

Men's Lifestyle Magazines and the Construction of Male Identity

Ross Horsley

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* From September 2006, David Gauntlett is Professor of Media and Communications at the School of Media, Arts and Design, University of Westminster. [See <http://www.theory.org.uk/david>].

Abstract

This thesis seeks to investigate young men's understanding of masculinity as part of their own developing identities, and how this may be related to wider constructions of masculinity in the media, with particular reference to lifestyle magazines aimed at men.

The increased popularity of men's magazines since the mid-1990s is examined, and the genre itself analysed both within a context of previous studies into male representations in the media, and against a backdrop of the more established, equivalent line of research into women's magazines. Notions of gender identity are brought under scrutiny, as the concept of masculinity is explored in terms of 'performances' linked to gender, sexuality and societal expectations.

A discussion of recent 'creative' research projects introduces the original methodology undertaken as part of this study. Young, predominantly male readers of men's magazines were encouraged to produce 'scripts' – which consisted of an illustrated front cover and contents listing – detailing an imagined lifestyle magazine of their own. 100 such scripts were collected, with participants based in Doncaster, Preston, Wigan and Leeds, and drawn primarily from high schools, colleges and a prison. The material they produced, together with their own written discussion of this work and their wider experience of men's magazines, formed a body of research data upon which further conclusions are based.

A relationship is hypothesized between young men's apparently heightened interest in forms of gossip surrounding media celebrities, and an increasing awareness of their own sense of masculinity as something that is personally constructed and purveyed. It is suggested that new men's lifestyle magazines, with their frequent demonstrations of 'ironic performances' and 'edited personalities', both facilitate and reflect this process.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century was a bewildering time to be a man. This, at least, is the conclusion one might have drawn looking at the popular media and its surrounding debates in the UK during the late 1990s and early years of the new millennium. The ‘macho’ role models of the preceding decade, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Harrison Ford, were apparently finding it difficult to secure work in the Hollywood action-hero roles they were most famous for, more often finding themselves in comedies, dramas and ‘personal’ projects. Similarly, on television, ‘sensitive’ teenage dramas like *Party of Five* (1994-2000) and *Dawson’s Creek* (1998-2003) offered new and sometimes surprising portrayals of men as emotional, confused, and emotionally confused individuals, while popular female-fronted fare such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *Charmed* (1998-present), and *Alias* (2001-present), often appeared to relegate male characters to the role of ‘guy candy’¹, acting predominantly as love interest for the more dominant female characters. Bookshelves featured much-discussed non-fictional works like Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed: the Betrayal of the Modern Man* (1999), Anthony Clare’s *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* (2000), and bestselling tales of troubled single men in their thirties, such as Nick Hornby’s *About a Boy* (1998) and Tony Parsons’ *Man and Boy* (1999). Furthermore, a new genre of media aimed specifically at men had burst onto the scene only a few years previously, bringing with it a whole new set of notions and assumptions of and about men – but, after a veritable boom period, apparently run into problems of its own.

1994 and 1995 had seen the launch of new lifestyle magazines aimed at male readers at an unprecedented rate, including *FHM*, *Loaded*, *Men’s Health*, *Maxim*, *Unzip* and *Attitude*, joining the already established *Arena* (which had been in print

¹ This term, popular in magazines aimed at young women, is a pun on ‘eye candy’, a phrase often previously used in a somewhat derogatory way to describe the presence of beautiful women in superfluous roles in films and television programmes.

since 1986), *GQ* (since 1988) and *Esquire* (launched in the UK in 1991). It seemed that publishers had finally successfully tapped into a long-considered elusive sector of magazine readership – one whose members had previously been happy to buy special interest magazines on a wide range of subjects, but who would reject any attempt to appeal directly to them in the manner that magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* had targeted women. The formula appeared, on the surface, to be a fairly predictable assortment of sports, interviews, gadgets, adventure, even fashion and ‘grooming’ for men, all interspersed with copious photographs of beautiful women wearing little or no clothing. The novelty lay in the way that this mixture was presented: self-awareness, irony and a great deal of humour informed the new ‘lad culture’ that would become a touchstone of mid-nineties media product, generating large amounts of debate and influencing the content of other media, especially television². For a while, it looked as though any publishing company might be able to bring out a monthly men’s lifestyle magazine, and sit back and collect the profits. By 1999, however, only three titles – *FHM*, *Maxim* and *Loaded* – accounted for 75% of total sales in the genre (Quinn, 2005). Readership figures had peaked for the most successful magazines, *FHM* and *Loaded*, a year before (Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks, 2001: 30), and, as with all of their contemporaries, fallen to a steady but somewhat diminished level.

Even the media commentators were surprised. In the space of a few years, related headlines in *The Guardian*’s media section, which followed the market’s developments with great interest, went from celebratory (‘Funny, useful and selling’, 17 February 1997; ‘Boy zone’, 1 December 1997) to ominous (‘Growing pains hit the lad mags where it hurts’, 21 February 1999; ‘Men’s lifestyle titles suffer’, 16 February 2001; ‘The lads go limp’, 18 February 2002). As the ‘lads’ mag’ boom ended, it became clear that publishers had apparently only captured the imagination of a particular subsection of male readers, and that the male reading

² Jackson *et al.* (2001) note the sports quiz *They Think It’s All Over* (1995-present) and the situation comedies *Men Behaving Badly* (1992-1998) and *Game On* (1995-1998) as key examples of lad-oriented television (p. 2). We might also add *Harry Enfield and Chums* (1994-1997), *The Frank Skinner Show* (1995-present), *TFI Friday* (1996-2000), *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* (1996-present), *Jackass* (2000-2002), and, in varying degrees, anything involving the celebrities Jonathan Ross, Chris Moyles, Johnny Vaughan, Denise Van Outen, and Johnny Vegas.

habits had not been revolutionized to a point equivalent to those of female readers. As *The Observer*'s Sally O'Sullivan pointed out, '[m]agazine-loving lads have not metamorphosed into magazine-hungry dads (in the way *Cosmo* girls happily cruise on into *Vogue* or *Harpers* or *Eve* or *She* or myriad others)' (15 June 2003). No sooner had analysts trumpeted the birth of this new genre than – if they were not quite preparing to sound its death-knell – they were at least being forced to recognize its more limited scope.

Academic analysis had been a little slower to surface. What had once seemed a considerable development in patterns of media consumption had to be quickly put into perspective, or the studies that it had inspired would run the risk of looking suddenly overzealous. Jackson, Brooks & Stevenson (2001), in one of the first major works on the sociological implications of the new men's magazines, *Making Sense of Men's Magazines*, carefully located their study in a post-laddish era of uncertain male identities. Benwell's *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines* (2003), although published later, was a broader but more reactionary and, ultimately, less shrewd collection of criticism, however. Again, it was in the press that the new trends were most quickly noted, as media commentators analyzed shifts in the market that brought elements – and even editors – of magazines like *Chat* and *Heat* into the arena of men's magazines ('Woman's editor in with lads', *Guardian Unlimited*, 22 January 2001; '*FHM* moves closer to *Heat*', *The Guardian: G2*, 17 January 2002). In 2004, the arrival of two *weekly* men's magazines, *Nuts* and *Zoo*, brought a new degree of reinvention and rejuvenation back into the genre.

This study began during 2001, when market developments such as these were yet to take place. Recent studies had employed focus groups, other interview-based methods, and linguistic and textual analysis (as discussed in the next chapter) to explore the relationships between the new men's lifestyle magazines and their readers. In tandem, a relatively new method of research using 'creative' techniques (in which participants are asked to produce pieces of media or artwork of their own) had moved on from an initial focus on assessing people's media literacy by asking them to re-edit news stories and footage, to considering the potential of providing art, design and photographic resources with the wider aim of encouraging them to

think about their media usage in new ways³, with often fascinating and enlightening results. Thus, the present study arose from an interest in applying these new creative methods in response to a similarly new genre of men's media, in the hope that its findings might both complement contemporary research into male identity and men's magazines, and provide a useful and innovative new approach. In this respect, the original contribution to the field offered by this piece of research is perhaps as evident in the issues explored by asking participants to invest creatively in the research (as we shall see in Chapter 5) as it is in the various conclusions of the thesis. I nevertheless hope, however, to argue that the subtleties drawn out by the methodology of this study foreshadowed some of the more recent developments in the evolution of men's magazines as described above, such as the arrival of the more topical, celebrity-focused men's weeklies influenced by *Heat* magazine and its ilk. In these instances, it will be argued that the findings proposed are particularly relevant in light of the significance of what is here termed 'gossip' – a notion more complex than it might first sound.

The next chapter, then, looks back over the relatively new body of criticism concerned with the rise of the new men's magazine. In drawing together studies focusing on the relationship between magazine reading and self-identity, I find it useful to locate my review within a context of feminist criticism of women's magazines going back several decades before lifestyle magazines for men became popular. The work of Angela McRobbie (1999) provides a functional framework for this, with her four stages of feminist analysis of magazines being cited and adapted as a basis for my own history of academic study of the genre. I then examine what magazines provide for their readers in terms of 'knowledge' and a sense of personal identity, informed by Joke Hermes' notion of 'readers' repertoires' (1995) and Pierre Bourdieu's 'habitus' (1979). This subsequently provides the background for an overview of the literature pertaining to men's lifestyle magazines – from studies written specifically on the subject in recent years, to those tracing new patterns in men's relationship with fashion and consumerism in the 1980s – itself culminating

³ See the Bournemouth Media School-sponsored website, *Art Lab*, for a more detailed history of such projects (<http://www.artlab.org.uk>).

with a number of suggestions as to the directions that further studies might most usefully take.

Chapter 3 attempts to define the central notion of ‘masculinity’, inescapable in any discussion of male identity, examining the ways in which various critics have approached the concept from several different fields, with a view to understanding what it is that magazines aim to represent and target, and what readers consider relevant when they think of themselves ‘as men’. An essential distinction is that between sex and gender, which also introduces a brief discussion of the biological perspective on what it means to be male. Other, often contrasting arguments from the fields of psychology, sociology and anthropology add further insight, while debates initiated by exponents of ‘queer theory’ are also summarized. The chapter concludes with an open definition of the *performance* of ‘masculinities’ that will inform many of the conclusions outlined later in the thesis.

In Chapter 4, the notion of readers ‘making sense’ of their lives with the aid of media such as magazines is extended to cover other forms of entertainment, most notably cinema and television. In this brief overview of these highly influential art forms, I touch on aspects of film theory to ask what, if anything, this school of thought has contributed to wider debates concerning masculinity and male identity. Using the work of Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (1993/1995) as a starting-point and guide, the chapter look backs on some of the ways in which men have been portrayed in visual media throughout the last century, and note shapes and changes in these that might correspond to patterns in the magazine publishing world. Concerned that film theory offers a world-view dominated by individual academics and idiosyncratic arguments, the chapter lastly turns to examine more recent audience reception studies – those which privilege the opinions and perceptions of consumers themselves – in a way that sets the scene for my own research.

It is this original research that is first introduced in Chapter 5. As with investigations into men’s magazines in general, studies that involve their participants in *creative* ways also remain relatively recent. Hence, the major forerunners of the present study are cited and described in this chapter, locating this thesis within a context of similar work on media and audiences. My own

methodology of asking participants to produce and discuss a men's lifestyle magazine of their own is then introduced, with an explanation of the ways in which it is hoped that the approach will offer insights into the motivations of male readers when they pick up a magazine.

Chapters 6 and 7 approach the results of this project from two perspectives. Firstly, a review of the data examines the trends and patterns that emerged from the work produced by participants during the scheduled nine research sessions on a group-by-group basis. This allows for discussion of the various groups by their age, incorporating their experience of existing men's lifestyle magazines and opinions on these. Secondly, a number of themes are identified amongst the initial findings (including irony, contradictions, role models, celebrity, and gossip) and investigated in turn, as several wider theories begin to emerge.

In the final chapter, these theories are put forward in greater detail and evaluated against the validity of the research method in general. Conclusions on the roles of irony, gossip and contradictions, in particular, are tied together to propose an 'identity-explaining' function served by lifestyle magazines, and its peculiar relevance to the lives of men who, as we noted at the beginning of this introduction, might already have been experiencing a certain degree of upheaval in traditional and established notions of masculinity. The thesis suggests that lifestyle magazines offer men a psychological space in which to explore and 're-edit' their own sense of masculine identity – in a manner not dissimilar to the creative process of making a magazine that this particular research project encourages.

Chapter 2

Approaches to Magazines, Audiences and the Self

Studies into men's magazines are, like their subject, a recent development. They are also quick to point out the scarcity of similar contemporary research. Writing in 1997, Graham, Bawden & Nicholas assert that men's magazines 'are still a relatively recent phenomenon, and little has been written to document their rise' (p. 119). This is likely due to the fact that the men's lifestyle magazine is itself a comparatively recent concept in commercial terms, it being generally agreed that the first general interest magazine specifically aimed at a male readership did not appear in the UK until 1986, with the launch of *Arena* (Nixon, 1996: 138). Introducing perhaps the most comprehensive account of the genre to date, Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks (2001) agree that '[w]hile there are several impressive studies of women's magazines ... there is as yet very little academic work on the men's magazines market' (p. 5). Indeed, it appears that there is some way to go before research into male-targeted titles and their readership can claim to match the work carried out on their female equivalents.

Graham *et al.* above are not alone in treating the rise of men's magazines as a 'phenomenon'. While academic analysis may remain limited, the press has provided copious, often passionate commentary on the progress of the industry, concentrating in particular on the booming sales of men's titles like *FHM* and *Loaded* between 1994 and 1998, and the apparent market saturation and decline of these in the years that followed⁴. Circulation figures aside, this 'phenomenon' has also stirred up new controversies in the discussion of gender identity.

⁴ See, for example: Garratt, Sheryl, 'Funny, useful and selling', in *The Guardian: G2* (17 February 1997); Cook, Stephen, 'Boy zone', in *The Guardian: G2* (28 June 1997); Dugdale, John, 'Time to reload', in *The Guardian: G2* (30 November 1998); 'Away the lads', *Guardian Unlimited* (12 April 1999); 'Why would any bloke over 13 buy one of these?', *Guardian Unlimited* (29 August 1999); 'Woman's editor in with lads', *Guardian Unlimited* (22 January 2001).

2.1. Magazines and Identity

It is broadly held that an individual's sense of identity has some form of relationship with media products. McRobbie (1999), for instance, has observed that for several decades 'feminists have singled out girls' and women's magazines as commercial sites of intensified femininity and hence rich fields of analysis and critique' (p. 46). Here, we also see the associations drawn between identity and the media beginning to include considerations of gender – in this case, the 'femininity' of the reader being somehow addressed and affected. We are left with the question of how this relationship works, and how it might operate on a wider, commercial level as well as an individual one.

Such concerns are characteristic of the work carried out into magazine reading. Stevenson, Jackson & Brooks (2000), in an article that would later form part of their aforementioned book, *Making Sense of Men's Magazines* (2001), ask: 'what implications does the mass popularity of [men's] magazines have for the social construction of masculinity?' (p. 369). If, in the flourishing men's magazine sector, we have a marketing phenomenon, it is logical to suggest that this may be related to a change in the social understanding of masculinity. This could mean that the construction of masculinity is affected by market factors (as Stevenson *et al.* appear to posit here⁵), or, conversely, that fluctuations in the market reflect changed social perceptions – or, of course, that the relationship works in *both* directions. Clearly, the possibilities are extremely complex.

Jackson *et al.* draw on the work of Johnson (1986) to suggest that 'the images, discourses and frameworks of understanding that we borrow from the media in order to make sense of our everyday lives are embedded in wider cultures of production and media circulation' (2001: 50). Specifically, this is an adaptation of Johnson's 'circuits of culture' hypothesis (1986: 283-285), a model that arises from some surprisingly honest concerns about the aims and capabilities of 'cultural studies' in general⁶. Put

⁵ They actually make a much more involved argument, which I will come to shortly.

⁶ As Johnson queries, 'What if the existing theories, their methods and their results actually correspond to different sides of the same process? What if the process is more complex, in

simply, Johnson thinks it unlikely that any one approach could ever account for the complexities of media production and usage. He argues that the production, circulation and consumption of cultural objects form a cycle of ‘moments’: ‘Each moment depends upon the others and is indispensable to the whole. Each involves distinctive changes of form, real transformations’ (p. 284). In other words, ideological messages spread by the media – along with the responses they provoke – draw on such a vast and convoluted array of interconnecting sources that their influences on each other become impossible to accurately map out.

A conceivable criticism of Jackson *et al.*’s position, consequently, could be that they take as their basis a model that *is not really a model* – that is, one that does not explain (nor even attempt to explain) how any form of ‘social understanding’ might take place, beyond acknowledging its complexity. This, however, is their point. In appreciating the problems and ambiguities of the circuits of culture, they are able to begin their own investigation into magazine reading in a more exploratory style, relatively free from the limitations of any particular analytical approach.

Narrowing down the huge field of media products to concentrate on magazines raises a number of issues in itself. McRobbie has argued that ‘scholarship on magazines has occupied a less central and prestigious place than academic research on other media’ (1999: 47) for two reasons. The first is the fact that magazines, she believes, constitute a relatively narrow slice of global communications (compared, for example, to widely distributed television programmes or Hollywood films). The second reason locks us firmly into a discussion of media usage and gender identity. While we might say that women’s magazines have existed for centuries⁷, it is precisely because they have existed as a *genre* that they have attracted so much attention from feminist critics. In contrast, most other magazine genres, from DIY instruction to Formula One racing coverage, have been associated with a male readership. Indeed, as recently as 1997, with men’s lifestyle publications still fairly

sum, than any one version suggests? What if the theories are true as far as they go? What if they are false if stretched beyond their competences?’ (1986: 283).

⁷ Barrell & Braithwaite (1979) cite a 1693 edition of *The Ladies’ Mercury* as the first known example of a women’s magazine (p. 3).

new on the scene, it has been written that, ‘when men’s magazines are mentioned, one tends to think of either the pornographic top shelf variety or the hobby and activity magazines’ (Graham *et al.*, 1997: 119). McRobbie argues that this has led to studies about magazines in general being marginalized as a ‘debate among women’ (1999: 47). However, whilst it is true that previous research has most often been conducted by women (and concentrated on women’s magazines), the majority of scholars would probably now consider the field a recognized and familiar one.

2.2. Reading Women’s Magazines

Before we can examine the literature about men’s magazines in any kind of context, then, it is necessary to familiarize ourselves with, at least, the shape that feminist critique of magazines has taken over the past few decades. Some of the most useful and interesting research has focused on the related genre of romantic fiction – and, since ‘romance’ appears in the form of fictional stories in some women’s magazines, and as a ‘real-life’ discussion topic in many others, it seems reasonable that this branch of research should also be considered relevant. In an overview of the field, McRobbie identifies four historical stages (1999: 47): ‘*angry repudiation*’, the ‘*theory of ideology*’, the focus on ‘*women’s pleasure*’, and the ‘*return of the reader*’. Although workable as a rough chronology, I would suggest that these can also be usefully thought of as four directions of thinking, with entwining paths but different destinations⁸. (For this reason, I tentatively bring them out of the past tense and into the present.)

2.2.1. Angry Repudiation

The ‘angry repudiation’ of the first ‘stage’ refers less to an academic trend than a movement in feminist expression, the exponents of which object to the ‘false and

⁸ McRobbie herself acknowledges that the stages ‘do not follow a strictly chronological order’ (p. 49). It seems to me that the main reason she views them as a chronology is that her own thinking began at the first ‘stage’ and then developed in the order of the others. By locating her earlier arguments at points in history, she – quite reasonably – aligns them with past trends in cultural studies, thus admitting that they might now be considered ‘out of date’.

objectified images of women in the mass media' (*ibid.*). Two influential writers in this area have been Greer (1970) and McRobbie herself (1979). While both have refined their arguments in recent years – toning down the anger but not necessarily the repudiation – each originally found the comic strip-style picture- and photo-stories of *Jackie* and other teenage girls' magazines a particular cause for consternation. This reveals certain assumptions made about the role of such publications in readers' lives, as well as the power they might be able to exert.

Greer attacked romantic picture-stories for encouraging the impressionable young female reader to 'seduce herself with an inflated notion of what is really happening' (1970: 181) during interactions with the opposite sex. Romance, she argued, is a myth that 'sanctions drudgery, physical incompetence and prostitution' (p. 188). Her initial model, then, is one in which the media 'sets forth' the codes ('The girls are leggier and trendier ... The men are wickedly handsome' (p. 173), for example, and '[t]he utterly ineffectual heroine is the most important part of the story' (p. 177)), while the reader unquestioningly accepts them. Once taken onboard, these messages – being more enthralling than dull reality – form a false consciousness that acts as a confining force on women's lives. Greer saw the removal of this as a crucial goal of feminism: 'If female liberation is to happen, if the reservoir of real female love is to be tapped, this sterile self-deception must be counteracted' (p. 188).

Creating and maintaining a restrictive view of the world in the minds of readers is an ability that McRobbie also ascribed to magazines in her earlier studies. In the 1970s, she posited that '[t]he work of this branch of the media involves "framing" the world for its readers, and through a variety of techniques endowing with importance those topics chosen for inclusion' (1979: 2). The effects of this, in her opinion, were no less damaging than in Greer's account: girls who read *Jackie* and its ilk were 'presented with an ideological bloc of mammoth proportions, one which *imprisons* them in a claustrophobic world of jealousy and competitiveness' (p. 3; her emphasis). For McRobbie, then, the specific danger of these picture-stories was that they might undermine the healthiness and benefits of friendship between girls, instead forcing upon them the message that they should be in a romantic relationship with a boy. In addition, the female would not even be afforded an active

role in this quest. Analysing the language used in the stories, McRobbie pointed out that the girl finds herself *chosen*, *taken*, and *loved* (p. 25), and has no other option but to wait helplessly until she is swept off her feet by a man. These conclusions lead McRobbie into agreement with Greer concerning the primary aims of the women's movement during one of its most active phases: 'For feminists a related question must be how to go about countering *Jackie* and undermining its ideological power at the level of *cultural* intervention' (p. 50; her emphasis). In the opinion of both critics, *Jackie* in the 1970s represented not only a bloc of ideological misinformation, but also a block to the progress of women in society.

Another aspect of girls' and women's magazines that critics have found worrying is their portrayal of women in visual terms. Bringing together a wide range of content analysis of magazines, advertisements, television, literary fiction, and even cartoons, Butcher *et al.* (1974) take issue with the very presentation of the female form. They are particularly offended by the front cover photographs of women's magazines, arguing: 'these images of women's faces on the covers are so refined, so bright and sparkling, disgustingly so, they're more like Christmas trimmings, shiny things than women' (p. 19). The concern here (expressed most clearly through Butcher *et al.*'s use of the word 'things') is that women are treated in the media as objects – the focus of men's desires, and trophies of male achievement. Dyer (1982) brings this idea into her analysis of a Renault advert that compares a car to a near-naked woman:

She is made into a decorative, passive object available and controllable like the car ... She is controlled by the gaze of the absent men and is represented by the imagined fetishes which men are supposed to respond to (p. 123).

Such notions have been traced back throughout the history of western art. Attempting to explain the effects this might have, Berger (1972) states that:

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves (p. 47).

Via a constant bombardment of imagery designed *by* and *for* a (heterosexual) male perspective, he contends, women learn to view themselves as objects, a process that leaves them particularly vulnerable to the guiles of advertisers. Viewing an advert, a

woman is presented with an improved version of herself that she can only achieve by purchasing the product. In Berger's words, 'the publicity image steals her love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product' (p. 134).

We might align the arguments of all of these 'angry' critics, to some extent, with the work of Adorno (1991) and Horkheimer & Adorno (1995), who express concern that the 'culture industry' exists to create 'false needs' in those ensnared by the repressive social state it creates and perpetuates. Greer and McRobbie's work, for example, clearly condemns the role of magazines in promoting a false consciousness, while Butcher *et al.*, Dyer and Berger all detect a falsity in the world-view that purveyors of visual images (such as advertisers) attempt to pass off as representative of reality. Accordingly, some of the criticisms that have been levelled at Adorno and Horkheimer's thinking can also be applied to these more recent studies.

For many critics, a major problem with Adorno and Horkheimer's approach is its elitism. The accusation that mass culture in some way 'impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves' (Adorno, 1991: 92) implies that the theorist commenting on the process is above such susceptibility. Posing this argument involves making broad and negative assumptions about the cognitive abilities of the audience. (We may notice that neither Greer nor McRobbie attempted to illustrate their original arguments using interviews with readers, for instance.) Such an approach also lends itself to subjective appraisal of the *worthiness* of different texts, such as Greer's offhand references to 'romantic trash' (1970: 188) in comparison to 'higher' forms of art. As Strinati (1995) notes, 'the standards upon which [such criticism] bases itself turn out to be arbitrary not objective, a reflection of the social position of particular groups not universal values' (p. 76).

Returning to the point that studies belonging to the 'angry repudiation' stage assume a state of *inertness* on the part of the audience, subsequent research (including Radway (1984) and Hermes (1995), detailed below) has exemplified the

opposite view⁹. Discussing a single *Jackie* photo-story with seven different groups of teenage girls, Frazer (1987), for example, found a wide variety of different responses to the text. On a basic level, some girls approved of the lead character's choice of boyfriend while others did not. More revealingly, a majority of focus group members did not feel that they could relate to the girl in the story at all, suggesting a freedom in their position as readers, rather than a fixed or highly impressionable set of attitudes easily targeted and exploited by magazine producers (p. 417). Most importantly of all, Frazer notes that the girls read the story *as a piece of fiction*, often taking a stance similar to that of literary and film criticism: they appear to recognize the machinations of the plot, and ask questions about the production of the story, involving, for example, the actors and photographer (*ibid.*). Of course, this study does not categorically demonstrate that the readers would *never* be affected by the magazine (and we should also bear in mind that the girls' comments were prompted by a researcher in an arguably 'unnatural' situation), but they do appear to suggest a level of reader-awareness that earlier critiques failed to recognize.

Barker (1989) tackles another problem with some of the pessimistic criticism surrounding *Jackie* and its picture-stories, arguing that previous writers have taken a 'cavalier attitude to the material – as though it hardly matters since “we all know” what dangerous junk it is’ (p. 135). Undertaking the most extensive survey of picture-stories yet conducted (by reading one from every month since *Jackie*'s launch in 1964), he points out that prior case studies have indeed been both highly selective in their choice of stories, and misleading in their presentation of story fragments in place of complete narratives. Subjecting McRobbie's 1979 contribution – which he considers the 'most influential' (p. 147) – to particular scrutiny, he shows that she makes incorrect assumptions about the week-to-week layout of the magazine (p. 155), and claims that “[m]essages” are being selectively discovered according to what she already knew “must be there”” (p. 179). While his research is incredibly detailed, and his criticisms of McRobbie justified, it should also be noted that his own analysis of the picture-stories, like McRobbie's, ultimately remains in

⁹ McRobbie acknowledges this in a 1991 piece: 'In my earlier work on *Jackie* I restricted myself to a purely textual analysis ... As various critics have pointed out, this was far from satisfactory' (p. 141).

the sphere of personal textual interpretation, with no real evidence of the input of those who read *Jackie* simply for pleasure.

We have seen, then, several problems with the work that falls into McRobbie's first category of 'angry repudiation'. These derive from two widely refuted assumptions made about magazines and their readers, which Hermes (1993) succinctly sums up as:

First, popular media texts consist of transparent, unequivocal, unrealistic messages about women. Second, women and girls will passively absorb these messages as (wrong) lessons about real life (p. 58).

These and other criticisms are taken up in the studies that make up McRobbie's second stage.

2.2.2. Ideological Theory

The 'theory of ideology' recognizes the simplicity of cries for women to break free of the 'control' that magazines have over them, and focuses instead on a wider system that works by 'naturalizing and universalising meanings and values which [are] in fact socially constructed' (McRobbie, 1999: 47). Again, we can see reflected in this definition a 'top-down' notion of power relations, with the dominant social group exerting and maintaining its influence through media texts. However, the theory of ideology also attributes all other social groups with some responsibility because it suggests that negotiations with ideology are what allow individuals to build a sense of *identity*. There exists, at this level, some level of freedom for readers of magazines to choose and use their texts selectively and creatively. In this respect, we can see the second stage as going deeper than the first.

The 'circuits of culture' theory outlined above, along with many others attempting to account for the relationship between media producers and audiences, can be placed at this stage. However, in order to apply it realistically, we need to recognize why McRobbie argues that thinking *moved on* to another phase. Asserting that the ideology stage was displaced by subsequent post-structuralist thought, she points out that, if we focus only on trying to map out the power relationships between different social groups, we risk creating (for our own purposes) sets of rigid

definitions of social role. The problem this poses for feminism is that it suggests, in McRobbie's words, 'the possibility of an eventual and superior truth of womanhood' (p. 48). On the surface, this may not sound particularly damaging; many popular attitudes continue to rest on the notion of men and women as 'natural' polar opposites, appearing in everything from newspaper articles¹⁰ to pop songs¹¹. However, such generalizations again ultimately *restrict* the positions available for women – and, indeed, everyone – by implying the existence of underlying, inherent qualities or attitudes that will always be found in certain groups of people.

Langford (1996) addresses this point in her own critique of ideology-based 'false consciousness' theories: 'defining all men and women as simply oppressors or oppressed', she explains, 'tends to characterize heterosexual love relationships as *only* about the oppression of women' (p. 24). Therefore, these definitions leave no room for an understanding of how women might be able to *resist* oppression, as any relationship between a man and women would result in the woman being oppressed. This also fails to explain why women might *want* to have relationships with men, something they do often appear to desire. Furthermore, being based on an assumption of heterosexuality causes the model to fail when applied to same-sex relationships: a gay male couple would involve a struggle of pure domination, Langford notes, while a lesbian relationship would be theoretically (and unrealistically) 'power-free' (p. 25). Instead, she suggests, the most important task should be the working out of what is and isn't harmful in human relationships: 'feminism must involve struggling against dimensions of power rather than gender' (*ibid.*). The problem is only confounded when we start thinking of women and men as entirely different and opposing groups.

Three additional criticisms of ideological theory are discussed by Frazer in relation to her study of *Jackie* readers described above. The approach, she feels, is based on a supposition that is often too easily taken to fully account for people's

¹⁰ For example: 'A gossip with the girls? Pick any one of 40 subjects (but men can only talk about work, sport, jokes and women)', *Daily Mail* (18 October 2001).

¹¹ Country-pop crossover artist Shania Twain, for instance, is one singer who has regularly exploited these themes, with hits such as 'The Woman in Me (Needs the Man in You)' (1995) and 'Man! I Feel Like a Woman!' (1999).

behaviour and beliefs. Since ideological theory maintains the existence of ‘a certain sort of relationship between readers and the texts which are said to be bearers of ideological meaning’ (1987: 407), a ‘more or less passive reader is depicted’ (*ibid.*). Secondly, she is concerned that ideological theory treats concepts such as ‘attitude’ and ‘opinion’ as measurable, almost scientific quantities, when in fact it is widely recognized that they are notoriously problematic, shifting and self-contradictory. Finally, she raises the issue of which texts ought to be considered bearers of ideology. We have already examined the subjectivity involved in trying to separate ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ forms of art; determining which texts are the most effective ideological manipulators is likely to be a similarly problematic pursuit.

According to McRobbie, the most significant move away from ideological theory in feminism arrived as a new ‘concern with the different discursive means by which the category “woman” or “girl” came to be understood’ (1999: 48). In a broader sense, this can be seen as the emergence of attempts to destabilize categories of gender and sexual performance. The boundaries of this debate have been pushed back most forcefully by the work of Butler (1990), discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. For now, it is important to bring in the third and fourth stages of McRobbie’s account of feminist magazine criticism.

2.2.3. Pleasure and the Role of the Reader

The focus on ‘women’s pleasure’ and the ‘return of the reader’ can often be seen in contemporary criticism to exist *alongside* some of the more complex theories of ideology, such as those involving circuits of culture. The former refers to the ‘love-hate relationship’ that McRobbie identifies in her and other feminist critics’ readings of women’s magazines. (1999: 49)¹². This position is progressive in relation to the pure ‘theory of ideology’ stage in that it recognizes that many women *enjoy* magazines, and allows space in its analysis for this fact (unlike the ‘entirely

¹² Ballaster *et al.* (1991), for instance, share a ‘mutual pleasure in reading women’s magazines ... tempered by the knowledge that this pleasure is by no means pure, unambiguous or unproblematic’ (p. 1), while Hermes (1995) admits: ‘They are not my favourite popular genre ... but I like some parts of them, especially the recipes and, in small doses, gossip items and fashion spreads’ (p. 9).

critical and dismissive' tone that Beezer *et al.* detect in most early ideology-based studies (1986: 104)). The 'return of the reader' refers to the implication of 'women's pleasure' – that the reader has an equally important status in the cultural process. In work that epitomizes the concerns of these two final stages, Radway (1984) and Hermes (1995) both set out to explore *how* and *why* women get pleasure from reading, with an emphasis on readers themselves.

Radway conducted extensive interviews with around 40 women who frequented a particular bookshop to purchase romance novels. Her findings are relevant to the study of magazines because they paint a vivid portrait of female readers pursuing what for them is an important interest. Radway rejects from the outset the kind of studies that assume '[t]he true, embedded meaning of the romance is available ... only to trained literary scholars who are capable of extricating the buried significance of plot developments, characterisations and literary tropes' (1984: 5). Her interests are located firmly in the *activity* of the reader.

Two of the characteristics of romance-reading she identifies are not immediately obvious, but remain highly illuminating: firstly, she finds that it is carried out as a 'combative' endeavour (p. 211), allowing women to refuse their prescribed social role (by, for example, reading instead of doing housework); secondly, it performs a 'compensatory' function, providing the readers with an opportunity to focus and reflect on themselves, their thoughts and fantasies during a daily routine that requires most of their energy to be spent on external, familial obligations. The act of reading, then, becomes emancipating and even empowering – a 'collectively elaborated female ritual through which women explore the consequences of their common social condition' (p. 212).

Thompson (1989) proposes that such activities may not only be deliberate and purposeful, but also a habitual practice among women. Over the course of many interviews with adolescent girls on the subject of their experiences of love and relationships, Thompson discovered that participants often 'rushed into fullblown narratives about sexual and romantic life' (p. 351) lasting uninterrupted for several hours at a time. She remarks:

The stories had a polished quality, and I think this was because they were rehearsed. These were the stories that teenage girls spend hundreds of hours telling each other, going over and over detail and possibility as part of the process of constructing and re-constructing sexual and existential meaning for themselves (*ibid.*).

Her account suggests that women can use romantic fiction to *make sense* of their own lives, applying established genre conventions to real experiences to reinterpret and re-examine them. This requires a familiarity with the romance genre, and demonstrates a use for it other than idle absorption. Experience of romantic storytelling, Thompson says, makes women *aware* of the processes involved in presenting a 'self' to the world through narrative. In recounting their own lives, women knowingly 'present a *version* of the self, one edited for myriad conscious and unconscious purposes' (*ibid.*; her emphasis).

Radway, discussing her own aims, highlights another important point:

A good cultural analysis of the romance ought to specify not only how the women understand the novels themselves but also how they comprehend the very act of picking up a book in the first place. The analytic focus must shift from the text itself, taken in isolation, to the complex social event of reading (p. 8).

This leads back to the circuits of culture theory, enriching it with the suggestion that, not only do 'moments' of media usage link to each other, but they also find a place within the routines and restrictions of everyday life. This is something that Hermes illustrates in her 1995 study of women's magazine readers. Her interviews with these are riddled with references to housework, shopping and other chores, with magazines providing an interruption to such responsibilities, and valued by their readers precisely because they 'fit in easily with everyday duties and obligations' (p. 64). Such texts share a characteristic that Hermes calls 'easily put down': they strive to strike a balance between being 'interesting enough to pick up (though not so riveting that they would be difficult to put down)' (*ibid.*). For this reason, many of the articles relate to the problems and experiences of everyday life, offering advice, for example, on relationships and homemaking skills.

This factor, then, brings us closer to an understanding of the *practical* function of women's magazines, but what of their ideological role? How does this analysis allow the reader anything more than a passive relationship with the text? Hermes

supposes that, by engaging the reader on this level, magazines ‘help readers imagine “perfect selves”’ (*ibid.*). This again implies an active position on the part of the readers, who are constantly working to construct their own identities. By rearranging their own ‘knowledge’ to incorporate the information imparted by the magazine, readers may assume or imagine a greater sense of personal worth. Hermes describes this bank of knowledge as the reader’s ‘repertoire’ – an expression that Jackson *et al.* also find useful.

2.3. Discourses, Repertoires and Dispositions

In Jackson *et al.*’s terminology, repertoires are introduced as ‘discursive repertoires’, and refer to ‘the *public forms of talk* that enable individuals and social groups to make the magazines meaningful’ (2001: 112; their emphasis). The concept has the same meaning for them as it does for Hermes, but they prefer to shorten it to just ‘discourses’ (p. 110). This is somewhat ambiguous in that they also use the term ‘discourses’ to refer to the actual *practices* of culture, such as ‘attending a football match, looking at a painting, reading a book’ (p. 111). Consequently, in their analysis, ‘discourse’ can refer to both the act of reading a magazine *and* the knowledge drawn on by the reader to make sense of the magazine. I find this slightly unhelpful and wish to draw a more clear-cut distinction. For this reason, I will concur with Hermes and refer to discursive repertoires as ‘repertoires’, rather than ‘discourses’.

Sarup (1996) brings to light another important characteristic of repertoires:

Our identities are influenced, among other things, by what we consume, what we wear, the commodities we buy, what we see and read, how we conceive our sexuality, *what we think of society and the changes we believe it is undergoing* (p. 105; my emphasis).

Not only, then, does the reader possess a repertoire, but he or she also has a *relationship* with this repertoire. Readers’ interpretations rest on a combination of *what they know* and *how they feel about what they know*. Jackson *et al.* describe this

as a ‘discursive disposition’ (2001: 110), a notion that draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, in particular, his concept of the habitus.

The habitus, in Bourdieu’s words, is ‘a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices’ (1979: iii). Many theorists have found the concept useful because it deals with the elusive relationship between subjective concerns and objective conditions, and how these might affect people’s dispositions. Neither set of factors can account for human identity and behaviour on its own, but the habitus acts as an area of intersection. As Harker *et al.* explain (1990), it is:

created and reformulated through the conjecture of objective structures and personal history. Dispositions are acquired in social positions within a field and imply a subjective adjustment to that position (p. 10).

Such an ‘adjustment’ might be a person’s sense of self within society, their moral stance, the magazine they choose to read – in fact, any personal variation in relation to perceived external conditions. In many ways, it is similar to a repertoire; it is the collected ‘body of thought’ or ‘knowledge and understanding’ that affects personal readings, as well as the readings themselves, which, arguably, mould and constitute the ‘reality’ of the world as much as they reflect it.

Jackson *et al.* provide a workable definition of the habitus as ‘a class-specific set of dispositions whose content is determined by the dominant class relationships in a social field’ (2001: 111). By ‘class’ in this description, they draw on Bourdieu’s concepts of *symbolic* and *cultural capital* to mean something other than a measure of social standing defined purely by economic income. *Symbolic* capital refers to the conversion of economic wealth into a kind of capital valued in terms of prestige and status – as in, for example, the social distinction that comes with the purchase of a new and expensive car. As Harker *et al.* point out, this conversion often seeks to conceal the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital (1990: 4), attempting to appear innate. Thus, those with high symbolic capital reserve their ‘natural’ right to ‘create the official version of the social world’ (p. 13). In some ways, *cultural* capital is an extension of symbolic, referring to ‘the acquisition of social status through cultural practices which involve the exercise of taste and judgement’

(Jackson *et al.*, 2001: 138): the new car, for instance, represents not the large amount of money it cost to its owners, but their exceptional taste and discernment. In relation to the habitus, this describes how people not only have a relationship with their own repertoires but with *other peoples*'. For Jackson *et al.* the habitus and its related notions of symbolic capital are 'a way of seeing how different discursive dispositions map on to other social divisions' (*ibid.*). A men's magazine may be able to promote feelings of in-group solidarity amongst its readers by addressing them as a group of *men*. In turn, these men might define themselves in relation to other men, making judgements based on perceived levels of symbolic and cultural capital, perhaps even related to magazine readership. We arrive in the midst of a circuit of culture that involves *access to* magazines (ideologically as well as economically), *attitudes towards* the various magazines available, and attitudes towards the activity of magazine reading itself. Again, we must question how these texts are valuable to readers in making sense of their lives.

2.4. Reading Men's Magazines

As has already been noted, studies specifically centred on male magazine readership are much fewer in number than those concerned with their female equivalent. However, mirroring the rise of men's magazines, such work has recently started to appear with more regularity. Jackson *et al.* offer the most comprehensive overview to date of the history of the men's magazine market in Britain, bringing to the forefront of their analysis a particular fact:

The sales of early titles such as *Arena* and *Esquire* were rapidly outstripped by such titles as *Loaded* and *FHM*, as images of the 'new man' were replaced by an emphasis on more 'laddish' forms of masculinity (2001: 1).

This turning point, associated with the launches of *Loaded* and *FHM* in 1994, divides the history into two stages: a period roughly spanning 1988-1994 which saw the arrival of the first men's titles, including *Arena* and *GQ*; and, following this, a new phase beginning around 1994, witnessing the initial appearance and booming sales of what have come to be termed 'new men's magazines' (Schirato & Yell, 1999: 81; Stevenson *et al.*, 2000: 369). The difference between the two stages, as

Jackson *et al.* point out, is one of content *and* tone, related to the contrast between two established social stereotypes: the ‘new man’ and the ‘lad’¹³. These will be examined in more detail shortly, but serve to illustrate briefly that the distinction between the stages is strongly linked to the personality and social role of the targeted reader.

Two other points are worth making here. Firstly, the two stages should not be taken to imply two sets of different magazines. Although, *Loaded* and *FHM*, for example, were not present in the first stage, *GQ* and *Arena* have been present throughout both. Thus, the turning point represents a *change* in the market (and not an overnight one), with the new titles affecting the character of those already established. Secondly, although we can mark out two separate and distinct stages to date, we should not rule out the possibility that the market has now entered a third stage. After rising to a dramatic peak in the first half of 1998 (Jackson *et al.*, 2001: 30), circulation figures for men’s lifestyle titles have, as we noted in the previous chapter, fallen again – although, in terms of the number of men’s magazines still sold each month, not by a drastic amount. It is rather early to draw meaningful conclusions from this, but it is a trend that has already been noted by several newspaper journalists¹⁴. In 2004, the market also witnessed the arrival of two *weekly* publications, *Nuts* and *Zoo*, representing a new development in the genre of men’s magazines but following a tradition long held by magazines aimed at women.

The two-stage chronology of the men’s magazine market is reflected in the body of academic work associated with it. Earlier writers concentrated on trying to account for the birth of the genre, linking it with social and economic changes in the 1980s and a new interest in men’s fashion (Mort, 1988; Nixon, 1996; Edwards, 1997; and Cole, 2000). Their work tends to be generally positive in tone, and interested in the emergence of new, socially accepted forms of male identity. Later studies (notably Schirato & Yell, 1999; Cook, 2000; Jackson *et al.*, 2000; and

¹³ There is a potential linguistic trap here: ‘new men’s magazines’ are not those associated with ‘new men’, but with ‘lads’. The ‘new’ refers to the newest wave of titles.

¹⁴ See, for example: Hodgson, Jessica, ‘The lads go limp’, *The Guardian* (18 February 2002); ‘Men’s lifestyle titles suffer’, *Guardian Unlimited* (16 February 2001); ‘Growing pains hit the lad mags where it hurts’, *Guardian Unlimited* (21 February 1999).

Benwell, 2003a/2003b) focus on the perceived change in the masculinities addressed and represented by the magazines in the mid-nineties. Jackson *et al.*, by far the most comprehensive of these, ultimately arrives at a more negative conclusion, voicing apprehension that this shift in the market might pose real problems for gender equality.

2.4.1. The Origins of the Men's Lifestyle Magazine

Writing in 1988, Mort could be confident in his assertion that '[f]or the industry, the holy grail of the new men's market is the search for a successful lifestyle magazine' (p. 211)¹⁵. At the time, the spectacular failure of *The Hit*, a widely promoted but short-lived magazine aimed at older teenage boys and launched in autumn 1985, was still fresh in publishers' memories. Mort attributes its collapse after six issues to the fact that 'young men balked at being spoken to as a community of men' (p. 213). The suggestion is that, when men are treated 'in gendered terms' rather than 'the norm which defines everything else', masculinity is turned into something that might allow men as a group to be marginalized in the same way that women have been in the past (*ibid.*). Masculinity in this sense is often something that men tend to reject or even be embarrassed by. As Winship adds, 'young men, unlike young women, do not like the idea of a magazine which suggests that other men have the same desires and angsts' (1987: 154). She argues that the obsessions with self and self-image, still present in young men despite their feigned indifference, are instead reworked as an interest in items like gadgets, bikes and fashion wear, thus 'safely removing them from the volatile terrain of emotions' (*ibid.*).

