

# **Magazine Representations of Women in Texts and Images of Valentine's Day Celebrations**

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## DECLARATION

I, Ntombifuthi Christophora Mthethwa, declare that the 'Magazine Representations of Women in Texts and Images of Valentine's Day Celebrations' is my own work, both in conception and execution. All the resources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that this study has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any University. .



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Ntombifuthi Christophora Mthethwa

January 2007

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- Oprah Magazine
- Marie Claire Magazine
- Woman's Value Magazine
- Cosmopolitan Magazine
- Fairlady Magazine
- Femina Magazine

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## **DEDICATION**

To my source of inspiration, my mother Nolifa Mthethwa, who is a pillar of strength and without whose support completing this work would not have been possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

Women's magazines have been accused of using their power of reaching millions of audiences to influence ideas such as the perceived role of a woman in the society; how she must behave, what she must do to win the attention of men as well as inform her of her limitations (Marshment, 1997). Women's magazines do this through the advertisements and stories that they publish.

Ballaster et al. (1991) posit that the media has very powerful means of influencing and persuading audiences to think, act and behave in a particular way. The media has the power to shape and direct the way in which audiences perceive themselves. Evidently, it creates a desire in people to improve themselves by purchasing a certain product.

Following a critique of seven women's magazines, this study acknowledges the power of the media to influence its audience and analyses the use of the theme of Valentine's Day in stories and advertisements of the selected magazines. The analysis explores how such influence can result in the promotion of gender stereotypes in society.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The field of feminist media studies has made concerted efforts to engage institutions of mass communication as sites to change the manner in which women are portrayed.<sup>1</sup> Evidently, the “image[s] of women in the mass media and women’s participation in the production of messages disseminated by mass media cannot be studied in isolation from the broad socio-economic, political and cultural context at a specific point in time” (UNESCO, 1979: 5).

This dissertation will examine the concern shown by feminist analysts, such as Rosemary Tong<sup>2</sup> with the issue of how women are represented in the media and assess what the consequences may be, particularly on how they view themselves and how they are viewed by others. It will use the Valentine’s Day as a basis for analysis and draw cases from the February 2005 issues of True Love, Oprah magazine, Cosmopolitan, Woman’s Value, Marie Claire, Femina and Fairlady magazines. The analysis specifically focuses on texts and images or stories and advertisements on Valentine’s Day.

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<sup>1</sup> This is both a social justice and feminist media matter that, in recent years has seen gender analytical research conducted. See for instance the Global Media Monitoring Project (2005), specifically [www.whomakesthenews.org](http://www.whomakesthenews.org).

<sup>2</sup> Tong, R. (1989) *Feminist Thought*. London: Unwin Hyman.

In responding to the main question posed in this dissertation; “In whose interests are the representations of women in texts and images of Valentine’s Day?” the study will analyse the ideological function of Valentine’s Day stories and advertisements in the selected magazines and critically assess how they represent women. It will explore if the representations promote and maintain gender stereotypes and women’s subordination in society as some feminist scholars assert.<sup>3</sup> This will be contextualised and linked to various arguments for and against women’s magazines as a genre and a means of mass communication. Subsequently the analysis takes into account the *forces* that may influence a particular direction taken by the women’s magazines in terms of content.

Margaret Marshment (1997) argues that the seeming naturalness of the social arrangement that broadly places women in an inferior position to men in society is evidence of the success of patriarchal ideology. While 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism can be described by its main feature, which was the struggle for the vote and the right to be represented in parliament, 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism extended the focus to include personal, cultural and ideological aspects of feminism. Issues of representation formed part of this ‘new wave of feminism’.

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<sup>3</sup> See the Global Media Monitoring Project (2005).

In South Africa the women's movement took a slightly different but similar trend. The oppressive foreign rule necessitated the need for transition to a comprehensive democracy, a long-standing central concern for the women. The twentieth-century political history intensified this concern, leading to a strong women's movement that made a significant contribution towards the inception of the country's democracy. It is for this reason that the South African women's movement is one of the most celebrated on the African continent. Hassim (2005) examines the women's movement and demonstrates how women's political organisations both shaped and were shaped by the broader democratic movement. Women boldly claimed for their political and social independence, on an expansive scale giving precedence to the democratic movement as a whole. The need for appropriate and credible representation of women formed part of the South African women's bold claim.

Globally, the 20<sup>th</sup> century new wave of feminism created awareness of many domains that work to oppress women, including certain aspects of the media industry, domestic issues, the workplace, to mention but a few. Clearly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century feminists like their contemporary counterparts, and unlike their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, were not simply concerned with the power of parliament, but have developed an awareness of the nature of women's oppression in society as a whole. They are concerned with the way in which women's subordinate position in a multiplicity of structures, value systems and institutions such as media, and in particular women's magazines, interact with each other to

lock women into an overall subordination (Ferguson, 1983 and Marshment, 1997).

Among the structures concerned with producing representations of women - from advertising to opera, from game shows to art galleries; women are depicted in ways that define what is expected of women in society, what women are like, what they are capable or incapable of, what roles they play in society, and how they differ from men. In its representation of the sexes; advertising, for example, comes to function as an ideological apparatus for the reproduction of gender identities (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985).

The dissertation will critique Valentine's Day themed images and texts about women and assess if there is a particular image of women that they portray. Furthermore, it will consider previous feminist work in this area and reflect on its analyses of how representation operates, how meanings are created and how people do or do not accept stipulated meanings.

It must be asserted early on in this work that the manner in which any person or object is portrayed in the media is not by accident but by design. The advertising industry has skilled personnel who I refer to as "the creatives" whose main task is to create meaning through presenting people or objects in a particular way.

The study will further examine the frequency of particular types of representation in Valentine's Day content. The significance of examining the frequency stems from the old marketing adage that in conveying an important message one needs to repeat it several times for the audience to believe it. "Say it until they believe it" goes the *unauthored* adage. In the same vein, Hall (1997: 257) points out that "stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed Nature". In creating meanings from various representations, the media publishes stories and images that show what images and messages they want society to see, hear and absorb. These images and messages are repeated over time until the audience get used to them. For instance, when booking space for an advertisement, the booking contract is rarely on a once-off basis but often goes on for a few months. Advertisers do this with the knowledge that the sustained presence of the advertisement is likely to result in a good portion of the audience taking the desired action of buying the product they are trying to persuade them to buy.

The meanings attached to particular types of representation that audiences see and hear in the images and messages (for example, slim women are desirable, fat women are funny) and the way these meanings are produced and reproduced in specific contexts will be analysed to show how representations of women compare and relate to representations of men. The comparison across both genders is important and will be achieved through the analysis and interrogation of representations of couplehood, heterosexuality and romantic love.

## 1.1 Overview of Dissertation

**Chapter one** states the case for the research study, what it intends to cover and how it does that. This is a guide for the reader and provides a general outline of the dissertation. This outline includes the focus, thesis, antithesis and overview of the magazines used in the study. Moreover, the introduction sets the tone for the dissertation, its stance and the adopted approach of the study.

The argument about there being certain interests behind the manner in which women are portrayed in the media is pursued early on in the discussion. I argue in chapter one that while the subject of gender representation has been debated and written about, there still remain specific elements that should be explored in greater detail. This aspect broadens the case beyond patriarchy and includes the use of a specific day in the calendar as a cause of promoting consumerism which entrenches women's subordination by shepherding women's interests to matters of love, home, beauty and food.

I acknowledge in this chapter that the media is a very influential tool of transmitting information. The importance of the frame of reference for audiences is equally important in determining whether they accept or reject information presented in the media. The power possessed by the media could pose danger to media consumers if abused as such will result in the public being bombarded with inappropriate stories and pictures. The power of the media to influence

audiences can be a danger when considering that it can be used inappropriately by owners of the means of production to infuse their ideology in society.

The infusion of consumerism and conforming to patriarchal ideals guarantees a docile audience that can be manipulated as desired. In this chapter I provide an overview of the magazines under review and the manner in which they present themselves as the solution to issues affecting women. All of the magazines regard themselves as the provider of answers to women's questions about love, home, food and beauty matters. Essentially what women's magazines do is create problems or concerns around issues of romance and beauty where none exist and then present solutions. The following chapters will reveal that the real problem with women's magazines is that they are entangled in a battle of capital interests and genuine women issues.

**Chapter two** reviews identified literature on gender representation in the media with an intention of providing a wider understanding of the fundamental issues that result in how gender aspects are portrayed in media stories and pictures. The theoretical framework upon which this dissertation is based is purposefully incorporated in the same section with the literature review. The integration of these two sections is done to foster a relationship between literature selected for this project and how this literature is relevant in the discourse being explored herein. Interweaving theoretical framework and literature review is intended to provide an immediate meaning, context and flow of the discussion. Three key

themes emerge from this section, namely: ownership and control, ideology and commercialism. These themes are used to strengthen the intended argument and demonstrate a link between media representations and the resultant portrayal of women in society.

I argue in this chapter that women's position in society is strongly influenced by their relation to the means of production. The argument is based on the Marxist feminist theory which holds that capitalism must be abolished in order to free women from capitalist ideologies which lock women into a circle of consuming products in search of solutions to their 'problems'.

The Marxist feminist theory holds that capitalism commercialises many aspects of people's lives in a manner that solutions to certain 'problems' can be attained by purchasing a product. In the case of women, lack of beauty or love is presented as undesirable and the solution to it lies in buying a product to solve the problem.

The ownership of media presents challenges for those advocating for a fair and equitable representation of the genders. I argue that dominant voices in the media, through published information, reflect the view of the media owners. When other groups are represented, it is essentially how this dominant group want to portray that group. It is unclear why some women in senior positions within women's magazines perpetuate the subordination of women through poor



portrayal as argued in this dissertation. It is clear, though, that the dominant group uses the media to infuse and entrench its ideology in society. I argue that what will resolve this issue is an equal distribution of the means of production, allowing all groups and their ideologies to be shared equally. In reality this is a long term dream that cannot be achieved overnight. I further argue that in the absence of a short term solution, women must be empowered to screen media messages and reject information aimed at perpetuating gender stereotypes.

One wonders if magazines, or any other form of media, have fallen into the commercial trap by accident or deliberately. This question arises from the non-shameful manner in which the content of media and women's magazines in particular, is full of commercial information persuading readers to make another purchase and often of a product they do not need. A closer look at the business model of the media reveals that publishers are heavily reliant on advertising to generate the necessary revenue to run the business. As a result, the issue of what would be normal news reports become strongly influenced by what information will attract the right readership to the magazine. The right readership refers to those with buying power who will not only read the publication but go out and buy the products advertised. Chapter one demonstrated how the magazines define themselves by the type of reader they want to attract. In most cases, she must be young, earn a salary and be independent to make her 'shopping' decisions.

**Chapter three** deals with the methodology used to identify relevant information for analysis and process of analysing data. This study uses the qualitative research method to respond to the question of the interests linked to the coverage of Valentines' Day in the selected magazines. The qualitative approach involves analysis, critique and interpretation of data and is considered valuable and relevant to the analysis of texts and images.

**Chapter four** analyses the various images and texts contained in the selected magazines. The analysis is grouped into themes that focus on examples that relate to a particular theme. The themes deal with the types of representation that arise from the portrayal of women in a certain way. The themes are front covers of the magazines, use of colour, semi-dressed models, single women, product marketing, makeovers, couplehood, gender neutral, domestic roles, page number for cover story and distribution of adverts. This chapter discusses examples from the selected magazines and makes a compelling case about the influence of capitalist interests in the media on the representation of women.

I argue that the use of red as the dominant colour across all the magazines under review is determined to create direct association with Valentine's Day. It is common knowledge that red and white are the 'official' colours for Valentine's Day. Those who support this day wear red and white clothes to a part of the celebration of the day of lovers. Lovers also exchange red roses on this day as an expression of love. The magazines use full colours and attractive designs to

catch the attention of the reader. In advertising, the visual effect is an important consideration to make when compiling an advertisement. It is believed that an attractive and catchy design is enough to capture the attention and interest of a potential buyer. The use of red and the red-heart symbols is designed to create a strong association with love and as a result, by glancing at the front cover the reader is attracted to red more about love.

There is a tendency in advertising to use photos of naked or semi-dressed models to attract readers. Naturally, people are curious to look at a semi-dressed model as such reveals body parts that are not normally shown. The curiosity and the voyeurism in society are such that people enjoy such provocative images. Of concern however is the resultant portrayal of women. If a woman is shown wearing underwear only and lying on her back with her legs raised, only one thing is clear: she is looking for sex. And that is not a good image. While advertising intends to be interesting and strange, a woman does not need to be in this position in order to sell underwear. A similar trend is discussed in other sections analysing advertising directed to single women, product advertising and domestic role.

The analysis will also look at gender neutral representations and those that represent women and men in a complimentary complementary manner. More of such stories and advertisement are needed to undo the damage done by poor images of women in the media. Showing men and women in complementary

roles indicate that women are not inferior to men but play an important role alongside men or on their own.

**Chapter five** concludes the discussion and states what the study found to be the main issues that influence the representations of women that prevail in women's magazines. This chapter concludes the study by making recommendations on empowering women to be able to reject media messages that promote patriarchy and perpetuate the general subordination of women in society.

The issue of offensive and degrading media messages affecting women is a serious one that must be pursued to ensure future generations of women do not suffer the same way older generations have. The implications for women's subordination in society are severe and are not simply limited to the personal and domestic sphere, but they also affect how women are perceived in the world of work.

I argue in this chapter that despite what women are doing to improve themselves and their contributions to their work, home and community, the media continues to pull them down and highlight their weak areas and why they cannot succeed. The media tell women that if they are fat, it does not matter how intelligent they are and how good their ideas are, when they get up to present people will look at their weight and not listen to their presentation. After the media has successfully stolen the woman's confidence, it will sell her slimming tablets and guarantee she

will loose the weight and feel confident. Furthermore, when she gets up to present, the audience will listen to her and envy her.

The previous chapter discussed various examples quoted from the magazines under review where it is demonstrated clearly that a woman who does not enhance herself or her home and cooking with the products advertised is not good enough. This chapter concludes by calling for further studies to investigate other aspects of the capitalist system that work together to deepen the roots of women oppression through becoming commercial slaves that are dependant on products.

## **1.2 Focus and Delimitation of the Study**

This study aims to enhance the understanding of the role played by Valentine's Day as a concept and its influence on the stories and advertisements in women's magazines. The study does not concern itself about the origin, history and purpose of Valentine's Day. The concept is solely used to analyse its application in the women's magazines under review. To emphasise this point, a similar study could be conducted around Christmas as a concept.

It is important to clarify that this study does not aim to criticise or be cynical about the purchasing of gifts for loved ones but intends to look at specific Valentine's Day aspects and trace any trends across the selected publications, in terms of

how women are portrayed in that context. Giving a gift to a loved one is an old acceptable gesture and it is not being questioned. Some South African indigenous cultures have traditional practices of giving across genders. In the pre-colonial culture of the Zulu speaking people, a girl would offer her chosen man beads as a show of her agreeing and consenting to be in a relationship with him.

This study is purposefully confined in one concept, Valentine's Day. The subject relating to the portrayal of women in women's magazines and its results is well documented as will be discussed in the next chapter. However, there is a lack of South African based research literature<sup>4</sup> that has made concerted efforts to identify and highlight key concepts employed by the women magazines which make women appear inferior. This study has identified Valentine's Day as one of the key concepts that is directly linked to this debate but has not been explored in the manner that I propose. It is hoped that this study is a contribution to this field and a report that will encourage other scholars to further pursue an understanding of the array of strategies that are used to perpetuate gender stereotypical representations in romantic texts.

During the writing of this thesis, I have become increasingly aware of the naturalisation of the negative portrayal of women in the media despite a widely held belief that gender sensitivities indicate that 'change is upon us'. It is not uncommon to find in some South African newspapers a section with a photo of a

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<sup>4</sup> Specifically in the area of romance.

woman in swimwear. On the caption, the newspapers call for other women who are keen to show off their bodies to send in their photos. It is hard to understand the relevance of a semi-dressed woman in a serious news publication? Is this meant to spice the news up? Newspaper readers see these photos in every issue and it has become a normal, natural and accepted element of the newspaper. My research reveals the need for more independent studies to show that in fact the prevailing image of women in the media is not innocent and natural but designed to promote gender inequity by those who benefit from it.

It has been widely agreed that women's magazines are one of the forms of mass media that perpetuates the oppression and subordination of women (MacDonald, 1995 and Hall, 1997). This form of media often attracts criticism in that it continuously portrays women in inferior positions to men and reduces happiness and sense of worth to something that can only be attained through the consumption of material goods. It further promotes women's subordination by encouraging women to make themselves look pretty and sexy to please a man and be the envy of other women, to look after 'his' home and bear and raise 'his' children. This means, by having magazines dedicated to women readers, aspects such as taking care of the home, cooking, gardening, parenting, beauty and fashion are promoted as the critical aspects of a woman's existence. This further resonates with a point raised by life strategist Dr Phil McGraw writing on the topic of women and parenting saying; "women have been socialised for centuries to believe they are here to serve (*Oprah* magazine, February 2005:21).

### **1.3 Thesis of the Study**

As the discussion in forthcoming chapters will reveal, there are dominant social and economic forces that influence the way in which publishers of women's magazines, as well as advertisers employ specific themes and strategies to portray women in stories and advertisements that create a need for the products.

It is for this reason that this study places emphasis on the association of Valentine's Day with women's representation in the media, specifically women's magazines. Conveying love to a loved one should be a simple and cost-free process, however with the help of Valentine's Day as a commercial enterprise this process has become heavily laden with acts such as the purchasing of an item as a means of displaying love up to a point where couples who follow Valentine's Day religiously could have an argument if one did not buy a gift. For example, Valentine's Day related advertisements from jewellery stores promote the purchasing of expensive jewellery as a symbol of love. A poster advertisement on one jewellery store window reads, "make your way into his heart with an 18ct band". Other methods of gaining someone's heart are not mentioned.



## 1.4 Antithesis

Women's magazines have an abundance of tactics for women to be better lovers. Often the aim is not about how to be better lovers so they (women) can be happy, instead ... 'so they can keep their man happy'. The February 2005 issue of *Marie Claire* contains a 30-page A5 glossy full colour insert of various recipes with Lindt chocolate.<sup>5</sup> At the bottom of the front page is printed: 12 magical ways to melt his heart. This reduces the woman's efforts to make herself great meals with Lindt chocolate for her personal enjoyment to a tactic of pleasing a man. It is such gender-biased representations that will be discussed in greater detail in forthcoming chapters.

## 1.5 Magazines' Overview

Below is an overview of each of the magazines under review in this dissertation. A large volume of the information provided was drawn from the magazines' websites and is credited and referenced accordingly. The main reason to use most of the information almost in its original form is to demonstrate how each of the magazines positions itself in the fiercely contested terrain of women's magazines. Reading through the information reveals that magazine institutions are aware that they must continuously find reasons to exist so they need to appeal to their readers all the time. Some magazines' promotional copies desperately attempt to create a very specific woman profile for its magazine

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 15.

thereby guaranteeing itself a market. Further, the study found that magazines also create a need among women to constantly find the magazine as a worthy source of ideas and solutions to beauty, fashion, relationship matters and weight problems.

### **1.5.1 Overview of True Love Magazine**

The True Love magazine, according to its website, ([http://www.media24.co.za/eng/mags/magazines\\_index.html](http://www.media24.co.za/eng/mags/magazines_index.html)), belongs to a magazine stable known as Media24 magazines which runs 35 magazines specialising in the areas of family, women, sports, financial and health publishing. Media24 is owned by the South African media giant, Naspers. It is the dominant player in the South African magazine industry and controls more than 60% of the country's total circulation and some of its magazines are sold to other countries in Africa.

