

**Negotiating Sexualities:
Magazine Representations of Sexualities and the
Talk of Teen and Young Adult Readers**

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Abstract

In response to contemporary moral and feminist criticisms regarding the hypothesised effect magazine discourses of sexuality have on readers, this thesis explores how six groups of adolescents and young adults respond to representations of sexualities from the teen and women's magazines *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*.

Drawing upon theories of poststructural feminism, cultural studies and audience reception this work expands upon existing magazine literature by attending to the ways teen and women's magazines are interpreted and talked about by different groups of adolescents and young adults. This analysis fills a gap in contemporary magazine research, which has generally failed to address how gender and sexuality, as they are portrayed in contemporary periodical publications, are made sense of by readers. Therefore, in focusing on reader talk this thesis is also able to address the ways in which individual and collective identities are constructed interactively in the socially specific context of focus group discussions. Attention is given to looking at the complexities surrounding the relationships that exist between magazine reading, representations of sexuality and adolescents and young adults through an examination of the discourses girls, boys, young women and young men draw upon in their talk on magazine representations of sexualities.

I argue that readers of magazines are active producers of meaning who think and talk about magazine representations of sexualities in a variety of complex, contradictory and often ambiguous ways. Research participants employ interpretive repertoires, drawn together from various new, traditional and alternative discourses about sexuality, in the process of attributing meaning to contemporary sexualities, as both cultural objects and aspects of everyday life. Thus, rather than take up and accept the sexual subject positions that magazines make available to readers, the talk of the research participants in this project illustrates how sexualities are constantly being negotiated. The articulation and performance of masculine and feminine sexualities is therefore recognized within this thesis as a highly contradictory, contextual and negotiated process.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In a recent *The Press* article, entitled ‘Sex Sells for Teen Mags,’ the teenzines¹ *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* were criticized by a range of sources for publishing ‘explicit references to sex, drug-taking and ... sexy clothes’ (Brooker 2004, p. A8). Of the concerns voiced by family advocates, academics and medical professionals, issues regarding the publication of sexually ‘explicit’ material garnered the most attention. A mother quoted in the article states she is ‘appalled at the “preachiness” of teen magazines and how they preach about being sexually liberated,’ while telling girls that they ‘have to [have sex] or else there is something wrong’ with them (ibid.). A medical professional argues that while ‘it [is] hard to pinpoint the influences which led teenagers to early sex ... magazines can have a negative effect’ (ibid.). Similarly, in an editorial piece written for the *Australian Age*, Christopher Bantick (2004) suggests that it may be in the best interest of society, and ‘your daughters,’ to

¹ The term ‘teenzine’ will be used intermittently throughout the thesis. It is a term utilised by Dawn H. Currie (1999) in her work on adolescent magazines and their readers. It is a ‘hybrid’ word, in that it combines the words teenager and magazine and is used in reference to magazines for a teenage audience – hence, teenzine.

discourage teens away from the ‘highly suspect information’ of girl’s and women’s magazines. This is because, in reading what he refers to as ‘misconceptions about sexuality’ and ‘stereotypes about male and female behaviours,’ readers are confronted with, and subsequently take-up, ‘inappropriate’² feminine identities. Such ‘moral’ criticisms have developed, in recent years, in response to what Estella Tincknell et al. (2003) and Angela McRobbie (1996) view as the circulation of ‘new’³ and ‘alternative’ discourses of sexuality in magazines for girls and young women. Accordingly, when *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* portray feminine sexualities as either lesbian or active, assertive and desirous they are chastised for being ‘too sexed up’ (Donaldson-Evans 2002). A consequence of this is that in western cultures teen and women’s magazines are frequently blamed for girls’ and young women’s increasingly promiscuous behaviour (Stokes 1999, p. 209)⁴.

Contrary to this conceptualisation of magazine content is the view that teen and women’s magazines are too ‘traditional,’⁵ emphasising the importance for girls and young women of forming committed, and preferably marital, heterosexual relationships. Reading traditional sexualities from magazines is seen to influence girls’ decision-making processes to the point that they establish subjectivities that are ‘too loved up,’ valuing romance and relationships above all else. This argument is given by Jennifer Wray and Jeanne R. Steele (2002), and Susan H. Alexander (1999) who describe teen and women’s magazines as texts that perpetuate norms of heterosexuality, by informing readers that it is in their best interest to take up passive

² Single quotation marks are used throughout this thesis to emphasise, or problematize, particular words, terms or phrases at their initial mention. To avoid repetition, subsequent referral to emphasised / problematized words, phrases or terms are not punctuated with quotation marks.

³ The term ‘new’ is used in reference to the recent appearance in magazines, and everyday life, of discourses about sexuality that are not so much new but which construct gendered sexual subjectivities in magazines in ways that differ to dominant or traditional discourses.

⁴ The controversy surrounding the publication of sex information in magazines is not new. Indeed, magazines have consistently been blamed for girls and young women’s promiscuous behaviour since the 1970’s (Stokes 1999, p. 210).

⁵ The term ‘traditional’ (as opposed to dominant) is used in reference to the appearance of discourses about sexuality that are heteronormative, and which present intimate heterosexual relationships, love and romance as one of the most important normative functions in a woman’s life.

feminine subject positions that are dependent upon the formation of intimate relationships with men and which value finding ‘The One’ as the ultimate achievement and signification of success in a girl’s / woman’s life.

The ‘cause and effect’ models of reception implemented in the above-mentioned analyses pose a significant problem for the research presented in this thesis. This is because, in focusing on the ‘effect’ magazines have on readers, these analyses proliferate the perspective that ‘the media do things to people, that audiences are passive and that media producers have a power which audiences cannot resist’ (Burton 2005, p. 98). Magazines are thus constructed in these works as texts that have the power to influence people’s thoughts in such a way that they ‘act out’ the ideas and activities that this form of media exposes them to (Taylor & Willis 1999, p. 156). Moral and feminist critiques, such as those outlined above, also do not account for the ways readers attribute meaning to magazines and the representations of contemporary sexualities that they contain, instead basing their findings solely on researcher conducted content and textual analyses of such publications. Refrain from incorporating actual readers into these analyses therefore works to position audiences as ‘cultural dupes’ (Hermes 1995, p. 5) who are unable to resist or reject ‘media messages,’ or indeed interpret them in a variety of ways.⁶

Drawing upon ‘audience’⁷ / reception studies, stemming from the academic tradition of cultural studies, this project acknowledges that the meaning of a text does not originate solely from the text itself, but from the interaction that takes place between the reader and the text (Hermes 1995, p. 10). Readers of teen and women’s magazines are thus constructed as ‘active meaning producers’ (Ang 1996, p. 8) who think and talk about magazines in a whole variety of complex and often contradictory ways. It

⁶ Not all contemporary textual analyses of magazines are based on a cause and effect model of media reception. Stokes (1999, p. 217), for example, utilises a content analysis of popular British teen magazines to oppose the perspective that magazines cause girls to behave in sexually provocative ways, stating ‘magazines for young women and girls do not contain a large amount of material on sex’ and, as such, should not be viewed as texts that lead to the ‘conspicuous display of sexual promiscuity’ (ibid.).

⁷ The term audience is problematic because there is no way to ‘isolate the role of the media in culture, because the media are firmly anchored into the web of culture, although articulated by individuals in different ways’ (Bird 2003, p. 3). Audiences, therefore, cannot be tied down or actively studied. Rather, they are created in the process of investigating readings of particular texts, which makes them contextual.

is, therefore, only through the implementation of reception studies that we are able to examine and interpret how readers actually understand and attribute meaning to girls' and women's magazines and the ways in which they portray contemporary sexualities. The research presented in this thesis explores how six groups of teenage boys, girls, young women and men respond to a selection of representations of sexualities from *Girlfriend*, *Dolly*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*. Attention is given to looking at the ways in which readers talk about popular teen and women's magazines and their representations of sexualities. It attends to the many varied and often contradictory meanings audiences articulate in response to magazines that, historically, have been marketed toward girls and young women. This allows us to see how cultural contradictions and ongoing struggles over the meanings of magazines, sexualities and gender are articulated and 'performed' by particular groups of adolescents and young adults, living in Christchurch, New Zealand in late 2004.

Magazine reading enables people to think and talk about sexuality in a variety of complex, contradictory and ambiguous ways. A number of research participants in this project, for example, regard the incorporation of sexual information in teen and women's periodicals as something that is useful. This is illustrated in the way magazines for girls and young women are described as resources that they use, or have used in the past, to help them to learn about sex. At the same time, some of the young women in the project remark that reading sex information, particularly in public, can be embarrassing. This suggests that while magazine texts that focus upon sexuality can be construed as informative, the process of reading this information requires that some of the young women in this project implement a range of strategies so as not to feel, or be seen by others as, 'perverted'⁸. This juxtaposition between the open and hidden use of magazines is indicative of the ways participants draw on a range of interpretive repertoires and discourses in the context of reading and discussing magazine representations of sexuality. What participants do with their talk, for instance voicing both opposition to, and acceptance of, the way magazines represent sexuality, shows there is flexibility in the use of particular interpretive repertoires, in particular contexts and in response to particular representations of sexuality.

⁸ Rachel (FT2).

This project is influenced by what Laura Carpenter (1998, p. 5) views as the general reluctance of researchers of sexuality to extend their analyses to popular culture. It also takes as a 'jumping-off point' the fact that recent magazine reception studies discuss sexuality only minimally, not at all or in relation to dated texts that no longer seem applicable when examined in relation to the contemporary lives of teenagers and young adults (ibid.). This thesis focuses on the meanings that are produced in response to reading representations of new, alternative and traditional discourses of sexuality from the publications *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. It attends to the changing nature of contemporary magazine constructions of sexuality and how these are understood as both cultural objects and aspects of everyday life. Furthermore, the ways participants put particular interpretive repertoires together in particular ways provides insights into the way individual and collective identities are constructed through talk. Where applicable the subject positions taken up by participants in the socially specific context of group meetings are also identified. This serves to address how contemporary gendered and sexual identities are formed in talk as adolescents and young adults engage with each other in regard to the representation of contemporary sexualities in teen and women's magazines.

This study has been developed from a preliminary research project undertaken in 2003.⁹ Though this original work centred on young women's talk regarding magazine images of women's and men's bodies, these discussions also frequently focused on the general reception of women's magazines and how readers use them. For a number of young women in the preliminary project magazines were described as an accessible resource of information on issues to do with intimate relationships and sex. Having neglected to pursue this line of investigation in 2003, this thesis elaborates on these issues by addressing the ways in which particular representations of sexualities in teen and women's magazines are used and made sense of by young adult and adolescent participants. The inclusion of teenzines and teen readers in this project is further linked to my engagement with contemporary cultural analyses, which suggest magazines may be one of 'the most important mass media sources' to which teens turn to for information on sex (Walsh-Childers, Gotthoffer & Ringer Lepre 2002, p. 155). The research presented in this thesis therefore engages with such academic

⁹ This preliminary project was undertaken as part of the requirements for the attainment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Cultural Studies at the University of Canterbury.

accounts via an analysis of adolescent and young adult talk on *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* and a selection of representations of sexualities published within them between June 2003 and June 2004.

During the preliminary reception study it was also brought to my attention that men, as well as women, frequently read magazines for girls and young women. This is further reflected in recent reader surveys of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, which show boys and young men consistently make up between eight and fifteen percent of these publications' readers each and every month (Roy Morgan Research Group 2003-2004). Despite this, however, the voices of boys and young men are rarely, if ever, included in contemporary analyses, while studies that do incorporate boys and / or young men, such as Joke Hermes' (1995) *Reading Women's Magazines*, do not focus exclusively on issues regarding gender and sexuality. Neglect of the ways in which this pertinent group of readers attribute meaning to teen and women's magazines may subsequently result in gender being constructed and perceived, in the work of contemporary cultural commentators, as a static, predetermined category (Ang & Hermes 1996, p. 110). This is because the exclusive focus on one gender (women) in the context of audience research positions gender as a 'natural' given. Therefore, to avoid this unintentional framing it is important that researchers investigate how gendered identities are constructed and performed in everyday life where the media is consumed (ibid.).

This thesis examines how six groups of adolescents and young adults respond to representations of sexuality from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. The representations selected for discussion were chosen because they are indicative of new, alternative, and traditional discourses about feminine and masculine sexualities. The use of the term traditional, in this thesis, refers to the dominant discursive construction of normative sexuality in western cultures as heterosexuality. Traditional discourses of sexuality are also gendered, in that masculine sexuality is associated with activity and agency and feminine sexuality with passivity (Jackson 2005, p. 283). The term new is also used extensively throughout this project in reference to the emergence of representations of feminine sexuality in magazines, and everyday life, that seek to position girls and young women as active, assertive and sexually desiring. Accordingly, girls and women are not constructed as the passive recipients of boys' /

men's sexual need in these texts, but as sexual subjects in their own right who are more than capable of experiencing sexual desires in their bodies and of acting on these desires (Carpenter 1998, p. 162). It has also been proposed that teen and women's magazines are now publishing more representations of gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual sexualities than ever before (McRobbie 1996).¹⁰ Subsequently, this research also addresses how adolescents and young adults respond to magazine representations of sexuality in which 'alternative' sexualities are the dominant focus.

This project is informed by the understanding that magazines, and the ways they represent sexuality, provide readers with an opportunity to think and talk about sexualities in a variety of ways. Analysis, therefore, focuses on the ways sexualities, as both cultural objects and aspects of lived experience, are understood and negotiated in the context of group discussions, and in relation to everyday life. This work addresses how adolescents and young adults make sense of representations of sexuality from teen and women's magazines asking; how are magazine representations of sexuality read? What interpretive repertoires do readers employ in response to a variety of representations of sexuality from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*? How do readers negotiate with, and talk about, different discourses of sexuality as they engage with the magazines, each other and the researcher? What subject positions are taken up in this context? In what ways are aged and gendered readings produced? This thesis also considers issues to do with the general reception of magazines and how participants attribute meaning to the practices and strategies of magazine reading. Chapter four, in particular, addresses the role magazines have in people's everyday lives, focusing on the interpretive

¹⁰ McRobbie (1996) stipulates that the representation of active feminine sexualities in magazines is a sign of progress and an indication of the 'postmodern celebration of plurality.' Therefore, because magazines today are less uniform they are seen to open up the possibilities of 'what it means to be a woman' by representing feminine sexualities as assertive and non-traditional. Stevi Jackson (1996, p. 55), on the other hand, states that she does not 'share McRobbie's optimism' regarding the representation of feminine sexualities in contemporary magazines. For her, McRobbie's interpretation of teen and women's magazines is problematic because these publications continue to equate sexual equality with women's ability to behave like men. Furthermore, while McRobbie (1996, p. 183) regards 'gay and lesbian identities ... [to] move more freely across the field of popular women's and girls' magazines ... exist[ing] as sexual possibilities where in the past they were permitted only a shadowy stigmatised existence,' Jackson (1996, pp. 58-59) maintains that 'while there is undoubtedly greater openness about lesbian and gay sexualities in the magazines ... these issues remain marginalised' (Jackson 1996, p. 59).

repertoires teens and young adults employ as they discuss teen and women's magazines, asking whether these are publications that are read on a regular basis. Do the magazines serve a particular purpose in the everyday lives of research participants? Are teen and women's magazines a source of pleasure for readers? Alternatively, is there anything about *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* that the research participants do not like? While based on the talk of only a small number of participants this investigation attempts to make sense of the way contemporary feminine and masculine sexualities are negotiated and constituted in talk, in light of the proliferation of new and alternative representations of sexuality in popular teen and women's periodical publications.

In the following chapter I provide an overview of the key theoretical debates that have been influential to the conceptualisation and implementation of this project. This includes outlining the theoretical framework of poststructural feminism, focusing on the concepts of language, power, subjectivity and discourse. This chapter also provides an in-depth look at the work of contemporary social and cultural commentators on the discursive construction of sexualities in popular culture, teen and women's magazines and everyday life.

Chapter three is a methodological chapter. Attention is given to looking at the processes of participant recruitment and involvement. Rationale is provided regarding the decision to use focus group discussions. An in-depth account of how the focus group meetings were implemented, and the talk later transcribed and analysed, is also outlined. Furthermore, because this work draws upon a poststructural feminist approach, it facilitates an exploration of how people 'construct particular interpretive positions, and hence identities' (Vares 2000, p. 104), through their talk on magazine representations of sexualities. This is achieved via the utilisation of the discourse analytic approach of repertoire analysis, which is detailed in chapter three. This chapter also provides a synopsis of the magazine representations of sexuality shown to participants during the focus group meetings.

The next three chapters are analyses of the transcript material. Chapter four examines how the girls, boys, young women and young men in this project discuss their magazine reading practices. It explores the contradictions and ambivalences inherent in people's talk on magazines. On the one hand, it examines how participants draw on

particular interpretive repertoires in an attempt to critique the magazines and, on the other, actively construct the magazines as significant and useful resources of information. This chapter also begins to address how readers interpret and talk about the representation of sexuality in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. It provides a discussion of the way young women discuss flicking through magazines to avoid references to sex that they are embarrassed by, especially when reading this information in public. The chapter also addresses the way in which the boys and young men in MT¹¹ and MS¹² discuss their penchant for reading the information about sex that these magazines publish. For example, the boys and young men in this project articulate heteronormative repertoires in attempts to position themselves, and others, as heterosexuals. This chapter also explores the talk of the girls in this project who state that they like reading about sex. Thus, they, and a few of the young women in this project discuss seeking out sexually themed texts from within the magazines. Another interesting feature of this talk is the way adolescent and young adult research participants express a sense of concern for readers who are younger than themselves and who are constructed as being somehow incapable of reading magazine content critically.

Chapter five highlights how masculinities are constituted by one group of boys and one group of young men through an examination of the interpretive repertoires and discursive constructions of masculinity and sexuality that they employ in their talk on a selection of magazine representations of sexuality and gender. It also explores the often ambiguous and contradictory ways in which contemporary masculinities are constructed and performed. This is illustrated in the way the boys and young men in this project articulate normative discursive constructions of masculinity throughout the focus group discussions. For example, both groups denigrate and ‘put down’ gay men, and any magazine that supports them. They also stipulate that the formation of marital relationships is something they want to avoid. Yet, at the same time, the boys and young men in this project also regard relationships as viable and much thought about forms of intimacy. This chapter therefore focuses on the ways in which normative as well as alternative discourses about masculinity are used by boys and

¹¹ MT = Male, tertiary student focus group.

¹² MS = Male, secondary school student focus group.

young men to construct their gendered and sexual subjectivities in socially specific ways.

Chapter six explores how girls and young women negotiate and perform feminine identities through their talk on the magazines. It analyses the variety of interpretive repertoires articulated in response to magazine representations of intimate relationships, romance, heterosexualities, homosexualities and sexual behaviours. It further demonstrates that there are significant differences in the interpretive repertoires articulated by adolescents and young adults, particularly when reading similar representations of intimate relationships and marriage. For example, the majority of girls in FS1¹³ and FS2¹⁴ speak in ways indicative of romantic repertoires, suggesting not only that they want a boyfriend but also that they ‘dream’ about the day when they will marry. The young women, on the other hand, tend to reject this understanding of feminine sexualities through the articulation of repertoires that are based on notions of reality. This serves to position them as women who do not need, or necessarily want, to get married. While the responses of these participants suggest there may be differences in the way girls and young women attribute meaning to magazine representations of sexuality, there are also times when the girls and young women in this project respond similarly, particularly when reading representations of lesbianism from teen or women’s magazines. Indeed, both the girls and young women in this project, for the most part, reject the proliferation of lesbian subjectivities in magazines, thus constructing themselves and others, as heterosexual. However, in so saying, Christina (FS1) also opposes the heteronormative construction of feminine subjectivity that is proliferated in the magazines. This subsequently suggests that while the girls and young women in this project draw upon discourses about sexuality that are traditional, they also directly challenge the representation of traditional sexualities in teen and women’s publications.

Overall, this thesis examines how six groups of adolescent boys, girls, young women and men, living in Christchurch Aotearoa / New Zealand in late 2004, interpret magazine representations of sexuality in diverse and often contradictory ways. In so doing, this thesis explores the ways in which a variety of interpretations and meanings

¹³ FS1= Female, secondary school student focus group one.

¹⁴ FS2 = Female, secondary school student focus group two.

of magazines, sex, sexuality and gender are articulated by research participants as they read and make sense of representations of sexuality from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*.

Chapter Two

Setting the Scene: Constructing Gender, Constructing Sexualities

This chapter provides an overview of the key theoretical debates that have been influential to the conceptualisation and implementation of this project. It outlines the theoretical frameworks of poststructural feminism and audience / reception studies. This chapter also highlights the ways in which contemporary social and cultural commentators theorize the discursive construction of sexualities in popular culture, teen and women's magazines and everyday life.

Language, Subjectivity, Discourse and Power

This research is located within a poststructural feminist approach which attends to issues regarding 'social power,' how it is exercised and how contemporary social relations, especially those concerning gender and sexuality, can be transformed (Weedon 1997, p. 20). Within a poststructural feminist approach meanings and

knowledges of gender and sexuality are intrinsically linked by the relationships that exist between language, subjectivity, discourse and power (Gavey 1989; Gonick 1997; Kondo 1990 & 1995; Sunderland 2004; Weedon 1997).

Language, from this perspective, is the 'place' where 'actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested' (Weedon 1997, p. 21). It is also through language that our subjectivities are constructed (Baxter 2003, p. 10). This implies not only that subjectivity is not an innate or biologically determined aspect of self, but that it is a social construction enacted and formed via our use of language. Thus, rather than allow for the unique expression of individual subjectivity language seeks to construct the individual in a variety of socially specific ways. As Chris Weedon (1997, p. 21) points out:

Language, far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us. [This is because] neither social reality nor the 'natural' world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses.

Nothing in this world has meaning until it exists in language. It is therefore through our acquisition of language that we learn to give voice to our experiences, thoughts and feelings. Yet, as poststructuralists maintain, our meanings, thoughts and feelings are always formed in accordance with discourses of social reality that pre-exist our 'entry into language' (Weedon 1997, p. 32).

Discourses, from within this framework, are recognised as 'group[s] of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historical moment' (Hall 2001, p. 72). They make up how we make sense of the world and far from being simple modes of thinking about or producing meaning they 'constitute the "nature" of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern' (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 1). Discourses are also multiple, in that there are always a multitude of discourses circulating in a particular society or culture that relate to a particular discursive field (Potts 2002, p. 17). Therefore, because discourses are multiple, and serve political interests, social power is always exercised in and through discourse (Weedon 1997, p. 40).

Power, in this regard, is a force relation that exists everywhere and in everything (Foucault 1978, pp. 92-93). Power ‘inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their subjects’ (Weedon 1997, p. 113). Power is therefore exercised through discourse in the way it seeks to constitute and govern the individual (ibid.). Contestations of power are acted out via the subjectivities of individuals, because, as previously noted, subjectivity is always constructed in and through discourses that are governed by particular social and cultural groups that want to maintain, or alternatively gain, power (Gavey 1989, p. 464; Kondo 1990, p. 31; Weedon 1997, p. 121). People, however, are not passive in this process of discursive alignment (identity formation) (Kondo 1990, p. 31). Rather, the formation of identity is a negotiated process. Selves, therefore, are a ‘site’ for the play of a multitude of discourses and shifting multiple subject positions that are historically, socially and culturally specific (Kondo 1990, p. 31; Gavey 1989, p. 464). Individuals are constituted through a variety of subject positions that are made available to them through their engagement with discourse. The process of naming ourselves, and others, is therefore a product of a range of discursively constructed distinctions (Elizabeth 1997, p. 35). Identity, therefore, is formed as people align themselves, and others, with subject positions that are made available to them via discourses operating in particular social and cultural contexts (Baxter 2003, p. 25). However, in so saying, there are always some discourses that are more powerful, and more dominant, than others. Thus, the more powerful a discourse the more it appears to be a ‘natural,’ ‘right’ and ‘true’ representation of everyday life (Potts 2002, p. 17). Language users are able to actively choose to articulate and align themselves with powerful and dominant discourses or alternatively reject, resist and challenge them (Gavey 1989, p. 464).

Constructing Gender, Constructing Sexualities

This research examines the complexities and ambiguities of gendered and sexual subjectivities. This is achieved through a discussion of how six groups of adolescents and young adults read and make connections between magazine representations of sexuality and their everyday lives. Gender and sexuality are recognized as ‘products’ of discourse that are articulated and expressed as people take up subject positions

which contemporary discourses make available to them (Butler 1993). Gender, in this instance, is 'a social characteristic' that only sometimes coincides with a person's biological sex (Schwartz & Rutter 2000, p. 3). It is not a fixed aspect of identity but one that is constantly constructed as people interact with one another. The terms masculinity and femininity therefore refer to being a man or woman in particular socio-historic contexts, thus they are the terms used in reference to 'doing' or 'performing' gender (Johnson 1997, p. 22).

Social forces also construct sexualities. As Michel Foucault (1978, p. 105) maintains:

[Sexualities] must not be thought of as a kind of natural given ... or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries to gradually uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp.

Sexuality, like gender, is 'given meaning,' and socially organized through language, which as Jeffrey Weeks (2003, p. 7) points out, 'seek[s] to tell us what sex is, what it ought to be – and what it could be.'

The process of naming and defining sexuality had its inception in the seventeenth century with bourgeois attempts to silence, subjugate and control sex (Foucault 1978, p. 17). However, despite the intentional nature of these repressive actions Foucault (1978, p. 18) argues that:

At the level of discourses and their domains ... practically the opposite phenomenon occurred. There was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex – specific discourses, different from one another both by their form and by their object ... But more important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through elicited articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.

Foucault maintains that from the seventeenth century on there was an increased proliferation in discourses around sexuality. Such discourses work by creating social and cultural standards regarding what is possible, acceptable and expected, sexually (Weeks 2003, p. 7). As with all discursive fields, sexuality consists of many different

and competing ways of giving meaning to the world, and like all discourses those of sex and sexuality are hierarchically organized. This refers to the fact that discourses about sex and sexuality that derive from the most powerful social groups become constructed and positioned as ‘common sense’ knowledge (Weedon 1997, p. 72). Dominant discourses thus form the basis upon which ‘normal’ sexual behaviours are measured and judged. For example, in western cultures normal sexuality is heterosexual. Normative sexuality is also differentiated in terms of gender, whereby masculine sexuality is associated with activity and agency and feminine sexuality with passivity (Jackson 2005, p. 283). Alternative sexualities are subsequently subjugated and confined because it is assumed that it is “normal” and “natural” to engage in heterosexual sex’ while it is ‘abnormal’ to be a lesbian woman or gay man (Carabine 1996, p. 61).

Traditional discourses about sexuality are dependent upon repertoires of gender difference and a sexual double standard. The terms ‘gender difference’ and ‘sexual double standard’ refer to the way women, traditionally, are positioned as ‘passive objects of male sexual desire, want and need’ (Jackson & Cram 2003, p. 114). Dominant discursive constructions of gender and sexuality subjugate feminine sexualities as ‘proof’ of masculine sexualities that are acted out and proven via (hetero) sexual performance. This also means that while it is socially acceptable for men to have sex outside relationships the same is not true for women. Traditional discourses of sexuality position the only form of ‘acceptable’ sex for women as that which is participated in as part of a loving, committed, and preferably married, heterosexual couple (Schwartz & Rutter 2000, p. 45). This is not to say that women do not like, and do not engage in recreational sex, it is just that the more anonymous the sex, the more likely it is to be accepted and approved of when it is conducted by men and not women (Ward & Taylor 1994. p. 63).

Gender-differentiated constructions of sexuality can be attributed to traditional biological modes of sex and sexuality. From within this model, sexual desire is a ‘basic biological urge, drive or instinct which demands satisfaction’ (Potts 2002, p. 33). Historically, this urge or drive has been associated with male sexual need and desire. This suggests that while it is expected and accepted that men have sex when, if, how and with whom they want (as long as the other person is not a man), the same

is not true for women (Jackson & Cram 2003, p. 114). Adherence to a biological model of sexuality also attributes sexual privilege and pleasure to masculine sexuality, while denying feminine sexualities this fundamental and basic right. Normative masculine sexualities are therefore constructed as active, and in need of release, while feminine sexualities are construed as the passive ‘receptacles¹’ of this release.

Traditional discursive constructions of sexual and gendered subjectivity persist and are based on the notion that heterosexuality is the ‘ideal’ form of sexuality. This heteronormative construct posits normal sexual behaviour as heterosexual (penile - vaginal) intercourse (Richardson 1996, p. 6). Any form of sex, or expression of sexual desire, that does not involve (penile - vaginal) intercourse is abnormal. Diane Richardson (1996, p. 3) maintains that this discursive construction of sexuality effectively leads to ‘the privileging of heterosexual relations as the assumed bedrock of social relations ... [which] reinforces the idea that heterosexuality is the original blueprint for interpersonal relations.’ The proliferation of heteronormativity also plays an important role in the continued discrimination of gay and lesbian sexualities, and the governmental disavowal, in most western countries, of legal marriages between people of the same sex.

In highlighting the pervasive nature of traditional discourses of sexuality it has not been my intention to argue that these are the only discourses upon which contemporary sexual and gendered identities are formed. Indeed, people can resist, reject and challenge these discourses by aligning themselves, or being aligned, with others. Furthermore, while some discourses are dominant, because they serve the interests of the most powerful social groups (Gavey 1989; Weedon 1997), they are also constantly under attack from marginalized discourses (Weedon 1997, p. 109). It is therefore through the circulation of these less powerful discourses that we are able to resist, reject and challenge traditional notions of appropriate sexual behaviour.

Recent changes in the way young women and men express sexual subjectivities have led some cultural researchers to focus their attention on, what have been termed, new

¹ See Virginia Braun (2004, pp. 17-34) for a discussion and critique of the cultural construction of the vagina as a ‘receptacle,’ whose primary purpose is to ‘receive the penis.’

and alternative conceptualisations of sexuality and gender. These, for the most part, are discourses of feminine sexuality that position women as active subjects of sexual desire, and not simply as the passive recipients of men's sexual desire. Tincknell et al. (2003), for example, contend that in the last ten to fifteen years new modes and models of femininity have emerged in the western world, the most notable of which is 'signified by the popular trope of *girl power*' (emphasis added). From the point of view of these authors this shift reflects the ability of girls and women to express 'sexual and social confidence, aspiration and career ambition' (Tincknell et al. 2003, p. 47).

The emergence of 'girl power', for McRobbie (1999), coincides with the circulation, in the 1990's and 2000's, of discourses of 'popular feminism.' Popular feminism refers to the mainstream interpretation of feminism that does not fall under a feminist label (Gauntlett 2002, p. 252). McRobbie (1999, p. 126) suggests that this model of femininity developed because:

To young women official feminism is something that belongs to their mother's generation. They have to develop their own language for dealing with sexual inequality, and if they do this through a raunchy language of 'shagging, snogging and having a good time,' then perhaps the role this plays is not unlike the sexually explicit manifestoes found in the early writing of figures like Germaine Greer and Sheila Rowbotham. The key difference is that this language is now found in the mainstream of commercial culture – not out there in the margins of the 'political underground.'

The 'shifting' nature of contemporary sexualities and gender highlights how complicated identity formation is. Indeed, as David Gauntlett (2002, p. 13) points out, identities are complex constructions, with gender and sexuality making up only two individuated aspects of an individual's sense of self - of who they are and of what they want to be. Whilst it may seem that the dominant construction of women as passive sexual objects has begun to shift to alternative constructions of women as powerful, assertive and active sexual subjects, the expression of gendered and sexual subjectivities is more contradictory and ambiguous than this unintentional binary framing allows (Due Theilade 2001, p. 26). Indeed, it is safe to assume that traditional discourses of gender and sexual subjectivity have not been shattered, rather it is just

that newer and alternative discourses of gender and sexuality have begun to create space for the expression of a diversity of identities (Gauntlett 2002, p. 248).

Representing Sexualities and Gender in Popular Culture

Contestations over the discursive construction of gender and sexuality in everyday life also operate in the media and popular culture. One of the most noticeable mass mediated constructions of women as assertive, powerful and successful developed from the advent of 'girl power.' Girl power, as a term and form of femininity, burst into mainstream popular culture in 1996 as the *Spice Girls* made their mark on the pop music scene (Gauntlett 2002, p. 216). This girl band successfully presented itself as beautiful and glamorous, whilst proliferating the message that girls and women should have a kick-ass attitude and an 'in your face approach' to everything that concerns being a girl. These issues were addressed in their songs, which spoke of female financial and emotional independence, inner strength and freedom from men. Female followers of the *Spice Girls* were encouraged to be themselves and to be sassy and sexy when possible, but only if and when they want (ibid.).

