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Masculine Ideals in Post-apartheid South Africa: The Rise of Men's Glossies

BIOGRAPHY

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Dr Viljoen was a lecturer in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria while completing the research for this paper.

→ **The rise of** men's lifestyle magazines in South Africa from 2000 to the present has, as of yet, not been documented or interrogated in a comprehensive theoretical format. The so-called new masculinities that emerge out of these magazines are influenced by the homogenising influence of mass media that requires critical problematising and de-naturalising within a South African context. While in the United Kingdom and North America, for instance, much of the theory and methodology of this study are old hat, in South Africa, men's lifestyle magazines are a fairly new occurrence and are, subsequently, under-theorised. In this paper I firstly chronicle the rise of men's lifestyle magazines in post-apartheid South Africa (including *Men's Health*, *FHM*, *GQ*, *BL!NK* and *Maksiman*), and secondly, attempt to contribute an analysis of the masculine ideal presented by these magazines to the already growing research surrounding gender in contemporary South Africa.

The investigation of the masculinities represented by the South African men's lifestyle magazines is informed by the underlying assumption that all of these magazines presented, in the early twentieth century, a simplified and two-dimensional masculine ideal. This assumption may lead to the further conjecture that the genre of men's lifestyle magazines, whether targeted at any culturally specific readership, is fundamentally concerned with the commodification and simplification of masculinity to an aspirational type.

In the South African context the 'straight forward' telling of history is complexified by the role that apartheid played in attempting to define culture, race and gender. This research necessarily locates itself within the rhetoric of post-apartheid South Africa (and the crossover period leading up to this) since the magazines in question were all founded after 1994, when the first democratic elections were held.

Products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of 'us' and 'them'.
Meenakshi Gigi Durham & Douglas Kellner (2001:1)

In 1979 Joe Dubbert adopted Betty Friedan's famous conceptualisation of sexual difference in order to expose what he termed the 'masculine mystique'. Since then theorists have used the concept of ideal masculinity to translate the popular feminist notion of the feminine ideal into masculinity studies (Connell 1987, 1995; Dubbert 1979; Segal 1990). In doing so, gender scholars effectively communicated the idea that men too were subject to the homogenising machinations of the media and popular politics and that it was time to focus the attention of radical feminist practice on the construction of masculine identity. It thus became evident to scholars of 'masculine' and 'feminine' types alike that the ascendancy of certain types of masculinity is sustained through the creation of a masculine ideal. Not unlike the feminine ideal, its masculine counterpart was perceived to be a dominant construction of manhood against which other forms of male identity are calculated and evaluated.

In this paper I briefly chronicle the rise of five men's lifestyle magazines[1] that emerged in post-apartheid South Africa, namely *Men's Health, For Him Magazine (FHM), Gentlemen's Quarterly (GQ), MaksiMan* and *BL!NK* and situate them within the theoretical discourse surrounding masculinity at the time of undertaking this research.[2] In doing so, I consider the various vernacular masculine ideals presented by each magazine as indicative of the nuanced yet homogenising aspirational tropes available to men in this strain of the South African media. Following Robert Morrell's argument (2001:33) that "there is no one typical South African man", the research undertaken here is underpinned by a twofold concern: firstly, that of globalised media values streaming into the post-apartheid economy, and secondly, the extent to which these values were modified differentially to target white, English, Afrikaans and black professionals.

Two primary methodologies are followed in this paper. The first is a narrative documentation of the circumstances that gave rise to each magazine; the second is a socio-semiotic analysis of the masculine ideal presented by the respective magazines at the time. The same attention is devoted to each magazine. Consequently, through this largely equalising study, the dominant and marginalised vernacular masculinities are juxtaposed in order to subvert the hegemonies conventionally inherent in a comparative analysis of this kind. In the following section, the theoretical notion of the masculine ideal is briefly teased out as a backdrop to the publishing narrative that follows. Thereafter, the South African context in general, as well as the localised debate surrounding each magazine in particular, is sketched.

A masculine ideal

Social analysts such as George Mosse (1996) trace the history of the modern ideal of masculinity in psychological as well as physical terms, commenting that this dualistic ideal is both a positive stereotype and a social function. Mosse (1996) interprets the western masculine ideal as the blend of middle-class, Christian norms and an ideal of the male physique drawn from classical Greek philosophy and art, and the subsequent theories of eighteenth-century art historian Joachim Winckelmann. Mosse dates the origin of this western myth to the late 1700s and early 1800s. This process of gender rearticulation occurred alongside the rise of bourgeois society and slowly cemented the correlation between physical beauty and moral fortitude with the image of the male body itself, becoming the ascendant code of manhood.

By the late 1800s, this ideal type was not only concretised in a popular preoccupation with body-conscious sports like gymnastics but also militarised so that the modern masculine ideal was typified by a 'Greek' physique, sober character and unwavering nationalism. In spite of the emergence of various *fin de siècle* countermasculinities, the normative western masculine ideal remained steadfast, gaining momentum from European and American wartime rhetoric and its psychological *zeitgeist* (Mosse 1996:107). Mosse (1996) deems this Ego Ideal to be a directing force in modern western history because of its ability to reconcile order and progress in the unifying image of the male. Historically, the ideal male thus symbolises a healthy, well-ordered society.

