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The Fallible Phallus: A discourse analysis of male sexuality in a South African men's interest magazine

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This article presents a discourse analysis of the constructions of male sexuality in the South African publication *Men's Health*. The focus of the analysis was a series of monthly featured articles on best sexual practices and behaviour. Since the magazine's content appears to confront men with, on the one hand, the construction of the ideal, potent phallus, and, on the other hand, the fallibility inherent in attempting to live up to this ideal, the overarching discourse in the texts was termed the 'Fallible Phallus'. By stipulating ideal sexual experiences and then juxtaposing these descriptions with the threat of those moments not occurring, a paradox is created in the texts between the phallic dominance of masculinity and the anxieties and insecurities that may result from sexual failure. The Fallible Phallus discourse is a synthesis of four subsidiary themes derived from the texts, namely the male sexual drive theme, the inadequacies of male sexuality, the rule book of sexual practices, and the problematic nature of female sexuality. In the discussion of these themes, it is suggested that the texts use male sexual performance as a yardstick for assessing level of masculinity.

Keywords: discourse analysis; male sexuality; masculinity; *Men's Health*, men's magazine; sexual practices

Interest in the study of men and masculinity has grown extensively since the late 1970s and early 1980s (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). This is evidenced by the number of books, newspaper and magazine articles, and journals published since that period, which focus specifically on men's issues (e.g., *Men and Masculinities* and *Psychology of Men and*

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Masculinity). While local interest in the area is growing, there is relatively little South African research on men's issues. Existing South African studies have examined how masculinity is constructed through men's drinking talk (Kaminer & Dixon, 1995), the relationship between masculinity and gang process (Luyt & Foster, 2001), gendered relationships in incarcerated men (Gear & Ngubeni, 2003), and the relationship between coping in the workplace and sex role orientation (May & Spangenberg, 1997), among others.

One area that has received both local and international attention is the way in which men, their bodies, and conceptions of masculinity are represented in various forms of media. For example, inspired by research on the 'ideal', thin woman portrayed in the media, Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000) assessed changing representations of men's bodies in the media, and found male models to be increasingly muscular. This preference for muscularity was associated with the development of mild to extremely severe body image concerns recently found in men, and referred to as the 'Adonis Complex'. This complex manifests in several ways, including excessive exercise and weightlifting, steroid abuse, and eating disorders (Pope et al., 2000). A South African study concerning the representation of men and masculinity found that men occupy more diverse roles than women in the media, and that men are typically represented as active and heroic, while women are represented passively, in posed or sexualised images (Media Monitoring Project, 2005). In another study, Clowes (2003) analysed changing constructions of masculinity and fatherhood between 1951 and 1965 in *Drum*, a South African magazine. Although this magazine was published by white men, the content was aimed at, and written by, urban black men. In the early 1950s, emphasis was placed on men's personal relationships and responsibilities in domestic life (including washing dishes and playing with children). However, by the mid 1960s, the gender division of labour seemed to have solidified and men were increasingly represented outside of domestic affairs, having little or no emotional or physical attachments to their families (Clowes, 2003). While it is difficult to explain the cause of this changing representation of men, a few suggestions have been attempted. For example, the changes may, at least partly, reflect the shift in familial structure at the time, as fewer black families were living together (due to influx control and pass laws). There may also have been changes in the persons who produced the magazine content, and/or the Western discourse of the non-nurturing father may have been adopted into the articles (Clowes, 2003).

In the current South African context, discourses of masculinity may reflect the changes that feminism and democratisation have brought to the status of South African men (e.g., an emphasis on values of equality, non-racism, non-sexism, and equal opportunity). Issues facing men living in South Africa's reconstructed society were discussed in a 1998 special edition of *Agenda* (see for example, Daphne, 1998; Morrell, 1998). In his book *Changing Men in Southern Africa,* Morrell (2001) explored how South Africa was traditionally a 'man's country', where power was exercised and held by men. While discriminatory laws normalised and supported patriarchal practices, the powers of masculinity did not

necessarily extend to all men equally. Political and legal discrimination meant that black men experienced a form of emasculation, while white men were afforded disproportionate power and advantage (Morrell, 2001). In a later paper, Morrell (2004) noted that, despite affirmative action and preference given to previously disadvantaged groups, men still remain the primary decision makers and earners. This does not mean that men are unaffected by the democratic changes. Rather, men have been encouraged to support gender transformation, and to change their behaviours to become 'new men' (Morrell, 2004). Given that constructions of masculinity are fluid, the goals for South African men appear to be unclear, possibly with the exception of a need to reconceptualise their position in society and to develop a more democratised form of masculinity.