With the virtual disappearance of the *Spice Girls* in the new millennium girl power has not disappeared. Now, more than ever, forms of popular culture disseminate messages of girl power, or at least derivatives of it. Singer / songwriters like *Destiny's Child*, Pink and Christina Aguilera are portrayed as 'passionately assertive women,' who are successful and work hard for what they have (Gauntlett 2002, p. 253). Discourses of girl power are also widely incorporated into representations of sexuality and gender on television, where as Gauntlett (2002, p. 59) points out, female characters in programmes such as *Friends*, *ER* and *The West Wing* are now more emancipated than ever before, and are presented as equal to, if not better than, male counterparts.²

One of the most successful programmes aired in New Zealand that incorporates discourses of women as successful and powerful subjects is *Sex and the City*. Bunting

² These programmes are but a few of the thousands of TV shows, produced each year, which feature female characters. It would therefore be interesting to investigate whether contemporary television programmes are now including more roles for women where they are not placed in a secondary position to male characters, that is, they are not simply playing someone's girlfriend, wife, or mother.

(cited in Gauntlett 2002, p. 60) is quoted as attributing the huge popularity of this programme to the way in which the four main characters:

Discuss every kind of sex – masturbation, dildos, telephone sex and blowjobs – comparing experiences, offering advice and encouragement. Nothing is out of bounds, sex is an adventure playground which doesn't necessarily have much to do with love ... The sex stuff works because it turns on its head the age-old female victim-hood. The whole rationale of *Sex and the City* is that these women want pleasure, know how to get it and are determined to do so. And the kick is the assumption that the women are always great in bed, the men more variable.

Whilst this may be why some viewers regularly tune into *Sex and the City*, Danish / New Zealand sociologist Karen Due Theilade (2001, p. 28) contends that the key to *Sex and the City's* success is the delicate balance reached between showing 'a variety of discourses about heterosexual relationships, while [also] presenting stories about female "sexual predators."' *Sex and the City* not only tells stories about women who are sexually predatory and in control of their (sex) lives, it also features story lines that are more traditional, in which romance and mutual heterosexual love are presented as fulfilling and much desired aspects of a woman's life (Due Theilade 2001, p. 27). In other words, while the women in *Sex and the City* engage in sex for the sake of sex itself, they also have not given up on love. Rather, love is something each of the four main characters actively pursue at one time or another.

The popular cultural discourses of feminine sexuality proliferated in *Sex and the City* highlight the complex range of discourses surrounding femininity and sexuality in everyday life. As Due Theilade (2001) maintains, the success of *Sex and the City* may therefore be contingent upon the ability of the programme to highlight the ambiguous, contradictory and confusing way in which contemporary gendered and sexual subjectivities are experienced. Programmes such as this, as well as the other forms of popular culture mentioned above, are subsequently involved in the normalisation of discourses about sexuality that resist the traditional subordination of women, at the same time that they actively reproduce them.

Representing Sexualities and Gender in Teen and Women's Magazines

Analyses of popular female-orientated texts note that teen and women's magazines do not publish a singular construction of femininity and sexuality but contain a diversity of discourses of sexuality and gender. However, only a small number of these studies focus exclusively on issues to do with sexuality or gender (Carpenter 1998, p. 160), while those that attempt to analyse gender and sexuality implicate magazines as a negative form of popular culture. In other words, many contemporary cultural researchers tend to focus on the adverse effect discourses of gender and sexuality from teen and women's magazines have on the girls and young women who read them.

One of the first, and perhaps most well cited, analyses of women's magazines is McRobbie's (2000 [1977]) '*Jackie Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl.*' In this groundbreaking analysis, McRobbie (2000 [1977], p. 77) argues that 'magazines are specific signifying systems where particular messages are produced and articulated.' *Jackie* is a signifying system that provides readers with specific and detailed accounts regarding the overall construction of femininity. McRobbie (2000 [1977]) identifies four codes in *Jackie*: romance, personal / domestic life, fashion / beauty and popular music. Each of these codes 'sets up' and defines 'the personal' as of the utmost importance for teenage life. The magazine is also seen to perpetuate 'romantic individualism' as 'par excellence' for all of its readers (ibid.). For the author, these codes are regarded as extremely powerful forces especially when they are 'absorbed' week after week in their codified form (ibid.). Though this study is now somewhat dated it is indicative of the analytical vein in which feminist researchers have approached magazine representations of gender and sexuality.

Recent studies have also stressed the negative impact magazine constructions of femininity have on girls and women. In Wray and Steele's (2002, p. 199) analysis of *Seventeen* the authors stipulate that *Seventeen* is a 'highly commercial' text that perpetuates norms of heterosexuality, while informing readers that the only 'appropriate mode of female behaviour is that which is passive.' They also suggest that *Seventeen* reinforces the message that the acquisition of a man, as a sexual and

life partner, is the ultimate goal of femininity. Therefore, it is proposed that in reading this publication girls are informed that they are not good or strong enough on their own, and that they need a man to fulfil their destiny and make them complete.

The analysis of teen magazines as heteronormative texts that exude discourses of traditional femininity and sexual subjectivity is further emphasised in Alexander's (1999) analysis of the US publications *Mademoiselle* and *Ladies Home Journal*. Here, the author notes that these contemporary periodicals are dominated by 'status quo' information on marriage and love. Women are presented as passive objects, subject to the formation and continuation of intimate heterosexual relationships that are forged via feelings of romantic love (Alexander 1999, p. 28). By presenting 'conservative' views, of what are supposedly 'appropriate' behaviours, these magazines construct reality in ways *dramatically different from people's everyday lived experiences* (emphasis added) (Alexander 1999, p. 35). In other words, both *Mademoiselle* and *Ladies Home Journal* offer representations of feminine sexuality that are 'stereotypical' and 'unrealistic.' For Alexander (1999) these discursive constructions of femininity remain the standards and ideals upon which many women continue to base their success and sense of happiness.

In the last ten to fifteen years teen and women's magazines have begun to depict women as sexually assertive and desiring. Some feminist theorists categorise these discourses as new. For example, McRobbie (1996) argues that the publication of new sexualities in teen and women's magazines marks a significant shift in the way different sexual subjectivities are made available to women in the context of everyday life. Rather than view new discourses of sexualities as oppressive, quoting Butler, McRobbie (1996, p. 178) argues that they open up the possibilities of 'what it is to be a woman.' She suggests:

This sexual material marks a new moment in the construction of female sexual identities. It suggests new forms of sexual conduct; it proposes boldness (even brazenness) in behaviour. The girl who knows what to expect is in a better position to make the right choices. Her sexual confidence makes her more able to insist on using a condom and she is therefore able to protect herself against HIV ... The widespread sense of parody and irony in the presentation of this sexual material in the magazines also implies a certain detachment or ironic distance from the old stakes of sexuality

for girls. They are far removed from romantic abandon and there is instead a determination to meet their male counterparts on equal grounds (McRobbie 1996, pp. 176-177).

The incorporation of new sexualities and femininities in teen and women's magazines marks an important cultural shift away from 'portraying young women solely as sexual objects and victims to recognizing them as agents who experience sexual desires' in their own right (Carpenter 1998, p. 162). It also represents what Tincknell et al. (2003, p. 50) view as 'an important cultural shift in young women's understanding of their sexuality.' This, however, is not to say that normative discourses of sexuality no longer exist. It is just that, in a world where 'virtually everybody wants young women to be successful,' traditional notions of femininity seem to be becoming less applicable (Gauntlett 2002, p. 10).

'Alongside the rhetorical assertion of female independence and sexual autonomy there is [nonetheless] a continuing anxiety about gender relations, the legitimacy of female sexual desire, and the possibility of meaningful social and sexual agency' (Tincknell et al. 2003, p. 50). Despite the fact that depictions of sexualities in magazines have undergone significant changes, the appearance of new sexualities / femininities in no way signifies a 'revolution'³ (ibid.). Indeed, magazines for girls and young women remain a 'site of struggle' where a variety of discourses are continually published. Yet, as Carpenter (1998, p. 162) notes, when newer conceptualisations of sexuality are published in magazines they are, more often than not, relegated to a secondary position. This results in newer versions of femininity being seen as less satisfactory than those that are more traditional. For example, readers of *Seventeen* are directed to traditional discourses and subject positions while at the same time they are discouraged from others (i.e. oral sex and homosexuality). Discrepancies between discursive constructions of sexualities are also often resolved in conservative ways, where sexual protection is promoted over pleasure (ibid.).

³ Jackson (1996) comments that while it is good that girls are taught about pleasure and their bodies, teen and women's magazine texts continue to remain problematic. This is because they emphasise female sexual pleasure at the same time that they encourage girls' and young women's participation in beautification and fashion rituals. This, therefore, works to construct sex as something that needs to be worked at. Furthermore, readers are also provided with contradictory advice that emphasises the importance of saying no to, and of not rushing into, sex.

Many changes have taken place in the discursive construction of sexualities and femininities in magazines for women, and yet, the discourses of sexuality and femininity that are published in magazines for teens remain dramatically different. Janna L. Kim and L. Monique Ward (2004, p. 49), in their work on women's sexual attitudes and their reading of magazines, point out that the prominent sexual messages in teenzines are more contradictory and ambiguous than those which are published in magazines for young women. Teenzines, like *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, tell girls to look and behave in sexually provocative ways but to abstain from sexual activity. They also inform girls that it is in their best interest to be strong and assertive, whilst refraining from taking on an active sexual role. This is illustrated in the way teen magazines represent sexual intercourse as a risky and dangerous sexual act (Kim & Ward 2004, p. 49), and is further reflected in comments made by the editors of *Dolly* who maintain that in creating sexual stories '*Dolly* is careful not to focus on the "pleasure side of sex"' instead addressing sex in 'a medically accurate way' (cited in Lumby 2001, p. 53). In further contrast magazines for young women praise these new modes and models of feminine sexualities by encouraging women to be sexually aggressive, sexually desiring and to take part in sexual intercourse that is 'fun, casual and risk free' (Kim & Ward 2004, p. 50).

Cause for (Moral) Panic?

For many social groups the inclusion of sexual information in magazines, particularly that which presents girls and women as assertive, active and sexually desiring, is troublesome. Throughout much of the western world, moral panics have developed in recent years in response to the supposed negative influence new discourses of femininity and sexuality have on girls and young women. For some critics, magazines are condemned for being 'too sexual.' They are also frequently blamed for the increasingly promiscuous behaviour of teenage girls and young women in the western world (Stokes 1999, p. 209). Whilst this controversy is not new, in that magazines have been blamed for girl's and women's promiscuous behaviour since the 1970's (Stokes 1999, p. 210), there has been a resurgence in moral panic regarding girls' and young women's magazine reading in recent years.⁴

⁴ This highlights a parallel between traditional discourses of feminine sexuality and those of moral panic. Thus, where women are traditionally constructed as the passive recipients of male sexual agency, moral panics seek to

Contemporaneous criticisms of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*,⁵ as outlined in chapter one, reflect the concerns of moral advocacy campaigners in the United States and the United Kingdom. Like detractors here, those based in the US and the UK conclude that the overall influence magazines for girls and young women have on readers is problematic (Gauntlett 2002, p. 189). It is thought that in reading magazines girls become ‘too open’ with their bodies and take part in sexual intercourse at a young age. This morality movement is epitomised in the US by the group *Morality in Media (MiM)*. In 1999 this group headed a nationwide campaign ‘to stop the “open display” of “overly sexualised magazines ... arguing that these “pornographic” magazines should not be placed “where children old enough to read are exposed day after day”’ (ibid.). The overall mantra adhered to by this group is somewhat fanatical in that *MiM* contend ‘material about sexual pleasure should not really be available to anyone’ (cited in Gauntlett 2002). Moral ‘crusades’ such as this have also taken place in the United Kingdom where, as Tincknell et al. (2003, p. 47) point out, ‘legislation proposed by the British Conservative Member of Parliament (MP), Peter Luff, in February 1996, which would require publishers to place age suitability warnings on the covers of young women’s magazines because of their use of “sexually explicit” material,’ serves as just such an example.

As gay and lesbian subjectivities have gained wider acceptance and are incorporated into the media more and more (Gauntlett 2002, p. 12; McRobbie 1996, p. 183), the concerns of moral advocacy groups also incorporate objection toward ‘alternative’⁶ sexualities. However, it must also be noted that gay and lesbian sexualities do not appear in teen and women’s magazines to the same extent as heterosexual ones do.⁷

re-position female readers as passive, without agency and vulnerable to the dangerous messages of these publications.

⁵ Recent academic work suggests magazines for girls actually de-emphasize and direct teenage readers away from the discursive construction of sex as a source of pleasure, by presenting sexual intercourse as ‘risky’ (Kim & Ward 2004, p. 49). Subsequently, rather than ‘preach’ about the pleasures of sex, publications like *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* are seen to support discourses of moral panic by representing sex as a dangerous act that teenage girls should avoid. This is further illustrated in the analysis of *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* magazines that is outlined in the following chapter.

⁶ When the term ‘alternative’ is used in this thesis it refers to gay and lesbian, as well as transgender and bisexual, sexualities.

Indeed, as Jackson (1999, p. 145) suggests, magazines for girls and young women ‘remain relentlessly heterosexual.’ And yet, the very (albeit minimal) appearance of alternative sexualities in magazines nonetheless implies that gay and lesbian sexualities now exist as ‘sexual possibilities where in the past they were permitted only a shadowy stigmatised existence’ (McRobbie 1996, p. 183). For critics, the representation of lesbianism in magazines is interpreted as outward encouragement and support for girls and women who partake in ‘amoral’ sexual behaviours. From this position, magazines are regarded as texts that encourage girls to participate in lesbian and not heterosexual sex. Moral disdain for teen and women’s magazines subsequently draws upon traditional discourses of feminine sexuality, arguing that alternative discourses of sexualities are a threat to tradition and signal the continued ‘moral degeneration’ of society (Tincknell et al. 2003, p. 47).

Writing with regard to television research, David Buckingham (2003, p. 165) argues that moral panics frequently lead to censorship that is designed to protect *young* people from the media’s ‘harmful effects’ (italics added). In essence, this is what we see in the expressions of moral panic discussed above. Critics construct magazines as powerful purveyors of sexual messages, whilst positioning readers as the vulnerable ‘victims’ of this information. Such moral panics stem from a growing sense of anxiety regarding undesirable moral or social changes, which cause some social groups to look for a single cause or explanation (Buckingham 2003, p. 165). In New Zealand, where women are younger at the age of first sex than in previous eras, have an increased number of sexual partners and engage in sexual activity equal to that of men (Jackson & Cram 2003, p. 113), magazines have been singled out as a direct cause of these changes. Readers of magazines are subsequently positioned as ‘cultural dupes’ who exhibit a limited ability to resist, reject, or interpret media texts in a variety of ways (Hermes 1995, p. 5). Any representation of sexuality that circulates repertoires of women’s sexual pleasure or desire is therefore seen to lead girls and women to sleep with as many people as they can.

⁷ This is reflected in the analysis of the content of the magazines used for this project, which shows that less than 7% of the sexuality pages in the magazines examined for this project focus on issues and themes regarding gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual sexualities.

Researching Audiences

Contemporary analyses of teen and women's magazines suggest that the discursive constructions of sexuality and gender in such publications are complex, contradictory and often ambiguous. On the one hand, magazines encourage girls and young women's participation in sexual activity (Bantick 2004; Brooker 2004), and on the other, they represent sexuality very traditionally, informing girls and young women of the importance of forming committed, loving, and preferably marital, relationships (Alexander 1999; Wray & Steele 2002). As textual analyses these studies do not tell us how contemporary magazine representations of sexuality are understood as both cultural objects and aspects of everyday life. Thus, as contemporary research has not focused on the ways readers interpret and talk about magazines this project seeks to address this 'gap' by exploring how six groups of teens and young adults attribute meaning to the complex, contradictory and often ambiguous ways in which *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* portray contemporary sexualities.

Moralistic criticism toward media representations of sexuality can often be located within a media effects model of audience reception. Effects based research has long been associated with positivist mass communication research. In general, this approach suggests that 'the media do things to people, that audiences are passive, and that the media producers have a power which audiences cannot resist' (Burton 2005, p. 98). Reading or viewing popular cultural texts is seen to have an adverse effect on the way people behave. Media effects research therefore takes as its focus the 'negative impact' the media has on audiences. Examples of this are seen in everyday life in the way criminal and amoral behaviours are often linked to the media's representation of sex and violence. For instance, following the death of British toddler James Bulger at the hands of two ten year old boys, the film *Child's Play 3* was ostracised and blamed by social groups, academics and the media alike for the boys' actions. This is in spite of the fact that as far as anyone could tell neither of the boys had watched this film (Buckingham 1996, p. 22). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, contemporary commentators have also chastised magazines for publishing sexually explicit material that is seen to 'cause' girls and young women to behave in sexually promiscuous and dangerous ways (Bantick 2004; Brooker 2004; Higginbotham 1996). Media effects research, and moral panics, attempt to make sense

of events that are incredibly difficult to understand, such as senseless acts of violence or increased rates of teenage pregnancy (Stokes 2003, p. 131). In this regard, popular culture is constructed as the instigator of negative social behaviours and the media as a whole is blamed.

Academics and social groups frequently draw upon effects discourse in their analyses and criticisms of popular culture (Tincknell et al. 2003, p. 47). At the same time, there is also a long history of critique toward this framework. Lisa Taylor and Andrew Willis (1999, p. 160), for example, note that media effects research focuses exclusively on issues to do with the way the media persuades people, while ignoring its other possible effects. This approach is also based on the assumption that objectivity can be maintained in research. However, it has been argued that all research is the product of subjective analysis undertaken by researchers who are themselves aligned with particular discourses, interpretive repertoires and subject positions in a particular socio-historical context.

Media effects theory has also been criticised for the way it approaches media content. For example, from a media effects perspective:

Textual meanings are taken as transparent, neutral ‘messages’ which are unproblematically quantifiable ... [Therefore] by focusing exclusively on quantitative results based on studies measuring manifest content, it ignores the qualitative meaning-making aspects of media content to which audiences also respond (Taylor & Willis 1999, p. 161).

This type of research does not take into account readers’ interpretations instead basing their analyses solely on quantifiable measurements. This has subsequently led a number of researchers to question the validity of such work because it does not account for the ways people interpret popular culture in a multitude of, often contradictory, ways.

One of the first challenges to the media effects tradition is audience research known as ‘uses and gratifications.’ Within this framework people are constructed as active and motivated by need in their engagement with popular culture (Burton 2005, p. 89). In other words, the audience is seen to select specific media texts for personal use and gratification. This framework marks an important shift in the conceptualisation of

audiences as it focuses on what audiences do with the media rather than what the media does to them (Taylor & Willis 1999, p. 162). However, as with effects models of research uses and gratifications is not without its problems. Of primary concern are the ways in which the implementation of this framework focuses wholly on the uses and gratifications of the individual (Taylor & Willis 1999, p. 163), thus providing a psychological rather than social / cultural analyses of media texts and audiences.

In contrast to uses and gratifications, researchers working in the field of cultural studies have developed methodologies that explore media texts and how they are made sense of socially and in relation to social power. This is demonstrated in the dominant shift away from purely textual analyses, in the 1970's and 1980's, to investigations of texts and how they are made sense of by readers (Stokes 2003, p. 132). This form of reception work draws from Stuart Hall's theory of 'Encoding / Decoding' (1980), with David Morley's (1980) *Nationwide* study being one of the first projects to demonstrate the shift away from the text to the audience. Showing episodes of the news programme *Nationwide* to different groups of viewers, Morley explored whether people's socio-economic backgrounds affected their reading of this programme (ibid.). His conclusions suggest that the socio-economic background of an audience does not determine the reading of a particular programme. This conclusion was arrived at in conjunction with the finding that participants do not always accept *Nationwide's* 'preferred reading.' This implies that there may be many different discourses in play at anyone time each of which influences people's understandings in such a way as to produce alternate readings from those that are proliferated in texts. As Pertti Alasuutari (1999, p. 3) comments, it is via Morley's study that it became evident that the meaning of a text is reliant upon people's interaction with, and interpretation of, the text.

Janice Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* is another cultural studies project that focuses on media and audiences. Radway (1984), however, takes the concept of the audience and of audience research one step further by examining the pleasures readers derive from romance novels. In this study, regular readers of romance novels were interviewed with the intent of viewing these texts, and their reading, as an interpretive process. Radway (1984, p. 8) argues that:

A good cultural analysis of the romance ought to specify not only how the women understand the novels themselves but also how they comprehend the very act of picking up a book in the first place. The analytic focus must shift from the text itself, taken in isolation, to the complex social event of reading where a women actively attributes sense to lexical signs in a silent process carried on in the context of her ordinary life.

This work is significant in the development of audience / reception work for two reasons. Firstly, attention is given to a form of literature that has generally been classified as ‘low-brow’ or ‘trash.’ Secondly, the methods implemented in this project allow readers to speak for themselves about something that matters to them (Stokes 2003, p. 134), that is their reading of romance novels.

Feminist reception studies following Radway’s (1984) include Janice Winship’s (1987) *Inside Women’s Magazines* and Hermes’ (1995) *Reading Women’s Magazines*. While these studies also look at lesser-studied forms of popular culture they differ from Radway in the way they do not vilify these texts, or readers of these texts, as some researchers contend Radway’s work does (Vares 2000, p. 43). Winship (1987) and Hermes’ (1995), for example, even include ‘confessions’ regarding their own enjoyment of women’s magazines in their analyses. Applying an ethnographic approach, told from the perspective of one reader, Winship (1987) herself, *Inside Women’s Magazines* generates an understanding of the place women’s magazines have in women’s lives. Her work also provides an assessment of the social processes and cultural codes that shape her three favourite publications.

Hermes’ (1995) *Reading Women’s Magazines* developed from her critical engagement with existing analyses of women’s magazines, including Ros Ballaster et al’s (1991) *Women’s Worlds*. For Hermes, these ethnographic texts are written out of a sense of concern, rather than respect, for readers. By framing her project within a postmodern feminist framework, Hermes provides an account of women’s magazine reading that is self-reflexive and shows respect and not concern for readers. The overall focus of this work is an exploration of how ‘meaningful’ magazines are in people’s daily lives.

In their discussion of cultural studies approaches to the audience and media, Taylor and Willis (1999, p. 181) argue that:

Cultural studies work on audiences usefully challenges a number of previously held assumptions about the relationship audiences have with the media. The idea that the readings audiences make of texts could be arrived at by analysing their formal features was rejected as over deterministic. Further, cultural studies critics recognized that the role of the media could not be wholly understood without some investigation into the lived household contexts in which consumption takes place.

For this project I utilise cultural studies and ethnographic approaches to audiences, which argue that it is highly problematic to view the meaning of a text as deriving solely from the text itself (Ang 1996; Hermes 1993). Textual analysis alone cannot tell us how readers will interpret, think about and give meaning to particular cultural artefacts. This project is thus informed by the idea that the meaning of a text derives from the interaction that takes place between the reader and the text, in particular social and cultural contexts (Hermes 1995, p. 5). Rather than frame readers of magazine representations of sexualities as the ‘cultural dupes of media institutions,’ this project positions the reader as an ‘active producer of meaning’ (Ang 1996, p. 114; Hermes 1995, p. 5), who is always:

[a]ctively negotiating with textual constructions ... in such a way that the meaning given to texts and consequently the positions eventually taken up by readers ... are brought into accord with ... [their] social and subjective experiences (Ang 1996, p. 114).

The acts of reading, viewing and talking are processes of negotiation, the outcome of which cannot be dictated by the text itself.

Reception studies are crucial for investigating how meaning is produced in the context of everyday life. This project highlights the voices of readers so as to provide an examination of the varied, and contradictory, meanings that are given to magazine representations of sexuality, by different people, in specific social situations (Ang 1996, p. 43). This reception study also challenges ‘the idea that those who consume are necessarily duped by the media’ by demonstrating the ‘sophisticated critical responses audiences make of media texts’ (Taylor & Willis 1999, p. 181). It is

therefore recognized that it is through the voice of the audience that cultural contradictions and ongoing struggles over meaning are made identifiable and thinkable and can, hence, be examined (Ang 1996, p. 43).

This project is located within what Alasuutari (1999) defines as the third generation of reception / audience studies. It recognizes that audiences are a discursive construction produced by the analytical gaze of researchers in the process of research development and implementation. Audiences, therefore, are not stand-alone groups that exist 'out there' waiting to be studied (Alasuutari 1999, p. 6), rather researchers create audiences with the intent of investigating how particular groups make sense of popular culture and aspects of everyday life.

The analysis provided in this thesis is based on the notion that 'one studies [the] range of frames and discourses on the media and their contents as a topic in its own right, not as a lens through which to peek into individual acts of reception' (Alasuutari 1999, p. 13). Analysis focuses on the content of interview transcripts from six focus group meetings with adolescents and young adults. These transcripts are cultural texts in their own right, and are not treated as a reflection or 'screen through which to look inside ... [people's] heads' (Alasuutari 1999, p. 15). I, therefore, analyse what occurs in the texts, while focusing on the interpretive repertoires participants articulate in the process of drawing together particular discourses about sexuality in response to magazine representations of sexualities.

Conclusion

Inspired by New Zealand cultural analysts Tiina Vares (2000) and Due Theilade (2001) this thesis explores the variety of interpretive repertoires and discourses about sexuality that the different groups of research participants articulate through their engagement with representations of sexuality from girls' and women's magazines.

This analysis is informed by the theoretical framework of poststructural feminism, which argues that selves are constructed in and through talk, and that talk remains a site of play for a multitude of discourses and shifting multiple subject positions that are historically, socially and culturally specific (Kondo 1990, p. 44; Gavey 1989, p.

464). It is also, however, important to note that talk is contextually specific. Thus, as Vares (2000, p. 40) suggests:

Talk in any context cannot be taken as transparently meaningful, but rather should be seen as a complex social construct which is specific to the particular environment in which it occurs.

In this project, participants took part in one focus group discussion where they engaged with the texts *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* or *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, each other and myself, the researcher.

This project also recognises that the contextual nature of talk is in and of itself a process of identity construction (Buckingham 2003; Gauntlett 2002). Hence, the ways teens and young adults discuss magazine sexualities facilitates an exploration of the discourses, interpretive repertoires and subject positions taken up in talk. This work therefore focuses on contemporary adolescent and young adult sexual and gendered subjectivities and the relationships that exist between reader reception, teen and women's magazine representations of sexualities and identity formation. This is achieved through an exploration of the ways six groups of teens and young adults talk about particular representations of sexuality and their everyday lives. In particular, this study examines how magazine representations of sexuality, that portray women as either assertive and sexually desirous, lesbian or in need of intimate heterosexual relationships, are understood and talked about by research participants as they read representations of contemporary sexualities from popular teen and women's magazines.

Chapter Three

‘All the Juicy Details’¹: Participants, Methods, Analysis

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approaches employed in this project. Attention is focused on the processes of participant recruitment, involvement, the use of focus group discussions and analysis of transcript material. This chapter also analyses the content of the thirteen issues of each of the magazines utilised for this project. It also provides a synopsis of the specific magazine representations of sexuality that were discussed by six groups of secondary school and tertiary students, in the context of focus group discussions conducted in Christchurch, Aotearoa / New Zealand between October and December 2004.

Focus Group Discussions

My decision to use focus group discussions has been influenced by the work of feminist social and cultural researchers, who highlight the ethical and methodological

¹ *Dolly* (2003) ‘Can you guess which guy is...?’, July, p. Sealed Section

advantages associated with this approach. Feminist commentators, concerned with the way research participants are treated when traditional qualitative methodologies are applied, have increasingly begun to incorporate focus groups into their own work. Sue Wilkinson (1999, p. 66), for instance, argues that participants involved in 'one-on-one' interviews are treated like the 'object-like subjects' of researcher inquiry. This implies that the needs, interests and concerns of participants are positioned as secondary to those of the researcher. One-on-one interviews also create 'unbalanced' power dynamics that are inconsistent with the methodological and ethical 'objectives' of feminist research (Wilkinson 1998, p. 123). It is, therefore, for this reason that focus group discussions are used in ethnographically based feminist research, for they help counter the imbalanced and exploitative nature of the interview situation. For many researchers focus group meetings *are* a more ethically viable form of 'data' collection (Wilkinson 1999, p. 66). This is because the power differentials inherent in any research setting are reduced via the involvement of more than one participant in the project (Kitzinger 1994, p. 106; Wilkinson 1998, p. 114). With more than one person involved in the research setting the balance of power shifts 'such that [the participants] begin to have more control over the interaction that takes place in the group than does the researcher' (Wilkinson 1998, p. 114). Focus groups may also be more ethically and morally sound because they provide participants with an opportunity to talk about things that are important and interesting to them (Wilkinson 1999, p. 67).

Jenny Kitzinger (1994, p. 103) defines focus groups as 'group discussions organised to explore a specific set of ideas,' where the group is focused in the way it involves *collective activity* that is fixed on a particular issue or topic. Focus groups enable in-depth discussions to take place between a relatively small number of people,² thus allowing participants' understandings, thoughts and feelings about particular topics to be heard. The role the researcher has in the context of the focus group is to guide the discussion and encourage the active participation of group members. This form of qualitative research methodology is also distinguished from other interview methods in the way it implicitly emphasises and encourages interaction in the group itself, as

² There are usually between three and twelve people involved in a focus group discussion (Wilkinson 1998, p. 112), although this number fluctuates according to the group size preferences of the researcher and, as was the case in this project, the overall 'success' of the recruitment process.

participants engage with the topic, each other and the researcher (Kitzinger & Barbour 1999, p. 4).

Whilst there are ethical, and methodological advantages associated with focus group discussions (Kitzinger 1994; Wilkinson 1998, 1999), it must also be noted that the power differentials inherent in any research situation can never be expelled from a project. This is because qualitative research studies, including those that involve focus groups, are always, in some way, dictated by the objectives and agendas of the researcher. Thus, while focus groups allow flexibility in group talk, diffusing the differentials of power existent between the researcher and participants, they remain a product of the research setting. This implies that the researcher can and never will be fully expelled from a project, despite having the best intentions of implementing methodological approaches that attempt to diffuse the significance and the role that they have in the research.

Nonetheless, during the focus groups conducted for this project, participants actively introduced their own agendas into the discussion. Aimee (FS2), for example, chose an article from a magazine that she wanted the rest of the group to read and talk about. Similarly, during the focus group FT2, Kate found an article from *Cosmopolitan* to be extremely compelling and continued to read it once the other group members had moved onto discussing something else. However, once Kate finished reading her article she then diverted the conversation back to the themes from the article that she found interesting. This suggests that the use of focus groups in this project did at times allow for the discussions to be more participant directed. The implementation of focus group research thus created a more ‘collaborative’ research scenario (Wilkinson 1998, p. 114).

Kitzinger (1994, p. 117), in her work on and with focus groups, contends:

We are none of us self-contained, isolated, static entities; we are part of complex and overlapping social, familial and collegiate networks. Our personal behaviour is not cut off from public discourses and our actions do not happen in a cultural vacuum whether that is negotiating safer sex ... attending to a smear test or going ‘queer bashing’ ... We learn about the ‘meaning’ ... of ... sex ... through talking with and observing other people, through conversations at home or at work; and we act (or fail

to act) on that knowledge in a social context. When researchers want to explore people's understandings, or influence them, it makes sense to employ methods which actively encourage the examination of these social processes in action.

Using focus group meetings provided me with the opportunity to explore the social nature of meaning production. As Vares (2000, p. 55) notes, the implementation of focus group discussions enables the act of 'decoding (the sense making process)' to be constructed as a group activity and not as the cognitive process of the individual. This enables the researcher to explore the construction of meaning as both a social and interactive process (ibid.). Focus groups provide researchers with an opportunity to examine how participants interact, not only with the text, but also with one another, in particular social settings (Wilkinson 1999, p. 67). They (focus groups) become a 'place' where individual experiences are expressed in an attempt to make 'collective sense' of personal everyday experiences (Wilkinson 1999, pp. 67-68), thus allowing the researcher to observe how meanings are co-constructed in social contexts, via the interactions that take place between group participants.

Focus group discussions also provide researchers with 'good quality data' (Wilkinson 1998, p. 117). This is due, in part, to the level of 'priority [that] is given to the respondents' hierarchy of importance, their language and concepts, [and] their frameworks for understanding the world' (Kitzinger 1994, pp. 108-109). The notion of collecting 'high quality data' also relates to the way research participants interact with one another in the context of the group meeting. For example, during the focus groups for this project participants asked questions of one another and challenged statements made by their friends. This type of group interaction, as Wilkinson (1998, p. 117) points out, leads to an elaboration of individual responses in the way participants build on the responses of others, thus creating a 'synergistic effect' where in-depth talk is developed in the group context, which may not have otherwise been available to the researcher (Morgan 1988, p. 17). In this way, having more than one person involved in the discussion assists the researcher in the way participants are continually:

... asking questions of each other (perhaps more searching than those the researcher could dare to ask); by contradicting and disagreeing with each other (in a manner which, coming from the researcher, might have seemed authoritarian); and by

pointing to apparent contradictions in each others accounts (often in a manner which the 'empathetic' and 'sensitive' researcher might feel to be inappropriate coming from her) (Wilkinson 1998, p. 118).

