilemmas (contradicting themes)

A conceptual distinction can be made between 'intellectual' ideologies, which are concerned with the classical Marxists notions, and 'lived' ideologies, which refer to beliefs, values and practices of a given society or culture (Edley, 2001). Ideological dilemmas refer to the fact that commonsense has no single, unitary meaning and that commonsense is full of contradictory ideas (Xue, 2008). In other words, ideological dilemmas imply that there are different ways of talking and writing about an object or event. The other implication is that, by talking and writing about an object or event, opposing positions are developed. For example, discourse around women may be seen as emotional and irrational, and constructed in opposition to being unemotional and rational.

An overlap between ideological dilemmas and interpretative repertoires exists, namely, that both view language as resources circulating in society, offering the raw materials for social interaction (Edley, 2001). The notion of ideological dilemmas draws attention to the fact that different interpretative repertoires of the same social object are themselves constructed rhetorically (Edley, 2001). When examining ideological dilemmas, we should be able to detect the structuring effects, and identify the discourses, of femininity, in order to understand the contradictions that existed between the various interpretative repertoires identified and opposing constructions of femininity.

Subject position

The third analytic concept draws more on social and cultural studies than psychology, which refers to the way that ideology creates or constructs 'subjects' by drawing people into particular positions or identities (Edley, 2001). Subjectivity may be viewed as a by-product of ideology, where the way people experience, or feel about, themselves and the world is an effect of particular ideologies or discourse (Edley, 2001). People do not encounter discourses prefigured or preformed, but, instead we are reconstituted as subjects in the moment of consumption of discourses or, as stated by Edley (2001, p. 210): 'It is this concept that connects us to the wider notions of discourses and interpretative repertoires to the social construction of particular selves.'

According to Edley (2001), discursive psychologists are interested in the subject position for two reasons: (i) they want to see what the subject position accomplishes within the context of their production, for example, Mr Average equals modesty; and (ii) the availability of these positions as routine ways of describing women yields towards the broader ideological context in which such talk is done.

When considering the analysis of discourse, the researcher needs to have cognisance of 'who' is implied by a particular discourse or interpretative repertoire (Edley, 2001). In other words, what does a given statement or set of statements say about the person who utters them? For the purpose of this study, subject position was applied as a concept of analysis, where the identities or positions given to women within the text and how this applies to broader society, were examined.

Stage 6: Validation

Validation of discourse analytic research from a discursive psychology viewpoint is already built into the processes that it takes on, including data collection and an analysis phase (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). Validation is provided by making use of naturalistic materials, signifying being faithful to the phenomena under review. This is achieved by presenting comprehensive analysis alongside that data, allowing the audience to use their own judgment regarding the plausibility and coherence of the analysis, and the researcher to compare the coherence of findings against other published work, which provides an extended corpus of material that is publicly available (Wiggins & Potter, 2008). In addition, analytic claims may be validated by examining deviant cases, whereby claims about patterns or interpretation are compared with accounts where these patterns are absent (Wiggins & Potter, 2008).

For the purpose of this study, validation was achieved by the continuous process of re-examining the data and explaining any inconsistencies in the results. Furthermore, complete transparency was ascertained by using and presenting all stages of the analysis together with the data, in order to ensure that the audience subject the results to their own judgment.

Stage 7: The report

The final stage entailed the writing up of the analysis and discussing the findings, as outlined by Wiggins and Potter (2008), as well as highlighting the applicability and relevance of the study to the reader, which is presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. For purposes of validation, the reporting phase also provides evidence of the analysis, which will enable the reader to assess my interpretations as researcher.

To establish rigour during analysis, it is necessary for the researcher to employ a systematic investigation during the research process (Taylor, 2001). With specific reference to this study of discourse analysis, it

means that the analysis sought out inconsistency and diversity within the text, as it is assumed that these were natural features of everyday 'talk' (Taylor, 2001). Therefore, I read and reread the text thoroughly and logically, making note of all inconsistencies within articles and contradictions across articles. To validate the findings, I inspected the coherence of my interpretations, in order to make sure that all explanations were systematic and logical, and had no loose ends, by referring to the relevant theoretical and academic literature.

In addition, rigour is also evidenced through the wealth of detail of the data and analysis, as well the explication of the process of analysis (Taylor, 2001). For the purpose of this study, the analysis and interpretation of data are discussed within a theoretically sound and grounded approach, in a very comprehensive, open and transparent manner, to enable the reader to assess the interpretation of the data.

Another claim that can be made for the data is that the project, as a whole, has relevance which relates to the authenticity of the study, although this is not deemed as an adequate argument for the value of analysis (Taylor, 2001). This implies that there exists some connection between the topic under review and a widely publicised social issue or political event. In this study, I ensured this through understanding the way femininity is constructed within women's magazines and how such constructions may or may not contribute to the inequality of women within society.

Various arguments presenting the value of analysis are based on its usefulness or fruitfulness (Taylor, 2001). The final chapter of the study will elaborate on how the analysis attempts to generate new theories and hypotheses, and provide original explanations, including those relevant to previous analyses or to situations that are different from the one being studied, which is known as transferability.

Summary of the discourse analytic method

In this section, I provide an integrative summary of the method that was used to analyse discourse in this study, which is depicted in Figure 2 below:

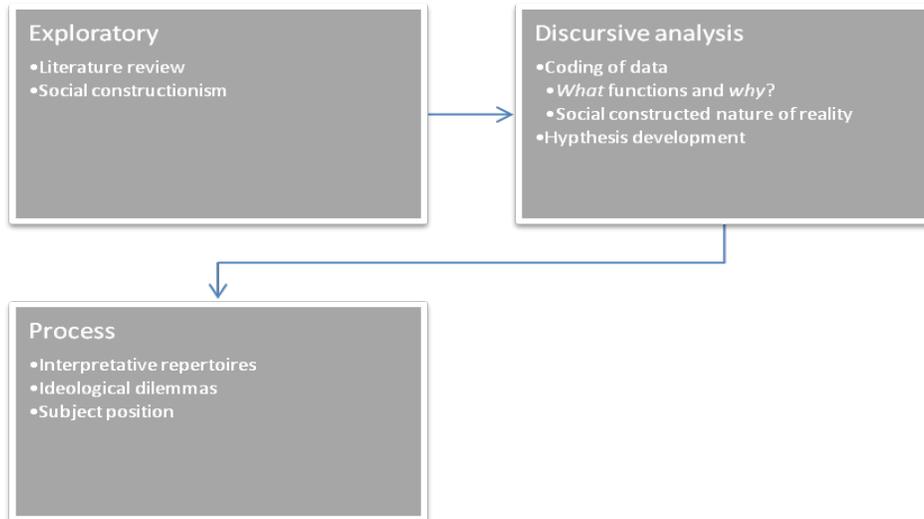


Figure 2: Method of discourse analysis

During the discourse analytic process, the first aspect that was considered, related to the explorative phase of analysis. This included a comprehensive literature review of media, specifically magazines, and gender, in order to demarcate the study and devise the research question. In addition, various theories were examined to understand the development of gender, as well as to contextualise the study within a social constructionist theoretical foundation. The next step of analysis included coding of the text and developing the research question by considering the functions the text serves and why it serves these functions. From this, the research question was identified as exploring the discourse practices and strategies which normalise constructions of femininity in magazines, and identifying discourses of gender which construct femininity within a contemporary women's magazine. In addition, during this stage of the process, hypotheses were formulated as I became more familiar with the text. During hypothesis development, I identified that, not only were multiple constructions of femininity present in the text, but these constructions were directly contradictory in nature. In order to address the research question and hypothesis, I identified discourses of femininity within a contemporary magazine by investigating the interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions present within the text.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As researchers, our responsibilities include the concerns of the subjects of our research (du Plooy, 2001). According to *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* of the American Psychological Association (2002), individuals who participate in research studies have the right to informed consent, to be informed of test findings, to privacy and confidentiality, and to the least stigmatising label. For this study, the focus on available text within a contemporary women's magazine and absence of human participation limited ethical concerns, relating to the infringement of the rights of participants and causing physical or emotional harm to individuals.