This article presents a consideration of men's sexuality, including their sexual behaviour and sexual practices. It is situated in a poststructuralist approach and thus assumes that language and discourse offer competing, and potentially contradictory, ways of giving meaning to the world (Parker, 1990). Discourses offer variable positions and degrees of power to groups, and legitimise particular experiences over others (Burr, 1995). For example, in terms of sexual practices, heterosexual discourses are usually constructed as the norm, while other sexual orientations tend to be stigmatised and constructed as perversions (Miles, 1997; Ussher, 1997). Social constructionism holds that all forms of categorisation and labelling, including the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine', are socially constructed. This implies that 'correct' behaviour for men and women is dependent on both the culture and time that created and sustained it (Davis & Gergen, 1997). It also implies that there is no single, universal essence to masculinity or femininity, but rather that there are a multiplicity of experiences for men and women, and manifold meanings attached to being masculine or feminine (Burr, 1995; Connell, 2000; Whitehead, 2002). However, in many societies there is a hierarchy of masculinities, and the culturally dominant form is designated as hegemonic (Connell, 2000, 2002). While the hegemonic form may change over time, the dominant form at a particular point in time is contained in discourses that normalise certain behaviours for men (Stibbe, 2004).

Masculinity may have competing, contradictory, and multiple attributes, but the attainment, achievement, and reinforcement of a sense of self as masculine is often linked to sexuality and sexual practice. For example 'sexuality is not about mutual pleasuring, but the confirmation of masculinity, which is based on physical capacities' (Kimmel, 1990, p. 104), 'heterosexual performance may be the mainstay of masculine identity …' (Segal, 1990, p. 210) and '… male dominance is achieved through heterosexuality' (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997, p. 408). These quotes imply that men's sexual failures challenge their sense of self as masculine (Kimmel, 1990). In other words, sex may be a contradictory experience for men as a source of both pleasure and power, consequently reinforcing masculinity while simultaneously producing feelings of anxiety about possible sexual failure, which threaten masculine identity (Ussher, 1997). Thus, there is a contradiction between the illusive, powerful, phallocentric ideal of masculinity and the unattainability of this ideal (e.g., Potts, 2000; Segal, 1990).

Hollway (1984, 1989) noted that sex is a domain wherein different and unequal subject positions are afforded to men and women. For example, men are typically thought to be driven by a physiological need to actively seek out and initiate sex, while women are expected to be passive, and to have little interest in sex (Hall, 1991). In some instances, men are positioned as the 'norm', while women are constructed as 'other', and imbued with a 'lack' or 'emptiness' (Frosh, 1994). Even in current youth magazines, males are portrayed as sexually driven, with no mention of females as having similar drives and desires. For example, Firminger (2006) analysed the portrayal of male behaviour in popular teenage girls' magazines. A dominant theme that emerged was the separation of sex from intimacy by males, while responsibility was placed with females to choose the 'right guy' (who can control his sex drive and who values more than just appearances), as opposed to the 'bad guy' (who has a high sex drive, is emotionally inexpressive, and is attracted to superficial appearances) (Firminger, 2006).

Previous theory and research on sexuality identified several versions and discourses of sexuality at different points in time. For example, Michel Foucault (1979) identified four strategic units that dominated nineteenth-century knowledge about sex. These were the masturbating child, the abnormality of perverse pleasure, the socialisation of procreative behaviour ('the Malthusian couple'), and the female hysteric. Later research by Hollway (1984, 1989) identified three contradictory discourses, namely the male sex drive, the have/hold discourse, and the permissive discourse. The male sex drive discourse has been mentioned in other research, including a South African study, where men were constructed as needing sex, always available for sex, and possessing physical urges that were beyond their control (Shefer & Ruiters, 1998). While men noted that sex was a means of proving themselves as men, women were described as less sexual and as viewing sex within the domain of love (Shefer & Ruiters, 1998).