Researchers who utilise the qualitative research methodology of focus group discussions are thus assisted by the interaction that takes place between group members. This is because those who take part are able to question and contradict one another, as well as offer peer support in situations where potentially sensitive issues are addressed. For example, the young men in this project interacted with one another in ways that emphasized their alignment with heteronormative and homophobic repertoires. Furthermore, in all of the groups disagreements between group members led to the aggressive assertion of personal opinions in an attempt to override what other group members had said. The girls in FS1, for instance, debate whether cohabitation and sex before marriage are appropriate and right modes of feminine behaviour. At a later stage in the discussion, one of the girls in a secondary school group even becomes so annoyed by the heteronormative way with which magazines represent sexualities she states, 'why do they assume all *Girlfriend* readers are going to be interested in guys?' (Christina FS1). Christina's talk reflects comments made by Jackson (1996, p. 58) who maintains that teen and women's magazines 'remain relentlessly heterosexual,' in spite of contemporary commentaries that suggest otherwise. Thus, during the focus group discussions many of the teenage girls involved in this study spoke in ways that indicate both their acceptance and rejection of magazine representations of sexuality that reproduce heteronormativity.

Focus group discussions have been used in this project because they represent a less exploitative form of qualitative research. Additionally, and of the utmost importance, is the fact that this form of group meeting allows the social nature of meaning production to be demonstrated in and through people's talk on particular topics.

Recruiting Participants

The recruitment of tertiary student participants involved the implementation of an extensive advertising campaign at the University of Canterbury, the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology and the Design and Arts College of New Zealand. It was my expectation that a colourful, interesting and succinctly worded

advertisement (see Appendix 1) would attract people to the study, while the opportunity to read and talk about magazines would draw people in. This, however, was not the case. Advertisements placed around these three tertiary institutions received only two responses, none of which resulted in the organization of a focus group meeting. Due to this poor response I proceeded to send a mass email to all first year, and some second year, Cultural and Gender Studies classes at the University of Canterbury. To reiterate the importance of these electronic requests I also made two, in-class recruitment visits, where I handed out approximately 100 information sheets (see Appendix 2) to American and Gender Studies classes. While I received several email responses expressing interest in the study only one of these correspondences resulted in a focus group, this with the group of young men (MT).

During the process of recruitment I attempted to make participating in the project seem as fun and interesting as possible. However, as outlined above, this did not encourage people to take part in the study. One reason for this, I would suggest, is with regard to the time at which advertisements were placed around all three campuses. Advertisements were put up in mid July and by this time students were submitting end of semester projects and preparing for exams. Many potential volunteers may have felt constrained with their time. Furthermore, talking about sexuality (as this project involves) may also be embarrassing for some people, for as Geraldine Treacher (2004, p. 58) points out, talking about sex can be regarded as an activity that is done in private or with people you are 'close to.' Disclosing this type of information to someone unknown may therefore have prevented some people from volunteering to take part. Due to this overall lack of interest I felt it appropriate to employ a snowball strategy among my family and friends. This method was successful and by the end of November 2004 three focus group discussions had been conducted with male and female tertiary students.

In an attempt to recruit secondary school students I approached a student liaison at an inner-city secondary school, in mid-August, asking permission to visit their school to ask for volunteers. By November, however, I had not heard back from this school (this is after making several calls and sending several emails to the student liaison). It therefore became apparent that I would need to recruit teen participants in another way. A snowball strategy of participant recruitment was also used in an attempt to

recruit secondary school participants. I approached people who I knew were either parents of teenagers or who knew people with teenagers. I explained the project to this contact person asking whether they would be willing to pass an information sheet (see Appendices 3 & 4) onto their friends. Alternatively, if they had a teenage child themselves I asked whether they would be willing to let their child participate. This method was successful and within two months three focus group discussions were held with secondary school students.

An objective of this project has been to conduct focus group discussions with pre-existing groups. Pre-existing groups are groups of people who know one another prior to meeting for the research. The use of pre-existing groups was intended to help participants feel confident and supported in the interview process (Kitzinger 1994, pp. 111-112), and to allow participants to speak about sensitive topics with people they would normally speak to in their everyday lives. Gaining access to pre-existing groups meant that I came to rely heavily upon the kindness of volunteers. This meant the contact person went beyond simply volunteering to take part in the study by recruiting and convincing their friends to take part with them. To achieve this, I contacted a potential volunteer via an acquaintance or, as with the male tertiary groups, had them get in contact with me. When contacted or contacting a potential participant I informed them about the project, what it would involve and how their contribution would be used. If at this stage they were interested I asked if they would be willing to ask some of their friends to take part with them. This strategy worked relatively well, and in conjunction with the implementation of a snow-ball method of recruitment, I organized and conducted six focus group discussions with tertiary and secondary school students, all of which were made up of pre-existing social groups.

The Participants

Nine tertiary students and thirteen secondary school students took part in this study. Each attested to currently being, or having in the past been, a reader of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo* and / or *Girlfriend*, *Dolly*. Those who had not read recent issues of these publications were given copies of the magazines prior to our meeting to refresh their memory. All of the boys and young men in the secondary school and tertiary student focus groups, as well as one young woman from a tertiary group, were given copies of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* or *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* to read prior to meeting with me.

Six focus group meetings were conducted for this project: two with female tertiary students (FT1, FT2), one with male tertiary students (MT), two with female secondary school students (FS1, FS2) and one with male secondary school students (MS). At no time were focus groups conducted with people of different biological sexes, or with people in different school (age) groups. This is because as Philip Schlesinger et al. (1992, p. 17) point out, the presence of boys / men in focus group discussions with girls / women has the ability to distort and inhibit girls' / women's responses, and vice versa. It is also important to note that my inability to recruit a male facilitator meant that I was present and guided each of the discussions with the boys and young men. My attendance at each of these discussions may therefore have had an impact on what these participants said.

During focus group meetings all secondary school and tertiary participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendices 5 & 6). These questionnaires were designed to gain background information on the participants and to find out about their general magazine reading habits. Completion of the questionnaire was not compulsory. All participants were made aware of this at the time the questionnaire was distributed. The information disclosed on completed questionnaires was not discussed during the focus group meetings. Participants were also asked not to put their names on these forms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Focus group FT1 consisted of three young women aged between 20 and 26 years. One was Pakeha, one English and the other Chinese. At the time of the study all of these participants resided in Christchurch, Aotearoa / New Zealand during the school year. Each attended an inner city tertiary education institution where they were studying art. One identified herself as an avid reader of magazines, reading up to twenty a month. The other two read between three and five magazines a month. They listed their favourite magazines as *Vogue*, '[because] it has the latest fashions,' *NW*, '[because] I like the fashion and the gossip,' and *Wallpaper*, 'because it incorporates international artistic and design developments and creative ideas.'

The four participants in FT2 were all nineteen years of age and of NZ European / Pakeha descent. All but one of these young women attended a tertiary institution in Christchurch. Two participants were, at the time of the project, studying toward a

Bachelor of Arts, one a Bachelor of Music and the other a Bachelor of Performing Arts. These young women read between two and eight magazines per month. The magazines *Nylon* and *New Idea* were their favourites.

The two young men in the group MT were twenty-one years of age.³ One had been born in South America moving to Christchurch as an early adolescent. The other was New Zealand Samoan. Both were students at the University of Canterbury. One was studying toward a Bachelor of Arts, the other a Bachelor of Commerce. This is the only group of participants recruited via the advertising campaign implemented at the University of Canterbury. Each read between two and four men's magazines a month. *NZ Rugby* was the favourite publication of one of the participants because it has 'the best info about world rugby.' The other enjoyed *Rugby League* '[because it] has previews about upcoming games and stats that help the reader understand the game better. [It also has] great ... pictures.'

Eight girls took part in FS1. Three of the girls in this group were 13 years old, the other five 14 years of age. Five were Pakeha, one English, one Maori and one Indian-Irish. Each attended a large co-ed high school in Christchurch. At the time of the study all of the girls had just finished their first year of high school and were moving into Year 10. Each of the girls read between one and four magazines per month. Six of the girls favoured *Cosmopolitan*, '[because] the articles are more interesting and not so aimed at younger people.' One liked *Dolly*, 'because it has more articles and real life stuff,' and another liked *NW*, 'because it has a lot about celebrities and good stories.'

Two of the girls in FS2 were fifteen years of age, the other fourteen. All of the girls in this group identified themselves as NZ European / Pakeha. All had recently completed Year 10 and were moving into Year 11. One respondent read seventeen magazines per month. The other two girls read between five and eight. As with the majority of girls

³ This is the only group that involves less than three people. It was not my intention to conduct a focus group with only two people, having originally organized three young men to meet with me for the discussion. However, upon arriving at the focus group meeting and waiting approximately fifteen minutes it became evident that the other person was not going to arrive. I therefore decided to conduct the group discussion anyway as the other members had taken time out of their busy schedules to meet with me. Also, because of the problems had with organizing focus group meetings I did not want to run the risk of losing this group altogether.

in FS1 these girls favoured the woman's magazine *Cosmopolitan*, citing it as 'interesting and funny.'

The three boys in MS were seventeen years of age. Two were Pakeha, the other British. Each of the boys attended a single-sex high school in Christchurch. One was in Year 13 and the other two in Year 12. Each read between two and six magazines per month. *Ralph* and *FHM* were their favourites '[because they've got] lots of cool articles [and] interesting stuff for guys.'

Though participants were recruited on the basis of their educational status, as either a secondary school or tertiary student, they are referred to throughout this thesis as adolescents, teens or teenagers or young adults. The descriptors teen, teenager or adolescent are used to signify the secondary school participants who were between the ages of 13 and 17 years at the time of the study. The term young adult refers to the tertiary students, who at the time of the project were between 19 and 26 years of age.

Conducting the Focus Group Discussions

Although it was not my initial intention, the focus group discussions organized for this project met at different locations. Both groups of young women met with me at my flat, located in the Christchurch CBD, while the young men met at my office on campus at the University of Canterbury. Each of the secondary school groups with girls met at the homes of one of the participants and the boys at an office I have available to me at the Arts Centre of Christchurch.

During each of the meetings participants were supplied with a selection of food and beverages. Prior to the meeting the type of food and drink to be provided was decided in conjunction with the contact person.

Depending on the age of the participants involved a selection of magazines and individual (colour photocopied) articles and texts, representative of contemporary sexualities, were placed around the area in which we sat.⁴ Not all of the participants in this study were shown the same images and articles. This is because both

⁴ The articles / images discussed during each of the focus group discussions will be outlined in the following section.

Cosmopolitan and *Cleo* target readers who are between the ages of 18 and 34 years, while *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* target a readership between the approximate ages of 14 and 24 years (Carrington & Bennett 1996, p. 152). It is therefore assumed that these magazines contain information produced with the intent of appealing to teens, as in the case of *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*, or to young adults, as in the case of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*. My aim was to explore how magazine representations of sexualities are made sense of by their intended (age) audiences. The images and articles chosen for discussion were selected because, from the point of view of the researcher, they are indicative of a complex mix of traditional as well as new and alternative representations of sexuality. As previously mentioned, the selection of these individuated texts stems from my recent engagement with cultural criticism, which focuses on the sexual content of teen and women's magazines and the hypothesised effect reading this information has on female readers. By addressing how readers attribute meaning to magazine representations of sexuality this thesis seeks to address the complex, contradictory and ambiguous way in which magazines, and magazine representations of contemporary sexualities, are interpreted, understood and given meaning by teens and young adults.

Issues of the magazines were also made available to participants during the focus group meetings. This was so as to provide participants with the opportunity to dictate the research agenda and to discuss things they felt were important and interesting.⁵ As Hermes (1995) points out, readers of magazines often cannot recall the particulars of the magazines they read, thus having the magazines available during the focus groups may also have had the added benefit of stimulating people's memory with regard to their magazine reading habits.

Prior to the start of the discussions (that is, when the tape recorder was turned on) I introduced myself and informed the group about the project. I then told the participants how the information collected would be used. At this time I reiterated the fact that all participants could withdraw any or all of the information provided at anytime. At this stage I also felt it important to go over the concept of focus group discussions and how they differ from traditional one-on-one interviews. I tried to

⁵ Although, perhaps because we were dealing with sensitive issues and / or because the age difference between myself and the participants was significant, I often felt as if the groups looked to me to initiate the conversation.

stress the importance of group interaction and the need for participants to talk to one another, and not just to me, during the meeting. In addition, as the topics / themes to be discussed were sensitive I reiterated the fact that we could refrain from speaking about a particular topic or issue if at anytime they felt uncomfortable.

At the initial stage of the focus group it was also at the forefront of my mind to establish a sense of rapport with participants (Zeller 1993, p. 175). This involved disclosing details about my private life and using humour to lighten up what initially were tense situations. To achieve this I engaged the groups in small talk. This form of self-disclosure serves to establish the research situation as a give – take scenario, in the way the researcher tries to give something personal back to the people who volunteer to take part (Zeller 1993, p. 170).

Once the conversations had progressed from this introductory phase, all of the participants were given a consent form (see Appendices 7 & 8) and questionnaire. In the case of the secondary school students I also requested that the parent / guardian consent forms (see Appendix 9), distributed to parents before our meeting, be handed back.

Prior to the focus groups I developed two informal discussion guides, one for the secondary school / teen magazine focus groups and another for the tertiary student / women's magazine focus groups (see Appendices 10 & 11). In some instances these guides were not followed, especially when participants openly discussed intimate details about themselves, sexualities and their understandings of magazines. However, more often than not I took on a directive role. This involved using the guides to keep the conversation going, especially when participants looked to me, rather than each other, for an indication of what to discuss.

The discussion guides were constructed in a way that would ease participants into the group situation. Questions flowed from the general to the specific. Initial questions dealt with the general magazine reading habits of participants and their thoughts on *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo* or *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. They then moved onto more in-depth questions regarding what participants thought about specific representations of sexualities. These questions were also further segmented, in that they initially focused on traditional depictions of sexualities moving onto a discussion of the new ways

sexualities are portrayed in magazines for girls and women. To the best of my knowledge, and in having listened to the audiotapes of the focus groups repeatedly, I at no time used the terms traditional, new or alternative to describe or discuss these representations of sexualities during the focus group discussions. However, without naming them, particular attention was given to magazine articles and images that attempt to disrupt heteronormative constructions of sexualities.

The focus groups lasted between one to two hours. Each discussion was recorded on audiotape, with the permission of participants. In the case of the secondary school participants I also gained the permission of parents / guardian to tape the discussions. Prior to transcription I listened to each tape in its entirety and transcribed it verbatim. Once drafts of the transcripts were complete I re-listened to each of the tapes approximately three times, checking for accuracy. Where transcript material appears in the thesis all names have been changed to protect participant anonymity. Extracts presented in the thesis also do not include word repetitions or utterances like ‘um’ and ‘ah.’ This is because, as Annie Potts (2002) points out, this can distract from the presentation and analysis of transcript material. Where an ellipsis (...) appears this indicates where a section of the transcript has been left out. Square brackets are used around words or sentences to signify where wording has been changed either for clarity or to avoid presenting information about participants that is identifiable. When the words inside these brackets are in italics this signifies researcher notes. I have also punctuated and edited the extracts for clarity.

In the following sections, I outline the range of representations of sexuality and gender shown to participants during the focus group discussions. Participants openly discussed each of the representations. However, at the same time, these also served as a ‘jumping off’ point for further discussion on everyday life and their thoughts on contemporary sexualities.

Representing Sexualities in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*

Cosmopolitan (Australia) is a joint publishing venture between ACP Publishing, Australia and Hearst Corporation USA. According to AC Nielsen (2003), New Zealand readership levels top 244,000 per month. The average age of the *Cosmo*

reader is 18 – 34 years (Roy Morgan Research 2003). One issue of *Cosmopolitan* in 2003 and 2004 cost approximately NZ\$7.50 per issue.

Cleo (New Zealand) is published by ACP Media (NZ) Ltd. New Zealand readership is slightly higher than that of *Cosmopolitan*, with approximately 254,000 people reading the magazine each month (AC Nielsen Media Research 2003). *Cleo*'s readers are between 18 and 34 years of age. This magazine cost \$NZ6.20, at the time of the study.

Girlfriend (New Zealand) is published by Pacific Publications (Australia). It has a readership of 217,000 readers per month (Roy Morgan 2003), the majority of who are between the ages of 14 and 17 years (Nielsen Media Research 2003). The purchase price of *Girlfriend* magazine in 2003 / 2004 was NZ\$5.70.

Dolly is published by ACP Publishing (Australia). It has a New Zealand readership of approximately 176,000 people per month (Roy Morgan 2003). As with *Girlfriend*, the average age of *Dolly* readers is between 14 and 17 years (Nielsen Media Research 2003). *Dolly* cost NZ\$5.60 in 2003 / 2004.

To understand the extent to which contemporary sexualities are represented in teen and women's magazines the content of the thirteen issues of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* published between June 2003 and June 2004 were examined. This involved counting and classifying the contents of the fifty-two magazines according to the following thematic categories:

- Beauty (advertisements and feature articles on hair, cosmetics and skin products)
- Fashion (advertisements and articles that focus on clothing, shoes, accessories, style trends and advice)
- Diet / Food / Fitness (information regarding food intake, recipes, dieting and fitness routines)
- Sexuality (all texts, images and advertisements focused on intimate heterosexual relationships, dating, sexual techniques, learning about men, images of male bodies, alternative sexualities and sexual health)
- Career / Money (text with a dominant focus on providing career and money advice)
- Self Help (texts intended to help readers become a better people. Includes horoscopes and divination pages)

- General Health (these pages focus upon diseases and how to prevent them, as well as ways to keep your body healthy. Included under this heading are feminine hygiene advertisements)
- Real Life (stories written or told by ‘real’ people, rather than the editorial staff of the magazine)
- Celebrities (features, images and texts on local and overseas celebrities)

After categorising the pages from each of these magazines I then calculated the average number of pages from each of the magazines devoted to that category. The following table presents the average number of pages in each publication and the percentage⁶ of the whole magazine that is devoted to these particular thematic categories.

Content of <i>Cosmopolitan</i>, <i>Cleo</i>, <i>Girlfriend</i> and <i>Dolly</i> Magazines: Percentage Devoted to Selected Themes / Topics June 2003 and June 2004										
Title	# Pages⁷	% Beauty	% Fashion	% Sexuality	% Diet/ Food	% Celebrity	% Health	% Career/ Money	% Real Life	% Self Help
<i>Cosmo</i>	225	26	19	13	5	5	2	2	4	3
<i>Cleo</i>	142	26	19	18	7	4	3	1	3	5
<i>Girlfriend</i>	132	17	14	8	2	15	2	1	7	8
<i>Dolly</i>	166	17	17	6	3	10	3	2	6	12

This indicates the extent to which contemporary sexualities are represented in magazines for young women, as opposed to magazines for girls. For example, in *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* the three largest categories are beauty, fashion and sexuality, with approximately 45% of these publications being dedicated to beauty and fashion spreads, features and advertising each and every month. *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* also devote a significant percentage of their texts to beauty and fashion features and advertisements. However, where publications for girls and young women differ is in the amount of attention each gives to the topic of contemporary sexualities. For instance, 13% of *Cosmopolitan* and 18% of *Cleo* deals with sexual issues and topics, while only 8% of *Girlfriend* and 6% of *Dolly*'s text is focused exclusively on themes to do with sex and sexuality. This suggests, as Jane Stokes (1999, pp. 214-215) points

⁶ The percentages listed have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁷ The number of pages is the average of the thirteen issues of each of the magazine examined.

out, that the amount of sexual information teen magazines contain is minimal, especially when compared to the amount of information they publish on fashion and beauty. It also shows that these magazines for young women tend to devote between 6% and 11% more of their text to contemporary sexualities than do the magazines for girls.

To further decipher the topics and themes of sexuality published in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* each of the sexuality pages, from the thirteen issues of each of the publications examined for this study, were counted and classified in accordance with the following categories:

- Intimate Relationships: These are articles focused on the dynamics of intimate heterosexual relationships.
- Dating: Images and texts providing information on sexual techniques and positions.
- Know Him: Information written by or about men that provides readers with an opportunity to know men better.
- Male Object: Images of boys and men in various states of undress in which they are presented as 'objects' of a female gaze.
- Alternative Sexualities: Texts that highlight and discuss gay and lesbianism, transgender and bisexuality.
- Sexual Health: Health information focused on STD's, contraception, abortion and sexual abuse.

The following table shows that in spite of the wider acceptance of gay and lesbian sexualities in society, and their incorporation in the media (Gauntlett 2002, p. 12; McRobbie 1996, p. 183), magazines for girls and young women are dominated by themes of heterosexuality. Indeed, upwards of 93% of the sex pages in these magazines deal exclusively with issues regarding heterosexual relationships, dating, sexual positions and techniques, getting to know him, male objectification and sexual health.

**Content of Sexuality Pages in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*:
Percentage Devoted to Selected Sexuality Themes / Topics
June 2003 and June 2004**

Title	# of Sexuality Pages	% Intimate Relationships	% Dating	% Know Him	% Techniques	% Male Object	% Alternative Sexualities	% Sexual Health
<i>Cosmo</i>	30	27	10	13	17	7	7	20
<i>Cleo</i>	25	28	8	20	12	12	4	12
<i>Girlfriend</i>	8	21	8	30	0	25	0	15
<i>Dolly</i>	10	23	2	36	5	3	2	29

In the thirteen issues of *Dolly* examined for content analysis only 2% of the sex pages were dedicated to themes of alternative sexualities. In *Girlfriend* no pages focused on these themes. Of all the magazines *Cosmopolitan* publishes the most information on alternative sexualities, with, on average, 7% of *Cosmopolitan*'s sex pages dedicated to gay, lesbian relationships, transgender and bisexual sexualities. This analysis also shows that where *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* incorporate information on sexual techniques and positions *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* tend to focus more on providing female readers with information that is intended to help them get to know boys / men better. For example, between 30% and 36% of the sexual information in teenzines provides readers with information that is written by or about boys. At the same time, between 0-5% of each of the teenzines addresses themes of sexual technique. This is compared to the 12-17% of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*'s sexuality pages that focus on this theme.⁸

In selecting the representations of sexuality for this project it was not my intention to select texts representative of the overall content of the contemporary teen and women's magazines used for this study. Rather, my aim was to include a selection of texts that covered a broad spectrum of the thematic categories mentioned above. Subsequently, the representations of sexualities selected for discussion can be categorised thematically as texts dealing with intimate relationships, dating, getting to know him, sexual techniques, male objectification, alternative sexualities and sexual health. A broad selection of articles was chosen for the adolescent and young adult

⁸ The amount of sexual information contained in women's publications as opposed to teen publications may subsequently have an effect on the magazines teen readers prefer. The teenage girls in this project, for example, prefer *Cosmopolitan*, to *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, because it deals with 'adult issues.' I would therefore suggest that the adult titles to which teen readers refer may relate to their desire to know and learn about the technicalities of sex.

focus groups. This was to ensure that participants could engage with a variety of representations of sexualities from contemporary magazines and not just some.⁹ The articles ‘I Do, I Do’ (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, pp. 130-131), ‘The Moment I Fell in Love’ (*Cleo* July 2003, p. 91), ‘The Craziest Thing I Did For Love!’ (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 52-53), ‘Love-O-Meter’ (*Dolly* May 2004, p. Pullout) and the ‘*Dolly* Sex Survey Results’ (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section), for example, deal with issues regarding romance, love intimate heterosexual relationships and marriage. Readers were also invited to discuss articles written with the intent of helping them learn about boys and men, such as is found in, ‘It’s a Guy Thing’ (*Girlfriend* June 2004, pp. 60-61), ‘The Top 6 Things Guys Want’ (*Cleo* May 2004, p. 89) and ‘Love Doctor’ (*Girlfriend* May 2004, p. 98). At the same time, readers were confronted with images and texts addressing themes and issues regarding alternative sexualities. These include the teen and women’s magazine articles, ‘Which One of These is a Guy?’ (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, p. Sealed Section); ‘I Have a Girlfriend But I Like to Wear Frocks’ (*Cosmopolitan*, July 2003, p. Sealed Section); ‘What it Feels Like For a Girl’ (*Cleo* January 2004, p. Sealed Section); ‘Here Comes the Brides!’ (*Cleo* April 2004, pp. 88-90) and ‘Girl Crushes’ (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39). Furthermore, both teen and young adult readers were supplied with representations of sexuality that focus upon feminine sexual technique and desire. Such themes are discussed in the articles, ‘The Safe Guide to “No-Strings” Sex’ (*Cleo* December 2003, pp. 94-95); ‘Girls Who Like Toys ...’ (*Cleo* February 2004, pp. 132-133); ‘10 Secrets of Women Who Love Sex’ (*Cosmopolitan* June 2003, p. Sealed Section) and ‘15 Ways to Be Intimate (Without Having Sex)’ (*Dolly* March 2004, p. Sealed Section).

The following section provides a synopsis of the texts and representations of sexualities shown to participants during group discussions. Following the methodological insights of Hermes (1995) and Schlesinger et al. (1992) I have decided *not* to provide a textual analysis of the teen and women’s magazines used for this project, nor of the specific representations of sexuality discussed. One reason for this is provided by Hermes (1995, p. 10) who argues that:

⁹ To ensure that the participants engaged with a variety of representations of sexuality they were invited to select images and articles, for discussion, from issues of the magazines that were made available to them during the focus group meetings.

The academic voice is the authorial voice and its account is bound to be far more powerful than any other account of everyday reading. To focus on both text and readers can easily drown out the accounts of readers, and thereby eliminate the added value of seeing ... through their eyes.

The decision not to conduct a textual analysis derives from my desire not to privilege the researchers' analysis of these representations of sexuality. Therefore, the synopses provided in this chapter are accounts of what participants viewed during group discussions. Each of the descriptions provides an overview of the main storylines participants responded to. The intention of these synopses is, therefore, to give readers a feel for what participants read and talked about, providing a 'backdrop for an appreciation and evaluation of the responses given by ... group members' (Schlesinger et al. 1992, p. 42).¹⁰

Contemporary Sexualities in *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* Magazines

A number of the articles shown to young adults during the focus group discussions are heteronormative in nature, in that love, romance and intimate heterosexual relationships are central themes. In 'The Moment I Fell in Love' (*Cleo* July 2003, p. 91) four couples talk about how they knew their current boyfriend / girlfriend was 'The One.' Each of the people who make up the couple talk about the exact moment they knew they were in love. Reasons given for being in love and finding 'The One' include: 'I looked around at all the single people that night and was convinced that they were all looking for what Chris and I have' (Liz 29), 'After picking me up in his sports car and taking me on his yacht, I was in love!' (Meredith 26) and 'The moment I saw Natalie I knew she was The One' (Matt 24).

In 'I Do, I Do!' (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, pp. 130-131) this romantic theme is elaborated further. This involves the detailed descriptions of two wedding days as

¹⁰ By not including a textual analysis of the magazines I do not mean to suggest that the discourses circulating in and through magazines are socially or politically inert. Indeed, I acknowledge that there are complex discursive dynamics at work in the interactions that take place between the discourses of magazines and those of the readers. Magazines put 'sex' and gender into discourse before a reader encounters the magazine and the reader then engages and negotiates with these discourses in a variety of ways. However, this thesis looks at the ways different groups of girls, boys, young women and young men respond to particular magazine discourses of sexuality, particularly those that represent feminine sexuality in new, alternative and traditional ways.

told from the perspective of the brides. Images of each wedding are flanked by a question and answer style section giving precise details about the weddings, including the costs of the wedding dresses and shoes as well as the number of people in the wedding parties. Each of the brides gives a run down of their relationship with their (now) husband, informing the reader of the romantic way with which their groom proposed, the 'best moment of the day' and how they feel now they are married – 'I feel complete, I'm so happy! (Mirella).

Young adult participants also read and talked about articles in which independence, sexual desire and sexual assertiveness / aggression are presented as aspects of women's lives that should be celebrated and encouraged. The focus of such texts is on how women can gain pleasure and satisfaction from sexual activities, either through masturbatory means ('Girls Who Like Toys...') or by engaging in sex with men, when, how and if they want ('Safe Guide to "No Strings" Sex').

'Girls Who Like Toys...' (*Cleo* February 2004, pp. 132-134) is a piece about the modern-day perils of buying sex toys. This article outlines the types of toys currently available, where they can be purchased and how they have evolved over the years. It also includes a testimonial from 'Kylie,' a one-time vibrator virgin, who shares 'her first sex toy experience and why it won't be her last.' 'Kylie' elaborates for the reader the first time she went to a sex shop to buy a vibrator highlighting how nervous she was. However, in the end it appears that her anxiety is worthwhile because the orgasms she has with her vibrator are intense and highly enjoyable. So enjoyable, in fact, she plans to visit the shop again 'for an upgrade.'

'The Safe Guide to "No Strings" Sex' (*Cleo* December 2003, pp. 94-95) is written by the creator of *Sex and the City*, Candice Bushnell. In it she outlines 'her sex secrets – and the etiquette of casual encounters.' These 'secrets and rules' of contemporary sex are written in a step-by-step guide. Each step deals with a different aspect of how, or how not to, engage in 'casual' sexual intercourse. Rule 1, 'only bed one guy per group,' informs the reader that it is important not to sleep with men who are friends, but rather to approach different men for sex and to behave like a 'lady.' Rule 2, 'sex is pleasure,' emphasises that sex should be engaged in only under circumstances in which it is pleasurable for you (women), and not when you are trying to get something else out of it, such as being made to feel attractive or get attention.

Bushnell also makes light of the unfairness of contemporary sexual double standards and the inappropriateness of derogatory sexual terms that are applied to women, like slut, if she has slept with more than one man. As with the characters on *Sex and the City*, Bushnell regards sex as every woman's right. This article encourages women to have pleasure sex, to experiment and not to feel guilty or bad about it.

This theme is reiterated in the '10 Secrets of Women Who Love Sex' (*Cosmopolitan* June 2003, p. Sealed Section) where the secret of good sex is described as 'loving it!' This article invites the reader to learn how to 'love it' by incorporating the sex tips outlined on the page into their lives. Examples include; learning how to switch on your sex drive, viewing your body as a 'pleasure palace,' acting like a 'sex goddess' and communicating your sexual needs and desires to your partner, to ensure sexual satisfaction.

A number of the articles shown to participants during the focus group discussions also portray lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gendered sexualities. 'Here Comes the Brides!' (*Cleo* April 2004, pp. 88-90) focuses on the relationship of 'Camille' and 'Justine.' These women are wearing wedding attire. 'Justine' has on a satin gown and 'Camille' is wearing a white pantsuit. The article is written in a diary / confession format, in that both 'Camille' and 'Justine' individually express their thoughts and feelings about their lover and the reasons they would like to have the legal opportunity to be married. The article also contains images of celebrity lesbian couples like Portia de Rossi, Melissa Etheridge and Rosie O'Donnell. Next to each of their photographs are statements regarding their desire to cement their love for their partner by getting married.

The main focus of 'What it Feels Like for a Girl ...' (*Cleo* January 2004, p. Sealed Section) is the two-page spread of 'Natalie' (30) and 'Courtney' (19), who are photographed wearing matching lingerie. 'Courtney' is on her back looking up at 'Natalie,' while 'Natalie' crawls over her legs and torso and rests above her breasts. The text addresses these women's sexual relationship and asks them 'what it's like to be in love with another woman.' 'Natalie' discusses her personal preference for having relationships and sex with feminine looking women, like 'Courtney,' and the age at which she realised she was a lesbian. 'Courtney' on the other hand identifies herself as bi-sexual. She states that while she hopes her committed relationship with

‘Natalie’ will last for the rest of her life, though she cannot say that she’ll never have sex with a man because she has in the past. Each of the women discusses their views regarding the advantages of lesbian sex. They believe women know what other women like sexually and are therefore better equipped to provide them with sexual pleasure.

‘Which One of These is a Guy?’ (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, p. Sealed Section) is a sealed section feature that is presented as a game. The objective of the game is for the reader to pick, from the four pictures of ‘women,’ who is actually a man. To do this readers are instructed to look carefully at the four images (with blurred faces), make their choice and then turn to the next page where the faces of each person, as well as what they look like on a daily basis, are shown. In turning the page it is revealed that each person pictured is in fact a man. The reader is given personal information about each of the men, including their real and stage names, their ages and a range of statements about how and when they decided to dress in drag and what their families think about it.

Similarly, ‘I Have a Girlfriend But I Like to Wear Frocks’ (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, p. Sealed Section) tells the story of ‘one bloke who has a girlfriend, is captain of his football team and ‘loves a beer with his mates’ but who also likes to dress in women’s clothing. The story is told in the first person by ‘Dave’ / ‘Katya,’ who believes it is important for people to become better educated about ‘alternative genders.’ Throughout the article it is ‘Dave’ / ‘Katya’s’ intention to highlight how ‘normal’ he is and therefore how ‘normal’ the act of cross-dressing is.

Other articles / images made available to tertiary participants during the focus group discussions include the perfume advertisements *Dolce and Gabbana* (*Cosmopolitan* June 2003, p. 15) and *Ralph Lauren Romance* (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, p. 13), each shows a man and woman embracing one another in various states of undress. Participants were also given an image from a *Cosmopolitan* showing the pelvic area of a woman in lacy white underwear with a large pad lock slung around her waist (January 2004, p. 155), and a sealed section page entitled ‘The Top 6 Things Men Want’ (*Cosmopolitan* May 2004, p. 89), which considers what men like when it comes to getting a blow, or hand, job from a woman. Participants were also given the article ‘Girls Who Want to Be Boys’ (*Cosmopolitan* May 2004, pp. 110-111), which

explains the concept of the 'boi' and what it means in relation to stereotypes of butch and femme lesbian women.