However, the question of the masculine ideal is not only a political concern but is also intimately connected to the construction of gender. The existence of a single, dominant masculine ideal implies that certain masculinities privileged over others, leading to the marginalising of individual character traits in favour of the model features of the prevailing masculine ideal. Furthermore, feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin (1991), Sherry Ortner (1974) and Griselda Pollock (1988) are quick to point out the problematic manner in which gender ideals reduce male- and femaleness to the binaries of subject/object, active/passive and culture/nature. This binary reading of gender typically implies that the gender of an individual is not secure but measured on a continuum according to its compliance with these criteria, thus leading to the notion of 'gendered behaviour' or the 'performativity' of gender (Butler 1990:136). Judith Butler (1990:136) contends that acts, gestures and enactments are performative in the sense that "the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (emphasis in original). Through the analysis of ideal masculinities in men's lifestyle magazines it is suggested that performative behaviour (Butler 1990, 2004) is as powerful in a represented format as it is in 'real life' and, thus, that gendered tropes of all persuasions are performative.

The presupposition that there is a masculine ideal in contemporary western society is an interesting assumption against which to regard the men's lifestyle press in South Africa. Mosse (1996) treats ideal masculinity as both historically amorphous as well as fairly contained in its morphology. This conceptualisation of gender as being simultaneously flexible and fixed is useful to this study because of the varying strains of vernacular masculinity that emerge from the sundry men's lifestyle magazines in South Africa. The ideal masculinities presented by these magazines are diverse and yet involve a measure of horizontal identification or commonality. The normative construction of a masculine ideal across all of the magazines is thus as important as the particular nuances presented by each title.

Two strains of thought or variations on the theme of ideal masculinity impact the study of men's lifestyle magazines in South Africa. Firstly, research surrounding new masculinity or metrosexuality is an important *leitmotif* throughout various investigations of men's lifestyle magazines because of the way these magazines challenge the traditional western assumptions about physical and psychological self-interest being exclusive to women. Originating in Britain in 1994, with the utterances of social commentator Mark Simpson (2004), the term 'metrosexuality' refers to the disposition of modern, urbane men who embrace the accoutrement of self-beautification.

Metrosexuality has subsequently become a part of the aspirational syntax of men's lifestyle magazines that aim to procure the support of high-end advertisers, and in doing so endorse the connection between masculinity and consumption. This phenomenon is not overtly present in all the South African men's lifestyle magazines, but seems to be an important signifier in the redefining of masculine identity in this context, particularly considering the fact that "modern forms of consumption privilege certain public masculinities as the subject of the look" (Nixon 1996:70).

Secondly, the set of theories established in the 1990s – collectively addressing what is known as 'masculinity in crisis' – infuses much of the research concerning why men read men's lifestyle magazines, and thus implicitly informs this paper. Roughly following the time that men's lifestyle magazines were reaching new circulation highs in the United States of America (USA), such social theorists and popular writers as Robert Bly (1990), Anthony Clare (2000), Rosalind Coward (1999), Roger Horrocks (1994) and John MacInnes (1998, 2001) theorised various views of masculinity as pathological, defeated or collectively 'confused'.[3] Their conclusions were based on the analyses of statistics relating to crimes perpetrated by men, depression and suicide that seemed to indicate that overwhelming numbers of men were engaged in violent or self-destructive behaviour. Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Rob Patman (2002:[sp]) argue that if this crisis does exist it is anchored in a variety of societal phenomena, including

> **the collapse of traditional men's work, the growth of a technological culture which cannot be 'passed on' in any recognisable way between the generations, the rise of feminist consciousness amongst women, and, more abstractly, challenges to the dominance of the forms of rationality with which masculinity has been identified, at least in the West.**

In 2000, following on the research by Roger Horrocks (1996), clinical psychologist Anthony Clare published his influential social text *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis*, in which he proposes that American men are, as he puts it, "in serious trouble" (Clare 2000:[sp]).[4] The umbrella phrase for the cooperative theories that culminated

in Clare's popularised thesis is 'masculinity in crisis'. Clare proposes that the body of knowledge concerning a crisis in contemporary western masculinity has been well developed if not uncontested in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[5] Consequently, 'masculinity in crisis' forms a subtle backdrop to the analysis presented in this paper since it is assumed that the failure to fulfil a particular masculine ideal on a personal level may result in a crisis of identity (Reid & Walker 2005:10).

The inception of five men's lifestyle magazines in South Africa

When publishers considered introducing a men's lifestyle magazine into the otherwise stodgy British market in the mid-1980s, they were met with a fair amount of scepticism. Media practitioner Simon Marquis (cited in Nixon 1996:129) predicted that such a publication was doomed to fail because "[w]hile women become 'friends' with their magazines there is an inbuilt resistance to the idea of a magazine that makes public ... ideas about being a man ... Self-consciousness is permissible, even attractive, in women; it is perceived as weak and unmanly in a man".

As it turned out, the success of Nick Logan's *Arena* and the first British edition of *GQ* indicated that the British market was indeed ready for the kind of masculine consumption sceptics had dismissed. More or less a decade later, the same debate was taking place against the backdrop of the embryonic new South Africa. The apartheid oligarchy had come to an end, sanctions were lifted and the stage was set for new media entities to capitalise on the newfangled enthusiasm of a nation seeking to redefine itself.