The current study analysed the way in which male sexuality is represented in the South African male interest magazine *Men's Health*, and highlights the implications of these representations for masculinity. While magazines aimed at women have been published for many years in South Africa (such as *Fair Lady*, since 1965, and *Sarie*, since 1949) (Naspers, 2006), men's lifestyle magazines only started to gain international momentum in the late 1980s and 1990s (Stevenson, Jackson, & Brooks, 2003). In South Africa, two popular men's magazines, *Men's Health* and *FHM*, were launched comparatively later in 1997 and 1999 respectively (Naspers, 2006). Earlier magazines targeted at men focused on hobbies (such as fishing or cars), rather than being about men themselves (Edwards, 2003). Gill (2003, p. 43) speculated that the creation of men's lifestyle magazines may be problematic because men 'lacked self-consciousness about their sex', and there was uncertainty as to whether men would buy a magazine that dealt with being a man, men's fashion, and men's issues. While women's magazines had typically treated their readers like friends, it was deemed important for men's magazines to avoid being associated with homosexuality, and so the magazines spoke to readers as 'mates', and overemphasised women's bodies and heterosexual sex (Gill, 2003). Similarly, Edwards (2003) described

men's magazines, at least those published in Britain, as all about 'sex, booze and fags' (p. 132). It has been argued that these magazines were a response to the dilemma of reconstructing masculinities and provided clarity on what it means to be a man, since the magazines reflected a variety of versions of masculinity, and sometimes contested and negotiated the meanings of these masculinities (Benwell, 2003). However, it is unclear whether these magazines have responded to the demands of men, whether they were merely commercial initiatives, or how the magazines have affected men (Edwards, 2003).

Men's Health magazine, which forms the focus of this study, is an international brand magazine, but the South African version is written and produced locally. Stibbe (2004, p. 32) described the American version of *Men's Health* as 'providing for men what women have had for a very long time, that is, a lifestyle magazine that gives advice on every aspect of living, from sex to shoes and, incidentally, health'. As with the South Africa magazine, the American version is targeted at a middle to upper socio-economic group. The message to advertisers in the South African version of *Men's Health* stipulates that '[*Men's Health*] provides focused penetration directly at the affluent male market delivering sophisticated, upscale males to discerning advertisers' (Stibbe, 2004, p. 34). In his analysis of the American version, Stibbe (2004) argued that *Men's Health* reflects middle- to upper-class white males' dissatisfaction with sexual equality and equality with other groups. For example, in an article in the September 2000 issue, which bore the title '138 Things a man should never apologise for', the list included 'reading pornography regularly', 'calling women girls', and 'putting your feet up on something … like say your wife' (Stibbe, 2004, p. 35). In addition, readers were urged to have control over themselves, other women, and other men. Consistent with suggestions by Pope et al. (2000), *Men's Health* emphasised that the only desirable body for men is one with big muscles, and that men should work to increase their body size. There is a commercial value to such a message, because, without considerable effort, men will not look like the cover pages, and so readers will continue to buy the magazine in the hope of a 'short-cut' to a better, more ideal body (Stibbe, 2004). The ideal man was also encouraged to be a meat eater and beer drinker, to avoid cooking (a traditionally female activity), and to favour convenience food. Of particular relevance to the present research was the construction of the ideal man as a 'sexual champion' (Stibbe, 2004). Accordingly, *Men's Health* offers techniques for having a lot of great sex in every issue, but no mention is made of safe sex or risks involved in sex. The goals and tips provided on how to satisfy partners appear more likely to create anxiety in men about not living up to the performance, and hence ensure that readers continue purchasing the magazine for more tips. Finally, Stibbe (2004) referred to two discourses emerging from the text, namely that of 'the buddy' and 'the discourse of medical science'. 'The buddy' discourse addresses the reader as a concerned male friend, and explains, mediates, and interprets the medical science used in the text. It is this style of communicating that is likely to draw readers to buy the magazine, as they can identify with a friend speaking to them 'man to man', telling them what they want to hear in order to be better men (Stibbe, 2004).