The magazine's website states that True Love was launched by late local publisher, Jim Bailey nearly 30 years ago as a photo-story book for men. Naspers bought it from Bailey in the early 1980s and in 1995 repositioned it as a general-interest, up-market publication aimed at young, modern black women, aged between 18-35 years of age, seeking to enjoy every aspect of their lives and make the most of the diverse opportunities and challenges the new democratic South Africa offers. It is regarded as an important lifestyle frame of

reference by both its target market and advertisers who want to communicate meaningfully with the emerging market (<http://www.media24.co.za/eng/mags/truelove.html>).

### True Love Magazine Fact File

Circulation <sup>6</sup>	114 793 (ABC <sup>7</sup> December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R15.95 (including VAT)

Table 1 – True Love Fact File

(<http://www.media24.co.za/eng/mags/truelove.html>)

### 1.5.2 Overview of Oprah Magazine

In 2002, in a publishing coup that attracted much international coverage, Associated Magazines was granted the right to publish the first international edition of O, The Oprah Magazine. Oprah magazine is published on a joint-venture basis with Hearst Magazines and Harpo. According to the magazine's website, ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)), "The magazine is aimed at the top layer of the black female market".

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<sup>6</sup> Circulation refers to the actual number of magazine copies sold.

<sup>7</sup> ABC means Audit Bureau of Circulations. The role of ABC is to monitor, record and report on circulation figures for print media. This is a useful tool of assessing the reach of a publication and advertisers rely on it to decide if a publication has enough readers to entrust it with advertising their products.

According to its website, Oprah magazine is about self acceptance and not self-improvement. Oprah magazine is about living your best life. The readers are active optimists with busy lives and serious goals. The magazine gives a 360-degree view of a woman's life, and readers come to Oprah magazine because they find little relevance in the traditional women's beauty, fashion and service magazines. Oprah magazine is about personal growth and aims to convince women that the real goal is becoming more of who they really are. It is all embracing. Oprah magazine's readers are passionately committed to the magazine, valuing its integrity, quality and warmth ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)).

#### **Oprah Magazine Fact File**

Circulation	64 103 (ABC December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R21.95 (including VAT)

Table 2 – Oprah magazine Fact File ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za))

#### **1.5.3 Overview of Woman's Value**

Woman's Value belongs to the Media24 Magazines stable and is a sister publication to True Love. It is owned by Naspers.

According to its website advertisement, Woman's Value is one magazine no creative South African woman can do without. It is an inspiring Do-It-Yourself

guide packed with practical, accessible and affordable ideas to improve the reader's environment, save her time and money, and simplify her life and the lives of her family

(<http://www.media24.com/eng/mags/womansvalue.html>).

### **Woman's Value Fact File**

Circulation	69 786 (ABC December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R14.95 (including VAT)

Table 3 – Woman's Value Fact File

(<http://www.media24.com/eng/mags/womansvalue.html>)

### **1.5.4 Overview of Marie Claire Magazine**

According to the website, ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)), in 2003 Associated Magazines acquired the license to publish Marie Claire from the Marie Claire Group. Marie Claire is an international brand with a national heart and claims to be a pioneer of serious, investigative journalism in the women's press. According to Marie Claire their reader is between 25 and 35 years old but her age is irrelevant as her state of mind distinguishes her from other women. Marie Claire claims she is driven by curiosity and concern for the world around her and is courageous and self-assured, with a very personal sense of style. She is an independent, educated and passionate woman, and reads Marie Claire because

it satisfies her curiosity without telling her what to think. She is adventurous and spirited enough to want to find her own way in the world.

**Marie Claire Fact File**

Circulation	47 252 (ABC December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R20.95 (including VAT)

Table 4 – Marie Claire Fact File ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za))

**1.5.5 Overview of Cosmopolitan**

According to the website of Cosmopolitan magazine, ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)), in 1983 Jane Raphaely, Michael Raphaely and Volker Kühnel formed a company called Jane Raphaely and Associates in a 50% partnership with Nasionale Pers (now Media24) to publish a South African edition of Cosmopolitan, licensed to them by the Hearst Magazine Corporation. Cosmopolitan was a runaway success and has continued to be the dominant and best-selling glossy on the South African market.

According to the website, Cosmopolitan has been specially adapted to suit the needs of the South African market. It is aimed at the woman who enjoys her freedom and whose time and money are her own; hence the focus on relationships, careers and lifestyle. With its positive approach to life,

Cosmopolitan makes the reader feel good about herself and her potential, which explains the slogan: “Anything I can do, I can do better” ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)).

The website further states that “Cosmopolitan is read by a woman in her freedom years: she’s between 18 and 34 years old and in an independent phase of her life. The Cosmopolitan reader is smart and ambitious, establishing a career, not just doing a job. She knows that balance in her life is all-important. She loves to shop and is a passionate sampler – willing to experiment with new products. She is neither set in her ways nor wedded to a particular product. Cosmopolitan informs her of what is new in the world of fashion and beauty. She is interested in local and international news, breakthroughs and trends and keen on the relationship and psychological features that make up Cosmopolitan’s editorial heart”, ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)).

**Cosmopolitan Fact File**

Circulation	118 296 (ABC December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R23.95 (including VAT)

Table 5 – Cosmopolitan Fact File ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za))

**1.5.6 Overview of Fairlady**

Fairlady also belongs to the Media24 Magazines stable and is a sister publication to True Love and Woman’s Value. It is also owned by Naspers.

According to its website, (<http://www.media24.com/eng/mags/Fairlady.html>), Fairlady has been a leader in the highly competitive women’s magazine market for 40 years. High journalistic standards and a reputation for balanced reporting have established the magazine as a source of inspiration, entertainment, and information that is reliable, thought-provoking, and relevant to the lives of South African women and the environment in which they live.

**Fairlady Fact File**

Circulation	88 123 (ABC December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R18.50 (including VAT)

Table 6 – Fairlady Fact File (<http://www.media24.com/eng/mags/Fairlady.htm>)

**1.5.7 Overview of Femina**

In 1988 Associated Magazines was formed to publish Femina. The title originally belonged to Republican Press but was taken over by Associated Magazines and completely revamped and repositioned. In its present format it speaks directly to



a sophisticated woman in her thirties either grappling with motherhood and a career, or contemplating doing so ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)).

According to its website, ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)), the Femina woman is post-30 and has a greater sense of herself, more security and more money. She is facing her decade of demand, and is expected to deliver on all fronts. She's living a 150% life with countless things competing for her energy, time and attention. She needs a magazine that is completely focused on her reality, a magazine that is designed around her life. That magazine according to the website is Femina.

The website states that "Femina informs, inspires and entertains her. Femina has pace and energy. It fits into her lifestyle and talks to her, not at her. Femina understands who she is and the pressures that are placed on her. Femina is her emotional forum – an intelligent, credible source that reflects her life and everything in it", ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za)).

### **Femina Fact File**

Circulation	44 167 (ABC December-June 2005)
Frequency	Monthly
Cover Price	R19.95 (including VAT)

Table 7 – Femina Fact File ([www.assocmags.co.za](http://www.assocmags.co.za))

The overview information confirms what was pointed above; that magazines clearly first exist as a business to their owners. The interest of informing and

educating women cross paths with business interests; with the latter presented as non-precedence. There is already a strong temptation to suggest a possible link of the use of Valentine's Day and commercial interest – however it is too early in the discussion to draw such conclusions.

As the focus of the study is Valentine's Day themed content, the forthcoming chapters present a detailed discussion of the manner in which aspects of Valentine's Day are covered in the women's magazines. In particular the critique focuses on related advertisements and stories; that is how these variables represent women. The hypothesis is that the magazines promote stereotypes of women's subordination by reinforcing a false consciousness and a series of unfulfilable desires (Leiss et al, 1990).

The next chapter reviews selected literature on gender representation in the media and attempts to provide some insight into the fundamental issues that result in how genders are portrayed in stories and pictures in the media. The theoretical framework upon which this dissertation is based is incorporated in the same section with the literature review. The integration of these two sections aims to foster a relationship between the selected literature and its relevance in the discussion of the dissertation's thesis. This approach attempts to present a discussion that is interactive and accessible. The fundamental guiding principle for the overall discussion is that the theoretical framework gets interwoven with

the literature in order to give an immediate meaning, context and flow of the narration.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Issues pertaining to the representation of women in the media have been debated in society. However there are certain developments in this area that require further analysis. These developments include the use and coverage of special events such as the celebration of Valentine's Day and the gender representations that may arise. The aim of this chapter is to link the focus of this study to larger themes in the discipline of gender and media and create a context. This is done by reviewing various arguments on women's magazines as a communication tool and the manner in which this tool relates to the portrayal of women in society.

Key questions that prompted this study relate to:

- whether Valentine's Day is presented in a manner that promote and maintain gender stereotypes;
- how gender biases are possibly linked to Valentine's Day and the way in which male and female representations in Valentine's Day themed stories and advertisements compare in terms of possible meaning(s) that readers may decode; and

- how capitalism and commercialism impact the application of the Valentines' Day messages in the women's media under review

While the subject of gender representation that result in the subordination of women in society has been widely written about,<sup>8</sup> the work has been broad and has considered wide issues without isolating specific themes that also play a role in representations such as Valentine's Day. No previous South African research-based work on the role of Valentine's Day or the manner in which it is applied and its possible relation to the representation of women could be located. However, some contribution on the gender representations in mass media by other writers must be acknowledged. This includes the work and arguments of Eva Illouz who posits that since the early 1900s, advertisers have tied the purchase of beauty products, sports cars, diet drinks, and snack foods to success in love and happiness. Illouz argues that romance is constructed by advertising and media images that preach a democratic ethos of consumption, that material goods and happiness are available to all, and that if you can attain the goods you will lead a happy and fulfilled life (<http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/6710.html>).

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<sup>8</sup> See: MacDonald, M. (1995) *Representing Women: Myths of Femininity in the Popular Media*. London: Edward Arnold. See also: Marshment, M. The Picture is Political: Representation of Women in Contemporary Popular Culture, in Robinson, V. & Richardson, D. (1997) (eds) *Introducing Women's Studies*. London, Macmillan Press Ltd.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study uses Marxist feminist theory as its main frame of reference and argues that representations of women are influenced by the position of women in the economic ladder. Related to this are issues of the ownership of the means of production, commercialism<sup>9</sup> or consumerism<sup>10</sup> and ideology and how these concepts are linked to the application of the Valentines' Day content in the selected magazines. The issue of a commercial agenda that influences the content of media will be examined to ascertain its relationship with the modern women's magazine.

Marxist feminist theory "argues for the dismantling of capitalism as a way to liberate women. Marxist feminism states that capitalism, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root of women's oppression in society", ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist\\_feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_feminism)).

This study extends the traditional Marxist analysis by looking at the representation of women in stories and advertisements of Valentine's Day contained in the women's magazines under review in order to support the Marxist feminist position. According to Marxist theory, "in capitalist societies the individual

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<sup>9</sup> The term is used in this study to refer to the selling of products, marketing of products, money making, and the making of profit.

<sup>10</sup> The term is used in this study to refer to the creation and promotion of a culture to purchase, buy, shop and use products.

is shaped by class relations; that is, people's capacities, needs and interests are seen to be determined by the mode of production that characterizes the society they live in. Marxist feminists see gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender oppression is class oppression and women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression which is maintained because it serves the interests of the capitalists", ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist\\_feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_feminism)).

Marxist feminists base their arguments on the corruption of the dominated section of society. They hold that wage earning is a form of oppression, that the workers are inevitably enslaved under a system of production where, deprived of knowledge and skill, they are reduced practically to nothing. If they cannot obtain employment with the capitalists, they will not have an income and their survival is threatened. It means that they cannot provide for their own basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing and children's education.

The argument of Marxist feminist theory further applies to the commercialisation of love and romance. Love is turned into a commercial transaction where a partner must purchase a particular product as an expression of love. The same applies to fashion, beauty, weight loss and domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. The achievement of the above is credited solely to the use of certain products. It is this enslavement of a different kind that Marxist feminists believe perpetuates inequity in society. Women become commercial slaves whose lives

are incomplete without the purchase and use of the products. The benefits of this enslavement are clear for the capitalists. When women have a need for the products, the capitalists will continue to produce and sell the products and make more money.

It must be noted that the Marxist feminist theory did not go unchallenged. In the 1970s there emerged what is known as the radical feminist theory which holds that modern society and its constructs such as law, religion, politics and art are the product of males and therefore have a patriarchal character. According to the radical feminists the best solution for women's oppression would be to treat patriarchy as the main problem of women's oppression in society. While Marxist feminists believe the source of women's oppression in society is rooted in the skewed ownership of the means of production, radical feminists call for the abolition of the social structures that are seen to perpetuate women's subordination ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist\\_feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_feminism)).

Magazines and their content are not immune to influences that may be driven by certain agendas and the analysis of this study will address these in order to understand gender representations that prevail. With regard to the commercial use of the Valentine's Day theme, an analysis of the content of the advertisements and stories will shed light on whether certain message construction ploys are used to create and maintain a consumer-base through creating a need for the products among the women market.



It is not necessarily the isolated image or characterisation that is important. What is more significant is the manner of representation as it concerns gender in our society. This refers to the range of frequency of particular types of representation, the extent and nature of omissions, the meanings attached to particular types of representation; for instance that slim women are desirable, fat women are clumsy. This further includes the way in which these meanings are produced and reproduced in specific contexts, how context and assumed audience contribute to the determination of meaning and how representations of women compare and relate to representations of men.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

The literature review has been divided into three main sub-headings: ownership and control, ideology and commercialism. Each of the sub-headings will review a wide selection of literature and link it to the representations of women that may prevail as a result of ownership and control, ideology and commercialism. The three sub-headings have been selected with an intention to allow the reader to interact with this document in a co-ordinated manner.

### **2.2.1 Ownership and Control**

The primary role of any media is to inform its audiences and consumers of a certain message. The purposes of media messages vary from education,

marketing, entertainment and information sharing. Dunn et al. (1990); Dyer (1982); Embree (1970) argue that media consumers are at the mercy of the owners of the means of media production in terms of the messages they receive. Valentines' Day is a popular concept that is observed and followed by millions of media consumers and audiences and it is important to assess possible interests and strategies behind the media application of the concept.

The ownership and control of women's magazines is an important aspect to consider since the poor portrayal of women has been linked partly to media being owned and controlled predominantly by males. According to a feminist analyst, Tong (1989), Marxist feminists argue that women are disadvantaged primarily through the principle of private ownership of the means of production, the ownership of which rests in the hands of a few males. However, there is a need for new research in the field of women representation in women's magazines because the magazines under review in this dissertation boast influential women in executive positions, including ownership. Oprah magazine is owned by American television talk show host and businesswoman Oprah Winfrey. Cosmopolitan, Femina and Marie Claire magazines from the Associated Magazine stable are controlled by a female publisher who heads the company, Jane Raphaely. The Chief Executive Officer of Media24 Magazines, the division of media giant Naspers which publishes True Love, Woman's Value and Fairlady is a woman, Patricia Scholtemeyer. All of the magazines under review in this

study are edited by women. In all the seven titles being reviewed, a majority of writers and other staff members are women.

Marshment (1997) argues that if women are under-represented in professions which produce and reproduce definitions of gender and gender relations, they are not in a position to speak for themselves and in their own interests. It is evident that there has been some shift since Marshment made this observation. Perhaps what would be the subject for a further probe is the impact of women serving in leadership positions in the media, such as the owners, publishers, editors and even writers of the magazines under review. What can they do to produce representations that could be seen as representing women in a positive, powerful and credible position in society? This means the media organisations must give female leadership sufficient powers and mandates to make big decisions. Without such powers women can do little to change the situation.

Being a publisher, owner and editor come with certain decision-making powers and the question is whether or not there is a willingness among women leaders to change the situation. Importantly, not all women are feminists. It can therefore be argued that there may be collusion with patriarchal systems. Marshment (1997) and Ferguson (1983) argue that women who accept the ideas and values of what feminists define as patriarchal ideology will be more likely to reproduce it in their work than to challenge it.

As a result, women that are responsible for the writing of romantic fiction and for producing women's magazines are viewed with suspicion by feminists. Ferguson (1983) and Marshment (1997) define the content of women's magazines as a cult which is preached to women by its high-priestesses, the women's magazine editors. They argue that it is this cult which keeps women subordinate to men through its insistence on the sexual and domestic roles of women promulgated everywhere in the magazines from fashion and beauty to cooking and home décor to problem pages and features. Ferguson and Marshment are blunt but one wonders if their criticism is fair without assessing the dynamics the women's magazine editors work in and how these contribute to their perceived continuation of the cycle of women subordination.

Due to the influential role media owners and producers play in the construction of messages in media texts and images, it is vital to contextualise an analysis of Valentine's Day media images and representations of women within an analysis of the economics of media ownership (Dines and Humez, 1995). However, the economic dynamics at play, although not completely innocent, cannot operate in a vacuum. There are social dynamics involved and the magazines have learnt to position themselves strategically within these. For example, the new South Africa introduced black women as a group of consumers with effective buying power since they have obtained equal opportunities to work and earn salaries like every other group. Clearly, it is a business decision to target black women as

consumers, not simply because the publishers had identified a genuine need to uplift them through information sharing and education.

The covert relationship between capital interests and the magazine publishers is of great interest since it often informs the structure and direction of the magazine content. The saying 'put your money where your mouth is' is relevant in this instance. Magazines, just like any other form of mass media, earn most of their revenue from advertising and it is clear why some publishers often retreat from taking a strong and principled stand against the use of advertising content that may have an adverse effect on any part of society.

It is vital to note that the issues of concentration and conglomeration in mass media ownership have played a key role in shaping the operations of the media industry (Doyle, 2002a and 2002b; Mosco, 1997). Media firms are in the business of power, control and the accumulation of profits and it is doubtful whether Media24 Magazines and Associated Magazines run their women's magazines because they are genuinely committed to the interests of women. In this case the magazine is just one of the company's numerous income generation ventures.

Multinational companies, such as True Love's parent company Naspers, recognize the importance of women's magazines for their financial operations as a result of the amount of advertising space they sell. The magazines are indeed

very central to the financial success of their parent companies (Doyle, 2002a and 2002b; Mosco, 1997; Ballaster et al, 1991).

A magazine that is printed in large quantities and sold to many people even outside of its country of origin can be qualified as a vehicle of mass communication. Mass communication provides for universal contact and the exchange of information and images, which carry with them various social and cultural values and influences. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels argue that the dominant values that are transmitted in the mass media are those of the owners of the means of communication. Although mass media is useful in connecting people with the world and keeping them informed of international events, Marxist thinkers hold that it was created by capitalists in order to reach and influence millions of people all over the world (Inglis, 1972; Ohmann, 1996; Jhally, 1987; McQuail, 1987).

Numerous scholars argue that the means of mass communication now available in Third World countries today originated from the First World and were not offered as a simple gesture of kindness by the developed nations, but are a part of the modernisation process that imposed development in the underdeveloped parts of the world (Searvaes (1999); Melkote and Steeves (2001); Ohmann (1996); Jhally (1987); Lerner (1958)). Melkote and Steeves (2001) further argue that capitalists in the First World are always looking abroad for potential markets for their products since the markets have been saturated in their own counties

and it is in their interest to mass distribute messages to influence these vast audiences.

For the capitalists, their target audience must be able to read in order to understand the messages contained in the media. Lerner (1958) points out that this need brought about a concept known as modernization. The modernisation of Third World societies brought with it urbanisation, transportation and literacy in order for people to travel to the cities to work, see and buy the goods produced by capitalists, as well as read so they can read advertisements in the mass media and then desire to be like the people they see in them – such desire will influence people to buy the products. Thus, learning was not introduced in order to develop the people but rather to co-opt them into the capitalist system of consumerism (Lerner, 1958).