Although ethical concerns were limited, cognisance was taken of the subjective nature of the researcher. In an attempt to address this, I acknowledged my own role within the research context and, therefore, identified and indicated this during the course of the study through the process of reflexivity.

As the study makes use of articles obtained from a contemporary women's magazine, copyright infringement was considered as a possible ethical concern. To limit any form of copyright infringement and to promote transparency of the research process, I contacted a number of magazine editors, in an attempt to obtain permission to include the name of the magazine in the title of this dissertation. Unfortunately, I was not granted this permission by the magazines that I contacted. To date, I am not aware that the analysis of magazine content infringes any copyright laws, as such content is considered to be public domain knowledge. Therefore, after careful consideration, I decided to only include samples of the text for discussion of the findings and not to include full articles in the dissertation.

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

As outlined by Taylor (2001), the primary question pertaining to the role of the discourse analytic researcher is how far the researcher can be separated from the research. From a post-modern assumption, the researcher cannot be separated from the research, a concept known as reflexivity (Taylor, 2001). In other words, it is assumed that neutrality and objectivity are impossible for the researcher, because the researcher and the research are impossible to separate in a meaningful way. This assumption implies that, in the same way that the researcher impacts on the world, the world impacts on the researcher. For this reason, the implication of the identity of the research for data collection and analysis should be considered during the research process. Detachment is impossible and, therefore, the researcher takes her own influences into account, with the aim to understand and be self-aware of how her own presence and actions influence the situation (Taylor, 2001).

My identity as the researcher is relevant to the study, because it influenced the topic I selected for the study, as well as the data analysis and interpretation phases. As a white South African woman who also

enjoys reading women's magazines, I do not, however, always agree with how women are portrayed in magazines. I recognise and acknowledge that my own personal interest and political beliefs positioned me to take an interest in the women's magazine and led me to choose it as a research topic. In addition, my own world view, life history and understanding of the language in magazines influenced the way that the data was analysed and interpreted. I, therefore, adopted a policy of openness and transparency, with the purpose of showing my own place within the research process, as outlined by Taylor (2001), including some self-description and accounts that relate to the topic.

CONCLUSION

In order to contextualise the research paradigm and method of this study, this chapter outlined the broad traditions of discourse analysis. The clear implications and importance of discursive psychological analysis as the approach employed for this current study, as well as the basic theoretical principles on which it is based, were presented.

Specifically, this chapter presented an introduction to Foucauldian approaches to discourse and Discursive Psychology, as well as the theoretical principles of Discursive Psychology, especially how it pertains to discourse analysis. It was indicated that, within a discursive framework, our social world is constituted of constructions of meaning which people produce, maintain and transform through their use of language and interactions, and that two main approaches have emerged from the existing theoretical traditions. First, the Foucauldian approach to discourse, where discourse analysis is used to evoke awareness of the ways in which language constructs and sets up social identity, and social relationships, and how it frames the reality of discourse participants. Second, the Discursive Psychology approach, where it is assumed that the social world is comprised of social actors who produce, maintain and transform through language, thereby constructing differing meanings. Therefore, it was argued that, within a discursive framework, three main characteristics or features of discourse may be identified, namely, discourse is constructed and constructive, it performs a function and it is situated.

It was indicated that, although these theoretical traditions are quite disparate, overlaps exist, and researchers borrow ideas and move between these frameworks, in most cases. The chapter then outlined and discussed the seven-stage process, based on discourse analytic theory and principles, and provided a clear alignment to the applicability thereof, for the purpose of this study, including the research question, selection of data and the corpus, data collection, coding, data analysis, validation and writing of the report. Finally, the role of the researcher was taken into consideration, with a brief deliberation on how it was employed in this study.

The following chapter will focus on the analysis and interpretation of the findings obtained through the discursive analysis, in terms of key discourses, relation to theory and interpretations of the researcher.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters highlighted the importance of and need to use discursive analysis in measuring gender and the media, and set out to address the main aim of this study through an exploration of the discourse practices and strategies, as well as themes and ideologies of femininity within contemporary women's magazines. The main aim of this chapter is to describe the discourse practices and strategies, themes and ideologies of femininity, based on sound theoretical arguments, and to present the resultant findings on the discursive analysis within a contemporary South African women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. In addition, during the discourse analytic process, it was hypothesised that, not only do multiple constructions of femininity exist within contemporary South African magazines, but these constructions are directly contradictory in nature. This chapter, therefore, sets out to explore how women's magazines construct femininity through discourse.

The chapter begins with a description of the text in the selected samples of the articles, in terms of the appearance, and the techniques used to normalise discourses within the text and for text analysis thereof. Then I identify and discuss the findings, in terms of the ways in which femininity is constructed in the selected magazine articles by means of the main discourses identified in the text, and in alignment with the theoretical underpinning presented. Throughout the discussion of the results, I compare and contrast the different discursive constructions of femininity within the text, with specific reference to a social constructionist viewpoint. This viewpoint assumes that individuals construct their own meaning, based on an understanding of their own reality and mindset, and construct, through various meanings, their own understanding of their social worlds.

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

A discursive analytic approach was used to ascertain how women's magazines present text to their readers. A collection of material from one magazine, namely, the contemporary magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, was intentionally selected for this study, as it is the most widely read monthly women's magazine in South Africa, with a readership of 1 070 000, indicating that approximately 3,1% of the total South African population read *Cosmopolitan* (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2009). Therefore, the text of gender-specific articles from 14 consecutive monthly issues of *Cosmopolitan* was analysed, to account for seasonal differences during the timeframe of March 2010 to May 2011.

The aesthetic appearance of the magazine's articles may be described as colourful and fun, mostly accompanied by photos and visuals which complement the theme of articles. In most cases, the articles consisted of a title and a subtitle, followed by the content of the article, which presented a way to uncover

the phenomena that were put forward, and to try and discover, and understand, the way and function of discourses in the text.

From these articles, a number of techniques were identified which function to normalise the portrayal and construction of femininity in terms of a discursive approach.

First, it became evident from the analysis that language was used by means of talking to women as their friends. In the articles examined, language was consistently used to build rapport with women by addressing them as friends and directly as women, for example, the continuous use of words such as 'you', 'we' and 'our'. This is in line with the theoretical construct proposed, where it was argued that magazines 'talk' to their readers in a counselling manner, speaking to readers by addressing them in 'their own language', which functions to naturalise discourses.

In addition, the tone of the text in the magazines mimics women's interactional context of mutual trust and information exchange. This finding is in line with the argument posed that, by speaking to their readers as 'friends', magazines build a bond with readers, which gives discourses trust status and ensures that they function to naturalise constructions of femininity. This finding supports the discursive psychology approach, which puts forward that the researcher should aim to understand how discourse constructs constitutes phenomena and how it naturalises constructions of femininity. The researcher should especially understand power relations embedded in history and culture (see Chapter 4).

It was also found that the magazine draws on professional and expert advice to support arguments and statements. The magazine made use of accredited sources in most of the selected articles. Experts and professionals such as psychologists, doctors, life coaches and therapists validate and support its content and provide credibility to what is being discussed. The use of expert and professional opinions in articles validates the theoretical stance of discursive psychology against traditional psychology. Discursive psychology is suspicious of traditional psychology's assumptions of the mind and behaviour, and of misleading people through the use of language, about mental phenomena, invariably locating it inside the heads of individuals, rather than as meanings constructed through culture and history. It, therefore, supports the theoretical argument put forward that women need to obtain external advice and expertise, but, consequently, also supports the notion that women could be controlled and disempowered, if they were led to believe that 'experts' had better knowledge of their own bodies, minds and behaviour, ultimately resulting in a power-knowledge imbalance. Subsequently, it is argued that, by drawing on a system of experts who validate the content of articles, the magazine was attempting to persuade its readers of the truthfulness and accurateness of their statements, opinions and arguments.