An analysis of various men's magazines available in Britain (such as *FHM*, *Maxim*, *Arena*, *GQ*, and *Men's Health*) also found that the magazines adopt a storytelling approach where they converse with the readers as friends, providing advice and tips in a non-patronising way. 'The language employed by the magazines is "familiar", producing a sense of mediated intimacy between the "lads" who run the magazine and their (assumed to be equally "laddish") readers' (Stevenson et al., 2003, p. 120). These authors suggested that the relationship between the magazine and the reader is hierarchical, with the magazine holding an expert and trusted status. In their study, male focus groups explored consumer culture and masculinity in the context of men's magazines. Some magazines (like *Loaded*) were identified as being more honest, while others (such as *GQ*) were referred to as more pretentious and superficial. *Men's Health* magazine was referred to in the context of 'openness', and was described as a magazine that encourages men to talk about themselves, and to explore their attitudes to sexuality, health, and fashion (topics that were previously avoided). However, it was mentioned that *Men's Health* does this in a humorous, non-intrusive way, which allows the reader to distance himself from any possible anxiety or embarrassment. Stevenson et al.'s (2003) study also examined the content of articles on sexual issues in men's magazines. While no direct reference was made to *Men's Health* magazine, it was noted that such articles typically reinforce binary distinctions between men and women, with the former portrayed as wanting sex and the latter as requiring trust and intimacy. The authors concluded that 'it is the magazines' capacity to be able to accommodate both more "open" and reflexive aspects of modernity along with the certitude of tradition that most convincingly explains their appeal' (Stevenson et al., 2003, p. 128).

It is evident that male sexuality is not a simple, biological issue with little or no psychological or emotional connection. Rather, it appears to be the site of several tensions for men, as sexual performance and practice seem to be related to an affirmation or denial of masculinity. As a result, the content of men's interest magazines appears to confront men with, on the one hand, the ideal, potent phallus, and, on the other hand, the fallibility inherent in attempting to live up to this ideal. How this overarching theme, as well as a number of subsidiary themes, was arrived at is presented in the remainder of this article.

METHOD

Sample

Monthly featured articles on best sexual practices and behaviours were analysed from the South African publication *Men's Health,* spanning the months September 1999 to August 2002. In editions where two articles discussed sexual behaviour and practices, both articles were included in the analysis. *Men's Health*, with its catch phrase 'Tons of useful stuff', is a monthly publication that was first published in South Africa in 1997, and is available only in English (Naspers, 2006). The magazine has readership demographics of mostly middle

to upper income men (Stibbe, 2004). It recorded a 90 058 average-per-issue circulation for the months July to December 2005 (Naspers, 2006). In September 1999, the magazine cost R14.95 which increased to R22.95 in August 2002. At the time of conducting the study, *Men's Health* seemed to be the most common men's magazine available for purchase in South Africa.

Data analysis

Discourse analysis was used to infer the constructions of male sexuality and masculinity in the texts. While there are no set rules for effecting a discourse analysis, the analysis was loosely guided by Parker's (1992) 'twenty-step guidelines' for recognising discourse. The focus was on 'Why was this said and not that? Why these words, and where do the connotations of the words fit with different ways of talking about the world?' (Parker, 1992, p. 4). This was done by means of careful and repeated reading of material in search of recurring themes. These themes were often contradictory, and functioned to normalise particular behaviours (Parker, 1990). It is important to note that discourse analysis is not a critical reading for 'truth', but rather a reading of the flow of power created by different uses of language (Deacon, Golding, Pickering, & Murdock, 1999). Since this article presents an interpretative account of masculinity and sexuality, the findings are not held to be objective or generalisable.