Contemporary Sexualities in *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* Magazines

The 'Dolly Sex Survey Results' (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section) page entitled 'Horse and Carriage' was discussed at length in all of the secondary school focus groups. In this article there are a series of quotes from readers regarding their views on intimate relationships and marriage. A variety of views are presented. Some like 'Michelle' (15) state, 'I don't want to get married or have kids. I want to have a career. I think kids would ruin my life,' thus projecting themselves as assertive women who are uninterested in pursuing traditional norms of heterosexuality. Others, like 'Tara,' support the ideal of marriage, dreaming, at the age of sixteen, about having 'a happy family one day; a husband and maybe two kids.' The dominant portion of this page is made up of a range of statistics telling readers of what girls, like them, think about love, sex and intimate relationships. Placed in bold on this page are statements like, '94% of you believe in sex before marriage,' '85% of you want to get married and 82% plan on having children' and '75% think you should be in love with someone before you have sex with them.'

In 'Do You Really Want a Boyfriend?' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 92-93) the article depicts singlehood and coupledness as equally weighted life choices. The article states that it is no longer appropriate, nor the norm, for girls / women to think they need someone to make them feel complete. Rather, it 'indicates that "the someone" could be oneself, a healthy, optimistic, sane, strong and sensitive self' (Cline 1998, p. 5).

In teenzines there are a significant number of articles / features devoted to boys and to informing girls about the idiosyncrasies of the 'opposite sex.' 'It's a Guy Thing' (*Girlfriend* June 2004, pp. 60-61) is an article where 'Peter' (19) 'spills the beans' about everything that went through his mind when he first 'hooked up' with 'Jen.' Written in a diary format, the article allows 'Peter' to discuss how hard it is for him, as a guy, to express his feelings to his girlfriend openly, and the every-day obstacles that further inhibit these actions.

The articles ‘Would you Date this Guy?’ (*Dolly* October 2003, p. 99) and ‘Rate the Babe’ (*Girlfriend* June 2004, p. 57) include images of boys and men in various states of undress, but only ever going so far as to be topless. The subheading of ‘Rate the Babe’ states ‘the eyes, the smiles, the bare chests ... If only the boys at school were this hot!’ Whilst no personal information is provided about the men featured in ‘Rate the Babe’ (ibid.) the boy in ‘Would You Date This Guy?’ (*Dolly* October 2003, p. 99) is asked a series of questions by the magazine including, ‘What’s your fave thing to sleep in?’ ‘Which do you prefer, blondes, brunettes or redheads?’ and ‘What’s your fave thing about girls?’

In ‘Girl Crushes’ (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39) being desirous of a lesbian relationship is discussed as a ‘normal’ aspect of human behaviour. Expert¹¹ testimony likens sexuality to a spectrum in which heterosexuality is at one end and homosexuality the other. This article explains that most people, most of the time, fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes – whether they admit it or not. Lack of acknowledgement of having sexual feelings for other girls / women is presented in this article as deriving from the stigma that is associated when intimacy is expressed between people of the same sex. This article also presents lesbianism as odd and different to the norm. This is seen in the subtitle ‘You’ve got the hots for someone, but he’s a she...’ and contradictory comments in the article that attempt to show lesbianism is common, whilst discouraging teens from ‘coming out’ at a young age.

In March 2004, *Dolly* published a Sealed Section entitled ‘Everything but...’ In this section of the magazine a one page article, ‘15 Ways to Be Intimate (Without Having Sex),’ instructs the reader on how to ‘get close to your guy without actually doing the deed’ (*Dolly* March 2004, p. Sealed Section). The suggested intimate behaviours included kissing, giving your boyfriend a massage, writing him a love letter and taking a bath with him while you’re both wearing a bathing suit. This article encourages readers to ‘think creatively’ when it comes to sexual pleasure stating that sometimes ‘not doing it can often be just as good as doing it. All you have to do is use your imagination...’ This article, whilst not giving explicit directions on how to have

¹¹ This person is identified as an expert by the magazine. This is qualified by their status as a psychologist specialising in sexuality.

sexual intercourse, presents it and other sexual activities as sources of pleasure that girls can pursue.

‘Let’s Talk About Sex’ (*Girlfriend* January 2004, pp. 120-121) is another feature that deals with sex. However, it is significantly different from ‘15 Ways to Be Intimate’ (*Dolly* March 2004, p. Sealed Section) in that it focuses on ‘common questions gals have about sex.’ Presented in a question / answer format, real readers of the magazine have their questions answered by the people who work at *Girlfriend*. It is assumed that girls who are confused, in some way, about sex, have written these letters. One reader cannot remember if being a virgin means you have or have not had sex, another wants to know when she will know she’s ready to have sex and another still is concerned about not ‘fitting in’ with her friends who have all had sex. In each instance, the editors of the magazine offer the reader a reassuring and supportive response, addressing psychological as well as physical issues to do with sex. The intention of this article is to fill the reader in on information they may have gotten in sexual education classes, but which they are still unsure about. In other words, it offers girls a safe and anonymous environment in which to ask questions about sex, which they have not had explained adequately elsewhere.

Other articles / images given to secondary school participants during the focus group discussions include ‘The Craziest Thing I Did For Love’ (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 52-53). In this article nine romantic stories are told from the perspective of real teens regarding the most romantic thing they’ve done for someone else. ‘Love Doctor’ (*Girlfriend* May 2004, p. 98) is a question and answer, self-help section of *Girlfriend*. Readers are invited to write to Luke Jacobz, *Girlfriend*’s ‘Love Doctor’ to have their questions about intimate relationships answered. Participants in these groups were also given the celebrity feature ‘Love-o-Meter’ (*Dolly* May 2004, p. Magazine Pullout) which shows six celebrity couples kissing and canoodling. ‘I Got Married When I Was 12’ (*Girlfriend* August 2003, p. 53) shows ‘Oman’ (15) and ‘Riani’ (12) in traditional Indonesian wedding gear on the day of their wedding. Secondary school focus groups were also given copies of ‘Can You Guess Which Guy Is...’ (*Dolly*, July 2003, p. Sealed Section), a feature structured in the same style as ‘Which One of These is a Guy?’ (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, p. Sealed). Here the cover page features four men sitting in a group and the reader is asked to pick which one is ‘a stud, a

virgin, married or gay.’ The answers are on the following page, along with a brief interview with each of the men regarding their sexual status. ‘The Make-Him-Melt Pashing Rules’ (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 30-31) provides a step-by-step guide on ‘how to deliver a kiss so good that he’ll be begging for more.’

Discourse Analysis

This thesis uses a discourse analytic approach to analyse the interpretations and readings of contemporary magazine representations of sexualities articulated by research participants during the focus group discussions. As a methodology, discourse analysis takes different forms. However, one commonality between many versions of discourse analysis is the referral to meaning as something that is constructed in and through language. Discourses are described as ‘broad constitutive systems of meanings,’ or ‘ways of seeing the world,’ which exist in language (Sunderland 2004, p. 6). Social realities (gender and sexualities) are therefore understood as discursive constructions. At any given time there are many different discourses in circulation in a society or culture, which are intrinsically linked to power and to contemporary social relations, which seek to construct reality in socially specific ways (Gavey 1989, p. 464). As Norman Fairclough (2003, p. 124) suggests, ‘different discourses are [regarded as] different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities and the social relationships in which they stand to other people.’

Feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis addresses questions of power by stressing the possibility that discourses take different forms at different times and in different contexts (Sunderland 2004, p. 9). As Nicola Gavey (1989, p. 466) argues, it is through the historically specific and detailed analyses of texts that we are better able to ‘explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests and to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it.’ It is therefore not the objective of this thesis to treat the talk of participants as a ‘screen’ through which to look inside people’s heads, but to study the interview transcripts as cultural texts in their own right (Alasuutari 1999, p. 15). This enables an examination of the fragmented, contradictory and inconsistent discursive constructions of gender and sexualities to take place (Gavey 1989, p. 466).

The language processes people use to constitute their own and other's understandings, of personal and social phenomena, are therefore indicative of power relations that operate in particular social and historical contexts. It is for this reason that discourse analyses tend toward the identification and naming of patterns that are inherently embedded in textual forms, in this case transcriptions.

Drawing on and extending the work of reception researchers Christine Christie (1994 & 1998), Due Theilade (2001) Hermes (1995) and Vares (2000), I argue that the goal of reception studies should not be to create analyses that are a product of a rigid categorization of the discourses people use. Rather, it is more appropriate for cultural researchers today to produce flexible analyses of people's talk, regarding specific cultural and sociological phenomenon (Vares 2000, p. 100). It is for this reason that I use the discourse analytic approach of repertoire analysis.

Jonathon Potter and Margaret Wetherall (1990, p. 149) identify 'interpretive repertoires' as the 'recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena.' Interpretive repertoires are the linguistic features that allow individuals to speak about social and cultural objects and subjects through the knowledge afforded to them by the discourses of their 'subjective' alignment (ibid.).

Repertoire analysis [therefore] is a form of discourse analysis that, on the one hand, has the advantage of addressing the messy character of everyday talk, and on the other hand, stressing everyday creativity. It provides a way of conceptualising social actors as more than the arbitrary products of intersecting discourses while not reverting to individualist and voluntarist notion of the subject (Hermes 1993, p. 501).

As Vares (2000, p. 104) notes, an interpretive repertoire approach allows researchers to explore the variable, flexible and interactive nature of meaning production. This includes looking at the interpretive repertoires employed in participant talk and how these are implemented in group contexts. The researcher can, through repertoire analysis, explore differences and similarities in and between groups, and the ways in which repertoires are used to construct individual and collective identities. Subsequently, one of the key advantages associated with repertoire analysis is that it

allows the flexibility of people's talk and their engagement with media texts to be seen as an aspect of everyday life.

The implementation of this research methodology is in keeping with Christie's (1994, pp. 53-54) conceptualisation of reception research and the need to acknowledge the fact that readers interpret texts differently, and not just in accordance with, or in resistance to, dominant discursive constructions of social realities. It is therefore paramount that researchers pay attention to the 'processes of interpretation' inherent in any reading of a text by developing methods by which the relationships between people's interpretations of a text and the context in which this interpretation is produced can be examined (Christie 1998, p. 223). Focus in this thesis is therefore given to readers' use of various interpretive repertoires as they discuss aspects of everyday life, gender, sexuality and magazines. Accordingly this thesis uses:

... an interpretive repertoire approach to tease out the more fluid and flexible use of various discursive resources that participants use in particular contexts ... It also facilitates an investigation of how participants' talk can seem contradictory through the course of the discussion (Vares 2000, p. 104).

This is not to say that how people discuss a particular topic is necessarily contradictory but that people's talk in different social contexts and in response to different materials / people draws upon many different interpretive repertoires (ibid.). An interpretive repertoire approach, therefore, makes it possible for researchers to attend to the ways participants construct particular positions and identities at different times and for any number of reasons, with regard to their reading / viewing of particular cultural texts. It is thus through the adaptation of a repertoire analytic approach that this thesis is able to explore the *content* of the discourses drawn upon by research participants as they discuss the often ambiguous and contradictory way with which representations of sexuality are published in contemporary teen and women's magazines. By examining how six groups of boys, girls, young women and men employ a variety of interpretive repertoires on magazines, sexuality and gender, through their engagement with *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, this thesis investigates not only the similarities and differences within and between group talk but also the ways in which particular repertoires are used to construct individual and group identities.

The analysis presented in the three following chapters is organized thematically. Like Treacher's (2004, p. 70) participants, the boys, girls, young women and men in this study utilize a diversity of interpretive repertoires in their talk on magazines, sexuality and gender. Indeed, much of the analysis attends to the content of the discourses, hence the interpretive repertoires, drawn upon by participants as they respond to magazine representations of sexuality. This thesis also accounts for the way participants interact with one another, the researcher and the magazines in their talk. The thesis, therefore, sheds light not only on how readers make sense of representations of sexualities from contemporary teen and women's magazines it also shows how readers articulate and construct particular individual and collective identities in socially specific ways.

To identify the interpretive repertoires participants draw upon in their talk on magazine representations of sexualities I have carefully read and re-read the transcripts looking for patterns and themes throughout. After an initial reading I roughly coded the transcripts according to main themes. These themes consist of 'reading the magazines,' intimate relationships, sexualities and sex. Though intentionally very general in nature these have become the themes upon which the analysis provided is organized. Chapter four, for example, looks at the ways participants attribute meaning to the practices and strategies of magazine reading. Drawing upon a variety of interpretive repertoires, magazine reading is constructed as a leisure activity that allows people to read, and reject, aspects of the magazines that they do and do not like. The 'flicky' nature of these publications is also attributed, by some participants, to the conceptualisation of magazines as 'shallow' or 'trashy' genres of publication that are trivial and sometimes 'socially damaging.' Furthermore, the type of sexual information readers associate with magazines also lend these texts to being read by young women in ways that prevent them from being seen by others as women who actively seek out information on sex. This contrasts with the talk of the girls in this project who actively seek out and want to read the 'sexually explicit' information magazines contain. This indicates that where women's magazines have begun to portray feminine sexualities in new ways (McRobbie 1996; Tincknell et al. 2003) some of the young women in this project are apprehensive as to the socially appropriate nature of this information, especially when it is read and talked about in particular social settings. On the other hand, the desire of the

adolescent girls to read publications that are targeted at women may thus be linked to the general neglect of teen magazines to include sexually themed pages, unlike women's magazines,¹² which do not overtly explore issues regarding sexual technique and the acquisition of active feminine sexual subjectivities.

Chapters five and six focus on the ways two groups of boys and young men and four groups girls and young women respond to representations of sexualities from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. In chapter five I explore the heteronormative ways in which the boys and young men construct their sexual subjectivities. For example, while reading an article on lesbianism the young men in MT refer to the publication of gay sexualities in magazines. These young men are opposed to viewing gay men in magazines. As such, they articulate interpretive repertoires indicative of homophobic and heteronormative views and in so doing actively position themselves as heterosexual men. The final section of this chapter discusses how these boys and young men attribute meaning to contemporary magazine representations of intimate relationships. This sees participants articulate traditional repertoires of masculine sexuality so as to reject the formation of committed intimate relationships as something that they want. And, yet, for the boys in MS the prospect of having a girlfriend is something they view positively as a way to form friendships and sexual relationships with just one girl. What is interesting about this talk is that in light of contemporary cultural criticisms that cite teen and women's magazines as texts that are dominated by themes of heterosexuality, these boys and young men are extremely adverse to the prospect of reading such information. This suggests that the inclusion of gay sexualities in magazine texts does not necessarily mean that the dominant heteronormative construction of sexualities in magazines, and the western world, will be disrupted.

Chapter six sees the girls in this project construct intimate relationships, particularly marital relationships, as things they strive for. Drawing upon a repertoire of romance the girls in FS1 and FS2 admit to 'dreaming' about the day when they will marry. The talk of these girls' contrasts with that of the young women who draw on repertoires of realism in an attempt to reject the notion that marriage is a committed, life-long relationship. For these young women personal experiences of divorce have lead them

¹² See analysis of the content of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* provided on pp. 47-51.

to take up subject positions in which magazine representations of marriage, as well as marriage in everyday life, are rejected. Furthermore, like the boys and young men in this study, the girls and young women frequently speak in ways indicative of heteronormative constructs of feminine sexuality, especially when reading representations of lesbian sexualities from the magazines. This therefore works to position these readers as heterosexuals.¹³ This heteronormative construct of femininity is, at the same time, opposed by a number of female participants as they question why contemporary magazines remain predominantly heterosexual.

¹³ In many ways, the heteronormative nature of this talk reflects the content of the magazines examined for this study, in that in each of the publications no more than 7% of the sexually themed pages focused exclusively on issues regarding homosexual or alternative sexualities.

Chapter Four

Having a ‘Flick Through’: Reading *Cosmopolitan, Cleo, Girlfriend* and *Dolly*

This chapter attends to the various discourses about magazines, sexuality and gender that research participants employ when reading and responding to *Cosmopolitan, Cleo, Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. Through the implementation of an interpretive repertoire approach this chapter is able to explore how discourse works ‘by attending to what the speaker is doing with her or his talk’ (Vares 2000, p. 103). This involves examining the often contradictory ways in which participants attribute meaning to the act of reading, or rather not reading, magazines. Analysis, therefore, focuses on the array of discourses research participants ‘pull together’ in the process of constructing interpretive repertoires about teen and women’s magazines. Many participants, for example, maintain that the genres of the teen and woman’s magazine are ‘trashy’ cultural artefacts. At the same time, these publications are also frequently described as texts that play an important role in the formation of masculine and feminine adolescent and young adult sexualities. This is reflected in the way participants talk

about using, or having used, such publications to help them learn about sex. The approach implemented in this chapter, and throughout the remainder of the thesis, thus facilitates an exploration of the variable, flexible and interactive nature of talk. This is achieved via an examination of the various interpretive repertoires, and hence discourses, that are employed as six groups of adolescents and young adults discuss the popular Australasian teen and women's magazines *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*.

The analysis in this chapter also explores how the sexual content of teen and women's magazines impacts upon and / or influences how teens and young adults read and talk about them. It delves into a discussion of the interpretive repertoires adolescents and young adults draw on in response to the representation of sexuality in magazines. The project also addresses a variety of responses articulated by research participants and how the ways in which such responses may potentially be linked to the genders and ages of those involved in the groups. For example, the young men and boys in this project discuss reading teen and women's magazines with the implicit aim of looking at images of women's bodies. Contrary to this, some of the young women speak of a desire to avoid the sexually explicit content of magazines for the fact that they do not want to be seen by others as 'perverted' (Rachel FT2). And yet, at the same time, other young women and the majority of girls involved in the study regard the sexual information from magazines as something that is actively sought out and desired. This implies that the interpretive repertoires articulated, and hence the varying discourses pulled together, by adolescents and young adults may be influenced and contingent upon factors like age and gender. The shifting nature of the meanings research participants attribute to magazine representations of sexuality, in the context of focus group discussions, is thus indicative of the flexible use and nature of interpretive repertoires and the extent to which their utilisation is dependent upon context (Vares 2000, p. 192).

'Flicked over, I would say, not read.'¹

During the introductory phase of the focus group meetings participants were asked to talk about *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* or *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* and the role, if any, these

¹ Sam (MT1)

publications have in their lives. One of the prominent characteristics of this talk is the referral to teen and women's magazines as texts that are not so much read but 'flicked over.' Hermes (1995, p. 32) attributes this type of casual reading to the 'putdownable' nature of magazines, in that magazines are 'the ultimate "in-between" activity' that 'fills empty time' and 'does not require much attention.' Currie (1999, pp. 160-161) suggests that the format of the magazine allows readers to 'pick and choose' what parts they want to read. Magazines, therefore, do not *have* to be read in their entirety, from cover-to-cover, as a book does. Rather, particular parts of a magazine can be read in any order and at anytime. For example, the young women in FT2 describe magazines as something you 'just look' at, because they (magazines) are 'more visual things, than [something you just] sit down and read.' The secondary school girls in this study also point out that magazines can be read when there is little else to be done, for example, 'when you're on holiday,' 'in bed' or 'in a shop.' Furthermore, the girls and young women in each of the focus group discussions maintain that the primary way with which they read magazines involves looking at 'the first few sentences' of an article and then 'flicking' past it.

Flicking through and not reading magazines is an aspect of magazine reading discussed by all of the groups. The girls in FT1 talk about reading *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* at a surface, and not an in-depth, level. This is exemplified by Charlotte (FT1) who purchases *Cosmo* and *Cleo* 'like every month I go out and buy one,' although in so doing she does not devote a significant amount of time to reading them, '[I don't] fully finish it ... I'll flick through and if I find anything interesting then I'll just read it and then I'll put it away.' For many participants, it is precisely because magazines allow for this leisurely, non-committed form of reading that they are so enjoyable. Shannon (FS1), for instance, contends that reading magazines is 'more interesting than reading books ... cause they're, like, you can read one article and then leave it and then come back and read another one.' This type of reading is also discussed by Kate (FT2), Lisa (FT2) and Charlotte (FT1) who make comments suggestive of Hermes' (1995, p. 34) contention that, 'women's [and teen] magazines ... [are] a genre that does not make demands ... [in that] they can easily be picked up and put down again ... [Thus] as readers, we know magazines will not capture us totally or carry us off ... [therefore making them] quite safe to read.'

The way participants talk about reading, or rather flicking over, magazines is indicative of Gauntlett's (2002, p. 196) concept of the 'pick and mix' reader. Pick and mix readers are readers who are ambivalent about the pleasures and displeasures derived from magazine reading. As pick and mix readers the young women in this study aptly discuss what they like and what they do not like about teen and women's magazines, almost within the same sentence. This is illustrated in the talk of the young women in FT1 who, when asked why they flick over *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, state:

Sarah (FT1): I think cause they've got a lot of advertisements in them. It depends on what you read them for. I kinda like the gossip and the pictures more than the articles.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Sarah (FT1): Yeah.

Erin (FT1): I think that [too.] I don't read a lot of the *Cosmo* or *Cleo*, I would probably only pick one up if I was at friend's house and they happen[ed] to have one, which they don't usually – not my friends. But occasionally they will.

Sarah enjoys reading 'gossip' and looking at 'the pictures,' mainly of celebrities, that are published in magazines for young women. At the same time, she does not like the 'advertisements' and some of 'the articles' *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* publish. Subsequently, any advertisement or article that does not contain celebrity gossip is flicked past. Sarah also positions herself as an individual with highly subjective and individualised tastes. This is made evident when she asserts that magazine readers flick through magazines for a multitude of reasons, which really depend 'on what ... [people] read them for.'

Erin, on the other hand, identifies herself as someone who does not like *Cosmo* or *Cleo*, though on occasion she will read them. However, when she does read either of these magazines it is usually when she is 'at a friend's house and they happen to have one, which they don't usually – not my friends.' Buckingham (1993, p. 71) suggests comments such as this 'serve to demonstrate the speakers' own critical sophistication,' thus allowing Erin to distinguish herself, and her friends, 'from "other people" who read magazines and are somehow incapable of "seeing through" them.

Erin also describes these women's magazines as 'low' or 'trashy' forms of culture. This description illustrates of the low cultural rank associated, particularly with, women's magazines and relates to Peter Jackson, Nick Stevenson and Kate Brooks' (2001) definition of a repertoire of 'surface and depth.' This repertoire is highlighted in talk in the way magazines are constructed as texts that are 'too shallow,' lacking in their depth and breadth of information (Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 2001, p. 141). Drawing upon this repertoire the young women in FT1 and FT2 position themselves as readers who do not take the genre of the woman's magazines too seriously, that is, women's magazines could best be described as 'total trash' (Rachel FT2). Erin reiterates this during a later part of the discussion when she equates the low cultural status of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* with the Australasian soap operas *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *Shortland Street*.

Erin (FT1): I think it's in the category of *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* and *Shortland Street*. I don't watch those programs. It's kind of like everyday stories that appeal to people because they want to believe that it's real or that it's true and sort of gain some form of advice about situations ... it just comes across as gossip really. It's just like 'Oh! This person did that and they did this!' and you know, and 'Gosh, isn't that shocking!' It's like small town gossip.

Lindsay: Mmm.

Erin (FT1): Like the sitcoms. I don't know, I guess that appeals to some people.

Women's publications are constructed in this talk as 'trashy' forms of culture that do not have any 'real' cultural, social or personal purpose. In placing *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* in the same category as *Home and Away*, *Neighbours* and *Shortland Street*, Erin highlights the lack of importance these magazines and television programmes have in her life, and in the lives of others. This is achieved by positioning women's magazines as forms of popular culture that are as trivial, meaningless and 'socially damaging' (Engel Manga 2003, p. 2) as contemporary soap operas.

Linked to this conceptualisation of magazines as cultural 'trash,' is the notion that they are a less than credible resource for information on sex, sexual health and intimate relationships (Treise & Gotthoffer 2002, p. 181). The girls in FT1 take up this position when voicing scepticism toward teen and women's magazines that, from their point of view, are written by 'schemers.' Hence, because magazines have a

lower cultural standing it is suggested that they do not tell the truth. These young women maintain magazines are produced with the sole purpose of duping readers into reading one publication over another:

Erin (FT1): I don't believe it though. I think here's some chick at her desk trying to think 'O.K., what story can I write this week? For what?'

Sarah (FT1): Yeah.

Erin (FT1): I totally don't believe that anything in here is really based on fact or truth. It's just a whole bunch of women at some magazine who do a lot of scheming to figure out what people want to read, or what people are interested in or what's going to sell. [They] make up stories.

Charlotte (FT1): Yeah. You remind me, cause actually my friend in China, she is working in this magazine industry and she just told me, like, 'Don't believe anything, we just made it up.'

Lindsay: Yeah?

Charlotte (FT1): Like, she's not working in those articles and stuff, she's working with those photos and street snapshots and everything. And she's like, 'That's not even shot on the street, I picked it up from the internet or somewhere else.'

Erin (FT1): Yeah.

Charlotte (FT1): I was like, 'But everyone knows?' and she's like, 'Well, if they read our magazine they won't go on the internet and search these pictures.'

Lindsay: Yeah?

Charlotte (FT1): And I was like, 'Yeah, exactly!' And she's like 'And those articles as well, they've just made it up.' And I was like, 'O.K.'

In contrast, McRobbie (1996, p. 179) argues that:

... cultural producers consider themselves to be creating [these magazines] for themselves and their friends ... Drawing on this strong sense of personal taste and style, the editors attribute the success of their magazine to the instinct that what they and their friends want to read or look at, proves to be equally appealing to readers.

Magazine producers, from this perspective, are not 'schemers' but readers themselves. This implies that it is in the best interest of magazine producers to publish information that is honest because it is written with the intent of creating texts that they and their friends would enjoy. However, both Charlotte and Erin do not view magazines as honest or truthful cultural artefacts, instead naming their producers as 'schemers.' By

using this term Erin constructs producers of magazines as ‘a whole bunch of women who ... do a lot of scheming to figure out what people want to read ... or what’s going to sell.’ Rather than be intimately enthralled in the process of creating the magazine, magazine producers are constructed as people who have little interest in what appears in the magazines, apart from beating last month’s sales figures. Subsequently, because magazines do not, from these young women’s perspective, provide an accurate account of everyday life they are regarded as fictional texts.

While the young women in FT1 are critical of how factual *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* are, they also maintain that magazines can, at times, contain information that is true. However, because the majority of the information is false it is up to the reader to critically engage with the magazines so as to decipher truth from fiction. For Sarah, Erin and Charlotte deciphering truth from fiction is made easy when magazines publish information by, or about, celebrities. This is because as regular readers of celebrity gossip these young women have knowledge about the lives of celebrities and can therefore tell what is real from what is fake. The young women in FT1 apply this strategy or skill, in the following extract, when reading ‘The Moment I Fell in Love’ (*Cleo* July 2003, p. 91). The featured writing in this article is informed by real-life couples and yet the young women in this group read the stories critically, or not at all, because they cannot be certain of the authenticity of the accounts given:

Sarah (FT1): I would just flick straight past this and be like, ‘Nah, I don’t want to know!’

Erin (FT1): And I’d think, ‘Ah, yeah! Who’s to say this is real! This is probably just some made up crap, again.’

Sarah (FT1): Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Charlotte (FT1): Yeah, cause you don’t know these people. It could be anyone’s pictures.

Sarah (FT1): Yeah. If it was like celebrities then I would be like, ‘Oh, Yeah!’

Erin and Charlotte (FT1): Yeah!

Charlotte (FT1): Then you’ve got to read them all.

Sarah (FT1): But then you know them and, well you don’t know them but you know who they are and you kinda. It’s always different when they’re celebrities.

Erin (FT1): It’s like, well, magazines are their lives. That is the truth.

Sarah (FT1): And they can't really be that, I mean they may be exaggerating but they're not complete fiction.

Erin (FT1): And they'd sue the magazine if it wasn't true.

Sarah (FT1): Yeah, exactly. So at least you know you're reading a bit of fact and, and it's not completely factual but at least you can just pretend that it is and think, 'Ah, isn't that sweet!'

When reading magazines the young women in this group want to be certain that what they are reading is accurate. This reflects Currie's (1999, p. 56) contention that realism is one of, if not, the most important characteristics required by readers in the context of reading magazines. Thus, for the young women in FT1 reading celebrity gossip is enjoyable because they know they are reading at least 'a bit of fact.' At the same time, this penchant for celebrity gossip also implies that these magazines are read because they allow readers to fantasise about a life less ordinary (Currie 1999, p. 157). Pleasure in reading therefore derives from the ability of the magazine, and of celebrity gossip, to remove readers from their everyday lives by allowing them to fantasise about a life that is as well-organized and perfect (Hermes 1995, p. 49) as the lives of celebrities.

The group FT1 are not the only group critical of the extent to which teen and women's magazines are truthful. For the secondary school girls in FS2 the 'The Craziest Thing I Did For Love' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 52-53) is interpreted as such an unrealistic representation of everyday life that they question how honest the people in the article are:

Nikki (FS2): She probably made it up.

Isobel (FS2): I wouldn't be surprised.

[*Indecipherable Talk*]

Lindsay: If you don't find them interesting, what is it about them that make[s] them not really interesting, or [makes] you not interested in them?

Isobel (FS2): Well, I think that they're not really true. It all doesn't sound real.

Nikki (FS2): Yeah.

Isobel (FS2): Who would actually do that?

Nikki (FS2): And they're trying to get people to be like, 'Ahhhh!'

Isobel (FS2): Yeah, 'Isn't that nice?' But there's a lot of people that ...

Aimee (FS2): It's just like a space filler.

Contemporary magazine research suggests that the inclusion of real people in magazines improves the magazine, adding to its audience appeal (Currie 1997, p. 464). However, for the girls and young women in this study the incorporation of these stories creates doubt as to the truth status of the magazines. This criticism is based on their understanding that the ‘real’ stories, they encounter in these publications, tend not to reflect their experiences of everyday life. Hence, the girls in FS2 argue that ‘The Craziest Thing I Did For Love’ (July 2003, pp. 52-53) is a space-filler that has very little in common with how real teens act when they are in-love.

The girls in this study are also critical of the way they are addressed and constructed by *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* as a particular type of teen. Subsequently, reading, or not reading, teenzines is influenced by the amount of teen jargon these publications contain. Thus, when Aimee, Nikki and Isobel are asked what it is that they do not like about *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, and how their dislikes adversely affect their reading, they state:

Aimee (FS2): The words.

Isobel (FS2): Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah? Do they just use kind of embarrassing [words?]

Aimee (FS2): [Laugh]

Isobel (FS2): Lame!

Aimee (FS2): [Laugh]

Isobel (FS2): So lame!

Lindsay: Like what? What is it about the words?

Aimee (FS2): Well, just the sound of the word.

Isobel (FS2): They made up a word here. They said, ‘Whadda ‘bout time?’ and it’s meant to say ‘what about time?’ But it says ‘whadda,’ [spells out the word] w-h-a-d-d-a.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Nikki (FS2): Ah! [Laugh]

Aimee (FS2): Another example, ‘Pimple S.O.S’

Lindsay: So, it’s amusing how they put things?

Isobel (FS2): Yeah, but it’s kind of weird.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Aimee (FS2): I prefer *Cosmopolitan*.

Nikki (FS2): Yeah, same.

[...]

Aimee (FS2): It's more grown up.

Cultural researchers based in Australia contend *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* incorporate 'schoolgirl slang' to appeal to as vast a teenage audience as possible (Carrington & Bennett 1996, p. 155). Schoolgirl slang is a stylistic feature of teenzine texts that has been adopted by editorial staff in an attempt to form intimate and knowing relationships between readers and the texts (ibid.). However, as we can see, the incorporation of this form of slang does not always, as in Isobel, Aimee and Nikki's case, result in the desired affect. In this instance, the slang that is incorporated into the magazines is not a language these girls recognize as their own. As such, they label particular instances of colonized slang, like 'whadda' and 'pimple s.o.s,' as 'lame' and 'weird' representations of teen speak. Furthermore, as Currie (1999, p. 154) suggests, one of the primary reasons teenage girls read teenzines is because they want to know about themselves as teenagers. Yet, for the participants in this group, because the language used in *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* does not accurately portray everyday life it is rejected in favour of texts that are written for older readers. This is illustrated in the way Aimee, Isobel and Nikki articulate their preference for *Cosmo*, because 'it's more grown up' and does not, from their point of view, condescendingly create a version of girlhood that they cannot relate to.

The talk of the girls and young women in this study also suggests that teenzines are cultural artefacts that girls literally grow out of. The young women in FT2 articulate this point when discussing their graduation from teen titles, as adolescents, to women's magazines, as young adults:

Kate (FT2): Well you know when you finish *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* and it's like, 'Where to next?'

All: [*Laugh*] [*Indecipherable*]

Kate (FT2): I remember thinking that.

