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The liquid woman: A discourse analysis concerning women's sexual (in)abilities in women's lifestyle magazines

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### ABSTRACT

Research on sexuality in women's magazines has identified dominant ideologies that promote sexual role stereotypes. Five women's lifestyle magazines were analysed to identify ways in which women's sexuality was represented. Using a Discourse Analysis four different interpretive repertoires were identified: the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire; men-ology; transforming the self (Gill, 2009) and dressed-down libido. A critical feminist analysis of the selected articles regarding how 'great' sex could be achieved suggested that far from promoting women's sexual pleasure and empowerment, men's sexuality was privileged. Although many discourses represent women as having sexual agency, it can be argued that women's sexuality has not been 'liberated'.

KEY WORDS:	WOMEN'S MAGAZINES	DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	NEOLIBERALISM	SEX	IDENTITY
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## Introduction

The alteration from a welfare-based to a neo-liberal society, from a solid to a liquid (post) modernity, has reconstructed the social classification of the individual into one that is “highly individualised, fragmented, commercialised and entangled in consumer culture” (Marques, 2010, p.314). Additionally, identity(ies) have become increasingly fragmented and unstable whilst developing into objects of consumption. Within the liquid/post-modern consumer society, we are identified, and come to identify ourselves, by our power to consume; we are “seduced with the promise that we can become ‘anybody we like’” (Rutherford, 2007: 10). In liquid modern consumer society, Bauman (2000; 2004) describes identity, and the construction of identities, as being in a period of unstoppable and constant experimentation.

In the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women’s sexuality became progressively more explicit (Evans et al., 2010). No longer regarded for its passivity, contemporary femininity is now increasingly likely to be signified by a new, liberated sexuality for women; “sex is stylish, a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of body work, self-expression, a quest for individual fulfilment” (Attwood, 2006, p.86). The emancipated modern femininity is an outcome of a larger, global neoliberal postfeminist discourse (Lazar, 2011). Specific themes associated with post-feminism have obtained prevalence in mainstream society, such as individual empowerment, entrepreneurship, sexual agency, and the entitlement to pleasure and emancipation (Akass and McCabe, 2004; Jackson, 2006; Gill, 2009; Lazar, 2009).

The continuous writing and talking about individuals by others is an example of power others have over society Foucault (1971). Even though this can potentially underestimate an individual’s power, it can directly be applied to lifestyle magazines, whereby discourses of the self can be brought upon by cultural and commercial forces, which neither editors nor readers sense they own (Matheson, 2005). Foucault (1989) has argued that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, identity has predominantly been constructed through sex within western society. Through scientific, medical, social and moral discourses, sex has become central, shaping both an internal psychological self and the self as a social organism, relating to others. Sexualised discourses are presented within lifestyle magazines classifying who we are or what we should represent. Identity is a social and cultural phenomenon emerging within social constructions and relations with others and critical theory is created on the notion of this, as opposed to something individuals are born with (Matheson, 2005).

Several themes have arisen from the analysis of this literature; accounts are affirmed on the assumption that sex/sexuality is biologically fixed, that men and women are *naturally* different with regard to their desires and preferences in/for sex, and that this is “normal” and in reality “healthy” (Gill, 2009). The performance of males and females is aligned with the reiteration of conventional sets of behaviours and actions, thus

seeming to be 'fixed' or solid'. However, in the liquid modern world, they are just men and women, not masculine or feminine. With the advancement of postmodernity, the notion of fixed identities is no longer feasible as they are assumed to be more fragmented and fluid (Marques, 2010).

Men and women are situated within a "discourse of essential difference" (Crawford, 2004, p68); as opposites in every aspect of life. Prevailing discourses have constructed male sexuality as driven by a intense biological 'need' for sexual intercourse for its own sake (Weeks, 1986), identified as a 'male sexual drive' discourse (Hollway, 1989), this is in opposition to traditional 'female sexuality' which is viewed as passive, responsive to men's sexual needs, and related to reproduction (Gavey and McPhillips, 1999).