A couple of years on from *The Hit*'s demise, Mort notices a change in the socially acceptable codes of manhood:

Young men are being sold images which rupture the traditional icons of masculinity. They are stimulated to look at themselves – and other men – as objects of consumer desire (p. 194).

¹⁵ Mort borrows the term 'holy grail', as used here, from the title of an article published in *Campaign* (29 August 1986), as quoted by Jackson *et al.* (2001: 28).

This sort of behaviour, which Mort places under the definition of ‘pleasures’, has been, he argues, ‘previously branded taboo or feminine’ (*ibid.*). In the eighties, however, media images like the famous, Nick Kamen-starring Levi’s ‘Launderette’ advert brought male ‘narcissistic display’ (p. 201) into the mainstream to exist side-by-side with the established convention of the beautiful female model. Mort specifically links this development to economic factors: in the above quote, the images are ‘sold’ and the desires ‘consumer’-oriented. Masculinity, he believes, is a concept strongly influenced by ‘the fashion house, the marketplace and the street’ (p. 194). As the decade drew to a close, his predictions of an imminent increase in the number of products – and hence advertisements – aimed at men proved to be astute.

Nixon (1996) argues that the advertising industry and emerging men’s magazine market had an equal influence on each other, each both *responding to* and *helping to establish* the new generation of style-driven and fashion-conscious men (p. 138). He credits eighties-launched ‘style magazines’ like *The Face*, *i-D* and *Blitz* with an integral role in this development:

For a number of publishing houses, the success of *The Face* between 1984 and 1986 really testified to a shift in the reading habits of young men. In particular, it was seen to have educated a generation of young men into reading a general interest magazine for men (p. 136).

While *The Face* (which ran until May 2004) was a pop culture and fashion publication not exclusively targeted at men, Nixon argues that it was the first to achieve a ‘developed sense of this group of consumers’ tastes, values and sensibilities’ (*ibid.*). In this sense, he suggests that encounters with *The Face* and its ilk primed young males as an audience for men’s lifestyle titles, making them, for the first time, willing to accept a magazine more explicitly targeted at men.

In Nixon’s account, market research in the mid-eighties identified a ‘shift in young men’s “values and life-styles”’ (p. 143) that advertisers and publishers both wanted to capitalize on. Advertisers saw men’s magazines as an important medium through which to reach this new sector of the market, while publishers depended on advertisers as sources of revenue to fund production. In this way, Nixon proposes

that ‘the economic relations between advertisers and publishers themselves had cultural conditions of existence’ (p. 144); ostensibly purely financial matters, they actually became a culturally significant force. The ‘work of representation’ (*ibid.*) – the creation and dissemination of images *of* the consumers (the shoes they wear, the watch they buy, and so on) – became something like the selling of a product itself. The success of this product depended on its images being adopted by the consumer and made into a cultural reality – that is, worn in the street and treated as markers of social status.

Another factor in this increasing acceptance of male-oriented visual material, according to Cole (2000), was the growing recognition and influence of gay male consumers. He cites *The Face*, in particular, as making obvious references ‘to the place of gay men in Britain’ (p. 177) through its sometimes homosexually coded fashion features, such as a 1986 spread entitled ‘Boystown’. These, he suggests, went a long way in ‘inviting heterosexual men to view gay-inspired images and to question the assumption of the male gaze’ (*ibid.*), further normalizing the notion of men looking at images of other men. He also points out that, since many of the production staff of *The Face* moved to fledgling men’s titles like *Arena* (launched in 1986), the styles and conventions they took with them may have made these new titles particularly appealing to the now-established gay readership, helping to secure, for the first time, a market base for a men’s magazine.

Edwards (1997) views this as the linking factor that draws all of the others together. Gay men, ‘supposedly free from the hang-ups of heterosexual masculinity concerning the stereotypes of effeminacy associated with style-conscious consumption’ (p. 74), have, he surmises, often been taken as a test group for male consumers in general. He identifies five other social conditions which, when combined in Britain in the eighties, created an atmosphere conducive to the successful launching of men’s magazines (p. 73): firstly, advances in (young, white, educated, middle class) male employment levels; secondly, more men living alone, without children, and with greater personal spending power; thirdly, a Conservative political climate encouraging ‘individualism and aspirationalism’; fourthly, the effects of the gay and women’s movements in pushing men towards greater self-awareness; and, finally, a growing social approval of the idea of men as ‘consumers

of their own masculinity'. Like Nixon and Cole, he attributes the arrival of the latter in a large part to the influence of the style magazines, which he argues created 'a style cultural intelligentsia of experts disseminating their specialist know-how', leading to 'an immense emphasis upon consumption as a means to join the new style elite' (p. 74).

2.4.2. The 'New Man'

What all of these accounts acknowledge is the existence of a new masculine identity – the 'new man' – although the debate over when this first emerged remains unresolved. Collier (1992/1993) suggests it arose in the 1970s in response to the intensifying women's movement, and offers the following breakdown of his identity:

Generally he is professional, usually white, heterosexual and between 25 and an indeterminate middle-age. He is also having something of an identity crisis as his girlfriend(s) discover feminism and, in some cases, green politics and non-penetrative sex.

This archetype is sometimes linked to 'hippie' ideals or an over-submission to feminist values, as in Benson's slightly derogatory reference to 'the you 'n' me sensitivities of seventies New Man' (*The Guardian: G2*, 15 December 1997). Edwards, however, describes such notions as simply one facet of a much larger concept that did not fully materialize until the mid-eighties, when the new man took on a twofold form, 'caring, nurturing and sensitive' on one side, and 'more narcissistic, passive and introspective' on the other (1997: 39).

The first of these two groups of characteristics went on to typify the popular social stereotype of the new man in the late eighties and early nineties, embodied, as Edwards sees it, in the famous advertisement for the Calvin Klein fragrance Eternity, showing a muscular man cradling a baby (*ibid.*). Along with the many posters this inspired, we may also see the popularity of this image reflected in the box office success at the time of films based around loving, fatherly and often single

men and (typically) young girls, such as *3 Men and a Baby* (1987), *Three Fugitives* (1989), *3 Men and a Little Lady* (1990) *My Girl* and *Curly Sue* (both 1991) and *Mon père, ce héros* (a 1991 French film remade in America as *My Father the Hero* in 1994). This ‘caring’ aspect of the new man might be seen to persist in current constructions of masculinity in the sense that ‘sensitivity’ is still generally accepted as a desirable quality for a man to have. Indeed, due to the current popularity of child star Dakota Fanning, a recent spate of films has paired her with several highly respected leading men in protective and fatherly roles, including Denzel Washington in *Man on Fire* (2004), Robert De Niro in *Hide and Seek* (2005), and Tom Cruise in *War of the Worlds* (2005).

Market analysts have concentrated more on the second, ‘narcissistic’ group of characteristics. For Mort, the essence of the new man is his ‘newly sexualised’ image, comfortable as both a consumer of images of other men, and as a body to be looked at by others (1988: 222). Nixon, too, focuses on the new man as consumer but suggests that the most important effect of the image is its ‘loosening of the binary opposition between gay and straight-identified men’ (1996: 202). It is this more sexually ambivalent concept of masculinity – indicative of a general ‘identity crisis’ linked to the new man’s sexual relationship with women, as Collier argues above – that later critics identify as instigating the second phase in the development of the men’s magazine market.

2.4.3. ‘New Lads’, ‘Soft Lads’ and the Rise of the ‘Lads’ Mag’

By 1998, the sales of the market-leading men’s magazine *FHM* had risen to nearly 800,000 – that is, four times its circulation of only two years previously, and eight times the circulation of the long-established *Arena* (Jackson *et al.*, 2001: 30). The new, highly successful titles, *FHM* and *Loaded*, differed significantly from their predecessors, most notably in their exaggerated and upfront preoccupation with sex, which was plainly signified by a switch in front cover images from what had often been male headshots to pin-up style pictures of female celebrity ‘babes’. As Jackson *et al.* note (*ibid.*), the magazines’ dramatic success did not go unnoticed by media

commentators, many of whom sought to account for it in terms of further shifts in male social identity.

Seidler (1997) describes the boom as symptomatic of ‘the reassertion of a “new lad” culture’, quoting a 1991 *Arena* editorial that defined the newly emergent lad as ‘a hybrid: a would-be New Man who can’t quite shake off his outmoded but snug-fitting laddishness’ (p. 10)¹⁶. O’Donnell & Sharpe (2000) see this as a male cultural response to the increased visibility of images of powerful femininity – a ‘reassertion of modified machismo in the form of “laddishness”’ (p. 189):

Among middle class young men, this sometimes takes the form of a slightly self-mocking revelling in football, beer and sex, the latter perhaps as much at the level of talk as of action (*ibid.*).

Following this argument, it would seem that new men’s magazines provided the perfect forum for sex talk of this nature, as young men increasingly found themselves ‘on the defensive’ in their power relations with women. This new lad ‘aspires to New Man status when he’s with women, but reverts to old man type when he’s out with the boys’ (*Arena*, 1991; cited in Nixon, 1996: 204), suggesting a slightly precarious form of masculinity that is constantly regulated by the self and peers, and receptive to any advice given by the media regarding sexual performance.

While most writers on the subject appear to agree on this diagnosis, they are divided when it comes to deciding whether or not it represents a harmful retaliation towards the women’s movement. Like O’Donnell & Sharpe, who ultimately consider it ‘more a petulantly defensive gesture’ (2000: 189), Schirato & Yell (1999) find the self-mocking aspect of such behaviour the most revealing. Examining the Australian men’s magazine *Ralph*¹⁷, they conclude that its apparent celebrations of ‘macho’ behaviour actually constitute a deliberate, even somewhat satirical *over-performance* of these codes – an affectation both nostalgic for the past and critical of it:

¹⁶ Editorial by Sean Hagan in *Arena*, issue 27, Spring/Summer 1991.

¹⁷ A title roughly equivalent to the UK’s *FHM*, it would seem, although an official version of *FHM* has since been launched on the Australian market.

The writers of *Ralph* are still committed, in all kinds of ways, to the performance of stereotypical Australian masculinity. But they are also aware that the iteration takes place in another context – one where pure iteration (if such a thing existed) was more or less illegitimate (p. 88).

Traditional or stereotypical masculinity, they argue, has become unacceptable in recent times, but any discursive ‘performance’ of it (for example, its sexism and homophobia) is undercut by the knowledge that it is, consciously, a performance. Furthermore, they propose that this can be a *positive* thing because, while magazines might reproduce no-longer-legitimate attitudes, they also re-confirm the current, more desirable ones by normalizing them. So, for instance, while magazines might produce sexist discourse, it is always in a mannered way, while representations of women as ‘sexual agents’ go by without criticism; that is, the writers never question or dispute the role of women as sexual equals. In *Ralph*, Schirato & Yell argue, the existence of homosexuality and female sexual agency, as well as the fact that men need lifestyle advice, are ‘givens’ (*ibid.*), while older attitudes exist as nostalgic fun, at best silly and at worst objectionable.

Other critiques of the laddishness of the new men’s magazines have been less optimistic. Cook (2000) accuses them of taking a direction ‘clearly oriented away from real change in masculinity itself’ (p. 184). A case study of men’s toiletry product advertisements reveals a trend towards what she calls ‘hyper-masculinity’ – a re-imagining of personal hygiene as a macho ritual of ‘suffering’ (through, for instance, vigorous scrubbing), emphatically designed not to ‘tone’ or ‘beautify’ the body but to increase its mechanical effectiveness (p. 177). Such adverts attempt to re-distance men from any accusations of ‘feminine’ behaviour. Discussing the articles themselves (especially those concerned with providing grooming tips), Cook finds that the writers commonly ‘anticipate resistance’:

The careful staging of the skincare procedures ... is balanced by a set of carefully-positioned joke responses, attributed to an editor, which anticipate and validate male readers’ nervous cynicism (p. 178).

In her view, then, although representations of men *appear* to be widening to include new, more ambivalent positions, in fact they ‘rapidly re-close around the

reformed but still powerful principles of a socially central masculinity' (p. 185). Any challenges to the long-established dominant role of masculinity are, she posits, undermined symbolically and linguistically in the magazines.

Jackson *et al.* (2001) voice some similar criticisms of new men's magazines but at least recognize the complexity and self-contradiction that characterizes the genre. Their aforementioned stance on the relationship between text and reader (subscribing to the circuits of culture model) reflects this openness to the problems of over-generalization. Accordingly, their conclusion that the magazines provide an 'ambivalent space' (p. 141) for men to 'explore the contradictoriness of modern masculinities' (p. 146) is progressive, and leaves plenty of room for negotiation. However, on a less optimistic note, they also argue that magazines allow readers the luxury of 'repressing certain key questions regarding their current construction' (*ibid.*). This is achieved through a process of 'constructed certitude', which Jackson *et al.* define as 'the attempt to shield tradition from criticism by excluding certain questions' (p. 69). For modern men, these questions concern how masculinity might be changing. Jackson *et al.* illustrate the way these issues are avoided with an example: when new men's magazines are accused of advocating sexism with their laddish stance, the frequent defence put forward by their writers is that 'they are not sexist but sexual, taking refuge in the readers' natural sexuality' (p. 70). This response, they point out, manages to dismiss the criticism as irrelevant; it ignores the fact that magazines, as well as reflecting social attitudes, can also support and perpetuate them. By claiming that they simply provide for the whims of a 'natural' sexuality, they are able to rise above criticism because '*everyone knows what men are like*'.

Finally, it is worth noting that several critics have suggested that, whatever the threats posed to equality by the new lad and his choice of media products, he has more recently begun to tone down the more laddish aspects of his personality. Benson (1997), a former editor of *The Face*, suggests that the young man of the late 1990s has 'looked at the codes of practice espoused by the masses in recent years (the juvenile, self-debasing idiocies of so-called lad culture) and sees no future in them' (p. 3). This 'soft lad' is characterized by a rejection of 'adolescent' behaviour and outdated masculine archetypes, and a greater willingness to admit his

shortcomings and insecurities. Kenny & Stevenson (2000) see the constructed certitude and “‘blokelash” against feminism’ (p. 138) of men’s magazines as giving way to ‘a variety of different, more tentative responses to contemporary dilemmas’, involving ‘a negotiation of and reflection upon, if not an obvious escape from, our masculine heritage’ (p. 149). These, they suggest, are embodied by many men’s circumstances in the late twentieth century, such as living alone or as a single parent, attempting to relate to their children from previous relationships, investigating self-help and therapy, or establishing ‘different kinds of male networks’ (*ibid.*) – by which the authors appear to mean more emotionally supportive friendships, amongst other things.

Interestingly, both Benson and Kenny & Stevenson illustrate their arguments with references to popular all-male music groups of the late 1990s, whom they see as expressing the self-doubts of the soft lad through their songs: Benson cites The Verve as ‘national confessor figures’ whose number-one single ‘The Drugs Don’t Work’ ‘slowed up a generation rushing headlong into hedonism’; Kenny & Stevenson choose Echo and the Bunnymen, whose ‘tales of lost love, divorce, obsessive relationships and the uncertainty of becoming your (male) self’ (2000: 150) are, for them, ‘framed by a recognition of the ambivalence involved in being a man’ (*ibid.*). This fairly recent construction of a more hesitant, thoughtful and somewhat struggling masculinity is also often commented on in relation to men’s magazines, where it is frequently linked with the ironic tone and level of contradiction employed by many publications.

2.4.4. Irony and Contradictions

Most studies of new men’s magazines single out the texts’ often apparently self-mocking styles as an important indication of their stance on contemporary masculinity, especially in the case of the irony-heavy *Loaded* (whose very tagline famously reads, ‘For men who should know better’). In Jackson *et al.*’s focus group discussions, irony is cited by participants as a sign that the magazines should not be ‘taken too seriously’ (p. 125). This is in some ways comparable to Barker’s

discussion of the ‘lightness of tone’ he associates with *Jackie*, as conveyed through its bright colours, bouncy fonts and slangy language:

It asks to be read at a leisurely pace indicating that its subject matter is not wholly serious, is certainly not ‘news’ ... Now why shouldn’t we take this as a hint from *Jackie* not to become too engrossed, to take its pronouncements with a pinch of salt. In other words, why should it not be a *modification* of the message? (1989: 158; his emphasis).

Jackson *et al.* might disagree. They posit that irony has always enabled readers to distance themselves from genuine and important concerns about the changing nature of masculinity (p. 78). Moreover, and more damagingly in the case of new men’s magazines, irony can be employed as a kind of ‘escape route’ for dismissing criticisms of sexism, homophobia and other undesirable attitudes. For those worried by this, it seems that ‘[t]o offer a political critique of the magazines is to miss the point of the joke and place yourself outside a mediated laddish community’ (*ibid.*). Like constructed certitude, they argue, irony acts as a built-in defence to criticism, implying, simply, that those who *do* find fault with aspects of the magazines just *don’t understand* them.

This concern is also voiced by Benwell (2003a), who agrees that irony ‘allows the sender to save face while preserving the form (and therefore potentially the meaning) of the original surface utterance intact’ (pp. 20-21), which could allow damaging discourses and outmoded attitudes to continue to be circulated without criticism. In such cases, she argues, sexist material in men’s magazines ‘is not always characterized by irony that is harmless and playful’ (p. 16), illustrating her point with some examples of surprisingly – if also recognizably ironic – misogynistic quotations from *FHM*¹⁸. While Jackson *et al.* claim that critics of such ‘humour’ are chiefly *marginalized* by the irony involved, Benwell takes the argument further, to suggest that they are effectively forced to ‘share the joke, regardless of their usual politics’ (p. 21), a potentially even more harmful situation, both psychologically and ideologically.

¹⁸ Benwell cites an article from the April 2002 edition entitled ‘Whoa There Fella, You’re Still in Charge You Know’, which openly lambasts feminism.

It would be unrepresentative, however, to suggest that either Benwell or Jackson *et al.* simply attack magazines as re-inscribers of backward-looking masculinity. The latter authors make clear early on their intention to ‘interpret the magazines’ cultural significance in more ambivalent terms’ (p. 22) and aim to ‘provide evidence of a variety of “readings”, including those which display greater ambiguity and reflexivity towards the masculinities currently represented’ (*ibid.*). Similarly – if a little more cautiously – Benwell calls irony ‘one of the most common ways in which the accommodation (and transformation) of feminist discourses is achieved in men’s magazines’ (p. 20), recognizing the simultaneous capacity of irony to express the more ambiguous aspects of male identities, and the ways in which they have been shaped and challenged in many ways by feminist attitudes.

Using this ambiguity as a starting point, Gauntlett (2002) takes a different view of irony in men’s magazines – one that moves away from the notion that the technique acts as a form of protection against criticism, to concentrate on what it actively *offers* to male readers as part of the magazine-reading experience. Arguing that irony ‘provides a “protective layer” ... between lifestyle information and the readers’ (p. 168), he suggests that a certain level of humour in the delivery of advice in magazines, makes it more palatable to men, in that the ‘need’ for advice does not threaten the adequacy or capability of their masculinity; that is, men *want* to read about all kinds of subjects, including such matters as relationships and personal health, but do not necessarily want to believe that they *need* to (*ibid.*). In this way, Gauntlett believes that ‘it is the *irony* which is genuine’ (*ibid.*; his emphasis): readers may act out sexist or otherwise prejudiced attitudes in a playful way, knowing that the weight of these ideas is diminished by the fact that contemporary society now considers them rather ridiculous.

This idea complements the conclusions of Schirato & Yell (1999), discussed above, wherein the authors examined the notion of ‘over-performed’ masculinity in the magazine *Ralph*. Schirato & Yell here saw sexist and homophobic discourses as being presented in a ‘mannered’ or overdone, ironic fashion, which automatically called their validity into question, while more politically correct modes of address were simultaneously *substantiated* by being treated as a current norm requiring no

remark. Gauntlett's argument is that forms of irony in men's magazines can serve the same purpose: 'the *intended* laugh, more often than not, is about the silliness of being sexist rather than actual sexism' (p. 169; his emphasis). As he points out, the 'intended laugh' and the meaning taken by the reader do not necessarily correspond; however, as with the progression from angry repudiation to the recognition of the reader in studies of women's magazines, the range and variety of possible meanings at least becomes a part of the equation when we view irony in this way.

Along with irony, a significant degree of contradiction is frequently cited by critics as a defining characteristic of lifestyle magazines. Ballaster *et al.* (1991) suggest that '[t]he success of the women's magazine is no doubt connected with its ability to encompass glaring contradiction *coherently* in its pages' (p. 7; their emphasis). This argument draws on the work of Winship (1987), who examines the women's magazine *Cosmopolitan*, paying particular attention to its frequently alternating stances on subjects such as the importance of body weight, beauty, marriage, fidelity, the women's movement, and sex. She finds this degree of self-contradiction to be, perhaps surprisingly, an actual source of *pleasure* for the reader:

For the magazine – the British edition at least – the discrepancy between its 'tough' and 'tender' faces has always been one to revel in. And if there is a key to *Cosmo's* commercial success it is in embracing that contradiction to offer a pluralism of opinions, voicing what are potentially mutually exclusive views on the subject of women (p. 100).

She goes on to quote former *Cosmopolitan* editor Deirdre McSharry in a 1983 interview, who describes the editing process as one of striking a considered balance between opposing elements – offering enough to be reassuringly familiar, but exploiting the value of surprise because 'that's really what keeps [the readers] going' (*ibid.*).

Adapting these arguments, Jackson *et al.* propose that the contradictions of men's magazines come to represent the very mixture of ambiguity and uncertainty that characterizes modern masculinity, with those that speak most effectively to the confused young male being the ones that sell the most copies. Existing in an unusual position of being 'able to occupy a field that is ultimately contradictory' (2000: 90),

they argue, ‘the magazines that have best recognized these tensions and ambivalences have been most successful commercially’ (2000: 54). In the words of Kenny & Stevenson, men’s magazines, then, ‘externalise questions of risk’ (2000: 138). Arising from the contradictions of male experience, the magazines offer advice on the ‘performance’ of socially acceptable masculinity, whilst hiding behind a buffer of self-mocking irony. This does not necessarily mean that the magazines’ contradictions are a product of outright *fear*, however; as Gauntlett argues, the ambiguity of contradiction can, at the same time, be seen as exciting. Pointing out that magazine producers like Deirdre McSharry above are ‘far more interested in generating “surprise” than in maintaining coherence and consistency’ (2002: 255), he suggests that ‘multiple messages contribute to the perception of an open realm of possibilities’ (*ibid.*) and therefore represent the stimulating array of identity choices that readers nowadays enjoy.

Benwell in some ways encapsulates this duality in her notion that masculinity is ‘haunted by that which it attempts to exclude’ (2003a: 22). She argues that any performance of masculinity not only champions the characteristics it intends most forcefully to demonstrate, but also unavoidably engenders the qualities it hopes to suppress; thus, for instance, the performance of vigorous heterosexuality often provokes suggestive homoerotic subtext (2003a: 22). Similarly, the heroic exists only in comparison with the antiheroic (2003b), with both macho heroism and selfish ‘loafishness’ being qualities that are equally valued on different occasions in male-oriented media. For her, contradictions like these highlight a ‘fascinating tension’ (2003b: 162) inside men’s magazines, in which constructions of masculinity continually fluctuate between contradictory points. The potentially troubling aspect of this, she notes, is that, therefore, ‘the magazine man achieves a kind of invisibility’ (*ibid.*). Hiding beneath a veneer of irony and inconsistency, he deliberately refuses to be identified with any stable construction of masculinity, evading responsibility for the characteristics and attitudes that he expresses, and making analysis (and, consequently, feminist criticism) difficult.

The complex and interlinked relationship of irony and contradictions is observed throughout research on men’s lifestyle magazines, and will inform several significant findings of the study that follows. For now, we will conclude this review

of previous research into the genre with a brief look at some of the suggestions that have been proposed regarding the direction of further studies.

2.5. The Future

It seems appropriate at this point to return to McRobbie's history of feminist studies of women's magazines, not to revisit her list of stages but to consider the three further steps of analysis she proposes in order to 'fully update our understanding of the magazine form' (1999: 47). These are: firstly, the recognition of the 'new sexualities of the 1990s'; secondly, a rethinking of magazines' relation to feminism; and, thirdly, the 'reconceptualization of the social relations of production and consumption' (p. 47-48). With some slight reworking, these are all applicable to the study of magazines in general and the research I will undertake.

By 'new sexualities', McRobbie refers to 'images and texts which break decisively with the conventions of feminine behaviour by representing girls as crudely lustful young women' (p. 50), the emergence of which is linked to the rise of the male 'lad' in the mid-1990s. Her examples range from the young women's magazine *More!* – typically concerned with 'shagging, snogging and having a good time' – to the late-night television programmes *God's Gift* (1995) and *The Girlie Show* (1996-1997), both of which 'relish what happens when girls turn the tables on men' (p. 51). As with new men's magazines, McRobbie notes the pervasive use of irony and pastiche in all of these texts, arguing that these encourage more complex readings to be made, taking place on several levels:

This new form of ironic femininity allows readers to participate in all the conventional and gender stereotypical rituals of femininity without finding themselves trapped into traditional gender-subordinate positions' (p. 53).

Unfortunately, however, as Gough-Yates (2003) notes in her discussion of the 'ladette'¹⁹ magazine *Minx* (which ran from 1996 to 2000), wider expressions of

¹⁹ According to the Oxford Concise English Dictionary, 'ladette' is defined as 'a young woman who behaves in a boisterously assertive or crude manner and engages in heavy

these new forms of femininity may have been censored and curtailed by women's magazine marketing departments wary of upsetting advertisers (pp. 142-143). This would suggest that irony and gender role-play may have different meanings and levels of power in the different contexts of men's and women's magazines. Indeed, the trend in women's magazines appears to have moved on from the late-nineties 'ladette phase' into a more grown-up and 'serious' vein represented by newer titles such as *Frank* and *Red* (see Gough-Yates, 2003). On television, however, Channel 4's popular *Big Brother* (2000-present) continues to make brief media heroes out of ladette-types, while ITV1's tongue-in-cheek reality programme *Ladette to Lady* (2005) followed ten 'loudmouthed, beer-swilling, belching' young women as they attended 'a finishing school of etiquette, manners and social graces at Eggleston Hall, North East England' (*ITV.com*, 2005).

We have already seen how McRobbie's argument about 'ironic femininity' above can be transposed directly onto new male sexualities, with the difference that any traditional positions that men might be 'trapped into' would involve being the oppressor rather than the subordinate. However, any enjoyment of such an 'oppressor' role at face value would represent for men in the current social climate an unfashionable position likely to impede his success with the opposite sex. Any pleasure he may take in it would seem to be moderated by an element of ironic detachment, bringing about a demand for a new brand of men's magazines aware of this shift in outlook (as we have seen since the 1990s), and marking out irony as a key area of focus in subsequent studies into men's magazines, such as the current thesis.

The rise of men's magazines in the nineties also saw the arrival, in 1994, of *Attitude*, aimed primarily (but not exclusively) at a young gay male readership. Nixon identifies this as a new crossover audience drawn together in part by the success of *The Face*, appealing to both gay men and 'strays' – straight men interested in gay culture and its innovations (1996: 205). The relationship of modern men – and readers in general – to the new sexualities presented by all of these magazines will also likely form a significant area of new research into modern

drinking sessions' (*BBC News Online*, 12 July 2001). The word obviously derives from the new meanings associated with 'lad' that we have encountered.

masculinities, and, in this study, we will encounter a number of ‘alternative’ men’s magazines produced by various participants.

McRobbie’s second factor, regarding the impact of feminism on women’s magazines, can be opened out to examine its impact on all lifestyle magazines, including those aimed at men. Implicit in most studies of men’s magazines is the suggestion that male identities since the eighties have been affected – and, in some cases, even regulated – by discourses concerning the equality of men and women, and the validity of alternative sexualities. Such discourses found their basis in the output of feminist thinkers, many of whom continue to find modern women’s publications lacking in certain respects. Writing in 1987 about women’s magazines’ treatment of the subjects of sex, relationships and emotion, Winship stated:

I feel that the way in which commercial magazines still monopolise those concerns (constantly assuming heterosexuality and the social norm of marriage and monogamy, and posing dilemmas and solutions in terms of the individual) is a problem that should be confronted (1987: 160).

McRobbie finds this issue of assumed heterosexuality still relevant 12 years later, agreeing that ‘[t]he whole cultural field of the magazines takes heterosexual desire as constituting a framework of normality’ (1999: 57). This is as relevant to the most popular men’s titles today (such as *FHM*, *Zoo* and *Nuts*) as it is to the newer women’s and girls’ magazines that McRobbie discusses (such as *More!* and *Sugar*), but complicated slightly by the presence of *Attitude*. Nevertheless, it represents a genuine symbolic gap in the magazines’ framing of the world. As McRobbie states, ‘[t]here is no underestimating the harm done and the injury caused by the endless invocation of femininities which violently excludes the desires and identities of young lesbian women’ (*ibid.*). In the case of men’s magazines, further research would determine if the same holds true in the division between ‘straight’ titles like *FHM*, ‘gay’ titles like *Gay Times*, and the slightly more ambiguous position held by *Attitude*²⁰.

²⁰ Editor Adam Mattera describes the early identity of *Attitude* (launched in 1994) as ‘a gay magazine that didn’t patronise its readers by assuming a shared sexuality’ (issue 100, August 2002, p. 4). Elsewhere in the issue, several interviewees responded to the question, ‘What does *Attitude* mean to you?’ with the suggestion of a broad readership: ‘It’s less ghettoised than some magazines and anybody can read it’ (actor David Paisley, p. 47); ‘I’ve

Winship's concern over magazines 'posing dilemmas and solutions in terms of the individual' is more subtle, relating to the sense of female community that magazines establish within their pages. She argues that this false notion of sisterhood allows a woman of any social class to experience the advice and support offered by the middle-class agony aunt or young, upwardly mobile city journalist – but breaks down once the female reader puts down the text and returns to her own real-life cultural group: 'when the reader closes her magazine, she is no longer "friends" with [agony aunt] Esther Rantzen and her ilk; but while it lasted it has been a pleasant and reassuring dream' (1987: 77). Some of the later conclusions of this study will address this notion of the 'imagined community of friends' presented by magazines, and the relevance it may have to male readers and their lives. The idea is also worth considering in terms of Hermes's comments about the imagining of 'perfect selves' (1995: 64), and the correlation between the images of masculinities projected by men's titles and the real-life experiences that readers deal with.

This brings us on to McRobbie's final stage, which she terms '[r]e-conceptualizing the relations of magazine production and consumption' (1999: 58). Her main observation here is the fact that, as she testifies, most if not all British girls' and women's magazines can count amongst their staff a number of media studies graduates – writers and designers who are, presumably, aware to some degree of the feminist critiques of the media we have been discussing. Many accounts in the past have focused on the 'meanings' of text and images found within magazines, whilst ignoring the thoughts and motivation of the editors and writers who put them together.

always thought it's more accessible because it's geared towards gay men but not exclusively gay men' (actor Jeremy Sheffield, p. 50); 'It appeals to everybody. Anyone who's relaxed and comfortable with themselves can read it. When I was in the RAF a lot of the guys would read it. They didn't realise at first that it was gay, but when they did, they were still happy to read it' (model Carl Austin, p. 50). Embracing the spirit of contradiction, *Attitude* was back to describing itself simply as 'a gay magazine' in a feature entitled '100 Things That Rocked Your World in *Attitude*'s Lifespan' (pp. 52-61): '1994 was a grand year for gay magazine launches. There was *Phase!* There was *Bona!* And there was *Attitude*' (p. 52); and 'David Beckham appears on the cover of a gay magazine for the first time ever. In which one? Us, naturally' (p. 61).

Jackson *et al.* (2001) address this possible miscalculation with a chapter on ‘editorial work’ (pp. 48-73), in which they interview seven editors who, in 1997, were working on men’s lifestyle magazines, including *Maxim*, *Attitude*, *Stuff for Men* and *Xtreme*. They find, for example, that a striking number of these describe their target readers (somewhat contradictorily) as both ‘ordinary blokes’ and ‘people like themselves’ (p. 71), while there is also a tension between the notion of the ‘regular guy’ reader and the more aspirational individual who must be ‘sold’ to advertisers. Among many such enlightening insights, it becomes clear that the opinions and intentions of a magazine’s staff play an important role in locating the product within a social and commercial context. In the study at hand, we will be placing a new emphasis on magazine readers *themselves* as imaginary media producers, investigating the processes and roles they experience as part of their own brush with magazine editing, and how these affect their knowledge and understanding of their more usual position as consumers.

The preceding modification of McRobbie’s suggested perspectives from which to approach recent trends in men’s magazines, then, brings this history of studies of lifestyle magazine to a forward-looking conclusion. Before proceeding with our own investigation, however, it is necessary to examine in greater depth a subject central to male identity, and much-discussed in relation to theories concerning men and their media contact: the concept of masculinity.

Chapter 3

Gender and Masculinity

So far, the term ‘masculinity’ has been freely used with little in the way of a contextual definition. As we will see across the course of this chapter, this is partly due to the many complications that arise whenever the concept is addressed on a semantic level. Furthermore, as I will argue at the end of this chapter, masculinity makes more sense in relation to individual ‘performances’ of identity than it does in terms of any quantifiable measurement of gender or sexuality, a notion which is often overlooked in both popular and academic discourses about gender identity. The discussion of masculinity that constitutes this chapter is most heavily informed by Connell (1995), whose useful classification of definitions of the concept forms the basis for its first section. The chapter will then move on to evaluate studies from the fields of psychology and sociology that have suggested correlations between gender and certain patterns of behaviour, or investigated attitudes held about these. Finally, we will return to Connell’s theories to present a perspective on masculinity that will form the philosophical basis of my own study.

3.1. Gendering the Sexes

Connell observes that ‘[i]n many practical situations the language of “masculine” and “feminine” raises few doubts’ (1995: 3). As was noted in Chapter 2, many popular viewpoints, constituting what a lot of people might think of as ‘common sense’, assume the existence of a fundamental, underlying difference between the sexes that predisposes each to a certain set of attributes and attitudes. Thus, we often hear common and often well-established generalizations like ‘women are better at doing two things at once’²¹, or ‘men refuse to ask for

²¹ This maxim was reiterated in a recent advert for a brand of sanitary towel, and attributed to nothing other than ‘common knowledge’.

directions', as exploited by popular self-help books like Allan & Barbara Pease's bestselling *Why Men Don't Listen and Women Can't Read Maps* (2001) and its similarly gender-polarizing sequels.

In general, the characteristics associated with men in western culture (grouped under the term 'traditional masculinity' by many writers)²² combine to form an *active* role, as opposed to the typically passive qualities often associated with females. Three of its main attributes are strength, ambition and command – all useful in 'getting ahead', and usually viewed in a positive light. Even the less positive characteristics associated with traditional masculinity – such as stubbornness and aggression – retain an air of respectability in that they remain indicative of power and control rather than weakness. Analysts in the field of gender studies have sought to understand how these 'masculine traits' came to be associated with the male role in the first place, and why they continue to pervade society and popular discourse as 'common sense' notions of gender roles.

Before proceeding, it is important to make clear what is meant by the term 'gender'. Horrocks (1994) draws a distinction between *sex* identity and *gender* identity as follows:

The first is assigned at birth according to physical characteristics, particularly the external genitals. But gender is a complex set of collective attitudes, roles and fantasies that are assigned in the family in a more unpredictable manner (p. 2).

This can also be described (as Horrocks himself notes (*ibid.*)) as the difference between the *male/female* distinction and the *masculine/feminine* distinction, the first relating to the body, the second to behavioural traits. Pronger (1990) refers to these latter characteristics as 'signs of gender', the 'various gestures ... that indicate the forcefulness or significance that one's gender is supposed to take' (p. 54). Such gestures could include one's choices of clothing, hairstyle and body posture, and one's participation in forms of behaviour that have in themselves taken on associations with gender. (Pronger gives the example 'being a football player' (*ibid.*)). It follows, of course, that there is not necessarily a relationship between sex identity and gender identity. As we might have come to understand from our own

²² See, for example, Schirato & Yell (1999), and Jackson *et al.* (2001).

experience, interpreting the behaviour of either a male *or* a female as masculine is not an unfamiliar notion.

Consequently, gender as a concept is open to much greater debate than sex, and it is clear that masculinity, as one aspect of gender identity, can take on an entire range of potential meanings. Mort observes that ‘we are not dealing with masculinity, but with a series of *masculinities*’ (1988: 195; his emphasis). As well as recognizing that class, race, sexual orientation, and many other factors all enter the equation at the level of identity, the term ‘masculinities’ refers to the fact that no two people’s performance of so-called masculine traits will ever be exactly the same. Whenever I adopt the term here, it is in recognition of the fact that, as Horrocks puts it, ‘there is clearly not a homogenous monolithic identity possessed by all men in all contexts’ (1994: 3).

3.2. Definitions of Masculinity

Whilst, then, we have identified some characteristics that can be grouped under the term ‘traditional masculinity’, we do not seem to have established a definition of what *masculinity itself* might be. Connell (1995) argues that “[m]asculinity” does not exist except in contrast with “femininity” (p. 68), pointing out that, unless men and women are assumed to carry particular, polarized characteristic traits, the concept of masculinity does not have any meaning. He gives the example of European culture before the 18th century, suggesting that the qualities of women were not *differentiated* from those of men in terms of their character, but seen as a lesser or incomplete version of male identity (which was taken as human identity as a whole). It was not until the 19th century’s social regulation of men and women into separate ‘spheres’ of living, Connell posits, that the sexes became identified with equivalent and differing characteristics, and the concepts of masculinity and femininity came about.

Under such societal structures (the notions of which, we may argue, retain a certain degree of influence in European societies today), generalized attitudes are

likely to arise regarding the relationship between gender and identity. These are recognized by many definitions of masculinity, such as Craig's statement that '[m]asculinity is what a culture expects of its men' (1992: 3). This description suggests that masculinity essentially exists only in a cultural context, as something rooted in the traditions, codes and – in particular – *expectations* commonly held by society. Similarly, Mosse's definition of masculinity as 'the way men assert what they believe to be their manhood' (1996: 3) implies that masculinity is widely understood as a way of behaving in accordance with one's sex-defined characteristics, either as a manifestation of one's sexual identity, or by way of a responsibility towards the 'general order' provided by understandings of gender.

These and other ideas are collated by Connell (1995) in his outline of the four main strategies through which scholars have sought to understand masculinity. Firstly, attempts to describe 'what men actually are', in a manner related to biological or social grouping, fall under what he terms *positivist* definitions (p. 69). These are concerned with marking out 'masculine' behaviours or describing common patterns of men's lives. Craig and Mosse's accounts above share elements of this, although, like many explanations, they cannot simply be slotted into one category. They also include an element of *normative* assessment (p. 70) – that which considers society's conceptions of 'what men ought to be' and, in some cases, attempts to prescribe these. Unlike some positivist descriptions, these can be highly responsive to the wide range of differences amongst men, but, in concentrating on the 'blueprint' of a masculine ideal, Connell notes, sideline the many men that fail to fit into it. *Essentialist* accounts (p. 68) base their analysis on one aspect of the masculine that they consider principal, such as a specific personality trait, or the presence of a particular hormone. Finally, the *semiotic* approach (p. 70) contrasts masculinity and femininity as symbolic spaces. Here, '[m]asculinity is, in effect, defined as not-femininity' (*ibid.*); the signifiers of masculinity (such as the phallus) are contrasted with those of femininity (the 'lack' of the phallus) to examine symbolic power relations between the male and female. We will encounter all of these perspectives as we now turn to some of the main claims and controversies surrounding the debate over masculinities.

3.3. Masculinity in Mind

Most people would expect the words ‘It’s a boy’ or ‘It’s a girl’ to accompany the delivery of a newborn child, either of which pronouncement, as Doyle (1983) puts it, ‘immediately sets restrictions, grants privileges, defines status, and lays down expectations’ (p. 3) for its life. The significance attached to this early biological distinction is such that certain characteristics of personality and behaviour often come to be broadly associated with each of the two sexes: faced with some obvious differences in the outward appearance of men and women, it is tempting to assume the deeper influence of biological factors on ‘gender behaviour’ – leading, in some cases, to provocative but ultimately rather hollow statements like the following:

Geneticists have discovered recently that the genetic difference in DNA between men and women amounts to just over three percent. That isn’t much. However, the difference exists in every cell of the body (Bly, 1990: 234).

Bly calls this ‘the three percent difference that makes a person masculine’ (*ibid.*), a notion that, despite sounding bold, fails to provide anything more than a vague claim for the innateness of masculine spirit. Other theories have made more concrete assertions, citing the male hormone testosterone in particular as variously responsible for such character traits as aggression²³, the suppression of nurturant behaviour²⁴, and heterosexual desire²⁵. In overviews of this strand of research, however, authors such as Maccoby & Jacklin (1974), Fausto-Sterling (1985) and Segal (1990) show it to be a body of literature typified by generalizations and exaggerations. As Segal notes, ‘[t]he only consistent picture obtained from psychological sex-difference research is one where any sex differences are small, their origins unclear, and the variation within each sex far outweighs the differences between the sexes’ (1990: 63-64).

²³ See, for example, Kreuz & Rose (1972).

²⁴ Ehrhardt & Baker (1978).

²⁵ Byne & Parsons (1993) refer to the common belief in medical science between the 1940s and 1970s that homosexuality was related to a lack of testosterone.

Other writers place less emphasis on the biological aspects of gender development, but still find ideas related to the body significant in their accounts of evolving masculinities. Several major contributors to this area of the debate come from the field of psychology, the most influential of these being Freud, whose *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1977 [first published in 1905]) have formed a starting point for many subsequent studies of masculinities²⁶.

Freud's theory of psychosexual development is a hypothesis based on the psychoanalytical interpretation of the human child's early life. Its model consists of five stages, which, once successfully navigated, are believed to establish a fully formed sense of sex role in the individual. The first of these is the *oral* stage (1977: 95), during which the dependent infant comes to associate the touching of its mouth, lips and tongue through feeding with pleasurable sensations. Since most of this is supposedly done by the mother, the infant forms a strong maternal attachment; its 'sexual' aim becomes the obtaining of satisfying stimulation. The second phase is the *anal* stage (p. 102), when the child realizes it can achieve similar pleasure from the control of its bowel movements.

Until the age of four, progression through the stages follows the same course for both boys and girls. With the advent of the *phallic* stage, however, the sexes begin to experience different complications. The boy supposedly develops an 'Oedipus complex' – the overwhelming sexual desire for his mother, coupled with a jealous hatred of his father, whom the boy sees as a rival for his mother's affections. This eventually becomes a 'castration complex' (p. 113), when the boy begins to fear his father's retaliation, which he believes will manifest itself as the removal of his penis. This anxiety persuades him to give up his sexual ambitions towards his mother and all identification with her. Now, he comes to identify with his father and, in doing so, takes on the characteristics he associates with him, including the father's signs of gender. Thus, this Oedipal crisis represents, as Minsky (1996) describes it, 'the crucial moment which ... determines ... future gender identity' (p. 40). There are two remaining stages in Freud's programme, but neither carries the formative weight of the phallic drama: the pre-pubertal *latency* stage sees the child

²⁶ Both Connell (1995) and Horrocks (1995), for instance, begin their own work with discussions of Freud's theories.

repressing everything to do with sexuality; at puberty, the *genital* stage takes over, reawakening interest in sexual behaviour, and the individual moves towards experiencing a sexual relationship for the first time.

The level of speculation in Freud's account ensures that its appeal to readers rests almost entirely upon their willingness to accept his suppositions. Doyle, for instance, calls it 'an interesting theory but one that is virtually impossible to substantiate' (1983: 124). He points to the fact that events taking place inside the mind of a four-year-old cannot realistically be investigated. Another flaw he emphasizes is its 'inability to explain adequately female development' (1983: 129); we may have problems accepting Freud's complex account of the phallic stage in the male, but his treatment of the equivalent female conflicts has proved even more unsatisfactory for several critics²⁷.

The fact that other theorists have arrived at completely contradictory conclusions illustrates the likelihood that attempting to hypothesize the psychological experiences of the developing infant is a deeply subjective task. Badinter (1995), for instance, finds great significance in the fact that a male infant begins his life inside a female body:

A boy's development is governed by a natural, universal, and necessary given: the fact that he is born of a mother. This particular situation of a boy, that he is nourished physically and psychically by a person of the opposite sex, determines his fate in a more complex and dramatic way than is the case for a girl (p. 43).