Lindsay: So it is an actual jump, once you finish?

Kate (FT2): I think so.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Rachel (FT2): Cause it goes from like looking at boys, and 'Oh, my goodness!' to sex and stuff, when you're like fourteen [*Indecipherable*]

This shift toward older magazine titles relates to Catherine Lumby's (2001, p. 53) perception that 'the content of magazines consumed by teenage girls are to a large extent, contained and directed by external concerns and expert opinion on what teenage girls are *supposed* to know' (emphasis added). As readers learn to feel confident about themselves as girls they may exhibit a desire to learn about being women. This shift may therefore cause some girls to move onto magazines that are intended for older girls and young women. Shannon (FS1), for instance, describes reading *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* today, as a teenager (14 years old) and how this differs from reading them as a nine year old.

Shannon (FS1): I remember when I was nine years old and it came up with like, 'What is ecstasy? And I was like, 'Yeah, what is ecstasy?'

All (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Shannon (FS1): I know more about it now so its kind of starting to be like, 'ahhhhhh! [*Screams*] I know it already!'

Shannon is no longer as interested in *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* magazines as she once was, because as a fourteen year old she finds their content repetitive, 'ahhhhhh! I know it already.' Where in the past teenzines were interesting because they contained new information, as a fourteen year old they are no longer helpful and as such they are merely flicked through. This type of reading, as noted by Currie (1999, pp. 158 & 179), relates to the way teen magazines are used by girls to help them construct contemporary gendered and sexual identities. As Shannon, and the talk of the young women in FT2, illustrates when knowledge about adolescence, femininity and sexualities is better understood, or personally experienced, teenzines are of lesser importance to the now-educated teen reader. This results in magazines like *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* being read with much less enthusiasm by girls when they are older (Currie 1999, p. 179), for as Jackson (1999, p. 140) points out:

Part of the appeal of these magazines is that they speak to those who are still classed as children, still lacking the rights of adulthood but whose dreams and aspirations are for the maturity and status that young womanhood seems to offer them.

Therefore, when teen publications are no longer helpful in the formation of mature femininities girls reject them in favour of titles for older girls and women, much like *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*.

Like many of the girls in Elaine Bell Kaplan and Leslie Cole's study (2003, p. 145), many of the girls in this project regard *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* as magazines that have already passed their use by date. This is in spite of the fact that all of the teens in this study are under the age of eighteen and within the 'average' age range of *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* readers.² Indeed, of the eleven teenage girls who participated in this project all but two named *Cosmopolitan* as their favourite magazine. Christina (FS1), for example, talks of her reluctance to settle for teen titles when parental guidance thwarts attempts to buy *Cosmo*, 'cause my mum wouldn't let me buy' it. The girls in FS1 justify their preference for adult magazines stating *Cosmopolitan* is 'funny and informative. [Because] it has more adult issues which are way more interesting than teenage issues – let's face it' and 'the sex stuff is waaaay interesting.' Subsequently, while some readers enjoy and flick through teenzines because they are useful, 'you've gotta know how to sort through it and pick out, cause not all of it's relevant to you' (Shannon FS1), others prefer *Cosmopolitan* because it implicitly focuses on adult issues and topics that the girls in this study do not feel are actively and fully explored in either *Girlfriend* or *Dolly*:

Shannon (FS1): In some of the articles you can kind of tell that they're sort of holding back in what they're saying.

Jamie (FS1): Yeah, I agree.

Shannon (FS1): Yeah. And it's like they go into things but they don't go into it in great detail.

The concept of 'holding back' relates to what Lumby (2001, p. 53) identifies as the age group stratification of information in western cultures. Age group stratification of information entails access to particular kinds of information is 'gradually bestowed' to people as they age (ibid.). Particular modes of information are therefore something of a 'rite' of passage associated with getting older.³ However, the girls in the extract

² The average ages of *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* readers is between 14 and 17 years (Nielsen Media Research 2003).

³ This notion of age stratification is reflected in the teen and women's magazines examined for this project, in that where between 12% and 17% of the sexuality pages in *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* are dedicated to the topic of sexual technique only 5% of *Dolly*'s sexually themed pages, and none of *Girlfriend*'s focus on this issue. Furthermore, homosexuality and alternative sexualities are also themes that are more readily discussed in magazines for women than they are in magazines for girls. See chapter three for a more in-depth examination of the differences in the themes of the articles in teen, as opposed to women's, magazines.

above reveal that they want to have access to this type of adult information now, and not at a time when others / adults regard it appropriate. To gain access to information that is intended for adults, and to present themselves as old enough for it, they distance themselves from the constructions of adolescent life that are represented in teenzines. For instance, the girls in FS1 assert they are mature and that as mature girls they have the same sexual desires and interests as adults. This talk also illustrates how adolescent feminine subjectivities are acted out in everyday life, where, as Jackson (1999, p. 140) points out, 'girls of this age' often want to be 'treated as adults, what they are debarred from on the grounds of age.' Thus, in order to appear as adult-like as possible the girls in this study continually articulate contempt for *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* and reverence for *Cosmopolitan*.

While girls in the secondary school focus groups read magazines specifically for information on sex, in contrast, a number of the young women in the tertiary groups view the publication of 'graphic nudity' as a hindrance to their reading, particularly in certain contexts:

Erin (FT1): I think the flicky nature also could be because there's a lot of graphic nudity and big titles saying 'Blow Job,' or something like that.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Erin (FT1): Which can be embarrassing if you're standing in a café or if you're around other people and you're seen to be lingering on something like that. I think there's a certain element of embarrassment, and so you would tend to flick past it and just glance.

Erin indicates her potential embarrassment if 'caught' reading sexual material. Rachel, Lisa and Kate (FT2) argue that reading sexual information is uncomfortable and embarrassing, particularly when they are in public:

Kate (FT2): I didn't look at one too often in case someone saw me looking.

All (FT2): [*Laugh*]

Rachel (FT2): That's why you can't look at those ones [*indicating Cosmopolitan and Cleo*] in the supermarkets cause everyone thinks you're a pervert.

In her work on sex books, Amy Bloom (2003) argues that many women feel embarrassed about reading sexually themed books or articles. This is because, in so

doing, they run the risk of being seen by others to be sexually desiring or as what Rachel refers to as a 'pervert.' Bloom (2003, p. 98) maintains that the threat of personal mortification at being 'found out' prevents many women from seeking information that could potentially have a positive impact on their sex lives. This is due in part to the gendered construction of sexualities in western cultures. Boys and men, and not girls and women, are taught to be sexually assertive, while girls and women are taught to desire the emotional connection that a relationship supposedly brings (Tolman 2002, p. 5). Boys and men, therefore, are expected to be 'obsessed with their sexuality,' to feel sexual desire and to act on it, while girls are taught to yearn for love, romance and an intimate personal relationship with a man (ibid.). Within these discourses, girls' and women's sexual longing and desires are not encouraged, nor are they even acknowledged. This results in the effective desexualization of girls and women's sexuality, where sexual desire and women's acknowledgement and need to experience 'sexual feelings in their bodies' (ibid.) are subverted by a desire for relationships and the formation of emotional connections with men. Acceptable sexual behaviour and feminine sexualities are subsequently constructed in relation to masculine sexualities. Thus, for girls and women to be sexually educated about the pleasures of sex is contradictory to traditional notions of feminine sexuality and the ways normal girls and women are expected to act. As a result, girls and women who position themselves as sexually desiring subjects, interested in learning about how their body works and what makes them and their sexual partners happy (Bloom 2003, p. 98), charter unforgiving territory that is potentially risky, scary and embarrassing. This is because being seen as an assertive sexual woman involves the risk of being labelled as abnormal, bad or wrong. To read sexual information from *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, in some contexts, is therefore potentially embarrassing because 'normal' girls and women are not expected to act in this way.

Contrary to the talk of the young women in FT1, the young men in this study are not perturbed or embarrassed about reading *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo's* sexual content, either in everyday life or in the context of the focus group. In fact, information about sex is something they actively chose to read. In the extract below, the young men in MT describe reading magazines in ways that both express and help them construct particular masculine identities in the context of the focus group meeting.

Lindsay: Prior to looking at these issues of *Cosmo*, had you ever read them before?

Well, *Cosmo* or *Cleo*?

Sam (MT): Kind of.

Lindsay: Kind of? Like?

Sam (MT): Flicked over it, I would say, not read.

Lindsay: Yeah?

David (MT): Yeah. When I used to go to my girlfriend's house. It was more prevalent in the third and fourth form [...] Yeah, young and naïve, I guess.

[...]

Lindsay: What kind of information would you read or look at, when you did read them [*the magazines*]?

David (MT): Probably then, relationships and just – yeah ... the pictures. Come on!

Sam (MT): Yeah, pictures and gossip and...

Lindsay: Pictures of what?

David (MT): Models, definitely models, eh.

Lindsay: Yeah?

David (MT): I was more a visual person. So, yeah, it's probably that perception of males that girls just think, you know, we've got tunnel vision. But, it was probably a bit of both, like visual and reading the text as well.

As with the participants in Treise and Gotthoffer's study (2002, p. 17), these young men read women's magazines to learn about women, relationships and sex. They also, as David comments, use women's magazines as a source of sexual pleasure. This is most commonly achieved through the objectification and use of images of women's bodies as sex objects. Admission of this objectified and sexualised form of reading is, from their point of view, a stereotypical trait that is associated with normative masculine sexuality. They, therefore, maintain that reading women's magazines is motivated by 'that perception of males that girls just think, you know, we've got tunnel vision.' Reading magazines in a sexualised way, as these young men do, also implies, that 'sex is not thought of as a threat to boys – [rather it is something] they are expected to "know" about' (Jackson 1999, p. 147). It is not embarrassing or shameful for boys and men to read sex information because this type of behaviour is indicative of the dominant modes of masculinity that allow boys and men to experience their subjectivities as intact and unified through the objectification of women's bodies (Ballaster et al. 1991, p. 37). This talk also shows that masculine

sexual subjectivities and desires are constructed in ways fundamentally different from the expression of feminine sexual subjectivities. For this group of young men, sexual desire is ‘natural’ and instinctive (Tolman 2002, p. 13); it is an unavoidable outcome of being born male. This construction of normative masculinity is reflected in these young men’s insistence that ‘come on!’ of course they read women’s magazines for ‘the pictures,’ and the sexual pleasures doing so provides.

‘I like reading about how you should have sex and stuff ... [and the] trashy gossip!’⁴

Throughout the focus group discussions, participants state that they read *Girlfriend*, *Dolly*, *Cosmopolitan* and / or *Cleo* primarily to be entertained, but also to gain insight on sex and contemporary sexualities. Accordingly, while the magazines are often read in a mocking and humorous way they also serve a particular purpose in the lives of readers as they learn how to ‘do’ masculinity and femininity, as well as sexuality (Jackson 2005a, p. 295). For the young women in FT2 this means reading *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* for ‘trashy gossip’ but also to learn about ‘sex and stuff’:

Lindsay: Why do you read them?

Rachel (FT2): Cause they’re total trash and you don’t have to think.

[...]

Lisa (FT2): And you get to see Britney Spears wearing really bad outfits like this.

[Shows page from *Cosmopolitan*]

All (FT2): [Laugh]

Lisa (FT2): And laugh.

Rachel (FT2): Fashion tips, oh!

Kate (FT2): Oh, I sometimes like looking at what they say about people. You know, who is marrying who and who has got a child and whose getting fat and, it’s interesting, like ‘Oh! Look at that!’

Lindsay: Just the celebrities?

Kate (FT2): Yeah.

Lindsay (FT2): Yeah?

Rachel (FT2): Trashy gossip. I love trashy gossip.

Kate (FT2): Trashy gossip. And, I’ll be honest here, I like reading about how you should have sex and stuff. [Laugh]

⁴ Kate (FT2).

All (FT2): [*Laugh*]

Kate (FT2): Cause I wouldn't know! [*Laugh*]

Rachel (FT2): I, so, totally – no!

Kate (FT2): And how to give blowjobs.

Contemporary teen and women's magazines include a range of information that is both useful and helpful to girls and young women in the development of identities (Kim & Ward 2004, p. 49). They also, as Kerry Carrington and Anna Bennett (1996, p. 159) point out, 'facilitate an important site and means for a positive transformation of sex into discourse.' The sexual information in magazines therefore provides girls and women with insights about particular sexual topics that they may not normally have access to in everyday life. This is certainly true for Kate (FT2) who regards the sexually explicit material in women's magazines as an important resource of information providing her with knowledge about a topic she has little to no first hand experience of - sex. This is illustrated in the extract above when Kate identifies herself as someone who is sexually inexperienced and who, as such, *needs* the magazines to find out about 'how to give blow jobs ... and how you should have sex and stuff.'

Similarly, during the focus group discussion with the young women in FT1, Erin and Charlotte reminisce about times in their lives when *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* were read for the information they contained on committed intimate and sexual relationships. For Erin this involved buying *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* early in her marriage 'because [at this time] ... things were new and I hadn't been in a sort of full on relationship really ever before,' while Erin 'was interested in the how-to-do's and things like that.' This supports Jackson's (1999, p. 141) argument regarding girls and women's use of magazines specifically for the information they publish on how to manage sexual relationships. Reading *Cosmopolitan* allowed Erin to come to terms with her new role as a married and sexually active woman. This is illustrated in the extract below as she and Charlotte discuss the extent to which magazines are useful, and whether they have ever used them as a resource for information on a particular topic:

Charlotte (FT1): I did, I did.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Charlotte (FT1): I was like Erin. I'd just come here and I didn't know anything. I came here when I was eighteen and still didn't know anything, and I remember I was in high school and the first lesson we're taught, we were international students and we were sitting with 11, 12 and 13 year old children, and we were being taught how to use condoms. I was like, 'O.K. I've never seen one before!' [*Laugh*] I was really shocked. So I was like, 'O.K. I better know this, I better like protect myself.' So I was like, 'O.K. I'll just buy some [magazines]. If I know more it's better for me.'

Lindsay: Yeah?

Charlotte (FT1): So I did go and search and I found a lot and I read a lot in the first year that I came here, and I think I'm getting used to it.

Lindsay: Yeah? You kinda know more now so you don't need to buy them so much?

Charlotte (FT1): Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Charlotte (FT1): I know them. I don't have to read other people's experiences.

Both Charlotte and Erin talk about using magazines for the information they contain on sex. This supports Kim Walsh-Childers, Alyse Gotthoffer and Carolyn Ringer Lepre's (2002, p. 155) claim that, for girls, magazines are a primary source of information on sex and sexual health issues. Reading magazines when you have not had much sexual experience allows readers to become better informed about the technicalities of sex. This talk also highlights what Hermes (1995) refers to as a repertoire of 'practical knowledge.' Practical knowledge, as a repertoire, 'stresses the practical use of magazines' (Hermes 1995, p. 37). In this instance, the magazines provide practical information on sex. Thus, as Kate (FT2) states, she uses magazines because they contain information on 'about how you should have sex and stuff ... and how to give blow jobs.' Charlotte and Erin (FT1) also maintain that these magazines helped to teach them about how to have sex and engage in long-term relationships.

While the girls and young women in this study talk about using the magazines for sex information in the context of everyday life, some also voice concern for younger readers who may potentially do the same thing. This expression of concern is articulated in an attempt to foreshadow the hypothesised effect magazine information has on other people. In the extract below the young women in FT1 discuss their thoughts on the relatively free and easy access girls have to information on sex:

Lindsay: Do you think it's good to have that kind of information out in the open? Like you can read about sex if you want to. Is that good for teenagers?

Sarah (FT1): [...] I think they're more for girls in their twenties. I don't really think of them [*Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*] as being teen magazines. I think they shouldn't be teen magazines [...]

Erin (FT1): The teen magazines are nearly as bad at the moment.

Sarah (FT1): Yeah?

Erin (FT1): Cause my sister is thirteen and the trash she reads is just like, 'My sister is reading about this stuff!'

Sarah (FT1): What magazines does she read?

Erin (FT1): Well, she reads magazines like *Girlfriend*. And I remember reading *Girlfriend*. *Girlfriend* certainly wasn't the same ten years ago.

Sarah (FT1): Really?

Charlotte (FT1): *Girlfriend* was bad.

Erin (FT1): *Girlfriend's* bad now.

Charlotte (FT1): They're all having those things in them.

Erin (FT1): [...] it's quite similar to *Cosmo* and that. And it was sort of like her, and my sister's flippant attitude to sex and towards kissing and that sort of thing is so flippant that ... I don't think the magazines play a good role in the promotion of that attitude.

Buckingham (1996, p. 64) argues that when it comes to discussing the effects of the media, these effects are often referred to as something that happens to other people, while the person doing the talking is somehow immune. This is certainly true for the young women in FT1 who regard the sexual content of teen and women's publications as having a negative impact on the younger people who read them. Participants in this group subsequently construct themselves as mature while positioning people younger than themselves as immature and lacking in the knowledge that is needed to actively question and reject the information magazines publish. This reflects what Buckingham (1996, p. 65) views as the way 'children are typically constructed within dominant discourses' in terms of lack and their 'inability to conform to adult norms.' Where Erin, Sarah and Charlotte in FT1 maintain they are not influenced by what they read in magazines, they also position anyone younger than themselves as heavily influenced and even detrimentally affected by magazine content. This therefore demonstrates that 'when you talk to ... kids [or people in general] the story is the same, there is a kind of infinite regression here, as children

[people] in each age group claim to have already attained the age of reason some years previously' (Buckingham 1996, p. 81). Accordingly, as mature readers, the young women in FT1 contend they are better equipped to make sense of *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, and that this level of maturity means they will not model their behaviour on such sexually inappropriate materials. This is in spite of the fact that, as the previous discussion demonstrates, the young women in FT1 openly admit to having read these magazines in the past specifically to be sexually educated.

Not all of the talk in this study relates to the use of magazines as a source of information. While many participants find magazines useful, others maintain that their interest in them stems entirely from the understanding that magazines are a source of entertainment. Rachel and Lisa (FT1) suggest that their interest in magazines is based purely on their entertainment value, whilst Lisa and Sarah (above) indicate that their enjoyment stems from the willingness of magazines to show celebrities like 'Britney Spears wearing really bad outfits like this,' or 'getting fat,' married or pregnant. This reflects what Hermes (1995, pp. 127-128) defines as an interpretive repertoire of 'melodrama.' Melodrama refers to the way people's reasons for reading and enjoying magazines often focus on things like 'misery, drama, sentimentalism, sensation and paying for daring to rise above other people for being filthy rich.' Moreover, a melodramatic repertoire is similar to that of 'harmless fun' mentioned in Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks' (2001, p. 211) study on men's magazines. Comments like, 'they're total trash and you don't have to think' (Rachel FT2) thus imply that reading magazines for entertainment purposes relates to the overall, generalised construction of teen and women's periodicals as cultural forms that contain 'little or no serious content' (Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 2002, p. 121).

The entertainment value of magazines includes their being understood as texts that can be read with a sense of irony. Participants in FS2, for example, like '*Dolly Doctor*' because it is 'funny':

Shannon (FS1): They've got kind of cool article and like some of the things, you kind of laugh at people, like with *Dolly Doctor* and stuff.

All (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Shannon (FS1): But maybe that's just me. [*Laugh*]

Liana (FS1): Me too, [Shannon]! [*Laugh*]

[...]

Lindsay: Yeah? Cool. What is it about *Dolly Doctor* that you like?

Amber (FS1): It's funny.

Christina (FS1): Like how can people be so dumb?

Although regular columns like '*Dolly Doctor* are intended to supply readers with 'serious advice on personal or emotional problems' (ibid.), this is clearly not the case for the members of FS1. For the girls in this group advice pages are not read for advice but for entertainment. This is because the questions posed by readers are frequently found to be humorous. As Nikki (FS2) states 'I never read the answer I only ever read the question.' The girls in this study also distance themselves from the girls who write into magazines asking for advice. This is illustrated in the way Isobel (FS2) states that people who write into magazines 'sound like real losers and stuff,' which you 'kind of laugh at.' This talk is similar to that of the participants in Jackson, Stevenson and Brooks' (2001, p. 121), as well as Lisa Duke's (2000) study, who reject the advice given by magazines, arguing that advice pages are 'the domain of sad losers, rather than ... a source of practical information or serious advice.' In reading the questions, and not the answers, readers laugh at the seemingly obvious advice people their age have requested. This subsequently allows them to position themselves as more knowledgeable, and smarter, than people who write to magazines. Aimee takes up this position when she states, 'like how can people be so dumb?' This interpretation of magazine advice pages, and their inquisitive readers, also relates to the way advice and health pages seem to reinforce stereotypes about natural and normal adolescent behaviours (Batchelor & Raymond 2004, p. 220). As the information and advice sought by readers of magazines is regarded as 'common sense' knowledge, the girls in this group contend that their laughter, and the assertion that they are superior to the teens who write into *Dolly Doctor*, is not only warranted, it is justified. It is perhaps, then, their knowing that proves they are smarter and more knowledgeable than the 'sad losers' who write to magazines asking for help.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined some of the ways six groups of adolescent and young adult research participants talk about and give meaning to the practice of reading

Cosmopolitan, Cleo, Girlfriend and *Dolly*. The meanings articulated by participants indicate that the act of magazine reading is a highly contextual and negotiated process. This is demonstrated in the way research participants articulate a variety of interpretive repertoires and pull together an array of discourses in their talk on magazines, in the context of describing how they are read and engaged with in everyday life. For example, this talk suggests that the format of teen and women's magazines allows them to be flicked through. Readers can effectively 'pick and choose' from a magazine's content what they like and want to read, while purposely ignoring and rejecting that which they do not like, or find uncomfortable reading. Sarah (FT1), for instance, discusses how much she likes to read celebrity gossip whilst stating she does not like, and therefore does not read 'the advertisements.' Furthermore, both Erin (FT1) and the girls in FS1 and FS2 draw upon an interpretive repertoire of realism as they question the validity and accuracy of articles that claim to be written by real people. This subsequently leads the girls in this group to articulate their preference for magazines that are written for older women, which, from their view, do not fabricate and inaccurately represent everyday life. Erin (FT1) also equates the inaccuracy of particular aspects of women's magazines with the fact that they are low or trashy forms of culture that are written by 'schemers' who quite literally cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Yet, for the majority of girls and young women in this project the very process of negotiation that is involved in interpreting and reading teen and women's magazines remains one of the primary reasons they are enjoyed. Accordingly, participants in this project construct magazine reading as an 'in-between activity' that allows them to read at a surface rather than in-depth level, in that magazines are publications that do not require the same level of concentration as books. Teen and women's magazines are, thus, made enjoyable by the fact that, unlike books, they do not demand anything from their readers (Hermes 1995, p. 34).

This chapter also illustrates how participants draw upon a variety of interpretive repertoires to construct the sexual content of teen and women's magazines, and hence their identities, in socially specific ways. In each of the focus group discussions the girls, boys, young women and young men maintain that they read magazines to learn about sex. Yet, how these readers talk about reading this sexual information reflects the highly contextual and negotiated processes that are implemented while reading magazines. For example, the girls in FS1 and FS2 state that they want to read

information on sex and sexualities. At the same time, they also articulate the view that teenzines hold back on this type of information. This results in the expression of contempt for *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* and reverence for *Cosmopolitan* for the fact that *Cosmo* does not hold back or treat them like children. The girls in FS1 and FS2 therefore use interpretive repertoires that allow them to reject the subject positions of adolescent feminine sexuality that are published in teenzines. In talking about how much they prefer *Cosmopolitan* to *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* the girls in FS1 and FS2 attempt to align themselves with subject positions of adult feminine sexualities, which are made available to them as they engage with women's, rather than teen, magazines.

The young women in FT1 and FT2, while stating sex information is something they want to read, also construct the publication of this type of information as something that hinders their reading of women's magazines. For these young women reading sexually explicit information, particularly in public, is embarrassing. In drawing on traditional discourses of feminine sexuality the young women in these groups position themselves as passive sexual agents who do not, or who in the least do not want to appear, sexually desiring or 'perverted' (Kate FT2).

The young men and boys in this study, like the girls in FS1 and FS2, are not embarrassed nor are they perturbed when it comes to reading the sexual content in *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* or *Dolly*. Indeed, reading sex is something they actively seek out and enjoy. This is because reading teen and women's magazines, and the information they contain on sex and sexualities, allows boys and young men to learn about sex, women and intimate relationships. Furthermore, when reading what traditionally have been deemed feminine cultural artefacts, the boys and young men in this study admit to using magazine images of women as a source of sexual pleasure. Drawing upon heteronormative repertoires in their talk on teen and women's magazine representations of sexuality the boys and young men in MT and MS construct their masculine identities in very heteronormative ways.

Chapter Five

Negotiations of Masculinity: Adolescent Boys and Young Men Talk About Magazine Representations of Gender and Sexuality

This chapter explores the interpretive repertoires employed by one group of boys and one group of young men as they discuss a selection of representations of sexuality from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. The analysis presented in this chapter fills a gap in contemporary research on teen and women's magazines that has generally failed to incorporate the voices of boys and young men into analyses. Attention is focused on the ways masculinities and sexualities, both as cultural objects and aspects of lived experience, are given meaning by boys and young men in the context of focus group discussions, and in relation to everyday life. This allows for an examination of the ways in which contemporary masculinities are constructed in talk as participants respond to a selection of representations of sexualities from teen and women's magazines. This chapter thus provides an investigation that focuses on the ways gendered and sexual identities are constructed and negotiated, in the context of

focus group meetings in response to magazine representations of gay, lesbian and heterosexualities.

Existing literature on masculinity defines traditional masculinities in terms of the active subordination of women, and people of alternative sexualities, by heterosexual men (Connell 2002, pp. 61-62). Normative masculinity is heterosexual masculinity. Sexualities that differ from this heterosexual masculine norm are subsequently subjugated and confined in an attempt to sustain dominant positions of social power, which are intrinsic to the proliferation of normative standards and ideals. Examples of normative masculinity are exhibited in everyday life in the way boys and men are encouraged and expected to be sexually assertive, sexually driven and emotionally detached subjects who engage in sex acts with different girls and women where and when they want (Allen 2003, p. 224). As this chapter will show many of the young men in this study perform masculinities that are in line with these normative standards. For example, when reading representations of sexuality from teen and women's magazines the boys and young men speak of a desire to avoid committed (heterosexual) relationships and to remain single so that, as Richard (MS) states, they can 'party' and have 'fun.' They also frequently draw on interpretive repertoires that denigrate gay men, and anyone who supports them. The result of such talk is that it allows these research participants to assert their status as heterosexual, masculine and, therefore, 'normal' boys and young men.

When normative masculinities are incorporated into teen and women's magazines it is hypothesised that these representations reproduce traditional social and gender relations in which men are presented as 'owners of social capital and agency' (Tincknell et al. 2003, p. 59), who are heterosexual, assertive, active and sexually desirous (Garner, Sterk & Adams 1998, p. 67). In 'The Top 6 Things Men Want' (*Cleo* May 2004, p. 89), for instance, the reader is provided with a list of six sex acts that summarise what 'he's really hoping for down south.' The intention of this article is to inform readers how sex can be made more enjoyable for men. Making sex more enjoyable for men involves incorporating particular skills into a person's sexual repertoire thus, as the men in the article suggest, 'I love a girls to look at me when she's sucking my penis,' 'I like my balls massaged or squeezed,' 'I get off on the fact that a girl can hold it [my penis] with both of her hands' and 'Don't ever

underestimate the psychological value that swallowing can have.’ Another instance in the magazines where heteronormative masculinities are emphasised is in the *Dolly* article ‘Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?’ (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section). In this feature the ‘stud’ (‘Rod Harys’ 23) discusses his propensity for dating and sleeping with different girls, stating things like ‘I’ve slept with about 10 to 20 girls,’ and ‘Do I treat girls well? Yes and no. I’m independent; I like going out with my friends and I don’t want to be tied down.’

Yet, despite the sustained circulation of normative masculinities in western cultures, recent studies suggest traditional forms of masculinity may be in a state of ‘flux’ (Gauntlett 2002, p. 7). This is illustrated in the way newer or alternative masculinities are appearing alongside traditional modes of masculinity, in an attempt to redefine the role men and women have in contemporary cultures. Competing masculinities allow boys and men to negotiate and construct gendered and sexual subjectivities in ways significantly different from traditional constructs of man as an emotionless and sexually driven subject (ibid.). For example, the ‘new man,’ ‘sensitive new age guy’ and ‘metrosexual’ are ‘straight, sensitive, well educated urban dweller[s]’ who are in touch with their ‘feminine side’ (Nazario 2005). New masculinities privilege relationships and relational sex, and the exhibition of sensitivity towards relational and sexual partners. Though the boys and young men in this project, more often than not, construct and perform masculinities that are normative, they also draw upon interpretive repertoires in which they align themselves with subject positions that are more in keeping with newer discursive constructions of masculinities. For example, when discussing ‘Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?’ (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section) Richard, George and Aaron refer to intimate relationships as ‘a blend of friendship and sex’ where they can disclose most things, including their feelings, to partners. This demonstrates not only these boys’ ability, but also their willingness, to be vulnerable in the context of relationships and in the socially specific setting of the focus group.

Tincknell et al. (2003, p. 59) maintain that the publication of newer versions of masculinity in teen and women’s magazines also serves to remind girls and young women that ‘boys [and men] are people too!’ Magazines are therefore publishing images of new masculinities in which boys and men are presented as emotional,

caring and communicative subjects who are not just interested in having sex. Examples of this are seen throughout the selection of teen and women's magazines articles chosen for discussion. In the *Girlfriend* article 'It's a Guy Thing' (June 2004, pp. 60-61) 'Peter' provides an in-depth account of what it feels like when he starts to date a girl. He goes from describing himself as someone who thought he was 'a typical guy – emotions are scarce and any feelings are kept to myself or discarded due to lack of significance' to knowing that he has intense feelings that are 'all over the place!' Similarly, in 'Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?' (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section) both 'the virgin' ('Andrew Bevan' 18) and 'the married guy' ('Phil Smith' 20) construct their subjectivities in ways indicative of newer versions of masculinity. 'Andrew,' for example, states that the reason he remains a virgin at eighteen is because he has not found the 'right' girl, 'I've had a few girlfriends but I'm waiting for the right girl. I want it to be special – I don't want it to be like a one night stand.' 'Phil,' on the other hand, describes his wife as someone who he 'knew ... was the one even before we started dating.' His assurance in knowing she was 'The One' led him to propose to his (now) wife after only two months of dating.

This chapter subsequently explores how the two groups of boys and young men in this project employ a variety of interpretive repertoires on magazines, sexuality and gender through their engagement with *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. This provides us with a means of examining differences and similarities within and between the focus groups, whilst focusing on the extent to which particular interpretive repertoires are articulated, and discourses drawn upon, in attempts to construct particular individual and group identities. An interpretive repertoire approach thus allows for an investigation that focuses on the meanings readers attach to magazine representations of sexuality, demonstrating that these meanings are socially constructed and only partially contained in the magazines themselves.

'It's A Guy Thing'¹

The representation of masculinity in teen and women's magazines has been theorised by contemporary cultural commentators in two distinct ways. Firstly, as Gloria Gadsden (2000, p. 51) points out, magazine masculinities proliferate traditional

¹ *Girlfriend* (June 2004, pp. 60-61)

stereotypes and standards in which reading about men educates girls and young women about the skills that are needed to get and keep an intimate male partner. From this view, the publication of magazine representations of masculinity helps girls come to terms with and better understand what boys want and expect from their girlfriends and sexual partners (Garner, Sterk & Adams 1998, p. 66). Linked to this is the second view that boys and men are incorporated into teen and women's magazines in an attempt to reverse the traditional 'male gaze' (Gauntlett 2005). Contemporary teen and women's magazines are therefore seen to reverse the construction of girls as sex objects by eroticising boys' and men's bodies as objects of a 'female gaze' (Jackson 2004, p. 109).

Despite the theoretical debates surrounding the representation of masculinity in teen and women's magazines, the boys and young men in this project draw upon a range of interpretive repertoires as they engage with magazine representations of masculinity. Much of this talk focuses on the extent to which the representation of masculinity in magazines for girls and young women is representative of men like themselves. For example, the boys in MS regard the overall representation of masculinity in *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* as a 'good thing.' The incorporation of boys' voices in teen texts is seen to make their reading more enjoyable because it provides them with information they can relate to. For example, when reading 'It's a Guy Thing' (*Girlfriend* June 2004, pp. 60-61), an article from *Girlfriend* written in a diary style format about the wavering feelings and uncertainty 'Peter' has at the early stages of his relationship with 'Jen,' the boys in MS relate to what 'Peter' reveals about himself and his feelings. Accordingly, they agree with 'Peter' who states that he likes it when girls 'make the first move':

Aaron (MS): Guys would tend to probably just wait for the girls to make the first moves.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): Yeah. Even though it's always meant to be the guys for the first move [...] But I think guys are more into the girls for the first move.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): I think [boys are] just scared. [Boys] need more confidence, or something like that.