Up to this point there were no men's lifestyle magazines in South Africa, but there were a number of so-called soft-porn magazines. Most notable among these was *Scope*, a local magazine roughly modelled on Hugh Hefner's American soft-porn magazine *Playboy*, founded in 1953. In South Africa in the 1990s, the global crisis, or flux, in the self-articulation of masculinity was compounded by the socio-political changes brought about by the country's first democratically elected government. The 1996 South African Constitution and Bill of Rights represents masculine identity in such a way that makes clear the extent to which this identity draws on but also breaks with the past. Liz Walker (2005:164) interprets the constitutional masculine ideal simply as a man "who is non-violent, a good father and husband, employed and able to provide for his family", yet she argues that the transition in gender and power relations embodied in the South African Constitution has exacerbated a crisis in masculinity. She stresses the fact that different men respond to this crisis in different ways: "While 'constitutional sexuality' seems to have shut some doors for men by shrinking the 'patriarchal divide' (at least at the level of legislation), it has simultaneously opened up spaces and created opportunities for men to construct new masculinities" (Walker 2005:61).

The implementation of a national mandate on employment equity in 1994 also brought with it far-reaching shifts in the socio-economic demographics of the country. This fundamental shift in social status necessarily implies a rearticulation of the power relations involved in the societal delineation of gender, race and ethnicity, whether corporately or individually. As is to be expected in any new democracy, the identity crisis of the South African nation was followed by the ripple effect of multiple crises related to the delineation of self or selves in this post-apartheid 'imagined community'. The South African context may, in other words, present a new, hybrid slant on the old theme of masculinity in crisis or flux.[6] The theme of masculinity in flux permeates the story of the five men's lifestyle magazines available in 2007 in South Africa as the economic valorisations of a period of wider political and social change.

Due to sanctions imposed on the apartheid market, South Africa was late in arriving at the fiscal trends that emerged in the western global economies during the 1970s and 1980s; however, it did not take long for manufacturing processes in South Africa to become increasingly marketing-led. Each stage in the production process of diverse endeavours became linked with design, distribution and retail, and 'flexible specialisation' replaced the old post-Fordist models. Against this backdrop of tailor-made marketing schemes a preference surfaced for subcontracting based on innovation through cooperation and knowledge sharing between companies.

The scene was therefore set for men's lifestyle magazines and the profitable partnerships these would forge with the kinds of international designer brands seeking to make an entrance into the virgin territory of South Africa. In addition to the cash cow that men's lifestyle magazines promised to become, the discourse of enterprise that marked this new economic playing field gave political direction to these strategies of economic development. It therefore comes as no

surprise that the first magazine to enter the South African market would do so not only in tandem with a number of key global brands but in the name of a redeeming moral virtue – namely, to bring health to a situation marred by the maladies of the past.

Men's Health

The past decade of research into male well-being in the western world is marked by the consistent finding that the high mortality rate for men is not simply related to their biology (Courtenay 2000; Helgeson 1995; Waldron 2000). Studies in the USA (Courtenay 2000; Helgeson 1995) attribute this phenomenon to harmful behavioural factors such as smoking, poor diet, eating disorders and excessive consumption of alcohol. Vicki Helgeson (1995:[sp]) draws a correlation between these practices and masculine identity, claiming that "a sizeable portion of men's excess mortality is linked to ... men's roles, and gendered patterns of socialization". In post-apartheid South Africa this pathological reading of male health is further informed by negative political connotations, ideologically associated with white men. Masculine identity in South Africa is affected by the political shift from a patriarchal regime of oppression to a system that attempts to represent and valorise the disenfranchised. In effect, white men have become the subsequent poster children for a past of infamous hostility and domination. The global interest in male well-being and the health of a corporate male self-image is thus a valid concern in the current South African climate.

As if responding to the awareness surrounding male health sparked by the local crisis in masculinity, Media 24 (a division of Naspers) launched *Men's Health South Africa* in 1997, more or less following the format of its American predecessor.[7] Paul Kerton was the first South African editor, and the magazine entered this country in order to fill the gap in the market for a magazine that addressed men on their health (Richter 2006), proving that even in South Africa health was no longer a purely female concern.

The American *Men's Health* brand was built on the classical idealisation of the male body and the platitude that a healthy body equals a healthy mind. The local covers formed an integral component of this brand strategy, with black-and-white photographs of brawny, smiling men personifying Winckelmann and Pater's articulation of ideal beauty as 'rest in motion'.[8] At the time, *Men's Health* was almost exclusively concerned with exactly what the title suggests – men's health and fitness. The image of a buff male torso cunningly differentiated the magazine from the laddish thrust of other men's lifestyle magazines set to appear on the scene, and included more fashion features than its overseas predecessors. Elsewhere in the world, *Men's Health* entered a market chock-full of men's lifestyle magazines; in South Africa, it was the first magazine of its kind and thus Kerton decided to capitalise on the absence of men's fashion magazines by means of the abovementioned strategies.

After 2000, *Men's Health* had to diversify its interests to compete with the local editions of *FHM* and *GQ*. In order to rival the titillating inflection of *FHM* and *GQ* (see below), *Men's Health* introduced more features centred on sexual knowledge as well as more sexualised images of women. Furthermore, in an attempt to procure the interest of more male (and female) readers, the magazine launched a do-it-yourself supplement for pragmatic metromen, titled *Men's Health Living*, in 2006. Despite these diversions, the content of the magazine remained primarily focused on health, nutrition and fitness, thus fondly recalling eighteenth century hygiene movements and, perhaps, reflecting the American nostalgia for a puritan past.

The masculine ideal presented by *Men's Health* was thus a fairly conservative reading of masculinity that placed emphasis on the physical health and strength of men as a metaphor for general well-being. In the burgeoning new South Africa, a context sorely in need of assurance in terms of its well-being, *Men's Health* capitalised on Mosse's (1996) notion of the (bodily) masculine ideal as indicative of a healthy society.