For Badinter, *femininity* is seen as the default state, experienced by a child whatever its sex as a symbiotic bond with the loving mother. Girls, then, are able to 'accept their femininity in a primary, uncontested way' (p. 46), while boys face a struggle to first renounce their early femininity, secondly separate themselves from their mothers, and thirdly convert to the heterosexual outlook capable of desiring her (p. 47). Unlike femininity, then, masculinity as a form of identity must '*be created*' (*ibid.*; her emphasis).

The trauma caused by the male's separation from his early symbiotic relationship with his mother has been taken by some writers to account for 'typical'

²⁷ See: Thompson (1973); Fast (1984); Unger & Crawford (1992), pp. 574-575; Jacklin & Reynolds (1993); Segal (1999), pp. 127-127.

masculine qualities in later life. Horrocks believes that the man's urge to recapture this bond 'partially explains the intense drive that many men possess in the business world, in science, and in the professions' (1995: 15). Badinter proposes a model based on the idea that, in an age when masculinity is questioned more than permitted, a man is 'forbidden to express a manliness that is being challenged' (1995: 125). Accordingly, the typical modern man is 'mutilated', becoming either a 'tough guy' – 'the macho man who has never reconciled himself to maternal values' (p. 127) – or a 'soft man' who feels it necessary to 'abandon all virility and adopt the most traditional female values and behaviors' (p. 143).

These explanations of adult male behaviour, however, subscribe to some rather stereotypical notions of masculinity. As Petersen observes: 'Badinter fails to recognize the extent to which those bodily qualities, abilities, and practices that have come to be seen as quintessentially "masculine" in the modern West ... are a product of historically and socially specific relations of power' (1998: 67). Certain assumptions about gender and social role are not always subjected to the questioning they deserve in everyday life, where aspects of human behaviour are fundamentally entwined with often deeply entrenched cultural and societal codes. As Segal puts it:

Biology affects culture. But *how* it influences our lives is a historical and cultural variable. Biology does affect culture, but not in ways that can be specified independently of that culture (1990: 64; author's emphasis).

With this in mind, we will now examine some of the studies that place masculinities in an explicitly *social* context.

3.6. Masculinity in Society

Gilmore (1990) defines manhood as 'the approved way of being an adult male in any given society' (p. 1). Studying the many different ways in which this is marked out in cultures around the world, he observes a fact that appears to contrast with the previously discussed notions that viewed masculinities as arising naturally from biological maleness: masculinity, it seems, is widely regarded as a quality that

men have the capacity to *prove*. Furthermore, such endeavours often appear to be actively required of them.

Citing various rituals designed to ‘test’ masculinity in diverse global societies, he concludes that the ‘recurrent notion that manhood is problematic, a critical threshold that boys must pass through testing, is found at all levels of sociocultural development regardless of what other alternatives are recognized’ (p. 11). This does not appear to be the case with regard to most female roles. Gilmore points out that, although the sexual standards applied to women often appear stricter than those for men, ‘it is rare that their very status as woman forms part of the evaluation’ (*ibid.*). This forms the basis of an important distinction between perceptions of masculinity and femininity. As a social concept, masculinity is viewed as a *variable* that a man is expected to claim. As Gauntlett (2002) puts it, ‘[m]asculinity is seen as the state of “being a man” ... Femininity, on the other hand, is not necessarily seen as the state of “being a woman”’ (pp. 9-10). This can be taken in two slightly differing ways. Gilmore suggests that femininity revolves around aspects of bodily adornment ‘that enhance, rather than create, an inherent quality of character’ (1990: 11-12) – so society views femininity as a women’s *adaptation* of the qualities naturally assigned to her. Gauntlett (2002) takes the view that contemporary society already recognizes that such qualities do not exist: ‘Instead, being “feminine” is just one of the performances that women can choose to employ in everyday life – perhaps for pleasure, or to achieve a particular goal’ (p. 10). We could argue that, while men are also able to make various performances, society expects these to include an element of masculinity (in one form or another) at all times.

Within such cultures, where value is attached to a notion of ‘manhood’, Gilmore claims that three particular criteria are repeatedly associated with the masculine role: to impregnate women, to protect dependents from danger, and to provide for kith and kin (1990: 223). Societies do not view these as inherent or characteristic traits, but *impose* them as obligations – or ‘moral injunctions’ (p. 222). Thus, Gilmore argues for the existence of what he calls a ‘ubiquitous male’ (p. 223) identity. This is not a universal or natural masculinity but an oft-invoked assemblage of characteristics, which he terms ‘Man-the-Impregnator-Protector-Provider’ (*ibid.*).

We would not doubt that, individually, these three roles embody valuable tasks in the maintenance of a successful society. Biologically, the first requires male input, but, based on our previous discussion of genetic and hormonal differences, it is not immediately clear why the second two should have become so synonymous with exclusively masculine responsibility. Gilmore's analysis of patriarchal dominance rests on the observation that '[b]ecause men usually exercise political or legal authority, and because they are bigger and stronger, they can usually coerce women into compliance by the threat of force' (p. 221). While this account veers close to the precarious 'common sense' notion that *men are stronger than women* (again a generalization, and a vague one at that), it recognizes a gender imbalance that does exist across many modern societies. Gilmore argues that the tasks of impregnating, protecting and providing all share an element of 'risk', and that men's involvement in them consequently comes to be identified with strong performance and the fulfilling of obligations – a willing enthusiasm in the face of danger (p. 226). While this may help to explain established associations between such qualities and masculinity in respect to tradition, it fails to ask *why* the related duties originally became tradition. The element of 'risk' is never satisfactorily defined, assuming greater heroism, for instance, in the man's task of impregnating a woman than in the woman's giving birth to and nurturing a child. Accordingly, Gilmore's conclusion that '[m]anhood is the social barrier that societies must erect against entropy, human enemies, the forces of nature, time, and all the human weaknesses that endanger group life' (*ibid.*) – despite acknowledging the immense diversity of masculine roles in different cultures and, hence, doubtful existence of innate gender predispositions – seems to suggest that patriarchy in itself is in some way integral to the preservation of society.

Other theorists have chosen to concentrate more deeply on the connection between roles such as that of the protector-provider and the social *power* associated with them. Studies tracing the history of this struggle, or examining how it plays out in current social climates, typically agree that men as opposed to women have had more success in this respect. Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1972 [originally published in 1884]), links patriarchy with economic factors relating to ownership. The progression of the familial unit from barbarian

coupling to structured grouping was, he posits, intricately bound to the development of cattle herding and, later, human slavery in certain early societies (pp. 84-85)²⁸. With these new possessions came new issues of ownership and inheritance. In line with ‘the division of labour within the family at that time’ (p. 85), the man, whose job it was to obtain food, assumed ownership of the related tools; since cattle and slave workers appeared most logically to slot into this category, the man also took on the ownership rights to these during his life. An established rule of ‘mother right’, however, saw the property of a deceased clan member remain with blood relations on the mother’s side in order to keep it within the same clan²⁹. Engels proposes that this existing situation, coupled with the increase in ownership and wealth, brought about a shift in both tradition and economic balance:

as wealth increased it made the man’s position in the family more important than the woman’s, and on the other hand created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favour of his children, the traditional order of inheritance (p. 86).

Consequently, mother right was superseded by inheritance customs in favour of the father. While Engels’ theorizing on the subject might be criticized as an interpretation of ancient and poorly documented historical systems, it provides a useful perspective on the extremely complex connections between economic history and power relationships. Writers such as Horrocks (1994) regard his analysis as a strong example of the unequal power and status of men and women. Irigaray (1993) draws similar parallels between historical tradition and patriarchal rule in her discussion of the preservation of the father’s surname in genealogy (p. 2). The following group of studies examine how some other practices and institutions of the present day are influenced by certain entrenched beliefs about gender identity.

3.7. Inscribing Masculinity

²⁸ Engels uses evidence from various early societies, ranging from American Indians to Indian Aryans, to create generalized theories relating to many of them.

²⁹ For more immediate clarity, I have used the word ‘clan’, but Engels uses the word ‘gen’ to refer to a kin grouping related by one parental bloodline. Again, the concept is both theoretical and based on historical record (see Engels, 1972: 223).

In the above description of the psychological approach to the formation of male gender identity, we saw how a boy's early experiences were considered of prime importance throughout the process. Criticisms of the various theories arose, however, on the basis that it was difficult to scientifically investigate the hypothetical thought processes of young children. A range of more recent sociological studies have sought to examine parenting processes in detail, taking the view that contact with carers acts as one of the most influential socializing factors on the infant. There are several ways of categorizing these projects, with significant differentiations occurring between those that take as their subject the opinions and behaviour of the *carers* (as in Grieshaber (1998) discussed below), those that concentrate on the *children* and their responses, and those that examine both. In each case, it is the actions of the carers that are usually believed to have bearing on those of the child, the reasoning behind this being that they hold greater sway in moderating the shared behaviour to fit established (and therefore 'understood') patterns. As Grieshaber puts it:

As specific sites where gender relations are enacted, the everyday life of families is inscribed with practices where identity ... is defined and differentiated through the category of gender. Existing social discourses and patterns of family interaction are therefore likely to work to position foetuses, where the sex is known, and infants in particular gendered ways (1998: 16).

Grieshaber's reference to foetuses here reflects a particular feature of her study. Selecting 20 couples from those who responded to an advert requesting the assistance of parents-to-be, she interviewed each on three occasions: before the birth, during the baby's second or third month, and, finally, when the baby was between five and seven months of age. She documented, amongst other things, the parents' preferences as to their child's sex, and the activities they imagined sharing with the child in the future, all of which lead to some interesting observations about parental attitudes and assumptions.

Of the 40 individual parents, 26 expressed a preference regarding the sex of their unborn child, with 19 of these hoping for a son. This, then, made up the largest category, outnumbering the parents with no preference, and, by a significant margin, those hoping for a daughter. The parents' most frequently given reason was the notion that a boy, as the firstborn child, would best be able to protect any younger

siblings (pp. 24-25). Grieshaber suggests that this common but stereotypical belief could affect the practical ways in which both parents bring up their child. If, even before a boy is born, his parents expect him to be inherently strong, protective and independent, she argues, 'it is difficult to see that such perspectives would not become part of daily life in these families' (p. 25). Perpetuated at a familial level from the earliest age, these beliefs become the basis of the 'common sense' notions of gender we discussed previously.

A wide range of often contradictory research into parenting techniques and gender complicates this picture. Studying parent-child relationships at the earliest age, Moss (1970) presents evidence suggesting that mothers tend to actively stimulate male babies more than females (with whom they would more often *repeat* the infant's actions and noises back to them), and, as boys grow older, make fewer attempts to soothe their irritability than they do girls. Oakley (1972) interprets this as 'direct evidence of a maternal tendency to reinforce behaviour differently in the two sexes' (p. 174). She claims that mothers do not develop a verbal relationship with boys, and, in line with the cultural construction of males as more assertive and independent, tend not to interfere with expressions of 'maleness', such as their stubbornness in refusing to stop crying. Campbell (1993: 21) argues just the opposite in her discussion of a study by Langlois & Downes (1979) that looked at 'cross-gender' play among children. In this experiment, children were placed in a room with a selection of 'gendered' toys, such as dolls and cars, and allowed to play as they wished; after a short time, their parents were allowed to enter and join in. Researchers noted the reactions of the parents to their child's behaviour, and found that fathers were nearly five times more disapproving of boys playing with 'girl's toys' than vice versa. Mothers, however, showed no difference in their levels of approval regarding the play routines of either sex. Campbell reads this as evidence that men devalue expressions of femininity more than women do – and actively discourage them in their sons – while women 'see nothing wrong with empathy, nurturance and love' and may, in any case, be 'too close to [the] baby to see gender as an important issue' (*ibid.*). The problem with both of these accounts is that much of their conjecture is itself based on certain assumptions and speculations about the nature of gender – from how it is 'expressed' as masculine or feminine, to how it

might underpin a parent's intentions. The only conclusion we can therefore draw with any real conviction from such studies is that a relationship of some sort is likely to exist between parents' understandings of gender roles in society, and those that their children develop.

Beyond parenting, schooling constitutes another significant socializing influence on children of all ages. At school, younger children bring the understandings of gender that they have formed at home into a wider context, where they may be challenged or supported by many new sources of information, including teachers, other children, and the learning materials they encounter³⁰. As Lowe (1998) summarizes:

Children create gendermaps³¹ based on the many and varied contexts that they experience in their lives. The family and home context is the first and, I would argue, one of the most powerful sites of discourse that informs children about masculinity and femininity. For many children, the educational context either reinforces the position they have constructed for themselves, or creates dissonance between the prevailing dominant gender culture and the child's individual position (p. 208).

Lowe gathered data from her experiences working with 25 children aged four and five attending a pre-school centre in Queensland, Australia. Noting that the girls spent most of their recreational time in the play area's 'home corner' (a section fitted with toy kitchen appliances, dolls and cribs), she considers them 'familiar with the rituals and positions involved' (p. 209) in domestic life. The boys, in contrast, 'were more comfortable exploring the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour and developing the skills they felt they would need as adults to work outdoors and outside the home' (*ibid.*). An example of this was their dominance in the building blocks area, where they took possession of the bricks, controlled the building projects, and tried to prevent girls from joining in (although not always successfully) (p. 215). Conversely, Lowe notes, one of the more domineering girls, who assumed

³⁰ Bailey (1993), for example, offers a pessimistic review of the storybooks available to young children in terms of their male gender-bias and stereotypical portrayal of gender roles.

³¹ This is Lowe's term for the set of perceptions and beliefs held by an individual on the subject of gender. We might see it as the specific part of a person's repertoire concerned with notions of masculinity and femininity.

the authoritative role of ‘mother’ in the toy house, would typically remain relatively quiet and meek outside the home corner (p. 216).

Based on these observations, Lowe asked the parents of 12 of the children to keep a journal over the course of a week, recording the way their household chores were designated amongst the family members. She found that, while girls were assigned tasks ‘preparing them for their possible future role as caretaker’ (p. 209), such as looking after pets and younger siblings and helping to clean the home, boys were more often given chores outside the house, in line with their fathers’ duties, such as garden work and washing the car. These findings form an interesting parallel with those of Sanchez & Thompson (1997), who examined the effect of parenthood on the gender division of labour among married American couples. A crucial observation of this study was that, while new motherhood would considerably increase a woman’s amount of housework and restrict her employment, her husband would find *neither* of these responsibilities affected. Sanchez & Thompson are surprised, as recently as 1997, to reach the conclusion that ‘motherhood is still linked to primary responsibility for household management and domesticity and that contemporary fatherhood has not altered this relationship’ (p. 763). It would appear that the role of the father as provider rather than domestic caregiver is one that is still quite firmly etched on the ‘gendermap’ of a young child.

As children progress through the educational system, the effects of the school environment itself on their conceptions of gender in society might become more apparent. Mac an Ghail (1994) undertook a three-year ethnographic study of final year students (aged 15-16) at a state secondary school between 1990 and 1992, in order to examine the influence of the schooling process. He offers a critical conclusion that schools act as ‘microcultures’ in which ‘deeply gendered and heterosexual regimes’ (p. 4) construct patterns of power that are played out in society at large:

Schools function to prepare students for the sexual division of labour in the home and the workplace. Furthermore, schools do not merely reflect the dominant sexual ideology of the wider society, but actively produce gender and heterosexual divisions (p. 8-9).

This, he argues, is achieved by way of an institutionalizing process that operates through ‘the interrelated social and discursive practices of staffroom, classroom and playground microcultures’ (p. 45). Members of staff bring entrenched notions of gender to the administrative and organizational structuring of the school system, while students, for whom concerns related to sex are ‘compulsively and competitively discussed and played out’ (p. 90), maintain a peer group environment that polices the ways they express their sexuality very rigidly.

However, Mac an Ghaill also notes that ‘in response to these structural conditions, which are further shaped by relations of class, “race”/ethnicity, age and disability, there are no predetermined outcomes’ (p. 168). He points to the existence of gay students willing to speak about their experiences, for instance, as evidence that it is possible for pupils to reject their ‘teachers’ presentation of a model of a heterosexist and homophobic society’ (*ibid.*), and that some students are able to defy their peers’ expectations and attempts to force them into dominant sexual or gender identities. Ultimately, the effects of schooling appear to be as complex and difficult to measure as those of parenting.

3.8. Hegemonic Masculinity

Whilst, then, it often remains difficult to draw unambiguous conclusions on the subject of gender and masculinity in society, many of the accounts we have discussed thus far agree that men appear to occupy a dominant position in relation to women. Furthermore, certain groups of men seem to hold greater power than other men. Connell refers to these as bearers of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (1995: 76). The concept of hegemony describes the cultural processes by which a certain section of society establishes and maintains its dominance over others. Connell argues that, at any particular point in time, ‘one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted’ (p. 77). In many ways, the current hegemonic masculine identity might be aligned with the notion of ‘traditional masculinity’ discussed above, since, to become accepted as traditional, it must have achieved a clear level of success and

durability in the past. However, Connell also notes that the hegemonic position is always unique to the pattern of gender relations in which it exists, and, as a result, contestable rather than fixed (p. 76). Consequently, gender relations in society might be described as a struggle, in which the dominant players get to define the ‘reality’ of existence.

Where Connell’s theory becomes particularly relevant to the current discussion of magazines is if we consider men’s media as not only bearers but also promoters of hegemonic masculinity. As representations of ‘typical’ or desirable male lifestyles, the magazines might be seen to lay out a hegemonic blueprint for the range of behaviours, interests and character traits currently seen as acceptable within the boundaries of masculinity. This process of definition has three further effects relating to magazine audiences. The first is described by Connell as *complicity* (p. 79) – the process by which men (who are unlikely as a group to meet every given standard of the hegemonic benchmark) collectively recognize the tenets of hegemony in order to benefit from its force without placing themselves in the line of fire as its ‘frontline troops’ (*ibid.*). We could, of course, view men’s magazines as the facilitators of this process, laying out the tropes and strategies by which men may become complicit in the dominant form of masculinity, further strengthening its power.

A second effect of this dominance is thus *subordination* (p. 78) – the ability of hegemonic masculinity to push out and suppress groups of men who challenge the hegemonic norm by not conforming to it. This may be illustrated in the arena of men’s magazines by their typical assumption of a heterosexual readership, ranging from the denial of gay readers to the mocking of gay men or behaviours. Similarly, a process of *marginalization* (p. 80) arises where notions of masculinity intersect with those of class and ethnicity. As Connell notes – along with Sabo & Jansen (1992) and Brookes (2002) in their discussion of sports below – hegemonic masculinity does not always offer a level playing field to those encompassed by its ideals: while black athletes, for example, may be ‘exemplars of hegemonic masculinity ... the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally’ (Connell, 1995: 81). Investigating such issues within UK men’s magazines might involve a survey of the frequency of

representations of non-white men in popular men's titles, examining how these relate to the portrayals of 'typical' male lifestyles offered.

3.9. Lenses of Gender

Offering a strong argument that ties into the notion of hegemonic masculinity, Bem (1993) is of the view that 'lenses of gender' operate in society to 'systematically reproduce male power in generation after generation' (p. 2). These lenses are 'hidden assumptions about sex and gender ... embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions and individual psyches' (*ibid.*), and work like filters held over the eyes of society by those in the dominant hegemonic position. They contribute to our understanding of masculinity by the way they naturalize certain notions. The first is *androcentrism*, the locating of males and male experience as 'a neutral standard or norm' (*ibid.*) against which females and their experience become a deviation – an Other defined by her sex. *Gender polarization* refers to the notions we discussed at the beginning of this chapter concerning the binary opposition of males and females. Bem suggests that this is 'superimposed on so many aspects of the social world that a cultural connection is thereby forged between sex and virtually every other aspect of human existence' (*ibid.*). Everything from clothes to hobbies to the expression of emotion and sexual desire becomes a demonstration of gender (and, therefore, sex). These two lenses are legitimized and made to seem logical by a third, *biological essentialism*, which treats them as the natural, inescapable results of different biological personalities inherent in each sex.

The lenses of gender, Bem argues, reproduce male power in two ways. Firstly, 'the discourses and social institutions in which they are embedded automatically channel females and males into different and unequal life situations' (p. 3); that is, the influential and deeply entrenched notions that underpin the conventions of society place males in a more powerful position than women. Secondly, 'during enculturation, the individual gradually internalizes the cultural lenses and thereby becomes motivated to construct an identity that is consistent with them' (*ibid.*). This

idea fits coherently with our discussion of repertoires in the preceding chapter, as well as with the basic conclusions we reached above regarding the influences of early socializing experiences on the emerging gendermap of a youngster. Bem suggests that, as human beings, we are motivated to create an identity for ourselves that allows us to make sense of our position in the perceived world. In order to be understandable, this must accord with the already existing conventions, as we perceive them; no matter how we seek to position ourselves in relation to these, we still accept that they exist. Bem's concern is that, instead of being in any way neutral, these operate in a patriarchal manner, forcing women and men into unequal gender roles in society – and, more insidiously, making it difficult for women to understand themselves as anything but subordinate.

Several scholars have argued, however, that such a situation is at least as damaging to men as it is to women. We noted above that Connell recognized a strand of thinking about masculinities as *normative*, concerned with notions of what masculinity *ought* to be, and attempting to identify a standard manifestation of this. Connell himself acknowledges that most men are unlikely to meet this idealized measure, asking, '[w]hat is "normative" about a norm hardly anyone meets? Are we to say the majority of men are unmasculine?' (p. 70). It is also true that many men may have no *desire* to match this norm. Critics such as Kaufman (1994) and Horrocks (1994) posit that, nevertheless, its widespread hold on notions of masculinity severely restricts and injures many men. Kaufman writes:

There is, in the lives of men, a strange combination of power and powerlessness, privilege and pain. Men enjoy social power and many forms of privilege by virtue of being male. But the way we have set up that world of power causes immense pain, isolation and alienation not only for women but also for men (p. 142).

The attainment of hegemonic masculinity, he suggests, is a process that requires men to suppress a great deal of their emotional life, along with many wants, needs and possible options. Conversely, they must strive to meet an incredibly demanding stereotype of the male role as achiever, provider, conqueror, and controller – a task that is, in its entirety, impossible, and which causes men much self-doubt and anguish. This, Kaufman concludes, also 'inspires fear for it means not being a man, which means, in a society confusing gender and sex, not being a male ... losing

power and ungluing basic building blocks of our personalities' (p. 149). Together, these two behaviours are more destructive than either on its own, combining to both cause the problem and make it impossible to escape from.

Horrocks's argument runs along similar lines. Asserting that hegemonic masculinity is a paradox, he contends that:

Manhood as we know it in our society requires such a self-destructive identity, a deeply masochistic self-denial, a shrinkage of the self, a turning away from whole areas of life, that the man who obeys the demands of masculinity has become only half-human (p. 25).

Taking the argument slightly further than Kaufman, however, Horrocks claims that men and women have marked out completely separate spheres of influence, where, when one dominates, the other is deprived (p. 26). While men are powerful in the economic and political zones, women are powerful emotionally; since society values power of the first sort more highly, the 'emotional poverty of many men's lives' (*ibid.*) is overlooked. He describes this as a state of 'male autism' (p. 107), arguing that the only way for both men and women to achieve personal happiness and a full sense of themselves is by recognizing that traditional gender role expectations are simply that, and attempting to break free from the constraints they impose.

3.10. Gender as Performance

In response to concerns over the limiting notion of gender, other models have been put forward that attempt to describe human sexuality in looser or completely ungendered terms, viewing it as a form of 'performance' rather than an innate, sex-defined attribute. In the 1970s, Bem began to study the notion of androgyny, using a test method known as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1993: 118). This differed from previous tests in that it did not seek to locate subjects on a scale with masculinity at one end and femininity at the other, but instead sought to measure each quality separately. The technique still rested on subjects rating particular characteristics as part of their gendered personality, but offered new outcomes alongside the

traditional ‘sex-typed’ and ‘inverse’ positions, such as ‘androgynous’ (that is, high in both masculine and feminine characteristics) and ‘undifferentiated’ (low in both). Bem found these particularly exciting because they appeared to offer new freedoms in the understanding of gender roles, and a portrait of a healthy individual that did not rule out attributes typically assigned to the opposite sex.

She has since criticized androgyny, however, on the basis that it ‘focuses so much more attention on the individual’s being both masculine and feminine than on the culture’s having created the concepts of masculinity and femininity in the first place that it can legitimately be said to reproduce precisely the gender polarization that it seeks to undercut’ (p. viii). By continuing to treat masculinity and femininity as givens, the concept does nothing to undermine their existence. Like the ‘lens’ of biological essentialism that Bem would go on to describe, it effectively naturalizes notions of male/female opposition and heterosexuality. There is also the problem, as Bem herself notes (p. 124), that androgyny as a theory completely ignores issues of gender inequality, sidelining the many accounts that have focused on the history and effects of power in society. If, as she argues, ‘[t]he elimination of gender inequality will require institutional change, not just personal change’ (p. 123), then studying androgyny fails to move from the level of the individual to that of the political, effectively rendering it irrelevant to its own cause.

Examining the cultural construction of gender at a deeper level, ‘queer theory’ seeks to problematize the very notion of coherent gender identity. One of its leading exponents, Judith Butler, separates notions of sexual performance and bodily appearance with the assertion that ‘there are no direct expressive or casual lines between sex, gender, gender presentation [and] sexuality’ (1991: 165). In the words of Elliot (2001), ‘[s]he believes that the traditional conception of antithetical gender identities profoundly limits our sexual repertoires, and crushes the psychic, emotional, intimate and social possibilities for expression of the self’ (p.116). This argument rests on the claim that bodies, in themselves, do not ‘make sense’. It is only through structurally regulated codes that they become comprehensible, but these ‘cultural configurations of gender’ also come to ‘take the place of “the real”’ (Butler, 1990: 32-33). They are forced into a fabricated stability that limits the possibilities available by naturalizing the notions of binary sex roles and underlying

heterosexuality. Thus, gender and sexuality – seen by many people as an obligation to what they perceive as their bodily reality – can in fact be described purely as aspects of performance.

Queer theory suggests, then, that masculinity is best understood as a cultural construction – or, as Jackson *et al.* describe it, ‘a socially regulated performance’ (2001: 13) – and just one pattern of identity available from an almost infinite number of possibilities. This is a crucial observation that many accounts of masculinities find useful. However, we should also be aware of some of the criticisms that have been levelled against taking such notions too far. Segal (1999) writes:

Queer theory’s semiotically driven reflections rarely address the ways in which, throughout our lifetimes, we move in and out of the identifications, pleasures and vulnerabilities of gender settlements, structures of desire, and management of bodily capabilities: health, age and a myriad of other belongings and exclusions play a central role. We are never simply subject to (or in rebellion against) sexual and gender norms and normatives (pp. 68-69).

A genuine drawback of queer theory is that it can be difficult to apply to the practicalities of day-to-day life, and the relationships, identifications and desires we seem to create and sustain for ourselves. Watney (1997) adds that ‘whilst all sexual identities may be (or may become) restrictive to some people ... they may also provide refuge and stability, whilst providing us with our most intimate sense of psychic and social belonging in the world’ (p. 380). The notions of gender and sexuality that queer theory seeks to weaken may also be the keystones of our concepts of identity³².

3.11. Conclusion: Models of Masculinity

The preceding analysis of masculinities has touched on various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and we have seen that each, to

³² As Watney points out, many advocates of queer theory also regularly fail to address problems in society. He asks how we might be able to help people in situations of abuse, or in response to an epidemic like AIDS, without attempting to understand or engage with their own notions of sexual identity.

some extent, draws on and feeds into the others. This is reflected in the patterns formed by notions of masculinity in everyday life – in the way, for instance, that the values of hegemonic masculinity might be seen to influence social institutions such as parenting and schooling. Horrocks brings the different perspectives together into a useful description he calls an ‘interdisciplinary theory of gender’ (1995: 20).

This hypothesis is based on the idea that ‘gender forms an intersection between political, psychological and symbolic systems in human existence’ (p. 20). Its *political* axis concerns the relationships between men and women, how power is distributed between them, and how this might push them into stereotypical social roles. This segregation has *psychological* implications, which manifest themselves as ‘gender requirements’ and can further divide the sexes. (If we subscribe to any of the various psychoanalytical interpretations of gender-role development, such as Freud’s, we would also include them here.) Ultimately, these notions of gender may gain *symbolic* weight, coming to be embodied in cultural myths that ‘teach, warn, punish and reward’ (*ibid.*). Combined, these three elements form an overarching structure of beliefs that we perceive as the ‘reality’ of gender.

Attempting to locate the place of masculinity on these axes raises a number of problems. Firstly, as Connell points out, ‘there is no description without a standpoint’ (1995: 69). Trying to demarcate masculine behaviours, or even simply describe the patterns of men’s lives, involves making basic and inescapable assumptions about gender. (There must be ‘something to count’, for example, in the compilation of statistical data.) Secondly, descriptions of male behaviour usually rest on the pre-arranged categorization of men and women – the very categories that we are attempting to analyse. Furthermore, relating masculinity to ‘what men are’ only undermines our previous observation that both men and women can be described as masculine *and* feminine. As Steinman (1992) notes, all that we can really observe are the ‘unevenly shared ways of understanding behaviour (of males or females) as masculine’ (p. 199). Hence, masculinity in itself may not exist at all as a ‘thing’ that can be defined. Instead of thinking of it as a character type or form of identity, Connell suggests that:

we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. ‘Masculinity’ ... is simultaneously a place in

gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (1995: 71).

Masculinity can never be truly defined because it varies, not only from person to person, but also across time and distance. Its meanings differ so much across these points that they often become contradictory, while still expressing meaningful human identities. Masculinities are 'acted out' by individuals; they are performances made up of varying behaviour patterns, and it is only on these terms that they can be studied. Recognizing the symbolic power that particular versions of masculinity have wielded in the past – but looking forward to a time when generalizations of inherent gender have given way to more complex yet fluid expressions of identity – will provide us with the most useful ways in which to discuss these masculinities in the future.

Chapter 4

Masculinities in the Media

In Chapter 2, we looked at some of the ways in which the activity of magazine reading has been described as a process allowing readers to ‘make sense’ of their identities and their environments. Informed primarily by the work of Johnson (1986), Jackson *et al.* (2001), and Hermes (1995), it was suggested that this involved a form of interaction between reader and text, in which the reader draws on his or her discursive repertoire to form some kind of interpretation. In order to be comprehensible, the text needs to connect meaningfully with the reader’s repertoire. In the case of men’s magazines, we encountered two opposing opinions of how this might take place, the first attributing the *text* with greater formative power in the process, and the second concentrating more on the role of the reader: Cook (2000), as an example of the first position, took the view that magazines play deliberately to traditional notions of gender identity, validating their existence in readers’ repertoires and restricting the space available for newer models; Schirato & Yell (1999), in contrast, afforded the reader a more active role, suggesting that the reading process is more accurately one of negotiation, in which the reader navigates a route through many interpretations, recognizing the multiple meanings available and responding to them in a knowing and creative manner. Of course, this *could* allow a reader to purely reinforce his or her existing beliefs, but it nevertheless remains a conscious, intentional activity.

This section will review a number of studies concerned with the relationship between masculine identities and other forms of visual media, specifically cinema and television. We will begin with an overview of the wide body of work that subjects various films and television programmes to theoretical analysis of masculinities in an attempt to draw out a number of central themes, before moving on to an examination of several recent projects based on audience research rather than theory.

4.1. Images of Masculinity

Kirkham & Thumim's volumes *You Tarzan* (1993) and *Me Jane* (1995) bring together over 30 essays on the subject of masculinity and film, the first book being a compilation of work by male writers, the second female. The reasons for this division involve a distinction that the editors draw between the positions of men and women in society: men, they argue, 'write about the construction and representation of the masculine in relation to their experience as masculine subjects' (1993: 11); women, on the other hand, 'are subject to patriarchal masculinity in their own feminine formation but *not* subject to it in the sense that masculinity itself is never a requirement [and] cannot be a goal' (1995: 11; their emphasis). Their understanding, then, subscribes, at the first level, to an established model of societal patriarchy, locating the male as subject and female as object. This, they suggest, conditions men and women to watch and respond to films differently, the former able to compare himself directly to the corresponding representations onscreen, but the latter forced to view herself as if through a filter of masculine values. Somewhat paradoxically, however, at a deeper level, women actually have a freer position from which to analyse gender identities in film, precisely *because* they are not expected to 'measure up' – or even fully relate – to the dominant (masculine) roles portrayed.

Grouping the work of their contributors in this way provides Kirkham & Thumim with an interesting perspective from which to approach another of their editorial tasks: the identification of recurrent themes throughout the included essays. In *You Tarzan*, they are able to detect four 'sites' where the 'various traits of masculinity are signalled' (1993: 11), namely *the body* (broadly summarized as the state of 'being'), *action* ('doing'), *the external world* ('interaction'), and *the internal world* ('experience') (pp. 11-12). The meanings and significance of these sites shift (and, if anything, become more complex) in *Me Jane*, where the female collaborators' interests in the internal and external worlds comes to the fore, and considerations taken in the analysis of the body change completely. This leads Kirkham & Thumim to rename the first category 'the body, action and inaction' (1995: 12). They also find it pertinent to introduce a new category – 'the politics of gender' (*ibid.*) – to deal with the peculiar situation described above involving

women's more detached experience of cinematic constructions of masculinity, and the role of existing gendered values in the creation of filmic conventions.

These sites can exist in two forms: as 'qualities either asserted or assumed in the construction and development of masculine characters' (1993: 11), by which Kirkham & Thumim refer to the representation of male *identity* in films; or as 'signifiers of themes quite consciously concerned with an interrogation of masculinity' (*ibid.*), meaning elements of plot that attempt to associate masculinity with particular values or behaviour. I will now examine all of these sites in greater depth, illustrating them with examples taken from Kirkham & Thumim's two collections, and from other sources drawn from wider reading.

4.1.1. The Body

In the last chapter, we looked at the ways in which sex and gender seem to have become inescapably linked throughout the conventions of society. In film, as in everyday life, expectations and explanations of gender identity often begin with the physical appearance of individuals, the difference being that, in film, the *performative* nature of gender (as expressed via the performance of an actor) might be considered even more explicit. Kirkham & Thumim group all aspects of masculine visual representation under the banner of *the body*, including, along with the actual flesh of the character, his attire and – if he is played by a famous actor – his movie star persona (1993: 11-12). A key concept associated with this first site is that of the filmic body as spectacle.

The notion of the 'spectacular'³³ male body refers to the presentation of the male form as something to be looked at and admired. Horrocks (1995) offers two illustrations: 'surely part of the appeal of the action film is the exposure of the male body? And the buddy film shows a dual exposure: men are exposed to each other and to the viewer' (p. 54). In the first case, examples of muscular male leads in body-revealing outfits indeed appear to prevail in action movies, from Johnny

³³ Most critics use the word 'spectacular' primarily to mean 'of visual importance', while frequently also punning on its other meaning of 'impressive'. See, for example, Tasker (1993).

Weismuller in 1932's *Tarzan, the Ape Man* to Vin Diesel in *The Chronicles of Riddick* (2004). To illustrate his second observation, Horrocks cites Italian westerns as films in which 'men look at each other intensely' (*ibid.*), as well as those centred on a "'homoerotic' male couple' (p. 66), such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). In both instances, the male body as spectacle poses a problem for some more traditional understandings of film and the 'male gaze': as Kirkham & Thumim put it, there exists a 'contradiction between the vulnerable passivity arguably implicit in the state of being-looked-at, and the dominance and control which patriarchal order expects its male subjects to exhibit' (1993: 12). Unusually, the body as spectacle requires a reading that regards the male as object rather than subject, and directs the male gaze towards a male focus.

Several ways by which mainstream storytellers resolve – or deny – this homoerotic dilemma have been suggested. Horrocks, referring in particular to the Hollywood western film, claims that '[m]en can't literally ravish each other in mainstream cinema: instead they kill each other' (1995: 54). In other words, having one or both of a male duo die within the narrative allows them to symbolically profess their 'love'³⁴ without fear of any sort of consummation. Hunt (1993) suggests that the erotic overtones of male bodily display and appreciation in 'male epics' like *Spartacus* (1960) are to some extent glossed over by their concentration on bodies that evidence 'physical punishment' (p. 69): musculature and sweat, for example, are constructed as markers of strength and endurance, providing an excuse to admire the male physique other than sexual desire. Finally, analysing an episode of the Burt Reynolds-starring sitcom *Evening Shade*, Steinman (1992) finds that, although physical, homosocial male bonding is celebrated to a point where its closeness to homoerotic behaviour is often jokingly touched upon, should a character begin to 'step out of bounds' the narrative will 'claw back' the gesture by unambiguously (and swiftly) reaffirming his heterosexuality (p. 212).

Of these critics, Horrocks is the most pessimistic in his discussion of male spectacle as a symptom of 'masculinity in crisis': for him, the western hero 'embodies a brooding sense of unease, mutilation, unwantedness', the male porn star

³⁴ Horrocks quotes Wyatt Earp's dying words to 'Doc' Holliday from *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957): 'I need you, Doc'.

an 'intense deprivation and infantile yearning', and the heavy metal singer 'a homoerotic connection that provides a comforting refuge from women' (1995: 170). Such conclusions are inescapably personal but serve to illustrate the point that, clearly, the notion of the body as spectacle does not necessarily entail that this body exists in a state of enviable and celebratory glory. It is this matter that Kirkham & Thumim highlight in their renaming of the site 'the body' to 'the body, action and inaction' in *Me Jane*. While the essays by the female contributors are 'based on a great deal of looking, few focus on the direct display of the male body as spectacle' (1995: 23); in this second volume, the editors suggest, the notion of spectacle is not automatically equated with that of impressiveness.

Tasker (1993) calls this a tension between 'the body in crisis' and 'the body triumphant' (p. 109) but, rather than attempting to argue a case for the prevalence of either, simply emphasizes the fact that the tension plainly exists, played out with the body as its site. Citing the 1986 Clint Eastwood film *Heartbreak Ridge*, she illustrates how 'Hollywood mythology thrives on paradox' (p. 121). The narrative tension of this film surrounds Eastwood's military tough-guy character and his attempts to balance the time spent 'making men' of the young marines in his training camp and relating to the woman he loves. Tasker detects a cultural tension in the way the film offsets the masculinity-threatening nature of this second pursuit with constant references to homosexuality, as if recognizing 'unmanliness' makes the avoidance of it easier: 'this repeated insistence threatens to draw attention to the very fact of homosexual desire that it seeks to deny' (*ibid.*).

Whether in crisis or triumph, however, the body is undeniable in its visual presence on the screen, making it perhaps the primary signifier as regards the representation of masculinity in the media. As an analytical 'site', it encompasses a wide variety of concerns related not just to appearance, but also to behaviour, and, as we will see, remains a constant reference point throughout any discussion of the remaining three sites.

4.1.2. Action

The second site is not always easy to distinguish from its predecessor. As we have already noted, Kirkham & Thumim explain that it involves ‘doing’ as opposed to ‘being’. For this reason, they consider the process of working on or building up the body to fall into the realm of *action* rather than *body*, thereby attaching a specifically active aspect to the more purely visual nature of the body as spectacle. They note, ‘[h]ere it is the process of *forming* a body which will function effectively, to which audience attention is invited’ (1993: 15; their emphasis). Tasker, for instance, discussing *Rocky IV* (1985), contrasts the image of Rocky training hard by chopping wood and doing manual tasks for Russian peasants with that of his Soviet opponent Drago injecting steroids in a laboratory: ‘This sentimental opposition of a populist, self-created muscular strength and an artificial, mechanical tool of the state is a crucial one, restating the hero’s control over his body’ (1993: 125). Rocky’s actions in the ways he goes about working on his body mark out his masculinity as more ‘natural’ and independent than that of the almost synthetic, inhuman Drago; Rocky’s is a personal achievement evidencing his own sense of control. Spoto (1978) identifies a parallel moment in the original 1976 film:

Rocky, in sweat suit, sprints up the steps of a city memorial – the camera following his progress in a single, unbroken take, as the pan-dolly shot suddenly rises into a crane shot. The camera movement is itself a metaphor for the hero’s progress from graceless lug to cult hero (p. 227).

Such films do not only display the male body for consumption, but also focus on the *act* of creating an impressive physique. In their celebration of personal training, they imply that mastery of the body equates to mastery of the self, valuing control as a core feature of masculine identity. Rocky’s action – his striving for and gradual attainment of fitness and muscle power – is therefore partly representative of his development into a ‘real man’.

Another way in which similar forms of male exertion are presented as a visual entertainment is through sporting events. Sport draws massive audiences but remains heavily dominated by an interest in men’s team games. As a performance, it

combines elements of both the spectacular body and the body mastered through action, but critics have formed highly contrasting interpretations of its role and value in society. Sabo & Jansen (1992) view it as ‘a cultural theater where the values of larger society are resonated, dominant social practices are legitimized, and structured inequalities are reproduced’ (pp. 173-174). In this respect, the imbalance in media coverage afforded to men’s and women’s sports, they argue, works to perpetuate patriarchal dominance in a wider context. Quoting studies showing the linguistic links that sports commentators routinely make between male athletes and descriptions of power, aggression and size, they accuse the media of affording men a ‘glorious presence’ (p. 174). At the same time, women are trivialized by constant references to their sex, the arguably demeaning use of terms such as ‘girls’, and a tendency to use their first name (as opposed to the surname, by which men are more often referred to). The combined effect, according to Sabo & Jansen, is that the sports media portray the sexes ‘within a relational framework in which men are dominant, masculine, and valued ... reinforc[ing] hegemonic models of manhood while marginalizing alternative masculinities’ (p. 179).

A similar hypothesis is put forward by Brookes (2002), who argues that the media’s coverage of sport reflects society’s already existing ‘stereotypical assumptions about what is “male-appropriate” and “female-appropriate”’ (p. 128). His definition of male-appropriate activities includes any in which the necessary sporting skills correspond to qualities commonly associated with hegemonic masculinity – such as, he suggests, strength and power (p. 129) – whereas female-appropriate sports eschew those involving physical contact, to concentrate on individual performance, style and grace (*ibid.*). The media’s prevailing focus on men’s team games ensures that stereotypical notions of male characteristics and behaviour may be widely perpetuated in this way.

Brookes also makes the interesting point that portrayals of masculinity within sport are at their most powerful when they pass without question or are ‘taken for granted’ (p. 133). He suggests that hegemonic masculinity actually disassociates itself from any high-profile, sports-related incident that might be linked to exaggerated or violent masculinity (the footballer involved in a drunken brawl outside a nightclub, for instance, or the tennis player who loses his temper with an

umpire) while quietly associating itself with notions of ‘*controlled* aggression’ (*ibid.*; my emphasis), a quality supposedly required by successful sportsmen. Examples of the former are roundly criticized in the media, while the latter, evidenced by frequent, unquestioned representations of tackles, combat and gruelling training routines, is normalized as expected male behaviour.

Horrocks (1995) acknowledges viewpoints such as those of Sabo & Jansen and Brookes, but, coming from the perspective that hegemonic masculinity is as damaging to men as it is to women, prefers to concentrate on the unconscious reasons why many men might have invested such an interest in sport. Firstly, he believes that spectator sports indulge what the Hollywood film, for example, ultimately denies: the male’s desire to look at other male bodies. Furthermore, ‘[s]port permits a considerable displacement of this desire: the spectator need not be aware that this is what he wants at all’ (p. 55). Secondly, he describes sport as ‘a way of relating through the body, not the mind’ (p. 169): since so much of a man’s emotional life is discouraged by hegemonic masculinity, he develops a ‘desperate hunger for ... bodily grounding’ (*ibid.*). As this, too, is disallowed in terms of relationships between men, the physicality of sport offers an acceptably masculine outlet for such desires – one that is so psychologically important to men, and which they are so protective of, they often seek to actively debar female participation.

In summary, then, the relationship between action and the body as sites of masculinity is a very close one. Both Tasker and Spoto, in their separate analyses of the *Rocky* films, suggest that the activities Rocky engages in – in both building and using his spectacular body – have bearing on the validity of the body and what it stands for. Horrocks interprets the physical action of sports almost as a form of communication in itself – a way for men to relate to other men *using* their bodies. The meaning of any act of ‘doing’, it would seem, is firmly bound to the ‘beings’ involved.