For Aaron, Richard and George, the level of confidence required of boys who ‘make the first move’ is constructed as something many lack. Despite the fact that ‘it’s always meant to be the guys for the first move’ this group contends that boys are often ‘just [too] scared’ to make the first move themselves. It is for this reason that it is preferential for boys to form relationships where it is the girl that puts herself out on a limb, by approaching prospective male partners and making her feelings known. Statements such as this also imply that rather than being emotionally detached subjects these boys are susceptible to ‘feelings of inadequacy’ (Allen 2005, p. 47). Drawing upon discourses that position masculinity as ‘unemotional’ and lacking in the skills of self-expression (Garner, Sterk & Adams 1998, p. 67), Aaron, George and Richard present themselves as emotional beings that frequently feel inadequate. They also demonstrate that, in the process of reading newer versions of masculinity, they are able to take up and perform masculinities in which the assumption that boys and men are the pursuers and instigators of relationships with girls and women is challenged.

For the boys in this group magazine representations of masculinity not only provide them with reading material they can relate to, it also supplies girls with information about boys and men that is intended to help them get to ‘know him better.’ This is illustrated in the extract below as Richard, George and Aaron discuss the advice page ‘Love Doctor’ (*Girlfriend* May 2004, p. 98). ‘Love Doctor’ is a question and answer page in which actual readers of the magazine are invited to write to Luke Jacobz (the ‘Love Doctor’) for relationship advice. In reading this specific representation of masculinity the boys in this group state that the publication of information about guys in teen and women’s magazines is ‘good.’ When asked why this is so these boys state:

Richard (MS): [Because] it’s always good to get a guy’s point of view!

George (MS): Yeah.

Richard (MS): You can relate, rather than [having] all your girlfriends trying to tell you. You might as well try and get a guy’s point of view.

Lindsay: Yeah? Do you think that a guy’s point of view is a lot of the time different from how girls think about things?

Aaron (MS): Yep, yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah?

George (MS): Yeah, I’d say it would be.

In responding to 'Love Doctor' (*Girlfriend* May 2004, p. 99) the boys remark that having information about masculinity in teenzines is 'good' because it helps girls learn about boys from boys, 'rather than [having] all your girlfriends try and tell you.' This suggests that, in drawing upon an interpretive repertoire of gender difference, the boys in MS regard boys and girls as people who are inherently different from one another. Hence, a guy is someone who 'kind of tell[s] it straight out how it is' (George MS), while girls 'work around things and stuff' (George MS). Teenzines, therefore, are useful because they allow girls to encounter representations of contemporary masculinities, which can then be used and applied to their relationships with boys and young men.

The young men in MT acknowledge that men's perspectives are included in women's magazines, however they also state that they do not think men are included in these texts to the extent that they should be. Furthermore, both Sam and David contend that when representations of masculinity are incorporated into women's magazines they often misrepresent contemporary masculinities. Hence, when reading *Cosmopolitan* David remarks that this publication 'doesn't really explain the truth' about men, because it is written from such a 'far right feminist perspective.' In his talk, *Cosmopolitan* is interpreted as a publication that emphasises feminist 'ideals,' like autonomy and women's independence from men (Pierce 1990, p. 497), whilst taking this feminist agenda one step further by exhibiting a persecutory role that, as David (MT1) remarks, 'puts us males on the spot in a way.'

Like the cultural commentators Ana Garner, Helen M. Sterk and Shawn Adams (1998), the young men in MT view women's magazines as publications that are dominated by representations of masculinity in which boys and men are presented as lacking in the emotional and verbal skills of self-expression. This interpretation of magazine masculinities relates to what John Beynon (2002, p. 134) defines as the contemporary discursive construction of 'emasculate men.' The term emasculate men relates primarily to the discursive construction of masculinity in contemporary media that portrays boys and men as 'emasculate, incompetent, hopeless and infantile.' David and Sam are critical of this discursive construction of masculinity and as such articulate their disdain for women's magazines for continuing to present men in this way. Indeed, they even go so far as to suggest that the dominant representation of

men's behaviour in women's magazines is a total misrepresentation of what men are like.

The differences in the way the young men and boys in this project interpret magazine representations of masculinity is reiterated further in the comments below. For David in MT *Cosmopolitan* purposely neglects to publish equally negative versions of femininity, alongside what he views as the magazines' inaccurate and derogatory representation of contemporary masculinities. This is reflected in his responses to an article from *Cosmopolitan* on emotional abuse. Thus, rather than represent abuse as something that men always inflict upon women David comments that:

David (MT): I always reckon it's a two way street, just the elements of respect and that. If it's gonna get published, and stuff ... [well] this doesn't really explain the truth.

David's apprehension toward the representation of violent masculinities in magazines is consistent with comments made by the women in Gauntlett's (2002) study who question how accurate women's magazines are in portraying men and women as different from one another. Like the young men in MT, these readers view magazines as texts that give 'the impression that women are secretly better than men' (Gauntlett 2002, pp. 204-205). In attempting to demonstrate how masculinities and femininities could be more accurately portrayed, David suggests that *Cosmopolitan* should start to include equally negative versions of women alongside equally positive representations of men.

This is not, however, to say that the young men in MT reject all of the magazine representations of masculinity that they read during the focus group discussions. For instance, while reading 'The Top 6 Things Men Want' (*Cleo* May 2004, p. 89), the subtitle of which states 'he might not come out and say it, but here's what he's *really* hoping for down south' (italics in original), Sam and David remark that this article is accurate in what it says about men, regarding what men like sexually. However, because of the sexual nature of this information, 'I like a girl to look at me when she's sucking my penis;' 'Please touch the balls. Frequently! In fact, don't stop touching the balls,' they assert that this is the type of information that should not be available to girls and women who are not sexually active. Sam and David, for example, express

shock when they first encounter this article, ‘You didn’t take this out of one of those!’ (Sam MT). This shock, however, quickly turns to a sense of concern for people who are younger and less sexually experienced than themselves, while they, at the same time, position themselves as men who are somehow immune from the effects that this information can have on readers:

David (MT): This is fairly deep stuff, eh?

Sam (MT): Can children buy this?

Lindsay: Is it too explicit do you think?

Sam (MT): Just a little bit.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Sam (MT): Well, it depends who is reading it.

David (MT): Yeah, that’s right, I mean ...

Sam (MT): If it’s someone who is sexually active, no problem. If it’s a child [well] you know. You buy this and your ten year old daughter, ‘Mum, I’m gonna read the magazine!’ [*Laugh*] It’s just a bit ...

David (MT): Especially if your little sister was reading it.

These young men do not question the validity of the expressions of sexual desire that are published in the above-mentioned article, and yet, they are apprehensive as to how appropriate it is for sexually inexperienced women, ‘if it’s someone who is sexually active, no problem,’ and girls, ‘can children buy this?’ to read it. Stating the article contains ‘fairly deep stuff,’ they argue that girls who are not sexually active, or who are younger, should not have access to information that is focused on normative masculine sexualities. This, however, contrasts with these young men’s attempts to position themselves as readers who are not affected by articles like ‘The Top 6 Things Men Want in Bed’ (*Cleo* May 2004, p. 89). Accordingly, this talk highlights Jackson’s (1999, p. 147) argument that ‘sex is not thought of as a threat to boys – [it is something] they are expected to know.’ Thus, while it is considered inappropriate for girls and women to read information on sex, it is wholly acceptable for boys and men to read this same information. Sexual agency is subsequently positioned in this talk as a masculine trait, where men are expected and encouraged to act out their sexual subjectivities as active and knowledgeable whilst girls and women are not (Tolman 2002, p. 5).

‘We all know romance needs two people, a male and a female.’²

According to McRobbie (1996, p. 183):

Gay and lesbian identities now move more freely across the field of popular women’s and girls’ magazines, existing as sexual possibilities where in the past they were permitted only a shadowy stigmatised existence.

Throughout the focus group meetings with boys and young men images and texts of lesbian and gay sexualities were introduced into the discussions. Despite this, the *talk* of these research participants remains ‘relentlessly heterosexual’ (Jackson 1999, p. 145). This is illustrated in the way the boys and young men in this project consistently identify themselves and others as heterosexual subjects, in the context of reading magazine representations of alternative sexualities. This is perhaps not surprising given that, as Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu and Rachel Thomson (1996, p. 145) point out, heterosexuality is intrinsic to the construction of normative masculinities, and vice versa. Hence, whilst reading an advertisement for *Dolce and Gabbana’s* (*Cosmopolitan* June 2003, p. 15) new fragrance, Sam and David (MT) talk about how much they like to gaze upon the woman in the advertisement, and not the man. The discussion that follows took place after this group were asked whether they liked this advertisement:

Sam (MT): Half of it.

Lindsay: You like half of it? What half is that?

David (MT): Yeah.

Sam (MT): [*Covers the male figure with his hand to show that he likes the portion of the advertisement showing a female figure.*]

Lindsay: The half of it with the woman on it?

Sam (MT): Yeah.

David (MT): Yes, I’d agree with that.

Lindsay: Why do you like that?

Sam (MT): Because it’s a good-looking woman.

There are two interesting things happening in this exchange. Firstly, the young men in MT reject half of the *Dolce and Gabbana* ad in an attempt to signify their status as

² David (MT)

heterosexual men. In so doing, the acquisition of masculine identity is positioned as a homosocial act (Kimmel 1997, p. 232). This refers to the way in which the construction of normative masculinity is reliant upon the articulation of heteronormative and homophobic repertoires as men talk about, or perform, contemporary sexualities (Whitehead & Barrett 2001, p. 19). Heteronormative and homophobic repertoires therefore seek to define normative masculinities in opposition to homosexual sex acts, as well as in opposition to gay sexual subjectivities. By rejecting the image of the man in the *Dolce and Gabbana* advertisement Sam and David take up heterosexually desiring subject positions to 'ensure that no one could ever possibly mistake ... [them] for homosexual' (Kimmel 1997, p. 233). Furthermore, this performance of masculinity also necessitates the sexualization and objectification of feminine subjects (Allen 2005, p. 44). Thus, while the young men in MT reject the masculine figure in the *Dolce and Gabbana* perfume ad they also discuss this advertisement in a way that implies a masculinist reading. This is illustrated in the way they assert their attraction toward the 'good looking woman.' Sam also takes up this position on another occasion during the focus group meeting when he comments upon how much he likes to read articles on weddings because he likes to look at images of 'the bridesmaids.' On both occasions the young men in MT enact heterosexual masculinities in which it is deemed acceptable for men to project heterosexual fantasies and desires onto women (Gauntlett 2002, p. 38).

Through their talk on magazine representations of sexuality, heterosexuality is constructed as a 'natural, fixed and stable category' (Richardson 1996, p. 2). This implies that all other forms of sexuality are 'abnormal' and wrong. For example, when discussing a *Ralph Lauren* advertisement for the perfume *Romance* (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, p. 13), David and Sam (MT) attribute the success of the advertisement to the fact that it accurately portrays romance as something 'we all know ... needs two people, a male and a female.' Furthermore, when the boys in MS talk about 'Girl Crushes' (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39) they contend that it is inappropriate for magazines to suggest lesbianism is 'normal.' Drawing upon heteronormative discourses lesbian sexuality is constructed in this talk as a form of sexuality that does not exist in the everyday lives of adolescents. This is illustrated in the extract below as George, Aaron and David discuss 'Girl Crushes' (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39):

George (MS): It's quite interesting how they've been friends for quite a long time, like since they were quite young. And then one day, when she was twelve or thirteen, she just started having feelings for her.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): I think it's a young thing as well. I think she'll grow out of it.

Aaron (MS): She could be going through puberty. Like, the hormones are going and she's a bit confused.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): Even though she may be experimenting at a young age. But I think once she's older she might change and realise that it was her hormones or whatever.

The degree of normalcy these boys associate with and socially prescribe to contemporary sexualities means that the lesbian subjectivities of the girls in 'Girl Crushes' (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39) are not accepted as 'real'.³ This is demonstrated in the way George, Aaron and Richard explain away adolescent lesbian sexual desire as an 'experiment,' which results from 'puberty' and 'hormones.' Lesbian desire, therefore, is something 'she'll grow out of.' Indeed, for these boys, heterosexuality is so normative it is a social imperative (Sunderland 2004, p. 57). In other words, lesbianism literally *cannot* be the decisive, long-term sexuality of girls. By positioning sexual experimentation as a facet of adolescence, sexuality is constructed as a derivative of age and maturity. Young people are too young, too immature and lacking in the life experience needed to know what their real sexual preferences are. The boys in MS subsequently remark that when teens are old and mature enough to resist their hormones they will reject lesbian subject positions. This implies that lesbian sex, from their perspective, is a form of play or experimentation while heterosexual sex remains the only type of sex or sexuality that is real.

While the young men in MS respond to magazine representations of gay and lesbian sexualities in similar ways, the way in which the young men in MT respond to lesbian versus gay subjectivities is extremely different. When reading 'What it Feels Like for a Girl' (*Cleo* 2004, p. Sealed Section) the boys in MT make comments that suggest heterosexuality is more prescriptive and compulsory for men than it is for women.

³ Adolescent lesbian subjectivities are also not necessarily accepted by the magazines, in that the term 'crush' can be used in reference to the acts of sexual experimentation that many young girls experience while they are growing up.

Though the article focuses on lesbian sexuality, the young men in this group make reference to what it would be like if they were confronted with images and magazine content suggestive of sex acts between two men. At the same time, they also describe how much they would like to see these same sex acts performed by two women. After reading the above-mentioned article, which features a two-page spread of a lesbian couple draped across one another in their underwear, David and Sam state:

David (MT): I reckon good on them, to be honest. Like, I don't reckon you'd ever see a mag with two guys lying down.

Sam (MT): I hope not! [*Laugh*] Can you imagine you open up *Ralph* and there's two guys? [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: Why wouldn't you want to see that?

David (MT): Because! Ah, god, yuck! [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: You wouldn't?

Sam (MT): Fuck no! [*Laugh*]

David (MT): I'd have to burn all my magazines. Like, it wouldn't matter if they were rugby ones or not. It's just that feeling of resentment. [*Laugh*]

Sam (MT): Yuck! [*Laugh*]

David (MT): Have you seen *Ace Ventura*, when he gets kissed by that girl? I'd probably do a scene like that. You just feel violated. You feel violated. You'd feel violated, I reckon.

Sam (MT): That's just wrong. I mean when a guy sees two girls it's like ...

David (MT): Normal!

Sam (MT): Everyone knows that a guy's fantasy is two girls and a guy. Every guy dreams of that, but to see two guys that's just gross. That's just wrong! Wrong! [*Laugh*]

David (MT): Wrong! Yeah, definitely. [*Laugh*]

Sam (MT): Would you like to see?

Lindsay: Two guys?

Sam (MT): No way! Kissing each other! [*Laugh*]

David (MT): I'd set up a fan base with all this hate male to the editor.

[...]

Lindsay: What makes it different if ... [it's] two guys or two girls?

Sam (MT): Cause, I don't know, two girls just make more sense. It's less wrong.

Lindsay: Less wrong?

David (MT): It's like natural, I reckon.

Lindsay: Two girls?

David (MT): Yeah.

Lindsay: Is natural?

David (MT): Yeah.

Sam (MT): Where have you been? [*Laugh*] I don't know, it's just more ... I can't find the word.

David (MT): It's probably not seen as [being as] deviant as two guys.

Sam and David draw upon interpretive repertoires that see gay relationships between two men categorised as an unnatural perversion (Giddens 1992, p. 13). Lesbian sexualities, however, are framed within this talk as natural and 'not ... as deviant' as the sexualities of gay men. The young men in MT even admit to liking it when lesbianism is represented in women's magazines, 'I reckon good on them, to be honest.' This, however, does not signify opposition to the continued proliferation of discourses of heterosexuality in women's publications (Jackson 1999, p.145). Rather, delight in seeing two women together, sexually, stems from the performance of heterosexual masculinities. Lesbian sexuality is considered normal and natural only in so far as it caters to male heterosexual desire and fantasy, 'everyone knows that a guy's fantasy is two girls and a guy.' Here, masculinity and heterosexuality are equated with conquest and fantasy. To have sex with two girls at the same time is inherently more heterosexual, and therefore more masculine, than having sex with just one. The acceptance of lesbianism by these young men thus relies solely upon the role that lesbians have in the construction of normative masculine fantasies (Pascoe 2005, p. 335).

This extract also sees Sam and David take up homophobic positions as they discuss intimate sexual relationships involving two men. This is reflected in the venomous way in which gay men are denounced as 'wrong,' 'gross' and 'deviant.' Michael Kimmel (1997, p. 229) argues that masculinity, historically, is defined in terms of 'the repudiation of femininity.' Consequently it is perceived that men constantly try to assert that they are everything but feminine, primarily because femininity implies penetration and 'to be penetrated is to abdicate power' (Bersani cited in Pascoe 2005, p. 329). To resist the label of emasculate, penetrated and therefore powerless man, the young men in MT exhibit exaggerated masculine behaviours when reading magazine representations of alternative sexualities that involves putting down gay men (Kimmel

1997, p. 236). This, as Deborah Chambers, Estella Tincknell and Joost Van Loon (2004, p. 403) note, stems from the fact that homophobic repertoires are central to boy's lives and to the construction of masculine subjectivity. Thus, throughout the focus group discussions homophobic repertoires are drawn upon in an attempt to assert masculine power within the group. Sam and David illustrate this when they announce that they would 'burn all my magazines' or send hate mail to men's magazines if they dared publish images of two gay men together, 'I'd set up this fan base with all this hate mail to the editor.' Not only, then, do Sam and David present themselves as heterosexually desiring men who fantasise about having sex with two women, they also substantiate this claim through the articulation of homophobic views. In so doing, they actively suppress and subvert homoerotic desire by launching verbal attacks on gay men and anyone who appears to support them, in this case men's magazines. The purpose of this talk, as Kimmel (1997, p. 232) suggests, is to position themselves as heterosexuals by aggressively denouncing the representation of gay sexual subjectivities in men's magazines and everyday life.

Homophobia is exhibited in the talk of *all* the boys and young men in this study in an attempt to construct gendered and sexual subjectivities that are in line with normative masculinities. For example, when talking about the TV programme *Sex and the City* David remarks that he watches this show and that he thinks it is only natural for people to talk about their sex lives with their friends, 'I think it's natural, as well, to talk about it. I personally am not ashamed of my sexuality,' to which his friend Sam jokingly replies, 'So you shouldn't be mate, there's nothing wrong with being gay.' Similarly, as Aaron, George and Richard talk about 'Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?' (*Dolly* June 2003, p. Sealed Section) they tease one another about their sexual status. This is reflected in the extract below as they discuss why one of the men in this feature article is 'gay looking':

George (MS): He just looks a bit happy for my liking. [*Laugh*]

Aaron (MS): [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): You can tell with his face though.

George (MS): He's got gay eyes.

All (MS): [*Laugh*]

George (MS): That's what it is. He does, though.

All (MS): [*Laugh*]

George (MS): Look at him. He's looking at you [Aaron]!

This is indicative of what CJ Pascoe (2005) refers to as 'fag talk,' which is exemplified by the level of joking that takes place in men's talk as they seek to discipline themselves and others away from the expression of feminised sexuality. Therefore, when Sam (MT) insinuates that David is gay, and George (MS) teases Aaron about being looked at by another man, they do not mean to say that their friends are literally gay. Rather, because of the centrality of homophobia in the conceptualisation of masculinity, this talk is meant to jokingly remind their friends of their heterosexual status. Anyone, therefore, can be 'gay' regardless of sexual subjectivity (Pascoe 2005, p. 330). At the same time, however, the act of evoking this language also seeks to present the evoker as not gay as a means of affirming his own status as a heterosexual, masculine man (Pascoe 2005, p. 339).

'That's the furthest thing from my mind.'⁴

The boys and young men in this study also read and talked about articles from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* in which intimate relationships were the dominant focus. Engagement with these magazine representations of sexuality, for the most part, saw these groups of participants articulate interpretive repertoires that served to construct their masculinities in normative ways. When reading 'Do You Really Want a Boyfriend?' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 92-93), an article that debates the pros and cons for girls of being in a long-term committed heterosexual relationship, Aaron (MS) argues that, like the girls in the article, 'some [boys] tend to stay away from [relationships] ... just cause they want to, you know, experience different people.' Comments such as this are reminiscent of, what Karin A. Martin (2002, p. 147) defines as, a 'burden of commitment,' where men's personal commitment to one-woman is regarded as a burden that prevents boys and men's pursuit of and engagement in sexual acts with many different people. Thus, in reading this particular representation of intimate relationships Aaron remarks that the sexual subjectivities of 'some' boys, though not his own, may be enacted via the intentional rejection of

⁴ David (MT)

intimate relationships, in exchange for the promise, or rather potential for, emotionally detached sex.

As the boys and young men read the magazine representations of intimate relationships and marriage supplied to them they frequently spoke of a desire *not* to form long-term and committed intimate relationships (at least not at this stage in their lives). This is illustrated when the boys and young men in MS and MT discuss the concept of ‘The One,’ as it is represented in the *Cleo* article ‘The Moment I Fell in Love’ (*Cleo* July 2003, p. 91). Though the young men in MT are familiar with this term, ‘yeah, definitely you always get that,’ they are apprehensive as to how realistically it represents contemporary intimate relationships. When asked whether they had heard this term prior to reading this article they state:

Sam (MT): Yeah.

David (MT): Yeah. [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: Yeah?

David (MT): Yeah, definitely, you always get that.

Sam (MT): She was The One, for right now.

Lindsay: For right now?

Sam (MT): [*Laugh*] The One comma for right now. [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: So you don’t think there is [The] One?

Sam (MT): Nah, I do think ... I don’t know. I really don’t know. I think there’s one for right now and so on until it’s over. But I don’t know if there’s one for the rest of your life.

This talk connects with Anthony Giddens’ (1992, p. 58) notion of ‘the pure relationship’:

A social relation [that] is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.

From this perspective relationships are not permanent or exclusive (Lawes 1999, p. 7), as the article implies, rather they are impermanent and highly volatile. Hence, as Sam states, ‘there’s one for right now and so on until it’s over.’ This talk seeks to

position Sam as a man who does not expect or desire just one relationship but many different relationships over the course of his lifetime, ‘I don’t know if there’s one for the rest of your life.’ And, while he is not averse to forming an intimate relationship now he does reject the proposition that he will ever be tied permanently to just ‘The One’ (person).

Though the boys in MS concede it is possible that they will form a long-term relationship, they also argue that this is not something they actively desire or are looking for.⁵ When reading the game-like feature article from *Dolly* entitled ‘Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?’ (July 2003, p. Sealed Section) the boys in this group openly identify with the ‘stud’ in the article, stating ‘I think people can relate more to him’ because ‘well some guys like to think they have a lot of girlfriends and stuff.’ Whilst discussing why some boys ‘go out with’ lots of girls, instead of looking for ‘The One,’ Richard remarks that it may be because boys and young men do not generally think about getting married:

Richard (MS): [...] so early on.

Lindsay: No?

Richard (MS): I think when you’re older, maybe thirties or thirty-five, when you want to settle down, have your kids or whatever, it’s a bit different. But I think at a young age it’s not as serious.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): It may be serious, but I don’t think as serious as what it would be later on ... they’re someone to have fun with.

Lindsay: Yeah?

George (MS): And sometimes it works quite well.

Richard (MS): Yeah.

George (MS): And you stay together for quite a while.

Like the ‘stud’ in ‘Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?’ (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section), the boys in this group do not regard intimate relationships as being as

⁵ This directly contrasts with the talk of the girls in FS1 and FS2 who interpreted the same representations of intimate relationships in ways that emphasise their desire to form intimate, and preferably marital, relationships. Indeed, the girls in these groups took the magazine articles that focused on intimate relationships and used them as a jumping off point for a discussion of the extent to which they actually ‘dream’ about the day when they will marry. See chapter six.

‘serious’ now as they can be ‘later on’ when they are ‘older.’ This talk stresses the importance for boys of not committing too much to a relationship or to just one person when they are still young. This reflects what Martin (2002, p. 148) views as the continual need for some boys to complain about and reject the level of commitment that serious relationships involve, which is linked to a particular stud version of masculinity. Though this group admit that relationships can ‘work quite well ... and you stay together for quite a while,’ the prospect of a relationship, formed as a teenager, lasting the duration of life is constructed as highly unlikely. This relates to what Stephen M. Whitehead (2002, p. 161) views as a lost sense of commitment, where today, relationships are more temporary than ever before. For instance, at the time of this study, New Zealand has seen significant increases in the age of men and women at the time of their first marriage, increases in rates of divorce and cohabitation, as well as decreases in the number of New Zealanders engaging in registered marital relationships (Statistics New Zealand 2006). These changes may, therefore, be significant for young people as they decide to form, or rather not form, permanent relationships. For instance, sociological trends suggest permanence is an implausible trait on which to base relationships. Research participants argue that while it is possible for relationships to last the duration of a person’s life this is highly unlikely. Therefore, rather than look for ‘The One’ the boys and young men in this study are content just having fun. Statements such as this are also indicative of the concept of ‘the pure relationship,’ in that relationships are entered into because they are fun not because they are serious. This also implies that relationships can be ended when they are no longer enjoyed. Hence, George and Aaron are willing to commit to another person, however, this level of commitment extends only in so far as the relationship is enjoyable and their continued participation in it is worthwhile (Giddens 1992, p. 59). Though this talk indicates that the boys in this group are aligned with a particular stud version of masculinity, contemporary research suggests girls and women also frequently perform, what Kimmel (2000, p. 221) refers to as, a ‘masculinist’ version of sexuality. It is therefore for this reason that in the next chapter I explore how girls and young women discuss magazine representations of relationships, marriage and sex before marriage.

Opposition to the formation of committed long-term relationships is also discussed by the boys and young men in MS and MT as they engage with magazine representations

of marriage. This is particularly evident in the responses of the boys in MS regarding the 'Dolly Sex Survey Results' (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section) section on marriage. In reading these pages, the boys in MS maintain marriage is not something they, like some of the girls in the article, think about. Richard, for example, suggests there are differences in thinking about relationships and marriage that relate to age:

Richard (MS): [...] I think it's more [you] might think about a girlfriend, rather than marriage. I think you're too young when you're a teenager to think about that. You're young, you may as well still party and get on with your life while you can.

Richard suggests it is more applicable for him to speak in terms of finding a girlfriend than to think or speak about getting married. This supports Giddens' (1992, p. 57) argument that the changing nature of contemporary relationships involves the establishment of relationships rather than marriage. Additionally, much like the young men in Diana Smart's (2002, p. 31) study, Richard states he does not think about marriage or of the day when he *may* get married. Instead, because he is 'young' he says that it is more appropriate for him to 'think about a girlfriend,' of 'partying' and of getting 'on with your life while you can.' The notion of 'party' is associated with the formation of masculine identities that are based on compulsory heterosexual activity (Whitehead & Barrett 2001, p. 22). For Richard, marriage is rejected because it poses a threat to the masculine ideals of having fun. This sees Richard elude to the desire of boys and men to engage in sex acts when, where and with whom ever they want (Schwartz & Rutter 2000, p. 45). By rejecting marriage in favour of sex, when talking about magazine representations of sexuality, or at least attempting to do so, these boys preserve a sense of masculine subjectivity that is in line with normative ideals.

In further attempts to assert normative masculine identities the young men in this group also distance themselves from the perception that they, like women, think about the day when they will get married. This is evident in the focus group discussion with the young men in MT as they respond to the article 'I Do, I Do!' (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, pp. 130-131). When asked whether marriage, as it is portrayed in *Cosmopolitan*, is something they think about these young men state:

David (MT): Not at this stage. No.

Sam (MT): [*Laugh*] No way! Not for at least another ten years.

David (MT): Yeah, not for at least another ten, fifteen [years]. That's the furthest thing from my mind.

Sam (MT): Yeah, no way!

David (MT): Yeah.

Sam (MT): Not in my vocabulary, mate.

David (MT): Yeah, cause at this stage you've got a career to think about, and I reckon it's the main thing you've got to sort out these days.

Barbara Ehrenreich (cited in Brittan 2001, p. 52) suggests that 'the man who postpones marriage even into middle age ... who is dedicated to his own pleasures, is likely to be found not suspiciously deviant but healthy.' Contemporary masculinities are, therefore, based on independence from relationships and the pursuit and acquisition of individual wants and needs. For the young men in MT this is clear in their talk on magazine representations of marriage, particularly in the way they express a desire to put a temporary hold on marriage 'for at least another ten, fifteen years' while they establish themselves in a career. As David states 'at this stage you've got a career to think about ... it's the main thing you've got to sort out these days.' Reading about marriage leads these young men to position marriage as 'the furthest thing from ... [their] mind[s],' while a career, as David Collinson and Jeff Hearn (2001, p. 161) note, is something they currently and actively seek and desire. Thus, these young men align themselves with normative masculinities in which being a man hinges upon the ability to prove, through employment and financial status, that you are successful. It is therefore only after personal success has been achieved that it is possible for men to contemplate the act of marriage.

The majority of focus group talk with teenage boys and young men, regarding magazine representations of intimate relationships and marriage, indicates that these readers are resistant to the formation of permanent, or long-term, intimate (heterosexual) relationships. However, at the same time, the talk of these participants also implies that they are not averse to relationships and the potential benefits being in one might provide. In fact, for the boys in MS having, or at least wanting, a girlfriend is something they are open to. When reading 'Do You Really Want a Boyfriend?' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 92-93), Richard states 'I think all guys do think about [having a

girlfriend].’ Aaron and George reiterate this point in a later part of the focus group, in relation to the same article, as they discuss their desire for a girlfriend and the potential outcomes they associate with having one:

Richard (MS): It’s someone you can have a good time with, just being yourself kind of thing.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Richard (MS): I think that’s the main reason.

Lindsay: Is it like when you’re in a relationship the girl you’re in that relationship with knows more about you than anyone else? [Or] is it just kind of like a more intimate relationship than anything else, maybe?

Aaron (MS): It’s a bit of both.

George (MS): Yeah.

Richard (MS): Yeah.

George (MS): Yeah, a bit of both really. Like if you’ve been going out with a girl for quite a while, she’s got to know quite a lot about you and you’ve probably told her most things. And yeah sometimes guys just want to have a girlfriend for a bit of fun and stuff [*Laugh*], you know.

Lindsay: Yeah?

George (MS): Yeah, so I don’t know, it’s a bit of both really.

Martin (2002, p. 147) suggests that for many teenage boys intimate (heterosexual) relationships remain ‘a blend of friendship and sex.’ This is illustrated in the extract above as George, Richard and Aaron draw upon heteronormative repertoires in an attempt to frame the formation of masculinities in terms of sex and desire for relationships that guarantee sexual satisfaction. They also, at the same time, articulate a desire, and capacity, for the formation of intimate relationships that are based on strong emotional attachments to partners. A girlfriend, therefore, is ‘someone you can have a good time with ...[and who is] going to know quite a lot about you.’ This highlights the complex and contradictory nature of boys’ sexual subjectivities, in that sex is positioned in this talk as a facet, and not as the most important feature, of an intimate (heterosexual) relationship. Rather than present themselves as sex obsessed the boys in MS regard the formation of intimate (heterosexual) relationships as a chance to form close and emotional friendships with girls. A girlfriend is ‘someone to have a good time with, just being yourself,’ she is also someone you ‘tell ... most things.’ This implies, as Louisa Allen (2003, p. 231) points out, that the cultural

construction of boys as emotionally detached subjects, who prefer sex to relationships, may in some ways be an outdated cultural assumption. Although, I would add that the articulation of 'softer' masculinities does appear *alongside* attempts to assert masculine subjectivities in terms of traditional norms. This suggests that in reading teen and women's magazine representations of, particularly feminine, sexualities the boys and young men in this study make sense of these in ways that are relevant to themselves and in so doing employ interpretive repertoires that position them as masculine subjects, in complex and often contradictory ways.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how masculinity and masculine sexualities are negotiated and constructed by boys and young men when reading teen and women's magazine representations of (feminine) sexualities in the context focus group discussions. In response to a selection of representations of gender and sexuality from *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* or *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* the boys and young men in this project debated, critically engaged with and negotiated often contradictory versions of masculinities. For example, the representation of masculinity in magazines was met with apprehension by the young men in MT who view *Cosmopolitan* as a feminist publication that effectively 'puts us males on the spot in a way,' by portraying men as emasculate, immature and lacking in emotionality and vulnerability. At the same time, the teenage boys in MS are appreciative of teenzines for including what they view as accurate representations of masculinity. As such, the talk of the boys and young men in the first section of this chapter highlights the contradictory way with which contemporary (adolescent and young adult) masculinities are understood and constructed when teen and women's magazines are read by boys and young men in the context of focus group discussions. While the boys in MS take up subject positions indicative of an invulnerable masculinity, the young men in MT are critical of magazines for continuing to represent men and contemporary masculinities in this way.