Control and ownership of mass communication is a contested terrain since it means the control of what information people get and the forms in which they get it. As long as the media is controlled by commercial interests, the presentation of knowledge will not be free from commercially-biased values. In the industrialisation period capitalists were concerned with mass production in order to accumulate wealth, however there appears to have been a shift from the industrial to consumer society, where capitalists are now busying themselves with strategies of securing mass consumers for their goods, and one of such

strategies is educating consumers about products and creating a need for the products (Leiss et al, 1990; Inglis, 1972).

Curran (2002) suggests that the seemingly bullish stance of getting people to be dependant on products is driven by the capitalist need to maximise profits. He posits that the system of controlling the media using the state ended in the early nineteenth century. This was replaced by a new system based on economic forces which meant that those who own the means of production will have control of what is produced in the media. And the rest of society will be consumers of those media messages. Under a capitalist or economic driven system with less government subsidies and sponsorships, media institutions must earn their money hence they base their decisions on economic considerations rather than empathy for the cause of a particular social group.

Hall (2000) argues that the notion of power thrives under circumstances of inequity. In conditions where unequal relationships exist, such as between the owners of the means of production of media messages and the media audience, it would be difficult to eliminate representations that may portray any group in society in an adverse manner.



### **2.2.2 Ideology and Representation**

Representation is both a political and personal issue. Representation is a difficult and problematic term in that it is often loaded with the narrator's own biases and prejudices. Is a fair representation of something ever achievable? Women owners, publishers, editors and writers of women's magazines are possibly caught between a rock and a hard place. How do they encourage women to be women, to be feminine, to love their partners, to cook for their husbands, to look after their homes, to take care of their skin, hair and body shape without producing representations that violate women's dignity and risk being accused of promoting patriarchy? This is a loaded question that should be posed by both media and feminist researchers.

Anything that is represented, just as women are represented in advertisements and stories of Valentine's Day, is naturally subject to some degree of influence and bias of the person constructing the representation. The premise of this study is that when something is represented it is no longer bias-free. Therefore there is a strong case that representation of women that is not constructed by women will tend to carry the biases of constructor.

Marshment (1997) agrees and further argue that most of power still rest with men. Without the power for women to define their interests and to participate in the decisions that affect them, they will continuously be subject to the definitions

and decisions of others. These 'others' are likely to produce decisions that serve their interests rather than those of women.

Ferguson (1983) and Friedan (1963) argue that the content of women's magazines promotes an inferior position in society through poor portrayal. They believe that the general perception of women's magazines is that they tend to focus on issues of love, beauty, food, home and fashion. On paging through a magazine's pages, a reader is most likely to come across advice on how to find *Mr Right* and keep him, how to lose weight, how to get a perfect skin without acne, what to wear to a special occasion and how to cook great meals for your man so that he does not leave you for a woman who makes better tasting food.

In perpetuating gender stereotypes, the media further reinforce traditional roles such as ascribing to women the roles of caregiver or needing care and identification with family roles such as motherhood, bearing children and cooking. However, men dominate the public sphere as professionals, sports and business people and are often portrayed as successful and heroic (Agenda editorial, Vol. 31). At face value one would like to believe that with more women taking part in leadership positions in the business and sporting fraternities these stereotypes have changed.

Although stereotypes of women still abound in the media, above all in the sexualisation of women in images and texts, it must be some consolation that the

last 25 years have seen a significant shift in regimes of representation concerning women. Many more mainstream fictional texts now feature women as the central protagonist, often dealing with women's issues such as rape and domestic violence (Marshment, 1997). Instead of emphasising an idyllic image of domesticity, modern advertising will find a broader perspective in concentrating on the problems faced by the majority of women today, who have full time or part time work while also being in charge of the domestic chores (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985).

The role of the media is both overt and covert. The former is a noble one of informing and educating. The latter broadly aims to influence people's cultures and behaviour and its success lies in infusing its influences at an ideological level. Ideology works by strategies of distortion, through the imposition of false consciousness. Marxist theorists hold that ideology is a force that works to stabilise and legitimise the economic base and must be distinguished from scientific representation, in that science lays bare the facts or reality while ideology serves to disguise or mystify it (Ballaster et al, 1991).

Structural theorists argue that ideology is not simply a belief system in people's heads but must be understood to be rooted in discourses, or in texts, books, magazines, films and music. For Louis Althusser,<sup>11</sup> ideology is deeply entrenched in the structures of the modes of production and is produced and manifested

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Althusser was a French Marxist philosopher who became known for his break from some of the key features of traditional Marxism. According to Louis Althusser ideology shapes our consciousness and social structures.

through various means by the owners thereof. On the other hand Antonio Gramsci<sup>12</sup> equates ideology to hegemony. For him an ideological state is that which makes inequalities and subordination appear natural and just and thus induce consent to relations of domination (Ballaster et al, 1991; Ohmann, 1996; Jhally, 1987). This theoretical background is fundamental to the understanding of the dynamics of ideology and how it has been employed to create a subordinate position for women in society through their portrayal in various forms, including in Valentine's Day texts and images.

Ideology can be a powerful source of inequality as well as a rationalisation of inequality. If the definitions of women found in the pages of women's magazines do not fairly and accurately represent the real lives of women, and the reality of their potential as human beings; if women are defined, for example, as wives and mothers to the exclusion of their work outside the home; if women are judged by their sexual attractiveness to the exclusion of their moral and intellectual qualities, if they are defined as being inferior to men, then they are not receiving fair representation in society. Therefore, while the law may no longer prevent women from entering certain professions, it might be argued that if women are predominantly defined as naturally belonging to the domestic sphere, this could function just as effectively to prevent them from seriously pursuing careers (Ballaster et al, 1991).

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<sup>12</sup> Antonio Gramsci was an Italian writer, politician and political theorist. He was influenced by Karl Marx and he himself influenced Louis Althusser on ideology, culture and politics. He was of the view that hegemony is achieved by means of education and the media.

The reading of magazines is an important pastime in the lives of women hence the political and sociological significance of such texts and images in the acquisition of gender identity. Feminist theorists provide further insight in the concept of ideology. They maintain that ideas, norms, values, representations of gender difference exercise considerable influence in maintaining women's subordination (Ballaster et al, 1991).

The media is an often misperceived source of cultural teachings and information. It contributes to educating people on how to behave, and what to think, feel, believe, fear and desire as well as what not to do. It further teaches them how to be 'appropriate' men and women; how to dress, look and what to 'consume'. Media products provide materials out of which people forge their identities, their sense of self and their notion of what it means to be male or female in society (Dines and Humez, 1995).

In women's magazines such teachings are offered through advertisements and stories. Gunter (1995) and Ballaster et al. (1991) argue that women in magazine advertisements prior to the 1970s were rarely shown to be in paid work, and when they were - it would usually be a stereotypical role such as the smiling secretary who was always ready to please her male boss. It is also interesting to note that the position of secretary, which is seen as a servant role to the boss is mostly occupied by women. The current trend is that the well-known stereotype of the ways in which women's magazines used to address women as

housewives whose dream was to impress their authoritative, working husbands by using the latest kitchen accessory or washing powder is slowly being fused with the independent and modern career woman. It is interesting to note the kind of advice offered to women, which is often not about how to fulfil their own potential but to serve others. There exists a persistent focus on bringing happiness to their family, in particular their male partners.

For Millett (1977) the production of ideological consent to patriarchy is based on the needs and values of the dominant group, men. This is done through a process of socialising men and women into masculine and feminine roles. This factor is also dictated by what men cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates; that is - aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, virtue and ineffectuality in the female. The media has been accused<sup>13</sup> of promoting such differences through the manner in which they represent both genders. This has resulted in the perpetuation of subordination of the female gender.

Friedan (1963) argues that women's media has a tendency to promote a feminine ideal to which women must conform. She describes United States women in the 1950s, an era in which it was claimed women's involvement in the public sphere declined as women succumbed to the feminine mystique which defined women as healthy, beautiful and concerned only with her husband, her children, and her home. These women attempted to conform to the feminine

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<sup>13</sup> See Lull (2002) and Overland, 2003.

ideal promoted by media forms such as women's magazines and advertising. Achievement of the health, beauty and pleasing the husband was always based on the usage of certain products.

However, Friedan's views have been criticised for being one-dimensional. She has been criticised for seeming to find much of the evidence of the existence of the feminine mystique in women's magazines, which she argued promoted a unified picture of the feminine ideal. This view was challenged by Hollows (2000), Meyerowitz (1994) and Hall (1981) who identified far more complex and contradictory constructions of femininity. Friedan (1963) implies that the feminine ideal portrayed by media texts and images is absorbed by anonymous passive mass of consumers without questioning it or altering it to align with their needs and circumstances. For example, when she conceives of the housewife as an anonymous biological robot in a docile mass, in this way she draws on the assumption of mass culture and does not allow any possibility of the housewife to interact with the media she consumes and apply its tips and tricks to suit her situation.

On the other hand Hall (1981) argues that representations are very instrumental in creating a particular image or perception of something. However, he disputes the notion that audiences receive and accept messages with no capacity to digest them and arrive at a meaning based on their frame of reference. He argues against the mass culture theory which presents consumers as cultural

dopes who live in a permanent state of false consciousness and assume that messages from magazines are simply injected into passive audiences which absorb them uncritically. Hall believes that readers make active engagements with media texts and images to produce different readings based on the knowledge and experience that is a product of the social and cultural groups to which they belong.

Friedan is not the only feminist whose work is underpinned by the assumptions of mass culture theory. Embree (1970:196) claims that “the mass media shaped people into one-dimensional receivers of communication – people who are more easily channelled into the roles of unprotesting consumers”. Embree describes the bombardment of the woman consumer with information via dedicated tools such as women’s magazines as a psychological warfare which reinforces the position of women as both passive and as emotional non-intellectuals.

McRobbie (1991) agrees and further argues that for feminists virtually everything in women’s magazine is connected with the oppression of women. She points out that in the 1970s women’s magazines were organised around romance. She uses girls’ magazine Jackie as an example. She argues that Jackie produces a damaging form of subjectivity among its readers. The girls are encouraged to see the pursuit of romance as the most important feature of their lives. She argues that the code of romance which is concerned with the world of the emotions is outlined forcefully in the stories which are the main ingredients of Jackie. “While



the world of romantic relationships is presented as fun, on the other hand it is presented as deadly serious and as the essence and meaning of life" (McRobbie, 1991:96).

Further, she points out that:

"Messages produced by Jackie stories are unambiguous:

1. The girl has to fight and keep her man.
2. She can never trust another woman unless she is old and hideous, in which case she does not appear in Jackie stories anyway.
3. Despite this, romance and being a girl are fun" (McRobbie, 1991:101).

McRobbie further argues that Jackie is centred on romantic individualism. There are no opportunities for female solidarity because all girls are in competition for the right boy and true love. This conservative and conformist femininity is reproduced in other parts of the magazine resulting in very biased representations of the essence of being a woman. She argues, "The problem pages are based on values which are wholly conservative and endorse uncritically the traditional female role. Fashion and beauty pages are equally problematic. Beautification is equated with self empowerment. The pop pages are not interested in music but stars, offering the readers another opportunity to indulge their emotions, but this time on the pop-star figure rather than the boyfriend" (McRobbie, 1991:125-127).

From these perspectives, the different parts of the magazine equated being a woman with entering into the world of the personal and the emotions and this narrow definition of femininity makes it difficult for readers to imagine alternatives. In other words they assume that once locked into the ideology of romance, girls see their futures in terms of being wives and mothers.

However, McRobbie, just like Friedan and Embree, is criticised for assuming that girls passively absorb and reproduce Jackie's ideology of femininity without questioning it and adjusting it to their situations. This is seen to ignore the way the magazine is integrated into the girls' collective cultural practices. Frazer (1992:194) argues that the girls make active engagements with the magazine and a self-conscious and reflexive approach to texts and images is a natural approach for teenage girls.

The importance of the ideological role played by the media is further recognised by Faludi (1992) who argues that popular culture plays a major part in creating a false image of womanhood. She claims that the media is saturated with images of miserable single women, evil career women and happy mothers who are content to turn their backs on the world of work. In its representation of the sexes, media images and texts come to function as an ideological apparatus for the reproduction of gender identities and stereotypes. Mower (1981) agrees that the ideology of biased media texts and images is harmful because it reinforces

those tendencies which seek to make society static in the sense of retarding or preventing the revision of basic principles of the social order.

In patriarchal culture, women are defined by those who subordinate them. It is for the most part men, who are for instance publishers, film directors or television producers, and who produce the images that define women. It is in men's best interests for women to be confined to the domestic sphere. Not only does this reduce competition in the work place and ensure a servicing for men at home that facilitate their work and leisure activities, it renders women dependent on men. Images of women cooing over babies and cleaning floors are not therefore necessarily just limiting stereotypes, but they may be interpreted as encouraging a division of labour that favours men and disadvantages women. It is clear that there is no single view but rather a multi dimensional view and reasons why some women may be seen turn a blind eye on poor portrayal of women in the media.

For example, there is a television advert<sup>14</sup> run by Joko tea which shows a woman wearing an overall, cleaning a wide floor with a mop.<sup>15</sup> Having to clean such a wide floor would cause distress to anyone. However the woman is shown dancing and gyrating her buttocks excitedly. While the viewer is busy trying to figure out what the source of happiness could be when she is faced with such a mammoth task, the wording on the television screen reads: "she had a cup of

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<sup>14</sup> It is on South Africa's national broadcaster, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 9 is an article on the advert, presenting one of the complaints received on the advertisement.

Joko in her break". In other words this means women in similar jobs must have a cup of Joko and continue to enjoy what they are good at, that is domestic work such as mopping floors.

The matter of the Joko advertisement raises other debates such as the acceptable behaviour for men and women in a particular cultural grouping or community. I am aware that in the Zulu culture gyrating buttocks in the manner the woman on the advertisement does is not acceptable, especially by the older generation. It is viewed as sexually suggestive and as such her actions carry inappropriate sexual connotation. Sex, as a concept is viewed as a very private aspect in the Zulu culture and any public suggestion of sex is not welcome. Compounding the issue of the Joko advertisement is that the lady appears to be well into her middle age and such behaviour from a woman of that age group is considered inappropriate. The issue of the power of the dominant group which owns the means of production is relevant in this instance. The Joko company decided it wanted to run such an advertising campaign and they found a willing 'model' to act in the advertisement. It must be considered as a possibility that the woman on the advertisement probably does not agree to its format but she acted on the advertisement and got paid for it. So for her it could simply be an issue of income versus what is an appropriate representation of women.

Marshment (1997) posits that women may themselves be seduced to accepting images that portray them in subordinate roles because patriarchal ideology has

achieved a general hegemony. It is society's reality that however much poor portrayal work against women in the long term, in the short term it may offer what benefits are available to women in a patriarchal society. These include housewives with benefits such as living in a beautiful home, having a domestic worker, a car and monetary allowances from their rich husbands. The internalisation of patriarchal values by women is also the reason why it is not necessarily a satisfactory answer for women to simply take control of the means of cultural production. What is needed is a shift in ideology and infusion of women's mental, physical and emotional strength and independence to fight patriarchy and other forces that perpetuate women subordination in society.

### **2.2.3 Commercialism and Representation**

This section contains a review of literature relating to the influences of the commercial sector in media texts and images and the resultant gender representations. According to Ballaster et al. (1991) women's magazines emerged<sup>16</sup> in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century out of a consensus that gender difference rather than distinction of status or wealth was the primary arbiter of social power for women. However, it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that advertising became a crucial source of revenue for magazines. The introduction of advertising on a large scale in magazines radically altered the appearance of the women's magazines as well as their

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<sup>16</sup> Although the history of South Africa's women magazine industry, as 5.1 indicates is more recent; similar trends have been observed.

normative representations of femininity. Advertisers realised that the role of educating women as consumers fitted in well with their aims to persuade women to spend more on domestic appliances, clothes, food and cosmetics.

During the 1980s, magazines increasingly introduced their readers to the seduction of buying. Feminine identities were shown to be constructed through the use of commodities. For example, “in the choice between Oasis and Top Shop for clothes, between a *Take That* or *Blackstreet* CD, between Keanu Reeves or Leonardo DiCaprio. The downside of this process was that readers became more strenuously addressed as consumers” (McRobbie, 1991: 186).

Kellner (1995) holds that while the advertising industry claims that advertising is predominantly informative, careful scrutiny of magazine advertisements indicate that it is overwhelmingly persuasive and symbolic. Its images not only attempt to sell the product by associating it with certain socially desirable qualities, but sell a lifestyle and value system congruent with the imperatives of consumer capitalism. For example, if one smokes Malboro, one will be viewed as macho like in the advertisements. Symbolic images in advertising attempt to create an association between the products offered and socially desirable traits in order to produce an impression that if one wants to be a certain type of person, one should use a certain product.

In the capitalist system, the primary purpose of mass media is to deliver an audience to advertisers. Audiences are clearly defined target groups and products generated by the media to be sold to advertisers. All media industries earn the majority of their revenue through selling space (in the case of print media) and airtime (in the case of electronic media) to advertisers (Inglis, 1972; McQuail, 1987; Leiss et al, 1990; Dines and Humez, 1995; Murdock and Janus, 1985).

Readers are distinguished from one another by their consumption patterns, lifestyles and the socio-economic classes, which are demarcated by the criterion of age, occupation and income levels such as the Living Standards Measure (LSM). Publishers and editors are only interested in occupation and income levels in so far as these are determinant of consumption patterns. Their interest in the female reader boils down to what she consumes, and not who she really is and her real dreams (Ballaster et al, 1991; Dines and Humez, 1995). This is true of the magazines under review in this study as their fact files in Chapter 1 show that they mainly define themselves by their circulation figures, the age of their typical woman reader, what her status is in society and how the magazines can create conveniences for her through the products it recommends to her.

Dines and Humez (1995) believe that there have been some changes in the images of women and indeed a new woman has emerged in commercials in recent years. They suggest that she is generally presented as a superwoman,

who manages to do all the work at home and at the office. However, she does this with the help of a product, and not of her husband or children or friends. She is portrayed as the liberated woman, who owes her independence and self-esteem to the products she uses. Dines and Humez argue that these new images do not represent any real progress but instead create a myth of progress and an illusion of what women's power and success is really all about. Women, argue Berger (1987) and Sinclair (1997) are perceived by the advertising industry in one of two roles, as a mother or as a successful businesswoman. It is rare that these two stereotypes are blended, even though there are women who assume both roles.

A link has been established between femininity and consumption in relation to female beauty as an aspect of femininity. Magazines have extended the work of beautification beyond the traditional areas of dress and fashion, or care for the hair and complexion into the purchase and skilful application of make-up and beauty products. Cosmetic advertisements and advice on their application in the magazines thus bring together consumption and the representation of woman as object of the gaze. Femininity also becomes a source of anxiety because it can never be fully achieved and the magazines and their advertisements perpetuate the myth of femininity and offer themselves as a solution (Randazzo, 1993; Ballaster et al, 1991; Janowitz, 1978). In a state of almost a wild goose chase, women buy magazines, issue after issue, in pursuit of this elusive dream.



Cortese (1999) argues that an analysis of women representations in advertisements and stories reveals a pattern of symbolic and institutional sexism and points out that due to the visual appeal of the images, women readers want to look like the ones on the advertisement, and they will have to spend a lot of time and money on this never-ending quest. Giddens (1991) adds that media messages aimed at women promote the idea that products will help women to accentuate their individuality hence the project of the self is redirected by the corporate world into a set of shopping opportunities. Giddens sees this as a corruption of and a threat to the true quest of self. A South African television advertisement by women's clothing store Foschini shows a woman rushing into a store saying: "Why waste valuable shopping time by sleeping". This implies that women must learn not to waste time but use any available opportunity to shop as much as they can.