4.1.3. The External World

Kirkham & Thumim write that ‘[m]ale power is central to any consideration of masculinity’ (1993: 18). Thus, their third site examines the position of the male

character in the external worlds of business, politics, authority, and social standing. In films, they argue, success in these areas usually acts as a marker of ‘successful’ masculinity, since ‘patriarchal order continually attempts to define power and masculinity as practically synonymous’ (*ibid.*). As might be expected, analysis of the wide variety of films in existence both supports and contests this view.

Street (1995) discusses *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), a Hollywood-set tale in which the male protagonist is an unsuccessful screenwriter whose desperate stint as a live-in gigolo for a faded female film star leads, ultimately, to his death. As he stays in her house, hiding away from debt collectors, his symbols of status (such as his car and apartment) are taken away from him, signifying the erosion of his independence and, by extension, his masculinity. The little success he has had in the external world, Street argues, gives way to his entrapment in the domestic (that is, female) sphere of the actress’s home, where he suffers the ultimate emasculation of being ‘kept’, financially and physically, by a dominant woman.

Discussing American road movies, Hark (1997) points out a version of masculinity based on the value of the exact opposite – the *rejection* of wealth and material attainment. Wim Wenders’ 1984 film *Paris, Texas* involves two brothers, one a business-minded achiever in the city, the other recently returned, half-dead, after being missing for four years in the desert. The latter, as Hark puts it, ‘recuperates his masculinity ... not by becoming a high flyer like [his brother] but by reconfiguring his relationship to the ground³⁵ into one that carries a powerful charge of phallic masculinity’ (p. 211). He does this by turning himself into a ‘king of the road’ (*ibid.*), driving around, fully in control of his destiny, in a vintage American car. Here, the car again acts as a symbol of independence (as in *Sunset Boulevard*), but this time in terms of spirit and strength of character rather than financial success.

As Hark traces the evolution of the genre through the rest of the decade and into the 1990s, however, she suggests that this romanticized image of the ‘Road Man’ (p. 206) repeatedly clashes with that of the (equally fantasized) power-

³⁵ Throughout the film, Hark posits, financial success is linked with images of the sky and ‘looking up’, while the highway (ground) represents the opposite. See Hark (1997: 211).

grabbing businessman, who is never at risk of being emasculated by having to demean himself to earn the money to get by. She concludes with the question:

what could be a more masculine territory than the cut-throat world of mergers, leveraged buyouts, bond trading, arbitrage and entrepreneurship that the “greed is good” ethos of *Wall Street*’s Gordon Gekko promoted? (p. 214).

Indeed, a good many films in the late 1980s featured ‘businessman’-type roles prominently (including *After Hours* (1985), *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*, *Legal Eagles*, *Ruthless People*, *Something Wild* (all 1986), *Wall Street*, *Fatal Attraction*, *Working Girl*, *Hunk* (1987), *Switching Channels* (1988), *Weekend at Bernie’s* (1989), *Pretty Woman*, *A Shock to the System* and *Filofax* (1990)), but it is worth noting that the ‘masculine territory’ portrayed is often also heavily identified with corruption and *loss* of personal identity – a world from which an emotionally cold male character can be rescued by the love of a woman. Many of these films (*Legal Eagles* and *Working Girl*, in particular) also pair their business-minded men with equally adept and successful women, while others like *Baby Boom*, *Overboard* (both 1987) and *Big Business* (1988) concentrate entirely on the business successes of central female characters. In films such as *Hook*, *Regarding Henry* (both 1991), *Toys* (1992) and *Miracle on 34th Street* (1994), businessman characters must learn to balance their careers with their family lives, in order to become ‘better’, less selfish and more fully-rounded men. By the mid-1990s, the actor identified with *Wall Street*’s greed-obsessed Gordon Gekko, Michael Douglas, had himself quite dramatically rejected the dehumanizing corporate world in *Falling Down* (1993), and fallen prey to the ambitious scheming of a greedy *female* boss in *Disclosure* (1994).

Within the space of a decade, then, American mainstream films were able to offer a wide range of different models of masculinity in relation to the external world. In many ways, this reflects the situation of the world external to cinema, where the diversity of everyday life makes the maintenance of a single, coherent male identity a problematic concept for both individuals and society. Hammond (1993) sees many Hollywood films as ‘attempts to efface contradictions and address anxieties’ (p. 63) in this respect. Citing 1989’s *Dead Poets Society* as an example,

however, he goes on to argue that their ‘totalising project’ is never achieved without leaving a ‘residue of incoherence’ (*ibid.*).

Hammond takes the main concern of *Dead Poets Society* to be ‘the rite of passage from boyhood to (heterosexual) manhood’ (*ibid.*). For its young male characters, this is a journey based primarily on interactions with older authority figures – with their idealistic English teacher at one end of the spectrum, and restrictive parents and repressive headmaster at the other. Hammond notes the rigid hierarchies established by the film – from the elderly tutors down to the students, with the English teacher (a former pupil) in between – comparing its rank-like power structure to that of a war film (p. 57). This, he argues, enables it to contrast the different styles of teaching as fascistic at one end and liberal at the other, although, implicitly, ‘both work to reinforce male authority’ (p. 61) since, at the end of the film, the boys leap up onto their desks to hail their beloved teacher as ‘captain’.

The remaining residue of incoherence appears in the form of contradictions (a notion that will become increasingly significant in regard to our discussion of men’s lifestyle magazines in later chapters). On one hand, the film criticizes repressive educational methods but, on the other, advocates the ‘cult of the personality’-based pedagogic style of the ‘good’ teacher (p. 63). Secondly, like many films concerning mostly male characters, the problem of the male-as-object arises: are we to identify with, respect, or desire the idealistic English teacher? (p. 61). Similarly, a close relationship arises between two of the boys, one of whom – a drama enthusiast who refuses to be sent to military school – ‘fails’, as Hammond construes it, to successfully make the aforementioned transition to heterosexual manhood. As Horrocks found with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, this form of ‘forbidden love’ (*ibid.*) between two males must ultimately be disavowed by the narrative: the boy commits suicide.

We can interpret this issue of incoherence and contradictions in two ways. Following Hammond’s line of thinking, we might conclude that they constitute residual evidence of a normalizing process that always falls short in creating a consistent presentation of patriarchal masculinity. Alternatively, noting the

surprisingly wide array of gender representations we came across in late-1980s cinema, for example, we may view the contradictions as a more conscious questioning of gender-related behaviours. These might be deliberately brought into play within single films to create interesting narrative and psychological dilemmas. This mixture of *challenge* to existing norms and *anxiety* over their displacement is addressed most directly through Kirkham & Thumim's final site, the internal world.

4.1.4. The Internal World

Whereas the external world was concerned with forms of masculinity played out in the social and public sphere, the 'internal world' refers to what Kirkham & Thumim call 'the domain of the psychic construction of identity' (1995: 12). We might expect this to focus on the wide range of thoughts and feelings expressed by male characters in the cinema (as well as, perhaps, the related responses of male viewers), but most important in Kirkham & Thumim's discussion is the familiar concept of 'masculinity in crisis'. Accordingly, in *Me Jane*, they subdivide the concerns of the internal world into three smaller sites: 'F/father, fragility, anxiety' (1995: 13), the first being the main source of much male trauma.

Kirkham & Thumim's distinction between 'Father' and 'father' is comparable to that of 'phallus' and 'penis': 'Father' relates to patriarchal rule and its authority in the symbolic order, while 'father' refers to the individual's *actual* father, his sense of his own fatherhood, and all of the worries and interior dramas played out in this respect (*ibid.*). They find it 'striking how much more detailed attention, probing and speculation [these demarcations] have generated among the female contributors to *Me Jane*' (*ibid.*), as opposed to its male-penned companion volume. Radstone (1995), for instance, touches heavily on them in her analysis of her own fascination with Al Pacino, who in 1989's *Sea of Love*, brings his personification of 'a certain fragility, a particular quality of fear, an edgy sense of collapse staved off' (p. 149) to the role of 'a man whose authority is on the wane' (p. 148). For her, Pacino's 'Italianness' has historical connotations with her father's (and her own) Jewishness. His shortness and 'falling short' (p. 159) remind her of the impossibility of meeting the high demands of the more narcissistic forms of femininity. Thus, she writes, he

‘evokes a series of affects associated with Jewishness, failure, loss and my father’ (*ibid.*); in Pacino’s character’s success at the end of *Sea of Love*, together with his real-life career success in this comeback role, he ‘rises from the flames, promising, perhaps, that fathers – and my father – will too’ (p. 160). This, obviously, is one of the more individual essays in the collection, reflecting the nature of this most personal of sites.

Male writers, in addressing the anxieties of the internal world, have a tendency to see them as manifested by alterations to the body. Just as the physical enhancement of the body was seen to represent mastery and masculinity, *losing* control over the body denotes the loss of power and manhood. Shaviro (1993) reads the transformation into an insect of the main (male) character in David Cronenberg’s *The Fly* (1986) as ‘fatal ... to the assertion of personal initiative’ (p. 147). This fly-man becomes an Other in his own home and body. His desires, as Shaviro points out, become increasingly alien – even violating the ‘natural’ borders of sex and gender identity, as when he proposes to his pregnant girlfriend that she should ‘fuse with’ his flesh (*ibid.*). The failure to control the body equates to a failure to understand one’s own masculinity – a prospect considered here to be literally monstrous.

Wells (1993), discussing 1950s science fiction B-movies (a 1958 example of which inspired *The Fly* above), looks beyond the anxieties most commonly associated with the genre³⁶ to suggest that it also constituted the first significant movement in American film to offer ‘a systematic destabilization of movie-made masculinity’ (p. 181). The first aspect of this is demonstrated through the films’ questioning of men’s capacity in the *external* world. Noting that many of the monsters and disasters featured in the films result from scientific accidents caused by the incompetence of male scientists, Wells writes that

time and again, men in the sci-fi B-movie demonstrate ineptitude in their attempt to secure power and take control of their circumstances. They have inherited the

³⁶ As Wells notes, a great deal of studies have – quite perceptively – read the genre as addressing public fears concerning Communism, nuclear power, space exploration, and other famous contemporary issues. Referring to Samuel Stouffer’s *Communism, Conformism and Civil Liberties* (1966), however, he argues that the average American at the time found more immediate, domestic and financial matters a greater concern.

frontier myth and its patriarchal lore but they find themselves in a society where these values are subject to change and re-definition. Men can no longer trust their status and position (p. 182).

Perceived disruptions to the order of the external world, then, multiply anxieties in the internal world. Wells argues that the sci-fi B-movie plays these out in metaphorical, visual terms, where threats to the male psyche are transposed as threats to society or even ‘the world’ as a whole: fear of inadequacy in *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957); powerful female agency in *The Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1959); the man’s own body in *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1957); or behaviour that falls outside the traditional boundaries of masculinity in *It Came From Outer Space* (1953)³⁷. However, Wells suggests that these films both acknowledge and *go beyond* their fear and paranoia, as ‘it becomes clear that the destabilised hero, with his identity rendered confused and inadequate, must recognize other kinds of relationships’ (p. 197) – with himself, other men, and the opposite sex. Concerning a genre traditionally considered apprehensive of the future and reactionary in its outlook, this is a bold claim, but Wells is right to point out that the films are rife with representations of potential alternatives to traditional forms of masculinity. It would be some time before these came to symbolize something other than evil and monstrous aberrations – in films such as *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), *Eraserhead* (1977), *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Starman* (1984)³⁸, *The Fly II* (1989), and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) – but the B-movies of the 1950s were arguably instrumental in paving the way for this later, wider range of social and cultural positions.

As with the preceding three sites, the boundaries of that which constitutes the internal world have proved somewhat difficult to mark out. Shaviro’s discussion of *The Fly* almost certainly focused as much on the body of its titular character as his psyche, while the only way to understand Wells’ analysis of the internal world of 1950s B-movies was to approach it in the context of his comments on their *external*

³⁷ Wells cites a scene in which two male truck drivers, their bodies taken over by aliens, hold hands (p. 197).

³⁸ It is interesting in itself to note how many of these film titles include the word ‘man’, as if the explicit redefinition of the label is part of each text’s intended purpose.

world. It would appear that attempting to define various 'sites of masculinity' is not as straightforward a task as it might have first seemed.

4.2. Assessing Kirkham & Thumim's Approach

Drawing on the work of Kirkham & Thumim to concentrate on four 'sites of masculinity' has provided us with a convenient basis for a brief summary of a very wide field of writing, but also presented a number of problems. The first of these is the issue of overlap. Emphasizing particular aspects of an individual writer's work allows it to be identified with almost any one of the four categories. We first encountered Tasker (1993), for example, discussing the body, whether in a state of crisis or defiance. These two states, however, are as much concerned with the internal world as they are with the body; indeed, her associated analysis of *Heartbreak Ridge* is more descriptive of Clint Eastwood's character's attitudes and beliefs than it is with his appearance. Attempting to locate her analysis of *Rocky IV* within the site-based framework, we encountered a similarly vague separation between *the body* and *action*, each seemingly inextricably linked *and* a part of something more than either taken on its own. In this latter case, I find it unhelpful to try to separate the sites of body and action, and prefer to apply Kirkham & Thumim's larger class, 'the body, action and inaction' (which they refer to in *Me Jane*).

A second and related problem of the site-based approach is that it can inhibit the more complex understandings of both texts and writings about texts. In order to follow the arguments of Hammond (1993) and Wells (1993), for instance, we had to take them on their own terms, temporarily breaking from the rigid structures imposed by thinking about sites. Hammond's study of institutions and relationships in *Dead Poets Society* seemed to fit most fully into the sphere of the external world, but ideas linked more closely with the body and internal world were essential to explaining why this was so. Equally, the internal and external worlds were so closely linked in Wells' analysis of the social climate and psychological concerns of

sci-fi B-movies that trying to separate them became almost irrelevant to understanding his argument.

The difficulties of separating sites aside, Kirkham & Thumim's method is slightly disappointing in another respect. While their discussions of the body, action and the external world tackle their subject areas from a neutral perspective, their summary of the internal world takes as its starting point a presupposition of masculinity in crisis. While we might expect it to cover *all* aspects of male experience, it focuses entirely on male anxiety, leaving us with nowhere to locate other, equally significant emotional and intellectual concerns.

Whilst acknowledging these criticisms, however, it is only fair to note that Kirkham & Thumim are not proposing a 'model of masculinity' with their classification of various sites, but simply a way of reviewing and addressing the matter. Throughout their analysis, they refer to the same studies under different site-headings, making it clear that an individual argument rarely fits into a single location. As a collection of concepts, then, the sites offer a basic reference tool for any discussion of masculinities in the media, but should not be taken as a list of definite criteria.

4.3. Masculinity in Pornography

This analysis of the representation of men and masculinity in various visual media has so far touched on genres as diverse as televised sport, horror films, situation comedy, and Westerns but, as yet, overlooked a sector of the entertainment industry worth an estimated 30 billion pounds worldwide, a billion pounds' worth of which exists in Britain (*BBC News Online*, 1 March 2005) – that of pornography. As well as being a genre traditionally associated with male audiences, it is also one which, as we saw in Chapter 2, represented one of the few established genres of magazine 'accepted' by male readers for a long time prior to the boom in men's lifestyle magazines witnessed in the 1990s. This legacy continues in the often blatant sexual content of men's lifestyle magazines, frequently signified on their

front covers by pictures of near-naked female celebrities in poses similar to those found on the front of ‘top-shelf’ titles. For these reasons, a brief look at the ways in which several critics have addressed issues relating to masculinity in pornography is relevant before we move away from examining the visual image itself to focus on the relationship of the text with the audience who view it.

In comparison to the sometimes finely detailed characters portrayed in many other genres, the representation of men and women in pornography remains simple and stark, often barely going beyond a participant’s gender. This has led some critics to investigate exactly what characteristics are associated with the seemingly straightforward roles of men and women in pornography. As might be expected, they have come to different conclusions.

Andrea Dworkin’s 1981 study, *Pornography*, is subtitled *Men Possessing Women*, a theme that the author traces throughout the films, books and images she examines. For her, the principal theme of pornography is one of ‘male power, its nature, its magnitude, its use, its meaning’ (p. 24); this power, as the subtitle above suggests, is one that is primarily wielded against women. The male’s dominance over the female is, she argues, the defining attribute of masculinity in pornography and beyond, represented in porn at its most raw and basic level, where the act of sex becomes a metaphor for the man’s violent oppression of women, and his penis his weapon:

Force – the violence of the male confirms his masculinity – is seen as the essential purpose of the penis, its animating principle as it were, just as sperm ideally impregnates the women either without reference to or against her will. The penis must embody the violence of the male in order for him to be male (p. 55).

Dworkin breaks down male power into seven ‘tenets of male-supremacist ideology’ (pp. 13-24), which she illustrates with an analysis of a pornographic photograph entitled ‘Beaver Hunters’ (p. 25-30). These are: the power of ‘*self*’, something that she argues women are denied (the men in the photograph are described as ‘self-possessed’ (p. 26), whereas the woman is possessed by men); ‘*physical strength*’, the physical manifestation of power (Dworkin argues that the photograph ‘celebrates

the physical power of men over women' (*ibid.*)); the '*capacity to terrorize*' (the men are dressed as hunters, while the woman is their 'prey' (p. 27)); the power of '*naming*', by which men assume the right to 'define experience' (p. 17), being the dominant voice in society (in the photograph, the woman is given the name 'beaver'); the power of '*owning*' (which Dworkin argues is 'expressed in every aspect of the photograph' (p. 28)); the power of '*money*', inseparable from the power of owning, and indicative in men of 'qualities, achievement, honor, respect' (p. 20); and, finally, the power of '*sex*', which is symbolic of male conquest – turning the man into 'a taker of what he wants and needs' (p. 24) – and, obviously, a central theme of all pornography.

To summarize, Dworkin's tenets amount to a description of masculinity itself, which, like the various attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity in Chapter 3, affords men the active and dominant role of the two sexes. Hers is, however, a much more critical and sexually politicized account, one that might be equated to the 'angry repudiation' stage of feminist writing on women's magazines, as identified by McRobbie (1999) in Chapter 2. Dworkin's passionate critique was one of the first major academic analyses of pornography, and set the tone for feminist voices on the subject of media culture in the early 1980s. Contemporaries such as Griffin (1981) branded pornography 'culture's rage against women' (p. 144), while groups of women vociferously picketed cinemas showing such films as *Dressed to Kill* (1980), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Crimes of Passion* (1984) and *Body Double* (1984), horror movies that took advantage of an initially more liberal climate – as well as recent advances in gruesome make-up effects – to push back filmic boundaries in terms of both the explicitness of their sex scenes, and the degree of violence with which they depicted female characters being attacked and murdered³⁹.

Other critics have pointed out possible deficiencies in Dworkin's argument, in much the same way as later feminist authors became dissatisfied with earlier, 'angry' condemnations of women's magazines and romantic fiction. Horrocks, for instance, observes that Dworkin – in concentrating on heterosexual men – ignores the enjoyment that some women, gay men, and couples take in watching

³⁹ See Pally (1984), Librach (1998) and Williams (2004) for reference to, and discussion of, the controversy surrounding such films.

pornography, a fact that, in itself, suggests some reassessment of the power relations involved is necessary (1994: 103). In direct opposition to Dworkin's view, he argues that pornography more accurately represents 'the powerlessness of men before women' (p. 119), evidencing men's desperation for female attentions, and is used as a substitute by men for whom actual sex is either unobtainable or a prospect filled with 'terror and shame' (p. 102). For Horrocks, pornography exposes a masculinity characterized by 'loneliness, inadequacy and impotence' (p. 103), a description which is a far cry from the virtues stereotypically associated with traditional masculinity.

Another function of pornography proposed by Horrocks concerns *performances* of masculinity. Discussing 'lesbian' porn, he writes: 'I wonder if the male viewer has another investment in the all-female cast: he can surreptitiously take part – as a woman! He can take respite from phallic sexuality' (p. 120). Here, Horrocks suggests that pornography – through its focus on the female experience of sex, and recurrent 'girl-on-girl' sequences – offers men the opportunity to explore their sexuality from a female perspective. The adoption of this feminine viewpoint might also provide men with a way of guiltlessly 'enjoying' looking at the bodies of other men, as evidenced by pornography's apparent veneration of large penises and the moment of ejaculation. Such a theory would again imply that heterosexual masculinity, or indeed any sexual role, is not something inherently linked to manhood, but instead 'acted out' by individuals.

Interestingly, one feminist critic has applied a similar notion of male identification with female protagonists to the kinds of horror films briefly mentioned above, in a way that sheds further light on gendered roles and performances. Clover (1992) notes that the main character in 'slasher' films like *Friday the 13th* is almost always female and almost always survives, usually by dispatching the killer. With this victory, Clover suggests, 'she becomes a hero; and the moment she becomes a hero is the moment that the male viewer gives up the last pretence of male identification' (p. 306). Like Horrocks, Clover is proposing that film can offer the viewing male a psychological space in which to rework aspects of his gender identity, and even experiment with new ones, in an environment that does not threaten his 'real' identity. Clover refers to this use of film as an 'identificatory

buffer' (p. 300) – a notion which will become useful when we turn, in later chapters, to consider the ways in which young men may also explore their identities within the psychological spaces opened up by lifestyle magazines.

4.4. The Return of the Reader: Audiences on Masculinity

The problem with the sort of studies described in this chapter is that they rely on the thoughts and opinions of particular individuals to 'explain the real meanings' of films and other texts. This is a debate we have encountered already, when we discussed, in Chapter 2, criticisms of the early, feminist-focused work of critics like Greer (1970) and McRobbie (1979), as well as Adorno and Horkheimer's disparaging account of the 'culture industry' (1991/1995). Such approaches tend to lose sight of the many ways in which actual audiences use, respond to and, crucially, *enjoy* the texts in question – as we saw above when we noted that it is not only heterosexual men who take pleasure in pornography. Thus, while the preceding theories advanced by critics on films such as *Rocky*, *Heartbreak Ridge* and *The Fly* may be useful in discussing individual responses to certain texts (as well as stimulating a wider variety of readings), their validity comes into question if they attempt to suggest that they represent the *essential* or most significant reading of that text.

One way of bringing the audience into the equation is by talking to them directly, as Radway (1984) and Hermes (1995) sought to do in their studies of, respectively, romantic fiction and women's magazines. In film studies, the process has involved, in some cases, observing the behaviour of audiences as they watch particular movies, as in studies by Wood (1993) and Fiske & Dawson (1996). While neither of these studies explicitly set out to investigate issues of masculinity in relation to the watching of films, they both, by the nature of the audiences involved, uncover some relevant findings. Wood's account of a group of teenage boys watching the supernaturally themed miniseries *Stephen King's It* (1990) paints a vivid portrait of young men competing with each other to 'prove' their masculinity through ironic sexism, expressed identification with the nastier characters, and

examples of their own bravado. Fiske & Dawson, observing a group of homeless men watching the 1988 action movie *Die Hard* in a church-run shelter, argue that the audience's much-vocalized enjoyment of the film's violent bloodshed, whoever the target, represents their inability to otherwise express certain aspects of their masculinity denied to them in the real world because of their circumstances – in this instance, 'the ability to exert power over others publicly' (p. 307). Such studies offer valuable insights into audience responses to media texts, although it may still be argued, especially in the case of the latter, that a significant degree of interpretation remains on the part of the researcher.

Other studies, such as those of Barker & Brooks (1998) and Gauntlett & Hill (1999), attempt to present the opinions of their subjects largely in their own words. As part of the latter, 500 members of the public kept detailed diaries of the interplay between their daily lives and television viewing over a period of five years. Amongst the project's fascinating wealth of data are many insights into men's perceptions of the role of television in their lives, from a common unwillingness to be seen 'gossiping' about programmes, as if this might undermine their masculinity (p. 129), to the inappropriateness of classifying television genres under the stereotypical banners of 'men's' and 'women's' interests (pp. 233-237).

Barker & Brooks' study is a more problematic piece of work entirely, as its authors admit from the outset. From its initial objective of researching audiences of the 1995 futuristic action film *Judge Dredd* via a series of focus group sessions, the book develops into a challenging assessment of the complexities of audience reception studies in general, prompted by difficulties that the authors describe as often simultaneously 'empirical, methodological [and] theoretical' (p. 1). Like Gauntlett & Hill, Barker & Brooks do not set out to focus on specifically male viewers or matters of identity and gender; however, their work is referenced here for two reasons. Firstly, on a somewhat trite level, the film in question can be taken as a prime example of a 'boys' movie': not only does it feature a masculine, heroic lead (in the shape of Sylvester Stallone) and copious amounts of action, destruction and special effects, but, as an adaptation of the popular comic book *2000AD*, it also comes with a pre-existing audience of 'fanboys', as one popular term identifies its predominantly male fan base. Secondly, the study prefigures some of the difficulties

that arise in my own research, as outlined later in this thesis – most evidently, that of how to go about analysing data when ‘interpreting’ it on the basis of a preconceived checklist of personal opinions is the last thing that one wants to do.

Fittingly, in the interests of my study, Barker and Brooks’ first two interview transcriptions detail the conversations of a group of 14- and 15-year-old boys on the subject of their responses to films (including *Judge Dredd*). Covering in detail the teenagers’ interests, values and role models, there is no shortage of interesting information – but, as Barker & Brooks note, it is not obvious how to use it:

on the one hand it could be used to provide ‘evidence’ for almost any position you choose; a determined moral panicker could with ease point to those repeated declarations of love of ‘violence’, and cry danger, especially given the ease which these under-age boys appear to get into adult-rated films – but on the other hand, others could as well point to the mass of evidence that these boys are well aware that they are watching films, and know their rules and conventions, therefore well know the difference between cinema and outside (p. 51).

The authors eventually settle on a process of looking through the interviews for elements that provide both individual, relevant details *and* ‘a basis for subsequent patterned generalisations’ (p. 52). Incorporating such features as recurring expressions amongst the boys’ talk (which could suggest the influence of external factors worth investigating), any apparent correlations and inconsistencies, and other surprising or incongruous references (or, indeed, omissions)⁴⁰, this process offers a structured method of dealing with a large amount of data, which also makes a genuine effort to enter into its study without first being influenced by any particular agenda.

⁴⁰ Barker & Brooks actually suggest seven such features, which could, I imagine, serve as a useful starting-point from which to approach any similar data. These are: repetitions, connections, distinctions, implications, key concepts (i.e. recurring ideas that interviewees apparently use to organize their thinking), modalities of talk (when interviewees ‘modify’ the overt meaning of something), and puzzles (the ‘incongruities’ mentioned above) (1998: 53).

4.5. Conclusion

This brief venture into film studies has established a number of strategies for examining masculinities in visual media, which it is hoped will prove useful in subsequent discussion of the original data introduced in this study. Our opening foray into film theory concentrated on the notion of ‘sites of masculinity’ – four aspects of male identity that provide provocative reference points for the investigation of cultural constructions of masculinity: the body, action, the external world, and the internal world. A further key idea we have encountered in this chapter is the notion of male identification with female media protagonists – not necessarily because this analysis seeks to travel down the road of queer theory and immerse itself in the ‘fluidity’ of gender roles, but rather to remind us that masculinity itself is a kind of performance, and one that may draw on apparently unexpected sources while still expressing coherent identities. Finally, a number of audience-focused studies have suggested that the most useful and relevant way of approaching the interpretation of any media text is with the input of those who use and enjoy it in the real world, with Barker & Brooks demonstrating a sensitive method of approaching the kind of interview-based data we are likely to encounter in such cases. Before introducing my own data and findings, however, it is necessary in the next chapter to explain my methodology in full.

Chapter 5

The Methodology of ‘Making Magazines’

Equipped with a fuller understanding of the construction of masculinity – including its influence on the way social roles are formed, how these are portrayed in the media, and how these two factors might feed into one another – we turn now to consider the present study. Unlike much of the empirical research we have so far encountered, this project involved a creative undertaking on the part of its subjects, engaging them in an assignment somewhat different to those involved in most purely interview-based or focus group-led research. For this reason, this chapter will begin with a short overview of the relatively recent branch of sociological research concerned with what we might term ‘creative’ methods, in order to locate the present study within a context of related work on media and identity. The aims and methodology of the present study will then be outlined, along with an analytical framework from which to approach the results, and, finally, an assessment of the value and validity of creative methodological techniques in general.

5.1. Creative Research Methods

The decision to employ creative methods to investigate the opinions and beliefs of members of the public appears, in several studies, to arise from a sense of dissatisfaction with the scope of more traditional techniques. Such criticisms often concern the anecdotal nature of data collected in interviews or group discussion, suggesting that, while obviously central to any kind of analysis, the interviewee’s ‘own words’ are not always immediately reliable, sufficiently considered, or even fully representative of the speaker’s personal position.

Some critics have suggested, for instance, that, although audience members may be able to demonstrate in conversation an active awareness of the ways in which they are addressed by the media (sometimes going so far as to explicitly state

their rejection of the ‘messages’ apparently being sent out to them), this does not necessarily preclude the possibility that they might still have been influenced by the media at some level. Arguing that ‘recognizing the role of “interpretation” does not invalidate the concept of “influence”’ (p. 160), Eldridge, Kitzinger & Williams (1997) illustrate this notion with a method of creative research often termed the ‘news game’ (p. 161). This technique involves asking participants to create and subsequently evaluate a media report of some kind, such as a succession of images accompanied by commentary, a full-length newspaper article, or a script for a news bulletin. An interesting result of the method is that, whilst ostensibly presenting their own viewpoints, subjects often appear to imitate the language and editorial slant of popular news providers. In studies such as Eldridge *et al.*’s ‘Child Sexual Abuse and the Media Project’ (pp. 168-179), for example, participants composing captions for still photographs taken from media reportage of a child abuse case reiterated broad tabloid clichés like ‘concerned parents’, ‘interfering social workers’, ‘predatory paedophiles’, and ‘ritual abuse’. Further discussion recorded by the researchers indicated that such media constructions apparently figured heavily in the dominant perception of the events behind the stories⁴¹. In this respect, asking participants to create *as well as* discuss a media text arguably gave Eldridge *et al.* a deeper insight into attitudes held at a more unconscious level by the participants involved – beliefs that the subjects took ‘as fact’, and which they therefore might not have explicitly discussed in an interview.

Similarly dissatisfied with the ‘too abstract’ (p. 7) nature of focus group discussion, MacGregor & Morrison (1995) devised their own, slightly more elaborate version of the news game technique in which respondents were asked to edit together an audiovisual text using footage from televised news reports of a Gulf War air strike. Specifically addressing concerns of media influence, the instructions that the researchers gave to participants encouraged them to create ‘a report that you

⁴¹ One possible criticism of news game exercises is that it is conceivable that, when participants reproduce existing media constructions in their own texts, they do so not because they necessarily think in terms of these constructions themselves, but because, consciously or not, they believe that this is what they are being *asked* to do – as if, for example, to ‘prove’ their media literacy. This is a valid argument, and one that researchers should bear in mind both when outlining the exercise and drawing conclusions afterwards. Discussion with the participants may help to clarify the experiment’s objectives and support the researcher’s hypotheses.

would *ideally* like to see on TV, not what you think others would like to see, [and] not what you think journalists would produce' (p. 9; authors' emphasis). Based on this remit, the 52 respondents, working in 11 groups, produced what MacGregor & Morrison describe as surprisingly similar news reports, all highly concerned with presenting 'ideal neutral versions' of events (p. 11), and favouring the 'best' footage supplied (that is, according to the authors, the material which was the most 'reliable' and 'comprehensive') (p. 10). An important argument put forward by the authors is that the *initial* opinions of the participants, as recorded in a pre-editing discussion, would have been reported as 'definitive' (p. 11) had the research been conducted purely as a focus group exercise, when, in fact, discussion conducted after the editing sessions revealed subtleties that had previously been undetectable. The participants' positions, the researchers argue, were 'modified as a result of the active engagement with the text' (pp. 11-12)⁴², suggesting that the research method employed here obtained more meaningful and accurate findings than those possible during a purely discussion-based investigation.

The work of Gauntlett (1997) moves on from encouraging subjects to rework and reevaluate existing media material to asking them to produce something entirely new of their own creation. The author recruited seven groups of schoolchildren in the shooting of video documentaries on the subject of 'the environment', filmed using video cameras on locations in and around their schools. Prior discussion with the children had established that much of their thinking on the subject was based on information provided by a proliferation of conservation-themed television programming aimed at young people in the early 1990s, ranging from factual or appeal-based segments of such children's schedule staples as *Blue Peter* and *Newsround*, to the storylines of contemporary family drama and cartoons (pp. 55-56). Therefore, Gauntlett argues, the children's filming of their own visual documentaries constituted an appropriate way of investigating their opinions, as the

⁴² For instance, the authors describe a situation in which participants reported an 'undesirable emotional tone created by the reporter' (p. 12) in one account, but were apparently unable to describe how they thought this had arisen, other than by picking out a word or two. It was only after they made their own versions – or, as MacGregor & Morrison put it, 'became active editors of the same text' (*ibid.*) – that they pointed out particular combinations of voiceover, picture and presentation style they believed to have created this tone.

method reflects the very framework of the media material they were, in effect, themselves analysing:

where the audience have received most of their input on the subject from the mass media, as it was established was the case with the environment and children in this study, then the videos which they produce can be assumed to reflect their understanding of which issues and angles are the most pertinent and pressing; and this can be presumed to have been influenced by the media (p. 85).

In this way, the study acts as both a document of the young people's understanding of the environmental concerns they believe relevant to their lives, and an analysis of the ways in which they receive information about this topic from the media (in particular, television). Taken as a whole, it provides the researcher with a sizeable amount of ethnographic data gleaned from time spent talking to the participants and facilitating the production of their videos, and also the finished documentary products themselves – texts which Gauntlett suggests may be rich with meaning as ‘constructed, mediated accounts of a selection of the perceptions of the social world held by group members’ (p. 93).

Gauntlett argues that there are many further advantages of this creative method. Like MacGregor & Morrison, he points out that primary discussion tends to represent, not the participants' considered opinions, but, in his words, a “‘brain dump” of *potential* interests and concerns’ (p. 150; his emphasis) – that is, a possibly misleading pile of information from which more representative and genuine data will likely emerge when the participants leave behind the relatively artificial situation of the focus group and begin interacting with each other with a more obviously constructive goal in mind (in this case, the filming of the video). Going beyond the problems and restrictions of collecting worthwhile data, Gauntlett also puts forward a case that video filmmaking may have benefits for its participants, offering them, for example, a certain degree of empowerment: firstly, in the sense that they are given a new way of expressing themselves beyond the boundaries of more widely established – and yet, to them, possibly restrictive – methods of verbal or written reportage; secondly, in that it could be argued that the participants are able to achieve a more positive sense of their communities and their own self identity by being given the opportunity to produce ‘alternative representations of themselves’ (p. 92) in a form of media that might previously have provided

somewhat critical or more negatively framed depictions of the same (for instance, in the case of less affluent inner-city areas). Similarly, there is no doubt that the process affords its participants a level of media education – at a basic level in the practicalities of filmmaking, but also in its encouragement of deeper thinking about the way information is disseminated and received, a process which, in itself, should eventually lead to more considered and worthwhile data being presented for the researcher. Finally, Gauntlett points out that the method is a definite step away from those that ask participants to select supposedly original opinions from a predetermined list. When taking part in a study such as this, respondents are free to construct almost any response to the research questions that they see fit – a potential which may seem disconcerting to the more traditional researcher (even if only in terms of presenting and analysing the data) but which the author here views as ‘a “risk” worth taking’ (p. 93).

All of this brings us closer to the study at hand, one similar to those above in the respect that it asked members of the public to produce a piece of media, in this case a kind of magazine. Perhaps its closest antecedent can be found in the work of Buckingham & Sefton-Green (1994: 195-209), where the authors discuss a satirical magazine entitled *Slutmopolitan*⁴³ produced by four female Media Studies students. The nature of their study differs from those previously discussed in this section in that the creative project involved was undertaken not in response to a research question laid out by the authors, but as a piece of A-level coursework through which the students were expected to demonstrate their media production skills. As a result, it might be classed as more of a ‘found study’ or analytical piece than an exercise in creative research, but there are several key reasons why it is considered relevant here. These pertain to the methodological philosophy underlying the authors’ conclusions – that is, the *way* their study works, the possible value involved for the participants, and how this value might benefit the study itself.

Turning to the first of these, it is clear throughout Buckingham & Sefton-Green’s writing that they wish to distance their analysis from any that privileges academic discourse as the ‘proper’ approach to material created by amateur authors.

⁴³ The name is obviously derived from that of the famously glossy magazine for young professional women, *Cosmopolitan*.

They state, with some honesty, that ‘Zerrin [one of *Slutmopolitan*’s creators], as a 17-year-old girl from a Turkish family, and ourselves, as rapidly ageing, middle-class male Media Studies teachers, inevitably have different agendas to explore’ (p. 199), and ask: ‘Given [the participants’] subjective and ideological investment in this project, is it in any way reasonable for us, as male teachers, to make our reading of the project its preferred reading?’ (p. 205). While at first this line of thinking may seem to strand the authors in a kind of analytical limbo, unsure of what they are qualified to say about *Slutmopolitan*, and even whether this would have any critical worth, the attitude could in fact be seen to *expand* the potential of the data collected. As with the news reports and videos produced by the investigations mentioned above, the writers have, on a primary level, a physical product (the magazine *Slutmopolitan* itself) rich with possible meaning and significance. Secondly, they have the girls’ own written analysis of their aims in producing the magazine, meaning that any conclusions can be based on the participants’ own intentions and opinions, rather than pure conjecture on the part of the researchers. Thirdly, the writers are able to acknowledge that they will inevitably form their own readings of the student’s work, what it means to them, and what they think it says about the students, all of these informed both by their contact with the participants and their previous research on the subject. Finally, there are the spaces between these three levels, in which meanings multiply, contrast, contradict and resonate. Granting the space for the existence of all these levels gives any study of this kind a wide scope – Gauntlett’s ‘risk’ may indeed have paid off.

The ‘value’ of creative research for its participants is a notion that we have already examined in relation to Gauntlett’s video project. Buckingham & Sefton-Green cautiously report ‘considerable intellectual confusion’ (p. 197) in the students’ own analyses of what they were trying to achieve within the pages of *Slutmopolitan*, pointing out that such central concepts as the titular ‘slut’ appear vaguely and contradictorily defined⁴⁴. However, they nevertheless place a high value on the range of social and sexual roles that the project enables the girls to explore

⁴⁴ The authors are unsure whether it is ‘sluts’ themselves that are the object of the magazine’s satire, or those who criticize ‘sluttish’ behaviour. They also admit to finding it unclear what the slut as a female stereotype represents in terms of power on the social scale, and in relation to gender politics.

and, crucially, ‘try on’ firsthand. If Gauntlett’s study allowed its children to put themselves ‘on TV’ in a positive light, then this project enables each female participant to experience ‘facets of her gender and sexuality as “other”’ (p. 199), an experience that may provide her with a critical distance impossible within the bounds of a traditional interview.

Such studies, then, find us starting to define a line of research in which I wish to place this investigation. The work of Gauntlett and Buckingham & Sefton-Green has begun to suggest that creative research methods may have their own unique benefits, and these will be returned to at the end of this chapter in an attempt to tie together the arguments supporting their validity. For now, we need to acquaint ourselves with the aims and methods of the present research.

5.2. Methodological Procedure

This study asked predominantly male participants to imagine a new lifestyle magazine aimed at men, and to then design a front cover and contents page representing this invented publication. Although those who took part did so under a range of circumstances, and with somewhat different resources available to them, each participant received the same basic instructions and answered the same follow-up questionnaire about their experience (with the exception of those in the prison-based group, for whom the survey questions were adapted slightly for reasons described later). The essential directions given asked participants to envisage ‘a men’s magazine that they would like to read, but which they also think would appeal to men in general’, in the hope that this might inspire not only an interesting hypothetical product but also a creative and personal composition with the capacity to reveal something about its creator’s own identity (as evidenced by what *they* would like to read) and their assumptions about *wider* notions of masculinity (evidenced by their attempts to appeal to ‘men in general’).

5.2.1. Evolution of the Methodology

The study had originally been intended to involve the participation of A-level students aged, typically, between 16 and 18. However, I became concerned that to limit the research to this age group would not accurately represent the wider readership of men's magazines, whose main body of readers are typically seen by their publishers as being aged up to at least 34⁴⁵. It was also feared that many sixth-form-aged students (a majority of whom could be expected still to be living at home) might even be too young to have gained the experience necessary to identify with the independent and highly sexually active 'young professional' reader apparently targeted by most men's titles. In fact, several of the covers designed by 16- and 17-year-olds in the earlier research sessions even appeared to demonstrate a degree of unfamiliarity with the men's magazine market in general, focusing more on computer games and expensive cars than any notion of a young male 'lifestyle'. For this reason, it was decided during the later stages of the data-collection period to substitute two groups of sixth-formers for groups made up of slightly older men aged between 18 and 38, in order to bring a wider age balance to the sample.

Recruiting groups of participants for research purposes outside the education system is a less straightforward task. Indeed, one of the reasons that college students had initially been considered was the comparative ease of access to similarly-aged subjects in environments perfectly tailored to the completion of written (or similarly paper-based) projects. Outside of the classroom, it seemed that participants would either have to be drawn from existing groups of some sort, who might be willing to take part in the project *en masse*, or simply individuals recruited in some way and encouraged to make magazine covers using their own resources and in their own time.

⁴⁵ EMAP Advertising claims that *FHM* reaches over a third of all males aged 15-24 in the UK in 2004 (see: <http://www.emapadvertising.com/magazines/nrs.asp>); *Nuts* currently defines its key audience as men aged 16-34 (<http://www.nutsmag.co.uk/advertise.php>); The National Magazine Company lists the median age of the *Esquire* reader in 2004 as 28 (<http://www.natmags.co.uk/magazines/magazine.asp?id=3>); *Maxim Online* quotes the findings of a 2004 MRI poll to describe its print equivalent as the '#1 reach magazine ... in the delivery of men 18-34' (http://www.maximonline.com/press_room/20040106_mri_spring.asp); Bercovici (2004) places the median age of the *GQ* reader at 32.

The original methodology proposal suggested that the study take place purely in classroom-based situations, with students designing magazine covers within an allotted time period and discussing their results. For various reasons, this early plan developed into a more complex structure of groups and participants, and it was decided that a website would help facilitate this, both in terms of ensuring that those taking part received the same information, and perhaps for recruiting new participants. A site entitled *Reading Into Magazines* was therefore made available at the URL <http://www.readinginto.com/magazines>, briefly detailing online the intentions of the study, giving instructions on how to take part, and displaying some of the magazine covers previously collected. An email address was also provided, via which people were encouraged to contact me about my research and send covers they had made. Of course, using the World Wide Web to conduct research brings with it its own problems and requires certain precautions, but, as the study progressed, the website became more a tool for communication between existing participants and me – rather than a driving force behind the research – through which people with whom I had already spoken about the project were able to access further instructions and, ultimately, send me the covers they had made.

Late on in the research stage, I also unexpectedly found the opportunity to work with a teacher at a high school near Wigan with the hope of gathering more data. The schoolchildren involved were of a yet younger age than previously encountered, being between the ages of 11 and 14. Following the concerns outlined above that such an age group was too far removed from the targeted audience of men's lifestyle magazines, I remained skeptical of pupils' ability to provide relevant results, but decided to go ahead with the research session for interest's sake. In many regards, however, my fears proved to be unfounded, as the 12 young men and eight young women from Haigh who took part went on to produce work of a standard often indistinguishable from that of the other, older participants. (Some possible reasons for this will be offered in the specific section relating to group 5 below.)

5.3. Overview of the Groups and Data

100 sets of magazine covers and contents pages were produced by 105 individuals in total, with this slight difference in figures due to the fact that three covers represented the combined efforts of two or more collaborators. 66 of the covers were created during classroom-based sessions, involving the participation of four groups of young men and one of young women, while a further 22 were begun during timetabled classroom sessions but completed in the students' free time. The remaining 14 covers were made by independent participants entirely in their own time. Table 5.3 below shows the sizes, age range, and location of each of the aforementioned groups. (It should be noted that the names of schools, institutions and individuals have been changed to protect the privacy of participants, although all descriptions and geographical locations remain accurate.)

5.3.1. Groups 1 and 2

The all-male members of groups 1 and 2 were drawn from a sixth-form of around 250 students at St. Michael's High School in Doncaster, a large town in South Yorkshire. The project was run as two class assignments for both first- and second-year groups of English A-level students, under the supervision of their usual teacher, for whom a lesson plan describing the aims of the research had been provided (see Appendix I). It also happened that this teacher had run a similar lesson in years past, in which classes were asked to think about the kind of language used on magazine covers and, in some cases, produce their own. After a short discussion of men's magazines with the current class, the students were encouraged to produce their own covers during the lesson, using any materials they wished.