In addition, and building on the previous technique, a strong relationship between *knowledge and empowerment* became evident in the discourses examined in the articles. Because the use of a word such as 'truth' aims to dispel myths and reveals the truth about women (and men), this way of providing 'expert' information produces ideological effects, as it is both empowering, for example, the attainment of knowledge is seen as taking control of situations, and disempowering, for example, women need expert advice and their ignorance is revealed. This ownership of knowledge about women produces a power relationship or, as referred to by Fairclough (1992, p.165), an 'asymmetry of knowledge'. This power/knowledge perspective views power as inseparable from knowledge; sustaining unequal relationships by reinforcing discourses of truth that legitimate and reinforce such discourse as natural; and is embedded in the practice of language. Through this system of knowledge, embedded in unequal power relations, women were not seen as the experts on their own feminine and sexual identity, but rather in need to obtain this knowledge from experts or professionals.

Another technique used within the text of the articles examined was the theoretical construct that normalises discourses on femininity through the construction of the real. In the previous chapter, it was argued that, from a constructed and constructive discursive perspective, people constructed their own versions of the world and what they perceived as 'real'. In the analysis, it became clear that this technique was used to 'normalise' the experiences of the individuals by framing them to present the text as similar to the everyday or 'real'.

In the selected articles analysed, scenarios of other women's experiences were presented, which involved the sharing of intimate experiences, misfortune and fears. Thereby, the articles under discussion aimed to naturalise discourses of femininity by their explicit use of the 'real', and shared scenarios and experiences, involving intimate experiences, misfortunes and fears, where women in the articles were not fantasy or made up. Rather, the discussions revolved around 'real women' with ordinary names. The scenarios of women's experiences, shared celebrations and concerns, and intimate life stories were constructed as common, everyday experiences of women and the practice of femininity.

In this section, I explained the various techniques, which became evident in the analysis of the text of the selected articles and were used as functions to normalise discourses of femininity. Four main techniques identified in the literature became prevalent in the analysis, namely: language was used by means of talking to women as their friends; professional and expert advice was used to support arguments and statements; a strong relationship existed between knowledge and empowerment; and the construction of the real was used to 'normalise' individual experiences as similar to everyday life. The identification of the techniques presented was important in the quest to understand the various ways in which a magazine can naturalise discourses of gender and femininity. In the next section, I will discuss the main findings

regarding the text, in terms of the predominant discourses identified, based on the literature. These findings pertain to the construction of femininity within a contemporary women's magazine.

MAIN FINDINGS ON DISCOURSES BASED ON THE DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

Discourses of femininity in the contemporary magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, in the selected articles from the sample, were also analysed, based on the process of analysis described in Chapter 4. The following three key analytic concepts were outlined, and used in the analysis for describing and understanding the construction of gender in the magazine: identifying interpretative repertoires of femininity; an identification of the contraction of these within the text, also known as ideological dilemmas; and the subject position of women in the articles of the magazine under review. Discourses of femininity were identified by defining femininity as a behaviour or performance. Therefore, any form of text that addressed how women should, or were supposed to think and behave, as well as how women were portrayed to think and behave were analysed.

According to Schippers (2007), in order to understand femininity within a localised setting and in broader structures, it is necessary to ask what characteristics or practices are understood as womanly in the setting under review and also, of those practices and characteristics, which situate femininity as complementary and inferior to masculinity. This guideline was applied in the study and from the text, and based on the main premise of the three key analytic concepts followed in the process of analysis, three main discourses of femininity were identified and categorised, based on the discursive analysis conducted, namely: (i) femininity as attainment and maintenance of a successful heterosexual relationship; (ii) femininity as naturally nurturing and emotional; and (iii) femininity as management and individual responsibility, which I discussed and contextualise below.

Femininity as attainment and maintenance of a stable and secure heterosexual relationship

It was argued that femininity is constructed as mainly white and heterosexual, constantly on the lookout for 'The One' or 'Mr Right', in order to establish a stable and non-threatening romantic relationship with men. The key thrust of femininity has, therefore, been highlighted as the search for a long-term committed relationship with a man, which will ultimately result in a fulfilled life. The results of the analysis subsequently indicated that the ultimate goal for (white) women is to find a stable, heterosexual relationship as the only route to a full and happy life. This is evidenced in the following quotes from the text in the articles:

Mpho, 25, a freelance travel writer in Cape Town, remembers her enthusiastic and relentless pursuit of her current long-term boyfriend, Endinako. "This really hot guy started working at the restaurant where I was waitressing in-between writing

assignments. We kept giving each other the eye.” Eventually she decided to hunt him down away from work. (‘Animal Magnetism’, August 2010)

It seems it’s possible to make the man of your dreams fall in love with you in just one-and-a-half-hours. (‘The 90-minute make-love-happen plan’, March 2011)

It is further evident that great emphasis is placed on heterosexual relationships as the cornerstone of successful femininity. Throughout the text, femininity centres around finding the right partner, which is male, and engaging in a heterosexual relationship, in order to find fulfilment as a woman, which can be seen in the examples extracted from the articles and presented below:

But unless you learn to live with his inner frog rather than your perceived ideal of a Prince Charming, you may find yourself not only alone but also empty and unhappy. (‘Embrace his inner frog’, May 2010)

You’ve made it through the wilderness of the dating game and here’s your prize: a happy, stable relationship with a possible future. (‘Animal Magnetism’, August 2010)

In addition, which also became apparent from the analysis of the text, is that femininity is not only constructed as a persistent search of a romantic relationship with ‘the perfect’ man, but that being unsuccessful in the achievement of a heterosexual relationship, leads to an ‘empty and unhappy’ life. In one way, the text is empowering, as femininity is constructed as powerful and in control of obtaining and meeting their relationship needs. Yet, in another way, it is traditional in the sense that a heterosexual relationship is constructed as a ‘relentless pursuit’, even to the extremes of desperation whereby women need to hunt a man down. This finding is in accordance with the viewpoint of Currie (1997) that the attribution of these stereotypical notions of femininity naturalises patriarchal meanings of womanhood, through which femininity is expressed as the everyday doing of gender, for example, the pursuit of a stable relationship with a man as being the main focus of full and satisfying feminine life.

Furthermore, it became clear that magazines do not seem to have changed over time, as for the most part, this women’s magazine is continuously ‘obsessed’ with the same message: that a woman’s existence and goal should revolve around landing the right guy. This supports the theoretical notion that women, specifically if related to femininity, are situated as needing men to live a fulfilled life, which ultimately reproduces and maintains hegemonic notions of gender and, specifically in this case, femininity.

From the text it can be seen that the constructions of femininity shifted on a continuum, between a progressive, empowered discourse to a more traditional discourse of emotionality, male dependence and emotional self-regulation. From this, it can be deduced that femininity was not statically constructed, but rather constructed as fluid, because the articles put forward that women need to negotiate a balance between these constructions of a feminine identity. This is evident from the myriad of contradictory repertoires seen in the text of these articles, and it became clear that these constructions and instructions set out to teach women the exact opposite. For example, from the following excerpts, it became clear that femininity is constructed as being confident and accepting oneself as is.

But watch out: moulding yourself into everything the nightmare ex wasn't can lead to a whole new set of problems, warns Kurimbokus. "There is no point overcompensating for what went before. You have to be yourself." ('Know your place', March 2010)

Love yourself enough to know you deserve the very best. ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

What is further evident from the analysis of the text is a discourse of self-love and self-accepting, not changing oneself to attract a partner or maintain a relationship. This type of empowerment discourse situates femininity as strong and assertive. In addition, there exists a discourse of taking control and setting boundaries when it comes to relationships, which is supported by the following quotations:

Pay attention to your own needs in the relationship and be clear to your expectations of your partner, and take action if they aren't being met. ('Revolutionary relationships', May 2011)

Know what you want and don't settle for anything that doesn't make you happy ... unfortunately, more often than not, women remain in such relationships silently hoping things will change – which they hardly ever do. ('Revolutionary relationships', May 2011)

Generally speaking, women are more vocal on what they want. ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

From a positive point of view, a strong feminist empowerment discourse came to the fore in some text, especially in terms of self-respect, the rejection of emotionally abusive relationships and the recognition of women as deserving of a successful relationship in which their personal needs are met. The following examples substantiate this viewpoint.