Appropriate to this analogy between bodily health and the health of a culture, Arran Stibbe (2004:34) argues that the American edition of *Men's Health* emphasises a one-dimensional view of masculinity in which men are portrayed as physically and emotionally in control. In relation to the South African edition, Stibbe's critique enables a questioning of the extent to which the magazine favoured hegemonic masculinity, or so-called health, over the actual psychosexual well-being of its readers. Whether or not the magazine actually cultivated healthy readers, it certainly garnered a healthy circulation. With the readership defined as "affluent ... sophisticated, upscale males" of an average age of 31, and being 74 per cent male and 26 per cent female (Richter 2006), the 2007 readership of the magazine was 814 000 (AMPS February-June 2007) making it *FHM*'s primary competitor.[9]

FHM

Whilst *Men's Health* was the bourgeoning platform for targeting the broader South African male consumer market, *FHM* and *GQ* established more niche platforms from which to target men who considered themselves to be happily laddish or aspiringly sophisticated, respectively. *FHM*, along with *GQ*, only entered the South African market in 2000; both publications were launched in precisely the same month with December/January editions hitting the shelves in the consumer mayhem surrounding the millennium. *FHM* was published by UpperCase Media (UCM), while multinational publishing conglomerate Condé Nast founded *GQ South Africa*.

The differences between *FHM* and *GQ* in South Africa were perhaps larger than they may have appeared at first glance. For instance, both employed glamorous women in provocative, come-hither poses on the all-important covers. On closer inspection however, there were marked differences that were closely related to the brand strategy on which each magazine was built. Whereas *GQ* offered lofty tones and wishful thinking, *FHM*, like its British antecedent, seemed to shun all forms of aspirational rhetoric in favour of outright laddishness (meaning the sexual objectification of women, a locker-room dialect and interest in sports, gadgets and cars).

The first editor of *FHM* South Africa was marketing man Neil Bierbaum, who followed a toned-down version of the international *FHM* recipe, meaning that the South African edition of the magazine also employed sports trivia, a locker-room dialect and a plethora of objectifying images of already famous women in order to lure a young male readership and eventually become "the most successful men's lifestyle magazine in South Africa" (Cooper 2006). Inspired by the widely read but now-defunct *Scope*, UCM publisher Kim Brown (cited in Derby 2006) proffers that "[y]ou have to give the market something they want". The average readership in 2006 was age 28, (of which 30 per cent were women) (Cooper 2006).[10] Describing the average reader, the 2006 *FHM* editor Brendan Cooper (2006) sketched him as an everyman who likes to "sit on the couch, drink beer with his mates and talk *kak*" (italics added).

A former *Directions* and *Student Life* editor, Cooper took over from Bierbaum in September 2002, and with him came a number of editorial changes. According to Cooper (2006), he firstly improved the design of the magazine so that it became a more direct read with easier access points. Secondly, the new editor endorsed the down-to-earth tone of the magazine by including more South African colloquialisms such as *kief*, *ouks*, *miff* and *jislike*. With the subtitle to the magazine being 'It's a guy thing', Cooper continued to employ the editorial mantra 'sexy, funny, useful, relevant' but did so with a decidedly local flavour. In retrospect, this was a fortuitous move, considering the looming threat of an Afrikaans men's lifestyle magazine entering the South African market, eventually realised in Wilhelm du Plessis's and Mike de Villiers' new title *Manwees*, launched in June 2006. What further differentiated *FHM* from its competitors was its unabashed sense of plebeian self; the magazine thrived on reader-driven stock inserts like the popular 'Homegrown Honeys' competition and the 'Grossest Pics Ever' feature.

The masculine ideal presented by the South African issue of *FHM* was thus a twofold construct: firstly, the sense of laddish, naughty-but-niceness the magazine espoused, and secondly, the feminine ideal so overtly maintained throughout the magazine. Here too the object seems to have been good, 'innocent' fun, since the women are scantily-clad but almost never naked. Cooper (2006) is clear on the fact that South African men are "a pretty conservative bunch" and as such do not take kindly to "nipples or swearing". In other words, while the magazine was guilty of the usual charges levied against top-shelf magazines (the objectifying of women, stereotyping of male sexuality and dumbing-down of male interests), it nevertheless appeared to be a refreshingly honest take on a particular kind of masculine identity, and therefore reconciled with its own hegemony. Perhaps the most perceptible area of psychosocial concern for the author is the fact that increasing numbers of women read the magazine, presumably, among other reasons, for the same reason that men ostensibly read *Cosmopolitan*: in order to better understand the opposite sex. If this is indeed the reason the magazine had such a wide female readership, then it can possibly be said that the view of both men and women that readers found there was two-dimensional at best and grossly stereotypical at worst.

GQ

The oldest of the aforementioned magazines, *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, was launched in the USA in 1931 as *Apparel Arts*, a fashion quarterly for men. The title of the magazine changed to *GQ* in 1957; it became a monthly magazine in the 1970s, which primarily concentrated on fashion and attracted a large gay

readership. In 1983 the then editor, Art Cooper, introduced articles and features of a more global scope, aligning the magazine with a larger heterosexual (and metrosexual) readership.

In the first issue of the South African edition, editor Daniel Ford (2000) commented: "This is it then. At last, a classy, intelligent magazine for South African men". As a motive for purchasing the magazine he added, "[O]nce you're looking great, real style is about how you choose to live. And which magazine you read" (Ford 2000). Not unlike *Playboy*, in the 1950s in America, that catered to the needs of the more educated, sophisticated, middle-class male (Dubbert 1979:268), *Gentlemen's Quarterly South Africa* was founded in order to capitalise on the increasing consciousness about style, urbanity and 'new masculinity' or metrosexuality amid upwardly mobile South African men after the first democratic elections in 1994.