Table 5.3. Composition of groups involved in the study					
Group no.	Group members	Group size	Number of scripts produced	Age range	Location
1	1st year English A-level students (male)	12	11	16-17	St. Michael's High School, Doncaster
2	2nd year English A-level students (male)	12	11	17-18	St. Michael's High School, Doncaster
3	1st year English A-level students (male)	11	11	16-17	Parklands Upper School, Doncaster
4	2nd year Marketing A-level students (male)	11	11	17-19	Guildhall College, Preston
5	Year 7, 8 and 9 high school students (male)	12	12	11-14	Haigh Community High School, Wigan
6	Young men in prison	11	11	22-38	Ashley Prison, Leeds
7	Young men	14	14	20-35	Nationwide
8	Female 1st year English A-level students	14	11	16-18	Parklands Upper School, Doncaster
9	Female year 7 high school students	8	8	11-12	Haigh Community High School, Wigan

5.3.2. Groups 3 and 8

At Doncaster's Parklands Upper School, where the number of sixth-form students totals over 350, the production of a magazine cover and contents page was set as a voluntary 'opt-in' English A-level coursework assignment to be completed by a mixture of male and female first-year students over their Easter break. The participants took part in a class discussion, during which the task was explained to

them, and were directed to the website for further information. The scripts produced by the boys were sorted into a batch labelled ‘group 3’, while the girls’ scripts became ‘group 8’.

5.3.3. Group 4

This group of male second-year Marketing A-level students attended Preston’s Guildhall College, one of Lancashire’s largest Further Education institutions, with over 4,000 full-time students registered and a further 25,000 studying part-time or attending adult learning courses. The session, which took place during a two-hour lesson in a college computer room, was introduced by the students’ usual teacher but conducted with the aid an outside researcher (myself).

5.3.4. Groups 5 and 9

Haigh Community High School is a mixed comprehensive attended by 1,125 pupils and located in Haigh near Wigan in the county of Greater Manchester. Like groups 3 and 8, the two groups of students taken from this school consisted of one male group (numbered 5) and one female group (9). Both groups took part in the making of magazine covers during a ‘free’ period caused by classes being split to take exams. As a result, the groups incorporated pupils from three different age groups – the academic years 7 (aged 11-12), 8 (12-13) and 9 (13-14) – all of which worked together on their scripts using the computer facilities present. Again, the use of the *Reading Into Magazines* website was encouraged, and some members of group 5 actually incorporated elements of it into their work by using images of magazine covers downloaded from the site.

5.3.5. Group 6

Young men serving short sentences for drug-related offences made up the 11 members of this group, whose creative work took place within a number of English classes at Ashley Prison, West Leeds. For security reasons, no researcher was present during these sessions, but the teacher had been familiarized with the aims of

the research in a preparation meeting with me, and followed the same basic lesson plan as that used by the schoolteachers.

5.3.6. Group 7

A process of ‘friendship pyramiding’⁴⁶ was employed to recruit a further 14 men aged between 20 and 35 to take part in the study. The members of this group did not know or come into contact with each other, and produced their magazine covers independently, based on instructions supplied by me. Some of these men I met in person, remaining present as they worked on the project to discuss aspects of magazines and masculinity with them, and answer any questions they had about the study; others took their directions entirely from the website and contacted me only when they had completed their covers and questionnaires.

5.3.7. About the Groups

Almost all of the participants in the project came from city locations in England. The expanding town of Doncaster, in which four of the groups were based, has yet to receive the Royal Charter confirming city status that it applies for every year, but, with its population of nearly 290,000, has more than double the residents of, for example, the certified city of Preston. The two Doncaster schools from which participants were drawn could generally be described as having working class populations, a vast majority of which is made up of white British pupils, and this is exaggerated by the sample who took part in the study, of whom all were white. Members of the Preston group, on the other hand, had a mixture of white and Asian ethnic origins, reflecting the higher Indian and Pakistani population of the city (14,000 of a total of 130,000 residents, where Doncaster has less than 2,000). This group could also be described as coming from a working class background.

⁴⁶ This technique was inspired by the writings of Kitzinger (1987), who attracted interviewees for her study of the social construction of lesbianism by asking friends to recommend other friends, and so on. She notes that such methods cannot be said to result in a random sampling of participants, but points out that they are able to achieve a ‘breadth and diversity of response’ (p. 87) within the context of a focused study. The method certainly brought an element of regional variety to my research, involving participants from London, Ipswich, Nottingham, and Manchester.

In contrast, the pupils of Haigh Community High School generally experience above-average socio-economic circumstances, according to the school's 2001 Ofsted report. Of the small number of pupils with an ethnic minority background here, only two were present in the research sample, in group 5. This school also differs from the others in that it is located in a small town, with the nearest city, Manchester, being about 20 miles away.

The remaining two groups differed primary in age from those already mentioned, ranging from 20 to 38, whereas all the school groups had been aged between 11 and 19. The prison-based participants were residents of Leeds, a large city in West Yorkshire with a population of 716,000. Like the Preston group, their ethnic composition mixed white and Asian British origins, but the sector largely represented residents of very underprivileged backgrounds in somewhat deprived inner-city areas. In contrast, the often self-selected members of group 7 represented a much more middle-class sample, in general owning or renting their own homes, and having access to computers of their own, which many used to design their covers. These men were, in all cases, Caucasian and came from a range of locations around England, as shown in Table 5.3.7.

Table 5.3.7. Locations of members of group 7		
Location	Number of participants	Age(s)
Bristol	1	33
Ipswich	1	23
Leeds	5	23, 27, 28, 33, 34
London	1	26
Manchester	2	23, 35
Nottingham	1	23
Preston	1	29
Todmorden	1	31
York	1	20

These figures give an average age, for group 6, of just less than 28 – which is also the mean age of the *Esquire* reader, but towards the upper end of the age range of *Nuts*, and slightly above the main age range specified in EMAP's profile of the typical *FHM* reader (see footnote 5). The reason that the composition of the members of group 6 has been presented in greater detail is that this group could be considered, above all of the others, to represent the 'ideal' young professional reader targeted by most men's lifestyle magazines. This is not to devalue the work produced by the school groups, as figures such as those in footnote 5 clearly show that men's magazines are regularly read by individuals as young as 15, but to highlight a particularly relevant section of the sample. The older school groups – based on academic-year splits of students aged firstly 16-17, and then 17-19 – obviously produce an average age of 17, while the two groups of younger school pupils had an average age of 12. The prison-based group had an average age of 24. Due to this group of prisoners' current circumstances, however, these men were perhaps the most distant from the lifestyle generally portrayed in men's magazines, although it should be noted that such publications nevertheless remained popular with them.

The preceding descriptions are crude in terms of the ethnic and socio-economic demographics they attempt to illustrate, but serve as a brief background sketch of the 105 people involved in the research. Before we move on to the material they produced as part of the study, it is useful to consider some of the strategies that will be employed as we explore and analyse their work.

5.4. Analysing the Magazine Covers

This study is essentially an investigation into visual communication. There is no doubt that the most striking element of the work produced by the participants is its collection of 100 fictitious magazine covers designed by members of the public. Faced with such a wealth of colourful and often complex images, it is almost tempting for the academic to rush headlong into a discussion of form, content, connotation and layers of symbolic meaning, as prescribed by a long tradition of art

history and interpretation⁴⁷. However, this study is also about actual *people*, and what they get out of reading magazines when an abundance of other visual and aural media surrounds them every day. The project asked them to distill their opinions on this subject into a visual representation of what they wanted to see when they opened up a magazine supposedly aimed at them – in effect, an act of communication to others of how they view themselves as young male magazine readers.

Through the study, not only are we looking at pictorial and even artistic work produced by participants, but also written descriptions of the intentions behind their use of images (in the form of the questionnaire shown in Table 5.4 below), and, in most cases, a written description of the intended content of the magazine (taking the shape of a proposed contents page). Before we go on, I wish to introduce the term ‘script’ to refer to the individual set of magazine cover and contents page produced by each participant. In some instances, these were both highly visual, and closely integrated by design features carried across the two elements; in others, an eye-catching front cover might have been accompanied by a straightforward written description or non-illustrated list of content. Some participants also felt that their covers were comprehensive enough in their coverage of what was ‘inside’, that an additional contents page was unnecessary.

Table 5.4. The questionnaire	
Question number	Question
1	Why do you think the front cover of your magazine would appeal to male readers?
2	How will the articles you have included in your magazine relate to men’s lives?
3	How is your magazine different to men’s titles already available in the shops?
4	Can you think of three words (or phrases) to describe the ‘typical’ reader of your magazine?

⁴⁷ See, for example: Woodford (1992); Acton (1996); Kress & van Leeuwen (1996); Rose (2001); Sturgis & Clayson (2003); and Laneyrie-Dagen (2004).

Question 1 developed from a specific desire to involve the participants in some visual analysis of their own, asking what it is about the images they have chosen that they think relates to notions of masculinity, and how these can be expressed in visual terms understood by men other than the author behind them (if at all). In a similar vein, question 2 was intended to draw links between the magazine contents and ideas of what men as a group might be perceived to ‘want out of life’. Question 3 was designed as a springboard from which respondents could say whether or not they felt that actual men’s magazines catered for their interests in a successful way. Lastly, question 4 delves further into the notion of the ideal reader, whilst also encouraging relatively simple answers that might later be incorporated into a slightly more quantitative search for shapes and patterns in the data, if desired.

Here, then, the magazine creators themselves are engaged in forming their own analysis of the material that they have created, a method that Gauntlett (2004) goes so far as to call ‘the answer to the problem of how you interpret an artistic or creative work’ (p. 7) in studies of this kind. He argues that the trend in previous work on visual communication has been for the author to lay out a case for the validity of all kinds of meanings existing in the heads of all different kinds of readers of visual texts, only to progress to a main body of work in which the author’s own readings of these texts are afforded greater importance than those of the ‘ordinary’ reader (pp. 4-5)⁴⁸. In cases where a critic has undertaken a wide or detailed survey of a particular genre of visual text – such as a study of Cubist artwork, for example – it is arguable that he or she may indeed have developed through experience a more informed and analytical level of insight, making their conclusions, at the very least, worthy of serious consideration. In this particular study, however, participants were involved in creating a visual text with a specific and rather more immediate agenda: that of representing and communicating notions of gender identity to a researcher (myself), using a format prescribed by me. Having

⁴⁸ This opinion may also be traced throughout other studies referenced in this thesis. In Chapter 2, for instance, we encountered McRobbie (1999) criticizing her own 1979 study of *Jackie* on the basis that she had valued her own readings as an academic over the voices of those who actually read and related to the magazine. Similarly, in Chapter 4, we looked at many different examples of film theory, discussing accounts and interpretations of films as diverse as *Rocky* and *Sunset Boulevard* before concluding that, while such analyses can sometimes offer interesting insights into certain cultural constructions and their changes over time, there is only so far they can take us before we have to consider some of the ways that wider audiences have reacted to the films in the real world – hence an increasing interest in audience reception studies.

direct, interactive access to the creators of the visual pieces – unlike, say, the present-day commentator on the paintings of Picasso – it would seem foolish not to involve them in the ensuing analysis, as interested as I was in hearing what they had to say in the clearest way possible. Forming my own thoughts on the magazine covers produced became, therefore, a process based, not simply on the texts themselves, but also on the comments and explanations of their creators.

We might therefore visualize this methodology as having the shape of a triangle: existing at its three points are the text, the creator and the researcher; along its three sides move the meanings generated by the processes of interpretation and analysis. By ensuring that the creators remain a part of the triangle, we foster a pattern of communication not dissimilar to the interesting levels of interaction and understanding observed between Buckingham & Sefton-Green and their research subjects above. In this way, although the ambiguities and potential barriers to objectivity encountered at the ‘interpretation stage’ are not in some way ‘solved’, they are at least addressed and, I would argue, incorporated as a positive part of this research methodology.

Recent movements in the field of art therapy offer a useful parallel with the philosophy of the study at hand. The roots of art therapy lie in the works of Freud (1927) and Jung (1959), in which the authors offer prescriptive methods for understanding the particular meanings of certain images as they appear, for example, in dreams and works of art. Both subscribe to the idea that a given image or concept acts as a kind of ‘universal’ human symbol – that is, its occurrence or appearance reflects a particular emotion, desire or psychological problem, the representation of which via a specific metaphor is understood unconsciously by all people. Traditionally, art theory applies similar notions to artworks produced by psychiatric patients, investigating what these images might reveal about the artist’s mental state. The work of Furth (2002), for instance, directly applies Jung’s symbolic strategies to an analysis of pictures created by patients undergoing therapeutic counselling, proposing methods of treatment in response to the imagery produced, while Betensky (1973) and Klepsch & Logie (1982) assess the problems and progress of troubled children through their drawings. Gauntlett (2004), however, has noted a shift in art therapy away from this prescriptive analysis by the ‘expert’ to the mutual

discussion between therapist and subject of what an artwork represents. In this way, the focus remains firmly on the thoughts and opinions of the subject (rather than the hypothetical interpretations of someone else), which constitute, after all, the raw ‘data’ in which any researcher is supposedly interested. Such an approach may well be the most appropriate and rewarding across all fields of creative research, a consideration that will inform all of the remaining chapters, in which we will look at the participants’ scripts in more detail.

5.5. Turning Readers into Editors: the Validity of ‘Making Magazines’

Several advantages of using creative means to explore people’s relationship to the media have already been outlined in some detail in the discussion of previous related studies above. While those such as MacGregor & Morrison and Eldridge *et al.* used them as a powerful way to demonstrate in practice the high level of media literacy amongst their participants, they also highlighted a more subtle finding: that audience members were likely to reiterate to a degree some of the conventions and attitudes of popular media when expressing opinions on the subjects in question. Nevertheless, the process of creating a piece of media themselves facilitated, in these researchers’ view, the collection of much more considered views from their respondents. This notion was borne out by the conclusions of Gauntlett and Buckingham & Sefton-Green, both of whose studies also ultimately gave audiences the option of replicating the style and content of media material that they had themselves experienced, or altering and even criticizing these to meet their own preferences. Both studies found elements of the latter within their data, especially in the case of *Slutmopolitan*, which appeared in many respects to be a direct parody of the style of many women’s magazines. This critical process is key to the aims of the present study, in which hypothetical magazines envisaged by participants may be compared to actual magazines available in shops, and the entire practice of taking part works towards stimulating comprehensive discussion amongst those involved.

The process can be seen as part of what Buckingham & Sefton-Green call ‘becoming critical’ (p. 206). This is not to suggest that the researcher is the

gatekeeper of such a skill and is imparting it to the less enlightened participants; rather, the actual process of going through the production of a ‘personalized’ media text – on the parts of both researcher and respondent – constitutes an act of learning in itself, about one’s relationship to the media form in question. As Buckingham & Sefton-Green put it:

‘Being critical’ is not a higher state of grace into which the elect are received. On the contrary, it is a social practice which takes place within specific social contexts and relationships (p. 208).

Returning for a moment to the parallel with certain trends in art theory discussed above, we may compare this process in aspects of communication studies to one proposed by McNiff (1998) as a desirable direction for art theory-based research:

I would like to see studies conducted which assess the extent to which the simple process of looking at an artwork together with a person in therapy energizes the image, the persons involved, and the immediate context. ... In his writings on active imagination, C. G. Jung repeatedly describes how the simple act of contemplating an image has an animating effect: ‘It begins to stir, the image becomes enriched by details, it moves and develops’⁴⁹ (p.204).

Here, McNiff suggests, in a way very similar to Buckingham & Sefton-Green, that the act of working on a creative exercise (or, in this specific case, contemplating a piece of ‘art’ of some description) not only enriches and deepens the response of the participant, but also the relationship between participant and researcher – perhaps strengthening the very basis of the research. It is to this mixture of creation, communication and education that we now turn, as we examine the ways in which the participants in this study approached the task, and the material they produced.

⁴⁹ McNiff here quotes from *Jung on Active Imagination* (Jung, 1997).

Chapter 6

The Procedure in Practice: Results of the Research Sessions

As the creative method employed in this study is somewhat original, it is important to gain a clear picture of the material produced by participants, and how this may be used for research purposes. We have already seen how the methodological procedure evolved from a fairly rigid schedule of school visits to a more flexible data-gathering process based on a wider variety of respondents and research environments. In Chapter 7, we will be using examples from the scripts created in these sessions to examine the validity of some of the theories proposed by previous writers on the subject of men's magazines, as discussed primarily in Chapter 2. First, however, we will concentrate on an overview of the scripts themselves.

6.1. Overview of Results by Group

An early consideration of this research was the matter of how familiar the (often young) respondents would already be with the range of men's lifestyle magazines available. This section will provide a brief overview of common features of content and style found in each group of scripts – and in the scripts as a whole – combined with a look at the authors' awareness of the market in general, as expressed in both the stylistic features of their magazine covers and their questionnaire answers.

One clue to the familiarity of an author with the commercial lifestyle magazine market is the extent to which they reproduce or adapt the general visual style of current magazines. Of course, the fact that a cover may be very different to those we are used to seeing on the shelves of newsagents does not in itself suggest that its author is not familiar with such publications. In some instances, however, it seems clear that the author has reappropriated the styles of other, perhaps more popular or

visible magazines; hence, in these particular cases, we might conclude that they are mimicking the materials that they are most familiar with, or the images that come to mind when they think of magazines in general, suggesting a possible unfamiliarity overall with those titles aimed specifically at men.

6.1.1. Group 1

11 of the 12 first-year students from St. Michael's High School used a combination of pictures cut from existing magazines and their own drawings to illustrate handwritten scripts, while one simply used pencil drawings.

Table 6.1.1. Scripts produced by group 1		
Magazine title	Creator(s)	Cover image
<i>3M (Mean Motors and Music)</i>	Justin & Matty	Sports cars
<i>Ego</i>	Michael	Collage of famous women's faces and bodies
<i>Fritz</i>	Gavin	Pencil drawing of woman's face and full body / Man's face (inset)
<i>G.C.S Magazine (Girls, Cars, Sports)</i>	Andrew	Near-naked woman smearing her body with peanut butter
<i>Just 4 Men</i>	Hamish	Bikini-clad women straddling car
<i>Men + Motors</i>	Steve	Woman in bikini top
<i>Menagize</i>	Tom	Shirtless male soap star
<i>Rave</i>	Kerr	Woman wearing bra
<i>Rush</i>	Gary	Woman in bikini top / Racing cars
<i>Speed</i>	David	Jordan and other women showing cleavage / Car
<i>Xtreme Men</i>	Aaron	Provocatively dressed Christina Aguilera

Of the covers produced by this group, seven approximate the general style of current commercial lifestyle magazines, featuring the publication name at the top of the page and a large central image surrounded by numerous ‘sub-headings’ listing the articles inside, occasionally accompanied by smaller images. Only two of these, however, include a sub-heading relating to and explaining their choice of cover star (‘Want to bag this girl?’ asks *Rave*, for example), while the other three feature seemingly arbitrary choices of female celebrities and models, not specifically anchored by any accompanying text. The similarly designed (and titled) *Rush* and *Speed* differ from this first group by comprising a mixture of pictures and text without an identifiable ‘main’ image, while *Ego* (Figure 6.1) displays a detailed collage of female figures with little surrounding text. Finally, *3M* (Figure 6.2), although by its own remit catering for lovers of cars and music, looks very much like a typical car magazine such as *Top Gear*.

Such results suggest that the group as a whole had a basic familiarity with lifestyle magazines, if not specifically those aimed at men, with just over half being fairly comfortable with the concept (Gavin and Andrew in particular produced covers very close to an almost professional men’s magazine standard). Several others looked more like magazines of related but different genres, recalling more specifically, for instance, the sorts of titles widely assumed to be read by teenage girls⁵⁰ and car enthusiasts. The fact that a number of other authors apparently lacked any great experience of men’s magazines was further supported by the fact that four appeared not to understand the question of how their magazines differed to those already in the shops when prompted by the questionnaire: Kerr and Gary simply left the section blank, while Mark and Michael misinterpreted the question⁵¹.

The questionnaire in general, however, did prove enlightening as regards the authors’ previous experience of the genre in question. Answering the first question,

⁵⁰ It is possible that boys of his age group have had more access to teenage girls’ magazines via classmates or siblings than they have to the ‘racier’ men’s magazines.

⁵¹ This may have been largely due to my regrettably confusing use of the word ‘titles’ to mean ‘publications’ in this question. When asked, for example, ‘How is your magazine different to men’s titles already available in the shops?’, several authors went on to talk about their choice of magazine *name*, as in Michael’s answer regarding the ‘title’ *Ego*: ‘I chose it because a lot of people/males can relate to it as they are either lacking it or have too much of it. And it is short and stands out and memorable’ (*sic*).

Andrew begins with the phrase ‘After researching other leading men’s magazines...’, suggesting either a deliberate investigation on his part into a possibly unfamiliar genre, or a euphemism for his own reading for pleasure. His magazine, *G.C.S* (Figure 6.3), clearly imitates the presentation and content of a title such as *FHM*, even including a hand-drawn barcode with the price in pounds and dollars on the cover. With its image of a naked woman, her breasts covered only by smears of peanut butter, it is also perhaps the most explicit cover produced by this group (and, therefore, arguably closest to those available in shops), although not necessarily by the standards of some published magazines. Gavin’s *Fritz* (Figure 6.4) takes this awareness of the market to a greater extreme, proclaiming, ‘It’z a real manz mag!’ as if to mock the shortcomings of the others available. His magazine is also clearly branded, often using the letter ‘z’ instead of ‘s’ to make words plural, and turning its own title into a new verb: ‘Letz get these sexy women FRITZED’.

The other magazines are generally further away from the concept of a lifestyle magazine, a fact reflected in their accompanying questionnaires. Justin & Matty explain that their creation, *3M*, is different to other men’s magazines because ‘it will feature bikes as well as cars’ and ‘will also have a free CD with it’. The first of these two statements might be more meaningfully applied to the realm and typical scope of car-themed magazines than men’s lifestyle magazines, which frequently make reference to all kinds of biking. The latter represents a real difference since, while the inclusion of a free DVD is not uncommon, no major men’s magazine other than the American *GQ* in November 1997 (which came with a recording of David Bowie’s 50th birthday concert in New York) has, to my knowledge, given away a free CD dedicated purely to music. Like the former statement, however, this feature of *3M* may form further evidence that it is conceived more as a music magazine (commercial versions of which regularly supply accompanying CDs) crossed with a car enthusiast’s magazine than a genuine lifestyle title⁵². The apparent awareness of other members of the group regarding men’s magazines extends to a view of their content as being firmly concerned with cars and women. Hamish describes his *Just 4*

⁵² Of course, we could also take the content of this script (especially when considered in the context of a study such as this) to be a comment on the notion of ‘lifestyle’ itself – that is, the author could be suggesting that music and cars are all a young man needs, with other ‘lifestyle’ concerns unnecessary.

Men as 'quite similar to other magazines however it contains less models of women, but more information about cars', while Steve asserts that '[m]ost men's magazines are full of naked women'. Demonstrating a slightly broader awareness of the genre, David names the '3 factors which are often associated with men's magazines' as women, sport and cars, but goes on to identify men's health and fashion as other common components.



Figure 6.1.

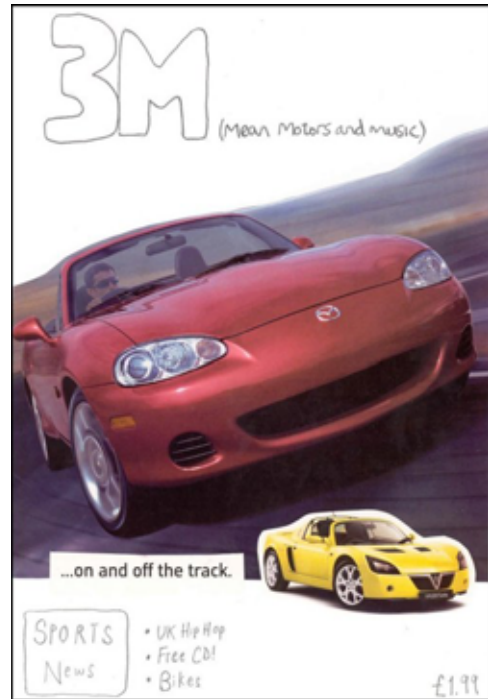


Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.3.



Figure 6.4.

6.1.2. Group 2

Of the second-year students at St. Michael's High, six designed their covers on computers, with the aid of desktop publishing software and images copied from the Web, while the other five used pens and pencils. No one from this group pasted magazine clippings.

Table 6.1.2. Scripts produced by group 2		
Magazine title	Creator(s)	Cover image
<i>Balls</i>	Scott	Paris Hilton in bikini / David Beckham in football strip (inset)
<i>Birds & Burnouts</i>	Sam	Woman emerging from behind car bonnet
<i>Car World</i>	Rob	Racing car
<i>Cheeky Monkey</i>	Chris	Christina Aguilera seen from behind / <i>Robot Wars</i> robot (inset)
<i>Close Shave</i>	Charles	Topless man lying on bed
<i>FHM</i>	Samuel	Topless woman / Car / Topless male singer (inset)
<i>Fine Weapons</i>	Greg	List of various weapons
<i>Guy's World</i>	Clive	Jordan posing next to car
<i>Revolution</i>	Liam	Topless woman / Male bodybuilder / Car / Computer
<i>T.Scream (Total Scream)</i>	Harry & Ian	Christina Aguilera lying naked on bed with guitar
<i>Twisted Generation</i>	Christopher	All-male music group N.E.R.D.

This group of students produced a similar set of covers to their slightly younger counterparts, with the availability of desktop publishing packages apparently both facilitating the production of some highly professional-looking covers by some members, while restricting others to thinking in terms of evenly spaced text- and picture-boxes. Eight of the 11 covers seem fairly obviously

intended as approximations of the design blueprint of popular men's lifestyle magazines, while another (*Revolution*, Figure 6.5) uses text and titles in the familiar way but opts for four competing cover images on the basis that, as its designer, Liam, puts it, 'most men like women, cars and gadgets' (*sic*). *Fine Weapons* lists the names of various weapons, such as 'guns, tanks, swords, daggers, knives', but its designer, Greg, suggests that these might be replaced by images of these on the finished cover, which 'would have a lot of things on it that men like'. Finally, as in the previous group, one magazine (*Car World*, Figure 6.6) is devoted almost entirely to cars, displaying on its cover a simple picture of one, accompanied by the text: 'Read about the Ford Focus RS. Free Poster inside'. Although its author, Rob, states that '[t]he front cover of my magazine will appeal to male readers because a lot of men like reading about car and woman' (*sic*), it is only on the contents page that we see anything relating to a subject other than cars, with the rather upfront content listing: 'Page 101-120 woman pics'.

Again, several members of this group (the creators of *Car World*, *Guy's World* and *Birds & Burnouts*) were unable to explain on paper how their men's magazines differed from those already available. Liam simply writes that 'it's not', while, in a similar vein, Samuel explains that his version of *FHM* (Figure 6.7) is 'not much different to men's titles already available in shops as those sell and are very popular so my magazine has a similar format'. Christopher, however, makes a criticism of current men's magazines, saying of his own:

It has more of a realistic sense to it as it doesn't try to make the reader believe in things that are virtually impossible – e.g. 'get the perfect body in two weeks', etc. Instead, it concentrates on what the reader is interested in: hobbies, appearance, and articles that focus on what is happening around the targeted audience.

This assertion that his content is somehow different to that of most men's magazines because it focuses on things that men are 'actually' interested in is reflected in a number of other answers: Harry & Ian argue that *T.Scream* (Figure 6.8) is more 'fun to read' because 'each of the topics mentioned are areas which directly interest most men', while Charles writes: 'magazines are normally about one thing for men, either cars *or* sport *or* women. However I have done a mixture of things'. In fact, such

responses would indicate that the authors are actually unfamiliar with the content of men's lifestyle magazines, which typically do cover a range of different subjects. Greg, the author of *Fine Weapons*, is perhaps more accurate when he states that 'my mag is different because there are no other gun and weaps mags on the market today'. There exist, of course, several magazines specializing in sport and game shooting, but the focus of his – designed to appeal to 'tough men' – is indeed narrower than that of any commercially available men's lifestyle magazines.

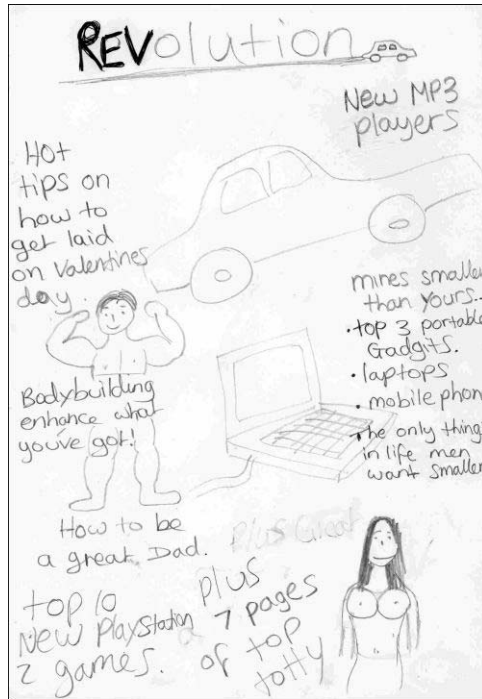


Figure 6.5.

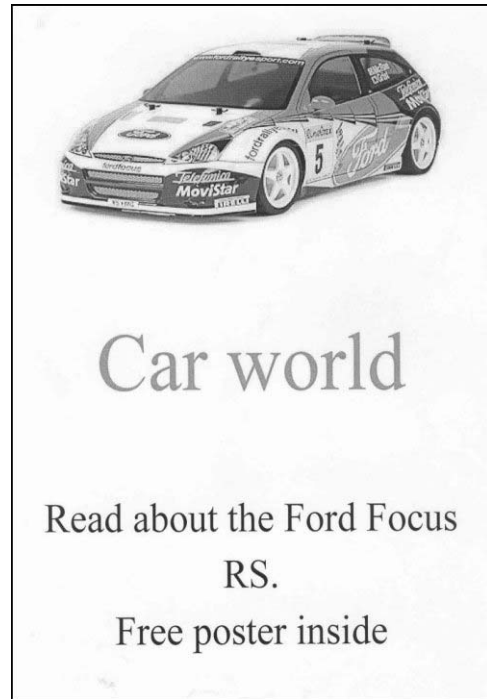


Figure 6.6.

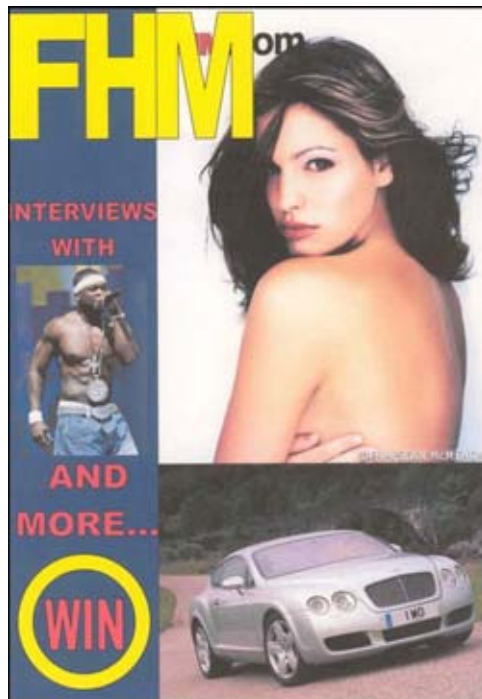


Figure 6.7.



Figure 6.8.

6.1.3. Group 3

Free to complete the project in their own time, ten of the 11 male students from Parklands Upper School used home computers and images downloaded from the internet to produce their scripts, while one produced a collage of headlines and pictures from existing print media sources.

Table 6.1.3. Scripts produced by group 3		
Magazine title	Creator	Cover image
<i>Barok</i>	Mick	Brian May / Grinning pig (inset) / Football team (inset)
<i>Hotshot!</i>	Bryan	Beyonce / Guinness logo (inset) / Football club crests (inset)
<i>Identity</i>	Mark	Television set with phrase 'BUY BUY KILL' / Celebrity faces with eyes blacked out
<i>Mens</i>	Angus	Boat on beach
<i>New Man</i>	Kyle	Man's face
<i>Parts</i>	Jake	Beyonce
<i>Ready 2 Go</i>	Kevin	Keira Knightley
<i>Rev</i>	Daniel	Female catwalk model / Man's face with 'dodgy beard' (inset)
<i>Suicide, Politics and the News</i>	Liam	Collage of newspaper photos, including Tony Blair
<i>What!</i>	Simon	Cars / Female celebrities / Football trophy
<i>X-Cess</i>	Matthew	Man behind the wheel of sporty car

In contrast to previous groups, nearly all the members of this class of first-year college students appeared to have a very clear idea of the conventions of lifestyle magazines aimed at men, and either faithfully reproduced these or took their design plans in completely different directions. Seven of the authors follow established

styles, adjusting the content to suit their personal tastes, while only one (*What!*) seems to aim for these but fall into the ‘trap’ of producing more of a collage than a recognisable magazine cover. Like *Fine Weapons* in Group 2, we find amongst this selection one script with a narrow, hobby-related scope – the misleadingly titled *Mens*, which features a sparse cover containing only one picture (of a boat) against a largely blank background, and the caption: ‘The new and up to date journal on boats’.

Regrettably, with this group of scripts came the least amount of respondent feedback, with only two of the authors completing a questionnaire to accompany their work, and attempts to obtain additional ones clashing with the students’ exam period and other commitments. However, those who did return questionnaires addressed the similarity of their work to magazines available with a relatively astute awareness of the market, even if this was to simply say, as Kyle did about *New Man*, ‘It isn’t really different’. Matthew contends that his *X-Cess* (Figure 6.9) would ‘include a wider range of articles’ than *Nutz* and *Zoo* on the basis that these titles are published weekly, while his would be monthly – although he does not go on to address the issue of how *X-Cess* would therefore compare with all of the other men’s magazines, which are also monthly.

Two scripts from this group stray significantly from the patterns so far established, in that they address topics not usually associated with men’s lifestyle titles, and feature completely different styles of covers, but still follow the instructions and remit of the task in a relevant way. The first of these, *Identity* (Figure 6.11), takes a critical look at some of the subjects commonly covered by men’s magazines, such as celebrities (‘Popular Idols: What do we really have in common? ... Our morbid fascinations with the pain of others’) and drinking (‘Alcoholism vs. Capitalism: The REAL reason addiction is on the increase’). Set against a backdrop of scripts containing articles *celebrating* alcohol and its effects – such as *Hotshot!*’s ‘St. Paddy’s day: How drunk did you get?’ and *Rev*’s ‘What’s your drink saying about YOU?’ (Figure 6.10) – such an approach takes a markedly different stance, suggesting room in young men’s constructions of masculinity for opinions that are critical and even condemning of certain traits of hegemonic masculinity. *Identity* is also one of the few magazines in this group not to feature a

cover star; instead, various celebrities have their faces obscured by the black bars commonly associated with accused criminals, implying an outright rejection of the right of such media figures to dominate the reader's thinking. Somewhat similarly, the magazine *Suicide, Politics and the News* (Figure 6.12) fills its cover with images and text literally 'torn from the headlines' of the press, laying the slogans 'Mr Blair misled us' and 'A one-man rebellion' over a photograph of the Prime Minister apparently sneering. Aside from being one of the only scripts in the sample to provide explicit coverage of politics, *Suicide* also adopts a clearly critical tone towards society's current figureheads, not only criticizing Tony Blair, but also eschewing the celebrities from the worlds of pop music and television favoured by the authors of most other magazines, to concentrate on alternative music, book reviews, and art exhibitions. This unusual juxtaposition of a photograph of the Prime Minister (yet no real reference to an accompanying article) with an overwhelming patchwork of the names of music groups, authors and artists suggests that the author might view the latter as the more authentic voices of his generation.

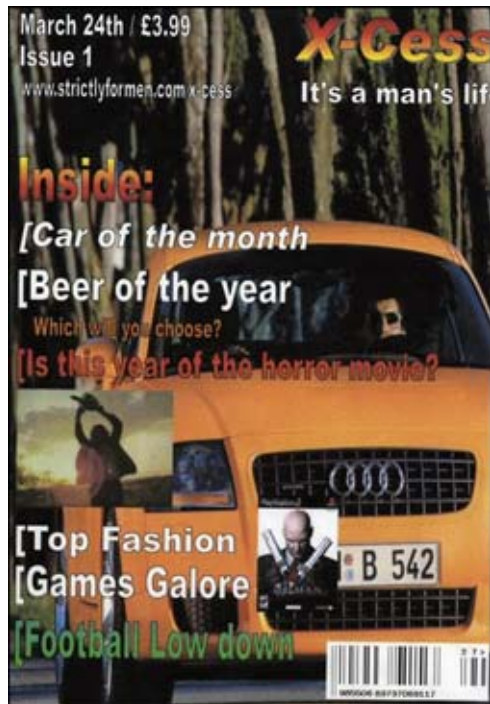


Figure 6.9.



Figure 6.10.

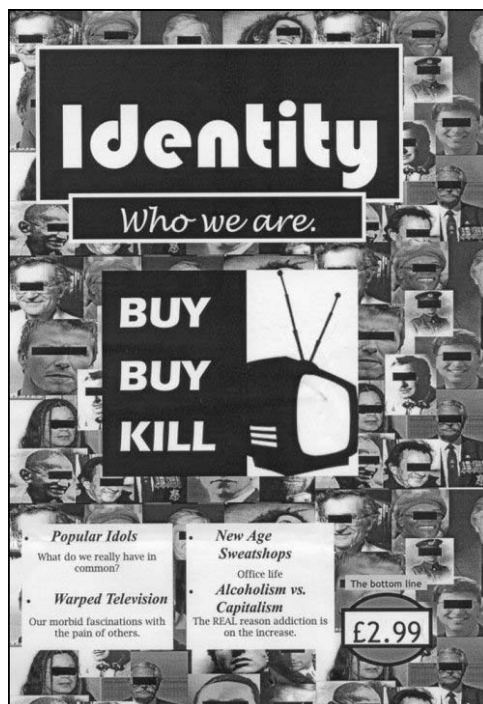


Figure 6.11.



Figure 6.12.

6.1.4. Group 4

The young male students from Guildhall College, Preston all displayed a particularly high level of computer literacy, and were eager to move from the earlier discussion-based segment of the session to the practical element, apparently viewing the opportunity to search the World Wide Web for pictures of female celebrities as a rare treat. Well within the allotted time of an hour and 20 minutes, they had produced a batch of often highly professional-looking scripts using Microsoft Word, many with quite elaborate use of varying fonts and imported images. In the final 15 minutes, they printed out their designs and completed the questionnaire.

Table 6.1.4. Scripts produced by group 4		
Magazine title	Creator	Cover image
<i>4 Men</i>	Liam	All-female musical group Mis-Teeq / Car (inset) / Beer (inset)
<i>Blaze</i>	David	Soap actress in bikini top
<i>FMM (For Me Magazine)</i>	Russell	Keira Knightley
<i>FMP (For Men At Play)</i>	Kieran	Near-naked female models / Car / Female model on motorbike
<i>Laid Bare</i>	Michael	Woman in bikini
<i>Limitize</i>	Carl	Woman in bikini top
<i>Mens Wealth</i>	Ravinda	Female celebrities / Car
<i>Only Men</i>	Anthony	Provocatively-dressed woman sitting on car
<i>Rush</i>	Lee	Robert Downey Jr.
<i>S & M (Sophisticated and Manly)</i>	Rameez	All-male musical group The Cooper Temple Clause
<i>Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll</i>	Jonathon	Psychedelic swirl

Again, the covers in this group fall into several increasingly recognisable categories: those that look almost exactly like already-available men's magazines (in this case, four); those that clearly aim to, but lack the design 'finesse' of these

(another four); those which look more like magazines of other genres (two covers, of which *S & M* adopts the style of a music magazine, while *Rush* resembles a typical men's magazine in all but choice of cover star – in this case, a man); and those that are more singular (*Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll* (Figure 6.13), which places simple text onto a patterned background).

Two of the authors here describe their magazines as no different from others they have read, with one of these certain that those on sale cater for him perfectly, asking, 'why would you make a magazine any different than the content in the ones already out?' (Michael on his *Laid Bare*). The rest of the group wanted to create a magazine that would be 'better' than those in the shops, but sometimes have difficulty expressing how this might be so. Liam asserts, for example, that his *4Men* (Figure 6.14) 'offers much more than other magazines because [it] holds exclusive interviews with the most famous celebrities and features articles that other magazines would not dare have in their magazine', yet there is nothing listed in the contents of *4Men* itself to support this claim. Similarly, the authors of *Limitize* and *FMP* claim to be bringing together *many* interests common to men in one magazine, apparently unaware that this has long been the intention of established titles like *FHM* and *GQ*. Kieran writes:

Most men's magazines have either lots of women modelling in them or it's just about football or just about cars and motorbikes. My magazine covers all these points so men would rather buy my magazine to buying several different ones.

Finally, two authors did seem conscious of the existing market, but made efforts to take their magazines in a slightly different direction. Lee's *Rush* (Figure 6.15) has a mildly cynical attitude, similar but less unforgiving than those of Group 3's *Identity* and *Suicide, Politics and the News*, which it applies to real-life scenarios that might be faced by many men, such as 'Meeting The In-Laws' and 'Dealing With A Difficult Boss'. He explains: 'I think having a "bad-boy rebellious" image – i.e. black and white cover, Robert Downey Jr etc. – coupled with straightforward lifestyle articles makes it slightly unique'. This different approach also extends to having a male cover star, a choice that is relatively rarely reflected in real-life magazines aimed at heterosexual male readers. *FMM* (Figure 6.16), on the other

hand, has a female cover star in actress Keira Knightley but deliberately tries to avoid objectifying her image. Describing the relatively restrained image used, Russell writes:

Most men's magazine's front covers have photos of models that are usually wearing sexy clothing such as 'bikinis' or underwear, where mine does not have as much nudity, it just contains photos that are casual but still very appealing.

This shift of focus appears to extend beyond *FMM*'s use of pictures to its articles, as evidenced by the text that accompanies its cover image – 'Keira Knightley talks about life as an actress, talks about her new movie' – which avoids describing the cover star's physical appearance, and instead refers to her career and life.



Figure 6.13.



Figure 6.14.

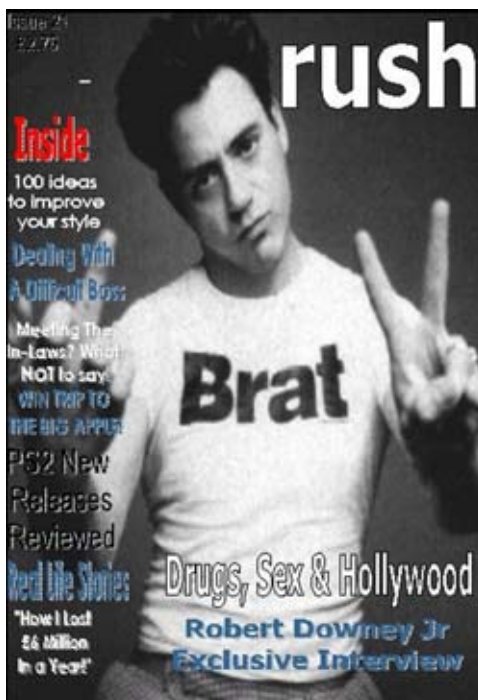


Figure 6.15.



Figure 6.16.

6.1.5. Group 5

These 12 Haigh Community High School students all designed their magazine covers with the aid of computers, using the World Wide Web to search for images. None chose to complement their cover with a contents page, but all but one turned in a completed questionnaire. The research session took place in a classroom, with pupils taken from the first three years of high school, under the supervision of a teacher who had been briefed on the aims of the investigation.