The medias portrayals of sex and sexuality have been responsible for (re)producing particular variations of 'great' sex and undeniably influence what is considered as customary sexual practice, in addition to what sexual activities individuals desire and engage in (e.g. Jackson et al., 2001; Benwell, 2002, 2004; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008; Adams et al., 2011; Farvid and Braun, 2013). Whilst Farvid & Braun (2006) found men within women's magazine being portrayed as 'raring to go', Tyler (2008) stated that within sex self-help books, even though language concerning women's rights and women's pleasure has been extensively accepted, advice promoting men's sexual interests and the (active) sexual servicing of men by women to allow heterosexual relationships to be maintained by women was prevalent (Gupta et al., 2008). The high proportion of sexual content included within lifestyle magazines, rarely matched by other media forms, reflects the widespread hunger for education and knowledge regarding sex in a sex-negative society (Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008).

Judith Worell (1988) examined portrayals of women in self-help books and concluded that women were depicted as both incompetent (lacking the skills and techniques to establish fulfilling relationships) and ignorant (confused, not knowing what they want). These books incorporated what has been termed the 'woman-as-problem' framework (Crawford and Marecek, 1989), whereby women's problems in surviving are viewed as psychological deficits that can be resolved through individual change. Lifestyle magazines have specified that sex should play a more central role in women's lives and that women should 'rid themselves of anachronistic ideas about the importance of sexual asceticism' (Tyler, 2004, p96).

Gill (2008) acknowledged that whilst previously women were objectified as passive objects of the male gaze, they are now shown to be independent, active and sexually powerful; always up for it, within magazine advertisements as a result of the post-feminist, neo-liberal era, and discourses of 'girl power' in the 1990s. Magazine articles have constructed similar portrayals, for example within *Cosmopolitan*, Machin

and Thornborrow's (2006) concluded that through the way women sexually behave and seduce men, through images and language they are represented through as powerful, assertive and independent. This newfound sexual narrative of empowerment is an indication of sexual liberation; sex is at the core the way mass media demonstrate how women can achieve power.

Lifestyle magazines have been chosen for the present research, as there is a near silence around sexual pleasure within formal and informal means of sexual education, resulting in women looking for advice in the media, especially lifestyle magazines (Holland et al., 1998). They are filled with language in order to certify the readers sex lives will be 'effective' and 'efficient', 'controlled' and 'well-planned' (Tyler, 2004), more conventionally associated with management texts, as the following magazine headline examples demonstrate; 'guaranteed – the best sex ever' (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2000); 'the world's greatest sex ideas ... to turn you into the greatest lover on Earth' (*Men's Health*, May 2001); 'a seven point plan for sex which guarantees your ladyfriend an orgasm' (*FHM*, April 2001). Magazine readers will continually be exposed to articles relating to sex and self-improvement even if they do not specifically purchase the items for this (Kleinplatz and Menard, 2007).

Whilst examining representations of sex in two best-selling Australian women's magazines Moran and Lee (2011), revealed considerable contradictions between surface messages, which revealed on the one hand a sense of liberation and enjoyment, and underlying ideologies, which implied that women's sexual behaviour was purely for the benefit of men. This can essentially undermine women's confidence in the rightfulness of expressing their own individual sexual preferences.

Discourse analysis pays attention to processes, whereby "the social world is constructed and maintained" (Philips & Hardy, 2002 p.2). Popular media such as magazines are focal to the development and continuation of numerous discourses which act as a vital role that can form contemporary gender ideologies (Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006). The media views discourse as being constructed in interaction as well as constructive of interaction (Howitt, 2010). Along with a collection of values, purposes and associated legitimations (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), it is also concerned with the "functions they serve in different contexts" (Parker, 2004 p.149). There is an interest within social scientists (e.g. Gergen, 2001) into ways in which language is used in communication and how the environment can become 'socially constructed'. Gender, which connects to femininity and masculinity, could be viewed as a social construction embodied within the recurrence of actions, which are vigorously represented and re-informed within the media, with particular reference to magazines (Benwell, 2002), that could be found within articles related to sex and self-improvement.

A discourse analysis of articles within popular UK lifestyle magazines recognise how discourses illustrated within these may construct ideas

regarding how symbolic sex and power is achievable whilst negatively portraying women. Previously, Farvid and Braun (2006), identified a discourse of 'man pleasing' within New Zealand versions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*, whereby to prevent their partners from cheating, women were positioned as needing great sexual skills. Men's 'need' for sex positioned them as sexually satisfied and easily aroused opposed to the female orgasm which was portrayed as being problematic or difficult to achieve. This has provided great support for magazines representations of gender stereotypes through sexuality, in implying that men are more sexually important than women (Gadsden, 2000). These discourses of gender do not simply reflect but can establish and construct the social world, from a social constructionist stance (Gorely, Holroyd and Kirk, 2003), making discourse analysis appropriate for this study.