Unlike *FHM*, *GQ* was built on the fundamental assumption that its readers were aspiring to more financial and social success in life and saw the magazine as a shorthand means of achieving the necessary information needed to attain their social goals. Whereas Cooper (2006) described the average *FHM* reader as "cheeky and full of shit ... not on the fast track to becoming the next CEO", the *GQ* reader appeared, as far as can be discerned from the magazine's content and articles, to be something of a modern-day *flâneur*. The *GQ* readership demographic was, in 2002, "urban males, aged 18 to 45 with post-matric qualifications [and a fairly high income]" (*GQ South Africa Psychographics* 2002).

GQ differentiated itself from *FHM* by creating a brand that encapsulated 'class' *and* sexualised display. For instance, the publication fluently coupled saucy pin-ups with upmarket advertisements for brands such as Mercedes, Tag Heuer and Armani, and in so doing, sexualised materialism. Subtle references to the genteel customs of hunting and hand-tailored suits were employed to remind readers that *gentlemen* were their demographic, thus encouraging aspirational branding and dressing up sexist stereotypes in a classy *savoir faire*. On paging through features on everything from boardroom to bedroom etiquette (and the two are frequently coupled), it becomes apparent that *GQ* strived to be a 'how-to' guide on personal branding. In the early twenty-first century, gentility depended not on birthright but on personal branding, and *GQ* enabled its readers to brand themselves more favourably. The masculine ideal presented by *GQ* was defined by its biographical features on Fortune 500 celebrities, rigorously chronicling their rise to fame, rather than by the equally prevalent features on sex or the latest South African models.

Where *FHM* ran a competition to gauge who their readers considered to be the sexiest women in the world, *GQ* published an annual calendar that comprised the renderings of a number of local and international artists. *GQ* thus teased the boundary between art and pornography, but could not sustain real discourse that might have lent the publication subversive or artistic credibility. Instead the magazine seemed to create a sense of chauvinist exclusivity and clubbish camaraderie by enforcing a limited definition of masculinity based on sexual conquest, high-flying corporate culture and extreme sports. While the background image of a Jeep may have been replaced with that of a Jaguar, the indulgent displays of images of women as sexualised for visual pleasure/consumption and the consumer-driven tone was not so different from that found in *FHM*.

However, the real difference between these two magazines seemed to be their readership figures. With a then-current readership of 319 000 (AMPS February-June 2007), *GQ* was no threat to *FHM* and was deemed in 2007 to be something of a failure in the South African magazine industry.[11] However, under the influence of the editor Craig Tyson, the magazine returned to a monthly publication schedule (with an additional three issues of *GQ Cars* being published every year), having lapsed to a bimonthly status for a short period. At R31.95, *FHM* was, in 2007, the most expensive men's lifestyle magazine in South Africa. The magazine made most of its money from off-the-shelf sales, which meant that in 2007 *FHM* had the highest retail sales value (RSV)[12] in the country. *GQ*, on the other hand, generated more income from advertising than from magazine sales and was known to adapt its content in order to accommodate the sensibilities of its upmarket advertisers. Thus, *GQ* seemed to represent quite neatly the kind of magazines that Nixon (1996) describes as being founded in order to provide a platform from which advertisers can access a particular niche audience.

In 2007 it was difficult to tell the difference between *FHM* and *GQ* from their covers. Tyson (2006) notes that *GQ* did not follow the "tits-and-bums" approach to publishing and was therefore not aiming to reach the mass market, but this response belies the similarity of the covers of *FHM* and *GQ*, a fact that may be indicative

of the horizontal identification between the three mainstream men's lifestyle magazines. For instance, *Men's Health*, *FHM* and *GQ* all boasted that roughly a third of their readers were black, yet, true to the homogenising influence of the men's lifestyle magazine format, as recently as 2007 not one of these titles addressed its readers as multiracial, included features on multiculturalism or provided even a representative sample of 'black' subjects and models.[13] Instead, the issues of the time present a narrow view of the South African population that in its lack of political substance and tonal diversity recalls a pre-1994 picture of masculinity. In this picture, to be 'mainstream' meant to be white and middle class, as if this were the dominant demographic in the South African social structure. Perhaps the problem lay in the fact that the magazines were not upfront about their target market but pretended to be speaking to the affluent male population as a whole, when they were, in fact, more racially exclusive than this. In contrast to these mainstream men's lifestyle magazines that addressed a white audience without ever calling them this, the more fringe magazines like *Maksiman* and *BL!NK* appear more honest in their deliberate exclusivity.

Maksiman

The first Afrikaans men's lifestyle magazine was founded in 2001 by Carpe Diem Media under the title *Maksiman* (literally translated as 'Maximan'). Not only was this a departure from the traditional use of English as the communicator of globalising new masculinity, but, as editor Hennie Stander points out, the magazine was also the first Christian men's lifestyle magazine in South Africa (De Wet 2005). The magazine was thus created in order to reach a sector of the market that was not being specifically targeted by other magazines – namely, Christian Afrikaans-speaking men – and as such, its competitors, according to Stander, are imported magazines like *New Man* (De Wet 2005). The target market and demographics of readership was thus 30+ (the exact LSM of the magazine is not defined by the editorial team but presumably fell around 7+ (Briers 2006)).