This chapter also illustrates the way in which boys and young men draw upon normative discursive constructions of masculinity. By this I refer to the way in which the research participants put down gay men, and anyone who supports them, in the

context of reading representations of homosexualities from both teen and women's publications, so as to assert heterosexual masculine subjectivities. Thus, despite the increased visibility in representations of alternative sexualities in magazines (McRobbie 1996) the boys and young men in this study continue to negotiate and construct their own and others subjectivities in ways that are consistently heterosexual. Furthermore, in response to articles on marriage the participants asserted versions of masculine (hetero)sexuality that resist marriage and permanent relationships. Yet, at the same time, the boys in MS regard less permanent or dating relationships as a viable and much thought about form of intimacy that has the ability of blending sex with companionship. Therefore, much like the girls quoted in 'Do You Really Want a Boyfriend?' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 92-93) the talk of these boys shows a shift in the interpretive repertoires, and the discourses, drawn upon by teenagers today as they speak about wanting a relationship rather marriage. Overall, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate how the interpretive repertoires employed by boys and young men, in the context of reading teen and women's magazine representations of sexuality, reflects the coming together of an array of discourses of masculinity that serve to construct individual and group identities in contradictory and ambiguous ways.

Chapter Six

Negotiating Feminine Sexualities: Magazine Representations of Sexuality and Girl Talk

The analysis provided in this chapter addresses how two groups of girls and two groups of young women interpret, negotiate and make sense of magazine representations of new, alternative and traditional sexualities. By examining the interpretive repertoires articulated by research participants in the context of group discussions this chapter provides an investigation which explores the 'messy character of everyday talk' (Hermes 1993, p. 501) by attending to the ways adolescent and young adult feminine sexualities are constructed and negotiated in talk.

This chapter shows that readers do not simply take up the sexual subject positions that are made available to them in the context of magazine reading. Rather, the interpretive repertoires readers' employ, in the context of focus group discussions, suggest that the act of attributing meaning to magazine representations of sexuality is a negotiated process. This is illustrated in the way the girls and young women in this project articulate an array of interpretive repertoires as they discuss representations of

sexuality from teen and women's magazines, by pulling together and drawing upon various of discourses about sexuality in their talk. For example, while reading representations of marriage and intimate relationships participants articulate both romantic and realist repertoires. Accordingly, representations of marriage from magazines are accepted and described as aspects of everyday life that girls 'dream' about, whilst at the same time they are rejected and labelled inaccurate representations of intimate relationships in the 'real world.' Therefore, by exploring the interpretive repertoires that are employed by four groups of girls and young women this chapter is able to examine the differences and similarities within and between the focus groups and the ways in which different discourses are drawn together and interpretive repertoires articulated in the process of constructing individual and group identities.

'It's like all of our dreams'¹

For the girls in FS1 and FS2 intimate heterosexual relationships are an important aspect of adolescent life, which they regularly think about and desire. This position is exhibited in their talk on 'Do You Really Want a Boyfriend?' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 92-93), a teenzine article that presents both having and not having an intimate heterosexual partner as equally advantageous and disadvantageous life situations, 'there are things that are great about both being single and in a relationships, and things about both which suck.' Despite the published advantages associated with single-hood the girls in FS1 reject this proposition through the continued articulation of desire for love relationships with boys. In fact, upon seeing the bold print title of 'Do you really want a boyfriend?' the girls in FS1 shout 'yeah!' - for having a boyfriend *is* clearly something they 'really want.' When asked why a boyfriend is important both Liana and Shannon reply 'cause they're guys!' Desire for a boyfriend, in this instance, is contingent upon the heteronormative understanding that heterosexuality is a natural, fixed and universal category (Richardson 1999, p. 3). The articulation of this repertoire therefore helps to position the girls in FS1 as heterosexual subjects.

Not only do the girls in FS1 answer the magazine's question 'Do you really want a boyfriend?' by stating 'yeah ... cause they're guys,' they also contend that having a

¹ Liana (FS1)

boyfriend allows them, as girls, to experience a sense of emotional well-being that is associated with being in-love and being loved. For Amber, Liana and Shannon desire for a boyfriend stems from the understanding that:

Amber (FS1): [All girls] want to be loved.

Liana (FS1): It's true!

Shannon (FS1): And [...] it takes over your whole life if you have a boyfriend cause everything sort of relates, well not takes over your whole life but, you know.

Amber (FS1): It does. [Be]cause you're always wanting to spend time with him and then you've got to spend time with your friends as well.

Claire (FS1): And heaps of stuff reminds you of him, like 'Ah, he has that car!'

All (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Central to these girls' responses to 'Do You Really Want a Boyfriend?' (*Dolly* July 2003, pp. 92-93), and their expression of desire for a boyfriend, is the understanding that all girls 'want to be loved.' 'Love,' in this instance, incorporates an interpretive repertoire of ideal love, which refers to the construction of love as 'submission to and adoration [for] ... an idealized other ... from whom one wants confirmation and recognition' (Martin 2002, p. 143). A boyfriend, therefore, is someone to idolise, in that 'he' 'takes over your whole life' to the point where 'you're always sorta wanting to spend time with him ... and heaps of stuff reminds you of him, like "ah, he has that car!"'

Like the teenage participants in Currie's (1999) project, the girls in this study draw upon traditional conceptualisations of femininity when discussing magazine representations of adult femininities that they have yet to experience. This is illustrated in the talk of the girls in FS1 and FS2 as they discuss the 'Dolly Sex Survey Results' (January 2004, p. Sealed Section) on marriage. When asked whether they agree with *Dolly's* contention that up to '85% of people who read *Dolly* want to get married,' Aimee (FS2) remarks, 'yeah, I want to get married someday.' Liana accentuates this position by making the claim that marriage is something 'all' girls think about and want, hence 'it's like all of our dreams!' Marriage, in fact, is so special it is regarded as *the* romantic social act:

Liana (FS1): You, like, fantasize about [...]

Amber (FS1): Who doesn't, like, plan their wedding?

Claire (FS1): Me!

Liana (FS1): I do.

Amber (FS1): Yes you do! Who doesn't plan their wedding? Like, what they would like to have and stuff?

Claire (FS1): Me!

Jamie (FS1): I plan bridesmaids, but that's it. That's how far I get.

Claire (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Amber (FS1): What? It's true!

Shannon (FS1): Well, you know, you always think about the big day and then a white dress and all the attention to you and the guy that you love standing up there [at the altar], and the piano player.

Amber (FS1): O.K.!

All (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Shannon (FS1): O.K. I'm going a bit too far. [*Laugh*]

The girls in FS1 actively plan for and fantasize about the day when they will get married. This involves not only thinking about the details of 'the big day' but also imagining how it will feel to have 'all the attention [is] to you and the guy that you love [is] standing up there [at the altar], and the piano player' (Shannon FS1). This supports Chrys Ingraham's (1999, p. 104) argument regarding the prominent role marriage has in girls' and women's lives. As the talk of the girls in this group implies, marriage is such an important aspect of contemporary lived femininity that 'over and over again women proclaim they've been waiting for this moment [their wedding day] since they were children' (ibid.). Furthermore, when confronted with magazine images of normative femininities in which marriage is presented as an inevitable ideal, Shannon, Jamie and Amber therefore speak in ways that reproduce a 'heterosexual imaginary.' The heterosexual imaginary is a belief system that:

... relies on romantic and sacred notions of heterosexuality in order to create and maintain the illusion of well-being ... The effect of this illusory depiction is that heterosexuality is taken for granted and unquestioned while gender is understood as something people are socialized into or learn ... Through the use of the heterosexual imaginary, we hold up the institution of heterosexuality as timeless, devoid of historical variation and 'just the way it is' while creating social practices that reinforce the illusion that as long as this is 'the way it is' all will be right in the world (ibid.).

The talk of the girls in FS1 illustrates the extent to which they are aligned with the heterosexual imaginary. When reading magazine representations of marriage the girls in this group draw upon romantic repertoires and in so doing position both heterosexuality and marriage as aspects of women's lives that are universal and representative of 'just the way' life is. In other words, the level of importance that is given to heterosexual marriage sees the girls in FS1 speak about magazine representations of marriage in ways that 'reinforce the illusion that as long as this is "the way it is," in that as long as people engage in heterosexual marriages "all will be right with the world" (ibid.).

Adherence to the heterosexual imaginary further implies that in contemporary western cultures it is expected that girls and young women will get married at some time in their lives. Thus, from within the heterosexual imaginary marital relationships are perceived as an inevitability. Yet, at the same time, participants in these groups also actively reject the notion that marriage is a universal feminine pursuit when they question the normative function heterosexual marriage has in the formation of contemporary femininities. This is clearly illustrated in the talk of Claire in FS1 who, in reading 'The *Dolly* Sex Survey Results' (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section), insists that she does not plan for her wedding. However, this statement is met with animosity by Claire's friends who refuse to accept her position and shout, 'Yes you do! Who doesn't like plan their wedding?' The rejection / resistance to their friend's talk, which questions the prominence of marriage in the lives of girls / women, works to reaffirm the dominant status marriage has in normative femininity (Blackmore, Lawton & Vartanian 2005, p. 322).

The '*Dolly* Sex Survey Results' page (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section) on marriage also includes a list of quantitative research results regarding how old *Dolly* readers want to be when they get married. For the vast majority of survey respondents twenty to twenty-five years is cited as the most appropriate age for marriage. In reading this, the majority of girls in FS1 agree with this statement arguing that it is better to get married sooner rather than later. Like the participants in Anna Sandfield and Carol Percy's (2003, p. 481) study, the girls in FS1 regard being unmarried 'older' women, albeit still under the age of thirty, as problematic. This is illustrated in the way *Dolly's* survey results act as a catalyst for talk about cultural representations

of femininity in which being single, and over the age of thirty, is constructed as a failure. For instance, when discussing the prospect of being older single women the girls in FS1 reflect upon the movie *Bridget Jones' Diary*. They make connections between their lives and that of the main character Bridget Jones, particularly with respect to their desire not to be alone / unmarried when they are older. Indeed, the prospect of being unmarried, or uncoupled, conjures for them images of 'the whole old woman with twelve cats story' (Claire FS1), and is reiterated by the re-enactment of 'Bridget Jones's' fears of dying alone and being 'eaten by my Alsatians' (Amber and Claire FS1). Fears of isolation and aloneness are highlighted in Claire and Christina's (FS1) talk. This is illustrated in the way they use dramatic overtones and generalizations to emphasise what a personal failure it is to be an adult woman and to not be married, or at least to not be in a committed relationship. Hence, the very thought of being single at the age of thirty leads these girls to reflect on particular aspects of themselves that could potentially lead to such a result / outcome. For example, both Christina and Claire ask 'why am I alone? Is there something wrong with me?' 'I'm too ugly to be married!' This not only positions unmarried life as a failure it also constructs the lives of older single women as somehow physically, if not emotionally, flawed (Sandfield & Percy 2003, p. 481).

While the girls in this project do not want to be single for the rest of their lives, Amber and Shannon are also quick to point out that they do not want to marry now, at fourteen, or in the immediate future. This discussion stems from the conversation that took place after reading the 'Dolly Sex Survey Results' (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section) in which a number of the girls in FS1 expressed how much they, like the readers of *Dolly*, want to get married. However, while the majority of girls in FS1 want to be married between the ages of twenty and twenty five years, Amber and Shannon argue that it is better to hold off on getting married until 'you are at least thirty.' This is because the postponement of marriage until later in life is seen to provide women with an opportunity to accomplish what they want to as individuals before they devote their lives to another person.² As Amber states, it is better to get

² This talk reflects that of the boys and young men in MS and MT who when reading magazine representations of marriage also articulate their desire to establish themselves in a career before getting married (see chapter five). Furthermore, the notion of postponing marriage until one is 'at least thirty' is indicative of the shifting ages of both men and women in New Zealand at the time of first marriage. Statistics New Zealand (2006) shows that the

married when you are about thirty because then you ‘get more of a life.’ The statement ‘more of a life’ is made in reference to the fact that:

Amber (FS1): I want a career and I want to travel first.

Shannon (FS1): You can still do that.

Christina (FS1): Ah! Boring!

Jamie (FS1): You can still have a career though, when you’re married, it doesn’t [indecipherable]

Amber (FS1): Yeah, I know but I want to get it started up before I get married.

Jamie (FS1): Why?

Claire (FS1): I agree! I agree [Amber]!

Amber (FS1): Yeah, exactly!

[...]

Shannon (FS1): I agree. I reckon you should have something going and you shouldn’t only rely on your husband. Cause you’ve got to get your career, and you know, get yourself set up.

Jamie (FS1): Yeah, but it doesn’t say that you’re going to rely on your husband. It’s just about getting married.

[...]

Amber (FS1): [...] But, you know, if you want to travel and stuff you might have a husband that doesn’t want to, then that sort of screws up your plans.

Engagement with the ‘*Dolly Sex Survey Results*’ (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section) leads both Amber and Shannon to articulate conflicting interpretations regarding the role marriage has in the development of adult femininities. On the one hand, marriage is positioned as a legal contract that is not entered into by equals. From their understanding, traditional marital relationships require women to become financially dependent upon their husbands (Delphy & Leonard 1992, p. 13). Marriage is also seen to interfere with a woman’s sense of independence, for the very act of having a husband implies that a woman’s life will forever be influenced by her husband, thus ‘if you want to travel and stuff you might have a husband that doesn’t want to, then that sort of screws up your plans’ (Amber FS1). Contemporary

median age for women at the time of first marriage, to the end of December 2004, was 28.1 years. This is an increase of two and a half years compared with those women who married for the first time in 1994. Similarly, for men the median age at the time of first marriage has risen approximately two and a half years from 1994 to 29.9 years in 2004.

marriages are thus constructed in this talk as social processes in which women's lives are transformed from having a sense of independence to being dependent. Both Shannon and Amber therefore resist traditional conceptualisations of marriage via the articulation of new discourses of femininity that seek to position girls and women as independent subjects who should not 'rely on your husband.' This is illustrated in the way traditional forms of marriage, in which the husband is the 'breadwinner,'³ are rejected. At the same time, however, neither Amber nor Shannon rejects marriage entirely rather it is just that they do not want to get married until they are 'least thirty.' This is because waiting until one is older is seen to provide them with a sense of security that comes from knowing traditional marital relationships can be resisted. Subsequently, instead of marrying to become financial and emotional dependents Amber and Shannon want to hold off on marriage until they are secure in themselves, have a career and are 'set up.'

Contrary to the girls in this project, when reading magazine representations of intimate relationships and marriage, the majority of young women in FT1 and FT2 state that they do not 'dream' or think about having a boyfriend or of getting married. This is illustrated in the extract below as the young women in FT2 respond to 'I Do, I Do' (*Cosmopolitan* July 2003, pp. 130-131). On each page of this article a different wedding is highlighted. These weddings are represented in images and texts in a diary style format, which outlines the particulars of each 'big day.' When reading these pages Kate and Rachel remark that they like looking at the wedding dresses magazines publish because it allows them to imagine 'which one I'd want.' Lisa, however, expresses animosity toward girls and young women who use magazine representations of weddings in this way:

Lisa (FT2): I find that really sick! I remember [Theresa] standing at the bus stop in fourth form, when we were on a trip, and she was blimin' discussing what wedding dress she would wear. This was in the fourth form! [*Laugh*] [...] 'Oh, my god, I'm going to wear a little top!' And then all these other girls started joining in. People that I had respected before! [*Laugh*]

All (FT2): [*Laugh*]

³ Contemporary research on the feminisation of poverty highlights the extent to which women's economic dependence on men, within marriage, directly impacts upon their standard of living if they get divorced (VanEvery 1996, p. 51).

Lisa (FT2): And it made me sick! [*Laugh*] And they said, ‘What would you wear, [Lisa]?’ And I was like, ‘Fuck!’ I said black. [*Laugh*]

All (FT2): [*Laugh*]

[...]

Kate (FT2): Have you lost all respect for us [Lisa]?

Lisa (FT2): No, I haven’t lost all respect for you, it’s just the way they were talking about it, like it’s an actuality. The shoes!

Lindsay: Why do you think people talk like that?

Lisa (FT2): They’ve found everything but the man.

Jessie (FT2): It’s an ideal.

Like the girls in FS1, Kate and Rachel enjoy reading magazine representations of weddings as it helps them imagine their future wedding day. Lisa, on the other hand, is extremely critical of this practice especially when participated in by teenagers, ‘this was in the fourth form,’ and people who are not yet engaged, ‘they’ve found everything but the man.’ This is illustrated in the way she voices contempt, ‘I find that really sick,’ for girls and young women who participate in planning and / or dreaming about experiencing the romantic conceptualisation of a white wedding.

The young women in FT2 also resist the ways in which intimate relationships and marriage are represented in women’s magazines in overtly romantic ways. This is illustrated in the way Erin, Sarah and Charlotte question how realistic the *Cleo* article ‘The Moment I Fell in Love’ (July 2003, p. 91) is in depicting ordinary couples who claim to have found ‘The One.’ After reading ‘The Moment I Fell in Love’ (*Cleo* July 2003, p. 91) the young women in this group debate whether a soul mate, or ‘The One,’ is something that exists:

Erin (FT1): Ha. Ha. I thought [The One] did [exist].

All (FT1): [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: What do you think that means?

Sarah (FT1): I think for some people it does [... but] I’m still at that age where I’m like ‘Who knows really?’ I look at my parents and they’re still together after thirty years of marriage and they’re as happy as ever. But then their friends have all divorced, and I think that’s so scary because they’ve all got kids and they’re all families just like my family [...] It just ruins that illusion that you get married, you

have kids, you grow old, you die. As you get older you just start to think, ‘Man there’s no right way to do things.’ [...] Maybe there’s not just ‘The One.’

Charlotte (FT1): People change.

Sarah (FT1): Yeah, people change. It really annoys me when I hear about people that are, no offence [Erin], people that rush into marriage [...] I just think ‘What the hell is the rush!’ People change. You could be completely different people in different places in five years time and you’re just going to end up being miserable and having to get divorced.

Erin (FT1): But then I don’t think there’s ever any guarantee. You could wait til you’re thirty, I mean I’ve got lots of friends who have recently split up and they’re like 38 [...]

Sarah (FT1): That’s why I’ve always thought [...] I’m not saying no to marriage but I’m not one of those girls that thinks I’m going to get married.

The young women in FT1 do not equate marriage and romance with notions of permanence (Giddens 1992, p. 52). Indeed, they are disillusioned by the fact that relationships they have been involved in, where they thought they had found ‘The One,’ have since ended. Thus, as Erin comments, ‘Ha, ha. I thought [The One] did [exist].’ The romantic prospect of ‘you get married, you have kids, you grow old, you die’ is therefore dismissed by the young women in this group as an illusion. This implies that while the teen girls in this project speak in ways that uphold the heterosexual imaginary (Ingraham 1999, p. 104), the young women in FT1 question the validity of such a discourse about marriage by rejecting the notion that permanent relationships and marriage result in a sense of well-being and personal fulfilment that lasts for the rest of one’s life.

Furthermore, as ‘there’s [n]ever any guarantee’ marriages or relationships will last, Erin, Sarah and Charlotte maintain relationships are highly volatile. Drawing upon an interpretive repertoire of realism they attempt to position marriage and the formation of intimate heterosexual relationships firmly in ‘the real world.’ Like many of the participants in Rachel Lawes’ (1999, p. 7) study, these young women propose that ‘permanent, exclusive and happy marriages exist only as theory or supposition, while the reality of marriage falls well short of this ideal.’ For example, Sarah describes her resistance to thinking about marriage as a permanent relationship because divorce is all around her, ‘[my parent’s] friends have all divorced.’ Erin reiterates this position

arguing that her own divorce has served as a catalyst for her 'cynical' view toward marriage and intimate relationships. In these instances, it is the experience of marriage and relationships in the 'real world,' and their lived volatility, that leads Sarah and Erin to contemplate, and not simply accept, the role marriage may have in their, and other women's, lives.

The talk of the girls and young women in this project, regarding similar magazine representations of sexuality, suggests there are differences in the way girls and young women attribute meaning to contemporary intimate, and marital, relationships. For example, while the girls in FS1 position having a boyfriend and marriage as something they 'dream' and 'fantasise' about, the young women in FT1 and FT2 reject this romantic ideal through the articulation of a repertoire of realism. This suggests that the way magazine discourses of marriage and intimate relationships are made sense of by girls and young adults may relate to lived experience (Currie 1997, p. 466). As Currie (1997, p. 467) points out, 'from the vantage point of different life experiences' it can be assumed that 'girls [and young women] could draw differing conclusions about [... similar] ads.' This is illustrated in the way the girls in FS1 draw upon romantic and traditional repertoires in their talk on magazine representations of marriage, so as to position marriage and the formation of intimate relationships as a feminine ideal that 'all' girls aspire to. Contrary to this, the young women in this project relate magazine content on marriage to personal experience. This leads to the articulation of interpretive repertoires in which marriage as a traditional feminine ideal are opposed and displaced as an unachievable illusion. These differences in interpretation and talk implies that girls may articulate repertoires that are more traditional, and which focus on notions of romance and love, when discussing contemporary magazine representations of adult femininities (Currie 1999, p. 133). It also demonstrates that as girls get older and begin to experience relationships first hand, they may reject traditional discourses about marriage and relationships through their alignment with subject positions in which relationships are constructed in terms of reality, rather than love and romance.

‘Why do they assume all *Girlfriend* readers are going to be interested in guys?’⁴

When reading magazine representations of sexuality the talk of the girls and young women in this project suggests not only that they regard teen and women’s magazines as being primarily heterosexually themed texts but that they also relate this normative construction of heterosexuality to their own lives. This refers to the way participants draw upon homophobic and heteronormative repertoires in the process of attributing meaning to magazine representations of heterosexual, as well as lesbian and gay sexualities. For example, during the focus group discussions with teenage girls participants read ‘Girl Crushes’ (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39). This is an article that seeks to comfort readers of *Dolly* who may be ‘confused about your sexuality’ by telling them not to ‘freak out’ if they have a crush on another girl. This is because having a crush does not necessarily mean someone is a lesbian. In the process of reading ‘Girl Crushes’ the girls in FS2 respond:

Nikki (FS2): Ok, that’s weird!

Aimee (FS2): [*Laugh*]

Lindsay: Why is it weird?

Nikki (FS2): Because it’s weird [...]

Lindsay: Do you think it’s interesting?

Isobel (FS2): Yeah.

Aimee (FS2): Yeah, it’s pretty interesting to read about.

Nikki (FS2): No it’s not!

Isobel (FS2): It’s scary, cause it’s saying that you could find out that you’re gay along the way.

Aimee (FS2): Yeah, weird.

Lindsay: Why is it scary?

Isobel (FS2): Cause it’s gross.

Aimee (FS2): Cause I like guys.

The girls in FS2 interpret the proposition of finding out ‘that you’re gay along the way’ as ‘weird’ and ‘scary.’ Like the boys and young men in this project, these girls clearly identify themselves as heterosexual. Part of the process of positioning themselves as heterosexuals involves articulating desire for boys, thus as Aimee states

⁴ Christina (FS2)

'I like guys.' It also involves these girls' participation in a struggle of power whereby the dominant and powerful status associated with heterosexuality is reinforced via their continued articulation of disgust toward the representation of lesbian sexualities in magazines. This is illustrated in the way, when reading 'Girl Crushes' (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-38), Isobel, Aimee and Nikki state that the lesbian subjects in this article are 'gross' and 'weird.' The nature of this talk not only ensures that no one could ever mistake these girls for being lesbians (Kimmel 1997, p. 233), it also reinforces the dominant discursive construction of lesbian sexualities in western cultures as unnatural and abnormal forms of sexuality.

At the same time, reading representations of gay sexualities from teen magazines leads the girls in FS1 to question why gay men are mistreated. This conversation results from considering the article 'Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?' (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section), a game-like feature in which 'Gary' recalls what it was like for him to attend secondary school as an openly gay boy. For 'Gary' being gay at school has been marred by tragedy and abuse, which led him to leave school in Year 9. Upon reading his recollection of high school the girls in FS1 are sympathetic toward 'Gary's' plight:

Amber (FS1): Ah! The poor guy.

Shannon (FS1): Ah, he got picked on for being gay, 'called names and bashed up.'

Jamie (FS1): Well they all do.

Amber (FS1): Yeah, they all do.

Shannon (FS1): That's so sad!

Amber (FS1): I know it's sad, but that's a part of life.

Liana (FS1): It's reality.

Lindsay: Why do you think that is reality?

Amber (FS1): Cause people are scared of, especially other guys [...] they're just so homophobic about it.

Shannon (FS1): Especially with guys.

Amber (FS1): Cause they're so scared that they might be themselves.

For the girls in FS1, the homophobic way in which heterosexual men encounter gay homosexualities, and heterosexual women make sense of lesbian sexualities (as seen in the previous extract), relates to the co-constructed meaning of heterosexualities and homosexualities. Thus, as Fuss (1991, cited in Jackson 1999, p. 173) contends:

For heterosexuality to achieve the status of the ‘compulsory,’ it must present itself as a practice governed by some internal necessity. The language and law that regulates the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system, is the language and law of defence and protection: heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality.

The girls in this study imply boys are scared of gay men because they are afraid that they too might be gay. To combat the threat that homosexuality infers it is therefore suggested that heterosexual boys and men pick on and mistreat gay men so as to assert their sexual status and dominance as straight men. The derogatory treatment of gay men is therefore regarded as an aspect of reality that is enacted via the articulation of homophobic views, which allow straight men to defend their heterosexual status from the threat that alternative sexualities pose.

Despite the fact that magazines do not publish a monolithic or homogenous representation of femininity Christina in FS1, like Jackson (1999, p. 145), maintains teen and women’s publications marginalise gay and lesbian sexualities. Thus, when reading *Girlfriend* she states:

Christina (FS1): Why do they assume all *Girlfriend* readers are going to be interested in guys? What about the lesbians out there?

All (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Christina (FS1): What? Let’s be honest.

Amber (FS1): But then they wouldn’t read that article. It’s one article in the whole magazine.

Christina (FS1): But the whole magazine is focused around that.

Shannon (FS1): But there are enough half naked girls in the magazine anyway.

Christina (FS1): And if they asked this guy off the street, ‘What would you say about a girl?’ Who’s saying that he’s not gay?

Christina’s query relates to the observation of many cultural researchers who regard the presentation of guys and intimate heterosexual relationships as central and dominating themes of teen publications (Currie 1999, p. 25; Wray & Steele 2002, p. 199). As such, she questions the pervasive way with which heterosexuality is

represented in teen magazines when she states ‘why do they assume all *Girlfriend* readers are going to be interested in guys?’ Contemporary teenzines are constructed in this talk as publications that do not make room for lesbian readers. Therefore, to combat the lack of attention that is given to lesbian sexuality Christina attempts to create a sense of camaraderie between herself and lesbian readers by stating, ‘what about all the lesbians out there?’ This position is further reiterated by a number of the other girls and young women who remark that the publication of lesbian sexualities in teen and women’s magazines, when they are included, is a ‘good thing.’ This is because the publication of alternative sexualities allows gay and lesbian readers to ‘feel comfortable’ (Rachel FT2) in the context of their magazine reading, thus reinforcing the perspective that gay and lesbian sexualities are just as normal and natural as heterosexualities. Shannon, Jamie and Liana (FS1) emphasize this point when defining the publication of articles like ‘Girl Crushes’ (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39) in *Dolly* as a ‘good thing’ because ‘it teaches people to be ... more open.’ Articles focused on gay and lesbian sexualities therefore break down barriers in the way they, as Shannon (FS1) says, show readers that gay and lesbian people ‘aren’t so weird ... [that] they’re just normal people who like their own sex.’ Thus, as McRobbie (1996, p. 187) remarks, articles that focus on gay and lesbian sexualities enable the transgression of ‘sexual boundaries to take place, whereby the dominant status of heterosexuality, as normative sexuality, is questioned.’⁵

⁵ Where gay sexualities are concerned this is not the type of transgression that the boys in MS and MT are interested in either reading or experiencing. This is illustrated in chapter five as the young men in MT ‘put-down’ gay men and anyone who supports them by articulating their intention to boycott, and physically harm, any men’s magazine that supports them. At the same time, they also state that they are more than happy when women’s, and men’s, magazines incorporate representations of lesbian sexualities. This is not so much because these representations transgress sexual boundaries but because, as their talk suggests, lesbians and lesbianism plays a pertinent role in male heterosexual fantasy and desire (Pascoe 2005, p. 335).

The representation of lesbian sexualities in magazines is seen to transgresses sexual boundaries. However, the young women in this project suggest that in representing lesbian women and gay men in these texts these same sexual boundaries are reinforced. This is because it is assumed that in publishing such information editors intentionally choose to publish information that they think readers will interpret as pushing ‘the boundaries’ of normative sexualities. It is therefore proposed that contemporary magazines include these types of articles because they want potential readers to buy the magazine. When reading ‘What it Feels Like for a Girl’ (*Cleo* January 2004, p. Sealed Section), an article that features a lesbian couple in lingerie laying across one another, Erin suggests that the publication of texts about or by lesbians is in fact part of an overall marketing ploy that is intended to ‘shock’ readers into reading the magazine. This interpretation of female sexualities in women’s magazines is illustrated in

‘What’s wrong with symbolising ... love by having sex?’⁶

In their study on teen and women’s magazines Kim and Ward (2003, p. 49) argue that magazines for teens are incredibly diverse and highly contradictory cultural texts. For example, teen publications like *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* inform readers of the importance of looking and behaving in sexually provocative ways, whilst emphasising the need to avoid participating in sexual acts. To prevent teen participation in sexual activities teenzines also portray sex as something that is risky and dangerous (Kim & Ward 2003, p. 50). Contrary to this, women’s publications place the sexually assertive woman in a prominent position. In so doing, such publications inform young women that it is important to be aggressive, to attract men to ‘fulfil their own sexual desires’ and to engage in sexual intercourse that is ‘fun, casual and risk free’ (ibid.). This section of the chapter examines the interpretive repertoires taken up by adolescent girls and young women in response to such representations of sex from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*.

As previously mentioned, the girls in FS1 and FS2 read and talked about the ‘*Dolly* Sex Survey Results’ (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section), which discusses *Dolly* readers and their thoughts on sex before marriage. The article states that sex before marriage is something most *Dolly* readers find acceptable, ‘only 6% of you believe in waiting til you’re married to have sex’ (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section). In response to this statement the majority of girls in FS1 argue that this particular representation of adolescent sexuality is something they agree with. However, as demonstrated in the extract below, sex before marriage is only ever accepted if the girl taking part in the sex act is in love:

Lindsay: What about sex before marriage?

Liana (FS1): I’m not even gonna go there. [*Laugh*]

the following extract as Erin maintains that the publication of articles like ‘What it Feels Like for a Girl’ (ibid.) are intended to:

Erin (FT1): [...] catch a male reader’s eye, you know, when they’re flicking the page. And [...] of stimulating] shock value in a woman’s eye. Or, perhaps intrigue in some women who are uncertain about their sexuality. I think they’re trying to appeal to a whole lot of different audiences with this sort of article and picture and layout. Especially the poses and everything ... It’s almost like they keep pushing boundaries. They just keep trying to find more shocking things [by asking themselves] what is going to get somebody’s attention and make them want to read more?

⁶ Amber (FS1)

Lindsay: Is it O.K.?

Christina (FS1): Yep.

Amber (FS1): Yeah sure.

Shannon (FS1): Yep.

[...]

Amber (FS1): If you love the person...

Shannon (FS1): Yeah.

Amber (FS1): Then what's wrong with symbolising that love by having sex?

Liana (FS1): By getting married!

Amber (FS1): But [...] if you were sixteen and you love some guy, you don't necessarily want to marry him.

Kelly (FS1): If you were sixteen?

Amber (FS1): Or thirteen. [*Laugh*]

Liana's identification as a religious person, at an earlier point in the discussion, is reflected in her talk on *Dolly's* representation of girls' thoughts on sex. She argues against the prospect that sex before marriage is an acceptable form of adolescent behaviour. This is illustrated in the way sexual intercourse is constructed as the sole expression and consummation of marriage. When Amber states 'what's wrong with symbolising that love by having sex?' Liana opposes this statement, arguing it is more appropriate to symbolise one's love for another person 'by getting married!' Amber, however, continues to agree with *Dolly's* contention that sex before marriage is acceptable. Sex, for her, is positioned as an expression of love, where as Martin (2002, p. 150) points out, 'a girl's love for a male peer at adolescence often adds a new dimension to ideal love – sex.' Like many girls, all but one in FS1 utilise repertoires of love and romance in response to the '*Dolly Sex Survey Results*' (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section). This serves to justify girls' participation in sexual activities, particularly from a young age (Giddens 1992, p. 10). Love, therefore, is a prerequisite for having sex. Thus, despite the fact that pleasure may derive from loving relational sex, normative conceptualisations of feminine sexuality regard sex, without love, or for pleasure as un-acceptable. This point is accentuated by Shannon and Amber when reading the '*Dolly Sex Survey Results*':

Shannon (FS1): [...] You could feel better about someone who's thirteen and is completely in love, having sex, than you would about a seventeen year old having sex with some random guy.

Lindsay: Yeah?

[...]

Shannon (FS1): I mean it can be more special when you're thirteen and in love [...]

Claire (FS1): Than sixteen and dying to have sex just for the sake of it.

Shannon (FS1): Yeah.

[...]

Lindsay: So love is also a big thing in having sex?

Amber (FS1): Yeah.