Why stay with a man who treats you with disrespect? Value yourself enough to realize[sic] you deserve better. And if this is the second time he's done it, end it immediately. ('Techno-cheating', June 2010).

If your boyfriend's behaviour is violating, disrespectful and/or abusive, reconsider your relationship. ('Embrace his inner frog', May 2010)

If you are involved with someone who stonewalls you emotionally, turns down any form of shared social engagement or dismisses your feelings or opinions, you should question why you're seeing him in the first place. ('The girlfriend experience', July 2010)

In the examples above, women, specifically relating to femininity, are constructed as self-accepting, assertive, intolerant of disrespectful and abusive behaviour, and deserving of their needs being met. However, this form of empowered discourse is juxtaposed with discourses of self-regulation, unrealistic expectations of relationships and insecurity, as reasons for women's failure to accept men's 'bad' behaviours. This translates both to an emotional and a physical level. For example, although articles construct femininity as deserving, in the examples below, it is obvious that this is contradicted by negatively constructed discourses of high and unrealistic expectations of relationships.

Be realistic and reasonable, as well as honest. "Women tend to have fixed ideas about what the perfect relationship looks like," says Du Randt. "This can be at odds with real life. Sometimes we need to accept that people are different, and that your partner might have different requirements from yours." ('Need some space man?', August 2010)

Sometimes we suffer from unrealistic romantic expectations and naturally it's impossible for our partners to meet the prerequisites of our "perfect man" and "perfect relationships". ('Embrace his inner frog', May 2010)

Despite the positive stance of the above text, where femininity is constructed as deserving of having personal needs met, this is despondently contradicted by a discourse of unrealistic expectations within the sphere of relationships, which is clear from the statement below:

We've been together for four years, but she has this princess mentality that drives me nuts. She insists that I need to adore her and she wants attention the whole time. She also becomes almost resentful when we socialise. ('Embrace his inner frog', May 2010)

In the above excerpt, femininity is constructed as emotionally needy, especially in opposition to men, who are constructed as being emotionally closed off, with greater physical needs, compared to women. This is evidenced by the following extracts:

Stereotypically, women seek emotional comfort and men seek physical comfort when they experience an unmet need ... these roles are changing, however, and some women have a need for thrill of passion and sex outside their partnership. While revenge can occasionally be the stimulus, many women turn to another man because they feel lonely and neglected at home. They seek affirmation that they're still desirable and attractive. ('Torn in two', December 2010)

Investing your happiness, success, wellbeing and sense of importance in a single person can make him feel smothered, while at the same time making you come across as needy – never an attractive quality. ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

Although it is acknowledged that it is stereotypical that women seek more emotional comfort, when compared to men, this actually naturalises and generalises this notion. Although it is pointed out that women are becoming more progressive in terms of sexuality, it is ascribed as being the result of not receiving the attention that women (so desperately) need. Once again, it also plays on women's insecurities – women need 'outside' affirmation.

In addition, women's failure to accept men's 'manly' behaviours indicates that the fault lies within women, and women are subsequently 'blamed' for a lack of acceptance. This is illustrated in the following excerpts.

Your inability to accept his behaviour could be a reflection of something that's missing in you. If you suffer from low-self-esteem, a lack of confidence and no clear sense of self, you may attempt to overcompensate by controlling the aspects of your life that you can. ('Embrace his inner frog', May 2010).

The reason a seemingly confident attractive women will date a man who treats her with so little respect is because that's how little she respects herself. ('The girlfriend experience', July 2010)

Don't blame yourself for getting caught up in the game ... But if it has happened to you before, examine your unmet needs and insecurities that are making you vulnerable, and consider counselling. ('Beware the blitz-attack relationship!', September 2010)

There are many other minor changes you can make to your lifestyle and mindset that will help boost your self-confidence: join a sports club and get some endorphins (happy hormones) pumping around your body; spend more time with friends and family for some positive reinforcement, and consider signing up for volunteer work, where your nurturing instinct can be put to use in a more constructive environment. ('The girlfriend experience', July 2010)

Sometimes women feel threatened by this independence, which they may see as avoidance, and try to restrict their partner's freedom. ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

Women's insecurities are constructed as the primary cause of many problems in their relationships with men and others. Although magazines portray that gender roles are changing, it is women's insecurities which are influencing this. In the above examples, women are advised to improve on their emotionality and insecurity, and are presented as inadequate and in need of 'fixing', in an effort to maintain or produce heterosexual relationships with men. According to Hasinoff (2009), magazines draw on socio-biological discourses to naturalise and justify men's 'bad behaviours', which women should then accept as their feminine duty. This reinforces the underlying structures of inequality and oppression.

Magazines situate women's perceived insecurities as distorting their sense of reality. Ironically, women are then advised to take control of their own perceptions. They are counselled to strengthen their unstable feminine minds. This is directed at the individual woman's self and she is urged to control her mind (consume but control contradiction) (Markula, 2001). Markula's (2001) study on magazines and body distortion states that magazines assure women that, once they accept themselves for who they are, they will be able to ignore the images of the ideal woman which make them feel insecure. Similarly, in this case, the magazine also assures them that they can and are able to accept themselves, and that their 'Mr Right' will also accept them. Therefore, they will be able to masterfully ignore their partner's bad habits.

In addition, femininity is constructed as falling victim of bad relationships, specifically men, of which the following are good examples:

We have a tendency to remember details and when we're locked into a victim mentality we complain and feel hard done by. ('Embrace his inner frog', May, 2010)

Kim is a victim of what's been dubbed "the super-romantic-flameout". ('Beware the blitz-attack relationship!', September 2010)

It is possible that some blitzers are victims of the dating philosophy that it's all about the hunt. Men are often told to believe this, so when they capture the prey they don't know what to do next. ('Beware the blitz-attack relationship!', September 2010)

So much for the blitz attackers. What about their prey? The repercussions for a victim include feelings of abandonment and self-blame. The victim [women] can be devastated ... the victim experiences a huge invalidation of self, feelings of being fragmented. ('Beware the blitz-attack relationship!', September 2010)

The analysis of these magazine articles reveals multiple and competing discourses. This echoes Farvid and Braun (2006), who found that data within teenage women's magazines were characterised by multiple, competing, and contradictory constructions of masculine and feminine sexualities. In addition, femininity was presented as 'empowered', whereby the magazine liberated women and offered them an image of sexual agency. However, alongside a discourse of empowerment and agency, women were represented as wanting and needing men in their lives, as well as seeking a long-term relationship with men as the outcome of their ultimate desire and goal.

In addition, from the text under discussion, it can be argued that the magazine assumes a position of normative whiteness, with token attempts to include experiences or femininities of women of colour. This affirms Schippers' (2007) viewpoint that heterosexual and hegemonic constructions of gender relations may be seen as natural of a hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity, which naturalises a relationship of dominance and submission. Schippers (2007, p. 91) explains it as follows:

The idealised features of masculinity and femininity as complementary and hierarchical provide a rationale for social relations at all levels of social organisation from the self, to interaction, to institutional structures, to global relations of domination. As individuals, groups, and societies use masculinity and femininity as the rationale for what to do and how to do it, and collectively do so on a recurring basis in different institutional settings, not just gender difference, but also the implicit relationship between genders becomes a

taken-for-granted feature of interpersonal relationship, culture, and social structure. That is, gender difference is institutionalised but, more importantly, so is gender rationality.

An analysis of what was absent from the text revealed that discourses within the text do not provide a space for multiple femininities. The limitation of black femininities within the text of the magazine articles, demonstrated the continuous marginalisation of black women, which undermined efforts to emancipate them. This result is supported by Butler (2004), who indicated that the exclusion of multiple femininities served to reinforce hegemonic beliefs and knowledge of gender norms which influenced ideas around feminine and sexual identities.