Table 6.1.5. Scripts produced by group 5		
Magazine title	Creator(s)	Cover image
<i>Bel FL</i>	Robert	Sports car / Footballer
<i>Fast Cars Women</i>	Mohammed	Many small images of cars and scantily-clad women
<i>For the Real Men!</i>	Arran	Text on a plain yellow background
<i>Glory</i>	Deacon	Christina Aguilera
<i>Mania</i>	Tyran	Footballer / Victoria Beckham / Katy Price / Car
<i>Men Weekly</i>	Tyler	Many small pictures of cars and bikini-clad women
<i>Mens</i>	Josh	Topless women / Car / Tanks
<i>Mens Mag Not for Women</i>	Jordan	Man kissing a woman's cheek in a café / Female model in swimsuit
<i>Menz Mag</i>	Ryan	Female model in swimsuit
<i>Pecks</i>	Joshua	Ferrari 360 Modena
<i>Power</i>	Martin	'Sexy girl' / 'Sexy jag'
<i>Thriller</i>	Tom	Near-naked women posing on cars

It had been a major concern that the members of this group (along with their female classmates, group 9) would be too young to be familiar with the concept of men's lifestyle magazines. As we can see from Table 6.1.5, however, the content of

their covers is not dissimilar to those of the preceding four groups, and this does not appear to be the case. While this could mean that high school students in general share a similar understanding of the magazine market – which is indeed likely – one further fact may be relevant: this research session took place two years later than those conducted at the Doncaster and Preston schools. Chapter 8 of this thesis describes the ways in which the men's magazine market itself changed over the period during which this study took place, and I would argue that these patterns, too, had some bearing on this younger group's perhaps surprisingly high level of media literacy. Not only had lifestyle magazines for men become even more entrenched in popular culture by 2005, but also a new breed of *weekly* men's publication had arrived in 2004, and gone on to become a significant and influential success. Incorporating television listings and more celebrity 'gossip', the frontrunners, *Nuts* and *Zoo*, may have proved more accessible to younger male readers than the more established, expensive and, in some ways, arguably more intensely lifestyle-focused and 'adult' monthly titles, resulting in an increased familiarity with the role and philosophy of this new genre of men's magazine, as well as the men's market in general. These ideas will be returned to in Chapter 8, but, for now, we will consider the actual scripts produced by group 5.

All of the magazines focus on a range of topics, with none limiting themselves to a particular 'male' hobby or interest, suggesting again that the participants are familiar with the notion of a men's lifestyle magazine. The subjects themselves – cars, football and, as Tom's *Thriller* puts it, 'sexy women' (Figure 6.17) – address the usual interests, but there are a number of items unique to the group. Josh's cover for *Mens* (Figure 6.18), for example, lists 'charity' as a major subject inside, possibly inspired by a contemporary interest in charity records fuelled by the single '(Is This the Way to) Amarillo', which spent several weeks at the top of the pop chart at the time of the research session. The video for this song featured the popular comedian and famously working class 'lad', Peter Kay, perhaps legitimizing or 'making cool' a link between young masculinity and charity work. Similarly expanding the spectrum of legitimate male interests, the cover of *Men Weekly* states: 'On this issue we interview ... Calvin Klein as he shows us what a life of designing

clothes is like’ – an incidence of a script presenting without irony a subject (in this case, fashion design) previously firmly associated with women’s magazines.

In another singular trend, five of the magazines (*Glory*, *Bel FL*, *Mania*, *Mens* and *For the Real Men!*) offer some prominent combination of quizzes, competitions and prizes, which may be a possible indicator of the slightly different interests of this younger readership. Taking this notion further, the ‘cover star’ of *For the Real Men!* (Figure 6.19), represented rather cleverly by the plain yellow rectangle of the magazine itself, is the cartoon character SpongeBob SquarePants. Such a dedication might indeed suggest a more childish magazine on the surface, but it also seems clear that the creator, Arran, is attempting a humorous and ironic juxtaposition of the magazine title – the somewhat unrealistic and therefore satirical-sounding *For the Real Men!* (with its use of an established yet now widely criticized as ‘sexist’ term, and an exclamation mark) – with a comic ‘personality’ not often associated with ‘real men’ at all⁵³. Describing himself in his questionnaire as ‘some one who knows what men today whant’ (*sic*), Arran makes his witty, light-hearted approach explicit with the observations that his magazine is ‘funny and attractive’ and ‘takes the stress off[f] a troubled man and gives him a good laugh no matter how sad you are’.

A further idiosyncrasy appears on the cover of Jordan’s *Mens Mag Not for Women* (Figure 6.20). Adjoining the customary image of a female model in a revealing swimsuit is a photograph of a man and woman drinking coffee at an outside café, the former planting a kiss on the cheek of his partner. As well as being the only representation of a black man who is neither a footballer nor hip-hop artist amongst the entire sample of scripts, this is the only front-cover portrayal of an actual relationship, as defined by the accompanying caption: ‘Look inside for jobs, dates and girlfriends’. Such content amounts to an obvious indicator of the magazine’s intended focus on male lifestyles, but it also sets up an interesting dilemma. On one hand, the cover puts forward a surprisingly progressive (in terms

⁵³ In fact, as well as being fictional, animated and predominantly viewed as a children’s character, SpongeBob is also widely seen as something of a ‘gay icon’, having been ‘outed’ by American Christian pressure groups such as ‘Focus on the Family’ after being spotted regularly holding hands with his male friend Patrick (a pink starfish), and declared a corrupting influence on young minds (see Ryan (2005), and *BBC News Online* (20 January 2005)).

of many men's magazines) representation of an apparently loving adult relationship. On the other, it reiterates the notion of the young man 'on the prowl', by also providing a scantily dressed, conventionally beautiful female model for the reader's consideration, as well as offering the strapline, 'It's not for girls' (which, when coupled with the 'not for women' stipulation of the magazine's name, sends out an unambiguous – if likely playful – message of male dominance)⁵⁴. Various theories outlined in Chapter 2 (regarding the contradictions found in lifestyle magazines) and Chapter 4 (regarding 'incoherences' in films such as *Dead Poets Society*) should have prepared us for these kinds of inconsistencies, however, and we will examine their appearance in this study in greater detail in the next chapter (see Chapter 7, section 7.3).

⁵⁴ The slogan 'It's not for girls' also appears in a long-running, tongue-in-cheek campaign for the chunkily 'masculine' chocolate bar, Yorkie.

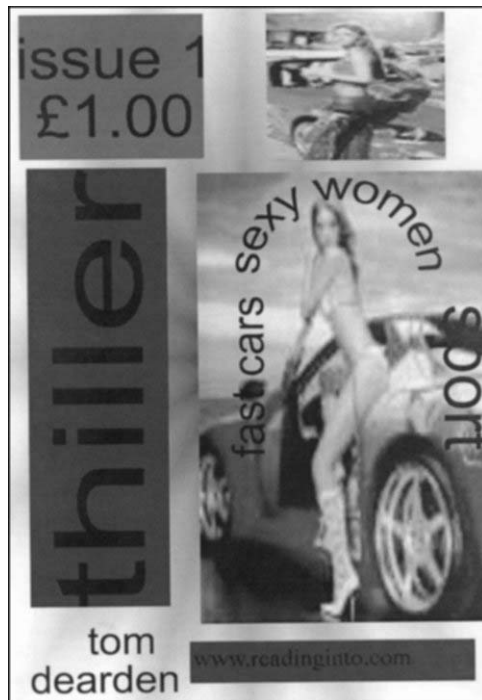


Figure 6.17.



Figure 6.18.



Figure 6.19.

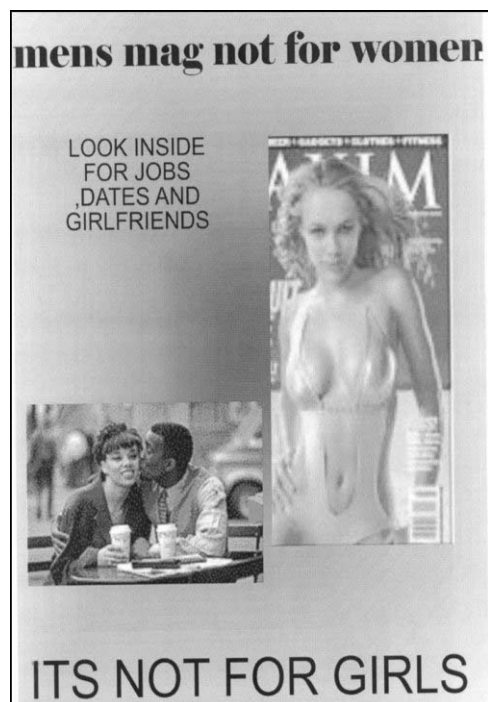


Figure 6.20.

6.1.6. Group 6

The inclusion of a group of prisoners in the study was carefully considered, weighing their viability as genuine readers of men's magazines against the arguably very different circumstances under which they now lived their lives, and how this might potentially distort the findings as a whole. However, since the majority of men in this proposed group were serving relatively short sentences (typically of less than five years) for mainly drugs-related offences, it seemed that their lives remained sufficiently comparable to those of other magazine-reading men to justify their involvement in the project. Taking into consideration, too, the fact that the members of this group themselves came from a variety of backgrounds, it was decided that they formed an interesting and suitably relevant sample, and so a research session with them went ahead.

Conducting research inside a prison proved to be an entirely different experience to working with a school. Not only was I submitting a lesson plan to a teacher in the institution, but this also had to be approved by the prison's education board, and, for reasons of security, I would not be present during the research session, nor able to interview participants directly. Nevertheless, there seemed to be little reason why the project could not be feasibly carried out to produce some useful results.

The first prison-based session produced seven handwritten scripts, ranging from elaborately illustrated and coloured-in covers to more symbolic 'layout maps' detailing the basic images and written content to be included in the author's magazine. An immediately noticeable difference to those produced by all the other groups is that only two of these covers shows a female model, instead more often opting for male bodybuilders (an image rarely found in any other group), musical equipment and cars. The questionnaires returned were also much less detailed, possibly due in part to their teacher's observation that the group disliked 'filling in forms' and distrusted any kind of request for personal information, including even their names. Therefore, for a subsequent return session, I decided to alter the instructions slightly, downplaying the 'data collection' element and encouraging participants to produce a more simple written list of the visual elements and text to

be used on the cover (see Appendix II for an example of this revised questionnaire). This resulted in a further four scripts based entirely on written descriptions of the content and style of the imagined magazines, backed up by an amended version of the usual questionnaire.

Table 6.1.6. Scripts produced by group 6		
Magazine title	Creator	Cover image
<i>Body Builder</i>	Ainsley	Mike Tyson in boxing gloves / Strongman lifting weights
<i>Body Builder Weekly</i>	Lee	Face and upper body of muscled man
<i>For Him</i>	Jim	Paper aeroplane / ‘Scratch and sniff thong’ / Saddam Hussein
<i>Gangz of England</i>	Nigel	Male graffiti artist pointing gun
<i>Mixin It Up</i>	Gormley	DJ stand with record turntables
<i>Muscles</i>	Ahmed	Male bodybuilder in trunks, lifting weights
<i>Ram Raids</i>	David	Provocatively dressed woman bending over car bonnet ‘with a dirty smile on her face’
<i>Smell’s Like</i>	Stephen	Guitar / Led Zeppelin (inset)
<i>The Lot</i>	John	Kylie Minogue lying on car bonnet in bikini
<i>Top Speed</i>	Zaffer	Fast car
<i>Untitled</i>	Jamie	Two male footballers

The members of this group were all familiar with a range of men’s magazines, perhaps due to their higher age in comparison to the school-based groups. In a discussion beforehand, they produced the following list of publications that they considered to fall into the genre: *FHM*, *GQ*, *Loaded*, *Esquire*, *Bizarre*, *Max Power*, *Fast Car*, *Nutz*, *Mixmag*, *Boys Toys*, and *Men’s World*. As in other groups, car magazines such as *Max Power* and music-oriented titles like *Mixmag* appear to be considered by many men as men’s lifestyle magazines. *Fast Car* widens the scope of

the traditional car magazine to include photographs of naked women in its ‘Honeyz’ section; *Boys Toys*, devoted to all forms of ‘gadgets’ from cars to mobile phones, is ‘aimed at men who want to get the most from life’⁵⁵; *Bizarre* mixes articles and pictures concerned with the offbeat and extreme with copious female nudity; and, finally, *Men’s World*, was a pornographic magazine for heterosexual men, in British circulation throughout the 1990s, but which no longer appears to be published.

Despite obviously being familiar with a number of lifestyle magazines, the group as a whole produced the set of scripts furthest removed from their conventions and content. A full six cater for narrower interests such as football or bodybuilding, such as *Muscles* (Figure 2.4). Another, *Gangz of England* (Figure 6.21) – which includes content listings for ‘Drugs & Alcohol’, ‘raciting’ [racketing], ‘women of the ghetto’, ‘pitt bulls’, ‘Gunz’ and more (Figure 6.22) – targets a niche market for which no equivalent existing magazine appears to cater. The remaining four scripts represent more fully-rounded men’s lifestyle magazines: *The Lot*, *Smell’s Like* and *Ram Raids* are fairly straightforward mixtures of car articles, music reviews, photographs of women, relationships advice and fashion, while *For Him* (Figure 6.23) includes similar content but also contains elements suggesting that it is partly intended as a satirical comment on the genre, offering ‘10 free gifts’, ‘Cut out and keep acid’, and articles entitled ‘Scientific breakthrough: scratch and sniff thongs’ and ‘Make your own plane’.

⁵⁵ The *Boys Toys* website describes the magazine as follows: ‘Firmly aimed at men who want to get the most from life, we target 18-40 year olds showcasing and testing a diverse range of the latest toys’ (http://www.boystoys.co.uk/product_info.php?products_id=88).



Figure 6.21.



Figure 6.22.

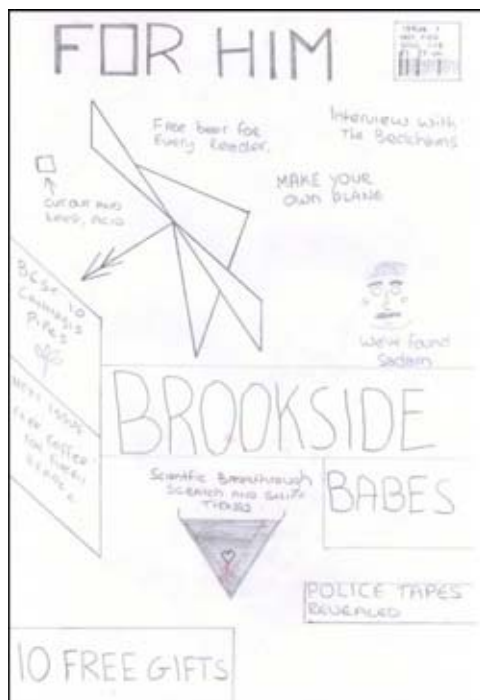


Figure 6.23.



Figure 6.24.

6.1.7. Group 7

Friendship pyramiding produced 14 scripts by men aged between 20 and 35, all of which involved an element of desktop publishing. This proved to be the most visually diverse set of front covers, ranging from the fairly typical formula of text laid over a picture of a celebrity, to images of alien life forms, classic art, and even artwork painted especially for the task using oil and canvas.

Table 6.1.7. Scripts produced by group 7		
Magazine title	Creator	Cover image
<i>Between the Sheets</i>	Matthew	Small pictures of male soap stars, gym-toned male, and <i>Sex and the City</i> cast
<i>Blue</i>	Alan	'Internet babe of the year' Trish Stratus showing cleavage
<i>The Cellar Door</i>	Joe	Kandinsky painting
<i>Cult</i>	Gareth	Monica Bellucci in tight top / John Lennon (inset)
<i>GQueer</i>	Steve	Quentin Crisp
<i>Gotta Hav' It</i>	Matt	Meg Ryan raising fist
<i>Men-Tal</i>	Simon	Man giving thumbs-up
<i>Mentor</i>	Nathan	Alien life form
<i>Nip/Tuck</i>	Richard	Naked man in bath
<i>Reason</i>	Scott	Topless Will Young
<i>Stud</i>	Tony	Topless Robbie Williams / Angelina Jolie in catsuit
<i>Tat!</i>	Chris	TV actress Emma Caulfield / Eric Cantona in football strip (inset)
<i>Unzip</i>	Christopher	Oil painting of a man's crotch in jeans
<i>"Whatever"</i>	Dom	Many small pictures of Michael Jackson

This section of the sample was the only one in which participants were not drawn from a pre-existing group of some kind, and, perhaps as a result, the research

carried out with members of this group took on a slightly different feel: for one, it offered the opportunity for a more personal, one-on-one level of contact with the participants, with the distractions and time constraints of classroom teaching absent; for another, the subjects were more isolated, their opinions and ideas not influenced by other participants (although it is possible that some discussed the project with friends not taking part), or mediated by the very dynamics of a group situation.

Whether due to the greater computer literacy of the members of the group or their wider experience of men's magazines, this selection of scripts most resembles the appearance and style of professional publications, although their content certainly does not. A broader range of topics are covered, including current affairs, financial advice, science, TV listings, gay life, and plastic surgery, with several of these afforded cover-picture status over the more traditional image of a female model or celebrity. This is reflected in the respondents' questionnaires, where even those who provided a more conventional front cover explain that they are trying to do something different with the actual magazine. Gareth, for instance, aims to combine 'the entertainment value of *FHM/Maxim* with the respectability and seriousness of *GQ/Esquire*' within *Cult* (Figure 6.25), while Chris says of his *Tat!*: 'I've not gone for the *Loaded* tits out approach. I'd try to be a bit more high brow but not holier-than-thou'. Such responses indicate that even regular readers of the sorts of lifestyle magazines available may occasionally take a fairly critical stance towards their preferred titles, aware of their differing styles and approaches and willing to select from what is on offer.

Four of the scripts (*Between the Sheets*, *Nip/Tuck*, *GQueer* and *Unzip*) are aimed at a gay male readership, but still cover a range of different audiences. The first of these titles, according to its creator, Matthew, is conceived as *Heat* magazine (a mixture of TV listings and celebrity gossip) with a gay slant, 'for young gay men who don't have the brains, money or bottle to purchase other gay men's mags', which he considers more overtly sexual than his creation⁵⁶. *Nip/Tuck* (Figure 6.26) is

⁵⁶ This comment – that Matthew's magazine is for readers who 'don't have brains' – seemed a little strange, so I emailed him for clarification. He replied: 'One of the biggest magazines [for gay men] is *Gay Times* but it's full of news about acts of parliament and gay men waving candles and I wanted to do something different' (personal correspondence, 16

somewhat unique – both amongst this sample and the mainstream magazine market – being devoted to articles about male plastic surgery⁵⁷. Although there is no mention of specifically gay-themed articles on the cover or contents page, its author, Richard, describes the typical reader as ‘gay’, ‘clean’ and ‘cultured’, implying that he considers gay males to be those most interested in cosmetic surgery, and also that a certain level of education or possibly a ‘high-brow’ nature is expected of readers, in contrast to the typical readership of other similar magazines (a common theme in itself, as we have already seen throughout the questionnaires). *GQueer* (Figure 6.27) shares this intent, aiming, in the words of its creator, Steve, to ‘put politics and debate back into the gay experience’, including apparently weighty sociological essays (‘Does the increasing blurring of sexual identities; and the replacement of old stereotypes with new ones based on fashion rather than sexuality mean the “gay struggle” is now a personal one?’), book reviews, and expert advice from ‘counsellors, legal and financial advisors, nutritionists etc’. Lastly, *Unzip* (Figure 6.28) continues the move away from the more youth-oriented gay men’s lifestyle magazines currently available in that ‘it sets out to appeal to mature gay men (at least over 30)’, as its author puts it. This does not appear to entail less of a focus on sex or scantily clad models, however, as the front cover promises ‘Graeme Le Saux’s first nude spread!’ and itself shows in close-up the crotch of a man’s trousers, albeit in the unusual form of an oil painting.

Two other magazines from this group appear not to target male readers of any specific sexuality yet feature cover stars in various stages of undress. Scott’s *Reason* (Figure 6.29) is a current affairs and news-based journal partly modelled, he admits, on *Time* magazine, but also incorporating the self-help-themed articles of many men’s titles (including, for example, advice on relationships, health and finance). Its cover image, perhaps surprisingly, is a topless Will Young spray-painted gold. Scott notes:

January 2005). Here, then, the author apparently used the phrase ‘having brains’ as an ironic euphemism for being politically active.

⁵⁷ The only other script to touch on the issue of cosmetic surgery for men is *Nimiety*, also a gay men’s magazine but created by a female member of group 7, and described below.

The example front cover would have general appeal to a cross section of readers due to clever use of imagery. This will include in this particular instance gay men, due to the subject matter. However, it is not intended to be a gay lifestyle magazine in any way.

This is possibly more a case of the author, himself a gay man, simply bringing together two different elements that obviously interest him – the serious journalism found in broadsheet newspapers and news magazines, and the titillating photographs associated with most men's magazines – and trying to justify the mixture in terms of a potential readership.

Tony's *Stud* (Figure 6.30), in contrast, features both male *and* female cover stars in revealing attire, but seems to be aimed at a predominantly heterosexual readership. Although the main photograph shows a shirtless and 'posing' Robbie Williams, no mention of his possible allure is made in the questionnaire, while it *is* suggested that the accompanying image of Angelina Jolie (who is, in fact, more fully dressed) 'would get most males interested as she is an action babe with a stunning body'. Tony also suggests that the main feature, concerning Williams being thrown out of a strip club, might also cause male readers to think 'we may see some boobs', further encouraging them to buy the magazine.

Two final scripts, *The Cellar Door* and *Men-Tal*, could be described as 'anti-men's magazine magazines', differing from each other in that, while both take a very critical view of the genre and attempt to turn convention on its head, the former strives to find new possibilities of style and content, whereas the latter takes magazine conventions to surreal and bizarre extremes. The cover of *The Cellar Door* (Figure 6.31) has no text other than its own title, and employs as its only image a full-page reproduction of an abstract painting by Kandinsky; the script's author, Joe, calls it 'antithetical to the brash iconography of most men's magazines ... offering a strong image that isn't a model or prominent sports/film star'. His intention is to provide a magazine 'in opposition to normal highstreet mags', this being one that avoids the 'banal' subject matter of these in favour of material that might 'enlighten' and 'broaden horizons'. Accordingly, the first article listed on the contents page is: 'Lad-Mags: Why they are tripe and reasons that you are a better

man for reading *The Cellar Door*', with the remaining articles covering topics such as religious wars, the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, the history of football, and etymology.

The creator of *Men-Tal* (Figure 6.32), on the other hand, expresses his dissatisfaction with the scope of existing men's magazines by applying their familiar format to a ridiculous and meaningless selection of subjects, such as: "I found out about bears": The shocking truth', 'All new slippers tested', 'Leather and lenses', and 'Grandma's footsteps'. His point appears to be that men's magazines might as well be full of nonsense for all the relevance they have to his life. He writes: 'maybe [*Men-Tal*] would open up a new dimension to the readers' thoughts about what is interesting', implying that the readers of current men's titles would benefit from some sort of eye-opening experience as regards the subjects they should be concerning themselves with. Whether *Men-Tal* is intended to provide this is not entirely clear, and nor are the sorts of subjects that the author does deem worthwhile. When completing the question asking for three words describing the magazine's typical reader, he offers the somewhat uncertain: 'Intriguing, weird, directionless'.



Figure 6.25.



Figure 6.26.



Figure 6.27.



Figure 6.28.

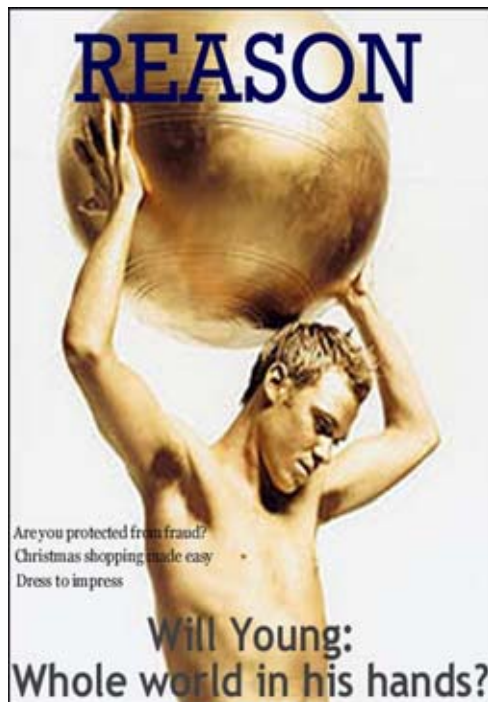


Figure 6.29.

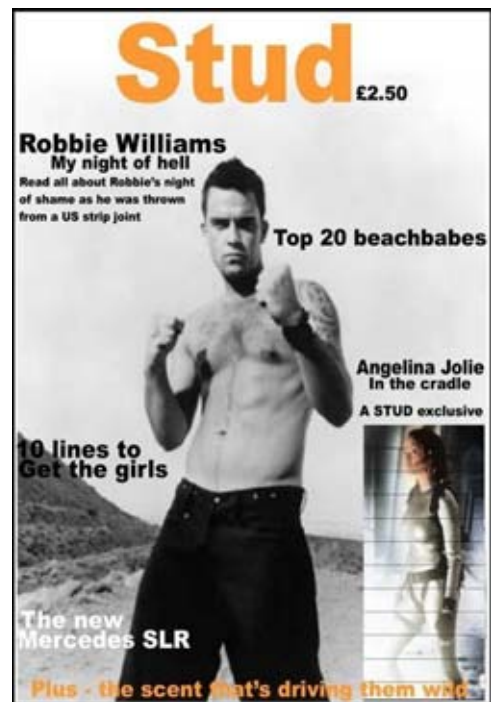


Figure 6.30.



Figure 6.31.

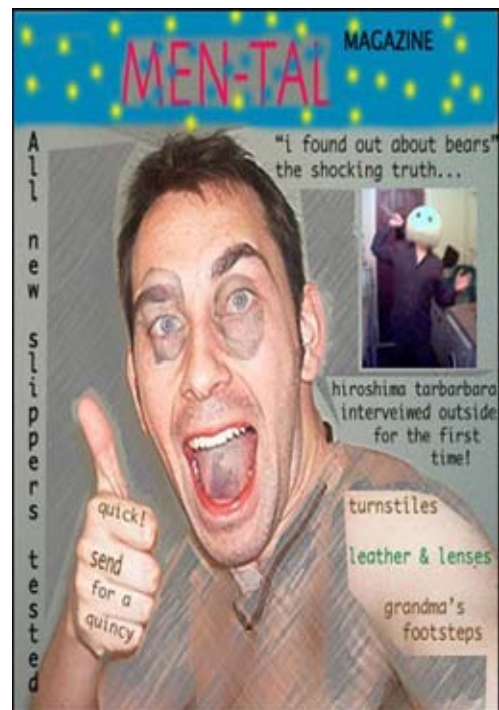


Figure 6.32.

6.1.8. Group 8

Six girls from Parklands Upper School used computer software in the layout of their scripts, while two used existing magazine clippings, and six produced scripts that were entirely hand-drawn.

Table 6.1.8. Scripts produced by group 8		
Magazine title	Creator(s)	Cover image
<i>Big!!</i>	Hannah	Kerry McFadden in tight leather
<i>Doubleman</i>	Terri	Topless Orlando Bloom
<i>I.Q.</i>	Caroline	Stephen Fry wearing suit
<i>The Knack</i>	Rachael	Jamie Cullum wearing suit
<i>Macho Man</i>	Michelle	Topless man
<i>MascuLine</i>	Ruth	‘Ugly woman’ in bikini / Car / Pint of beer
<i>Nimiety</i>	Louisa	Pink triangle against rainbow flag background
<i>Red Hot</i>	Claire	‘Attractive woman’ in dress / Women in fantasy outfits (inset)
<i>Tits</i>	Nikki	Pair of blue tits (birds) / Football strips / Squirrel / Jordan wearing negligee
<i>Tits and Motors</i>	Lauren, Jade, Jade & Kayley	Woman’s torso in bikini / Car / Topless woman straddling chair
<i>W&W (Wicked & Weekly)</i>	Lindsey	Avril Lavigne / Sports car / Woman in bikini

It is important to note that the female participants in this study were also asked to envisage lifestyle magazines aimed at *men*. Their scripts form an interesting comparison piece to the rest of the sample, falling broadly into three categories:

those that reproduce the style and content of existing men's magazines; those that parody and criticize these; and magazines aimed at gay male readers.

Big!!, *MascuLine* and *W&W* fall into the first category, featuring nothing to distinguish them from covers produced by young men in terms of subject matter. The female authors show few qualms about their male counterparts' apparent fascination with naked women, drinking and cars, pandering to these interests with articles like *Big!!*'s 'Kerry McFadden: My life as a page 3 model' and *MascuLine*'s 'Top 100 Nipples!!!'. However, a more critical stance occasionally becomes apparent in the accompanying questionnaires, with Hannah, for example, describing the typical reader as 'narrow minded', and Ruth naming *MascuLine* as 'the first magazine to have an ugly woman on it'⁵⁸. Lauren *et al.*'s *Tits and Motors* (Figure 6.33) looks, at first glance, to be another example of this category but, as its title suggests, is a little more extreme, indicating that the authors have moved beyond simply 'giving men what they want' into the realm of satirizing male obsessions. The cover shows a woman's torso in a bikini, emphasising the breasts but completely missing out her face (in fact, the design even superimposes a large cross or 'X' where the head might be), a car with an improbably lengthy bonnet and the registration XXX, and a topless woman straddling a chair. Although the contents page is a fairly straightforward list of characteristic 'men's' articles, the questionnaire describes the typical reader as: 'Dirty of the naked women; bored of nothing else to do; keep them busy' (*sic*), suggesting that the authors see men as sex-obsessed, uncomplicated and easily distracted, with lifestyle magazines the tools that can 'keep them in their place'.

Tits magazine (Figure 6.34) is a similarly satirical concept, with its juxtaposition of the ironic title with an image of two birds, and cover article entitled 'Jordan (again)'. Like the previous group's *Men-Tal*, Nikki's creation invokes the surreal and silly ('My man-eating squirrel shame'; 'I lost my sea-bass and I'm going to cry until I find it') but, in this case, remains a recognisable men's magazine, including '[i]nterviews and pics of all your favourite girls', football news and

⁵⁸ This is not immediately apparent from Hannah's hand-drawn cover: the woman in question appears tall, blonde-haired and smiling, her only difference from the cover-star norm being that she has a possibly slightly wider waist and smaller breasts.

entertainment reviews. Nikki pokes fun at the fantasies and fruitless aspirations of male readers with captions such as: ‘Jordan – “I like people who read men’s mags, they’re great”’ but, according to her questionnaire, intends to remain acceptable to them rather than alienating them. In tone, then, this script is perhaps the one most similar to Buckingham & Sefton-Green’s *Slutmopolitan* magazine (1994: 195-209), discussed in Chapter 5, both usefully addressing and gently ridiculing its projected readership, while also expressing its author’s own views on the subject.

Three other scripts indirectly criticize available magazines by attempting to offer, like group 7’s *The Cellar Door*, a product more ‘high-brow and based on providing the reader with information and intellectual analysis’ (Caroline on her *I.Q.* magazine, which features the widely-considered witty and urbane media personality Stephen Fry on its cover). With *Red Hot*, Claire asks, ‘Men think that women, sex and cars is what they need... Is it?’, and goes on to present a magazine addressing more serious and pragmatic issues that concern men, such as fatherhood, drugs and promiscuity. Nevertheless, her front cover includes plenty of images of attractive women, while the contents page inside offers: ‘A couple of pictures: women’. Lastly in this small subsection of scripts is *The Knack* (Figure 6.35), which author Rachael hopes ‘conveys the talent, gift a guy needs to find to be unique’. Although the magazine apparently aims to help the reader find ‘his own style’, Rachael makes it clear in her questionnaire that the ‘style’ she advocates relates to an older, professional man who is successful, ‘classy’ and well dressed. Addressing issues of male identity directly, she also expresses an interest in ‘encouraging males to be emotional and masculine at the same time’, which would imply that she senses an opposition in current constructions of masculinity: that, for a man, being ‘masculine’ precludes demonstrating – or even experiencing – a full range of emotions. This might align her with the position of critics Kaufman (1994) and Horrocks (1994), as discussed in Chapter 3, who argued that hegemonic masculinity can actually *damage* men mentally by simultaneously forcing them to compare themselves to impossibly heroic stereotypes and deny the right to feel and express certain emotions, to the extent that they may become, as Horrocks put it, psychologically ‘half-human’ (1994: 25). It seems that Rachael places at least some of the blame for such a situation with men themselves, however, as her magazine is clearly aimed at

improving and teaching men. Similarly, she explicitly references in her questionnaire the work of feminist author Laura Mulvey, whose famous assertion that female characters in the cinema occupy a subordinated and passive state of ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ (1989: 29), informs her own desire to exclude ‘the stereotypical image of women being men’s possessive objects’ from *The Knack*⁵⁹.

The presence of three gay-oriented scripts in this group at first suggested that some of the female authors had found a way to circumvent the restrictions of the task to produce something they might have more of an interest in reading themselves – that is, a magazine including images of attractive men, with less of a focus on the traditionally ‘straight male’ interest in sports and cars. However, *Doubleman* (Figure 6.36), *Nimiety* (Figure 6.37) and *Macho Man* (Figure 6.38) actually prove to be a set of surprisingly complex and fully-rounded texts not aimed at women in any way, and addressing a wide range of gay-themed issues and experiences, from ‘coming out’ and dealing with an abusive partner, to dating and sexual health. Both Michelle and Louisa are concerned about stereotyping their audience, with the former admitting that her choice of the ‘cheesy’ (i.e. corny or kitsch) magazine name *Macho Man* ‘is purely based on my stereotypical view of homosexual males being cheesy and feminine’. Likewise, Louisa defends *Nimiety* against possible accusations of stereotyping by pointing out that the line between traditional ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ concerns has become increasingly blurred:

It’s not as sex oriented as most stereotypical magazines. It’s not too stereotypical of a gay magazine, as both straight and gay magazines tackle the subject of fashion and surgery.

She appears to view the topics she mentions as more often associated with gay men, but her claim that ‘lots of modern men, gay or straight, would be interested’ suggests that she has noted a shift in perceptions of traditional masculinity to include a newer definition (‘modern men’) that does not necessarily distinguish between sexualities.

⁵⁹ It is likely that Rachael’s interest in the work of Laura Mulvey stems from an A-level Media Studies course, in which many of the basics of film theory are introduced, including the notion of the ‘male gaze’.

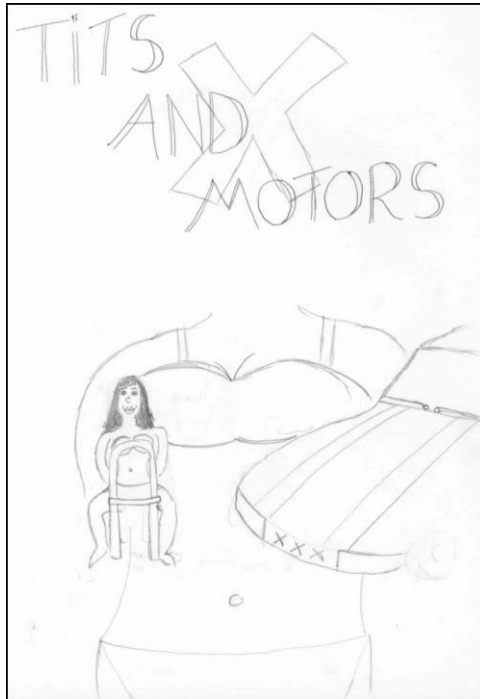


Figure 6.33.



Figure 6.34.



Figure 6.35.

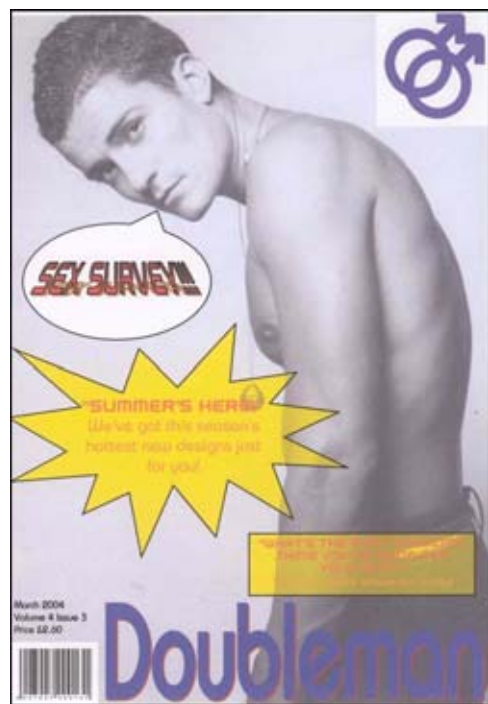


Figure 6.36.

6.1.9. Group 9

Like their male classmates, the young teenage girls of Haigh Community High School used computers to design their magazine covers, and did not provide contents pages.

Table 6.1.9. Scripts produced by group 9		
Magazine title	Creator(s)	Cover image
<i>Bad Lads!!!</i>	Amy	Woman in bikini / Sports car / Footballer / Monster truck
<i>Fab</i>	Jane	Sports car / Michael Jackson
<i>Footy Mad!!!</i>	Alice	Woman in bikini / Sports car
<i>Lads 'r' Us!</i>	Bryony	Peter Kay / Female models / Rugby ball
<i>Madness!</i>	Hayley	Jennifer Lopez
<i>Men For Sport</i>	Louise	Footballers in 'flying tackle'
<i>Only Men!!!</i>	Emma	Sports car / Britney Spears / Michael Jackson 'then and now'
<i>Zoom!</i>	Ellie	Britney Spears

The work of group 9 represents a more straightforward batch of imagined men's magazines than the correspondingly female-envisaged scripts of group 8, including no works of parody or magazines aimed at non-heterosexual men. It may be that the younger pupils took the task more literally, aiming to produce a 'correct' result rather than something more experimental. There are examples of quite considered strategies, however: Bryony, for instance, explains the motivation behind *Lads 'r' Us!* (Figure 6.39) in her questionnaire: 'In shops most magazines are just based on cars and girls but mine is based on everything a man likes' (which would seem to include 'gossip' about football and rugby, comparisons of the 'most nicest beers in England' (*sic*), and an interview with comedian Peter Kay); Emma takes the approach of addressing her male readers on a personal level, even questioning their

masculinity: 'Find out what kind of man Britney likes. Do you measure up?' (*Only Men!!!*).

Despite the general celebration of 'lad culture' in the scripts, there are two 'barbs' to be found: Louise describes her reader as '[n]ot a very clever person', while Ellie's *Zoom!* (Figure 6.40) includes similarly disparaging comments about both men and the female subject of her feature article: 'Jordan and her life style. Now who is she seeing. Find out what goes on with her and the dirty lads'. The latter, appearing on a magazine cover rather than in a questionnaire, represents the closest any of these scripts come to a subversive touch, although it may be that Ellie is simply aiming for a 'cheeky' tone in the style familiar from many existing men's magazines. Several comments in her questionnaire, however, suggest that she believes men to be only interested in women for their bodies, with little other inclination to pick up a magazine. Her account of *Zoom!*'s appeal to male readers rests on the fact that 'there is a woman on the front of it and it mentions Jordan and the page 3 girls', while most men apparently like Jordan 'because of her boobs'. Although the magazine appears to be full of the required women- and sex-related content, however, the author suggests that men 'must be willing to read' in order to get anything out of it.



Figure 6.37.

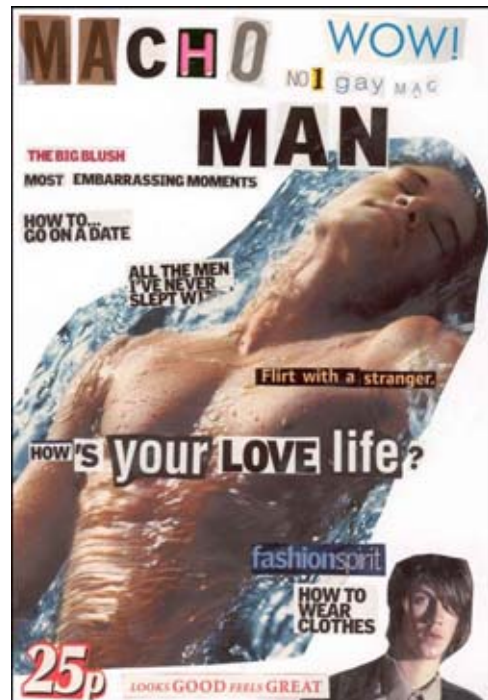


Figure 6.38.



Figure 6.39.

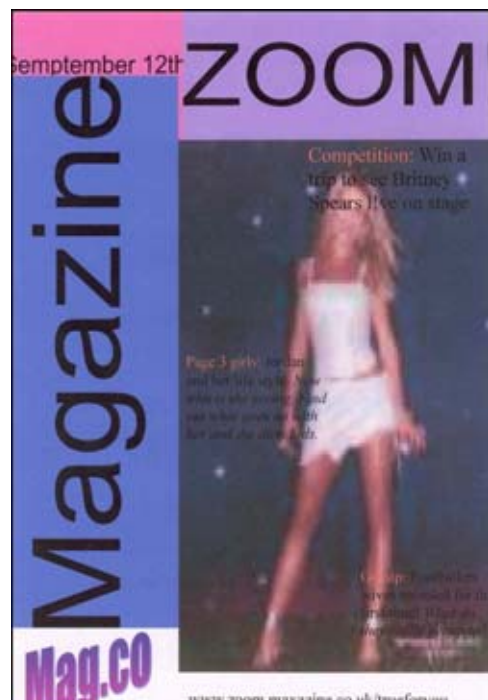


Figure 6.40.

6.2. Conclusion: ‘What Men Want’

In this overview of the work produced in the study sessions, we have seen that men’s lifestyle magazines are often seen as a catalogue of stereotypical interests and features – such as pictures of semi-naked women, articles on football and other team sports, coverage of cars and various gadgets, and references to going out with male friends, drinking alcohol, ‘pulling’, and having sex with women. In addition, however, we have seen a number of criticisms of existing men’s magazines emerge quite strongly. Without wishing to comment on whether or not these make accurate reference to the market, these are as follows:

- Many authors aimed to produce magazines that were more ‘highbrow’ than those already available.
- Many appear to believe that existing magazines do not cater for a wide enough range of interests, and aim to bring these together in their own scripts.
- A feeling was expressed that men’s magazines are not addressed towards the serious realities of everyday life.
- Several authors produced scripts devoted to subjects that they felt were not adequately represented by men’s lifestyle magazines (such as weaponry, boating, prison life, and television listings).

These were balanced by some indications that many of the participants were satisfied with existing publications:

- The majority of covers produced followed established conventions in terms of both content and images, with a number of authors citing their scripts as no different to real magazines.
- The authors in the sample were comfortable with the inclusion of self-help-themed articles, and advice on looking good.
- Room was found for magazines catering for male readers of different ages and sexual preferences.

We have also seen a range of different ‘performances’ of masculinity. In Chapter 3, it was suggested that men’s lifestyle magazines might act as purveyors of hegemonic masculinity, facilitating the process of ‘complicity’ between male readers by broadcasting and reinforcing the behaviours associated with men that allow them to maintain their dominant position within society. Accordingly, in many of the scripts produced by the prisoners of group 6, we can see the traditional ‘masculine’ characteristics of toughness, strength and aggression vividly performed: three of the eleven covers feature the muscle-bearing stances of male bodybuilders (an image unique to this group), while others focus on men pointing guns (*Gangz of England*) or playing football. It is arguable that the environment in which these participants are currently living their lives (i.e. prison) demands increased performances of ‘hyper-masculinity’ designed to make explicit the qualities of toughness and brutality that represent power (here over other men) in this particular situation.

In contrast, several of the performances of masculinity portrayed by the female participants of group 8 focused on the contrasting characteristics of intelligence (as evidenced by the smartly-dressed portraits of Stephen Fry and Jamie Cullum) and sexual allure – the latter even seemingly emphasizing the cover stars’ sexual submission (as represented by the boyish, unthreatening Orlando Bloom and *Macho Man*’s provocatively posed male model). Of course, a range of masculinities remained signified even in this small group, with other scripts produced by the girls offering up the usual large amount of naked female flesh for male perusal without particular comment or concern.

The following chapter will move away from considering the scripts mainly in relation to the groups from which they originated, to examine the themes and patterns that emerge from the data in general, asking whether or not these support or contradict theories found in previous writing on the subject of men’s media, as discussed in the opening four chapters.

Chapter 7

Findings

Having looked at some of the differences and similarities between the groups of scripts produced for this project, it is now time to start drawing them together as a whole in order to examine how, if at all, they relate to the arguments put forward by the theorists whose work was discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis. Together with their accompanying questionnaires, the scripts offer a range of insights into how the young men who designed them think about themselves, other men, and the opposite sex, and this chapter will now attempt to examine these in greater detail. Beginning with an exploration of what the scripts can tell us about young men's relationships with lifestyle magazines – addressing in particular the two central themes of 'irony' and 'contradictions' – we will then turn to an investigation of what else they might bring to an analysis of the young masculinities involved.