Caldas-Coulthard (1996) stated that within Western magazines, a 'conservative' discourse of separate spheres between men and women were still included, which can often be harmful for women (Potts, 2002); female sexuality was inaccurately epitomised as something that desires to be mastered and controlled, creating polar opposites between male and female sexuality, in relation to their individual needs and identities, leading to further oppression and patriarchy towards women. Hooks (2000) has argued that women should respond to men's requests and must engage in sex to be "liberated" in order to revitalise sexual oppression.

Discourse analysis has identified how discourses of sex and self-improvement can establish gender differentiations, for example, Gill (2009) suggested it was concerned with recognising the essential themes, representations and discourses which comprise magazines advice on sex and relationships, and discovered the ways in which they may be associated to continuous gender inequalities. Gill discovered three repertoires that collectively structure understandings of sexual relationships within *Glamour* magazine; the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire, constructed from the language of goals, plans and strategies related to the management of relationships; men-ology, situated around discourse of studying and learning about men; and transforming the self, which encourages women to 'makeover' not merely their bodies and sexual practices, but in addition their psychic lives too. For the purpose of the current research, these repertoires will be expanded in order to analyse representations of 'great' sex within lifestyle magazines. Additionally, a fourth repertoire will be included; dressed-down libido, in which women's sexuality is constructed as problematic and in need of education.

Previous research on sexuality has predominantly used editorial content within young women's and adolescent girl's lifestyle magazines (Ward, 2003). In an attempt to address the limitations and gaps in previous studies (e.g. Tyler, 2008; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008), younger and middle-aged women's UK lifestyle magazines have been chosen for

analysis as they are perceived to be important sexual educators (Batchelor, Kitzinger & Burtney, 2004; Nonoyama et al., 2005). Despite the absence of investigation into the medias portrayal of sexuality amongst middle-aged women, some researchers of the actual encounters of sexuality have claimed that heterosexism and the double standard largely prevail (Clarke, 2009). Magazines are often preferred over other sources of literature or media (Kim and Ward, 2012) due to their widespread availability. For example, in comparison to sex manuals, magazines are shorter in length, cheaper and more accessible.

### **Objectives**

Articles portraying sex and self-improvement are prominent in lifestyle magazines and previous research has stated this often promotes men's sexual interests over women, whilst undermining women's capabilities. This can ultimately lead to the objectification and the negative portrayal of women, this present qualitative analysis is situated in literature within this. The following research questions, will address how women's UK lifestyle magazines portray symbolic sex within their editorial content and techniques readers need to endure in order to achieve this.

1. How do the articles within the magazines mirror assumptions of sexual liberation as uncovered by "second-wave feminism".
2. In liquid modern society as put forward by Bauman (2000) and Marques (2010), how is women's sexuality depicted within magazines as being fragmented and fluid.
3. To what extent are gender polarities apparent within articles portraying sex and self-improvement (Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks (2001) whereby through the discourse women are constructed to be less sexually important, as discovered by Tyler (2008).

### **Method**

#### **Selection criteria**

An article has been described as "a body of editorial content described under a single heading in the table of contents" (Taylor, 2005, p156). A qualitative data interpretation will produce rich data comprising the analysis of words within the selected magazine articles that explicitly relate to sex and self-improvement. If a quantitative approach were conducted, it would not generate the same level of understanding as it aims to prove or disprove a hypothesis using only numeracy (Runciman, 2002).

The magazines used for analysis within this present investigation have been selected for inclusion based on their regular presence of content related to sex and self-improvement within editorial articles and blurbs and are reflective of high sales (e.g. Adams, Walker and Connell, 2011). Five UK women's lifestyle magazine were analysed, designed for two different age groups comparable to Clarke (2009). The magazines for those under the age of 35 include, *Cosmopolitan* (March, 2013 & April, 2013) (circulation 353 413), *Glamour* (February, 2013 & March, 2013) (circulation 470 138). The magazines for those over the age of 35 include, *Women's Health* (March/April, 2013) (circulation 100 289), *Top*

*Sante* (March, 2013) (circulation 63 525) and *Women and Home* (April, 2013) (circulation 353 731) (Press Gazette, 2012). The magazines were obtained around the same period so that constructions could be acknowledged within a particular cultural period, as opposed to recognising changes and trends that may have transpired over a longer duration of time (Farvid and Braun, 2006).