Dines and Humez (1995) adopt a Marxist analysis and warn of a need to be aware of how relations of power and domination are encoded or embodied in images and texts of women's magazines. They argue that the underlying messages that persist are those of the capitalists aimed at securing a wide pool of consumers for their products. It is clear that advertising is produced by capitalists who want to cultivate insecurities in consumers. They then sell solutions to these insecurities in the form of commercial products. Inglis (1972); Lindblom (1977); Janowitz (1978) further note that advertising persuades people that only in buying goods can they find satisfaction. In simplistic terms, the

solutions provided in the magazines must be purchased from a shop and can never be obtained freely from any other source. A simple example: all solutions to beauty problems refer to certain creams to be purchased from the chemist and not to any herb that a person can cut from the bush.

Advertising considerations also have a great influence on media content. Commercialised media that become pressurised to attract audiences to sell to advertisers tend to align their content to suit whomever they are trying to attract. Such practices place content in great jeopardy and open it up for abuse. The focus on advertising pushes commercial interests to a powerful and manipulative role in mass media (Murdock and Janus, 1985).

The economic focus of most mass media is not one without 'casualties'. Women are often used as a 'selling' strategy in images that seek to attract people to buy products. The point of the argument is not that women must not appear in advertisements but rather when they do appear the manner in which they are portrayed must not be sexist, derogatory and demeaning. The reality is that in a majority of advertisements women are portrayed as weak, childish, emotional and men as strong and in control. A typical advertisement will portray a man next to a big 4X4 vehicle and his scuba diving equipment. This portrayal successfully presents him as strong, macho and involved in extreme sports which demonstrate that he is mighty, strong, powerful and not afraid.

In most advertisements women are rarely shown as producers but rather as consumers of products. Leiss et al (1990) posit that the Marxist position sees advertising as essential to the maintenance of the exploitative relations of advanced capitalism and as a vital and integral part of the capitalist system designed to stave off the threat of overproduction. Clearly, the mass production of capitalist goods must be congruent with the demand for goods that advertising seeks to create. If there were to be no buyers for the goods, capitalism would not survive. Therefore advertising ensures there are enough consumers to buy and use all the goods produced by the capitalists.

Gauntlett (2002); Inglis (1972); Randazzo (1993); Williamson (1978), argue that advertisers have discovered the powerful truth that dreams 'sell'. Due to the fact that human beings are aspirational, advertisers wrap their dreams of being slim, pretty and rich in nice consumables such as perfume, clothes, slimming tablets and sell the package back to them as a solution. Advertisers create mythologies around brands that reflect people's desires. People purchase the product in the quest of what was promised by the advertisement. The writers point out that the magazine serves a dual commercial purpose, one of selling commodities to an identifiable market group, and that of being a commodity itself, a product sold in the capitalist market place for profit. Accordingly consumers pay twice, for the cover price of the magazine and for the purchase of the actual goods advertised in the magazine.

Dines and Humez (1995) further point out that advertisements sell more than just products; they sell values, images and concepts of success and worth, love and sexuality. Advertisements sell promises. The promise of the advertisement is not simply; 'You will have pleasure if you buy this product,' but 'You will be happy and people will envy you if you have this product.' The spectator of the advertisement imagines herself transformed by the product into an object of envy of others. When others envy her, she feels good and proud that others desire what she has become. In fact she remains totally oblivious that the advertisement of the product has stolen her natural love of herself as she is, and offered it back to her for the price of the product that she must buy to enhance herself.

Thriving on aspirations of consumers, advertising creates a need for consumption where none exist by showing a potential consumer the benefits of purchasing and using a particular product thereby creating false symbolism, mythology and fantasy (Dunn et al, 1990; Bullmore, 1992; Dyer, 1982; Leiss et al, 1990; Leymore, 1975; Wilson, 1968; Randazzo, 1993).

Dines and Humez (1995); Inglis (1972); Randazzo (1993), are among the critics of biased media images and texts and perceive this a major ideological tool of the marketplace. Although advertising addresses people about how they can be happy, the answers provided are all oriented to the marketplace, through the purchase of goods or services. They view advertising as a propaganda system for commodities in that happiness lies at the end of a purchase. They further note

that the problem, therefore, becomes how to get more things for everyone, as that is the root of happiness.

Those in favour of advertising often defend it and argue that it is merely a craft form that is primarily informational rather than persuasive and is therefore less of a manipulative tool (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995). This view further holds that people need commodities and therefore need to know about such commodities. However, the point of advertising, according to Galbraith (1958); Inglis (1972), is to encourage unquestioning consumption thereby perpetuating reinvestment into the coffers of the capitalist system.

Steinem (1990) chronicles her 10-year experience working as the advertising representative for the women's magazine *Ms.* She details her struggle with advertisers who were positioning themselves to determine the content of the magazine. When advertising and revenue generation is a priority for the media, there must be a revolution to that media content is not dictated by commercial interests. This will have to ensure the media does not become a tool for promoting the interests of a dominant group.

Women's magazines, offering the combination of a target market and quality colour visuals, provide the multi-billion dollar cosmetic and fashion industries with effective advertising. Glamour constitutes the primary content of articles, features and editorial pages of women's magazines. The strategic placement of adverts

next to complimentary editorial further creates an illusion of genuine advice from the magazine writers who are seen as specialists in their fields, whether it is fashion, food, relationships or caring for the children and the home.

It is unfortunate that the 'convention' of the industry of regarding women's magazines primarily as advertising vehicles precludes an extraordinary range of information and debate that could take place to enhance the lives of women. According to Steinem (1990) what society is faced with is a process whereby commodities are made the expression of a certain lifestyle or solutions to certain problems. For an example, women are encouraged and taught how to apply make-up in order to enhance their beauty. The ultimate objective of this process is to attach the desired identity (i.e. beauty) to a specific commodity (make-up), so that the need for an identity is transformed into a need for the commodity. Advertisements present this skewed version of reality in order to fit the 'needs' of the targeted audience. As a result advertisements cannot function as a source of objective information because they are biased in nature. Their aim is to persuade the readers to buy more products.

Products advertised in certain magazines emphasise the role of woman as a housewife, someone who takes responsibility for the daily meals and the maintenance of the home. In other magazines female beauty and appearance are uppermost, with suggestions of how a woman can improve or preserve her assets, and the stress on her ability to attract a man (Steinem, 1990). The dominant image of femininity in advertising today is that of the beauty and

fashion ideal. The transition from the domestic woman to the glamorous woman is reflected in advertisements that encourage women not to let motherhood spoil their bust-lines and promote products to keep them youthful. Is possible that the advertising intends introducing a shift in female priorities, which seems to be from motherhood and childcare to the maintenance of physical appearance. Advertisements wield a powerful weapon when they suggest that certain physical features are the subject of scandal-mongering, and victimise the women who do not live up to such definitions of femininity (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985).

Traditionally, advertisements have shown women as mothers and wives, thereby upholding a feminine ideal of domesticity. This image is still visible; however women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century see themselves playing a bigger role outside of the home such as in the business environment and in their communities. Women's magazines must contain more of such texts and images in order to promote a more positive and diverse image of women.

From the 1950s through to the 1970s the man-appeal was used in advertisements which domesticated women and focused her on how to please her man (Faulder, 1977). Some adverts reminded housewives of their duties in plain words. A Radox herbal bath advert (Woman's Own, October 1978) pictures a worn-out woman surrounded by toys, promising that 'we could make you a joy to come home to.' In other words, it suggests that a housewife has an obligation

to cheer up her husband when he gets home from work by making herself as appealing as possible (Steinem, 1990).

Advertisements of products that allow women to make the best of both worlds, being a super domestic person and a professional woman reflect that although women have become accepted in the labour market, the bulk of household chores are still regarded as their responsibility (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985).

The propensity for humans to succumb to the use of products to enhance one's circumstances is high because naturally most human beings aspire to be and have more. Media messages employ a technique to capitalise on women's wants to create a population of consumers. As a technique, media messages use creative and sometimes manipulated images and texts to entice unsuspecting readers. Images of and texts about women and Valentine's Day are used overtly and covertly to attract people to buy products such as perfume, jewellery, clothes and food. Again, it is how these images and texts are used that is the subject of scrutiny in this paper.

In order for the desired shift of portraying genders in an equitable manner to occur, all representations must show life as it really is. This requires providing an accurate reflection of society and its people, as opposed to reproducing myths and stereotypes. This means not always depicting authority as male, not always



showing women doing housework, and showing them as happy and glamorous when they do. It means including the whole range of roles and experiences of women, of whatever age, size, sexuality, class, race or ethnic group in mainstream representations. It also means portraying them as important in their own right, not just for their role in relation to men (Marshment, 1997).

What is needed is women empowerment towards self-determination. This study argues that women's portrayal must be free of any bias and women must have a say and role in how they are portrayed. The portrayal of women must promote the interests of women, expose the oppression experienced by women under patriarchal capitalism and encourage social equality between the sexes. Women and girls must be provided with positive role models and be empowered to question ideological notions of sexual difference (Marshment, 1997).

The most important question is whether the token woman functions as a trailblazer or as a diversion from issues that affect women in general. Is it a co-option of feminist values for commercial ends that is meant to divert attention from the more serious issue of women subordination? It must be pointed out that adherence to realist criteria produces a dilemma for itself. Asking for representations that are faithful to the reality of women's position in patriarchal society may risk demanding representations that show women predominantly in subordinate roles, as oppressed, as victims.

In fact, replacing stereotypical images of women with images of them as underpaid workers, bored housewives, battered wives, rape victims, may be more realistic as evidence of the oppression of women under patriarchy, but they are not in themselves empowering images. While these images will not assist in furthering the argument of a positive image of women, they will create more awareness of what challenges women are faced with and mobilise actions to free women from oppression.

As long as women continue to see themselves as housewives, the media will continue to address them as such. The revolution in the representation of women requires a major shift in popular culture and the way women see themselves. Women must use the power they have to cause the downfall of offensive media texts and images. Women must choose not to buy the products advertised and not to believe the promises carried in the advertisements (Mower, 1981).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Content from popular women's magazines will be analysed in order to respond to research questions stated in the previous chapter. This study uses the qualitative research method to respond to the question of the interests linked to the coverage of Valentines' Day in True Love, Femina, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, Fairlady, Woman's Value and Oprah magazines. The qualitative approach involves analysis, critique and interpretation of data (Du Plooy, 1997). This method is considered valuable and relevant to the analysis of texts and images. It involves an "interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2). Qualitative techniques are a preferred method of describing people's representations and constructions of what happens in their world.

Representation of women in women's magazines has been widely debated and documented. However, there is no in-depth analysis of the gendered nature of romantic themes in women's magazines such as Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is one of such themes which is celebrated annually on 14 February and is known as a day for couples to remind each other of their love.

As is the case with other special occasions such as Christmas, the media has taken over the task of reminding its audiences of Valentine's Day and provides tips on how it can be celebrated. Often the tips are about what product to buy for a loved one or love stories of celebrities. Of great interest is the application of Valentine's Day messages and its link to the portrayal of women in women's magazines.

In line with the qualitative approach, an analysis of advertisements and stories that refer to Valentine's Day will be conducted. The intention is to identify and group Valentine's Day advertisements and stories according to their themes as follows: profiles, motivational, educational or product promotion. This will be followed by an analysis of the construction of the stories or advertisements using a discourse analysis which entails selecting a sample of stories and advertisements. Discourse analysis reveals the hidden motivations behind a text or image and is a deconstructive reading and interpretation of texts and images. It must be clarified that discourse analysis does not provide absolute answers but enables the understanding of the conditions behind a specific problem. Importantly, in analysing representations, care must be taken that there is no one true view or interpretation of any circumstance. Any belief or view is a subjective interpretation that is conditioned by its social surrounding [www.gslis.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/discourse.htm](http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/discourse.htm).

The content of the groups of stories and advertisements will be analysed and interpreted to assess the main Valentine's Day message contained in the identified magazines. The investigation further assesses whether the use of a particular product is linked to the celebration of Valentine's Day. Finally, the analysis probes whether and how Valentine's Day messages and themes from related advertisements and stories respond to a hypothesis that there is a particular interest behind its application.

According to Leiss et al. (1990), through images and texts, magazines create, appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols, words and ideas that reach and impact on many people in varied ways. The analysis of stories and advertisements in the selected magazines using the qualitative method will offer an illustration of and expose how, if at all, magazine content could be loaded with gender stereotypes that perpetuate a particular position of women in society.

Since discourse analysis is basically an interpretative and deconstructive reading, it is proposed that it be enhanced by the adoption of a reflexive approach. This approach is important in the fight against women subordination. Studies about women must aim to develop the theories that explain the world from the position of women (Stanley and Wise, 1983). I believe that women's research should reflect women's interests and values and use women's interpretations of their own experiences. Taking these factors into cognisance this study is influenced by Dorothy Smith's work. Smith (1987) argues that

feminist research should never lose sight of women as actively constructing, as well as interpreting, the realities that constitute their everyday lives. Therefore, the analysis of the magazines takes into consideration my own interpretation as both a woman reader of the magazines and researcher in this study. Heeding Smith's call, the study looks at the way the production of magazines' discourses, and ideologies 'colonise' the material realities of women's lives.

The analysis of this study is also influenced by Norman Fairclough's framework for studying texts, "where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis onto one another: analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of socio-cultural practice" (1995:2).

Only stories and advertisements of February 2005 issues of the selected magazines will be analysed. Limiting the study within this timeframe was informed by the fact that Valentine's Day is celebrated on 14 February.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. QUALITATIVE AND INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS

The media contains many images of and texts about women and men, and it is unlikely that these images and texts will have no impact on gender identity. Therefore, why is it essential to explore the relationship between gender and the use of Valentine's Day in stories and advertisements of the selected women's magazines? Gauntlett's (2002) responds that people consume many hours of media even though they may deny it by saying they were not paying attention. Even if they read these items in an ironic state of mind, it must all sink in somewhere. Therefore the role of the mass media in the formation and negotiation of gender identities should not be taken for granted.

The aim of this chapter is to firstly, present evidence and examples to substantiate issues discussed in preceding chapters and illustrate how the coverage of Valentine's Day is used in women's magazines to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Secondly, I assert that the prevailing portrayal of women is not by accident but by design. Therefore this study will analyse examples that strengthen the argument that there are underlying forces and interests behind the application of Valentine's Day in the content of women's magazines.

What follows in the rest of this chapter are sub-topics that will be analysed by drawing on specific examples from the magazines and linking those examples to the theoretical framework on which this dissertation is based.

#### **4.1 Front Covers**

A look at the covers of the seven magazines under review gives a quick view of how women are represented in the magazines. At first glance, all the magazine covers look alike in terms of the key elements of the presentation style. All of them have bright colours and are cluttered with different headlines in big and bold letters. All of the magazines have a cover girl<sup>17</sup> that happens to be both beautiful and young.<sup>18</sup> The woman on the front cover looks straight into the camera so that it seems like she is looking straight at the reader and invites the reader to join her glamorous world by buying the magazine (Thwaites et al. 1994). Another observation is that all the women are generally slim and made pretty by make-up, hairstyles and sometimes revealing clothes.

Women's magazines generally carry photos of women on their front covers. According to Thwaites et al. (1994), a debate ensued in the Swedish fashion media about why there were only women cover pictures in women's magazines

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<sup>17</sup> The use of the term "cover girl" is unpleasant. Women's media have a tendency to refer to women as girls, despite their age. This reduces a woman to seeing herself as nothing but a "girl". The connotation of "girl" is someone young, still under the guidance of a guardian figure and cannot make any decisions for herself.

<sup>18</sup> There are products and tips in the magazine showing women how to be like the cover girl, how to prevent wrinkles, have a slim figure.



and why there were no pictures of men. A women's magazine tested the market by putting male models on the covers and this resulted in a drop in sales. However when they put an image of a woman on the cover again, the sales immediately increased. A similar trend of glamorous 'cover girls' gracing magazine covers prevails in South African women's magazines. They argue that it is clear women's magazines function as a mirror to reflect the way that a woman reader wants to become. The intention is for the reader to envy the pretty woman on the cover and aspire to be like her.

Another aspect that draws the reader's attention is the topics of the month. An important observation is that topics are somewhat similar to each other across all issues. Almost all topics relate to love, fashion, food and sex. According to Berger (1987), women's magazines increasingly use sexuality to sell any product or service. All the issues<sup>19</sup> under review carry at least one headline on the front cover about sexuality, romance and love. The women's magazines put sexuality on sale to get the reader's attention. It is shocking to see that even the content for Valentine's Day which is meant for lovers to celebrate their romance can be loaded with sexual undertones. The message is clear, "you can increase your sex appeal if you buy this product". Pratkins et al. (2001) argues that the use of sex appeal sells more products than, for example, the use of cartoons or historical figures.

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<sup>19</sup> See appendices 1-7 and table 8.

According to McRobbie (1991), sexuality and love issues underpin the content of many women’s magazines. This is partly fuelled by the recognition that sexuality and romance issues sell. Instead of presenting sexuality, love and romance as natural, it is now recognised as something which has to be achieved through tips linked to certain commercial products. This is evident in modern day’s typical women’s magazines with front page headline which read “10 ways to make him go crazy in bed” and many others. Even the products linked to Valentine’s Day such as lingerie have become a tool for furthering gender stereotypes in society. For example, the reader is encouraged to purchase skimpy lingerie so that her man can find her irresistible on Valentine’s Day. The woman is encouraged not to be her natural self but to improve herself using certain products, it is only then that she can appeal to her man.

Below is an illustration of the front cover topics of the seven selected magazines.<sup>20</sup> The front cover topics are presented in the form in which they appear in the magazines. This includes grammatical style.

TITLE	FRONT PAGE TOPICS OF THE MONTH
True Love (February, 2005)	- Stir it up – and get the sex you want!  - Heart to heart: the things we do for love...  - Love-struck Sonia: “I’m a hopeless romantic!”

<sup>20</sup> See appendices 1-7

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A beautiful feat for lovers: beautiful bedrooms and sensual Food</li> </ul>
<p>Marie Claire (February, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Singles' solutions: sexy toys tested, our matchmaking success story, the best mascara for a girl's night out</li> <li>- J Lo in love rebound – or third time lucky?</li> <li>- The 10 best diets of the decade and the best one for you</li> </ul>
<p>Woman's Value (February, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the moth of love: true romance</li> <li>- The food of love</li> <li>- Playful gifts of love</li> </ul>
<p>Femina (February, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Love in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: why coupledom will never die</li> </ul>
<p>Oprah Magazine (February, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Love! How to find the real thing. a new approach to getting the relationship you've always wanted.</li> <li>- Popping the questions: the hard ones you must ask before you commit</li> </ul>
<p>Fairlady (February, 2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Modern romance – how one woman found love round the corner</li> <li>- Breast reconstruction – understand your options</li> </ul>

	- Slow down – break the fast food habit
Cosmopolitan (February, 2005):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number 1 love mystery solved – why the guy didn't call, won't commit or slept with your sister</li> <li>- Hair and beauty – how to: pull off a sexy up-do, slap on false eyelashes, feed your face a chocolate mask</li> <li>- Fast, forward female! Seen someone you like? How to make him yours</li> <li>- The happiness quiz – could you be sunnier? Turn to page 74 to find out how</li> <li>- Romance rules! Kissy, cuddly sex (that's filthy enough to be fun)</li> </ul>

Table 8 – Front cover topics

#### 4.2 Use of Colour and Representation

This section explores the use of colour in all the advertisements and stories of Valentine's Day in all the magazines under review. The use of colour is a distinctly common feature in all the magazines. The magazines boast bright and daring red and pink colours in most of their pages. These colours are generally associated with love and their prominence in a February issue is not surprising. The application of red and pink creates a Valentine's Day association in the mind of the reader.