7.1. Magazine Titles

28% of the scripts produced had an overtly male-specific title, including *Menz Mag*, *Men + Motors*, *Mens*, *MascuLine*, and *Men-Tal*, while a subset of these (11% of all scripts) went as far as to present themselves as *exclusively* for men, with names like *Only Men*, *Lads 'r' Us*, *For Men*, and *Just 4 Men*. In some cases, these titles seem intended to highlight the differentiation between male and female readerships, as in the most extreme example, *Mens Mag Not for Women*. In others, however, a division between male readers themselves is implied, as with titles such as *For the Real Men!*, *Sophisticated & Manly*, *New Man*, *Bad Lads*, and *For Men at Play*, all of which suggest that different groups of male readers are being addressed. The remaining titles fall into two general types: those that simply indicate the content of the magazine (such as *Car World*, *Tits and Motors*, *Fine Weapons*, and *G.C.S: Girls, Cars, Sport*), and those that seem to seek to describe something of the

character of the intended reader (such as *Cheeky Monkey*, *The Knack*, *Twisted Generation*, *Ready 2 Go*, and *I.Q.*). A final small group of magazine titles are more esoteric and harder to classify (for example, *The Cellar Door*, *Fritz* and *Barok*) but, as users of such names often explain in their questionnaires, these types of titles are usually chosen exactly because of their attention-grabbing or offbeat nature⁶⁰.

There are several conclusions we might draw from looking at these titles. Male-specific magazine names may be used as a technique for attempting to unite readers in terms of their gender, presenting them as intrinsically different – or possibly even superior – to female readers. Titles such as *Mens Mag Not for Women*, *Only Men* and *Guy's World* certainly imply the existence of a masculine sphere that can be quite aggressively defended from the intrusion of women. Some titles may take these demarcations further, signifying particular kinds of men within the gender boundary, ranging in the titles mentioned above, for example, from 'real men' to 'new men' by way of 'lads'. By marking out their readership in this way, magazines arguably increase a sense of reader camaraderie, facilitating a psychological male community bound by the shared readership of a certain text. (This idea is discussed in section 7.6 below, and in greater detail in the next chapter.)

The scripts' titles also provide clues as to the sorts of qualities the participants presumably deem admirable or desirable in young men – and, by extension, male identities in general. Some of these are outlined in Table 7.1.

⁶⁰ 27-year-old Joe writes of *The Cellar Door*, for instance: 'It's intriguing and mysterious ... the cover asks the reader to make the step inside'.

Table 7.1. Masculine characteristics endorsed by magazine titles	
Characteristic	Titles
Confidence/success	<i>Big!!; Blaze; Ego; Fab; Glory; Hotshot!; I.Q.; The Knack; Men's Wealth; Reason; Red Hot; Sophisticated & Manly</i>
Drive/risk/living life 'to the max'	<i>Close Shave; Fast Cars Women; Gotta Hav' It; Limitize; Madness!; Mania; Men-Tal; Nimiety; Rave; Ready 2 Go; Rev; Rush; Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll; Speed; Thriller; Top Speed; X-Cess; Xtreme Men; Zoom!</i>
Sexual prowess	<i>Balls; Between the Sheets; Big!!; Laid Bare; Menagize; Red Hot; Stud; Thriller; Unzip</i>
Strength/power	<i>Body Builder; Macho Man; Mentor; Muscles; Pecks⁶¹; Power; Ram Raids; Reason; Rev</i>
Rebellion/originality	<i>Cheeky Monkey; Cult; Mixin It Up; Revolution; Twisted Generation; What!; "Whatever"</i>

None of these characteristics are particularly surprising, nor pose any great challenge to established notions of traditional masculinity. We should bear in mind, however, that a magazine's title constitutes arguably its foremost and most direct address to prospective readers, with authors aware of the necessity to *appeal* to the existing men's magazine audience. It is when we turn to look at the content, style and underlying themes of the scripts that various deeper patterns come to light.

7.2. The Use – and Abuse – of Irony

In Chapter 2, we looked at the views of several critics regarding the ways in which irony is employed in men's magazines, and found that they fell broadly into two groups. While both of these groups agreed that the magazines' apparent inability to take anything seriously could be viewed as a clue that the texts themselves should not always be taken at face value, they held different perspectives on the deeper reasons for this pervasion of irony and jest, and its possible

⁶¹ This is presumably a misspelling of 'pecs', a nickname for pectoral muscles.

implications. On one side, authors such as Schirato & Yell (1999) and Gauntlett (2002) argued that, when men's magazines present a stereotypically sexist, homophobic or ruggedly macho male persona, they do so as part of a knowing and inherently self-mocking *over-performance* of such traits, which makes fun of the now outmoded attitudes represented more than it does the apparent targets. Taking a slightly more cautious approach, critics such as Jackson *et al.* (2001) and Benwell (2003a) concluded that the magazines' ceaseless adoption of ironic standpoints may be rather more indicative of a built-in defence mechanism against the anticipated criticism of such backward-thinking attitudes. For them, the texts' ostensibly playful nature can sometimes be employed to mask more prejudiced and misogynistic discourses, with anyone inclined to point these out being dismissed as having somehow missed the joke. It seemed clear to both parties, however, that irony is an important – and expected – method of communication employed by magazine writers when addressing modern male readers.

Perhaps surprisingly, irony of the sort described above rarely comes directly to the foreground of the magazines produced as part of this study, possibly because it is mainly in the tone of fuller articles that it develops into a more noticeable trait⁶². Here, respondents concentrated on image-based covers and shorter snippets of text, and represented in the main a slightly younger group of readers than might be found in wider men's magazine readerships, for whom irony – although undoubtedly understood and enjoyed – may remain, from a creative standpoint, a linguistic technique not yet fully mastered⁶³. One script, however, appears to capture the

⁶² While it is, of course, possible to demonstrate irony in something as simple and short as a photo caption, the sort of 'performance irony' discussed here is something that I would argue becomes most evident via an accumulation of linguistic jokes and references across, for example, a particular article.

⁶³ Dews *et al.* (1996) find that children begin to appreciate the intricacies of *verbal* irony between the ages of five and six, but that, while they comprehend its use as a way of 'muting' the aggression of criticism, they do not yet appreciate its function as humour. Similarly, Harris & Pexman (2003) suggest that children between the ages of five and eight are able to understand the difference between criticisms and compliments made literally and ironically but, again, do not generally recognize irony's humorous function. Such studies would suggest that individuals of the ages involved in this study should have a much fuller grasp of the humorous kind of irony found in men's magazines. However, it is reasonable to hypothesize that their ability to *create* examples of their own, particularly in written form, may still be developing; as Pexman *et al.* (2005) suggest, children as old as ten find it harder

essence of the technique exactly, if not particularly in its magazine cover, then certainly in the accompanying questionnaire. 18-year-old college student Michael's *Laid Bare* shows a photograph of a bikini-clad woman kneeling provocatively on a beach, over which are imposed the words: 'Beer? Fit birds? Cars?'. With no other text or contents page, these 'questions' go unanswered, but suggest that Michael considers them the prime content requirements of the targeted male reader. It is in his questionnaire that he begins to employ the kind of ironic language described above:

Men like fit birds, they drink a lot of beer, they like fast cars and films and games fill in the time between drinking and sleeping with fit birds (or at least thinking of a fit bird if the guys married and is stuck with the ball and chain).

The almost *over*-repetition of the phrase 'fit birds' from the cover, coupled with the somewhat archaic expression for wife, 'ball and chain' (especially as used by an 18-year-old), here clearly signpost Michael's ironic intentions, along with such drolleries as his description of the ideal reader as someone who 'wants to expand mind and ideas'. While other authors, such as those of *Cheeky Monkey* (Figure 7.1) and *Balls* (Figure 7.2), employ the expectedly 'cheeky' conventions in their magazines, only to deconstruct them quite seriously in their analysis⁶⁴, Michael opts to remain in his ironic persona throughout his questionnaire, making observations like: 'The front cover has a picture of a fit bird with a lot of "skin" showing. Nuff said'. It would seem, in fact, that he actively *enjoys* this performance.

Another, somewhat briefer example appears in 12-year-old Jordan's questionnaire for his magazine *Mens Mag Not for Women*, where the author similarly refuses to be pinned down by the self-analytical 'rules' of the task. Explaining who his magazine is aimed at, Jordan suggests: 'People who like looking at women in bakinis (*sic*) such as a builder', while his cover would appeal to male readers because, as he baldly puts it, 'men like ladies'. Within the jokey context of

to identify with the speaker of ironic statements than the listener, and are less aware of humorous intent when they do so.

⁶⁴ Scott, for instance, writes of his magazine, *Balls*: 'The title is ambiguous – it is in reference to the sports side of the magazine and the slang word for the male genitals'.

his questionnaire⁶⁵, such statements are unlikely to be meant to be taken completely seriously; it seems more a case of Jordan taking a having a little fun by playing up to masculine conventions, only to subvert them slightly by, for example, suggesting that leering at women is behaviour (stereo)typical of builders (who, of course, represent a classic example of traditional masculinity).

Matt's *Gotta Hav' It* provides a solid example of the author adopting the comic tone familiar from the captions and prose of most men's magazines. The difference here is that Matt is not exploring a particular masculine persona but emulating a style now widely associated with male journalists, presumably to entertain both his intended audience and himself. His contents page takes a humorously blasé approach to the subjects covered, suggesting a laid-back, noncommittal and sometimes self-deprecating stance:

A look at the day, week, month ... God dammit the year ahead! ... All the usual jokes and tall tales, and of course all the readers input or written abuse ... don't skip these pages thinking it's a load of pretty boys wearing expensive clobber! ... A general summary of all the things you may have missed if you had been in a coma or just not out of your room for a month.

If a creative task such as magazine-making allows participants like Michael, Jordan and Matt to 'try on' certain personas in this way (as we hypothesized in our discussion of *Slutmopolitan* and its creators in Chapter 5), it would suggest that the act of reading a magazine itself – that is, simply being *addressed through* or *included in* discourses of this kind – can also act as a form of identity exploration and experimentation (providing an 'identificatory buffer', as Clover (1999: 300) called it in Chapter 4), with irony acting as a sort of 'safety zone' between the self and potential new identities.

This kind of role-playing aside, we regularly find instances of linguistic hyperbole amongst the scripts that also suggest an awareness of the potentially sexist or female-objectifying nature of men's magazines and how this is often dealt with within their pages. Examples include: 'Fine! Fine! FINE! Babez' (*Fritz*) and 'Luscious ladies: those sexy luscious ladies you have been dreaming about have just

⁶⁵ Asked how his articles would relate to men's lives, Jordan replies: 'I don't know, I have not completed it yet'.

turned up in this magazine! What a treat!’ (*Rave*). It could be argued that the tone of these headings tips into the kind of over-performance of masculinity described by Schirato & Yell, with a style that ultimately mocks the slaving tone of more outmoded forms of address.

Irony in several slightly different guises also plays a significant role throughout the sample for, I would argue, a variety of purposes. These guises can be grouped into three main categories: *media-aware* irony (that which is employed to comment on magazines and their content), *identity-aware* (that which concerns notions of masculinity itself), and *fantastical* (where irony is used for a more fanciful effect). In all of these instances, the techniques utilized involve elements of both satire and self-awareness and, as might be expected, occasionally overlap.

Media-aware irony, as it appears in the scripts, adopts two contrasting methods, which might be likened to *attacking* and *defending*, referring to the way in which the thrust of their humour relates to the ‘target’ of men’s magazines. The first approach uses irony to criticize and lampoon the genre in general; in this case, we as readers of the script ‘laugh *with*’ the author’s jokes in order to ‘laugh *at*’ a genre the author considers sexist or puerile. In the second instance, however, we laugh purely ‘with’ the script as it revels in frivolity or laddishness but simultaneously provides an undercurrent of ‘defensive’ irony to demonstrate that we should not take its content (a sexist joke, for example) too seriously.



Figure 7.1.



Figure 7.2.



Figure 7.3.

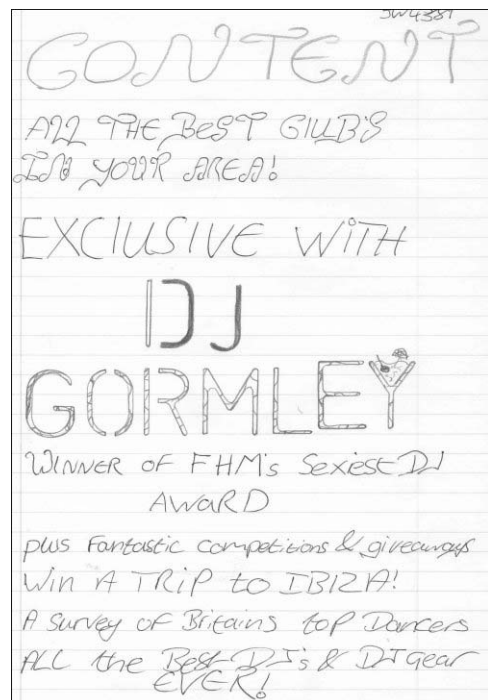


Figure 7.4.

In the last chapter, I discussed a small number of ‘anti-men’s magazine’ scripts – including *The Cellar Door*, *Men-Tal*, *Identity*, *Tits and Motors*, and *Tits* – in which it was clear that the authors had produced a piece of work that served more as a deconstruction of the genre than a straightforward addition to its ranks. These are the most obvious purveyors of ‘attack’-based media-aware irony, with a key ironic technique being the presentation of surreal and nonsensical content in the typical, instantly recognizable style of a men’s lifestyle magazine. The bizarre content of *Men-Tal* and sexist extremes of *Tits and Motors* (the latter written by a group of young women) seemed to propose upfront that the genre was gratuitous, distasteful or even irrelevant to the lives of modern men, while the less outrageous but still acerbic *Cellar Door* and *Tits* parodied existing magazines by promising to provide the expected content, only to provide something possibly more challenging instead.

A vein of similar satirical intent runs throughout the entire sample of scripts, with the difference being that most other publications appear to celebrate and revel in their world of ‘men’s obsessions’, celebrities and pop culture at least as much as they humorously ridicule it. Nevertheless, a layer of ‘defensive’ media-aware irony allows the reader to demonstrate that he or she is conscious of the magazine’s triviality or lack of political correctness while also enjoying its offerings. *Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll*, for instance, promises on its cover ‘complete babble in one magazine’, while one other, otherwise straightforward women-and-football magazine has a title – *Tat!* – that is similarly apologetic of its creator’s indulgences.

Further examples rely on quite extensive knowledge of celebrities and their lifestyles to make jokes at their expense, such as the article title ‘Jordan’s new job!’ in *Men + Motors*, which, when plastered across the cleavage of a model in a bikini, suggests an alternative kind of ‘job’ for the plastic surgery-friendly celebrity than that which might otherwise first spring to mind (Figure 7.3). Other features poke fun at both the personalities portrayed *and* the magazines’ apparently desperate, muddled or even meaningless fascination with them:

Britney [Spears]: ‘I was so stupid like whatever...’ / Eminem on gays, music and Ja Rule (*Balls*).

Christina Aguilera guides us through this week’s football (*Rev*).

President Hillary Clinton talks to *Mentor* in NYC (*Mentor*).

Dirty Christina [Aguilera] tells *Cheeky Monkey* her inner thoughts and true feelings. Plus her affair with Prince Charles (*Cheeky Monkey*).

And you thought you had problems? Who does Michael Jackson think he is? [Accompanied by images of Jesus, Peter Pan and an ape from *Planet of the Apes* with an alarmingly similar hairstyle to the singer] (“*Whatever*”)

A further irony (and probably one not lost on the various authors) is that, in order to fully appreciate such jokes, the reader often requires the kind of familiarity with the luminaries in question that only comes from a reasonably dedicated reading of celebrity gossip.

The second type of irony is more identity-aware, playing on expectations and stereotypes of masculinity, rather than the less personal world of the media, for its effects. As with all the uses of irony we have so far discussed, its power seems to lie in its ambiguity. Features like ‘Gadgets (*sic*) ... The only things in life men want smaller’ (*Revolution*), and the car article ‘Is yours a mini?’ (*Parts*) apparently mock associations between masculinity and penis size, yet their appearance in magazines aimed at men suggests that the subject is something which men are comfortable joking about. In the preceding chapter, we noted the ironic juxtaposition of the magazine title *For the Real Men!* with the cover star SpongeBob SquarePants – an unlikely pairing of rugged masculinity with a cartoon character who works in an underwater burger bar and likes to play with seahorses. Other scripts skewer male attitudes (along with magazines themselves) with teasers such as: ‘The usual in depth interviews and glossy pictures of women from the fantasy world found only inside the male psyche’ (*Gotta Hav’ It*), and ‘We stereotype, so you don’t have to’ (*Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll*), while the magazine *Sophisticated & Manly* emphasizes the sardonic nature of its title with the humorous initials *S & M*. It would seem that a willingness to lampoon existing notions of masculinity (however mildly) remains a significant aspect of the kind of masculinities being promoted by the magazines.

The final kind of irony identified – that of a ‘fantastical’ nature – plays a large role across this sample, appearing in all of the groups. Fantastical irony occurs when authors make reference in their articles to events or situations that are unlikely or even impossible, yet treat the reportage of such as fact. Examples include: ‘Graham

Le Saux's first nude spread!' (*Unzip*); 'Alistair Appleton, king of daytime TV, has struck gold in Hollywood' (*Between the Sheets*); 'Hendrix, undiscovered recording' (*Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll*); 'We've found Saddam' (*For Him*); and 'Lose 10 pounds in just 1 week. And still drink 8 pints' (*4 Men*). Of course, such fantasizing should be expected when participants are asked to *imagine* a new lifestyle magazine and illustrate a cover full of content – including 'exclusive' interviews and so on – that is obviously entirely fictional. However, I would also suggest that an additional process is taking place, particularly in cases where proposed content would be completely impossible to obtain. As with ironic 'over-performance', the authors are here incorporating elements of their own identities within the product they have produced. Their own aspirations, as well as identifications with media figures, are projected onto the page via a reappropriation of reality, and tailored to fit an idealized personal worldview. An obvious example appears in prisoner Gormley's magazine, *Mixin It Up*, which features an 'Exclusive with DJ Gormley, winner of *FHM*'s Sexiest DJ Award' (Figure 7.4). With a degree of humour, the author has portrayed himself as the subject of his own magazine – his celebrity status, interestingly, being authenticated by another men's magazine. Instances of fantastical irony like these provide us with clues as to their creators' concerns and desires, which, if read from the quotes above, can be seen to cover such subjects as the difficulties of losing weight, achieving fame, striving for peace, or just getting a chance to see a favourite celebrity naked. College student Russell's creation, *FMM*, encapsulates this notion simply and effectively: reappropriating the title of *FHM* (*For Him Magazine*), he comes up with a concept that condenses almost this entire research project into a nutshell: the construction of *For Me Magazine*.

Before moving on, it is interesting to make a brief note of instances in which possibly expected irony seems *absent* amongst the scripts. We encountered the idea in Chapter 2 that irony might be used in men's magazines to make the concept of men accepting lifestyle-related advice more palatable – considering that, in the past, men had been widely assumed to be more assertive and unquestioning where aspects of their 'natural' masculinity were concerned. Whereas Gauntlett (2002) called irony a "protective layer" ... between lifestyle information and the readers, so that men don't have to feel patronized or inadequate' (p. 168), Cook (2000) criticized it as a

form of ‘anticipated resistance’, distancing men from associations of ‘feminine’ behaviour by reasserting traditional masculinity even more rigorously. In this sample, advice on topics like sexual performance, fashion and looking good is common, with little reference to ‘problem page’-type content that offers anything other than straightforward, honestly intended advice, such as: ‘Get hair like this without any hassle!!’ (*Men + Motors*); ‘Am I fit or fat?’ (*Close Shave*); ‘100 ideas to improve your style’ (*Rush*); ‘Go from punk to hunk in a month’ (*4 Men*); ‘Top 10 tips on how to get a woman!’ (*Guy’s World*); ‘How to be a great dad’ (*Revolution*); and ‘Your plans for the future’ (*New Man*). The magazine *Nip/Tuck* takes these types of concerns to something of an extreme, being entirely devoted to factual articles on the subject of cosmetic surgery for men. Avoiding the humorous tone of many other scripts, it apparently takes its subject matter entirely seriously and at face-value, with a solemnity extended to such feature articles as: ‘Is the surgeon qualified to do the surgery?’ and ‘Is the male menopause real?’.

Of course, there are exceptions, the most notable in its use of irony being provided by the female-designed *Tits*, in which a page entitled ‘Ask ’Arry: Your chance to consult an East-end cabbie about your deepest, darkest problems’ ridicules men’s need for advice columns by providing useless and irrelevant counsel to apparently melodramatic concerns. Surprisingly, however, the author treats this feature quite seriously in her questionnaire – stating simply that it ‘would answer readers’ letters’ – thereby downplaying the nature of the satire she seems almost inadvertently to have created. In the script *Reason*, the notion of advice is not even grudgingly accepted nor cloaked in irony. Its 23-year-old male author writes: ‘There will be no “problem page” as such. The magazine is more of the mindset that the reader will make up their own opinion’. This attitude fits more comfortably within an era before men’s lifestyle magazines became popular, when, as Gauntlett says, men supposedly ‘didn’t need lifestyle magazines because it was obvious what a man was, and what a man should do’ (2002: 170). *Reason*’s editor appears to advocate a return to this state, denying any space within his construction of masculinity for uncertainty or a reliance on the advice of others.

A similar lack of irony to that seen in response to advice-based articles can be observed in the scripts’ treatment of celebrity gossip features, long a staple of

magazines aimed at women but still not found in such an explicit guise in most men's magazines. Scripts such as *4 Men* (which entices the reader to 'Find out all the latest celebrity gossip') and *For Him* ('The Beckhams') announce purely gossip-related content on their covers, and many others make heavy reference to it on their contents pages, as in *Xtreme Men*'s 'I'm a Celebrity update: What's happenin' between Jordan & Peter – we spill!!!', and *Rush*'s 'Celebrity Spotting' section. *Only Men* contains ten 'celebs pages' and is aimed at a reader who is, according to its author's questionnaire, 'celeb mad', while *Mens Mag Not for Women* is similarly aimed at 'people who like goesip' (*sic*), and *Gotta Hav'* It promises 'All you could want to know to be ahead of the latest gossip'. Content of this sort would suggest that problem pages and gossip columns – features traditionally associated with women's magazines – are seen by today's young men as legitimate interests for male readers, with the distinct lack of irony involved in their presentation implying the existence of a readership now perfectly secure with their inclusion⁶⁶.

7.3. Contradictions

Any discussion of irony in men's magazines, as we found in Chapter 2, eventually leads to the related subject of their often self-contradictory nature, a characteristic that is not limited only to titles aimed at men. Winship (1987) and Ballaster *et al.* (1991) saw contradictions as something that female readers take pleasure in when reading women's lifestyle magazines, where the mixture of feminism and recipes, high fashion and 'be yourself' articles arguably offers a constant source of both security and surprise. Jackson *et al.* (2001) extended this theory to magazines aimed at men, citing their 'ambiguous and contradictory' (p. 3) messages as 'evidence of potentially significant changes in contemporary masculinities' (p. 4), although, like Benwell (2003a), they remained slightly concerned that such contradictions might also be indicative of a deliberate and devious evasion of responsibility on the part of both magazines and male readers, regarding the constructions of masculinity put forward. Gauntlett (2002), however, was less concerned by these reservations, arguing that men's magazines are, in fact,

⁶⁶ This is discussed further in section 7.4 below.

‘*all about* the social construction of masculinity’ (p. 170; his emphasis), itself a site of much uncertainty but also, more positively, expanded possibilities of identity and sexuality.

Returning to the present study, the interesting thing about this sample is that the magazines created by participants each, to a degree, embody the identity of an actual person. (The brief asked participants to imagine a magazine that reflected aspects of their own identity but which would hopefully also appeal to a general male audience.) Therefore, any ‘contradictions’ found within them are directly representative of personalities that exist coherently in the real world. Perhaps because the scripts are very short – especially in comparison to a real-life genre that typically offers monthly publications in excess of 200 pages – instances of outright contradiction do not appear as frequently as in published magazines. The most noticeable is that which exists between the potential objectification of women as sexual playthings (via regular displays of female bodies in the scripts, as well as discussions of their physical attributes) and the contrasting endorsement of women as intelligent individuals worthy of respect (via the equally common relationships sections, and articles based around pleasing or attracting a woman). This inconsistency is neatly captured on the front cover of *New Man* (Figure 7.5), which goes from the objectifying ‘What’s hot and what’s not in a woman’ to the more considerate ‘What she likes in bed’ in the space of three headings⁶⁷. In his questionnaire, the author, Kyle, picks up on the dual nature of this mixture of articles, proposing that it would appeal to men because ‘it relates to how they have an impression on other men and women which ultimately is what men have a need to forful’ (*sic*). This observation, with its implication that men feel pressured to give one ‘impression’ of themselves to other men but a different one to women, harks back to *Arena*’s description of the ‘new lad’ who ‘aspires to New Man status when he’s with women, but reverts to old man type when he’s out with the boys’ (cited in Nixon, 1996: 204, and discussed previously in Chapter 2). This dual personality might appear contradictory on the surface, but actually represents a number of

⁶⁷ Here, I have assumed that the latter of these two articles is intended to be sympathetic towards woman and their wants, as opposed to the first; but it is arguable that such an article might be more concerned with *male* desires, in that it presumably also helps the male reader become more successful in achieving the ‘goal’ of sex.

conscious performances of different masculinities tailored to different situations. As a result, Kyle's comments also sit interestingly with Benwell's concerns regarding the 'invisibility' of modern masculinity (2003b: 162) – that is, the calculated ambiguity with which the 'magazine man' offers himself up to feminist (or other) scrutiny. However, the fact that the man's 'impressions' on others are seen as something he needs to somehow *fulfil* aligns Kyle's comments more closely with Gauntlett's account of the new man's uncertainties and fears concerning the ways in which he presents his masculine identity. This man's performance, it would seem, is more about impressing others, being liked, and being seen as successful – perhaps even *coherent* – than defending the possibly negative aspects of his male persona. Following such conclusions, it would seem almost too fitting that the magazine in question should be so provocatively named *New Man*.

In the previous chapter, we also noted the cover of *Mens Mag Not for Women*, which presented side-by-side two conflicting ways of looking at women: as a loving partner (represented by a photograph of a man and woman sharing a kiss over a cup of coffee) and as a object of pure lust (represented by an image of a swimsuit-wearing model exposing a large amount of cleavage). Coupled with creator Jordan's macho-styled yet builder-ridiculing questionnaire, this entire script is riddled with contradictions; judged against a presentation of a 'coherent' persona, it would fall spectacularly short. However, it indisputably *does* embody to some extent the identity of Jordan himself, and perhaps offers a significant clue as to how contradictions should be thought of in magazine terms in order for them to make any kind of sense. The fact is that this cover's two portrayals of womanhood take place *side-by-side*. They are contrasting but not mutually exclusive, representing two possibilities or potential performances that appear together on the page but may be acted out separately in different contexts in real life.

Another kind of contradiction that arises across the sample is that between the magazine covers and their accompanying questionnaires. As we saw in the last chapter, there are several instances of authors claiming to have created something 'better' or more diverse than the magazines available (for example, *4 Men*, *Limitize* and *FMP*) when, in fact, their scripts suggest that they are relatively uninformed of what the market actually has to offer.

Amongst the girls' scripts, in particular, inconsistencies between the apparent intentions of the magazines and their authors' own self-analysis are sometimes quite striking. The notably humorous *Tits* is accompanied by a questionnaire that plays down and sometimes even ignores its comedy element: for example, describing her surreal problem page (which includes items like 'Is it wrong to like badgers?'), Nikki simply states that "'Ask 'Arry'" would answer readers' letters'. Asked how her magazine compares to those available in the shops, she writes: 'It is similar to them because they seem popular'. In fact, almost everything about *Tits*, from its avian cover stars to bizarre content, is *different* to popular men's magazines, but Nikki chooses not to comment upon this. Conversely, Hannah's seemingly laddish *Big!!* (Figure 7.6) comes with a questionnaire that is surprisingly scathing of male readers, referring to its title as 'a word with only one syllable that will be easier for men 2 remember' (*sic*) and the imagined reader as 'male, straight [and] narrow minded'. We might observe that men's magazines often make 'cheeky' jokes at the expense of masculinity in this way, but Hannah appears to have made a sincere effort to 'give men what they want' in her magazine, only to reveal her real feelings in the accompanying questionnaire. Attempting to account any further for such discrepancies would involve assumptions and judgements somewhat beyond the scope of this investigation, but it is interesting to note that the kinds of contradictions detected by analysts of the men's magazine genre in general are replicated, albeit on a smaller and more personal scale, by the respondents who took part in this study.

7.4. Masculinity and 'Gossip'

Earlier in this chapter, we noted that certain aspects of men's magazines were presented in the scripts with relatively less irony than we have come to associate with many expressions of masculinity. One of these, surprisingly, was the plethora of articles relating to celebrities and celebrity gossip, the latter of which seemed even to outweigh the amount of similar material found in actual men's magazines. It was hypothesized that the 'buffer zone' of irony often found in relation to other 'sensitive' (that is, potentially non-masculine) subjects was simply not considered

necessary in this area, with the inclusion of celebrity features becoming increasingly acknowledged as a legitimate interest of young men. If its representation in the scripts is anything to go by, a related interest in gossip – once widely dismissed and even maligned as something of a vice (and a *woman's* one at that) – now apparently occupies a more acceptable position in popular male discourses.

In attempting to account for these developments, it is useful to return to Hermes's discussion of repertoires, as outlined in Chapter 2. Hermes saw readers as active sculptors of identity, using sources like magazines to help construct and understand their own identity and its relation to the outside world, with the aim of achieving a greater feeling of personal worth. She called this constantly evolving bank of self-knowledge the reader's repertoire. One of the ways in which magazines contribute to this repertoire is by supplying it with an 'extended family' (1995: 124) – a wider (and likely more diverse) group of characters than exists in the reader's immediate social circle. Hence, in the scripts produced for this study, we find references to 'male names [celebrities] who the readers might want to be like' (Chris, creator of *Cheeky Monkey*), 'stories from other men that every man goes through' (Hamish, *Just 4 Men*), and experience-broadening 'real-life stories' such as *Guy's World's* 'Drugs ruined my life' and *Macho Man's* 'I knew on my wedding day I was gay'.

This method of making sense of a social environment is encapsulated in the writings of Turner (2004), who builds on Hermes's model to describe talking about others as 'a way of sharing social judgements and of processing social behaviour' (p. 107), and gossip itself as 'one of the fundamental processes employed as a means of social and cultural identity formation' (*ibid.*). Reading celebrity gossip, therefore, might be seen as a method of expanding and enriching one's repertoire, with the aim of better understanding oneself. Furthermore, the fact that one is able to practise these judgements without the possible repercussions involved in discussion of closer relations (such as real-life friends and acquaintances) lends an experimental edge to the pursuit. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that gossip should show up so frequently among the scripts for, as I argued in Chapter 5, the process of creating a magazine is all about 'trying on' potential social, cultural and sexual identities for oneself. Doing so in relation to celebrities – people about whom we may know a lot

of facts but who remain, unlike friends, essentially ‘unknown’ and ‘untouchable’ – removes some of the responsibility involved in the process. It also means that any performances of identity (which may be as simple as a personal opinion on a star’s sexuality, for instance) remain similarly experimental and retractable. In this way, celebrity gossip (*‘it’s not real’*) works hand-in-hand with irony (*‘I was only joking’*) as a method of identity-play free of the judgements and stigmas often applied to performances of the self in real life.

Another feature of gossip is its encouragement of a sense of camaraderie between its participants. I suggested in Chapter 2 that a men’s magazine, in addressing its readers as a group of men, could foster a sense of in-group solidarity amongst its readers. If this is true, then the magazine’s provision of gossip, jokes and images relating to public figures and events might be seen as the ‘raw materials’ upon which such relationships are based. It is not a huge leap to describe this process in terms similar to Bourdieu’s notions of symbolic and cultural capital: the latest topical joke or outrageous, digitally manipulated image (i.e. the symbolic capital) not only engenders a shared laugh among male readers, but also awards prestige to the first to create or, more frequently, simply disseminate it. As access to this capital exists via such outlets as men’s magazines, cultural capital (in the form of what might colloquially be termed ‘coolness’) can be obtained by consumers’ discernment in finding the newest, most original or shocking material, and will in turn be linked to its source. This is evidenced by the regular requests of online offshoots of various men’s titles, such as *FHM.com*, for readers to send in funny emails, and by the popularity of a section of the Web directory, *Yahoo!*, entitled *The Office: Attachments*⁶⁸, which publishes links to online games, videos and other diversions under the banner: ‘the best of the web as circulated by you’⁶⁹. The marketers of *Zoo* tapped into this enthusiasm for so-called ‘viral’ (that is,

⁶⁸ Found at the URL: <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/promo/office/index.html> (accessed 18 March 2005).

⁶⁹ A similar example can be seen in the case of *Bizarre* magazine, which began as a specialist in extreme and unusual subject matter, but has gradually adopted the characteristics of more mainstream men’s magazines, including a greater emphasis on pin-up girls and media reviews. Conversely, newer men’s magazines, such as *Nuts* and *Zoo*, often now devote whole sections to ‘bizarre’ photographs, a trend followed in the magazine *Wicked & Weekly* produced for this study, which includes a section called: ‘DON’T LOOK! Pictures for the stronger stomach’.

disseminated over the internet) attachments when raising awareness of the magazine's launch in 2004, emailing a promotional Web-based game called 'Betsy's Gentle Bender' to 400,000 young men, with the expectation that it would subsequently be passed on to many more (reported by *The Periodical Publishers Association* (2004)).

Among this study's scripts, authors suggest similar reasons for their inclusion of such forms of gossip and light-hearted material. Sixth-form student Scott includes a section in his magazine, *Balls*, called 'Kare-Joke: The best mate impressing jokes around', explaining that 'jokes articles will enable men to join in banter with their friends which may help someone's confidence' (an assertion that implies a perceived link between 'confident' masculinity and popularity with male friends); David describes the intended reader of *Blaze* as 'one of the lads', a quality that seems important to a great many of the respondents; Chris's *Cheeky Monkey* instils a sense of belonging to a particular readership with the promise of 'Letters from all you cheeky monkeys'; and Matt explicitly references the appeal of viral email attachments with a listing on his contents page for 'all the funny emails that are going round'. To these authors, magazine reading is clearly part of a wider social activity that exists both within and outside the pages of the text. The personal experience of reading a magazine may assist the reader in the world beyond lifestyle magazines by helping them to develop their repertoires (to achieve social success, for example, as Scott suggests above); yet any male community fostered by the publications also exists *within* their pages, as Chris's branding of his hypothetical loyal readers demonstrates.

We have encountered in this section, then, the idea of gossip as a form of capital, a notion important to our study because it provides one possible explanation for the popularity of lifestyle magazines and how they relate to people's sense of identity. In addition, some critics have suggested that the subjects of this gossip – the celebrities themselves – also exist as a kind of symbolic commodity, a theory grounded in Marxist critiques of capitalism, and outlined in some depth in the work of Marshall (1997) and Rojek (2001).

7.5. Celebrity

For Marshall, the celebrity is a crucial factor in what we might call the ‘commodification of everyday life’. Marshall’s work concerns the ways in which the media legitimizes the political and economic model of capitalism, promoting an ideology of ‘exchange and value’ at all levels of social interaction. He argues that the popular celebrity figure works as a kind of prompt, or reminder, of this system to his or her consumer fans, not only reinterpreting capitalist values at the level of the individual, but also applying economic significance to social configurations. Thus, the celebrity is ‘pure exchange value cleaved from use value ... It articulates the individual as commodity’ (p. xi). Moreover, in a way similar to Turner’s account of the function of gossip as a tool of social analysis above, the celebrity enables members of society to make sense of the capitalist processes that surround them. Marshall writes:

Celebrities, in this fluid construction of identity through consumption, represent flags, markers or buoys for the clustering of cultural significance though patterns of consumption ... The celebrity functions as a semistable identity and cultural icon that runs through several cultural forms and establishes an identity through which the audience can estimate the cultural form’s relative value (p. 245).

This model positions all audience members as consumers, fascinated with celebrities because they represent an apparently stable point in a complex web of cultural and economic significance that the consumer cannot fully comprehend. Rojek builds on the hypothesis to suggest that ‘[c]elebrities are commodities in the sense that consumers desire to possess them’ (p. 15): the consumer’s accrual of information, images and memorabilia related to celebrities represents a symbolic quest to ‘own’ those celebrities in every incarnation, based on a ‘logic of capitalist accumulation’ that requires consumers to constantly ‘exchange their wants’ (p. 14). These arguments are relevant to the present study because they provide us with an interesting perspective on the magazine market, in which some publications (such as *Hello!*, *OK!* and *Star*) are almost entirely devoted to glossy yet repetitive photographs of celebrities, and whose popularity would therefore seem to support Marshall and Rojek’s observations. Similarly, a more recent trend in men’s magazines has seen titles like *Nuts* and *Zoo* instrumental in *creating* the very

celebrities they are subsequently devoted to, these being female models such as Lucy Pinder, Michelle Marsh and Abi Titmuss. In the previous chapter, we encountered many examples of common ‘male desires’ – the physical items that men are supposed to want, like cars, gadgets and women – and, considering the amount of celebrity-related material in both men’s magazines and scripts made for this study, it does not seem a great stretch to add the symbolic value of celebrities to this list. We should not, however, lose sight of one of the main interests of this study: the role of lifestyle magazines in processes related to the construction of *identity*. It is here that the second part of Rojek’s argument becomes particularly relevant.

Rojek argues that ‘celebrities are significant nodal points of articulation between the social and the personal’ (p. 16). In their actions, attitudes and projected identity, he suggests, celebrities provide frames of reference for the consuming audience – ways of looking at and understanding society that contribute to and enhance the reader’s repertoire. This reworking of Marshall’s model above (which viewed celebrities as ‘flags, markers or buoys for the clustering of cultural significance’) is nothing new, but Rojek also goes on to make some interesting points concerning the *nature* of this articulation. He sees celebrity as variously ‘embodying’, ‘humanizing’ and ‘mobilizing’ desire (p. 189), encouraging us as consumers to ‘construct ourselves into objects that immediately arouse sentiments of desire and approval in others’ (p. 16) in the same way as a celebrity relates to his or her fan base. Therefore, the underlying and most powerful reason for our fascination with celebrities lies in our unconscious recognition of the *performance* that they strive to mount for us. The persona of a celebrity incorporates both a ‘favoured self-image’ and a ‘public face acknowledged to be artificial and “designing”, in the sense of seeking to create an impression’ (p. 197). In other words, we look to celebrities not just for what they represent, but *how* they seek to represent it. As Rojek explains:

Celebrification⁷⁰ therefore divides us psychologically along two fronts. First, we are divided between the favoured self-image and the veridical self. Second, we are estranged from the artificial public face constructed in social encounters

⁷⁰ ‘Celebrification’ is Rojek’s term for the process of making a celebrity.

because we are aware that the construction is provisional, and hence liable to disruption. The psychological pressure that derives from these divisions is expressed in the most intense form in celebrity culture (pp. 197-198).

In the celebrity's efforts to maintain a popular and coherent presentation of their 'character' to the media, we recognize our own internal struggle to project a consistent and meaningful 'self' to others. In terms of identity construction, it might almost be argued that the single most important function of a celebrity is to demonstrate to consumers how to go about constructing a coherent persona. Therefore, the constant high level of reference to celebrities and related gossip within the pages of this study's scripts could be seen as indicative of a change in accepted constructions of manhood, expressing a modern masculinity that is less certain of the characteristics supposed to make it viable and desirable, and more willing to look to outside sources for advice on the matter⁷¹. At this point, Rojek's observation that celebrities 'simultaneously embody social types and provide *role models*' (2001: 16; my emphasis) also becomes relevant.

7.5.1. Celebrities as Male Role Models

As Gauntlett (2002) notes, the term 'role model' is a widely used but somewhat 'loose concept' (p. 211). Surveying the body of literature on the subject, he points out that the level of theoretical analysis involved goes no deeper, in

⁷¹ As an interesting footnote to this discussion, we may return to Marshall (1997), who makes mention of the American politics magazine *George*. Founded in 1995 by John F. Kennedy Jr., and pitched as a 'political publication for "post-partisan" America' (*BBC News Online*, 19 July 1999), *George* mixed political articles with celebrity interviews and the kinds of advertisements commonly found in men's lifestyle magazines, under the banner, 'Not just politics as usual'. Marshall writes: 'On a very simple level, *George* cloyingly tries to represent the decline of binarism in the representation of power and politics between something considered, in some vague, nostalgic way, "normally masculine" and something considered classically feminine. The binarism of women's magazines connected to consumption and men's magazines connected to production is certainly not so clearly delineated on the contemporary magazine rack, and *George* therefore is not alone in this almost mainstream trend' (p. 249). His point seems to be that *George* attempted to occupy a new space somewhere between the traditional remits of men's and women's magazines, a space that we might argue was opened up by men's newly found – or newly legitimized – interest in popular culture and celebrity (that is, an interest in 'consumption' as well as 'production', the latter represented by the political content). In any case, *George* failed to sustain a solid readership and folded in 2001, blaming a lack of advertising support (*CNN.com*, 4 January 2001).

actuality, than that of ‘social learning’, a theory based on the idea of ‘people learning behaviour through observation’ (p. 216), which is generally accepted but has neither been investigated nor explained in any great detail in relation to role models. (This basic assumption, we can see, also formed the basis of Rojek’s understanding of the function of celebrities above.) Gauntlett illustrates his observation by identifying six types of role model, all of which fit the social learning hypothesis by exemplifying forms of behaviour generally accepted as desirable or worthwhile. These categories are: famous people who are models of ‘*straightforward success*’; those who ‘*triumph over difficult circumstances*’ or are seen as ‘*challenging stereotypes*’; those who embody a clean-living, ‘*wholesome*’ role, or its opposite, rebellious ‘*outsider*’ role; and, finally, people either famous or known personally who represent the strengths of ‘*family*’ (p. 214-215). A variety of examples of most of these categories can be found throughout our sample of scripts, with some identified in Table 7.5.1 below.

Table 7.5.1. Some role models identified in the scripts		
Type	Examples	Reasons for role model status
Straightforward success	John Lennon / Roy Keane / Steve Coogan (in <i>Cult</i>)	‘Men want to find out about the people they respect most in the world, predominantly successful musicians, sportsmen ... and comedians’ (Gareth, 23).
Straightforward success	Jonny Wilkinson / Vinnie Jones (in <i>MascuLine</i>)	‘Jonny Wilkinson is a well known sports star and men look up to him. As well as Vinnie Jones’ (Ruth, 16).
Triumph over circumstance	Michael Jackson (in “ <i>Whatever</i> ”)	‘the article in this case ... would hopefully be a more in depth psychological profile about his background and is intended to reflect on the minor psychoses that the readers share (especially the desire to hold off on growing up!)’ (Dom, 34).
Challenging stereotypes	Robbie Williams (in <i>Stud</i>)	‘The main feature is Robbie Williams who is both an icon to a gay and straight male audience’ (Tony, 25).
Challenging stereotypes	David Beckham (in <i>Balls</i>)	‘Becks-Appeal: We analyse David Beckham. Man, God or... WOMAN?!’ (Scott, 17).
Challenging stereotypes	Quentin Crisp (in <i>GQueer</i>)	‘To what extent did the way this man chose to live his life change public perceptions of homosexuality?’ (Steve, 33).
Wholesome	Jamie Cullum (in <i>The Knack</i>)	‘My magazine is aimed at older men who care about their image, style etc. Jamie Cullum creates that older style’ (Rachael, 17).
Outsider	Eric Cantona (in <i>Tat!</i>)	‘fans who don’t like him are still interested in him due to his eccentric “bad boy” image’ (Chris, 33).
Outsider	Robert Downey Jr. (in <i>Rush</i>)	‘he is not seen as much of a “goody-two-shoes” which I think can be off-putting, especially for younger readers who want to “rebel”’ (Gary, 23).