Seven articles were analysed in total from a larger data set to produce a greater focussed analysis (Gill, 2009). Coherent with previous research (e.g., Taylor, 2005; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008; Clarke, 2009; Reviere and Byerly, 2012), the articles were determined through an evaluation of current issues for the prevalence of sexual content. Comparable to Menard and Kleinplatz (2008), all articles that contained explicit, prescriptive content were included for the analysis. Whilst sexual messages are pervasive within the articles in lifestyle magazines, much is in the form of implicit messages, such content was not the focus of this study. Magazines tended to contain one feature article regarding sex and self-improvement across two or more pages each (Erjavee, 2006). A list of the articles analysed, with their publication dates is specified (Appendix 1).

In line with Reichert and Lambiase (2003) and Menard and Kleinplatz (2008), an extensive procedure of gradual refinement occurred after article, which included reviewing magazine articles repeatedly (Appendix 2). At least one narrative example (i.e., a quotation) was recorded for each appearance of a theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006), to permit greater reflexivity and critical awareness (Fairclough, 1993) (Appendix 3).

### **Analysis Process**

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was implemented (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) to question 'approaches, assumptions and results' whilst researching gender, as it draws a connection between discourse and power, and through its participants generates their social world (Schroder and Phillips, 2007). This analysis, comparable to Gill (2009) used a feminist approach as it was stimulated by the desire to recognise how cultural constructions can emerge within the lifestyle magazine articles promoting sex and self-improvement can be related to patterns of inequality and oppression. When investigating the media, a CDA is appropriate as it discloses the myth of the notion that the media signifies a neutral position, when in fact, it can greatly alter opinions and discourses of the public due to the constructing and mediating role it has in society (Matheson, 2005).

The most significant aspect of this approach focuses on the discourse itself, as opposed to viewing it as a method of 'getting at' some reality, which is believed to lie behind or beyond the text (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1991). CDA is concerned with the methods in which different kinds of texts can create constructions of power and inequality within society (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008), not in a direct or mediated way. Another dominant ideology of CDA is to determine who has the power to



communicate, or to establish language events through his/her own portrayals, and who is absent of power and is required to perform a self that is represented by others (Luke, 2002). In this instance who would be responsible to fulfil an individual's sexual needs and desires within the discourses and ways to achieve this i.e. who has the power. CDA considers language as a social practice in context (Bucholtz, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

The magazine articles were analysed using the three broad repertoires that Gill (2009) discovered; the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire; men-ology; and transforming the self. An additional repertoire was observed which Gill failed to include within her study, this is labelled as 'dressed-down libido'. The usage of repertoires as a component of analysis allows researchers to identify patterns through and between texts, and to attach these to broader contexts and social formations, which go beyond individual or discrete expressions (Gill, 2009). Portraying Hall (1982, 1988), repertoires leave room analytically for progressions of articulation (and dis-articulation and re-articulation), instead of supposing that discourses are singular units.

Ethical issues are always existent in research (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2004). This research was conducted within the guidelines of the British Psychological Society. No informed consent was obtained as no invasion of privacy occurred, since the articles are publically distributed. A PSC Application for Ethics Approval Form (AEAF) (Appendix 4) has been completed in conjunction with a PSC Ethics Check Form (ECF) (Appendix 5). Reflexivity, however, will be a concern due to the usage of discourse analysis, this will be resolved within a reflexivity section.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Intimate entrepreneurship: taking a professional approach**

Under this repertoire there is a discourse of business, management and entrepreneurialism pervading magazine articles regarding sex and self-improvement. There was an underlying message within the articles that provided evidence to suggest that "great sex" was cast as work for women. Magazines continually used language regarding goals, plans and strategies as to how this could be achieved, doubting the female reader's knowledge and abilities.

Consistent with Gill's findings, magazines demanded that sex be situated at the core of a re-modelled subjectivity in a way requiring both physical labour (e.g. trying out new positions) and on-going psychological work. For example in *Top Santé* (March, 2013), readers were advised to "try jump-starting your receptive sexual desire with an unexpected act, such as oral sex, a naked cuddle or a long French kiss". There is a detection of female agency conveyed here; women are constructed as autonomous, active and in control of their intimate lives. The goals prescribed here are more traditional and somewhat old-fashioned versus, *Glamour* (March, 2013), "[sex] still requires variation to

stay fresh. Try different positions such as face-to face while lying on your sides, or sitting up in bed.” This places an emphasis on variety; previously men’s sexuality has been stereotypically portrayed as variety driven, therefore writers of magazine articles offer advice designed to please the presumed (and stereotyped) readers heterosexual partners preferences (Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008).