In the initial stages of analysis, data were grouped by content into more manageable themes, and, in line with Parker's (1992) approach, the possible meanings and connotations of the texts were explored. Next, the analyst identified and described the objects and subjects in the text, and, in the case of the latter, explored how the subjects' positioning in the text allowed or restricted their ways of speaking. Following from this, analysts were encouraged to view a discourse 'as a coherent system of meanings' (Parker, 1992, p. 10), and to sketch out the world the discourse represents. In accordance with further guidelines, contradictory or alternative representations of masculinity and sexual practices in the text were inferred, and attempts were made to infer the broader context of the highlighted themes. The interpretations were then compared to other documented representations of men's sexual practices and sexuality. Parker (1992) provides further auxiliary criteria that should be worked through: Analysts should identify institutions that are attacked or reinforced when the discourse is used, explore how the discourse reproduces power relations, and interpret the ideological effects of the discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Promising 'better sex tonight' (July, 2002, cover page), *Men's Health* relates to its reader as a friend who has learned from past mistakes and has developed a repertoire of skills and knowledge to 'coach' less experienced and inept men. The magazine plays on men's fallibilities, and, as noted in an analysis of the American *Men's Health* (Stibbe, 2004),

men are constructed as being in need of advice on how to overcome their difficulties. In the current study, men's sexual practices were not presented as a simple biological issue, but rather as the site of various anxieties and insecurities that contradict the traditional conceptualisation of men as strong, powerful, and in control. The result is an apparent paradox between the expected phallic dominance of masculinity and the way in which the 'phallic talk' generates anxieties and ineptitudes. As with other research (e.g., Hollway, 1994, 1998; Shefer & Ruiters, 1998), male sexuality was constructed, on the one hand, as uncomplicated, biologically driven, and focused on the penis. On the other hand, these representations were contradicted by the simultaneous constructions of anxiety and insecurity over sexual performance, and a resultant need for help and advice regarding sexual practices. The overarching discourse in the texts was termed the 'Fallible Phallus'. This is a synthesis of four subsidiary and contradictory themes, namely the male sexual drive theme, the inadequacies of male sexuality, the rule book of sexual practice, and the problematic nature of female sexuality. Each theme is discussed below and illustrated with selected, emblematic examples.

The male sexual drive theme

> Everyone's heard of Kegel exercises, the repeated flexing of the pubococcygeus (PC) muscles, which control urinary flow. Well, of all the reasons to do them, including the ability to hold out longer during sex, this may be the most compelling: 'Developing your PC muscles may increase the width of your penis a fraction of an inch', says Alex Robboy, a sex researcher and the creator of www.howtohavegood_sex.com. It's not much but we'll take it (July, 2002, p. 70).

In this theme, men's need, desire, and experience of sex are biologically based, and are seen in the many references to the penis, erections, and ejaculation. Here, it is essential to possess a large penis, the ability to maintain firm and lasting erections, and to strive for 'more size, more sighs!' (March, 2002, cover page). This resonates with Potts's (2000) statement that, in many instances, an erection is the essence of male sexuality, and that the 'sexed' male body corresponds to the erect penis. Colman (2001, p. 124) noted that 'most, if not all, men's feelings and fantasies about their sexuality cluster around the image of the erect penis, which thus becomes the central image in what might be called the phallic complex'.

By isolating the physical aspects of sex, male sexuality is divorced from a psychological or emotional dimension. For example, the phrase 'every erection is different. Some are best suited for a romantic night by the fire. Others are made for a sweaty romp in the barn' (March, 2002, p. 80), avoids any mention of men's psychological investment in the sexual act. This may be driven by the belief that emotion is antithetical to the definition of masculinity, and, in order to be distinguished from femininity, sex must be separated from emotion and limited to the functioning of the body (Brod, 1990; Frosh, 1994). The male sex drive is goal orientated and preoccupied with the achievement of male and female orgasm. For example, 'Think

of it as a game of sexual Cluedo: your partner's Miss Scarlett, and it's not crimes that interest you but climaxes' (August, 2002, p. 65), and 'during your anniversary, think ahead to the celebratory cork-pop you'll enjoy later' (March, 2002, p. 80). This representation of biologically based and goal orientated male sexuality is consistent with findings from earlier research (e.g., Hollway, 1984, 1989).