Shannon (FS1): Yes.

Liana (FS1): It is. Like, you know, how they say 'making love?'

All (FS1): [*Laugh*]

Christina (FS1): Making love! [*Laugh*]

While 'only 6% of [*Dolly* readers] believe in waiting til you're married to have sex' (*Dolly* January 2004, p. Sealed Section), the girls in FS1 complicate this statement by adding the perspective that feelings of love for another person make it acceptable to have sex with them. This linkage between sex and love, however, frames girls' and women's sexualities entirely in relation to masculine sexualities (Segal 1994, p. 45), where acceptable sex is that which is participated in as part of a loving and committed heterosexual couple (Schwartz & Rutter 2000, p. 45). In other words, girls and women literally need a man in order to be sexually active. While *Dolly* remarks that the majority of readers believe in having sex before they get married it does not account for the fact that, as these research participants point out, sex is not pursued for pleasure's sake, as some social critics would suggest (Bantick 2004; Brooker 2004; *Morality in Media* cited in Gauntlett 2002). Rather, as Tolman (2002, p. 5) argues girls' sexualities are effectively desexualised, thus making the expression of sexual feelings in girls' bodies secondary to their desire for relationships and emotional connections with boys and men.

This conceptualisation of feminine sexuality is linked to what Susan M. Jackson and Fiona Cram (2003, p. 114) view as a sexual double standard. This refers to the way in which women are traditionally positioned as the 'passive objects of male sexual desire, need and want' and not as active sexual subjects in their own right (ibid.). This position is highlighted in the talk of the girls in FS2, when reading 'Can You Guess Which Guy Is...?' (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section). This article features a guy

who is labelled as a ‘stud.’ In reading this, the girls in FS2 reflect upon their own lives and on the lives of young men they know who have had sex with many different women:

Aimee (FS2): [...] This guy’s not like a player or anything, he’s just normal, ‘I’ve slept with about ten to twenty girls.’ Fuck!

Isobel (FS2): That’s not that bad!

Aimee (FS2): O.K. slut! [*Laugh*]

Isobel (FS2): Think about it, [Mike], and he’s really ugly.

Aimee (FS2): Yeah, but it’s still gross.

Isobel (FS2): How old is he? Twenty-three!

Aimee (FS2): You get, like diseases and shit!

[...]

Nikki (FS2) Are they all different people?

Isobel (FS2): Yeah, ten to twenty. [...] Well, [Tim’s] eighteen and he’s like had sex with girls, like one for each year. Eighteen.

[...]

Lindsay: So is there like an ok number of people to sleep with, do you think?

Isobel (FS2): Well, at our age, not many is good.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Isobel (FS2): Like [Samantha], that’s wrong.

Aimee (FS2): Yeah.

Isobel (FS2): She’s had sex with like fifteen other people.

Nikki (FS2): Has she?

Isobel (FS2): Yeah, she’s a real whore!

Lindsay: So what is it like with guys your age?

Isobel (FS2): They can screw anything they want.

For the girls in FS2 ‘the stud’ in ‘Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?’ (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section) is not recognized as such, rather he is labelled a normal guy. This interpretation is justified via the understanding that boys and young men whom they know have slept with as many as ‘one [girl] for each year’ that they have been alive. Another interesting dynamic of this talk is the way these girls position sexually active girls and young women as ‘sluts’ while defining sexually promiscuous boys and young men as studs (Jackson & Cram 2003, p. 117). Drawing upon a repertoire of the sexual double standard the girls in FS2 chastise Tim and Mike for having sex with

a lot of girls. However, at the same time, these boys are not labelled ‘whores’ in the way Samantha is. Indeed, while Samantha remains a whore for having slept ‘with like fifteen other people’ it is recognized that, as boys, Tim and Mike ‘can screw anything they want.’ At a later point in the discussion the girls in FS2 even question how ‘fair’ it is for feminine sexualities to be constructed and controlled in ways that are significantly different from the construction of contemporary masculine sexualities. When asked why it is not socially acceptable for girls to sleep with different people, outside the confines of a relationship, while the opposite is true for boys, the girls in FS2 state:

Aimee (FS2): It’s not fair.

Isobel (FS2): It’s not fair, but then they have to carry more diseases and they have to get pregnant and stuff, so it’s reasonable.

Lindsay: Yeah?

Aimee (FS2): Yeah, but we still get called sluts.

Isobel (FS2): So.

Aimee (FS2): Like you said, ‘she’s a whore!’

Isobel (FS2): Well she is a whore.

Aimee (FS2): And guys are like ‘Yeah!’

Nikki (FS2): ‘I did this to her!’ and they’re like ‘shot!’

Kimmel (2000, p. 222) argues that the sexual double standard is a product of gender inequality. It is not a natural given but an aspect of everyday life that is taught. Isobel is aligned with the concept of the sexual double standard and has learnt to regard girls and women who ‘sleep around’ as sluts and whores. According to her, the articulation of this repertoire is justified because it highlights the perception that girls and women can easily become sources of disease and unwanted pregnancies. Hence, because ‘[girls] have to carry more diseases and they get pregnant and stuff ... [the sexual double standard] is reasonable.’ At the same time, Aimee and Nikki, like the young women in Allen’s study (2003, p. 221), resist representations of sexuality in which sex is portrayed as dangerous. Both Aimee and Nikki contend that it is not fair that girls and women are called ‘sluts’ and ‘whores’ for having sex, while men’s sexual activity is celebrated. The expression and celebration of a stud masculinity is further emphasised in the way boys and men brag about their sexual conquests saying things like ‘I did this to her!’ and ‘shot!’ after having sex. Therefore, while Isobel views girls

who engage in masculinized sexuality (Kimmel 2000, p. 221) as ‘whores,’ Nikki and Aimee argue against the gendered nature of sexual labelling, arguing that it is not appropriate for girls to attain a sexual reputation and negative identity for having sex, while boys do not.

Throughout the focus group discussions the young women in FT1 and FT2 discussed a selection of representations of sex from *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* indicative of newer discourses about feminine sexuality. By this I refer to the way in which articles such as ‘10 Secrets of Women Who Love Sex’ (*Cosmopolitan* June 2003, p. Sealed Section) and ‘The Safe Guide to “No Strings” Sex’ (*Cleo* December 2003, pp. 94-95) portray young women as independent, powerful and active sexual agents, whose sexual subjectivities exist outside the confines of masculine sexuality and desire (Jackson 2005a, p. 297). However, in the extracts that follow, such new representations of feminine sexuality from the magazines are met with resistance by many of the young women in this project. For example, these young women position themselves as readers for whom ‘sleeping around’ is not an acceptable practice. When reading ‘The Safe Guide to “No-Strings” Sex’ (*Cleo* December 2003, pp. 94-95), Sarah (FT1) states:

This woman is basically saying that [causal sex] is O.K. and I don’t think it is. I don’t think [...] you should be writing that where women will read it and think, ‘Oh, so I can sleep around.’ I’m not saying women are stupid, but you just don’t write that [...] I think that’s just giving a bad impression.

Casual sex is not ‘O.K.’ for Sarah. She regards the representation of this type of sexuality in magazines as inappropriate because it promotes forms of sex that are risky and dangerous. This indicates that Sarah, like the girls in FS1 and FS2 and the publishers of teenzines, considers ‘casual sex’ to be something that needs to be safely negotiated. At the same time, she is also quick to point out that ‘women are not stupid.’ This implies that although she regards magazine representations of new sexuality as telling women to ‘sleep around’ she does not think magazine readers will simply enact this behaviour. Furthermore, at a later point in the discussion, Sarah even praises women’s engagement in causal sex because it promotes a newfound sense of confidence and freedom:

Sarah (FT1): I think it's good in a way cause I think women are so free now that they have the confidence to do that. But then I think, that [it's] not really good cause I think of all of the diseases that you could get. I think it's dangerous. It's very dangerous [...]

Lindsay: Yeah?

Sarah (FT1): Yeah. I think it's dangerous in terms of you don't know that person, you know diseases, pregnancy and stuff like that [...] It's very dangerous.

Sarah's talk, in this instance, shows her negotiation of the interpretive repertoires of 'danger' and 'pleasure' in response to her reading of the *Cleo* article 'The Safe Guide to "No-Strings" Sex' (*Cleo* December 2003, pp. 94-95). On the one hand, Sarah remarks that the representation of sex and pleasure in women's magazines is fundamentally a 'good' thing. On the other hand, she is quick to point out that sex is dangerous. Like the girls in FS2, Sarah is wary of the diseases women can catch when engaging in casual sex. This reflects the discursive construction of intercourse, for women, as a risky and dangerous sexual practice because it can lead to the acquisition of STD's and unwanted pregnancy (Ryan & Gavey 1998, p. 147). At the same time, Sarah also suggests that sexual pleasure is now a fundamental 'right' that has resulted in women's 'increased confidence and control over their lives' (Segal 1994, p. 307). Thus, while women can have sex when, where and with whom they want, this form of behaviour is not always recommended. Nor, as we have seen, is it necessarily accepted as appropriate female behaviour by many of the girls and young women in this project, who continue to articulate interpretive repertoires indicative of their alignment with traditional discourses about feminine sexualities.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that in reading magazine representations of sexuality the girls and young women in this project speak about, and subsequently construct their subjectivities, in a variety of complex and often contradictory ways. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this talk is the extent to which the girls and young women articulate an array of interpretive repertoires, which indicate their alignment with a mixture of both new and traditional discourses about feminine sexualities. This is evident in the way sex is constructed by participants as an act that should be participated in by girls and women who are in love, and not by women or girls who

are simply seeking sexual pleasure or release. The girls and young women in this project also respond to magazine representations of sex in ways that suggest the taking up of subject positions that are in line with the sexual double standard. Accordingly, when discussing a representation of stud masculinity from *Dolly* the girls in FS2 maintain that it is justifiable for the sexual double standard to be applied to the sexual subjectivities of girls and young women because they remain the constructed sources of disease and unwanted pregnancy, 'they [women] have to carry more diseases and they have to get pregnant and stuff, so [the sexual double standard] is reasonable.'

For the most part, the girls and young women in this project also articulate heteronormative and homophobic repertoires in response to magazine discourses about lesbianism. This works to position heterosexuality as the only natural form, and expression, of sexual subjectivity for women. For example, when reading 'Girl Crushes' (*Dolly* September 2003, pp. 38-39) the girls in FS2 maintain that the appearance of lesbian sexualities in magazines is 'weird,' 'scary' and 'gross' because articles such as this serve to suggest that 'you could find out that you're gay along the way.' Therefore, because the girls in this group 'like guys,' they put down lesbianism so as to assert their heterosexual status. At the same time, the way in which girls and young women respond to gay sexualities is significantly different from how they respond to lesbian sexualities. This is illustrated in the way the girls in FS1 express a sense of empathy for 'Gary' the gay man identified in 'Can You Guess Which Guy Is ...?' (*Dolly* July 2003, p. Sealed Section), who recalls times in his life when he has been harmfully treated because of his sexuality. Thus, where magazine representations of lesbianism are interpreted as 'gross' and 'scary,' the fact that gay men also get 'called names and bashed up' is just seen as being 'so sad.'

This chapter has also shown there are significant differences in the way the girls and young women respond to similar magazine representations of intimate relationships and marriage. Where the girls in FS1 and FS2 draw upon repertoires of love and romance to justify their interpretation of magazine representations of marriage and intimate relationships as something they 'dream about,' the young women in FT1 and FT2 reject the role intimate relationships and marriage have in women's lives as a universal standard and ideal of femininity. Overall, this chapter has demonstrated that

the talk of the girls in this project shows there to be a propensity for these participants to draw upon discourses that are traditional when discussing contemporary magazine representations of 'adult' femininities, such as marriage (Currie 1999, p. 133). This is illustrated in the way they speak in ways indicative of repertoires of romance and ideal love. At the same time, however, this chapter has also shown that as girls get older, and begin to experience intimate relationships first hand, they may reject traditional discourses of marriage and intimate relationships, as in the talk of the young women in FT1 and FT2 who draw on repertoires of realism rather than those of love and romance.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This thesis explores how *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, and a selection of representations of sexuality from within them, are read by six groups of adolescents and young adults living in Christchurch, Aotearoa / New Zealand in late 2004. Influenced by contemporary moral panics and feminist analyses that have chastised teen and women's periodicals for being 'too sexed up' (Donaldson-Evans 2002) or too traditional (Alexander 1999; Wray & Steele 2002), this work demonstrates how magazine reading allows readers to think and talk about magazines, sexuality, sex and gender in a variety of complex, contradictory and often ambiguous ways. For example, throughout the focus group discussions the practices and strategies of magazine reading are constructed as highly contextual and negotiated processes. On the one hand, magazines are viewed as an in-between activity, the format of which allows them to be flicked through by readers. The editorial construction of contemporary teen and women's magazines also enables readers to pick and choose what they like, do not like, or find uncomfortable reading. Sarah in FT1 illustrates this

position when discussing her penchant for reading the celebrity gossip that magazines publish, whilst also establishing her dislike of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*'s advertisements. Both the girls and young women in this project also draw upon repertoires of realism in their talk so as to decipher how valid, accurate and trustworthy contemporary teen and women's magazines are. For girls, this involves rejecting magazines that are targeted at their age group (*Girlfriend* and *Dolly*) because they are seen to inaccurately portray adolescent life through the use of teen jargon and the publication of stories that do not accurately reflect these teen's everyday lives. Erin (FT1) is also reticent toward the publication of stories, in women's magazines, that are written by 'real' people. This subsequently leads her to question and equate the inaccuracy of such stories with the understanding that women's magazines are low or trashy forms of culture that cannot be trusted to tell the truth. And yet, contrary to the oppositional repertoires and discourses drawn upon by participants in response to *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* all of these groups cited these particular publications as resources of information that they use, or have used in the past, to help them learn about intimate relationships and sex. This indicates that the negotiated processes and strategies involved in magazine reading allow readers to actively and critically engage with magazines whilst constructing them as cultural texts which, as Walsh-Childers, Gotthoffer and Ringer Lepre (2002, p. 155) suggest, may be one of 'the most important mass media sources' teens and young adults engage with in the context of everyday life.

This study does not, however, focus solely on the strategies and practices of magazine reading that the research participants in this project articulated in the context of focus group discussions. Indeed, as the title of this thesis implies the primary focus of this work is the ways in which adolescents and young adults negotiate and perform sexualities whilst reading magazine representations of sexualities, in the socially specific context of focus group meetings. The focus group discussions with girls, boys, young men and young women illustrate how masculine and feminine sexualities are negotiated interactively through talk. For example, in reading magazine representations of alternative sexualities research participants articulate a variety of interpretive repertoires in an attempt to construct their own, and other's, subjectivities in normative ways. Hence, as each of the chapters show, group talk regarding magazine representations of alternative sexualities remains primarily heterosexual.

This is illustrated in the way focus group participants draw upon particular discourses in their talk on magazine representations of gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual sexualities, which work to uphold the dominant construction of alternative sexualities as ‘abnormal’ and ‘unnatural’ forms of sexuality. Thus, during focus group discussions with boys and girls magazine representations of lesbianism are not only labelled ‘weird’ and ‘scary’ they are also interpreted as unrealistic and inaccurate representations of adolescent sexual subjectivity. Furthermore, because lesbianism is regarded by these teenage groups as abnormal this further leads the girls in FS1 and FS2 to assert their status as heterosexual, and therefore normal, teens. The boys, on the other hand, consistently articulate normative discourses of masculinity as they discuss their ability and willingness to objectify women’s bodies when they are featured in teen and women’s magazines. Therefore, in articulating desire for people of the opposite sex the girls and boys and each of these groups are able to ensure that no one could ever possibly mistake them for being gay / lesbian (Kimmel 1997, p. 233).

Contrary to the talk of the teenage boys and girls in this project the young men in MT stipulate that the representation of lesbianism in teen and women’s magazines is a ‘good thing.’ However, the publication of lesbianism in women’s magazines is not accepted or encouraged because it problematizes heteronormative ideals (McRobbie 1996, pp. 58-59). Rather, these young men regard the publication of lesbianism in magazines as ‘good’ because, in viewing images and texts about lesbianism, they are able to take up subjectivities that are in line with normative masculinities. In other words, magazine representations of lesbianism are accepted and celebrated because viewing / reading them allows the young men in this group to take up normative masculine subject positions. Taking up normative heterosexualities in the context of the focus group discussions is further illustrated in the talk of the young men and girls, respectively, as they articulate heteronormative and homophobic repertoires in an attempt to denounce the publication and existence of gay sexualities, particularly in men’s magazines in the case of the young men, and lesbian sexualities in teen magazines in the case of the girls. And yet, the strategies of interpretation employed by the girls in FS1 suggest not only that some of the readers in this group are sympathetic toward lesbian readers, who are generally left out of these publications, but also that they are aware of the extent to which the subjugation of alternative

sexualities in magazines is reflective of everyday life. In voicing contempt toward the continued heteronormative construction of sexualities in teen and women's magazines these girls take up subject positions in which they, at least, seem open to the fact that lesbian sexualities are 'sexual possibilities' (McRobbie 1996, p. 58) that are just as normal and acceptable as heterosexualities.

Throughout the focus group discussions research participants also expressed their thoughts on a number of articles from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* that are indicative of traditional sexualities. For the most part these are images and texts that focus on themes to do with intimate relationships, love, romance and marriage. This thesis has shown that in reading these texts participants make sense of traditional magazine representations of sexualities in ways that are relevant to their own lives. This is enabled via processes and strategies of interpretation that allow them to employ a variety of interpretive repertoires, and to draw together various discourses, in their talk. For example, when reading magazine representations of intimate relationships and marriage the young men, and a number of girls in this study, express their desire to hold off on marriage until they are older and have established themselves in careers. The young women in FT1 and FT2 even go so far as to reject the traditional notion that marriage and intimate relationships are important and dominating features of girls and women's lives. For the young men, this talk highlights their alignment with normative masculinities in which having sex with many different women takes precedent over the formation of committed and lasting relationships with just one person. Girls and young women who oppose the dominant role intimate heterosexual relationships and marriage have in traditional conceptualisations of women's lives are subsequently seen to reject, or in the least oppose, traditional feminine subject positions. This is illustrated in the way they articulate contempt for representations of feminine sexualities in which success is regarded as women's ability to attract and maintain an intimate, and preferably marital, relationship with a man.

At the same time, however, the research participants in this project also spoke in ways indicative of their alignment with particular discourses about sexuality that uphold intimate heterosexual relationships and marriage as important aspects of femininity. Indeed, nowhere is this more evident than in the talk of the girls in FS1 and FS2, and

a few of the young women in FT2, who state that having a boyfriend and getting married are aspects of everyday life that they ‘dream’ about and desire. Further linked to this understanding of magazine representations of traditional sexualities is the talk of the boys who, like the girl participants, maintain that relationships are something they want, even though they are averse to forming committed and marital relationships at this stage in their lives. Indeed, where the talk of the girls in FS1 and FS2 highlights the talking up of femininities that are traditional, the boy’s talk is significant because it shows that this group do not reject relationships, as normative masculine norms would demand. This therefore suggests that where the young women, and some girls, in the project align themselves with newer discourse of femininity in the context of discussing magazine representations of intimate relationships and marriage, the boys in MS also draw upon newer versions of masculinity. However, in this instance, the talk of these boys illustrates how normative discursive constructions of boys and men as emotionally detached subjects can be resisted via the articulation of desire for intimate and knowing relationships with girls.

This project also shows that in spite of the proliferation of new discourses of feminine sexuality in teen and women’s magazines readers continue to interpret these representations in ways that uphold traditional femininities. For example, the act of reading magazines led the young women in FT1 to indicate that ‘graphic nudity,’ when it appears in *Cosmopolitan* or *Cleo*, hinders their reading of these publications, particularly in public settings, because they do not want to seem or be seen as ‘perverted.’ This group of readers also question the appropriateness of magazine articles in which women, and girls, are told that it is ‘O.K.’ to ‘sleep around.’ Thus, although the young women in FT1 recognise that the proliferation of newer discourses about feminine sexuality have led to the promotion of a new found sense of freedom for women, casual sex is not something they think women should be informed about because it is ‘dangerous.’ Contrary to this, the girls in this project view representations of active feminine sexualities in magazines positively. And yet, at the same time, they also adhere to particular discourses in their interpretation of girls’ engagement in sex before marriage. This is illustrated in the way they articulate interpretive repertoires that demonstrate their alignment with traditional discourses, which they utilise to try and substantiate their claims that it is only ever acceptable for

girls and women to have sex if they are in love. Furthermore, the girls in FS1 and FS2 also make it perfectly clear, when reading representations of active feminine sexualities, that it is important that girls do not have sex with too many people. Thus in drawing upon a repertoire of gender difference the girls in this project seek to justify the discursive construction of feminine sexualities as being not as free, active or assertive as masculine sexualities.

This thesis has explored the ways in which six groups of adolescents and young adults articulate various interpretive repertoires in the process of drawing together particular discourses about sexuality, in response to a selection of representations of sexuality from *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*. Unlike contemporary cultural commentators who suggest magazine reading leads readers to take up subject positions that are either ‘too sexed up’ (Bantick 2004; Brooker 2004) or ‘too traditional’ (Alexander 1999; Wray & Steele 2002), this study has shown that the process of reading and attributing meaning to magazine representations of sexualities is much more of a negotiated process than these commentators suggest. Indeed, as the talk of the participants in this project shows the articulation and performance of masculine and feminine sexual subjectivities is a highly contradictory, contextual, negotiated and often ambiguous process. Accordingly, this thesis provides some insight into the way sexualities are negotiated, produced and contested as boys, girls, young women and young men read and respond to representations of contemporary sexualities from popular teen and women’s magazines.

Appendix Two

Tertiary Student Information Sheet

Reading Representations of Sexualities in Teen and Women's Magazines

Are you a tertiary student?
Are you between 19 and 30 years of age?
Have you ever read the magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*?

If you answered YES!
-Then come take part in my research study!

I am inviting tertiary students, between the ages of 19 and 30 years, to take part in focus group discussions to talk about the women's magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*. During these **focus group discussions** participants will be asked to **discuss** the ways in which *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* address issues to do with **love**, **romance** and **intimate relationships**.

The focus group discussions will take between **1 to 1 1/2 hours**. During these sessions a number of issues / topics may be raised and talked about by participants. These may include: **love**, **romance**, **intimate relationships**, **dating**, **marriage**, **sexual behaviours**, **flirting**, **kissing**, **safer sex**, **pregnancy** and **STI's**.

During this time **snacks** and **beverages** will be provided.

With the **permission** of participants, the groups will be **recorded** on audiotape.

The **information** gathered by the researcher, Lindsay Mayor, will be used to write a thesis, as part of the academic requirements needed to complete a **Master of Arts** degree in **Cultural Studies** at the **University of Canterbury**.

At all stages of the project the **identity** and **anonymity** of all participants will be **protected**.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the project please feel free to contact me, **Lindsay Mayor**, on (03) 374-5577 or at llm19@student.canterbury.ac.nz. My supervisor, Kevin Glynn, can also be contacted during the day on (03) 364-2276 or alternatively at kevin.glynn@canterbury.ac.nz. He is **happy** to discuss any further questions or concerns you may have about participating in the project.

DISCOVER WHAT ROCKS YOUR BOAT SEXUALLY
Lucky in love unprotected sex

STILL SINGLE?
bi-curious
romance
dating
LOVE
couple
FALL IN LOVE
MARRIAGE
kiss
boy friend
NEVER BEEN KISSED
Love at first sight
kiss me
SEX
CHEATING
Turn-her-on SECRET #1
HAVE A FLING
SEX
eye candy
good sex
ROMANTIC
Just Married
Just
doesn't equal love
PASHES
IDEAL DATE

Appendix Four

Parent / Guardian Information Sheet

Your child has been invited to take part in an academic research project entitled 'Reading Representations of Sexualities in Teen and Women's Magazines,' conducted by Lindsay Mayor (MA Candidate, Cultural Studies Programme, School of Culture, Literature and Society, University of Canterbury). The aim of this study is to investigate how secondary school students make sense of the information contained within *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* magazines regarding love, romance, intimate relationships and sexual behaviours.

Your child's involvement in this project will involve their taking part in one focus group discussion with up to five other secondary school students, who are of a similar age to your child. Where possible the focus groups will be made up of people within your child's social networks. During these sessions participants will be asked to respond to a selection of images, articles and advertisements from the magazines *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* that discuss, or show, issues related to love, romance, intimate relationships and sexual behaviour. Possible issues / topics that may be raised by participants in the focus group discussions are: Love and Romance, Intimate Relationships, Dating, Marriage, Sexual Behaviours, Flirting, Kissing, Safer Sex, Pregnancy, STD's, Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, Bisexuality.

It is anticipated that each focus group session will take between 1 to 1 1/2 hours. During the focus group discussions participants will be provided with snacks and beverages. With your permission, and that of your child, the focus group discussions will be recorded on audiotape.

Your child's participation in this project is entirely voluntary and they can withdraw from the project at anytime, this can involve withdrawing any information they have provided. At all stages of the project your child's identity and anonymity will be protected.

The location and date of the focus group sessions will be arranged in close consultation with parents / guardians, secondary school participants and the researcher.

The information gathered during the focus group discussions will be used by the researcher, Lindsay Mayor, in her Masters dissertation, which is being conducted through the Cultural Studies Programme at the University of Canterbury. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the project please feel free to contact me, Lindsay Mayor, on (03) 3745577, or llm19@student.canterbury.ac.nz. My supervisor is Dr Kevin Glynn, he can be contacted during the day on (03) 364-2276 or alternatively at kevin.glynn@canterbury.ac.nz. He is happy to speak with you if you have any further questions about your child's participation in this project.

Kind Regards,

Lindsay Mayor (MA Candidate, Cultural Studies, University of Canterbury)

Appendix Five

Tertiary Student Questionnaire

I would greatly appreciate it if you could take the time to fill out this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide the researcher with some general background information about you and your reading of magazines. The information you provide is completely anonymous and will not be referred to within the context of the focus group discussion. Completing the questionnaire is not a requirement of the research project. If you do not wish to complete this form you can abstain from doing so.

Thank you for your co-operation,
Lindsay Mayor
University of Canterbury

1. What is your age?

2. Please indicate whether you are: Female ___ or Male ___? (Please tick one)

3. What is your ethnicity?

4. What qualification are you studying towards?

5. Are you employed either part or full time during the academic year?

If so, what do you do?

6. How many magazines would you say you read in one month?

7. What is your favourite magazine, and why is this your favourite?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

Appendix Six

Secondary School Student Questionnaire

I would greatly appreciate it if you could take the time to fill out this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide the researcher with some general background information about you and your reading of magazines. The information you provide is completely anonymous and will not be referred to within the context of the focus group discussion. Completing the questionnaire is not a requirement of the research project. If you do not wish to complete this form you can abstain from doing so.

Thank you for your co-operation,
Lindsay Mayor
University of Canterbury

1. What is your age?

2. Please indicate whether you are: Female ___ or Male ___? (Please tick one)

3. What is your ethnicity?

4. What Year are you in at school?

5. How many magazines would you say you read in one month?

6. What is your favourite magazine (and why)?

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire.

Appendix Seven

Tertiary Student Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research project entitled, 'Reading Representations of Sexualities in Teen and Women's Magazines,' conducted by Lindsay Mayor (Cultural Studies Programme, School of Culture, Literature and Society, University of Canterbury).

I understand that participating in this research project will involve taking part in one focus group discussion with up to five other tertiary students, between the ages of 19 and 30 years. I understand that information shared by other participants during these discussions is to remain completely confidential.

I am also aware that the researcher, Lindsay Mayor, will use the information gathered during the focus group discussions for her Masters thesis in Cultural Studies at the University of Canterbury.

I understand my participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw any or all of the information I have provided during the research project at any time.

I understand that, with my permission, the focus group discussions will be recorded on audiotape.

I understand my identity and anonymity will be protected at all stages of this research project.

Name:(please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Eight

Secondary School Student Consent Form

I agree to participate in the research project entitled, 'Reading Representations of Sexualities in Teen and Women's Magazines,' conducted by Lindsay Mayor (Cultural Studies Programme, School of Culture, Literature and Society, University of Canterbury).

I understand participating in this research project will involve taking part in one focus group discussion with up to five other secondary school students, between the ages of 13 and 18 years. I understand that any information shared by other participants during these discussions is to remain completely confidential.

I am also aware that the researcher, Lindsay Mayor, will use the information gathered during the focus group discussions for her Masters thesis in Cultural Studies at the University of Canterbury.

I understand my participation, in this project, is entirely voluntary. I also understand that I can withdraw any or all of the information I have provided during the research project at any time.

I understand that, with my permission, the focus group discussions will be recorded on audiotape.

I am aware that my identity and anonymity will be protected at all stages of this research project.

Name: (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Nine

Parent / Guardian Consent Form

I agree to let my child participate in the research project 'Reading Representations of Sexualities in Teen and Women's Magazines,' conducted by Lindsay Mayor (School of Culture, Literature and Society, Cultural Studies Programme).

I agree to let my child participate in one focus group discussion with up to five other secondary school students, who are approximately the same age as my child.

I understand that during these sessions my child will be asked to respond to images, articles and advertisements from the magazines *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, which portray issues to do with love, romance, intimate relationships and sexual behaviours.

I understand my child's participation in this project is entirely voluntary. I also understand that my child can withdraw any, or all, of the information they have provided during the research project at any time.

I understand that with my permission, and the permission of my child, the focus group discussions will be recorded on audiotape. I am also aware that my child's identity and anonymity will be protected at all stages of this research project. This will include the use of a pseudonym in transcription and write up phases of the project, and the locked storage of all research material.

I am fully aware that information disclosed, by my child, during these focus group discussions will be used by the researcher, Lindsay Mayor, to write her Masters thesis.

Name of Child: (please print) _____

Child's Year at Secondary School: _____

Name of Parent / Guardian: (please print) _____

Signature of Parent / Guardian: _____

Relation to Child: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Ten

Discussion Guide - Tertiary Students

1. Prior to being given copies of the magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, had you ever read these magazines before?
2. If yes, why do you read these magazines?
3. When and where do you read these magazines?
4. If you don't usually read *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, why don't you read them? Is there anything that would make you read them?
5. What do you like / dislike about these magazines?
6. Is there anything in particular that you liked about the magazines you were given to read? What? And why do you like this?
7. Do you think *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* are similar to one another? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
8. Who are these magazines made for? Are they made for you? Why / why not?
9. Is there anything about the magazines you would change? Why is this?
10. Do you think the information contained within *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo* is helpful to people your age? How is it helpful? Would you ever use these magazines to gain information about a particular topic? Why would you go to a magazine to get this information? What type of information would this be?

When looking specifically at representations of sexualities found within the magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, participants will be asked to read or view a particular representation. Then to start the conversation the interviewer will ask questions such as:

1. What do you think about this article/image/advertisement?
2. What kind of information do you think the magazine is trying to convey?
3. Can you relate to any of the issues/circumstances addressed in this representation?
4. What do you think is being said in this article/image/advertisement?
5. What are your thoughts on what is being said in this article/image/advertisement?

The following are issues / topics that may be raised by participants in the course of the focus group discussions:

- Love and Romance
- Intimate Relationships, Dating, Marriage
- Sexual Behaviours, Flirting, Kissing, Sexual Intercourse
- Safer Sex, Pregnancy, STD's / HIV and AIDS
- Sexualities, Feminine Sexualities, Masculine Sexualities, Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, Bisexuality

Appendix Eleven

Discussion Guide - Secondary School Students

1. Prior to being given copies of the magazines *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, had you ever read these magazines before?
2. If yes, why do you read these magazines?
3. When and where do you read these magazines?
4. If you don't usually read *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, why don't you read them? Is there anything that would make you read them?
5. What do you like / dislike about these magazines?
6. Is there anything in particular that you liked about the magazines you were given to read? What? And why do you like this?
7. Do you think *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* are similar to one another? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
8. Who are these magazines made for? Are they made for you? Why / why not?
9. Is there anything about the magazines you would change? Why is this?
10. Do you think the information contained within *Girlfriend* and *Dolly* is helpful to people your age? How is it helpful? Would you ever use these magazines to gain information about a particular topic? Why would you go to a magazine to get this information? What type of information would this be?

When looking specifically at representations of sexualities found within the magazines *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, participants will be asked to read or view a particular representation. Then to start the conversation the interviewer will ask questions such as:

1. What do you think about this article/image/advertisement?
2. What kind of information do you think the magazine is trying to convey?
3. Can you relate to any of the issues/circumstances addressed in this representation?
4. What do you think is being said in this article/image/advertisement?
5. What are your thoughts on what is being said in this article/image/advertisement?

This is a list of the possible topics that may be raised and discussed by participants in the course of the focus group sessions.

- Love and Romance
- Intimate Relationships, Dating, Marriage
- Sexual Behaviours, Kissing, Flirting, Sexual Intercourse
- Safer Sex, STD's, Teen Pregnancy, Parenthood
- Sexualities, Feminine Sexualities, Masculine Sexualities, Heterosexuality, Homosexuality, Bisexuality

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