The construction of masculinity within the Afrikaans-speaking Christian community is emphatically informed by the theologies of the Dutch Reformed Church, which was, historically, the dominant religious persuasion of Afrikaners. The magazine did not, however, make overt reference to any denomination and seemed to avoid theological issues in favour of lifestyle-orientated articles that offered answers to questions such as how to be a good husband or father ('*Jou vrou*' and '*Jou kinders*' are regular features) and whether the Christian masculine ideal includes ambition or a hunger for success ('*Soete droom wereld*', *Maksiman* November/December 2005:22-24).

Not only is the masculine ideal presented by this magazine more tentative (less sure of itself) than that extolled by *Men's Health*, *FHM* and *GQ*, but this version of masculinity includes the relationship to a significant 'other'. The men's lifestyle magazines discussed previously all employ the emphatic omission of almost all references to wives and children, preferring instead to depict their subjects and readers as eternally uncommitted. Through the construction of this simulacral male fantasy world,[14] the magazines presumably facilitated the guilt-free perusal of the women libidinously represented on their pages; mention is seldom made of the love interests of the women featured in men's lifestyle magazines. In contrast to this trope of eternal bachelorhood favoured by *Men's Health*, *FHM* and *GQ*, *Maksiman* seemed to consciously draw the attention of its readers to their partners and to cultivate a culture of accountability.

The sense of anti-escapist rhetoric employed by *Maksiman* coincided with the brotherly tone of Christian men's movements internationally. Writers like Susan Faludi (1999), Stewart Van Leeuwen (1990, 1993, 1998, 2002) and the pop-psychology best-selling author John Eldridge (2001) have interpreted the notion of masculinity in crisis within the Christian context and found that Christian men too suffer from an often severe sense of collective confusion regarding their identities and what it means to be a man in the modern-day context and church. Thus, a Christian men's magazine in some way answers to the general rhetoric of Christian masculinity in crisis in much the same way that *Men's Health*, for instance, responds to the widespread readings of secular masculine behaviour as unhealthy.

At the time, *Maksiman*'s editorial team did not seem to consciously engage with this crisis that may have been plaguing their readers, nor were the articles that engaged with such issues aggressive enough to provide fruitful answers. For the most part, the magazine followed the entertaining tone employed by the majority of mainstream lifestyle magazines and thus may have left a reader seeking answers to the stereotypical masculinities available to him unsatisfied. It may have been a conscious decision on the part of the magazine's editorial team to give their readers a space where they could find a refuge from serious questions, but if this was the case then one cannot help but wonder whether

this approach coincided with the purported Christian philosophy of *Maksiman*. Perhaps because of this confused brand identity – it was neither a theological nor a populist magazine – this bimonthly publication had, in 2006, a circulation of only 20 000 (Briers 2006).

BL!NK

The latecomer of the five magazines, the first edition of *BL!NK* was launched in October 2004 by Orlyfunt Holdings as an upmarket magazine aimed at young black males. Here too, the South African context provided its own narratological twists, as *BL!NK* was launched (controversially) with a R3.5 million loan from the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) as a black empowerment project (Loxton 2005).[15] The magazine was the brainchild of *BL!NK* Lifestyle Trading chief executive officer Vuyo Radebe, but in its infancy was edited by 28-year-old Siphiwe Mpye. According to Mpye (cited in McCloy 2005), "most men's issues in S[outh] A[frica] are not universal, they are race specific", which is why the magazine aimed to "paint a new face for the black man" who was still frequently "associated with 'abuse and desertion'". In discussing the initial objectives of the magazine, Mpye (2006) tendered that the primary incentive behind the founding of *BL!NK* was to show that the affluent black male would increasingly be the backbone of the country's economy: "[W]e ... wanted to show this man to be about much more than soccer, BMWs and bling. We wanted to show that he was also passionate, compassionate, intelligent, worldly, sensitive, politically aware, discerning".

Mpye (cited in McCloy 2005) thus defined *BL!NK*'s target market (and its masculine ideal) as "a thinking man who [is] every bit an [*sic*] African as he is worldly". In other words, *BL!NK* both articulated the emergent identity held by black professionals as assertive confidence and presented itself as a defence against charges of this new class being made up of 'affirmatives'. With the demographic being described in more idealistic terms than simply age 25-35, LSM 7+ and predominantly black, Mpye (2006) was not afraid to classify himself as a *BL!NK* man, even after leaving the magazine to pursue other areas of the media industry (and having been replaced by Thami Masemola).

Thus, the political alignment of the magazine with progressive views of black masculinity that attempted to arrogate hegemonic representations of black men raises the issue of *black* post-apartheid masculinity in crisis. Australian socio-psychological pundit and feminist Lyn Segal (1990:168-204) has examined the stereotypical rendering of black masculinity from the perspective of white masculinity.[16] Segal (1990:169) postulates that behind the social construction of "subordinated masculinity" one finds more evidence of the "conflict and chaos at the heart of the dominant ideal of masculinity". In lieu of her research and other investigations like it (Bertelsen 1998; Hunter & Davies 1994; Nyquist 1983) that emphasise the competitive aspect of diverse masculinities, one is struck by the earnest differences between *BL!NK* and other men's lifestyle magazines in South Africa. For instance, Segal (1990:169) presents the manner in which black masculinity is viewed and sketched through the eyes of white masculinity – "a child rather than an adult, a body not a mind" – as not really being about men at all.