In grounding male sexuality primarily as a biological 'force of nature', male sexuality is made unproblematic and straightforward, negating any possibility of anxieties resulting from feelings of inadequacy or not being found desirable (Metcalf, 1985). This simplification of male sexuality might also be embedded in social constructions that have consistently made female sexuality comparatively problematic, thus affording masculinity a preferential status (Burr, 1998). While the 'biological' male appears outwardly trouble-free, latent in the text is the suggestion that the preoccupation with male physiological functioning and the penis is not just a concern about anatomical reality, but also possibly a reflection of a deeper psychological insecurity about oneself as a man. In other words, the man's ability to seek out and adequately perform sex serves either to consolidate or deny his masculine gender identity (Frosh, 1994). This suggests that the organ (the penis) constructed as symbolic of masculinity (the phallus), is also an organ that can threaten masculinity (through failure). This paradoxical position is emphasised in the next theme, namely the inadequacies of male sexuality.

The inadequacies of male sexuality

A contradiction was inferred in the text between the male sex drive theme and the systematic production of male insecurities. The latter theme appears to highlight how the biological male is riddled with a series of anxieties about sexual performance. While men are presented in the magazines as desiring and seeking out sexual activity, they are also constructed as inadequate and inept in this domain, particularly with regard to satisfying women. This interpretation is consistent with Segal's (1990) statement that it is through sex that men experience their greatest uncertainties, feelings of ineptness, and dependence in relation to women.

> The average guy thrusts 90 times per session. A bit much isn't it? And for what? She may still not be satisfied. (July, 2002, p. 73)

> Try as you might — and we know how hard you try — you're never going to hit all the right spots exactly the way she wants you to. So let her climb on top and take control. (June, 2002, p. 58)

This theme positions men as the subject of the sexual act, but without a natural ability to carry out this act correctly. There is thus a contrast between the irresistible, fully functioning male (from the male sex drive theme), and the male who has anxieties and potential problems with regard to sexual functioning. There is an inherent assumption in the magazine's content that the reader is sexually unskilled and inexperienced so that *Men's Health* needs to step in to assist and explain to its readers how they can improve. In

order to be better lovers, and to provide a yardstick for measuring improvement, a series of comparative rating scales and indices of 'normal' sexual practices and masculinity is provided. For example, 'The average guy has 12 sex partners in his lifetime. You can do better' (July, 2002, p. 71), and 'The average guy stands a 1-in-3 chance of going limp' (July, 2002, p. 73).

The construction of the performance and goal-orientated male (also seen in the male sex drive theme) implies that sex is a competitive domain, which includes mastery of sexual practice, and an element of overcoming a difficult challenge (the female). This theme requires men to compare themselves to other men, for example: 'We're paying tribute to the average guy. Again. And this time we're sneaking a look at his sex life. Find out what's typical in the sack — and how to make your sexual performance nothing less than superior' (July, 2002, p. 68). This contrasts the 'biological' male with the 'inadequate' male who is distressed by the threat of sexual incompetence. It is within this context that the third theme, namely the rule book of sexual practice, can best be understood.

The rule book of sexual practice

> Something can only be a success if it is done in a well thought-out, cleverly planned and determined fashion. The same goes for sex. (February, 2002, p. 39)

Having created the notion of the inept male, *Men's Health* then proceeds to set out for men what they should be seeking to achieve, as well as the means to accomplish this. As found in other analyses (e.g., Stibbe, 2004), it was inferred that *Men's Health* presents itself as a 'buddy' who attempts to 'coach' his friend on sexual performance using rule books, codes, and scenarios of sexual practices.