In Cosmopolitan the background of the front page is red, headings and sub-headings are written in bold pink letters, the backdrop for photos is either red or pink and the same colours are applied widely as background to text throughout the magazine. The use of these colours can be linked to reinforcing the message that a woman's focus is love, whether it is finding love or giving love. However, it is only through the use of products that she can succeed in the battle of attracting a man. To illustrate this point, there is an advertisement of a variety of perfumes in the Cosmopolitan magazine. The advertisements are classified in three categories: "romance trigger", "memory maker" and "an act of love". According to Christopher Brosius, perfume manufacturer and founder of CB Limited in New York, "it is an act of love if you get your man to help you pick out a perfume and then wear it when you are going to be together, this will make him feel good. Wearing a fragrance you know he likes demonstrates that you are paying attention to his tastes and are making an effort to please him. This boosts his ego, combined with the heavenly way you smell, will make him even more inclined to get close" (Cosmopolitan, February 2005:128). Clearly, the woman reader is encouraged to attract a man and meet his desires. The globalisation of mass media also means that the influences of the product of Christopher Brosius are spread across the globe and continue to replicate whatever gender influences they carry.

Oprah magazine romanticises lights: "Light romance – looking for a little sparkle? Think of a chandelier as jewellery for your home" (Oprah magazine, February

2005:114). These words are contained in an advertisement for chandelier lights. The pink and red capital letters used in the heading associated the message with love, Valentine's Day. The advertisement has a connotation that fitting the lights in her home will enhance her romantic encounter with her man. The combination of words such as romance and sparkle suggested that a woman must always be busy creating opportunities and moments to please a man through romantic lighting that might just get him into the mood of sex.

Woman's Value provides a survival guide for Valentine's Day and shares tips on décor, gifts, how to keep the passion alive, food and drinks (Woman's Value, February 2005:6). The use of colour in shapes or images such as hearts which symbolise love made very discreet yet effective suggestions about Valentine's Day. The guide sent a subtle message that if a woman tried them out she could appeal to her man.

In a section entitled "Good Looks", Woman's Value uses colour and words that symbolise love and create an association with Valentine's Day in the mind of the reader. The section promotes various fragrances and makes statements such as "a passionate affair (what she will achieve by using the fragrance), fragrant romance, let a new romantic fragrance tantalise your senses and set love free, cast a spell (on him), Spanish flair for him (wear the perfume to impress him) (Woman's Value, February 2005:13).

Oprah magazine and Fairlady boast bold use of pink and red throughout the magazines as backdrop for photos, background for text and headings. In Oprah magazine, the section on fashion, beauty, home and food, the heading "Love That!" is in red capital letters and is easily associated with Valentine's Day, so do other words in the home section "Breakfast in bed – wake up to romance with satin, velvet and whimsical details" (Oprah magazine, February 2005:36, 38, 40, 42, 43).

In Femina red and pink are applied in a very bold and distinct manner throughout the magazine. An example of Valentine's content in Femina was a fragrance called Annique. According to the advertisement: "February 14 is the one day of the year devoted to just the two of you. Lock the world outside and escape into a sensual, fragrant space of your own" (Femina, February 2005:26). This means enjoyment of a quiet moment on Valentine's Day will be enhanced by the use of the product.

The examples used above relating to the use of visuals such as colour, shape, words and layout of Valentine's Day information demonstrate a clear strategy to promote the issues of love, looking after the home and making it beautiful as the primary focus of women. Promoting products under the guise that they will improve women's lives subjects women to commercial trappings that in reality play no role in the enhancement of women's status in society (Williamson, 1978; Wilson, 1968 and Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985). The application of colour

throughout the magazines shows a clear strategy of wooing readers to the messages contained in the carefully designed and decorated stories and advertisements. The attractiveness of the layout and design also takes the focus away from the facts published as, the reader becomes engaged in appreciating the design and neglects to scrutinise the facts. This means a reader could be misled by fancy designs into buying a particular product.

### **4.3 Semi-dressed Models**

The images of semi-dressed models were identified in a group of advertisements with Valentine's Day information. In the *Cosmopolitan* and *True Love* magazines, a push-up bra advertisement promises a woman that if she buys the product she will "get breakfast, lunch and supper in bed this Valentine's"<sup>21</sup> (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2005:35 and *True Love*, February 2005:17). The model is only wearing a bikini and the push-up bra showing her consent to the role of pleasing a man with her body. The advertisement promotes the idea that if a woman wears the push-up bra her man will find her irresistible and keep her in bed for the whole day and serve her all her meals in bed. There is nothing wrong with a woman wearing a push-up bra. At issue are the reasons why she wears it. If she wears it because it is comfortable, that is acceptable. However, if she wears it because she believes it will make her more attractive to her man, this is problematic from a feminist point of view. Feminists argue that women should not be channelled

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<sup>21</sup> See appendix 8.



into roles that are determined and enforced through patriarchy. The advertisement in fact encourages women to make themselves men's sex objects.

"Feel the heat! Red-hot, sizzling underwear is sure to set your man's pulse racing and spark off flames of passion! Go on – give him a Valentine's night to remember!"<sup>22</sup> (True Love, February 2005:34-39). This text is accompanied by a photo of a slim female model dressed in sexy revealing lingerie and stiletto heels. The model is lying on her back with her knees raised. According to Barnard (1996), fashion and beauty practices are part of the process by which attitudes to and images of men and women are created and reproduced. Her dress code and physical pose has a direct sexual connotation and presents her as a sex object waiting to please her man with her body. The power of images is such that this representation reduces the woman to a sex object and ignores other reasons for which she may wish to wear sexy lingerie. These could include the fact that it may be a perfect fit and she likes the fabric or colour. The pages<sup>23</sup> that follow the advertisement referred to above show the same model in different makes of sexy underwear. The result of this representation is that Valentine's Day could be seen as an opportunity for a woman to prepare herself and her body to attract, sexually please and satisfy a man.

McRobbie (1991), Miller (1998) and Millett (1977) argue that showing women on the floor or lying down in advertisements perpetuates a weak and subordinate

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<sup>22</sup> Appendix 10.

<sup>23</sup> Appendices 11-14.

position. Lying down is a position of weakness compared to those who are sitting or standing and can also be interpreted as a sign of sexual suggestion. Compounding this image is that half of women shown in such positions in the media are naked or half dressed, which confirms the sexual connotation. While there may not be an issue with female images placed along products, this becomes problematic when women are placed half-dressed or naked as if their bodies or sexual connotation is the key selling point. The display of women's bodies alongside products creates perceptions that female naked or semi-dressed bodies sell. In fact most advertisers understand this dynamic and exploit it to attract consumers.

Sinclair (1997) and Steinem (1990) agree that magazines employ feminine images as the major medium in marketing products to women. In these images women are naked or half dressed while men appear fully dressed and if they are not fully dressed, they only reveal the upper part of their body. In these advertisements women's bodies are displayed in a manner that is intended to draw people's attention to the products. This portrayal seems to suggest that a picture of a naked or half dressed woman will make people pay attention and as a result women's images have been exploited to benefit the commercial sector.

#### 4.4. Single Women

In Cosmopolitan, single women who are not involved in love relationships are given seven tips on how to survive Valentine's Day as singles. The article promotes the idea that a girl does not need to be in a couple to enjoy the day of lovers. However three of the seven tips tell the woman to:

- "flirt unashamedly",
- "go hunting in bars as all the men there would likely be unattached", and
- "keep on looking as she could meet the one" on Valentine's Day.

The other four tips are:

- "save money and spoil yourself instead of paying for the gift, card, cocktails, leg wax and blow dry";
- "you will be spared red roses, fluffy bears, heart-shaped chocolates, soppy cards and all the commercial trappings of Valentine's Day";
- "you can be selfish, if you are single Valentine's Day is all about you and no-one else"; and
- "you can have fun, this is a perfect day for you and your friends to flaunt your singledom, get a group of single girls and plan a man-free day" (Cosmopolitan, February 2005:56).

In Marie Claire, an advertorial<sup>24</sup> lists items<sup>25</sup> for the woman to spoil herself on Valentine's Day, namely: flower broach, belt, perfume, compact mirror, chocolate, ring, selection of CDs, underwear, sandals, bag and roses. "Spoil yourself this Valentine's Day, you deserve a little loving. It's all about you. All those hints about romantic dinner plans and dazzling trinkets have gone unnoticed. And if you are single, your friends with partners just become too mushy to stomach. So instead of living in dread that no little love gifts will land at your door, splash out and indulge. This shopping guide is your license to spoil yourself. Think Champagne, flowers, gorgeous lingerie and the best bit, chocolate. Cadbury Flake is the perfect melt-in-your-mouth experience. Let all your resistance crumble" (Marie Claire, February 2005:114-115).

The advertorial implies that a woman must get these products and console herself for not having a man on Valentine's Day. The forceful promotion of acquiring certain products seems to be driven by the fact that women are now in positions where they earn good salaries. Unlike in the past when women were often confined in the domestic sphere and men were the only ones with an income. The latest developments of equal employment opportunities, particularly in South Africa,<sup>26</sup> have increased women's buying power much to the delight of the capitalist system.

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<sup>24</sup> Advertorial refers to paid-for promotional information about products that is presented and disguised to look like a part of the magazine's normal stories so that it appears genuine unlike advertisements that some readers are skeptical of.

<sup>25</sup> Appendices 16-17.

<sup>26</sup> After the introduction of the democratic regime in South Africa in 1994, Affirmative Action was legislated with an aim to ensure upliftment of previously marginalized groups in employment practices.

While some women do go through Valentine's Day without a man in their lives, it is made clear that it is not an attractive option and that it is better to be in a couple. By promoting the benefits of receiving roses and gifts from a lover, all women are led to believe they have to go out to find a man so that they can have a normal Valentine's Day. Further tips on how to find, please and keep a man are a common feature in these magazines confirming that not to have a man to share Valentine's with is not normal.

Somehow women's magazines do acknowledge that not all women will be successful in finding a man and keeping him. So they come up with a variety of distractions to keep a 'girl' happy such as pampering herself with perfume, clothes, make-up. Women without men on Valentine's Day are provided with tips on how to console themselves. The nature of the consolation is strikingly commercial in nature as women are not encouraged to take a walk, go for swimming or dance classes, but to find solace in commercial products which should see them through Valentine's Day.

A Lindt chocolate advertisement in Fairlady and Oprah magazines, asks readers to buy a box of Lindt chocolate and look out for the silver Lindt dragon pendants. "Will you find the hidden dragon this Valentine's Day? Love is full of surprises and, this Valentine's Day, so is every box of Lindt chocolates. Inside each box there is a chance to instantly win one of 100 silver Lindt dragon pendants" (Fairlady, February 2005:25 and (Oprah magazine, February 2005:55). The

advertisement has a very subtle gender connotation. Single women usually hope to find a man on Valentine's Day. The advertisement equates the 100 dragons that a reader could find if she buys the product, to men who are considered to be elusive and sometimes difficult to catch. This implies women are desperate to find a man, and the more they (men) are being sought the more elusive, unavailable and unpredictable they become. The advertisement does not say how many boxes of chocolate will be produced, among which the 100 dragons will be placed. Assuming the company produces 1000 boxes this means only 10 percent of the boxes will contain the lucky prize. In terms of distribution of the boxes around the country, it is possible that the ones with the prize will not reach certain towns. So a woman's quest is an unending one of chasing after an unattainable dream as she has no way of knowing if the box she picks up in a store is the right one.

In Marie Claire, an advertisement for a Valentine's Day picnic where all funds raised were to be donated to St Luke's Hospice, encourages women to go and look for men on Valentine's Day, "Do it. Do not whine about the lack of men available, get out there and meet some. Dinner date in a members-only dinner club. Join seven other singles for wining, dining and a little flirting. It will cost you R350 to join", (Marie Claire, February 2005:20). The above words were printed on a red heart-shaped<sup>27</sup> background symbolising love. The effect of this representation is that it reduces women's priorities to finding Mr Right and reinforces the stereotype that a woman is indeed incomplete without a man.

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<sup>27</sup> Appendix 18.

## **4.5 Product Marketing**

In True Love a jewellery advertisement goes: "A heart is no longer just an expression of love, it is a style statement. Bridget Jones wears hers sideways and Paris Hilton likes hers with lots of bling. Come and select the one that is perfectly you. Wear your heart on your sleeve" (True Love, February 2005:11). With more women in gainful employment it makes sense for the jewellery company to direct the advertisement at women and also taking into account that women without partners may choose to spoil themselves for Valentine's Day by purchasing a jewellery item themselves. The connotation of the design element in the advertised necklaces, bracelet and earrings<sup>28</sup> demonstrates that a woman is preoccupied with love and relationships. She boasts the heart-shaped jewellery for two reasons, a man bought it for her or she is the so called 'independent woman' who does not need a man to love her and buy her gifts because she can afford to pamper herself. I argue that the latter is the type of woman that the capitalist system encourages, one who can spend her money as she pleases.

## **4.6 Makeovers**

In True Love, a True Makeover section encourages readers to "pamper themselves while preparing for that hot Valentine's date and to remember that the beauty is as much in the details as in the overall look!" (True Love, February

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<sup>28</sup> Appendix 19.

2005:60). This seems like good and honest advice however the commercial link creates a suspicion that it is influenced by commercial interests. The advice lures the reader to purchasing a product in order to be ready for the hot Valentine's date. "Before" and "after"<sup>29</sup> photos of a reader are shown depicting the difference between her original look and when she had undergone a make-over, including a hair do using the "renowned Ladine professional hair care system relaxer", (True Love, February 2005:60). One concludes that only through the use of a commercial product could the 'lady' realise her true beauty and be ready for a Valentine's date. The advertisement steals the woman's pride in her natural looks and makes her feel inadequate in herself and pressurises her to enhance her looks with the use of commercial products. The feeling of a low self image will result in a growth of business for the makers of the products as she can no longer be without them.

Woman's Value gives two readers romantic makeovers<sup>30</sup> in celebration of Valentine's Day. The readers, Elene and Jaci, both in their thirties wore their hair long, no make-up and looked ordinary. Says the magazine: "Elene's long hair had no real shape to it and made her look dull. We gave her a short, modern, layered style and finished off the new look with a rich brown colour rinse. We retained her fringe because it strongly complements her striking eyes, and simply thinned it out to add definition. Her striking eyes were complimented with a purple and plum eye-shadow. To add definition to the shape of her eyes, we used a

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<sup>29</sup> Appendix 20.

<sup>30</sup> Appendix 21.



darker eye pencil. The light, natural lip colour ensured that the focus remained on her eye area. The flowing dress, cut on the bias, accentuates her long, lithe figure. To give Jaci a luminous look, we chose a short modern cut to make the most of her striking features. She had never coloured her hair and she was keen to experiment, so we added streaks of caramel to add warmth and texture to her blonde hair. Her full mouth and sparkling eyes were accentuated with dramatic eye make-up and bold, red lipstick" (Woman's Value, February 2005:15-17).

The title of the makeover section, 'Love is in the air' causes concerns since it suggests that the reason why the women undergo makeovers is to make themselves attractive to men. A common feature of the makeovers is that they are sponsored by merchandisers in an effort to promote their products. Using an ordinary looking woman is a ploy to make another ordinary looking woman desire to be transformed into a glamorous and luminous looking woman from head to toe. The makeover is a show off of how better and prettier a woman can be, but in order for her to achieve the look she must buy the products. The new-looking woman looks directly in the readers' eyes and flashes a broad grin in an attempt to invite you to join her into her world of glamour as you will enjoy the feeling of beauty. Accompanying information on Valentine's Day makeovers is a good example of the tips and guides that advertisers provide on how a woman can get her nails, eyelashes and eyebrows looking a particular way. Women are shown in clothing advertorials how to mix and match their clothes for a certain look. All

these aspects and more reduce women to people that are concerned with materialistic things in life.

The tips are published alongside products that are compulsory for the end product to be like the one on the photograph. This is an obvious demonstration of promoting consumerism. For great looking face a woman must not only wash it with face wash but she must also apply toner, anti-ageing cream, anti-wrinkles cream and moisturiser. For great looking face she must not apply facial cream but she must apply lipstick, eyeliner, lip-liner, blush and mascara. And all these items are expensive.

A beauty section in Oprah magazine, for example, lists a girl's beauty toys and the sub-heading reads "To me, with love". The compiler of the section is said to have "rounded up a few of her favourite things, those extra special spoilings that leave her feeling pampered all over" (Oprah magazine, February 2005:56). The list comprise of various make-up products, how to apply them, how beautiful you will look and how great you will feel afterwards. While Oprah magazine prides itself of being a medium that does not discuss sex and associated topics, despite this the magazine fails the test as its pages are loaded with sex and related topics (Oprah magazine, November 2005).

Women have dreams. They dream of having no cellulite, being slim, dress smartly, have face clear of acne, have beautiful hair, wear gorgeous accessories

and jewellery and smell beautifully. However, women are not born with these dreams. Advertising constructs the dreams and sell them to women. Geer (1999) argues that the products are presented as a must for any woman wanting to be beautiful. "Every woman knows that regardless of her achievements, she is a failure if she is not beautiful. Magazines financed by the beauty industry teach women that they need make-up and train them to use it, in that way establishing their lifelong reliance on beauty products. Not content with showing them how to use foundations, powders, concealers, blushers, eye-shadows, eye-liners, lip-liners, lip stick and lip gloss, the magazines identify problems of dryness, flackiness, blackheads, shininess, dullness, blemishes, puffiness, oiliness, spots, greasiness, that women are meant to treat with moisturizers, fresheners, masks, packs, washes, lotions, cleansers, toners, scrubs" (Geer, 1999).

#### **4.7 Couplehood**

It is good to show the genders complementing one another. True Love contains a story and photo of a woman lying on her stomach and a man massaging her back. The photo accompanied a story headlined as follows: "A touch of love: Learn the art of sensuous massage and give each other a truly touching Valentine's Day! Not only is it divinely relaxing, it is also a beautiful, intimate way to stimulate skin and blood cells – among other things..." (True Love, February 2005:54-55). This story and the accompanying photo show that the male and female genders can be equal in terms of giving love to and receiving love and

care from one another. It shows that a woman does not have to lie down in suggestive poses to catch the attention of a man but can be treated tenderly and with respect by her partner. This story challenges coverage of Valentine's Day discussed elsewhere in this chapter which portray women in very narrow and stereotypical roles that show women seeking to please a man.

In True Love appears another positive advertisement showing a couple holding a piece of jewellery. The words on the advertisement read: "A Valentine's investment – this Valentine's Day invest in your relationship with old Mutual." (True Love, February 2005:101).<sup>31</sup> The advertisement encourages loving couples to manage their finances properly and invest money for unexpected expenses that may arise in the future. It warns that while it is great to spoil your loved one on Valentine's Day, you can really show how much you love someone by doing things that will help avoid disagreements over money. The advertisement is very positive and does not separate the role of a man and a woman but show that they must work jointly as a team in order to achieve their goals. It gives both genders an equal status in the relationship.

On the other hand heterosexual couple-hood has been sold to the consumers as the only romantic option that exists. The advertisements and messages are exclusionary as homosexual love and romance is never made reference to. Silence around homosexual couple-hood is an indication of the society's attitude towards non-heterosexual relationships. This 'ignoring' tendency has been

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<sup>31</sup> See appendix 22.

criticised by some scholars like Sonja Narunsky-Laden (2005), dubbing the tendency a shunning technique.

#### **4.8 Gender Neutral Representations**

A number of gender neutral representations were identified during the analysis of Valentine's Day related stories and advertisements. One of such advertisements is contained in Oprah magazine in a section providing general advice linked to Valentine's Day; "For the love of it – we celebrate romance this month and have put together a list of idyllic hotels and resorts so you can plan a fun-filled romantic escape with your loved one" (Oprah, February 2005:29). The advertisement is gender neutral and does not promote one gender at the expense of another.

Marie Claire magazine contains an invitation to women and their men to attend a Valentine's Day Ball fundraising dinner. According to the advertisement proceeds from the dinner will be donated to charity organisations that provide counselling for abused women (Marie Claire, February 2005:12). This is a positive step which ensures the involvement of women in the celebration of Valentine's Day is given a more substantial purpose.