There was a prevailing assumption that readers of the lifestyle magazines were experiencing (or attempting to experience) optimum sex with a boyfriend or husband. In some texts, ‘great’ sex was seen as vital to maintaining a heterosexual relationship. This is evident within *Top Santé* (March, 2013); readers were instructed to “ban the phrase: I’m tired: instead, ask yourself ‘too tired for what?’ Are you too tired to make your relationship work in the long-term?” Women are tutored on how to maintain a relationship, which in the process, it has been argued, can potentially undermine a women’s confidence in the legitimacy of conveying her own individual sexual preferences (Moran and Lee, 2011).

Zygmunt Bauman, declared that “contemporary sexual and romantic encounters embody a form of ‘liquid love’ in which relationships have become ‘easy to enter and to exit’”, (Bauman, 2003: xii). In an article titled, ‘Rebound sex, the right way’ (*Cosmopolitan*, 2013), readers were advised on how to obtain a ‘sexy, generous partner’; “Here’s a better game plan: ask around your social circle for introductions to Ryan Gosling lookalikes; reactivate your online-dating profile; message that sexy commitment phobe you blanked after the second date, or email a colleague from your past who you had a crush on and invite him out for a drink. Then see if he meets a few key criteria... ‘You’re looking for a man with great sexual energy.’” Very contradictory to prevailing research findings, (e.g., Farvid and Braun, 2006; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008; Clarke, 2009; Gill, 2010; Moran and Lee, 2011; Reviere and Byerly, 2012) and other portrayals of heterosexual romance within the analysed magazines. This discourse conveys notions of post-feminism, one of ‘power femininity’ (Lazar, 2006), in which females are constructed to be liberated. This account suggests women have gained sexual equality and the negotiation of casual sex involves rational and ‘free’ sexual agents who are not controlled by unequal power relations within heterosex (Gavey, 2005).

Here, there is a strong sense of the independent, sexually active/desiring and empowered woman concerning sexuality (Farvid and Braun, 2006; 2013). Men within this article are stereotyped to be just as interested in engaging in sexual encounters, “let this lucky man know what you hope will unfold later in the night”. Presenting a ‘male sexual drive’ discourse for men who could/would not decline an opportunity for ‘no strings attached’ sex (Farvid and Braun, 2006). *Glamour* (March, 2013) provided further evidence for this, “Most guys have two or three girls in their phone book who are happy with a situation that’s purely no-string sex.” *Curtis*, 26.

### **Men-ology: learning to understand, please and reassure men**

As previously acknowledged, women's magazines tend to give precedence to men's desires over women's (Tyler, 2008; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008; Gill, 2009). Within the preceding repertoire, it can be observed that women are constructed as confident, entrepreneurial actors. In contrast to this, women are portrayed as rather unsure and inexperienced about how 'great' sex can be achieved, under this repertoire, far from documenting women's desires and devising a strategy to achieve them, instructions are given on how to please, pleasure and reassure men. As uncovered by Moran and Lee (2011, p.166), magazines illustrated how "women's sexuality is represented as something women 'do' for men, rather than something women have ownership over or choose to 'do' for themselves".

The articles included a provision of advice from self-proclaimed experts such as counsellors, sex therapists and authors, notably however, these were often men themselves. Coherent with previous research (e.g. Gadsden, 2000, p.51; Farvid and Braun, 2006; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008), male authors commonly "helped women understand their male partners and provided ways in which women could please their heterosexual mates". Men's voices offered accounts of how women should ideally dress, behave and participate in sexual practices, which was made apparent in, *Glamour* (February, 2013), whereby, a whole article was dedicated to men's ideals of optimum sexuality. Women were instructed on what props to use in the bedroom; "I love it when a girl wears a blindfold", and how to give a "spectacular blow-job". Even though representations of sexuality in the magazines represent women as being actively sexual, they have not "abandoned the view that women are primarily sex objects, whose desire is best fulfilled by remaking themselves into commodities that are sexually available to men and designed to attract [and keep] men" (Krassas et al., 2001, p.768). Women, therefore, need explicit instructions concerning their lack of sexual technique, presenting "great sex" as a skilled task, with rules that must be abided to (Moran and Lee, 2011).