> The first thing they taught you in school, besides that bit about glue not being food, was the alphabet. Why? Because once you had that down pat, the rest of the English language was at your fingertips. Sex is the same way: once you know the basics, you can string small tricks together to guarantee your partner a triple-letter-scoring orgasm. Here are 26 good reasons (strangely in alphabetical order) to learn the ABCs of S-E-X. (December, 2001, p. 43)

While apparent in all themes, the coaching and 'man to man' style of communicating is most noticeable in this theme. It was inferred that the magazine tries to connect with the reader by acknowledging that it knows what men are struggling with, that it knows what the difficulties are, and that it can help. For example, 'The scenes you are going to act out tonight are worthy of an Oscar. We've written the script The Perfect Night for you — dramatically good sex guaranteed' (February, 2002, p. 38), and 'From my personal bag of tricks I offer you this guaranteed way to get a woman going …' (June, 2001, p. 46). By listening to their friend, and following the schemes and advice for refining and mastering techniques, readers are assured that they will have better sex and win approval from women. By implication, when the sexual act is performed correctly, the reward is an affirmed masculinity, but when it is done incorrectly, masculinity is placed in doubt.

Related to this 'instruction manual' theme is the way in which sexual practice is predetermined and mechanised:

> Wrap her in your arms, straddle groin-to-groin. Legs intertwined, complete the link with your third lower limb. Now support her with your arms behind her back as you let her hands drop to the bed by her sides. Run one finger from breast to pubis, causing her elbows to bend as she leans her torso back. (September, 1999, p. 44)

> Once you've entered her, hold on to her hips and place the back of her heels on your shoulders, so her hips and open labia are flush against you, giving you a great view of the action. Her back should be in a straight line, which is easiest if she locks her heels over your shoulders. (June, 2002, p. 62)

The need for guidance and scripts for men emphasised in *Men's Health* contrasts male and female sexuality, because sexual practices are not something which the female is constructed as needing to learn. In fact, sex seems more natural and spontaneous for women because the gimmicks and ploys suggested to men will awaken in women pre-existing likes. In contrast, men seem to need instruction in how to use the female body to their best advantage, and require this to confirm their skills as a lover and a man. It is this restructuring of traditional female sexuality which forms the basis of the fourth theme, namely the problematic nature of female sexuality.

The problematic nature of female sexuality

There is a commonplace assumption that sexual difference lies in the physiology of women's and men's bodies, and that these biological distinctions imply that women and men have polarised traits, temperaments, and abilities (Edley & Wetherell, 1995). This may lead to assumed differences in men's and women's attitudes and experiences of sex (e.g., Firminger, 2006). This was inferred in *Men's Health*, where the male sexual drive was simple in comparison to the female's more complex and problematic sexual drive and experiences.

> Important: 89 percent of women need approximately 10 times as long as men in order to get into gear sexually. (February, 2002, p. 41)

> Being a visual creature, you want sex with the lights on; being a paranoid creature, she wants sex with the lights off. (August, 2002, p. 69)

Unlike men, women are portrayed as having the potential to be aroused in various ways and to have multiple orgasms. For example, 'Once you know the basics [of sex], you can string small tricks together to guarantee your partner a triple-letter-scoring orgasm' (December, 2001, p. 43), compared to 'Because you're a man, you have what is called a refractory period. That's the amount of time it takes after ejaculation before you can bring another erection to lift off' (March, 2002, p. 80). This does not mean, however, that women are constructed as having greater desire for sex or that they have more sexual prowess. In some

instances, women are presented as having an equivalent desire for sex to men. For example, 'Hey, we're women of the new millennium — we're busy, and we're just as horny as you are. Promise. As far as we're concerned, foreplay can be optional — as long as you can perform one of these lust-provoking tricks' (June, 2001, p. 41). The choice of the words 'just as horny' as opposed to 'more' removes any threat of women being more eager to have sex than men. *Men's Health* also reassures its readers that even if they do struggle to stimulate female orgasm, that is not necessary for a woman to be satisfied. For example:

> Technically, orgasm isn't even necessary for a woman to benefit. (The sound of male cheers fill the auditorium). (December, 2001, p. 44)