#### 4.9 Domestic Roles

Coverage of Valentine's Day food issues in women's magazines reinforced the old adage that "a woman's place is in the kitchen". Ensuring the preparation of family meals is used to narrow a woman's scope as opposed to men who can come home late without worrying about preparing dinner. The more women are confined to the domestic sphere the less they are in the corporate world to compete with men for jobs.

Marie Claire carries an advertisement of a red heart-shaped pot<sup>32</sup> that is sure to enhance a woman's role as the family chef. "A hot affair. Fall in love with the world's best cookware. There is no longer any need to fly to France for the enviously stylish and built-for-a-lifetime Le Creuset cast-iron pots and pans, from R350. Now available from Le Creuset, Cavendish Square shopping centre in Cape Town" (Marie Claire, February 2005:21). The shape of the pot has a very clear link to the love theme of Valentine's Day. The advertisement transforms a woman's relationship with a pot to something extra special and the aim is that she must see the pot as an important part of her success in her role as a cook, further entrenching her in the domestic role. Well, those who cannot afford it will simply fantasise about how their lives could have been enhanced had they been able to acquire this asset. Importantly the advertisement created an unnecessary desire among women, an imagined need as women do already have pots in their houses and are preparing meals for their families anyway.

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<sup>32</sup> See appendix 23.

The conveniences created by the magazine to make women more attached to products can be easily demonstrated in the following advertisement: "Naked chefs. Avoid the Valentine's Day restaurant rush and cook up your romantic meal for two. These naughty little numbers are so fuss-free they will not be the ones making you hot and flustered. Valentino's Pronto – created by Chef Valentino Marcattilli is available at all Mr Price home stores. Woolworths' new gourmet dinners for two are just in time for Valentine's Day. Impress him with salmon-trout pasta parcels with a light sparkling butter sauce and caramelised fennel (and that is just for starters), prawns with tomato brandy sauce and fresh egg pasta followed by crème brulee in a hear-shaped porcelain ramekin." (Marie Claire, February 2005:21).

Woman's Value magazine also carries Woolworths' guide of Valentine's Day meals. "Woolworths is making Valentine's Day easier this year with a special range of Valentine's dinners for two. The ingredients are pre-packed with easy instructions for you to do the final cooking and presentation of your special meal", (Woman's Value, February 2005:81). The advertisement listed various options of pre-cooked starters, main courses and desserts that will surely make the life of a woman easier. "There are three starters (R35 to R40) and three main courses (R80 to R90), each of which contains a generous serving for two. Choose from three tempting single-serving desserts (R10 to R17) (Woman's Value, February 2005:81). It would be interesting to see if the same material was covered in men's magazines to encourage them to make their own meals so they do not

need a woman to cook for them. By continuously showing the aspects such as preparing food as modern, glamorous, fun and easy, thanks to the convenience created by the likes of Woolworths, the aspect of it being hard work is taken away from it.

The pre-cooked convenience foods discussed in previous paragraphs further portray women in advertisements as consumers of the products. Women are never shown as producers or makers of products. The association of women with convenience foods follows the stereotype that even if women have high powered jobs, they cannot escape making meals for their partners which is seen to be their responsibility.

Woman's Value provides recipes and ideas to please a man on Valentine's Day. The recipes are introduced in a dramatised and romanticised manner, "According to Greek mythology, Aphrodite, goddess of love and sexuality, emerged from the sea bearing herbs that could cure impotence, enhance sexual pleasure and give rise to love and fertility – the origins of the word aphrodisiac. Through the ages, a range of food, spices and potions have been considered powerful aphrodisiacs, some sinfully delicious and others too awful to contemplate. Nowadays, most aphrodisiacs are packed with nutritional goodness, so by including them in your diet, you will not only be upping the love stakes, but you will also be adding to your general well-being" (Woman's Value, February 2005:91). The reader is asked to celebrate love with a special menu of choice foods known to make love



happen. Ingredients and preparations methods are explained in detail to assist the woman fulfil her role. The variety of menus is referred to as heart-racing Valentine's Day menus and readers are encouraged to mix and match these for an extra special celebration of love. Of interest is that some items on the menu were singled out and defined in a separate paragraph giving more detail why these are selected as foods of love. For example, according to the magazine, "oysters get you in the mood for romance, chillies are seen as aphrodisiacs because their effect on the body is similar to that of making love – you get all hot and sweaty" (Woman's Value, February 2005:91).

The magazines continue to associate women with roles such as cooking and looking after the home, even though these have been said to perpetuate the notion that a woman's place is at home. "Food for love! It has been said that no promising relationship was ever enhanced by a plain bowl of bean soup. And romance and passion can only be strengthened by enticing aromas and rich sensual foods. Turn Valentine's Day into a feast that awakens all the senses!" (True Love, February 2005:110). This advertisement is followed by 14 pages of romantic Valentine's Day food and décor ideas with a bold red colour scheme emphasising the theme of Valentine's Day. This further reinforces the message that a woman's primary role is to ensure that her man has food and the bedroom is well decorated in order to arouse him.

In the craft section in *Woman's Value* the reader is given tips on how to celebrate love by making Valentine's Day memorable with little surprises and special gifts for the man in her life. The *Do-It-Yourself* tips included a paper lunch box filled with lunch goodies, wrapping his favourite CDs or DVDs, wrapping a bottle of his favourite wine, filling a gift box with a selection of his favourite nibbles for him to enjoy while watching films. The colour of the wrapping paper shown in the photos is cerise, in line with the love theme (*Woman's Value*, February 2005). The advertisement suggests that the woman will use all her creative skills to try and create the surprises to please her man.

*Oprah* magazine publishes a full month calendar listing parts or full quotable quotes on each day of the month. The following two were worthy to note: "1. Real love is when you become selfless and you are more concerned about your mate's ego than your own - you are now a giver instead of a taker. 2. On Valentine's Day, surprise him. Hide a note in his underwear drawer. Purchase tickets for a rugby game or a concert. Send him a bottle of wine at work" (*O*, February 2005:17-19). The background of the calendar was bright red in line with the Valentine's Day colour. Women's creativity in the domestic arena is not encouraged for her to make something for herself, but for her man. She is encouraged to put a man before her. This is a very dangerous message that reinforces inferiority status of the female gender in a relationship.

#### **4.10 Page Numbers for Cover Story**

It is misleading to pretend the magazines are dedicated to women when in fact they look so much like top-class advertising booklets. When audiences are no longer principally conceptualised as people wanting to be entertained but rather as products needing to be sold, the content is profoundly influenced. This is clear from the trend that has been noted in this chapter regarding the angle of the coverage of Valentine's Day information in both advertisements and stories. This is further demonstrated by the many pages of advertisements that a reader must page through before reaching the main cover story.

Advertising is understood to be one aspect of the larger culture of consumption and the magazines look as if they are designed for shoppers and appear primarily like a tool for product promotion. The table below shows the page number where the main cover story appears. The main cover story is the story about the person whose picture appears on the cover. This is important because the cover story is usually the reason why readers buy a magazine. However before they reach their story of interest readers have to go through the advertisements first.

TITLE	COVER STORY	PAGE NUMBER
Cosmopolitan	Cover star: Miss American sweetie pie	Page 100
Fairlady	We applaud as Charlize pelts the fur trade	Page 22
Femina	Charlize our best export	Page 40
Marie Claire	J LO in love rebound – or third time lucky?	Page 30
O	Love: The real thing	Page 83
True Love	Love-struck Sonia: “I’m a hopeless romantic”	Page 62
Woman’s Value	Meet our Cover Girl competition winner	Page 19

Table 9 – Page number for cover story.

#### 4.11 Distribution of Advertising

Andersen (1995), Sinclair (1997), Randazzo (1993) and Ohmann (1996) argue that consumer marketing (advertising) in general is now integral to magazine design and layout and there is a need to explore the parameters of consumer culture and the nature of commercial discourse in order to understand their broad influence on media culture. Advertising as a persuasive mode of communication was previously considered to be distinct from entertainment and information

communication. However, advertising has penetrated the entire media spectrum in a manner that entertainment and information messages have become incorporated into advertising content development and presentation strategies. This means advertising has infiltrated other modes of communication and planted subtle and obvious commercial slant in all forms of communication. This view can be clearly illustrated in how simple information such as the celebration of Valentine's Day has become a vehicle to promote commercial products. Instead of dedicating the month to lovers and genuine love stories, product information is published prominently in the magazines and encourages readers to indulge in the advertised products as a main part of celebrating Valentine's Day.

A look at the distribution and prominence of advertisements in the issues under review shows that the magazines are serious about making money. The table below illustrates the total number advertisements per magazine compared to the total number of pages in the magazine. Most of the advertisements are full-page and full-colour.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Total pages</b>	<b>Pages with advertisements</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cosmopolitan	160	80	50%
Fairlady	178	76	42.7%
Femina	162	61	37.7%
Marie Claire	136	42	30.9%

O	134	34	25.5%
True Love	160	63	39.4%
Women's Value	130	19	14.6%

Table 10 – distribution of advertisements in the magazines under review

This is a very clear indication that women's magazines are part of an economic system and their business is shaped first and foremost by capitalist values. The excessive number of advertisements show that the magazine exists as a vehicle for advertisements of other commodities and that advertisers recognise it as such. The domination of the magazines by advertisements gives advertisers power regarding the content of the magazine. Messages transmitted through advertising are not bias-free since they are part of an ideological system by which gender difference is given meaning, as well as general dominance of the capitalist system is maintained. The analysis of some advertisements from the magazines provides good examples of inferior representations of women, and highlight positive developments such as representations of gender in non-biased manner which may serve to undo the stereotypes that portray women as the weaker gender.

With the analysis of images and texts with Valentine's Day information I have shown that some advertisers still consider the woman's position to be located in the domestic sphere. The prevalence of such advertisements promotes the

stereotype that women cannot be entrusted with important roles of making business or political decisions where the impact of mistakes will be greater.

Generally modern women's magazines encourage women to pursue and maintain successful careers and provide tips on how to juggle this with their domestic responsibilities. However while these magazines do celebrate the independent woman they run regular features and advertisements on cookery, interior decoration, parenting (Ballaster et al, 1991:13). This suggests that women cannot escape the virtues of being a woman and will never be free from the responsibility of particular domestic roles attached to her gender.

For decades women's magazines have presented themselves as handbooks for women, providing guidance through recipes, ideas, ingredients, tools or utensils, and methods for specific activities such as cooking, decorating and gardening. According to Ballaster et al. (1991) cookery, knitting, sewing and other home crafts are presented not as work but as leisure. Yet by presenting this work as leisure women's magazines deny and conceal it from being perceived as real and hard labour that requires skill, energy and creativity. Placing information on home care, cooking, gardening in the women's magazine further perpetuates the stereotype that it is women's primary responsibility. No suggestions are made of these roles being shared with their male counterparts.

Tong (1989) and Ballaster et al. (1991) argue that women's oppression has been attributed to relegating women's focus to the domestic sector and call for an abolition of all the structures that promote patriarchy in society such as the family and church. It is surprising to note that women's magazines seek to confirm the very social order to which women's oppression has been attributed. All the magazines under review are filled with cooking, beauty and fashion tips presented as means to help women become competitive in the home front. This contradiction reveals that the magazines are caught up in their own propaganda of covert capitalism while purporting to be working with women for women's betterment. From their inception women's magazines viewed female subjectivity as a problem, and themselves as the answer, offering themselves to female readers as a guide to living, a means of organising, responding to and transforming their experience as women. However as a result of their claim to represent rather than redirect or influence women, they find themselves reproducing those very contradictions and paradoxes they purportedly promised to resolve (Ballaster et al, 1991). The seemingly very close relationship between women's magazines and advertisers is also the reason why women's magazines appear to have neglected the very cause for which they were founded.

Many Valentine's Day advertisements studied are for cosmetics, hair products, jewellery, food, clothes, shoes and accessories. The advertisements that were selected for analysis are only those that carry a Valentine's Day message or theme. The fact that women's magazines believe purchasing these items are the



only way women will have a great Valentine's Day and enhance their role in society, means they misunderstand women upliftment or are wilfully misleading women in support of consumerism and capitalism.

The women's magazine industry may argue that it is harshly judged as it merely represents the needs of the women who read the magazines. In most cases such retaliations are based on consumer research. Representation is a very important aspect of creating and maintaining stereotypes and perceptions. Women's magazines are not reflecting the reality of ordinary women in society by producing representations that empower women. Women's magazines produce representations that suit their needs and those of the advertisers. I have shown in this chapter that the prevailing representations are those aimed at creating a consumer base to ensure the success of the commercial partners of the magazines, and the magazine itself. Representation implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping, not merely to transmitting of an already existing meaning, but means labour of making things mean, of creating meaning (Hall, 1981). What these magazines do is to create an image of the world by using a minority section of the female population to represent women, and not showing the broader profile of women a majority of who is nothing close to what is contained in the women's magazines. Women's magazines mostly depict women as slender and beautiful although not all women are like that.

This chapter has explained how women's magazines succeed in making the individual woman feel that she always has to improve herself by buying the products that are promoted in the magazines. The commercial advertisers are a big part of the magazines and the driving force behind this particular media industry. Fashion has a large impact on the young women of today and is a major part of the consumer culture.

This anonymous quote sums it up succinctly: "I have to say I loathe Valentine's Day. Not that I do not support the notions of love and romance, but all I see is the merchandisers making exorbitant sums of money out of a day that has been commercialised beyond recognition. Rather commit to a monthly Valentine, a day on which you and your partner spend time together, undisturbed, perhaps over a glass of wine or dinner, rekindling old flames and sharing feelings. It is a far more meaningful way to keep love alive and you do not need heart-shaped chocolates or pink ribbon either," (True Love, February 2005:131).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

The two preceding chapters analysed key literature relating to the representation of women in magazines and discussed examples from the selected magazines. Both chapters presented compelling arguments about the influence of capitalist interests in the media on representation. This chapter seeks to conclude the discussion and state what I have found to be the main issues that influence the representations of women that prevail in women's magazines.

The growing use of visuals in advertising has enhanced the ambiguity of meaning embedded in message structures. In the 1900s advertising usually stated its message quite explicitly through the medium of written text, but from the 1920s visual representation became more common. This is also the case in South Africa where a big emphasis has been placed on the visual presentation of, especially, sales and marketing information. This means viewers of contemporary times must work extra hard to find the meaning in advertisements (Leiss et al, 1990). Semiology, the study of signs, is very relevant in analysing how people interpret images. According to Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (1966) cited in Leiss et al. (1990), signs are things that have a meaning, that communicate messages to people.

In a majority of advertisements the woman is a sign for the commodity. If a woman poses next to a car, it is a sure thing that the car is for sale. French theorist Barthes (1973) was one of the first people to study advertising applying semiotic tools - a method for examining textual material. This approach suggests that the meaning of an advertisement does not float on the surface just waiting to be internalised by the viewer, but is built up out of the ways that different signs are organised and related to each other. For example, the stereotypes of women that exist today are a result of images of naked or half dressed women in advertisements, women shown cooing over babies, and women shown hard at work in the kitchen.

Of danger to the process of reading and interpretation of advertisements is the power and influence imposed by the mass media industry over its audience. Through its very powerful manipulative effects, the media shapes the manner in which audiences interpret advertisements (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1979; Curran, 2002; Dines and Humez, 1995; Gauntlett, 2002). Fiske (1989a) and Hall (1973), famous for the encoding/decoding theory, disagree and argue that it is the audiences who possess the ultimate power to decode or interpret media in their own way. They claim that audiences interact with media information and interpret it based on their knowledge and experiences and there is not a uniform understanding of any media information from one audience member to the next. This is doubtful when one considers the high level and sophisticated means of persuasion used in the media in promoting products. In marketing there is a term

known as below the line marketing which effectively means that the manner of selling is discreet and the person will be persuaded into buying a product without feeling any pressure or duress to make the purchase. To illustrate the point and power of below the line marketing, this type of buying can be equated to making a passive purchase when one is not in one's full consciousness.

In analysing Valentine's Day stories and advertisements in the seven magazines it became clear that the shape of women's magazines has been dictated mostly by gendered causes such as changes in economic policies and improvements in marketing techniques that built in strategies to gain the women market. Women's magazines are less influenced by a genuine interest in the issues of women in society such as women and children abuse, challenges of juggling professional and domestic responsibilities, crime, rising cost of children's education, women's diseases or rising cost of fuel (Ballaster et al. 1991).

While advertising may claim that it is predominantly informative, careful scrutiny of the advertisements in the women's magazines under review indicate that it is so overwhelmingly persuasive and its images not only attempt to sell the product by associating it with certain socially desirable qualities, but they sell a lifestyle and value system congruent with the imperatives of consumer capitalism (Dines and Humez, 1995). The advertisements firstly seek to create doubt in one's current situation; this could be related to food, fashion or love. It then provides certain remedies and solutions to those issues.

The symbolic images in advertising attempt to create an association between the product offered and socially desirable and meaningful traits in order to produce the impression that if one wants to be a certain type of person, then one should buy a certain product. For example, fashion advertisements created an impression that if a woman wears a particular type of underwear and perfume, her man will be impressed and this is how she is to appeal to his tastes and desires. This takes the focus away from the woman loving herself and dressing well for her own enjoyment. Her focus becomes meeting the needs of the man. This means the man is more important than her simply by putting his 'needs' first.

Generally, a thorough assessment of the contents of the magazines reveal that they are structured by a tension between representing themselves as a voice for women and a leader of the women. This tension becomes blatantly clear in the confusion between the magazines' function as a disseminator of fantasy and aspirational ideals for women, and as a means of representing the reality of women's lives. This confusion between the women's magazine as fantasy machine and social realist makes it difficult to assess what impact its images and texts has on its readers. The confusion between the two roles arises from the magazine's own propaganda of serving their commercial interest under the pretence of caring for women.

With so much commercial material in the magazines, women's magazines can only dream of representing women's reality in society, all that they currently are is a fantasy booklet that tends to conceal real issues affecting women but encourage women to enhance their lives by becoming materialistic. Due to the persuasion, women are pressured into buying the products with the hope of achieving what the advertisement promises.

The titles studied revealed that women's magazines are in the main produced and published for profit, not spiritual reasons. Whether women do or do not believe their magazines is of secondary importance, at issue is the fact that their behaviour is indeed influenced by what they read in magazines. Sinclair makes a very harsh but true observation: "Despite what women are doing in the workforce and despite what they say about not regarding themselves as sex objects, they do, to some extent, continue to view themselves as such. Women continue to buy products that use offensive advertising that undermine women and show them as subjects of male dominance and trapped in emotional consumption. Although sexual stereotypes are used frequently in advertising, the fact that these advertisements are still effective indicates that people still find them acceptable" (Sinclair, 1997). With the advent of democracy came the freedom of expression and many activist organisations were able to publicly voice their opinions on a number of public discourses. In South Africa this means complaints about advertising that is deemed to be offensive could be laid with the Advertising Standards Authority.

Martineau (1957); Murdock and Janus (1985) suggest that learning how to read, criticise and resist media manipulation can help empower people and give them more power over their cultural environment and what influences them. They hold that advertisements come under the guise of informing the consumer when in fact what they are doing is to primarily infuse information of power and control as well as creating dependence on commercial products.

Theories of mass culture have been applied in the analysis of the ideological effects of mass advertising on the representation of women. Ballaster et al (1991) point out that a distinction must be made between mass culture and popular culture. For them, mass culture is the imposition of foreign class values on an oppressed group and popular culture is a more authentic expression of shared values from within the group. So, women's magazines in their current form cannot be classified as popular culture or media produced by women solely in women's interest as their interests are clearly economic. Theorists of mass culture hold that mass culture impresses the same stamp on everything, forming a filter through which people view the world prior to their experience of it (Adorno and Horkheimer (1977) cited in Ballaster et al, 1991; Silverman, 1986).