Women are portrayed throughout magazines as having feminine identities, but in relation to a male audience. This long-standing heterosexuality favours masculine desires, so that women's, in addition to men's behaviours are under continuous observation from the power of this male-dominated heterosexuality (Moran and Lee, 2011). An article within *Cosmopolitan* (March, 2013), stated how women should be required to learn the appropriate sexual technique on the basis of the shape of her partners penis, "it's more about angling his equipment to press against the right places". This illustrates the preoccupation with sexual intercourse, with men literally being reduced to their penis and sexual impulses, and sex to a merely mechanical practice.

Although women were encouraged to be sexually confident, they were urged to take a subtle approach regarding their partners sexual performance (Farvid and Braun, 2006), for example, within *Women and*

*Home* (April, 2013), it was suggested to readers that “the best way to change things is not to criticise your partner”, potentially viewing male sexuality as sensitive. Similarly, *Cosmopolitan* (April, 2013) identified that there is less need for caution outside of a relationship when breaching a partner’s sexual prowess as, “out of the confines of a relationship, you can be vocal about what you want without worrying about bruising your man’s ego.” This can be connected to what has been termed as ‘emotion work’ (Hochschild, 1983), in which women seek to relieve this uncertainty by assuring men that they equivalent a heterosexual ‘sexual ideal’ and through this, a women’s participation for her own pleasure is essentially shifted to worrying about denting the male ego. Farvid and Braun (2006) stated, this positions women as ‘powerful’ and as having the capacity to produce ‘sexual anxiety’ by drawing attention to men’s sexual inadequacies. Potts (1998) and Farvid and Braun (2006) argued that male’s self-esteem regarding their libido are fragile entities, predisposed to be destroyed by a harmful comment or absence of reassurance. However, within these, there is no sense of ‘blame’ existing, instead it’s ‘just the way men are’ (Gill, 2009); women are faced with the sole responsibility to manage any problems that may arise.

The magazines provided accounts stating how women could fulfil ‘their man’s’ satisfactions sexually by ‘inventing’ an original ‘sex trick’ or ‘signature move’ (Farvid and Braun, 2006). The notion of a signature move evokes a specifically mechanistic, non-interpersonal opinion regarding sexuality, in which pleasure is understood to be ‘generic’; this would presumably be pleasurable for any/all men, irrespective of their personal sexual preferences. However, women are subtly set up for failure, because, how many distinctive sexual moves could there potentially be? This was found in issues of *Cosmopolitan* (March/April, 2013), *Glamour* (March, 2013) and *Women’s Health* (March/April, 2013). The concept of this persists to frame sexuality as ‘work’ for women, regarding an ‘original’ performance, comparative to the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire, as a talent or skill needing to be developed. It was declared “originality triggers the chemical processes that drive our reward system” in *Top Santé* (March, 2013).

It is crucial to observe, that in magazines for women, women’s sexuality is overwhelmingly portrayed as being about men. Within women’s magazines, if men can construct women’s sexuality, it can be concluded that women have not been victorious in obtaining a social area free from male power (Gadsden, 2000).

### **Transforming the self: remaking sexual subjectivity**

Within the magazines, in contrast to educating women about men, women were also encouraged to transform the self, in particular, making over one’s interior or physic life. The labour commanded here is not that connected with performing or acting, but rather, remodelling of an individual’s self. Specifically, one’s sense of sexual subjecthood in an approach recognised by Foucaultian scholars as connected to

'governing the soul' (Blackman, 2004). Four themes dominate this repertoire, identified as: learn to love one's own body; to become confident; to conquer repression and change one's feelings about sex; and to become a sexual adventurer. However, insufficient evidence was found in the current study regarding 'transform your feelings about sex' and as a result was abandoned.

#### *Love your body*

A women's increased comfort with her body was perceived to be an important contributing aspect to the experience of 'great' sex for men. For example, in *Women and Home* (April, 2013) "Please pretend you like your body then seduce him to bits. Count the complaints". What is regarded to be essential for 'great' sex, is not what your body is actually like but rather individual feelings about the body. It is that psychological aspect that requires work. Negative feelings should be dismissed by women. The attention given to women's appearance functions to divert attention away from her own individual feelings and desires, and towards her function as a product from men to enjoy. This discourse furthermore implicitly weakens women's agency regarding sexual issues. Contradictory, from the previous repertoire, whereby it was suggested that male sexual anxieties must be dealt with sensitively and reassuringly, women's body anxieties are cast as lethal concerning 'great' sex (Gill, 2010).