In addition to this colonialist reading are the many contemporary interpretations of black masculinity as pathological, leading to implicit associations with domestic violence and crime (Gray 1995). In South Africa, such negative associations can in part be traced to the era of apartheid when black male youths in urban areas were typically represented as inherently violent (Mtebule 2001:5). In response to this demonising representation the tendency arose for young black men to identify the then masculine ideal with the collective struggle of liberation politics (Carter 1991), but this comrade identity also led to conformity and undermined individual responsibility, self-criticism and differences of opinion (Ramphele 1992). Nkhensani Mtebule (2001:5) points out that between the late 1970s and late 1980s black men were thus fighting a double war: to be recognised as equals and as individual men.

This stereotype makes evident the need for radically new representations of black South African masculinity. Typical masculinities available to young black men in the early twenty-first century included the *amagents*, the 'Y generation' and the *ama-bourgeoisie* (Mtebule 2001:9). Taken from the word 'gentlemen', the *amagents* were regarded as comprising black, urban (township) men who made a living out of organised crime and had a notable taste for flashy cars and beautiful women. Named after the popular black radio station and magazine, the Y generation was berated by the African National Congress for being more concerned with street parties than with the manner in which they contributed to local politics (Mtebule 2001:9). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, *ama-bourgeoisie* was the colloquial term for the black middle-class that spearheaded the exodus from the townships to the suburbs where they epitomised the highly charged divide between the black haves and have-nots. None

of these types formed the sole readership of *BL!NK*, but by constituting in some small way the collective understanding of black masculinity in South Africa they did feed the discourse regarding masculinity evident in the magazine.

Antithetical to the simplistically negative aforementioned versions of black masculinity (past and present), *BL!NK*, unlike the other men's lifestyle titles, emphasised the cognitive prowess and ethical ideology of its readers.[14] In reference to the localised stereotypes of upwardly mobile black South Africans, Mpye (cited in McCloy 2005) boldly remarked, "[I]f you are not in touch with yourself and you find validation in your material possessions, then you are not a *BL!NK* man". Through such didactic proclamations, the tone of *BL!NK* recalled the political cadence of black philosophers such as Aime Cesaire, Steven Biko, Frantz Fanon and Malcom X, who through their racially conscious pedagogy emphasised the possibility for taking ownership of the processes that govern identity in the wake of an oppressive ideological system.

With thoughtful, critical features on black South African intellectuals (A love letter to black intellectuals, *BL!NK* March 2006:56-59), seditious African artists (The subversive palette, *BL!NK* March 2006:64-65) and articles that grappled with responsible black identity (Modern male identity, *BL!NK* March 2006:14-16) forming the mainstay of the magazine, *BL!NK* successfully challenged the haggard stereotypes not only about black masculinity, but about manhood in general. It would therefore appear as though black male identity was differentiated, at this time, from white male identity within *BL!NK* through an emphasis on political responsibility that underscored the Afrocentric nature of the magazine. If there is any criticism to be expressed in terms of the masculine ideal presented by the magazine, it is that it still painted a fairly monolithic portrait of black masculinity. Through the absence of homosexual voices, for instance, the magazine naturalised the 'othering' of homosexuality within the black community; similarly, the multicultural nature of South Africa was rarely recognised. However, the women featured in the magazine were represented with individual poise and personhood, and, since they were rarely featured in scant clothing, there was none of the "body fascism" (Nead 1992:[sp]) that seemed to underpin the editorial style of men's lifestyle magazines as a genre. Indeed, Mpye (2006) cited one of the goals of the magazine at its inception as "bridg[ing] the divide between the sexes", an ideal sorely amiss in *BL!NK*'s competitors.

Commenting on this niche magazine, *FHM* editor Brendan Cooper (2006) noted that, in his opinion, *BL!NK* was a little ahead of its time, and that the black market had not been ready for what the magazine offered. Indeed, *BL!NK* challenged the expected formulae of a men's lifestyle magazine by pushing the content beyond the usual rhetoric of sex, sport and financial success. The fact that it presented its readers with content that was more than just 'sexy, funny, useful, relevant' may explain why, as a monthly, *BL!NK* had a total circulation of only 35 000 and closed its doors in 2007.

Conclusion

A number of general conclusions emerge from this study. The first is that, while a target market does seem to have emerged that marketers and media owners could conceptualise in non-racial (cosmopolitan or metrosexual) terms – meaning that this identity attracted white, black (including coloured) and Asian readers – the dominant target market of the mainstream men's lifestyle magazines was, in 2007, an affluent white South African male. For while the dominant South African discourse of nation building would have liked to conceptualise the existence of a hybrid or non-racial identity, the financially successful men's lifestyle magazines (*Men's Health*, *FHM* and *GQ*) all presented their masculine ideal, albeit on a sub-textual level, as white. This white masculine ideal did not on any level resist the discourse of a unified South African maleness, but neither did it engage with what a unified identity might mean or 'look like'. It did not necessarily draw on the old pre-1994 patriarchal identity, but replaced this trope with yet another, that of the globalised, cosmopolitan, non-racialised (but white) male.

The second, analogous summation that emerges from this paper is that in spite of the more or less 'mixed' demographics of the mainstream men's lifestyle magazines there nevertheless seemed to be identifiable white English, Afrikaans, and black male identities that magazines still appealed to – a fact underscored by the emergence of *BL!NK* and *Maksiman*. On the other hand, the financial failure of both of these magazines indicates that most South African men preferred to buy into a globalised and two-dimensional image, as opposed to a more authentic, vernacular image of masculinity.