Lesbian identities were also absent from the text. This absence or misrepresentation of minority groups in the media refers to what is known as 'symbolic annihilation' (Tuchman, 1978). According to this study of the text, the 'symbolic annihilation' of black and lesbian femininities constructed these feminine identities as inferior to heterosexual feminine identities. This notion was coined 'compulsory heterosexuality' by Rich (1980), which refers to the naturalisation of heterosexuality as an ideological practice, whereby women and men who are properly socialised into their appropriate genders are pushed into heterosexual couples, and believe that it is a free choice. This is a form of heterosexism (Ostermann & Kellerman, 1998).

From the discursive analysis, it also became evident that oppositional discourses of femininity were present in the text. The text in the articles shifted between progressive and traditional discourses, being both oppressive and empowering simultaneously, which presents similar results as other studies (Mooney, 2008; Tyner & Ogle, 2007). It may, therefore, be argued that *Cosmopolitan*, as a contemporary women's magazine, simultaneously empowered and disempowered women in the text published in articles during this time frame.

This result may be approached in two ways: on the one hand, this 'schizophrenic mix' in the magazine may cause confusion and anxiety in readers regarding their own feminine identity (Winship, 1983; 1987). On the other hand, through these discursive dynamics, empowering feminist discourses and hegemonic rejection, alternative meanings may be presented to readers which open up more and even, in some instances, encourage various possibilities for gender identity and agency (Aronson, 2010).

Femininity as naturally nurturing and emotional

Although the text had a progressive tone, the analysis indicated that women were continuously being portrayed as naturally nurturing, locating women's role within a heterosexual relationship, which is described by the following text:

Either option can have a big effect on how your relationship develops, and it's natural that your instincts are to make everything better by being extra nice. ('Know your place', March 2010)

It comes down to basic genetics: it's proven that men are hard-wired to be less involved emotionally than women, who generally feel an instinctive need to nurture. ('The girlfriend experience', July 2010)

These results resonate with those of Sanger (2007), who argued that women's magazines constructed women, but not men, as nurturers. She found that, in selected South African magazines, women were overwhelmingly presented as prioritising their careers and as consumers, who spent substantial time and money on fashion and homemaking products, but not to the detriment of being nurturers or better mothers. Similarly, the findings of this study confirm that, although a discourse of women empowerment exists, it is not yet constructed as positive, especially if it interferes with the nurturing role that women portray. In addition, the nurturing and intuitive nature of women is prioritised over rational or logic thinking, as evidenced in the following excerpts.

Be suspicious of individuals who dig too deep, too soon. If something doesn't feel right, it isn't. Trust your intuition. ('Techno-cheating: flirting with danger', June, 2010)

Trust your gut feeling – you probably know the answer even if you don't want to admit it. ('Need some space, man?', August, 2010)

In the analysis, a strong discourse on an intuitive feminine identity was also substantiated, which can be described as a natural way of being for women. The presence of this discourse is ironic, as femininity is constructed as a natural state of being which women 'just know' how to attain. However, in the text, the women's magazine provided advice on how to attain successful femininity.

From the point of view of a discursive analysis, it is also important to consider what is absent from the text to understand the function of normalising discourse. From the text, this strong intuitive discourse of femininity included that women should base their decisions on intuition. As women are situated in

opposition to men, what is not said in the text, or is absent from the text, is the construction of femininity as intuitive, as opposed to masculinity, which is more 'rational'. What became evident from the findings is that the women's magazine utilised genetically determinist and socio-biological discourses, which were employed to justify traditional practices of femininity. This is in support of findings by Hasinoff (2009) that magazines are typically genetically determinist and utilise socio-biological discourses to justify the practices of femininity. Such a biological-determinist and essentialist discourse echoes an anti-feminist discourse of femininity, which values women's 'natural' reproductive role in homemaking and childcare, thereby rejecting feminist measures aimed at increasing equality for women (Strutt, 1994).

Previous studies on articles and advertisements in magazines have shown that women continue to be depicted as nurturers, suggesting that the representation of women hasn't changed during the past 50 years (Rabe-Hemp & Beichner, 2011; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007) As Sanger (2007) points out, South African magazines emphasise women's roles as mothers and nurturers, often idealising them for being able to assume multiple roles as caregivers, wives, mothers and career women. In other words, magazines construct nurturing as a normative characteristic of femininity as opposed to masculinity, which reinforces societal stereotypes and constructs women who choose not to nurture as not 'normal'. Presenting hetero-femininities as natural, and presenting women as desiring a family life, while men are driven by sex, is what Hollway (1984) refers to as the 'have-hold discourse' (in Sanger, 2007). This invisibility of men in their role in romantic relationships or their emotional invisibility reinforces the fact that the main responsibility or priority of women is men's needs and that this is not the responsibility of men.

Similar to Sanger (2007), who found that women were instructed to perform femininities in hyper (hetero-) sexual ways and were in continuous need to improve their bodies, this improvement discourse was also seen on a gender level in the text of the articles. Nurturing discourses were presented as an essential and natural aspect of feminine identity. According to Sheriff and Wetherell (2009), however, presenting this kind of commonsensical idea as natural and an integral aspect of womanhood was a type of social mandate, and individuals who deviated from this prescriptive norm experienced a sense of acute marginalisation.

Contrary to previous discourse analytic studies, which identified that femininity was constructed in the media as being a good mother and wife, usually involving the balancing act of motherhood, keeping up with domestic chores and holding a career (Lee, 2004), this study validates the fact that femininity is constructed as being nurturing, and primary caretakers of romantic relationships and men, to the point where men are almost infantilised. This is authenticated in the following citations:

After a nasty break-up, men tend to go one of two ways: into self-inflicted celibacy while their wounds heal, or on a one-night stand mission. Either option can have a big effect on how your relationship develops, and it's natural that your instincts are to make everything better by being extra nice. ('Know your place', March 2010)

When dealing with his annoying behaviour, rather talk openly and honestly – without blame or judgment – about the effect it has on you. Be gentle when discussing it and ensure that you don't break him down or try to put him on a guilt trip. ('Embrace his inner frog', May 2010)

"It's not uncommon for men to want less out of a relationship than women," says Ria Smit, associate professor in Sociology at the University of Johannesburg. "It comes down to basic genetics: it's been proven that men are hard-wired to be less involved emotionally than women, who generally feel an instinctive need to nurture." ('The girlfriend experience', July 2010)

In these excerpts, femininity is constructed as the need to take care of, and nurture, mostly men and their needs, as well as a heterosexual relationship with men, thereby embracing the need to nurture. By omitting the role of men in a romantic relationship, femininity is constructed as primarily responsible for a heterosexual relationship. Hasinoff (2009) explains that by these omissions, femininity is automatically constructed as relationship orientated and nurturing, fundamentally instructing women that they are only useful if they successfully embody these types of traditional feminine roles. The results of this study confirm Hasinoff's (2009) findings that women's magazines construct a homogenous masculinity, which is essentially constructed as inferior to femininity. From the analysis of the text, it became clear that the text draws on a sociobiological explanation of a nurturing femininity.

Prinsloo (2003) states that emphasised femininity is marked primarily by women's subordination to men. Patriarchal societies regulate the feminine sphere as supportive of the masculine sphere, which is constant across various societies. According to Sherrif and Wetherell (2009), discursive constructions of gender differences normally rely on and reproduce traditional stereotypes of gender.

Based on these viewpoints of Prinsloo (2003), and Sherrif and Wetherell (2009), as well as the analysis of Hasinoff (2009) it is, therefore, argued that an emphasis on the nurturing role of women in women's magazines, which produces an 'emphasised femininity' and focuses on gender differences, constructs femininity as subordinate to masculinity.