#### *Be confident*

Within the articles, there is also a distinct repeated injunction for women to be confident; advice was found within a *Glamour* article (February, 2013): "However sweet or dirty, what's the best thing a girl can do in bed?" "Be confident. It's so sexy when a woman is confident in her body and is assertive in bed." *Graham*, 28. Moreover, in *Women and Home* (March/April, 2013), "If you allow your brain to reframe your prejudices, you might just notice that you are a very pretty woman who is simply aged more than 20", this was in response to how a reader could repair her sexual confidence. Winship (1987), has argued that women's magazines 'perform ideological juggling acts'; one view positions women as being an 'ultra-confident, in-control, all-round modern woman', but contradictory to this, discourses provide readers simultaneously as lacking the confidence and knowledge when it came to sexual practices. Indicative of pre-(second wave) feminist magazines this advice, suggests that women should increase their value and appeal to men, whilst emphasising a sense of confident femininity.

#### *Try something new: become a sexual adventurer*

Under this theme, articles stated a need for sexual experimentation and variety by encouraging the introduction of new and exciting sexual techniques or improvements that can be made to traditional ones. *Cosmopolitan* (April, 2013) suggests, "Maybe you think it'd be hot to boss a guy around in bed, dominatrix-style, or to have frantic sex on the kitchen floor". This implicitly positions these sexual activities as 'unusual' for women and commonly would presumably be found only in

'adventurous' women (Farvid and Braun, 2006). Here women are encouraged to move beyond traditional "nice" behaviour and instead transgress in their sexual behaviour (Reviere and Byerly, 2013). Men have been portrayed as being wild and animalistic regarding their sexual behaviour, this essentially is encouraging the female reader to engage in similar behaviour.

This is reinforced by a question and response from a feature in *Glamour* (February, 2013), which asked, "Would you rather sleep with an older or younger woman? "I'd say younger – only because I think they'd be more adventurous." *Patrick, 28*. This can essentially simultaneously work to position women conventionally as not sexually adventurous, and men as adventurous and desiring sexually adventurous females. Evidence from a magazine aimed at older readers confirms this; *Women's Health* (March/April, 2013), advised readers to engage in "only a *subdued* session, give the wild *Cirque du Soleil* moves a miss"

### **Dressed down libido: women learning about women**

It could be argued that this rests in opposition to the 'Men-ology' repertoire described above; alternatively, magazines frequently offer advice to women, educating them about their own sexuality, and ways in which this could be amplified. As discovered from previous research, (e.g. Farvid and Braun, 2006; Menard and Kleinplatz, 2008; Gill, 2009), women's sexual encounters were portrayed as being highly problematic by the magazines and something that yet again requires further work.

The magazines continuously stressed ways in which women could increase their libido, this advice was often quasi-scientific, for example within *Women's Health* (March/April, 2013), readers were advised to "add ice cream to your sexy play too". Contrasting to this, *Glamour* (March, 2013), suggested readers discontinued taking 'the pill' as "it can also cause you to lose interest in sex", this is a particularly alarming recommendation, as the pill was a great liberation movement for women in the 1960s. Additionally, magazines positioned a woman's absence of sexual pleasure as the fault of her own deficient sex drive, as opposed to anything that her partner did or did not do, for example, in *Woman's Health* (March/April, 2013), "there's no excuse for slipping him the "Not tonight, sweetheart, I have a headache" line." in line with previous research (e.g. Gill, 2009) – women were held responsible for the sexual satisfaction of both partners (Moran and Lee, 2011).

Comparable, to Farvid and Braun (2006) and Braun et al. (2003), women's sexual pleasure (orgasm) was positioned as necessary within magazines, but as difficult and in some case unachievable, via sexual encounters. In *Woman and Home* (April, 2013) one female reader had stated she had never experienced orgasm through intercourse; the response reconfirmed magazines regularly viewing an orgasm as one of the main goals of intercourse: "if I'd never experienced orgasm through intercourse, I wouldn't want sex, either." There was a silence surrounding male orgasms within magazines as a result it can be

presumed they are uncomplicated and easily achieved, whereas female orgasms were presented as relatively complicated or hard to achieve. *Glamour* (March, 2013), reiterates this “you know you can be incredibly turned on, but it isn’t easy. In fact, sometimes it feels like all the stars need to be aligned for you to climax.”