The third conclusion is that while the various magazines under discussion in this paper each presented a nuanced slant on ideal masculine identity, a definite masculine ideal was evident in each. *Men's Health* placed emphasis on holistic well-being, *FHM* on laddish good fun and self-acceptance and *GQ* on the aspirational effort of fashion-conscious self-actualisation. *Maksiman* was a magazine that attempted to reconcile ideal masculinity with a Christian world-view, and *BL!NK* ostensibly challenged negative stereotypes surrounding black masculinity with an ethical and socially responsible black masculine ideal. In other words, each responded to a particular aspect of the South African crisis

in masculinity, whether this crisis was/is real or chimerical. This having been said, not all South African men read men's lifestyle magazines, perhaps indicating that there are men who did not identify with any of the masculine ideals that were on offer in these magazines.

Stephen Whitehead (2002:45-46) points out that studying gender or masculinity in the South African context is a doubly charged endeavour because of the history of racial inequality that defines this country. The resultant political correctness endemic to the so-called new South Africa further complicates any analysis that attempts to foreground stereotypical trends in gender construction within the public domain. In his comprehensive analysis of masculinity and the study thereof, titled *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*, Whitehead (2002:46) underscores the importance of treating masculinity as an entity situated on the threshold between the personal and the political.

The fact that masculinity is in flux in South Africa may mean that men are more susceptible to the homogenising influence of men's lifestyle magazines, but it also means that the role that these magazines may play in articulating vernacular identities is amplified. It is unclear how wide the gap is between how identity is constructed in media representations and 'lived reality'. What is apparent is that shifting power relations after 1994 have contributed to untidy disjunctures marking the field of gender studies in contemporary South Africa. Finally, if, as Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (1995:2) have asserted, "[masculinity is a] vexed term, variously inflected, multiply defined, not limited to straightforward descriptions of maleness", then South Africa with its unique cultural inflections is fertile ground for the analysis of the many masculine ideals that form part of the fabric of the new and not-so-new South Africa.

Endnotes

1. The phrase 'men's lifestyle magazine' is used to refer to glossy magazines targeted at men. The phrase is interchangeable with the phrase 'men's general interest magazine' or what feminists Andrea Dworkin and Cathrine A MacKinnon (1988) term 'glossy men's magazines' (while these magazines may be fairly objectifying of women, they are not legally speaking classified as pornography). The phrase 'men's lifestyle magazine' is employed in this paper because it seems to be preferred by the editors of the magazines in question (Cooper 2006).
2. This paper is based on a study conducted in 2007 as part of my doctoral research. For this reason, statistical information given may not be current. The premises, however, remain relevant since most of the information is historically bound.
3. Later theorists have continued this theme. See Brenton Malin (2005) and William Pinar (2001).
4. Clare poses two primary questions. First, he asks whether "phallic man, authoritative, dominant, assertive – man in control not merely of himself but of woman – was starting to die". Second, he enquires whether "a new man [would] emerge phoenix like in his place or whether man himself [would] become largely redundant" (Clare 2000:9).
5. The fissures in this collective taxonomy have been highlighted by, among others, Rosalind Gill (2005), James Heartfield (2002) and Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barret (2001), who question whether this is a valid social phenomenon or something of a moral dread invented by those who consider feminism to be threatening to a social system that preferences male power.
6. 'Crisis' is perhaps too strong a word to describe the changes taking place in the delineation of gender in South Africa. The term 'flux' is probably a more accurate and less dramatic indication of the local situation. The term 'crisis' is, nevertheless, still used in this paper to call into question the body of research that focuses on this concept.
7. *Men's Health*, published by Rodale Press, began in the United States of America in 1987 as an annual before becoming a quarterly and then a bimonthly magazine focused on "health, fitness, stress, sex and nutrition" (Spira 2003:1).
8. See Mosse (1996) for an explanation of Winckelmann and Pater's theory. The reference to art historian Joachim Winckelmann and the revival of the Greek ideal during 1800s may implicate far more homoerotic traces than explained here. This homoerotic aspect of the masculine ideal may require some teasing out in a future analysis.
9. These statistics relate to the period when the study was conducted. In comparison, *FHM*'s readership was 726 000 (AMPS February-June 2007).
10. The majority of the female readers do not purchase the magazine but read it second-hand (Cooper 2006).
11. It should be noted that unlike *GQ*, both *Men's Health* (published by the Naspers affiliate Touchline Media) and *FHM* have the financial backing of Naspers, the largest media conglomerate in South Africa. *FHM*, for instance, only turned a profit three years after its inception, meaning that it relied on the heavy investment of Uppercase Media, also affiliated with Naspers (Spira 2003).
12. RSV gauges a magazine's cover price multiplied by its frequency and its newsstand circulation. *Men's Health* and *GQ* rank 11th and 44th in terms of RSV (Derby 2006).
13. Subsequent issues do seem to do this.
14. Creating an artificial milieu within the magazine is a strategy employed by most men's magazines. One of *Playboy*'s advertising directors, Howard Lederer (cited in Dubbert), explained in 1967 that the magazine deliberately "takes the reader into a kind of dream world. We create a euphoria and we want nothing to spoil it. We don't want a reader to come suddenly on an ad that says he has bad breath. We don't want him to be reminded of the fact, though it may be true, that he is going bald" (Dubbert 1979:268).
15. The resultant contention around *BL!NK* culminated with the NEF coming under fire in Parliament when Ben Turok, an ANC member of Parliament, stated that he thought it was unacceptable that the NEF had granted the loan to a magazine which contains "nothing but disgusting pornographic pictures and articles" (Loxton 2005).
16. Although clearly a different project, *BL!NK* did seem to draw from older black magazines such as *Tribute* in its appropriation of a socially ethical tone.