Femininity as managerial and individual responsibility

Another characteristic of heterosexual success, as observed in this magazine and derived from the literature, is that it hinges on women's ability to take individual responsibility of their male partners and take full responsibility for maintaining a successful outcome of a heterosexual relationship. This result is corroborated by the following quotations:

But there are real advantages of being the follow-on girlfriend, says Kurimbokus. "Before, he had zero knowledge of who to please a partner, whereas now he should be far more aware of how a relationship works – and eager to learn more." ('Know your place', March 2010)

Kurimbokus' advice is to work on showing him that life goes on (or whatever other reassuring clichés you can dredge up), and you'll end up with an emotionally mature guy who won't flake out at the first sign of trouble. ('Know your place', March 2010)

In addition to this individual responsibility of maintaining a heterosexual relationship, it is evident from the text that women are responsible for defining the rules within a heterosexual relationship. This is authenticated by the following remarks:

If your man is vague, it's up to you to define the rules. Make sure your behaviour is not simply a reaction to his. "Own your needs," advises Naude-Lester, "and have enough respect for yourself to make in independent decision regarding your life and future." ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

It's important to set boundaries. He needs to know where the line is between fun and overindulgence. ('Revolutionary relationships', May 2011)

This responsibility may be seen as quite empowering, in the sense that women define the boundaries and rules within their relationships. In the text above, femininity was constructed as naturally predisposed to imposing order and control in relationships, whereby women needed to solve and tolerate men's natural and 'primal' tendency to 'behave badly'. This is elucidated by Hasinoff (2009, p. 277), who explains it as follows:

Sociobiology provides scientific authority for the individualist self-help rhetoric that women need to take responsibility for themselves, since neither feminism nor social programs will be able to address gender inequalities. Instead, readers must control their

emotional responses and learn how to accept bad masculine behaviors because they are natural and genetically fixed.

From the results in the analysis of the text, it also became clear that masculinity was associated with a lack of interpersonal skills. Therefore, men were released from responsibility for being emotionally immature, absent or insensitive. Instead, the text emphasised that femininity was constructed as being responsible for interpersonal self-control. Women needed to attain internal focus of control and interpersonal skills, and had to continuously maintain and improve these qualities, in order to facilitate the success of their romantic relationship with their male partner. The following quotation illustrates this finding.

While introspection and self-awareness are part of growth, it's equally important to realise that you are not to blame. ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

This supports Hasinoff's (2009) standpoint that magazines employ a common sense reasoning by employing sociobiology discourses, whereby women are predetermined to tolerate men's biologically intrinsic naturalised 'male flaws' and take responsibility to teach them. This also advocates the message that it is women's work to negotiate and resolve relationship problems, which is also supported in the following statements.

It may be important to be on your own and work on yourself. Once you're happier within, the person who'll complement you should be drawn into your life. ('Torn in two', December 2010)

Negotiating permanent solutions to these issues is important. ('Revolutionary relationship', May 2011)

This managerial discourse of femininity presents the notion that women can achieve successful relationships by using the authoritative or commanding techniques traditionally associated with management in the workplace, such as rules, boundaries and punishment (Jackson, 2005; Rogers, 2005).

In line with Wilbraham and Delvin's (1996) argument that managerial discourses of sexuality and sexual experiences normalise gendered sexual differences, and women are expected to be aware of men's hyper-sexualisation and need to acquire the skills to manage these masculine drives, this study similarly indicates that managerial discourses of gender identities normalise hyper-masculinity, whereby women

are constructed as the 'other', and expected to compensate for men's lack of emotion and responsibility in relationships.

Another predominant construction of femininity pertains to a teaching role. Women's important function as teacher or coach to men is emphasised within the text, whereby women are responsible to show men the ropes of relationships or practices of relationships. One prominent example to substantiate this argument is the following.

As a "first love" you have the responsibility (whether you want it or not) of showing him the long-term relationship ropes – you'll teach him what it means to be part of a committed couple. ('Know your place', March 2010)

This is similar to the results of a study by Duran and Prusank (1997) that a predominant theme emerging from women's magazines is the notion that sexual techniques may be taught to improve or enhance sexual relationships. This translates to the fact that in women's magazine, the focus is on what women should understand about men, as well as what women should understand about themselves, in relation to how they think about men as a category. They also found that men were portrayed as incompetent and deficient, whether with women or by themselves. This portrayal was often done in a sympathetic way, which meant that women needed to nurture men, whose deficiencies could be resolved if women attended to them appropriately.

The goal of heterosexual success depicted within these magazines further hinges on women's ability to take individual responsibility for their male counterparts or partners. This was evidenced in this study in that it was put forward that the construction of femininity pertained to the responsibility to decode men's behaviour, in order to understand them. This was insinuated in the following citations.

When a man says he needs some space, it could mean he wants more time to watch rugby ... or he might want out. Here's how to tell what he means and what to do about it. ('Need some space, man?', August 2010)

It can sometimes feel as though today's men belong to an entirely separate species. Often we're stuck trying to get our heads around different personality types and picking the one that's right for us. ('Animal Magnetism', August 2010)

In summary, and based on the examples and arguments provided, I maintain that it is clear that the ideal femininity is constructed as accepting the naturalised flaws of masculinity. Magazines support traditional

gender roles as fixed and permanent, which ultimately constructs and justifies genetically encoded gender binary. This categorises gender as a fixed social position, where these gender binaries maintain gender inequality and will probably continue doing so in future.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the analysis and findings of the study through a discursive analytic process and was based on sound theoretical and practical observations. First, the analysis of the text of the selected articles from *Cosmopolitan* was performed, based on a thorough application of the key theoretical principles of discourse analysis. Second, the main findings on discourse of femininity, based on a discursive analysis, were presented and anchored in the main premises of the three key analytic concepts derived from the suggested process of analysis in the theoretical chapters.

These were identified, categorised and developed from the discursive analysis conducted in this study and include: (i) femininity as attainment and maintenance of a successful heterosexual relationship; (ii) femininity as naturally nurturing and emotional; and (iii) femininity as management and individual responsibility. The chapter concluded with a summary of the main findings, in a quest to advance knowledge of existing research, and to provide further impetus to a core understanding of discourse analysis and its applicability to gender studies, specifically in a contemporary female magazine. In order to present the clear implications of this study, the next chapter provides a more critical discussion of the main findings, strengths and limitations, and the contribution of the study to the field of psychology, concluding with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of the present study was to explore the discourse practices and strategies, as well as themes and ideologies of femininity from a discourse analytical approach. More specifically, the study was interested in understanding the construction of femininity within women's magazines through discourse. The research problem evolved from various theorists arguing that popular media were central to the formation and continuation of various discourses, and played a crucial role in creating, shaping and maintaining current gender ideologies. Based on various arguments, it was deduced that women's magazines provided different and conflicting messages about gender and sex roles, and how women constituted, constructed, orientated and situated their perceptions of 'real', based on the messages presented in the text. The research problem was addressed through a discursive analytic approach, based on sound theoretical and practical insights. From the findings, the most important aspect which arose is that femininity in women's magazines is mainly constructed within a white heterosexual relationship, reflecting the absence of black and lesbian feminine identities.

This chapter concludes the study with a critical discussion of the key findings, strengths and limitations, and a methodological discussion of the contribution of the study to the field of psychology. Finally, it presents recommendations for future research to extend the value of this study and its implications to different settings.

CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

From the findings, three predominant discourses of femininity were identified, which need to be considered again to enhance their interpretation and application.

First, femininity is constructed as normatively white with the main aim of pursuing a stable heterosexual relationship. Within this construction of femininity, there are various contradictory constructions of femininity pertaining to empowerment, such as self-acceptance and intolerance of abusive behaviour by men, in contrast to more traditionally narrow discourses on the emotional neediness and insecurities of women.

An important aspect which needs to be considered is that the women's magazine posits white middle-class femininity as natural and inevitable which, according to Hasinoff (2009), is an indication of the ultimate naturalness of the Western construction of femininity. Central to this construction of a normatively white heterosexuality is conforming to the ideal of a white hetero-femininity. Furthermore, constructions of a white heterosexual beauty ideal have been critiqued in previous studies. Although not presented in this

study, Sanger (2009) argues that these constructions of a white hetero-femininity inform the regulation and management of the female body, whereby black women need to conform to such ideals in order to be considered socially desirable. She further argues that such racialised and heterosexualised constructions of femininity are problematic, as they contradict women's sexual and bodily freedom within the current 'democratic' context in South Africa. However, although such a beauty ideal of femininity was not presented in the study, it remains important to understand the constructions of femininity within a South African context, as multiple femininities do exist. The underrepresentation of such femininities deem them as non-normative and rebellious (Crymble, 2012).