Through stories and advertisements women's magazines reinforce gender identities and make the differences seem normal, such as the advertisements for food and home-making which show a housewife who knows just the right food to prepare for her husband and how to beautify the home to please him (Sinclair,



1997). In Ballaster et al. (1991) Gramsci argues that it is this normality that must be eradicated. For him, hegemony, a process of domination or oppression that has almost legitimised itself and has come to be accepted as such by the subjects, has been created by the capitalists through advertising. Images such as that of a woman in skimpy lingerie lying on her back with her knees raised should raise public outcry and protests against the poor portrayal of women. However because the system has legitimised itself, readers accept these images and emulate them. I argue that the message of the advertisement is that if a woman wants her man to find her sexy and irresistible on Valentine's Day she must buy the lingerie and behave in the degrading manner as the model on the advertisement.

McQuail (1987) argues that unless the means of producing mass communication are communally owned, women have little hope of having their issues treated seriously. The Marxist feminist theory argues that issues of women's oppression must be viewed in relation to economic terms and attribute the prevailing gender inequality and women's oppression to the private and male ownership of the means of production (Tong, 1989). There is a need to review the argument that the ownership of the means of mass communication rests in the hands of a few men and that the lack of women ownership has placed them at the mercy of men as they do not have an effective say on media content (Agenda Vol. No. 31).

The ownership and management of the seven magazines under review shows that women boast senior positions in the leadership structures of the women's magazines. Therefore it is unclear why they perpetuate representations of women that primarily show them as inferior to men and as heavily dependent on commercial products.

While there is a general suggestion in defence of the advertising industry that it does not cause the problems of women oppression, however its contribution to creating a climate in which the marketing of women's bodies must be accepted as its direct responsibility. To avoid misrepresentations of women, the advertising industry and other organs of society need to base their actions on commonly reliable descriptions of social reality, instead of persisting with offensive messages simply because they sell the goods.

The advertisement on financial investment by Old Mutual referred to in this dissertation is a good example of male and female genders in equal and complimentary roles. The reason for people to get into relationships is a partnership to share romance, support one another on any life matters, marry, build a home, bear and raise children together. What the advertisements and stories in women's magazines do is an opposite of this. Most of the Valentine's Day material examined, with the exception of one or two advertisements, was filled with stereotypical portrayal of women as dependent on commercial products to make a success of any aspect of their lives.

Another damaging image promoted is that in all advertisements and stories relating to relationships between the genders, the female is seen as going all out enhancing herself to please the male with her make-up, lingerie and food. In a nutshell the happiness of a woman is at the end of acquiring all the commercial items needed to attract and please the man in her life or going out there to get one. Of note is that all aspects of the magazines and it's coverage of Valentine's Day centres around men and commercial products.

This study showed that advertising is a systematic voice of commercialism, which works to create insecurities among women and provide costly solutions.<sup>33</sup> The Valentine's Day makeovers that were given to women so that they looked "dazzling" when they went out on dates shows how a woman's natural look is discarded by fashion editors together with merchandisers of clothes, hair and make-up products. The power of women's magazines makes women feel insecure in their bodies and the fashion industry makes a living out of that knowledge. The fashion industry classifies women according to their body shapes such as pear-shaped. A pear-shaped woman is given a choice of cuts of clothes to suit her body shape and is shown how to mix and match the items for a stylish look that will make her female colleagues envy her and the male colleague want to ask her out for a date.

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<sup>33</sup> Appendix 24, an article on how "Retailers score with Valentine mania" demonstrates a high level of consumerism attached with the celebrations.

The makeover and the advice given by merchandisers psyche the woman up to starting a new life path of enhancing her looks with commercial products so that her man finds her attractive. She is told in no uncertain terms that her natural look is not good enough and will not take her very far in the world of romance. Simply, no man will find her attractive. The suggested improvements offered to her do not come cheap. She can no longer leave the house without make-up or fancy hair-do. The advice is given in a frank manner and the merchandisers masquerade as if they care for the woman's success in life and they stress that this success is dependant on her looks.

Women have feelings and are sensitive to how people perceive them and the magazines use this to manipulate them into the culture of consumerism. Also by promoting themselves as looking after the interests of women, other readers are likely to be tempted to try the makeover suggestions at home, and as a result merchandisers will have a wider pool of consumers.

Further research into how modern women relate to magazine advertisements such as the ones published in the magazines under review would contribute to an understanding of the role such a powerful medium plays in promoting gender stereotypes. A study of the content of women's magazines which at face value appear to be over populated with advertisements could shed more light and confirm the suggestions that the content of women's magazines ends up

perpetuating the very stereotypes women in society are fighting so hard to eradicate.

Considering the efforts of women in society, especially feminists, to attain a status of women free from any bias, prejudice and stereotyping, it is clear that persistent misrepresentations of women in women's magazines amount to an injustice that must be redressed by more realistic presentations. In all the magazines women are represented as having the features, characteristics and backgrounds which only match a minority female population by these magazines. As a result feminists view women's magazines with a suspicion that facts are manipulated in order to fit the targeted reader and consumer. Feminists believe that women's magazines are a product of mass culture that aims to appeal and influence an audience in order to get higher profits and this influences the way women audiences are addressed (Thwaites et al, 1994; Steinem, 1990; Mower, 1981).

In the past feminists argued that women were far less likely to be shown in employment outside the home and were also heavily underrepresented in general in the media. However, there has been a shift that resulted in more women being shown involved in both domestic and professional activities. Unfortunately, commercial products have taken centre stage and claimed credit for the fact that women can now juggle these two roles through the efficiency provided by products. For example in the Woolworths Valentine's Day

advertisements of pre-cooked meals, a woman returning from work need not worry about cooking dinner from scratch for her man, all that she needs to do is to warm the food. Her life is enhanced by the use of the pre-cooked food. In reality women are under pressure in the evenings when they get home from work to do their domestic chores. It must be noted that not all women can afford a domestic helper who can assist with meal preparation. The advertising industry knows this gap and is addressing it – and making money in the process.

In order to correct the poor position of women in society promoted through the media, women must push for media images to keep up with changes in society, especially the transformation of gender roles brought about by the women's movement that aim to represent genders in an equal basis, complimentary to one another. Media images which present stereotypical images of women not only socialise girl children into traditional gender roles but also teach them that they should direct their hearts towards the home.

It is shocking that women's magazines can commit such gross harm against women by continuously portraying them in advertisements and stories in a manner that testifies to and acknowledges inferiority and dependence, and a readiness to serve men. True Love cover story about the love life of actress Sonia Mbele suggests to women who idolise her that it is attractive to appear needy. She is quoted admitting she is a hopeless romantic, that the father of her child left her while she was pregnant, that "she is a sucker for sentiment, a fully-

fledged member of the hearts-and-flowers brigade, she loves the idea of being in love and is a sucker for Valentine's Day" (True Love, February 2005:62). Such stories demonstrate another level of infusing the patriarchal ideology in the stories of female celebrities. These stories do not help the fight against poor portrayal of women.

The story continues: "Sonia first met her former lover when she was just a schoolgirl. 'To me initially he was just this guy – 12 years older than I, mature and very persistent – but he knew what he wanted and went for it, and that was that! I didn't even think of another man .....I thought this was definitely it! On my first birthday after we broke up ... .. I could not believe how alone I felt. I was really desolate'. The good thing for her today is the current man in her life..." (True Love, February 2005:62-63).

This is another example of how the love stories of celebrities are constructed to produce bias against the female gender. Portraying a female celebrity in a weak and fragile position is damaging as women readers who look up to her as a role model will try to emulate her lifestyle. The celebrity's confessions about her weakness in love matters are unfortunate as they legitimise an incorrect position for women in relationships. According to the story, no matter how strong Sonia is in her acting role in terms of the character she portrays, in reality she is a weak lovey-dovey waiting for some prince charming to sweep her off her feet. The media is very powerful and the audience may try to copy the lifestyles of their

idols as they see them portrayed in magazines. The loneliness Sonia felt after the break-up was soon addressed when she found another man. This means a woman can never attain true happiness unless she is in a couple. This promotes the stereotype of women's lives being incomplete without a man.

This dissertation attempted to address the question of the interests that may influence the coverage of Valentine's Day in the selected popular women's magazines. Women's magazines can be a very broad research subject and the challenge of this dissertation was to limit the analysis to Valentine's Day advertisements and stories. This was not easy considering that other material in the magazines not relating to Valentine's Day, but with similar problems of the biased representation of women was discovered.

In concluding this study, there are two final comments to note. Firstly, Valentine's Day information in the selected magazines is used to promote commercial products. The information is presented as tips and advice on how to celebrate the day of lovers. The tips range from what food to prepare, what clothes to wear, what décor to use and how, what make-up to use and how, and how to wear your hair. The information is presented in a compelling and strongly persuasive manner that an enjoyable Valentine's Day is only to be achieved after the application of these tips. The application of the tips will, of course, be preceded by purchasing the products which form a critical part of having a really great Valentine's Day.



Secondly, Valentine's Day information teaches and encourages women to serve the needs of their husbands or boyfriends. The tips provided are aimed at pleasing a man. Women are not encouraged to apply these tips for their own gratification but are told to do so in order for the man to either be happy or find her attractive. Women who are not in relationships are encouraged to follow these tips and go out and find a man.

Flowing from the two points above it is clear that Valentine's Day is applied in a manner that will mainly produce the following results: to perpetually represent women as inferior to men by promoting patriarchy and to promote consumerism by making women feel insecure and sell solutions for their insecurities.

There are two beneficiaries that reap the rewards of the particular subordination of women as defined above. It is the capitalist system, including both merchandisers/advertisers and the women's magazines themselves, who benefit as a market place for their products is secured. It is also men who benefit from the perpetual subordination of women in society which mean there will be no competition in the workplace as more women are channelled to focus on their domestic role. Those who try to pursue work outside of the domestic sphere are reminded in no uncertain terms by their chief advisers, the women's magazines, of their natural role. Men further benefit from the relegation of women into the home front as they will not need to worry about getting home from work to find

the house not cleaned, his suites, shirts and shoes not ready for the next day and his food not prepared.

Women must be educated about the impact of the content of women's magazines and how it can push women to view themselves in a manner designed by the capitalist system. Women must also be educated on the technique of decoding media messages, to be selective in the advice they follow.

Women must also be educated to be strong-willed and believe in who they are and not accept unsolicited advice as it is likely to be loaded with some other agenda, such as that of advertisers who are not interested in the well being of a woman but are interested in her as a consumer of their products. This is clear even in how these magazines categorise their target market or typical reader. They go after a particular age and salary profile, the main measure being LSM (Living Standards Measure). Women who fall outside of these categories are of no use to the advertisers and the women's magazines alike.

Finally, this study has provided sufficient information, analysis and argument that the representations of women in text and images of Valentine's Day messages in advertisements and stories of True Love, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, Fairlady, Femina, Woman's Value and O magazine are to the benefit of patriarchy/men and the capitalist system, women's magazines and merchandisers. Women's movements need to regroup in a fight against patriarchy and capitalism.

Patriarchy and capitalism that result in the subordination of women in society must be rejected.

There is a need for further research that will isolate other events that were established for other reasons but have been hijacked by the commercial interests of the media and other role players to deeply entrench the subordination of women in society and the promotion of capitalist interests.

There are women working in senior positions in the media, who are viewed with suspicion by feminists for perpetuating the poor portrayal of women. This includes magazine owners, publishers, editors, writers and photographers. Further analysis is required in understanding how do they view the capitalist and patriarchal interests that is oppressing women.

As a result of the damage done by the commercial agenda of women's magazines, women's rights activists must start a revolution that will result in legislation to stave off the commercial pressures suffered by women. Moreover, such legislation will have to protect younger and future generations of women who will be forced to grow up in the conditions where women's position in society is manipulated by dominant interests who possess the power to control what information women access and what products women consume.

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# TRUE LOVE

ALL A WOMAN NEEDS

Love-struck  
**SONIA:**  
"I'm a  
hopeless  
romantic!"

Stir it up –  
and get the  
sex you want!

Working with  
your man:  
Can your  
passion survive?

8-year-olds  
for sale:  
SA's child  
prostitute horror

Heart to heart:  
the things we  
do for love...

At home with  
**Zandi Nhlapo**

A feast for lovers:  
Beautiful bedrooms  
and sensual food

## HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY!



February 2005 No. 42  
R15,95 (R13,95 VAT excluded)  
Other countries R13,95 (tax excluded)



**Value**  
woman's  
the ideas magazine  
www.womansvalue.com  
meet our  
**cover girl winner**  
in the month of  
*love*

- French-style entertaining
- true romance
- create your own fairy tale

**how to**

- make your own drinks cabinet
- assert yourself
- sew cool clothes for boys
- look stylish on a budget

**romantic ideas**

**FREE**  
fridge text

FEBRUARY 2005

No. 298 R14.95 (R1.84 VAT INCL.) OTHER COUNTRIES R13.11 (TAX EXCL.)

a dream den for a girl

the food of love

a floral office chair

playful gifts of love



**O**

THE OPRAH  
MAGAZINE

SOUTH AFRICA

**Love!**

**How to find the Real Thing**  
A new approach to getting the relationship you've always wanted

**Popping the Questions**  
The hard ones you must ask before you commit

**"Do you have to breathe?"**  
Irritation and other little obstacles to bliss

**Meet Your Inner Bombshell!**  
Beauty secrets to reveal the goddess in you

**Contraceptive Update**  
Could a new method change your life?

Oprah gets real with **SEAN PENN**

**Fresh Idea**  
**Cooking with Roses**

FEBRUARY 2005  
R9956 (INCL. VAT), N55955  
R1750 (OTHER COUNTRIES)

0771682425029



FEBRUARY 2005 SOUTH AFRICA

# marie claire

R 19.95 (incl. VAT) Namibia N\$ 19.95. Other countries R 17.50

## SINGLES' SOLUTIONS

- sex toys tested
- our matchmaking success story!
- the best mascara for a girls' night out

## SHOPPING

60+ DREAM JEANS  
HOLD-IT-ALL HANDBAGS  
COOL CARDIES AND  
SHAPE-SHIFTING LINGERIE

## J LO IN LOVE

REBOUNDED  
- OR THIRD  
TIME LUCKY?

## controversy

Does virginity testing make girls targets of rape?

## WOULD YOUR DREAM JOB LIVE UP TO REALITY?

## a reader's story

'I'D CLIMB INTO THE BATH AND CRY'  
SURVIVING BREAST CANCER

## international scoop

'I CONVINCED THE WORLD I WAS A SAUDI PRINCESS'  
...and other cunning cons

## WIN

SEXY WEEKENDS AWAY (FOR JUST THE TWO OF YOU)

# THE 10 BEST DIETS

OF THE DECADE  
AND THE ONE FOR YOU





**FEMINA**

FEBRUARY 2005 R19,95 (incl VAT)  
Namibia N\$19,95 Other countries R17,95

**CHARLIZE**  
**OUR BEST EXPORT**

**SA TRIBUTE**  
**BARNARD, BIKO, PATON**  
Living with the legacy of a legend

**'I SURVIVED DRUG ADDICTION'**  
A user, mother and lover tell their stories

**LOVE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**  
Why coupledom will never die

**CHILD MAINTENANCE**  
What are a mother's actual rights?

**LOSING FAITH IN VIRGINITY**  
How a real woman wrestled with her libido and her religion

**BORN IN THE RSA**  
CELEBRATING ALL GOOD THINGS SOUTH AFRICAN  
FOOD • FASHION • DECOR • BEAUTY • CELEBS

**PLUS: MANAGE YOUR MONEY**  
32-PAGE SPECIAL TO GET YOU INTO FINE FISCAL SHAPE



**WIN TANZANITE JEWELLERY DESIGNED JUST FOR YOU**



The image shows the front cover of the February 2005 issue of Cosmopolitan magazine. The cover features a full-page photograph of actress Kate Bosworth, who is wearing a yellow strapless tube top and blue jeans. She has long, wavy blonde hair and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The magazine title 'COSMOPOLITAN' is printed in large, bold, orange letters at the top. Below the title, on the left, is the price information: 'R22,95 (incl VAT) R23,95 (Namibia) R21,01 (other countries)'. On the right, the date 'FEBRUARY 2005' is printed. The cover is filled with various headlines in bold, orange and white text. A large headline in the center reads 'ROMANCE RULES!' with a sub-headline '(THAT'S FILTHY ENOUGH TO BE FUN)'. Other headlines include '#1 LOVE MYSTERY SOLVED', 'FAST, FORWARD FEMALE!', 'THE HAPPINESS QUIZ', 'DAIRY ME! CAN MILK MAKE YOU THINNER?', 'CAUGHT UP IN WEBACHONDRIA', and 'SA REPORT WHY WOMEN FAKE THEIR OWN ABDUCTIONS'. A barcode is located in the bottom left corner, and a small text box in the bottom right corner identifies Kate Bosworth as the cover star. At the very bottom, a yellow banner contains the text 'WIN A R55 450 TRIP TO PARIS FOR YOU AND YOUR VALENTINE'.

# COSMOPOLITAN

R22,95 (incl VAT) R23,95 (Namibia)  
R21,01 (other countries)

FEBRUARY 2005

## #1 LOVE MYSTERY SOLVED

WHY THE GUY  
DIDN'T CALL,  
WON'T COMMIT  
OR SLEPT WITH  
YOUR SISTER

## FAST, FORWARD FEMALE!

SEEN SOMEONE  
YOU LIKE?  
HOW TO  
MAKE HIM  
YOURS

## HAIR AND BEAUTY HOW TO:

- pull off a sexy up-do
- slap on false eyelashes
- feed your face a chocolate mask

## THE HAPPINESS QUIZ

COULD YOU  
BE SUNNIER?  
TURN TO PAGE 74  
TO FIND OUT HOW

WHAT'S SO  
SPECIAL  
ABOUT  
DANIEL AND  
NATASHA  
BEDINGFIELD?

# ROMANCE RULES!

KISSY, CUDDLY SEX  
(THAT'S FILTHY ENOUGH TO BE FUN)



DAIRY ME!  
CAN MILK  
MAKE YOU  
THINNER?