Even in this sample, then, we see several different kinds of popular male role model, suggesting room within social constructions of masculinity for a range of apparently positively viewed male characteristics. These would, however, appear to be similar to the sorts of personality traits often traditionally associated with men anyway, such as success, triumph, challenge, and rebellion. We can also see the repetition of trends familiar from our discussion of magazine *titles* above, where we encountered in similar fashion the ‘masculine virtues’ of success, strength, drive and rebellion (see Table 7.1). Furthermore, some of Gauntlett’s categories are represented less enthusiastically, the most obvious being that of the *family* type of role model. This is obviously less likely to appear in magazines aimed at a general audience, being more personal to the individual, but Gauntlett suggests, additionally, that family role models may also take the form of ‘popular celebrity parents such as Victoria Adams and David Beckham’ (p. 215). Still, examples of this remain uncommon among the scripts, with only two references to fatherhood occurring – one inside a magazine made by a female author, and neither supported by an accompanying role model⁷². Whilst Beckham himself is very frequently mentioned, it is never explicitly as a father, loving or otherwise, and this aspect of his public persona is occasionally indirectly *mocked*, as in *Balls* magazine’s description of him as a ‘woman’ (see Figure 7.2). Similarly, the *wholesome* kind of role model is harder to find among the scripts: perhaps the most obvious we come across – the cover star of *The Knack*, jazz singer Jamie Cullum – is again identified by a young woman. Might it be said, then, that the kinds of role models chosen by young men represent existing stereotypes?

To answer this question, we have to look deeper into the categories of role model we have already identified, and explore other ways in which they are viewed and overlap. As we have already noted, role models of apparent *straightforward success* are regularly found in the scripts, in reference to various male celebrities from the public arena, but it is not always their financial, artistic or professional

⁷² Claire’s article in *Red Hot* is entitled ‘Why new age men prefer to stay home and look after the kids: Role Reversal’, while the only other reference to fatherhood appears in *Revolution*, by high school student Liam, with the article ‘How to be a great dad’. The concerns of the female author appear to lie in the gender stereotypes associated with parenting, while the male author looks at notions of being a ‘great dad’ without raising any issues related to gender roles.

success that is cited as the reason for their inclusion. The cover of *Men + Motors* includes an inset picture of Brad Pitt with the text: ‘Get hair like this without any hassle!!’ (see Figure 7.3); in his questionnaire, student Steve explains: ‘Brad Pitt is on the front cover as he is in the public eye as a handsome man, therefore I thought men would like to know how to get his look’. This reference to ‘looking like’ role models is not, I would argue, quite the same as ‘being like’ them. It seems closer, in fact, to Marshall and Rojek’s patterns of consumption and accumulation, with the audience seeking to obtain the ‘secrets of success’ possessed by approved-of celebrities, and appropriating them to similar ends (for instance, a young male might want to ‘get hair like this’ because it is associated with Brad Pitt’s apparent success with women). Several other similar examples can be found in the scripts, including 17-year-old Charles’s assertion that the anonymous attractive male on the front of *Close Shave* (Figure 7.7) ‘would appeal to men because they would want to look like him’, and prisoner Ainsley’s slightly less demanding suggestion that the cover star of *Body Builder* ‘shows you what you could look like if you want to’. This, I would argue, represents a shift towards a more insecure performance of masculinity – one that looks to the power and success of male role models, but often finds itself more concerned with trying to emulate their physical appearance, in a way similar to the feminist line of thought discussed in Chapter 2 concerning the ‘pressure’ placed on female readers by the unrealistically beautiful cover stars of most women’s magazines. This pattern is demonstrated in 28-year-old Matthew’s *Between the Sheets* (Figure 7.8), which features a ‘Bad boys of soap’ article, with the explanation that ‘everyone wants to look like them or have sex with them’. In a blurring of the *success* and *outsider* role model types, the author here turns the good-looking male cover stars into symbols of both power and objectification, which the viewer may simultaneously admire, attempt to emulate, and want to possess. These ideas are also explored in the next section but, before leaving the subject of male role models behind, special mention is merited by one of those figures most frequently cited among the scripts, not least because his often controversial public image has inspired hundreds of newspaper articles, several biographies, and a good many other texts concerning his individualistic style yet apparent mass appeal.

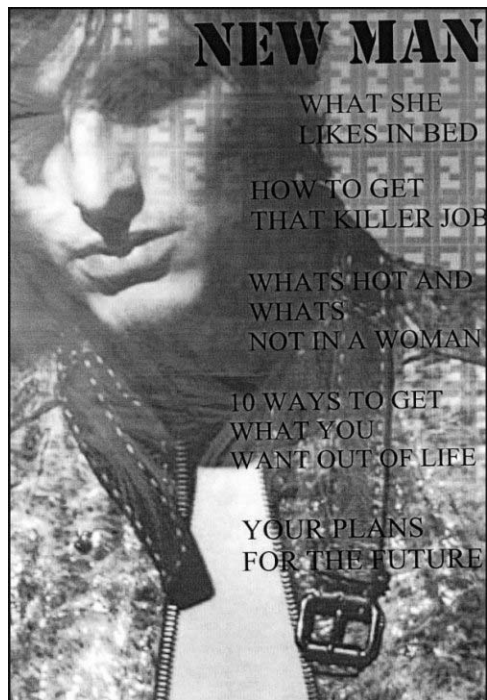


Figure 7.5.



Figure 7.6.



Figure 7.7.

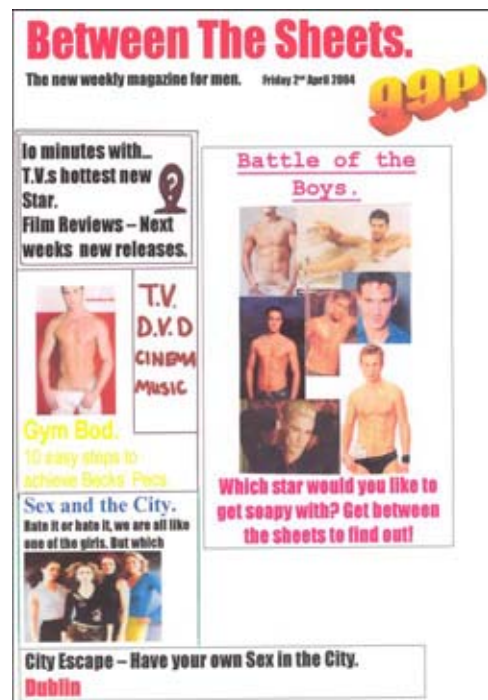


Figure 7.8.

7.5.2. 'Becks Appeal': David Beckham as Role Model

The fascination with David Beckham demonstrated by participants in this study extends to his making appearances on the front covers of *Balls*, *Twisted Generation* and *For Him*, as well as within articles inside *Menagize*, *Birds & Burnouts*, *Footy Mad!!!*, *Between the Sheets* ('10 easy steps to achieve Becks' Pecs'), and *Big!!* ('Find out how our very own Golden Balls is gettin' on in Spain'). Of these, *Twisted Generation* makes the most straightforward reference to his role model status, describing him as one of 'your newest icons' on its contents page, with the author, second-year sixth-form student Christopher, firmly locating him as a 'popular cultural icon that [men] can relate to' in his analysis. Other allusions are more ambiguous. Both *Menagize* and *Balls* take familiarly tongue-in-cheek jabs at Beckham's family-devoted, sarong-wearing, squeaky-voiced persona with the bantering headers 'Beckham: Man, or girl who plays football?' (*Menagize*) and 'Becks... Man or woman?' (*Balls*). *Birds & Burnouts*, presumably sick of all the attention, flatly states: 'Not included: The Beckhams'.

Various critics have attempted to analyse and account for the popularity of this, in some ways, unusual male role model⁷³. Cashmore (2002) argues that '[s]port in general and football in particular play critical roles in shaping masculinity, and the rapturous reception of someone as singular as Beckham clearly indicates that there are changes going on' (p. 130). His point is that the public persona of the famous footballer, father and fashionista contrasts with more traditional constructions of masculinity; therefore, Beckham's often very enthusiastic acceptance by male fans represents a corresponding shift in perceptions of acceptable masculinity. More radically, Cashmore goes on to suggest that 'the traditional rigid male/female divide disappears' (p. 132) for Beckham's fans, meaning that 'sexual orientation is somehow irrelevant' (*ibid.*). These are strong claims indeed, yet the references from the scripts mentioned above – ranging from those seemingly fascinated with Beckham's challenge to gender roles, to those simply fascinated with the man himself – appear, in some ways, to bear out his

⁷³ See, for example: Cashmore (2002); Brick (2003); Cashmore & Parker (2003); and Rahman (2004).

claim. For example, whilst Scott does not elaborate in his questionnaire on his provocative-sounding article, ‘Becks... Man or woman?’, his unique assertion that the expected reader of *Balls* would be ‘hetrasexual’ (*sic*) implies a possible discomfort with mixed roles of gender and sexuality that might mark this feature out as critical of Beckham’s blurring of such tropes. Hence, it could be the case that Scott is uneasy with the less traditional versions of masculinity that he sees as advocated by David Beckham. On the other hand, *Balls*’ contents page reveals that the full title of the article reads ‘man, *god* or woman’ (my emphasis), suggesting a level of admiration of the footballer after all. As Cashmore accurately notes: ‘[w]hat Beckham is portraying, whether he knows it or not, is a version of masculinity that contradicts, confuses and conflates a notion that it almost synonymous with football. Here’s the headline: BECKHAM ATTACKS FOOTBALL’S ALPHA MALE’ (p. 132).

By 2005, however, the headline had changed to: ‘Kirk’s kick in the Golden Balls for Beckham’ (*Metro*, 6 April 2005), referring to the fact that the footballer’s involvement in a Pepsi commercial was more recently being spoofed by the company itself in a new advertising campaign that replaced Beckham with 89-year-old Kirk Douglas as its cola-drinking Roman gladiator. A week after his much-vaunted appearance on ITV1’s *Ant & Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway* had drawn over three million fewer viewers than a new episode of *Doctor Who* on BBC1, the article goes on to quote various celebrities and fashion experts’ often cruel criticisms of Beckham’s apparent lack of style. *Sunday Times* fashion editor Claudia Croft, for example, opines: ‘Suddenly he is totally wrong. He looks overdressed and poncey. You look back on Beckham-mania now and think, “What was all the fuss about?”. He looks ridiculous’. The article itself continues: ‘Dripping with “bling”⁷⁴ jewellery, the Real Madrid player has fallen from grace in style circles to be voted the worst dressed man in Britain in a poll by *GQ* magazine ... crowning him King

⁷⁴ The expression ‘bling’ was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003, according to *The Independent Online Edition* (7 June 2003), and defined as: ‘expensive, ostentatious clothing or jewellery, or the wearing of them’. Due to its association with the new – and negative – social stereotype of ‘chavs’ (see footnote 16), however, ‘bling’ has since lost much of the status it might have once signified.

Chav’⁷⁵. Whilst the ‘building up then knocking down’ of celebrities in this manner is an established media tactic, the reference points of this particular piece – Beckham’s fashion sense and fondness for jewellery now being derided as ‘poncey’ or effeminate – suggest that his once-considered challenging and exciting ability to ‘contradict, confuse and conflate’ gender stereotypes may finally have become too much for popular constructions of masculinity.

7.6. Men on Masculinity

Towards the end of the section about role models above, we touched on the notion that readers look at images of other people for various, sometimes conflicting reasons. As we have seen, men’s magazines are often accused of objectifying women by making them the subject of a lascivious male gaze in revealing poses on front covers and in photo spreads. Since the evidence we are primarily provided with by participants in this study is pictorial, it is worth considering their presentation of the cover stars involved, and the conclusions this might suggest. Almost half of the magazines, then, feature a woman (or group of women) as the main image on their front cover. This is consistent with the assertion of many authors that men, in general, enjoy *looking at* women, for example: ‘Men like to see women’s flesh and body parts’ (Steve, 18); ‘Boobs – all men want to see them’ (Tom, 16); ‘If the woman doesn’t attract them, the car will’ (David, 24); ‘Sexy females – turn on for men’ (Martin, 14); and ‘the majority of men are attracted to any image of female beauty’ (Gareth, 23). The gender split of the scripts’ cover stars is outlined in Table 7.6.

⁷⁵ A buzzword that became widespread across the UK in 2004, ‘chav’ is defined by the online *Wikipedia* encyclopaedia as: ‘a derogatory slang term currently in popular usage throughout England. It refers to a subculture negatively stereotyped as being uneducated, uncultured and prone to antisocial or immoral behavior’ (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chav>, accessed on 8 July 2005).

Table 7.6. Gender of main image on magazine covers	
Image	Percentage of covers
Female	46%
Male	27%
Non-human / no main image	27%

33 of the female cover stars (72%) could be considered to be in a ‘sexually provocative’ or ‘revealingly attired’ pose, compared to 11 of the males (41%), further emphasizing the above point and providing strong evidence for the case that women’s bodies exist in mainstream media as objects of male lust and objectification. Of course, there is also a double standard in operation here, which undermines the basis of such a content analysis: a scantily clad woman seems, in the eyes of society, almost by default to assume a sexual or submissive pose; a man who is similarly undressed on the front cover of a magazine, however (while increasingly now presented and accepted as an object of an objectifying gaze), appears just as likely to be so as part of a sporting activity such as swimming, boxing or body building, meaning that his naked physique arguably becomes more of a symbol of his strength and physical prowess than his sexual availability. In Chapter 3, we encountered the ‘lenses of gender’ theory proposed by Bem (1993), in which assumptions like these concerning gender identity are said to become naturalized, portraying men and women as binary opposites, and hegemonic masculinity as the norm from which all else deviates. Indeed, amongst the scripts, we have also encountered many instances of gender polarization, from the ‘men only’ approach of a significant number of titles, to the use of gendered terms like ‘girl’ as a taunt aimed at norm-breaking role models such as David Beckham, and ‘real men’ to describe those who conform to traditional stereotypes. Such examples from the scripts might be taken as evidence of the pervasive lenses of gender still being worn over the collective eyes of society.

Beyond the relatively simple content analysis of male and female flesh presented here, however – and as the accompanying questionnaires demonstrate – this does not necessarily mean that all men see themselves in a position of natural social power and sexual dominance. Several statements made by male respondents in this study, for example, recall the opinions of critics such as Kaufman (1994) and Horrocks (1994), who argued, as we saw in Chapter 3, that the apparent ‘norms’ imposed by hegemonic masculinity set standards that many men simply cannot reach. 17-year-old Charles writes: ‘A lot of people think it is just girls who are insecure about themselves but I think it’s men too’. His magazine, *Close Shave*, has an attractive man on its front cover, accompanied by text such as ‘How to get a fit body’ and ‘Am I fit or fat?’, which Charles suggests would appeal to male readers because ‘they would want to look like him’. This notion, as we have seen, is common among the scripts, with many references to getting ‘hair like this’ (*Men + Motors*), ‘muscles to flash the gals’ (*Rush*) or ‘Becks’ Pecs’ (*Between the Sheets*). Likewise, 23-year-old Ainsley explains that his *Body Builder* cover ‘shows you what you could look like if you want to’, as mentioned above, while Richard’s *Nip/Tuck* is entirely devoted to topics related to plastic surgery for men. Such efforts lead 33-year-old Chris to the conclusion that ‘[m]en are more “made up” than women these days’ (that is, they spend more time perfecting their physical appearance than ever before). This would effectively put modern men in the same situation that Berger (1972; see Chapter 2) argues has long beset women – one of constantly trying to improve themselves in order to compare favourably with the ‘perfect’ images of men appearing in advertisements and on magazine covers. A review of the questionnaires reveals numerous references to the stresses caused by this endeavour:

Most men believe their lives are far more fast track than the reality ... Attitude is all important today and I think men try harder to please and understand (Tony, 35, *Stud*).

[I included] advice on relationships, love tips, how to go on a date. These are things men think about or worry about but are not overly vocal about it (Michelle, 17, *Macho Man*).

[My magazine] takes the stress off[f] a troubled man and gives him a good laugh no matter how sad you are (Arran, 12, *For the Real Men!*).

All men want to be good at sport, funny, good at sex or a rock/pop icon – they exude ‘maleness’ and ability in these areas create the image of a successful male (Gareth, 23, *Cult*).

It was noted above that notions of male camaraderie or community – the latter existing as both friendship groups amongst men in the outside world, and ‘readership communities’ implied by the shared experience of enjoying a particular magazine – are one way in which men may attempt to deal with these pressures. This is also reflected in the scripts, as authors comment upon the importance of supportive social interaction to men, such as 18-year-old Steve’s generalization that ‘they socialise in pubs with other men and enjoy a social drink, after work or at weekends’, or 17-year-old Carl’s observation that ‘[m]any male lives are built up on “women”, “cars” and “looks/attractability” ... [*Limitize*] is a mix between their “social” and “play” life’. Judging by the comments above, what we indeed see in many of the scripts is not only an attempt on the part of the authors to help male magazine readers *succeed* in life, but also simply to *cope* with the pressures and stresses it places upon them.

Over the course of this chapter, we have seen the cultural concept of masculinity, as difficult to define as it seemed in Chapter 3, assume a wide variety of faces across a similarly wide spectrum of contexts and purposes. It is to this second factor – the *function* of these faces and the purposes that lifestyle magazines serve within wider landscapes of identity-construction and social relationships – that our attentions will now turn. A number of established ideas associated with gender and cultural studies, such as role models, irony and performances of identity, have already been discussed, and found their way into larger patterns put forward by the study. We have, however, continually found ourselves returning to three central themes: celebrity gossip, contradictions and community. In the final chapter, I hope to bring these together into a helpful perspective from which to examine men’s lifestyle magazines and what they might mean to masculinities today, investigating what each offers male readers in terms of understanding their own identities.

Chapter 8

Conclusions: Men's Magazines and Modern Masculinity

Reading through a hundred sets of specially created magazine covers and contents pages, it is easy to lose sight of the theoretical underpinnings of this piece of research. Pictures, photographs, headlines, and catchphrases leap from every page, expressing in colourful style the various interests, desires and concerns of young people of a range of ages from different regions. This study began, however, with a discussion of the social and cultural purposes of lifestyle magazines – and men's magazines in particular – moving on to examine cultural concepts of masculinity itself, and the portrayal of these notions in the popular media. This concluding chapter will discuss the possible contributions of this piece of research to these areas, as well as the success of its methodology, as outlined in Chapter 5. Finally, it will also attempt to draw some broader conclusions from the specific findings laid out in the preceding two chapters to examine young men's relationship with lifestyle magazines, and their media literacy as demonstrated by this particular task.

8.1. Changing Times, Changing Representations

No research exists in a vacuum. Commencing in 2001, this study followed a period of declining sales of men's lifestyle magazines throughout the late nineties, with decreased yet stable sales of the titles that had successfully survived into the 21st century, such as *FHM*, *Loaded* and *Maxim*. Five years previously, the genre had witnessed a genuine boom, and the years over which the study ran saw several new men's titles launched and cancelled⁷⁶ – including a venture by former *Loaded* editor James Brown, *Jack*, which ran from 2002 to 2004 – while sales of celebrity gossip and TV-related magazines, in contrast, soared, led by *Heat* (launched in 1999) and

⁷⁶ Some short-lived men's lifestyle magazines of the period were *Cream* (1998), *Deluxe* (1998-1999), *Level* (1999), *Later* (1999-2001), *Mondo* (2000-2001), *Nine* (2002), *Snug* (2002-2003), and *Word* (2003).

Now. A new breed of weekly men's magazines arrived in January 2004 in the shape of *Nuts* and *Zoo Weekly*, incorporating elements of the successful new celebrity magazines (such as television listings) and a new emphasis on topical events made possible by the weekly format. Both have enjoyed strong sales, each recording readerships of over 200,000 each by the end of the year. A weekly competitor, *Cut*, launched in August 2004, may have been a victim of market saturation, however, and closed four months later.

At the cinema, the arguably male-oriented phase of the mid-nineties (which saw popular hits in action movies like 1995's *Crimson Tide*, *Braveheart* and *Die Hard With a Vengeance*) gave way to series in which strong female characters received equal screen time – including the *Scream* trilogy (1996-2000), *The Matrix* (1999-2003), *Star Wars: Episodes I-III* (1999-2005), and *X-Men* (2000-present) – as well as female-led action movies such as the *Charlie's Angels* films (2000/2003), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* films (2001/2003), *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* (2003/2004), *Catwoman* (2004), *Taxi* (2004), and *Elektra* (2005). Female characters also attained equal sexual status in 'raunchy' comedies like the *American Pie* films (1999-2004), *EuroTrip* (2004) and *The Girl Next Door* (2004), and displayed equally crude and vulgar behaviour on their own in 'chick flicks' such as *Head Over Heels* (2001) and *The Sweetest Thing* (2002).

In popular literature, a fashionable sub-genre concerned with male angst and 'thirtysomething' nostalgia, popularized in part by the novels of Nick Hornby, had started to wane by 2003, to be replaced by novels widely read by men featuring perhaps surprising portrayals of masculinity: Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* follows the adventures of a highly spiritual and somewhat asexual 16-year-old boy; Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is told from the perspective of a teenage boy with Asperger's syndrome, living with his father in Swindon; and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* features a college-professor action hero in his late forties, who drives a tiny Smart car and revels in art history, secret codes and old books. On television, the portrayal of gay men became even more prevalent in soap operas, situation comedies and reality TV, including the increasingly outrageous and successful American sitcom, *Will & Grace* (which

follows the lives of a homosexual man and his heterosexual female friend), both British and American versions of the groundbreaking gay drama series, *Queer As Folk*, and the variously gay and transgendered housemates popular with *Big Brother* viewers in the UK. By 2005, a bisexual action hero had even come to light in the shape of *Doctor Who*'s time-travelling Captain Jack, a popular character featured on primetime BBC1. The rate at which such representations have flourished over the last three years suggests that the portrayals of masculinity in the media will only diversify even further in the near future.

8.2. Success of the Research Method

Although these and other broader representations of masculinity have become more widespread across the media, it would seem from a cursory glance at men's magazines that the familiar preoccupation with naked women, fast cars and dangerous sports associated with men remains unchallenged. The following section looks at the various elements that participants in this study borrowed from existing men's publications to incorporate within their own creations, and asks if traditional portrayals of hegemonic masculinity retain any power in the forming of young male identities at the present time.

8.2.1. The Influence of Men's Magazines

When the research method of this study was in its design stage, an early concern arose: in designing their own magazines, would respondents simply reproduce the style and content of existing men's publications, or would their creations be completely different? Furthermore, would this matter? A natural early assumption seemed to be that, should the majority of respondents produce something different, more challenging or idiosyncratic than an apparently straightforward clone of *FHM* or similar, then the result might somehow be more representative of their own identities, rather than the current state of the lifestyle magazine market. Of course, this is not necessarily the case, as every script

comprising a cover, contents page and completed questionnaire affords an equally worthwhile insight into its creator's personality, lifestyle and identity, with some expressing their thoughts and attitudes through traditionally accepted codes and conventions, and others finding more unexpected techniques via which to communicate.

Nevertheless, it was decided to include a question explicitly addressing this issue in the questionnaire given to participants, asking specifically: 'How is your magazine different to men's titles already available in the shops?'. The resulting answers, as we saw in Chapter 6, varied considerably, with many authors stating that their creation was no different at all, some claiming (often without specific evidence) that theirs was simply 'better', and others using the question to express their dissatisfaction with men's magazines supposedly aimed at them but to which they felt little connection. Such answers taken by themselves, however, do not necessarily paint an accurate picture of the body of scripts' relationship to existing magazines, with instances (such as the fairly radical *Tits* magazine) of somewhat 'alternative' covers being accompanied by questionnaires that seemed to avoid this apparently central feature of their magazine, and vice versa. Of course, when engaging in such conjecture, the researcher privileges his own interpretations of the magazine over those of its actual creator, but in cases where such a profound gap appears to exist between the cover and the questionnaire, some 'reading between the lines' seems necessary. In reality, a majority of the respondents in each group produced a script either very similar in style and convention to existing men's titles or clearly aiming for the same, implying both a general familiarity with what the market has to offer and, by extension, some degree of satisfaction with its efforts. The most common response to the above question – that the author's created cover is no different at all to magazines available in shops – suggests a certain level of attachment to the genre, with some authors overtly defending it, such as Michael of group 4, who asks: 'why would you make a magazine any different than the content in the ones already out?'. Comments such as these may also suggest that, although the editorial team of each magazine would no doubt claim that their title had a very particular and carefully-conceived identity, men's magazines are perceived by their audience as being fairly homogenous.

The recurring *reproduction* of styles and conventions which script authors may be familiar with from their own contact with the media is an outcome that our overview of previous creative research projects in Chapter 5 might have prepared us for. The work of Eldridge, Kitzinger & Williams (1997) found that, while participants in ‘news game’ exercises made conscious efforts to present ‘unbiased’ reportage or their own opinions, their results were not always free from the sorts of clichéd language and ‘editorial slant’ popular in current mainstream news media. Similarly, in the study at hand, phrases, headlines and even the titles of articles are lifted in their entirety from existing magazine sources⁷⁷ (and, apparently, the scripts of other participants in the same group, in some cases), resulting in an expectedly ‘laddish’ tone and prevalence of images of female flesh. A straightforward ‘media effects’-based reading of this situation could suggest that respondents are so affected by the attitudes presented by real-life men’s magazines that they have come to adopt these as their own, assuming a sense of masculinity defined by its sexual dominance and self-indulgence. As outlined in Chapter 7, however, this thesis seeks to describe a more complex relationship between male readers and their chosen texts. Through illustrations of the purposes of irony and celebrity gossip, I have sought to present a process by which male readers recognize the media’s various portrayals of masculinity as exactly that, ‘cutting and pasting’ their own masculine identity from a surprisingly rich array of options and possibilities in much the same way as they edited together the magazine covers that formed the physical basis of this project.

8.2.2. ‘Becoming Critical’

Chapter 5 outlined a process that Buckingham & Sefton-Green (1994) termed ‘becoming critical’ – that is, developing a fuller understanding of one’s relationship to the media before attempting to describe it to others. Buckingham & Sefton-Green

⁷⁷ For example, *Menagaize* uses headings imported whole from *Heat* magazine, such as ‘2003’s Randidiest Celebs!’ and ‘Kylie’s wild night at the Grammys’, while *Rush* incorporates ‘More Exposed! Extreme sport madness’, an existing title probably from a men’s magazine. Although this practice might be explained as a limitation imposed by the creative technique (both scripts were produced using magazine clippings), the makers of other magazines employing the same method – such as *Macho Man* and *Suicide, Politics and the News* – choose to create entirely *original* headlines, by cutting out and rearranging single words and even individual letters from their paper sources.

postulated, along with MacGregor & Morrison (1995), that one way of becoming more ‘critical’ was by experiencing firsthand the production of a media product of one’s own. Indeed, I hoped that this project would give participants this opportunity – not only teaching them something about the workings of the media and, on some level, themselves, but also trying to secure data that was more varied, considered and uninhibited than that often associated with more rigid focus group-based exercises. It is not, of course, the position of the researcher to quantify or assess participants’ success in becoming critical, but evidence of participants noting it for themselves or demonstrating increased media awareness or skills may be observed.

Across the sample, for example, we find instances of authors expressing the decisions they faced as self-styled magazine editors, making comments such as: ‘the front cover should inspire and intrigue, which will create the appeal’ (Scott, *Reason*); ‘[t]he choice of articles is meant to be a little more thought provoking than the usual *Loaded* fodder’ (Dom, “*Whatever*”); and ‘[t]he letters section gives the chance for men to ... relate to each other’ (Chris, *Cheeky Monkey*). Here, the authors show evidence of sometimes quite detailed consideration, making their conclusions harder to write off as assumptions or generalizations.

In other scripts, we see authors experimenting with elements of identity-play, an activity that Buckingham & Sefton-Green viewed as a highly valuable critical process. Michael, the creator of *Laid Bare*, appeared to develop an ironic persona in his magazine that carried over into his satirically ‘laddish’ questionnaire responses, providing him with a ‘safe’ zone in which to explore his notions of masculinity. In the case of the young women who took part, many made imaginative leaps to put themselves in the position of male readers, envisaging both broadly male-heterosexual ‘tits and motors’-type magazines and carefully considered attempts to appeal to homosexual men. In all examples, the results display definite engagement with issues relating to the social constructions of gendered identity, demonstrating an extremely high degree of media literacy amongst the participants involved.

All of these factors suggest considerable room for further research based both on the data collected over the course of this study and in terms of the possibilities of new research carried out using similar methodologies. In this thesis, I have sought

wherever possible to allow participants to speak in their own words about the magazines they have created and the identities and positions they have attempted to express. This is not to suggest that much interesting work could not be done using the methods of visual analysis described in earlier chapters, including principles of semiotics widely employed throughout fields such as film theory and art analysis. Equally, the scripts produced offer a rich and voluminous source of material for detailed linguistic investigation, being both inspired by existing media texts and presented as such by their authors. Statistical content analysis of the covers remains a method that this study has merely touched upon, but which would seem an area ripe with possibilities given the 100 separate scripts involved.

As noted in Chapter 5, creative research methods are being increasingly employed as a means of investigating people's relationships with the media. Based on participants' positive reaction to the research methodology used in this study – along with the freedom of expression and enhanced 'critical' stance it has afforded them as research subjects – it would seem a valuable method of investigating other media, from the obviously related genre of women's magazines, to almost any other form of media text that can be placed under the creative control of the audiences more used to receiving it.

If the methodology used here were to be repeated, I would suggest that the opportunity be taken to use the scripts not only as outputs or 'records' of the issues and topics addressed, but also as active stimulus material for further discussion with the authors on an individual level and, where appropriate, in group debate. Some of the most interesting and in-depth data collected as part of this research came from the sessions conducted one-on-one and face-to-face with participants as they went about the often complex and always creative process of making a magazine cover. While the completion of surveys in this instance went a good way towards collecting from participants neatly distilled summaries of their main thoughts and opinions, the potential for qualitative research in the form of interviews based around the task is extremely exciting indeed.

8.3. Readers, Readings and ‘Real Life’

Moving on from the methodology itself, the findings of this study offer some interesting perspectives on critical arguments we have already discussed, as well as a number of insights of their own into the reasons young men have for reading magazines. This final section will examine what magazines offer their readerships in terms of readers organizing their own notions of self to construct personal and public identities, and how the imagined internal world of magazines relates to the external experience of real life.

8.3.1. The ‘Identity-Explaining’ Function of Celebrities

In Chapter 7, it was noted that a surprising number of scripts contained large portions devoted to celebrity gossip, a subject usually only encountered in men’s lifestyle magazines in regard to interviews with female model cover stars. Definitions of celebrity were traced in the work of Marshall (1997) and Rojek (2001), where it was suggested that celebrities act as ‘points of articulation between the social and the personal’ (Rojek, 2001: 16). That celebrities therefore provide a sort of ‘reference point’ amidst a complex web of role models and possible identities was deemed a crucial factor in their prominence throughout the scripts.

As noted above, the popular new men’s weekly magazines, *Nuts* and *Zoo*, arose in the wake of a successful range of new weekly television and gossip magazines led by EMAP’s *Heat*, which was launched in 1999. Unlike its contemporaries, *Heat* took a less female-focused approach, despite much of its content being similar to that of the established gossip magazines *OK!* and *Hello!* (*Wikipedia*, 2005), offering a clear mixture of male and female writers, and placing a large emphasis on such ‘gender-neutral’ aspects as television schedules and media reviews. Over time, *Heat* has come to position itself more closely to the women’s market, incorporating a large fashion and style section and general ‘girl-about-town’ mode of address aimed at female readers, but its influence on *Nuts* and *Zoo* – with

their TV listings (a first for any men's title), review sections and celebrity photo shoots – is obvious.

In this study, a trend towards the incorporation of a great deal of celebrity- and gossip-related content was immediately apparent, going beyond the expected interest in glamour model types to extend to celebrities such as David and Victoria Beckham and their family, the contestants of the ITV 'reality' game show, *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!*, and pop singer Michael Jackson. It was argued that this newfound interest in celebrity lifestyles represented a shift in dominant constructions of masculinity, whereby men, recognizing the widening spectrum of male roles and readings in popular discourses, empathized with the explicitly 'self-edited' faces of current celebrities; that is, they have become fascinated with the process by which a celebrity works to maintain a coherent persona to the world, recognizing within it the processes through which they, as individual men, work to express their own identities to the people around them.

8.3.2. The 'Identity-Explaining' Function of Gender Roles

At this point, I would like to extend this idea in reference to the potentially troubling issue of men's magazines perpetuating misogynistic, homophobic, restrictive, or otherwise negative constructions of masculinity ('troubling' as it has proved to authors such as Cook (2000), Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks (2001) and Benwell (2003a/2003b)). We see in the scripts, as mentioned above, a general attempt to emulate the codes and conventions of existing popular men's titles such as *FHM*, *GQ*, *Nuts* and *Zoo*, not limited merely to layout designs but also incorporating expressions and attitudes of a 'laddish' – that is, on the surface, sexist and occasionally puerile – nature. We have so far noted two contrasting conclusions that may be drawn from this observation. Firstly, it is conceivable that magazines simply perpetuate and reinforce stereotypical performances of masculinity, passing traditional male values on to new readers. Secondly, and by contrast, it may be the case that, when magazines fall into established, arguably outmoded expressions of masculinity, they do so as part of a conscious, self-mocking over-performance designed to show, partly implicitly, an *acceptance* that these expressions are no

longer acceptable in modern, more gender-balanced society. This study, finding various instances of self-parody throughout the scripts, has aligned itself more comfortably with the latter conclusion, but has also found room in its findings to accommodate the fact that the promotion of less desirable stereotypes and male behaviour may be possible in some cases.

However, a third conclusion, again contrasting but not incompatible with or exclusive of the preceding two, takes the aforementioned ‘identity-explaining’ role of celebrities as its starting-point. Here, it could be argued that – like the dominant cultural ‘face’ of a celebrity – conventional portrayals of masculinity possess a recognizable ‘clustering of cultural significance’, to use Marshall’s words (1997: 245). Over time, we could argue, such traits as avoiding displays of emotion, being highly sexually active, or repressing homosexuality have become established as a ‘cluster of meaning’ (as it might be termed) surrounding the nucleus of masculinity. Newer constructions of masculinity also have meaning, but they are seen as less stable, for three possible reasons. Firstly, being simply newer, they are intrinsically seen as likely to be transient, representing trends or fads that we have seen come and go in the past, sometimes as fleetingly as David Beckham-inspired fashion statements such as the men’s sarong. Secondly, and again because of their shorter history, they remain under a process of ongoing negotiation in public discourses, being shaped and defined in a way that the ‘unquestioned’ qualities of traditional masculinity are no longer. Thirdly, they often actively *challenge* established clusters of meaning, and are therefore often widely viewed as going against ‘conventional wisdom’, with the potential being, of course, that they will somehow fall short in comparison.

As we have theorized, the young male magazine reader is on a quest of his own to establish a coherent identity, constantly editing and reworking his sense of self-identity and the persona he presents to the outside world. He may navigate through the wider field of social and personal identity using the more stable constructions (for example, social stereotypes, so-called gender roles, or certain celebrities) as points of reference, which come into play for comparison purposes when dealing with the more unfamiliar or experimental roles. This may also entail

‘trying on’ established personas, a behaviour we have seen in our analysis of certain scripts, or actively rebelling against them, as we have also noted in others.

In this model, then, the perpetuation of outmoded social and sexual roles is a necessary function of media representations, providing the ‘map’ upon which explorations of identity may be charted. Such roles should not, therefore, be mistaken as having a simply reinscribing force; conversely, their continued existence may actually *facilitate* the gradual change and evolution of gender identities over time. Eventually, however, when newer roles become more stable, it seems likely that the more outmoded ones will become less relevant, and therefore less useful, and fall out of existence.

8.3.3. Magazines and Communities

A complex idea introduced in the last chapter was that of ‘communities’ of male readers. Drawing on evidence from the scripts that certain authors had attempted to foster a sense of camaraderie amongst their prospective readers, it was suggested that men’s lifestyle magazines had the capacity to enable ‘psychological communities’ of men within their pages, and contribute to real-life interactions between male friends in the outside world. Many participants noted in their questionnaires that social skills formed an important part of ‘being a man’. These ranged from making other men laugh and ‘relating’ to male friends, to making *women* laugh and being able to understand and even please them. A general notion seemed to be that an important function of men’s magazines was to provide resources related to achieving these aims. In this way, the male reader is acting simultaneously within two ‘social circles’ – the readership of a particular magazine (linked by mediated information, in-jokes, and feedback channels such as letters and emails) and the more tangible community of ‘real life’, in which social skills learned from magazines must be employed.

These two convergent communities may be likened in some ways to Kirkham & Thumim’s (1993/1995) concepts of the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ worlds of masculinity, as described in Chapter 4. As we saw, Kirkham & Thumim located the external world as the social arena of male success and power, equivalent in this

instance to the ‘outside’ community – the place where, as many of the respondents in this study would suggest, men are supposed to present a coherent and controlled identity. The internal world houses the ‘psychic construction of identity’ (1995: 12), which, in this analogy, equates to the community ‘inside’ the pages of men’s magazines, where identities are shaped and tried on, and male repertoires are stocked with information, tips and attitudes to be tested in the external world.

The internal community may also be likened to the notoriously intricate notion of the *habitus*, as put forward by Bourdieu (1979) and addressed in Chapter 2. Specifically, it is Jackson *et al.*’s sensitive reading that makes the most sense within this context, with the authors, we may remember, describing the *habitus* as ‘a way of seeing how different discursive dispositions map on to other social divisions’ (2001: 138). We can adapt this line of thought to posit that the internal community of magazines acts as a network of readers’ repertoires that can be ‘mapped on’ to community patterns in the external world – in other words, the internal forms the blueprint for the external, as potential performances of masculinity become physical portrayals in real-life situations.

8.3.4. Contradictions within the Internal Community of Magazines

There is an interesting difference between portrayals of identity in the ‘internal world’ of magazines and the ‘external world’ of real life, however – one that is based around the central theme of contradictions. In Chapter 2, we discussed several accounts by different authors as to the reason why contradictions appear so frequently in men’s lifestyle magazines (and, indeed, popular culture in general). Jackson *et al.* (2000) suggested that contradictions *reflect* the sense of uncertainty inherent in modern masculinity, even relating a magazine’s financial success to how well it manages this task (that is, how well it ‘speaks’ to young men). Gauntlett (2002) seemed mostly to agree, but looked at the situation from the opposite direction, proposing that magazines *offer up* ‘multiple messages’ (p. 255), thereby demonstrating the increasingly wide and often contradictory range of possibilities open to readers as formers of identity, and providing them with role models and examples to help with the process. These arguments build on the observation of

Ballaster *et al.* (1991) that lifestyle magazines ‘encompass glaring contradiction *coherently*’ (p. 7; their emphasis), a statement which I would like to pick apart slightly in order to advance the particular argument of this study.

Magazines, I would argue, do not present contradictions coherently. This is a luxury afforded to them by their very status as ‘clusters of meaning’ within the media rather than ‘real life’. In magazines, contradictions appear on the page side-by-side, united only by the fact that they exist within the same binding. In the external world, however, people usually attempt to present coherent representations of the self, drawing on examples set by cultural figures and within magazine articles, to ‘edit together’ a rational and consistent public identity. Magazines, then – like the contrastingly multifaceted and frequently self-contradictory personas of celebrities – perform an identity-explaining function; readers recognize within their pages the potential chaos of contradiction, yet are able to select enough meaning from the array of content on offer to come away with a reinforced (or somewhat stabilized) sense of self-identity.

Leafing through a magazine, the reader is already acting out the role of editor, selecting, reworking and incorporating into his or her own repertoire (as Gauntlett above and Hermes (1995) before him suggest) information with some personal meaning or relevance – whether this enforces existing opinions and attitudes, or perhaps challenges them in an intriguing or thought-provoking way. As Jackson *et al.* suggested, then, the magazines that offer the most diverse, original and provocatively juxtaposed content are indeed likely to attain the widest appeal. Through the production of scripts for this study, we see this editorial process acted out in one of the most explicit ways imaginable, as participants mix together presentable elements of their own identities with carefully selected elements from existing magazines to compose a single, unified text to show to the rest of the world.

8.4. Conclusion: the ‘Identity-Explaining’ Function of Magazines

The notion of ‘editing’ has been fundamental throughout this study. From the ‘news game’ exercises that, in part, inspired its methodology, to the ways in which we have theorized individuals present their own identities, we have encountered some process of selection, rearrangement and presentation. The research methodology itself was based on the editorial process of creating a professional magazine, encouraging individuals to imagine and construct a product of their own, designed both to represent their own identity and, on some level, appeal to other male readers (in the same way that a person’s public face incorporates both their sense of self-identity, yet is also usually geared towards being popular with – or at least acceptable to – others). As the study progressed, it became increasingly clear that this process of writing, drawing, cutting, and pasting – whether on paper or with the use of computer software – in some way mirrored the procedures involved in piecing together one’s own representation of the self and presenting this as a coherent persona to the outside world, and was therefore able to offer some insight into these behaviours.

A surprising focus on celebrity marked a significant clue as to how aware individual participants in this study were that their identity constituted a range of self-edited performances. We concluded that an important aspect of the appeal of celebrities was their personification of the ‘project’ of composing a coherent identity in the face of often contradictory elements. The fact that young men appeared to be becoming increasingly fascinated by celebrities and their lifestyles was taken as a possible indication that they were finding the process of projecting a masculine identity ever more complex, or at least involving of a wider range of options and possibilities than have been associated with constructions of masculinity in recent history. In this way, the rise in the popularity of men’s lifestyle magazines since the early 1990s has been linked to these changes in the social construction of masculinities.

The predominance of contradictions within men’s magazines suggested another significant function related to male identity formation and representation.

Magazines' ability to present contradictions simultaneously and alongside each other within the internal, psychological community they actively foster, it is argued, offers male readers a valuable way of experiencing the contradictions they must often deny in the outside world. In striving to present a coherent identity to others, men are encouraged to suppress the contradictions that exist in their own internal narratives, whereas magazines indulge the 'luxury' of contradiction, whilst also offering practical advice on how to go about constructing a more coherent identity in order to succeed in the external world.

Men's lifestyle magazines both symbolize and celebrate the increasingly intricate processes associated with forging a masculine identity in contemporary society. With their mixtures of gossip and insight, audacity and advice, they reflect the complex and often contradictory faces of modern masculinity, whilst simultaneously offering up for inspection the faces of the celebrities who embody its possibilities. As such representations and role models continue to diversify, the ongoing relevance of lifestyle magazines to the lives of male readers will remain an interesting relationship to observe.

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Appendix I

Lesson Plan for Teachers

About the Project: *Reading Into Magazines* is a PhD study by Ross Horsley (email: ross@readinginto.com), investigating men's lifestyle magazines and the construction of male identity. It asks readers of men's magazines such as *FHM* and *Maxim* to imagine a new lifestyle magazine aimed at men, which also reflects aspects of their *own* identity. As part of the study, I would like to investigate the opinions and ideas of college/sixth form-aged students in a classroom-type environment. While I am primarily interested in the responses of male participants, contributions by females are also welcome.

Some 'Guidelines' for the Project: The project could possibly be introduced as 'making a mini men's magazine'. Participants should be encouraged to concentrate on creating (1) a front cover, and (2) a contents page for 'a men's magazine that they would like to read, but which they also think would appeal to men in general'. There's no reason why they should be restricted in terms of anything else they might wish to add or include. As a lifestyle magazine, it shouldn't focus too heavily on one particular interest or hobby, but include a range of subjects, articles or sections relevant to the lives of male readers. The front cover will likely be image-led, but should give a good general idea of the style and contents of the magazine, with a certain amount of text describing what's 'inside'. The contents page could simply list the imaginary articles and features, either specifically or by their type. Ideally, it should be written as it would appear in the magazine, addressing the kind of reader in mind.

Innovation and looser interpretation of the task are not discouraged, but it would be helpful if it could be stressed that the work done should give a good rough idea of both the image and contents of the imagined magazine. The task could be completed either using paper and art materials, or a computer software package.

Paper-Based Method: Front cover: Participants could choose pictures freely from any sources (magazines of any sort, brochures, leaflets – anything with

pictorial content), draw their own, or indicate in writing the images to be included. They can write their own titles, headlines, captions and copy. Contents page: This could simply be written or typed. Pictures may be included.

Computer-Based Method: Front cover: A package like Paint or PhotoShop could be used to create a simple or more elaborate cover. One possible method is to use images taken from the internet, and overlay words and phrases as pieces of text on top. Contents page: This could simply be typed up as a Word document or similar, or made with the use of a graphics package.

Website: An accompanying website for this project can be found at: <http://www.readinginto.com/magazines>. The instructions can be found here, along with examples of magazine covers produced by other participants.

Appendix II

Revised Questionnaire for Group 6

The following is a representation of the slightly altered questionnaire used by members of group 6, taking part in the second research session at Armley Prison, as described in Chapter 6 (section 6.1.6) above. The original questionnaire is included in Chapter 5 (Table 5.4).

Questionnaire	
Question number	Question
1	What picture(s) would be on the front cover of your men's magazine?
2	Why?
3	What articles will be inside?
4	Why will these topics appeal to male readers?
5	What three words (or phrases) would describe the 'typical' reader of your magazine?