It was suggested that an explanation for women, not being as ‘naturally as sexual’ as men was a result of women not making over oneself with a ‘positive’ and ‘open’ outlook to sex, this can interlink with the above repertoire ‘transforming the self’; “You’re painfully aware of every blemish and lump on your body. And sweating the small stuff can stop you getting the big stuff: orgasms “Stop scrutinising,” says Dr Kerner.”, as stated in *Glamour* (March, 2013).

This was implied both biologically (the fragile female libido) and a result of thinking the wrong way. This can position a woman’s absence of sexual enjoyment as the defect of her own lacking sex drive. But if after a couple of months, you still can’t find the ‘perfect’ time for sex, force it. “Go to bed early and get naked,” says Dr Kerner. “Your body will ‘remember’ what it was like to have sex with your man and you might be surprised at how easily you orgasm” (*Glamour*, March 2013). This discourse states that women often result in thinking the wrong way (women overthink – thus resulting in a low sex drive). Reiterating, women have a lower sex drive than men and think about sex less frequently. Women’s responsibility to remedy this situation is not for themselves, but because it is important that women provide men with sex and at least appear eager and willing. *Top santé* (March, 2013) advises women “do make an effort to get intimate in those first 10 minutes of getting into bed”. This portrays men as being more ‘sexually needy’ and may go elsewhere if not satisfied. Depictions of men as more ‘naturally sexual’ privileges male sexuality and allows sexuality to be positioned as the man’s domain (Jackson, 1984), it can be declared this ‘just the way men are’ (Holloway, 1989). Indicating, yet again how much ‘emotional labour’ is required (Hoschild, 1983). Women’s sex drive was positioned as essentially being weak and ‘distractible’ (Moran and Lee, 2011). The assumption could be made that female sexual arousal is slow and inadequate and that – rather than men modifying their sexual technique to arouse their female partners adequately – women need to find ways to ‘speed up’ to be able to engage in sex, on men’s terms.

### **Conclusion**

This study concerned how women are encouraged to become autonomous and entrepreneurial regarding their sexual behaviour in which neoliberalism has increasingly recognised. However, it can be argued that it is still a women’s responsibility regarding the success of sex, related to her capability to regulate herself and her male partner, to make ‘good’ choices, and to decide how to behave. This finding asserts that whilst sex is no longer frowned upon, it has not become ‘free’ or ‘liberated’; women are offered many choices yet males needs are still being prioritised. Within both groups of lifestyle magazines, there was an

empirical invisibility regarding women's sexual desires. In the magazines for younger readers there was an emphasis of variety as a means of appealing to male pleasure compared to magazines for older readers in which 'great' sex was seen vital to marriage. As emphasised by Foucault, the abundance of discourses regarding sex that are observable in contemporary women's lifestyle magazines represent a field for an even greater complex regulation of sexuality: a sphere of techniques, prescriptions and careful choices that continue to differentiate 'good' and 'bad' women.

### **Limitations and future directions for research**

Limitations of the study that could suggest new directions for future research include the reliance on the analysis of magazines only, over a very limited time period, it would therefore be valuable to locate potential changes over time, especially regarding 'casual' sex. Additionally, it is interesting to note that whilst Bauman (2000) states the social and the self are in a period of fluidity and fragmentation why has male sexuality inevitably remained solid as shown in the analysed lifestyle magazines, for future research it would be vital to challenge this.

### **Reflexivity**

It has been suggested, that post-feminist analysis of written text naturally includes an 'analysis of the socially constructed nature of human behaviour, deconstruction of the assumptions within language and the processes of producing subjectivities' (Gavey, 1997, p.62). However, in line with my social position, it is vital to observe that, as magazines are located within a broader social, political, cultural, and historical context, there is opportunity for diverse interpretations (Gough-Yates, 2003), and I do not claim mine as a concluding or only feasible reading of the data.

The media is inescapable and as a young female, I am continually exposed to lifestyle magazines and therefore aware of the explicit sexual content they often prescribe. However, at times I found the sample choice very problematic with regard to being able to answer my research objectives.

Additionally, it is worth observing that prior to this research I had no real experience of conducting a CDA which may have resulted in the analysis as not being as detailed as some more experienced researchers, such as Rosalind Gill.



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