CAUGHT UP IN  
WEBACHONDRIA  
SHOPPING FOR  
AN ILLNESS ONLINE

SA REPORT  
WHY WOMEN  
FAKE THEIR OWN  
ABDUCTIONS

COSMO COVER STAR  
KATE BOSWORTH

WIN A R55 450 TRIP TO PARIS FOR YOU AND YOUR VALENTINE

**WIN STOVES AND CARPETS WORTH MORE THAN R100 000**  
SAPPI PICA BEST WOMEN'S GENERAL INTEREST MAGAZINE 2003 & 2004 • ADMAG AWARD BEST WOMEN'S MAGAZINE 2003

# FAIRLAY

**WILL YOUR BOSS  
ACCEPT A SICK  
NOTE FROM A  
SANGOMA?**

**SLOW DOWN  
BREAK THE  
FAST FOOD HABIT**

**MODERN ROMANCE**  
HOW ONE WOMAN  
FOUND LOVE ROUND  
THE CORNER

**BREAST RECONSTRUCTION**  
UNDERSTAND  
YOUR OPTIONS


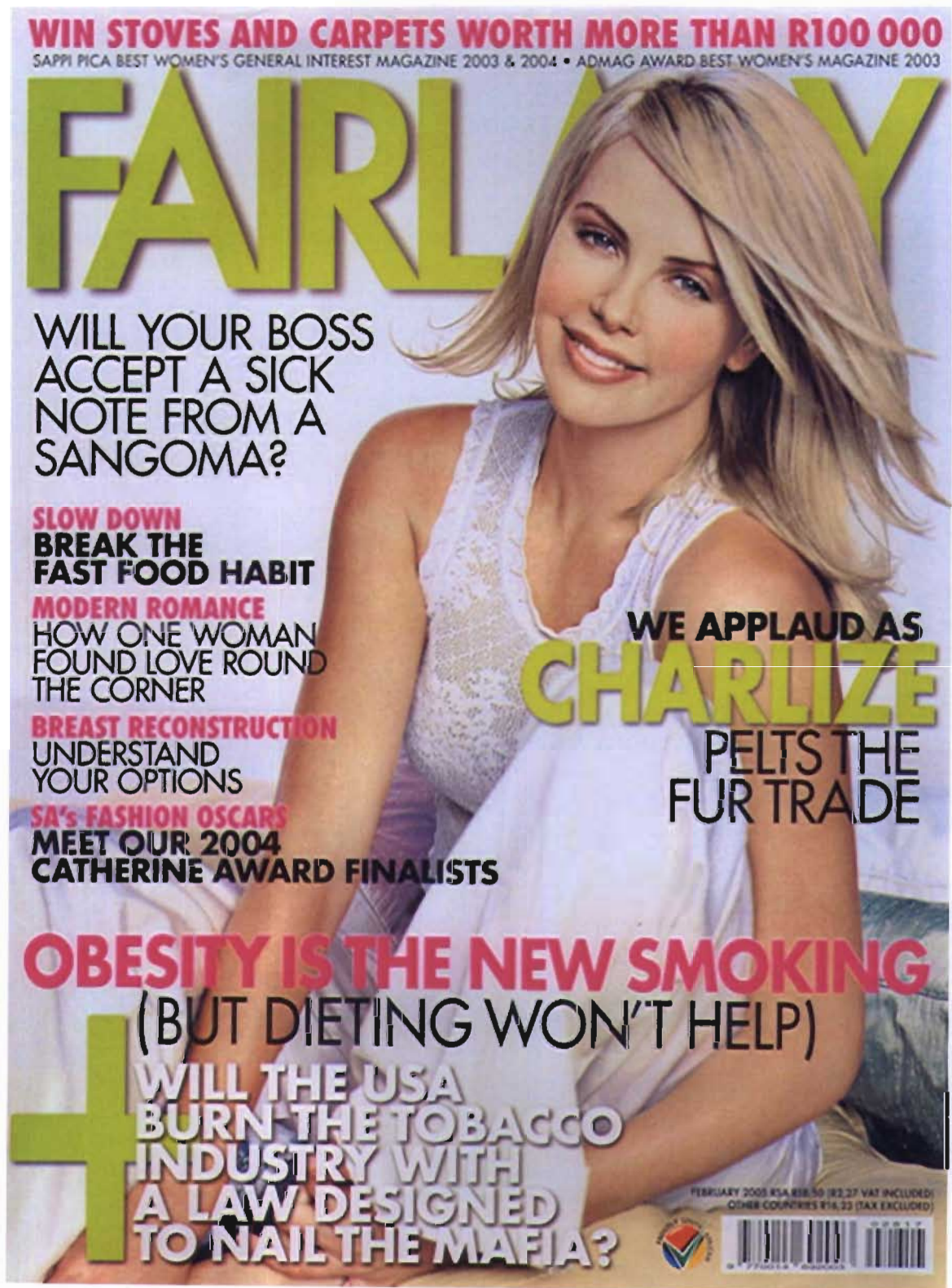
**SA's FASHION OSCARS**  
MEET OUR 2004  
CATHERINE AWARD FINALISTS

**WE APPLAUD AS  
CHARLIZE  
PELTS THE  
FUR TRADE**

**OBESITY IS THE NEW SMOKING  
(BUT DIETING WON'T HELP)**

**+ WILL THE USA  
BURN THE TOBACCO  
INDUSTRY WITH  
A LAW DESIGNED  
TO NAIL THE MAFIA?**

FEBRUARY 2005 R54.95 (R2.27 VAT INCLUDED)  
OTHER COUNTRIES R16.23 (TAX EXCLUDED)







**Triumph**  
INTERNATIONAL

**GET BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND  
UPPER IN BED THIS VALENTINE'S.**

**maXimizer**  
THE ULTIMATE PUSH-UP BEAS

The advertisement features a close-up of a woman with dark, wavy hair, looking directly at the camera. She is wearing a black, strapless, push-up bra. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white light. The Triumph International logo is in the top right corner, and the maXimizer logo is in the bottom right corner. The main text is in large, bold, red capital letters.



**NO JOKE.** . . There is no stopping the Joko lady

## **'Lift ad' call turned down**

THE South African Advertising Standards Authority (Asa) has dismissed the complaint against the Joko tea advertisement which some people argued was offensive, discriminatory and degrading to black women.

The advertisement is of a cleaning woman in an airport hanger gyrating her buttocks to some music.

The words "She had a cup of Joko in her break" appear on the screen.

In its ruling, ASA said the advertisement was a light-hearted portrayal of a woman whose mood or spirit has been given a lift by drinking a cup of Joko tea.

"The way the woman moves is a form of dance that is recognisable in a lot of African traditional dances, which has now been popularised as a dance amongst many young people," said ASA.

Gender activist Neo Seseane said that she was not surprised by the decision because ASA rulings were always dominated by patriarchal tendencies. - Staff reporter





APPENDIX 11





APPENDIX 12



APPENDIX 13



APPENDIX 14

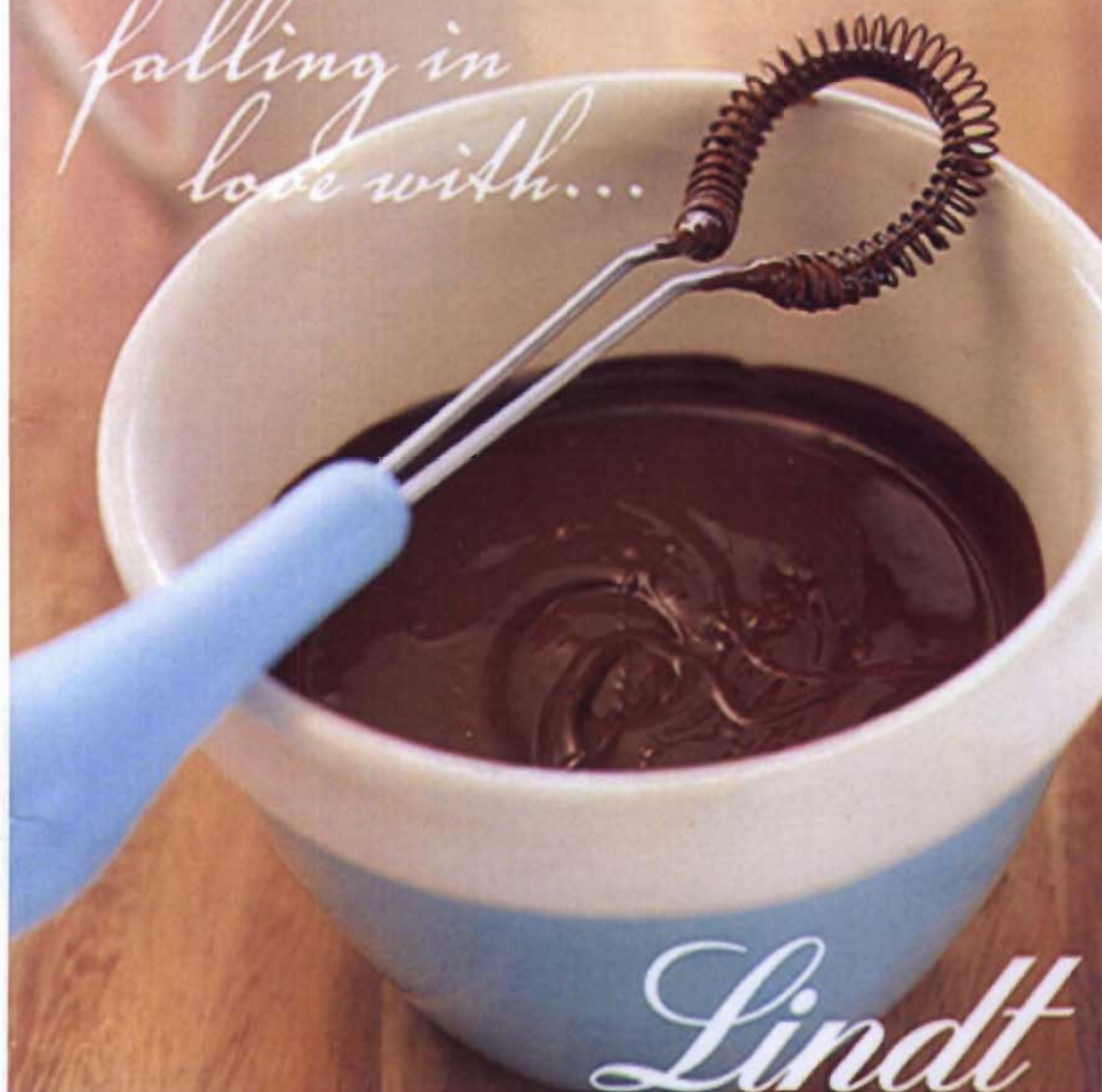




# marie claire



*falling in  
love with...*



*Lindt*

12 MAGICAL WAYS TO MELT HIS HEART

# Spoil yourself this Valentine's Day ... you deserve a little loving It's all

Accessorise with Lulu Belle's Redstone flower brooch and dazzle like a diva.

Make an entrance with a pink heart-buckle belt from Nina Roche.

Save face with Lulu Belle's mirror compact.

Give in to your favourite indulgent Cadbury Flake and savour every bite.

Be a bombshell in briefs from India Jane.

Be the envy of everyone with a stone-and-crystal ring from Lulu Belle.

Be the belle of the ball with a beaded bag from Lulu Belle.

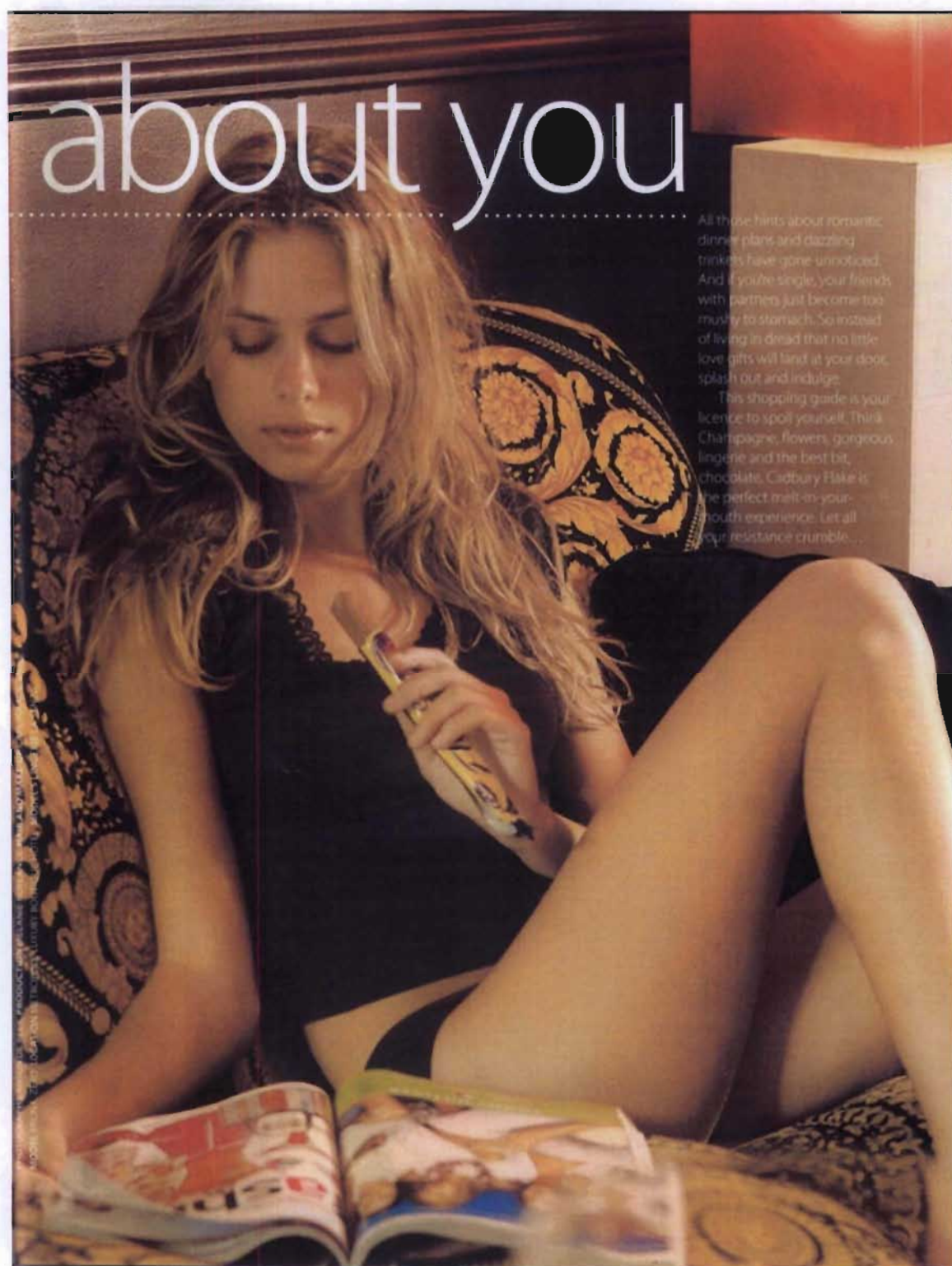
Treat yourself with roses from Lush.

Spoil yourself with Crystal Chic eau de parfum by Carolina Herrera.

Spoil yourself with a selection of CDs.

Strike a pose in Callaghan's pink and crystal sandals.





# about you

All those hints about romantic dinner plans and dazzling trinkets have gone unnoticed. And if you're single, your friends with partners just become too mushy to stomach. So instead of living in dread that no little love gifts will land at your door, splash out and indulge.

This shopping guide is your licence to spoil yourself. Think Champagne, flowers, gorgeous lingerie and the best bit, chocolate. Cadbury Flake is the perfect melt-in-your-mouth experience. Let all your resistance crumble...

## Do it

Don't whine about the lack of available men, get out there and meet some. Dinner Date is a members-only, Cape Town-based dinner club. Join seven other singles for wining, dining and a little flirting. It'll cost you R350 to join and dinner dates are listed at [www.dinnerdate.co.za](http://www.dinnerdate.co.za).



9ct Gold

Bracelet  
R699  
matching chain available

R499

R799

A heart is no longer just an expression of love, it's a style statement. Bridget Jones wears hers sideways and Paris Hilton likes hers with lots of Bling. Come and select the one that is perfectly you.

Wear your heart on your sleeve



C&L  
Chen & Laroche  
STERLING SILVER &  
CUBIC ZIRCONIA

Bracelet  
R699

R399

R199

R249

White Gold  
Diamond Pendant  
.49 carat  
R4999

Sterling Silver  
and Venetian  
Glass Earring  
and Pendant

These styles are available in selected stores only. E&OE. Prices subject to change and stocks may be limited. For further information please call 021-938 7510 (office hours).

AMERICAN SWISS  
YOU DESERVE IT



**TRUEMAKEOVER** / Lettie Ileshaba

# Be my Valentine!

*Pamper yourself while preparing for that hot Valentine's date – and, remember, the beauty's as much in the details as in the overall look!*

**Before**



**After**



*Thabisa Maphahle from Paulshot!*  
Thabisa's been hooked up with a really cool guy by her friend, and she's looking forward to seeing him on Valentine's Day. We showed her how to transform her look for a dazzling date. Thabisa's hair was relaxed with the renowned L'Oréal Professional haircare system, massaged, and then styled with a curling brush.

We gave two readers a romantic makeover in celebration of St Valentine's Day



*Love*  
is in the air

Our makeover team gave Elene Erasmus (30) from Johannesburg, and Jaci Hood (33) from Cape Town, a romantic new look. Elene is a freelance illustrator and Jaci is a full-time mom of two boys, Jared and Nathan, and a baby girl, Gaby.

Value good looks

**Elene**



Elene is elegant in a cream dress from Juanita Pacheco and gold sandals from Yucca Shoes (prices on request). ▶





promotion

This Valentine's Day, invest in your relationship – with Old Mutual.

## a valentine's investment

Every year we spend money on expensive Valentine's Day presents, flowers, cards and meals to show how much we care. Relationships are very important to us and we want to do everything we can to find love and make it last.

While it's great to spoil someone on Valentine's Day, you can really show how much you love someone by doing things that will help you avoid disagreements over money.

While talking about finances might not sound very romantic, people stay in love when they act intelligently about money together. Be honest with each other about your habits and come up with a plan for spending your money as a couple.

• **Draw up a budget:** Make a list of your income and expenses. This will give you a good idea of whether you're spending more than you earn and where you can cut costs.

• **Set financial goals:** Think about where you'd like to be financially in the short, medium and long term.

• **See a good financial adviser:** He or she will look at your financial goals, do an analysis to determine your financial needs, and then make recommendations.

• **Pay off credit card debt:** Surprise him with a low balance every month from now on!

• **Build up a cash reserve:** If you can save at least three months' living costs in cash, you'll be able to handle unexpected expenses as a loving team, rather than arguing about where you'll get the money to deal with the issue.

By removing money as a source of conflict, you'll have a more romantic, stable and loving relationship – not just on Valentine's Day, but all year long!

Remember, women tend to live longer than men, and they leave and rejoin the workforce more often than men because of pregnancies, caring for children and looking after elderly parents. This often results in lower overall earnings, less opportunity to contribute to a pension or some other retirement plan, as well as fewer company benefits.

While we might not like to think about it, relationships do eventually come to an end – so taking time now to build a secure financial future will stand you in good stead.

• For more information about handling your personal finances, or finding a good financial adviser, contact Old Mutual on tel: 0860 15 15 05.

APPENDIX 23



## Retailers score with Valentine mania

MERCURY — 14 FEBRUARY 2006

TOM ROBBINS

**Cape Town** If you are a heterosexual man and you did not receive sexy boxers today from your loved one, she may well be on the wrong side of the trend curve, and if you did get boy knickers and you went red in the face, the same goes for you.

**Edgars** Consolidated Stores (Edcon) department store division chief executive Jon Spotts said men were becoming a lot more fashionable and that was flowing through to underwear, "with a lot more exciting styles on the market".

Spotts said: "Women want to see guys in something different and guys are a lot more open to that than a few years ago."

However, Spotts said sales of ladies lingerie were also strong, particularly the "By Caprice" range, which was recently promoted in South Africa by the international

model who bears the same name.

Edcon sells underwear to middle-income consumers through its Edgars stores.

And just in case you still thought sex did not sell, some Cape Town restaurants have ordered what House of Chocolates owner Sandra O'Connell referred to as "kinky chocolates".

Electronic Valentine cards available on the Web might have hit physical card sales in some middle- and upper-income locations, but consumer goods distribution business Spar Group said sales of physical cards to black consumers, particularly those who were upwardly mobile, were increasing.

Spar group marketing executive Roelf Venter said orders for cards in Spar's countryside stores had been particularly strong.

Spotts said friends might increasingly send romantic e-mails to one another, "but a card is such a personal

thing" that couples still preferred them to electronic cards.

"You would have to be a bit of a cold person" to send your loved one just an e-mail, he said.

But Spar's Venter said traditional hot sellers like red roses and champagne were still being snapped up.

O'Connell said design had remained the same over the years "because a heart stays a heart", but what had changed was the packaging and the phenomenal amount consumers were now prepared to pay for this.

Spotts concurred, saying people were "dressing up their presents", with gift bag sales at Edcon-owned CNA on the up.

O'Connell said Valentine's Day was growing exponentially as a marketing opportunity and her business had started working on products "in November already".

This year Valentine's Day is even being used to market baby and toddler



**RED HOT SALES** Nobhule Ndlovu knows what she will be buying her partner for Valentine's Day

clothing. Maybe parents need a romantic spin put on changing nappies. What's next?

Frisly pink hearts dangling the showrooms of platteland dealerships?