The exclusion of black and lesbian femininities in this women's magazine should be highlighted. It has long been argued by feminist academics that, by ignoring or underrepresenting certain groups in the media, for example, groups based on race, gender or sexual orientation, through what is known as 'symbolic annihilation', social inequality is produced and reproduced (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 1978). Such annihilation has been argued to represent these groups as irrelevant or inferior, which has negative implications for these individuals in their negotiation of the gendered self. The symbolic annihilation of other femininities, such as black and lesbian feminine identities, represents a powerful aspect of gender stratification, yet also serves as an arena where definitions of femininities may be resisted or contested by individuals or collectivities (Milkie, 2002).

Second, femininity is constructed as naturally nurturing. The findings suggest that femininity is predominantly constructed as genetically and biologically predisposed to the need to nurture, which includes the nurturing of men. Such hyper-feminine constructions of women are argued to perpetuate traditional stereotyping of women and the subordination of women to men. In addition, femininity is constructed as naturally intuitive, whereby women need to base their decisions on their inherent 'sixth sense'. This notion of inherent intuition draws from a patriarchal construction of femininity, as masculinity is traditionally associated with rational thinking and justified oppression towards women, based on their emotionality and irrational thinking and behaviour.

In this regard, a discourse absent from the text is that of career women. Holtzhausen (2010) argues that the considerable lack of women depicted as career women is opposed to South African employment statistics, which prove that women constitute more than half of the workforce. This poses a number of questions on the function this may serve. It may be argued that this absence of women as career women and the construction of women as nurturers represent a generally post-feminist discourse, and such a construction may invalidate women as equals in career opportunities and capability.

Third, a strong managerial discourse of femininity became prevalent in the findings, suggesting that women are expected to take full responsibility to ensure the success of their heterosexual relationship. This includes the management, education and training of men, individual self-regulation, as well as the responsibility of coaching men into being better boyfriends, husbands and fathers. What the text fails to acknowledge is why the responsibility of maintaining relationships and managing men rests solely on women. This ultimately results in the differentiation between male and female characteristics, which naturalises traditional gender roles (Mendes, 2011). These constructions of women promote gender binaries, and are being justified as inherent and natural, ultimately reinforcing gender inequality.

What became evident from this study is that femininity is not constructed as an absolute, but rather that multiple and competing constructions of potential femininity are present. Subsequently, it is argued that women need to continuously negotiate between these constructions to produce a successful feminine identity. In one way, multiple definitions and constructions of femininity are positive for the empowerment of women, as it contributes to a more critical awareness of gender (Pinto-Coelho & Mota-Ribeiro, 2009) and a wider inclusion of feminine identities. However, for the successful empowerment of women, there still exists a need for a shift in mindset among editors and producers of women's magazines.

Although discourses exist which may be regarded as feminist or progressive, and that support feminine complexity and multiplicity, the promotion of normative white heterofemininity perpetuates the false presumption that feminine identities should be singular and have one goal (Crymble, 2012). Crymble (2012) argues that the construction of dichotomous gender identities, along with the positioning of some construction as more desirable than others, undermines women's agency and limits multiple versions of gender identities which support patriarchal ideologies. In another way, as argued by Sheriff and Wetherell (2009), competing discourses of a modern and traditional femininity produce an ideological dilemma, which requires women to manage their feminine identity. These contradictions are necessary for magazines, in order to succeed at being persuasive to a reasonable audience as 'false universals' are unpersuasive (Hardin et al., 2005).

What further became evident from the findings is the fact that traditional femininities are challenged by a plurality of 'new' feminine subjectivities. In spite of acknowledging their existence, dominant versions of femininities are and will still be naturalised in more traditional roles of femininities. On the one hand, it is argued that magazines provide a platform for identity formation and that conflicting discourses of femininity challenge women's agency and gender identity development. However, on the other hand, it is also contested that the plurality of discourses enable a critical consciousness when reading media text and may inform challenges or resistance to dominant discourses of femininity (Azzarito, 2010; Milkie, 2002). I argue that, although competing discourses of femininity exist within women's magazines, this

form of media provides a space for multiple constructions of femininity. These multiple versions of femininity are necessary within magazines, as it has been argued that women use, interpret and critique these constructions of femininity, which offer them a space to contest or reject feminine identities as they become better able to negotiate such constructions of femininities.

Another important result from the findings is that the women's magazine did indeed construct codes of femininity that relate both to feminist and post-feminist accounts. These contradictions need to be constantly negotiated by women (Sharp, 2007). Southard (2008) states that, while post-feminism is a loaded concept, it can be mostly defined as the depoliticisation of second-wave feminism, arguing that the political gender and feminist struggles are over, that second-wave feminism has achieved its goal of the empowerment of women, and that women should have a choice to either embrace or reject feminism. In one way, a post-feminist notion of femininity appropriates a more accessible and empowering version of feminism, as it compensates for all types of femininities, including race, class, sexuality and nationality, facilitated by the consumption of popular culture and media, and offering a safe space for audiences to reject oppressive meanings of gender. However, in another way, although offering a feminist objective and tone, it, in actual fact, depicts a 'false feminism' (McRobbie, 2008; Southard, 2008). Contradictions counter the universality of femininities, but provide a channel for various possible modes of femininities for women to construct and reconstruct their feminine identities (Liladhar, 2000).

Several scholars have argued the importance of recognising the complexity of plurality of sexuality in the realm of sexuality education (Jackson, 2005). It should, however, also be noted that a central feminist problem within media research remains understanding and explaining how femininity is defined in culture, which occurs both at the individual level and institutional level (McRobbie, 1997; van Zoonen, 1994). However, as magazines constitute an institutional context, this should also apply to gender in women's magazines, in general, especially because it creates opportunities for editors and producers of magazines to include alternative gender identities, specifically femininities.

In spite of the recognition of this argument, it was not evident and mainly absent from the findings of this study. The underlying meaning of this is probably an indication that editors and producers of magazines need to focus on and highlight alternative gender identities for women, as these are largely omitted from the text. Through alternative meanings of gender, individuals may be able to construct their own meaning and understanding of their social worlds, enabling them to negotiate gender identities. That said, it is important to realise that women's magazines cannot solely take responsibility for social change and fulfil this educational need, but rather, as Gibbs (2010) argues, that for women's empowerment to be successful, interventions are needed at all levels. Therefore, it is argued that women's magazines, in

general, need to be more socially responsible and that media representations should provide a channel for the successful empowerment of women.

Another critical factor evidenced from this study is the realisation that magazine text takes a central role in defining femininity through entering everyday practices and discourses, and that it becomes powerful by entering everyday negotiations of femininity, thereby creating and sustaining gender differences. Even though empowered and egalitarian discourses of femininity are evident within the analysis of the text in the women's magazine articles, it is argued that narrow and traditional discourses of femininity remain dominant, whereby women and other minority groups, such as black and lesbian women, are confronted with cultural prescriptions of white, normative heterosexual femininities. This is in line with the viewpoints that narrow discourses of femininity have powerful effects, as women need to close the gap between an idealised image of femininity and the reality of the own gendered identity (Milkie, 2002).

This does not mean to say that the way femininity is portrayed in magazines is passively embodied by women, but rather to suggest that, although women's magazines contain contradictory discourses, it is necessary to ask how women make sense of all these competing discourses. It is, therefore, argued that the study confirmed that the text in the articles of the *Cosmopolitan*, and women's magazines, in general, in all probability simultaneously empowers and dis-empowers women. This emphasises the necessity to ask how women make sense of all these competing discourses, which Winship (1983; 1987) refers to as a 'schizophrenic mix'. This 'schizophrenic mix' leads to utter bewilderment of readers. However, as Aronson (2010) argues, this does not mean that magazines are subversive incubators of liberation and dissent, but rather that magazines carry significant discourses constructive of the feminine, including women's anxiety, the beauty myth and traditional stereotypical gender norms. In actual fact, although within hegemonic limits, it is probable that this discursive eclecticism of traditional and progressive femininities may actually challenge hegemony by including these various mixes of the constructed feminine.

STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As the majority of studies focus on content analysis of the representation of femininity within the media, as identified in Chapter 3, the main strength of this study is that it distinguishes itself from current research in the field through the use of a discursive analytic method to analyse gender and the media, specifically text of selected articles in a contemporary women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. Furthermore, the study was based on a sound analytic process, and reliable, consistent theoretical and practical observations.

The study also has limitations that need to be considered in its interpretation, understanding and application. The main limitation is probably that the realised sample consisted of one women's magazine only. Another limitation is that the study does not focus on presentations of black femininities within magazines targeted at both white and black readers. It is suggested that future studies focus on the different constructions of femininity in these magazines. Further studies may also focus on addressing the perceived gap between real femininities versus femininities constructed in magazines and other media forms.

It is recognised that, a limited corpus was studied, which limits far-reaching generalisation. Future studies may benefit from exploring different magazine genres, such as family magazines, men's magazines and others. Hardin et al. (2005) state that, although text may produce a dominant discourse or ideology, it does not imply that it is completely accepted by audiences, but rather that it is negotiated. In other words, although femininity is constructed in magazines, it does not necessarily imply that women adopt these constructions of femininity. It may be that women resist these types of constructions of femininity and gender prescriptions, although they read the articles.

In the discussion and review of the numerous existing studies conducted, it was indicated that most of these authors argued that the main focus of women's magazines revolved around sexual relations that women engage in with men or that women are constructed as sex objects. This conception was not evident in the current study. The main reason might be due to the sample, which concentrated mainly on romantic relationship-focused articles. Therefore, the analysis was only performed on the text of these selected articles, which focused on romantic relationships with men. It may, therefore, be seen as a natural perception that an emphasised focus exists on relationships and the role that women play within relationships. Based on the literature review in Chapter 3, another consideration might be that most of these studies analysed photos of models in magazines. It may also be attributed to the fact that the selected articles focused on psychological aspects of women, which may yield different constructions of femininity. It is suggested that future discourse analysis combine both written and visual text to comprehensively understand the construction of femininity within magazines.

Another limitation is in the generalisability of the results to different contexts or genres of magazines, in that the study only included one top-selling women's magazine which limits the findings to the selected women's magazine. Despite this limitation, the validity of the research was ensured through comprehensive examination of the text of all feature articles in the selected women's magazine, but future studies could be done on a variety of contemporary women's magazine to validate and improve our understanding of the construction of femininity across these spheres even more.

Lastly, the study made use of magazines that are clearly marketed to heterosexual readers. It would be valuable for future studies to include magazines targeted at lesbians, as well. The focus of this study was mainly on gender dynamics in the text of the selected articles of the women's magazine, instead of a broader feminist analysis of the research and socio-economical dynamics. A comprehensive feminist analysis including both, as well as other types of articles and magazine genres, would provide a valuable understanding of the construction of femininity for future analysis.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY

In spite of some limitations, it is argued that this study contributes to a small, but coherent, body of research focused on the link between media, specifically discourses in women's magazines, and the construction of femininity. The main contribution of this study is that it expands on the existing literature and contributes to the body of knowledge within psychology, especially within the research area of discourses of femininity in women's magazines. As the majority of literature on construction of gender assume a critical feminist approach, this study is unique in that it takes on a social constructionist position, in other words, that magazines construct discourses which may be classified as feminist, as well as those which may be categorised as post-feminist. This may be conducive to women rejecting or resisting traditional and disempowering discourses of femininity. This knowledge may be used to gain an understanding of whether magazines as a medium may or may not contribute to sustaining traditional gender roles and expectations of women.

The valuable contribution made by this study is due to the method employed to address the aim of the research. In the present study, I have integrated the discourse analytic works of various scholars and, as depicted in Figure 1 in Chapter 1, I also integrated the loose ten-point process of analysis suggested by Potter and Wetherell (in Breakwell et al., 2000). This contribution simplifies the data analysis process, as it provides an understandable seven-stage process. In addition, this study expands on existing studies regarding the use of discourse analysis within the field of psychology, thereby augmenting the field of study. It demonstrates the effectiveness of employing discourse analysis as the preferred method for studying human subjectivity, such as discourse, as it provides a rigorous analysis of complex subjective issues, such as the construction of femininity in women's magazine.

Although previous studies have identified various role portrayals of women, this study has highlighted different versions of discourses and discussions of femininity, which have not previously been identified and discussed in detail by scholars. These include both post-feminist and feminist constructions which embrace femininity as the attainment of a successful heterosexual relationship, femininity as nurturing and femininity as managerial. This study identifies and describes these different versions of constructions of femininity, describing both empowering and traditional discourses within a contemporary women's

magazine in a South African context, a field which has not received much attention within academic literature. In addition, the majority of studies within a South African context focused on study magazines, which are outdated, whereas this research provides a current update of the constructions of femininity within a contemporary women's magazine.

In the present study, the main aim was to explore constructions of femininity within a contemporary women's magazine. This study was mainly concerned with exploring various constructions of femininity through discourses present in the selected contemporary women's magazine, *Cosmopolitan*. However, during the analysis phase, my attention was drawn to the competing constructions of femininity. As a result, I hypothesised that, not only are multiple constructions of femininity present within the text, but these constructions are in direct opposition to one another. From the findings, competing discourses of femininity are identified and discussed. An important contribution of this study is its identification of the fact that discourses of femininity were often constructed in opposition to one another, for example a dualism exists between post-feminist discourses and feminist discourses. Although various studies argue that this duality is problematic, I state that this opens up a greater variety of femininities, whereby women are able to resist and reject constructions of femininity with which they are not in agreement.

Although the findings of the present study may not be generalisable to all available magazine genres and titles, the findings offer insights into the construction of femininity in a contemporary women's magazine, specifically in a South African context, and serve as a platform for further discussion and enquiry.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to provide insights and understanding into the cultural production and construction of social norms related to the construction of gender, specifically femininity, within women's magazines. A discourse analysis revealed that a traditional discourse of femininity exists in magazines articles. This traditional discourse is contradicted by a discourse of empowerment. In addition, the number of overlapping and contradictory discourses of femininity may have implications for gender identity negotiation.

In the study, I highlighted the fact that women's magazines assume an apparent liberal and modern discourse, which informs women of their rights and position in their romantic relationships. This is, however, counteracted by rhetorical opposing discourses which instruct women to continuously improve themselves and acquire the desired skills to ensure a successful heterosexual romantic relationship. Although it may be argued that women don't entirely adopt, or may even reject dominant discourses of femininity within magazines, there is evidence that women's magazines play an important role in the social construction of the self, and continuous exposure to these discourses provides scripts for the

construction of the feminine self and reinforces normative and hegemonic values (Osteman & Keller-Cohen, 1998). When considering the construction of the self, it becomes important to understand the myriad of ways in which traditional, and hegemonic, discourses are constructed for women's negotiation of a valid and own gender identity.

My analysis focuses on the construction of femininity. I identify the dominant discourses which produce and represent notions of gender norms, and the research offers a glimpse into the complex manner in which femininity is constructed within women's magazines. The aim of this study is to explore the construction of femininity in women's magazines, and to provide a great deal of knowledge and understanding of how gender, specifically femininity, is constructed, and the complexities regarding gender and magazines. Specifically, I identified the emphasis of power in heterosexual relationships and the negotiation of femininity through the women's magazine's positioning of women as seeking a stable heterosexual relationship, having an instinctively nurturing nature, and the managerial discourse of femininity. To conclude, the present study offers a contribution to existing feminist research by providing a critical discourse analysis of the variable ways in which femininity and various feminine identities are constructed within a contemporary women's magazine.

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