Women seem to be mysterious, a site of great treasures to be explored, and men need to demystify and conquer women for their own sense of masculinity. It would seem that *Men's Health* emphasises the complexity of female sexuality, and urges its readers to think beyond vaginal penetration. *Men's Health* explains that sex for women is a physical and psychological phenomenon, and that in order to arouse her a man must use physical and sensory stimulation. For example, 'The more senses you can engage during sex, the better. Think about music, smell and texture' (August, 2002, p. 69). This is deemed important because, unlike the simplified male whose interest in sex is focused on the penis, women are more complicated and have several erogenous zones and different ways in which to be sexually aroused. For example, 'The anterior fornix erotic (AFE) zone — listen closely now, the directions aren't on Mapquest — is located about two or three centimetres up the backside of the vaginal wall, opposite the elusive G-spot' (June, 2001, p. 46) and 'You finally located her G-spot and thought you'd found the Grail. Not so fast. There's another female erogenous zone that needs your attention, and you don't need a mining lamp to find it. The U-spot resides at the opening of the urethra, just in front of the vaginal opening' (December, 2001, p. 48).

The simple, detached, biologically driven male is contrasted with women, who seem to require a more holistic approach to sex. While this makes her sexual experience more complex, women's sexual satisfaction and pleasure is portrayed as a focal point of male sexuality.

> More orgasms for her equals more sack time for both of you. (May, 2001, p. 48)

> Her orgasms don't just make her feel good, they're an undeniable marker of your success in the sack. The fewer she has, the wimpier you feel. (June, 2001, p. 121)

Woman who do not achieve orgasm or who are unfulfilled by the man's performance represent a threat for masculinity. Thus, the magazine continues to encourage men to sexually satisfy their women, and explains to its readers that this is not an easy task. Men are encouraged to think that, unlike the simple, straightforward approach they have to enjoying sex and achieving orgasm, women require coaxing and tricks to 'get in the mood'. This includes the rules and techniques discussed in the rule book theme, such as '10 legendary sex tricks she won't resist' (November, 2001, cover page).

Men's Health appears to construct a paradox between the ability of women to have many fulfilling orgasms and their need to be coerced into sexual acts. While this may suggest a flaw in female sexuality, men are constructed as reliant on women's achievement of sexual satisfaction before they are able to attain their own gratification (Frosh, 1994). Thus, the extent to which a man can sexually pleasure a woman will determine the extent to which his self-esteem and masculinity is confirmed. In other research, masculinity has been positioned as dominant to femininity (e.g., Hollway, 1984, 1989). However, in *Men's Health*, it seems that women are not placed as the subordinate 'other', but rather as central in affirming male sexuality, to the point where women are actually empowered.

CONCLUSION

Arising from the seemingly contradictory themes presented in the magazine, the overarching discourse is described here as the 'Fallible Phallus'. This is because the erotic and seductive sexual moments that are represented as possible and desirable for men are simultaneously juxtaposed with the threat of those moments not occurring, and the insecurity that may result. The magazine cultivates a 'concerned friend' relationship between itself and the reader, and, as noted by Stibbe (2004), this is likely to encourage men to continue to buy the magazine in the hope that they will be able to become more masculine.

In the present study, male sexuality as presented by *Men's Health* magazine does not appear to be a simple issue. Rather, it was interpreted to be fragmented, contradictory, and inconsistent. On the one hand, consistent with other studies (e.g., Shefer & Ruiters, 1998; Stevenson et al., 2003) male sexuality is constructed as biological, uncomplicated, and in contrast to the more complex female sexuality. In some ways, this polarity affords men greater power and status over the 'problematic' female. However, women are also presented as superior to men in terms of sexual pleasure (for example, through their ability to have multiple orgasms) and, because female orgasm is seen as crucial to men's sexual encounters, women's sexual satisfaction serves as a precondition to men's own sexual gratification and affirmation of their masculinity. This interpretation sets the current analysis apart from early work on men's sexual behaviour which typically held the female as objectified and passive and the male as dominant and uncomplicated (e.g., Hollway, 1984, 1989).

The biological male sex drive theme inferred in *Men's Health* is contrasted with representations of men as racked with feelings of inadequacy and anxiety about their sexual performance. In line with Stibbe's (2004) arguments, *Men's Health* prescribes techniques that claim to bring men sexual greatness. In the present analysis, the magazine plays on the constructed anxieties of men, and provides latent reminders to the reader of the illusiveness of sexual greatness. This removes men from their traditionally empowered position, and the constructions of male sexuality in the magazine move beyond that of the male sex drive (Hollway, 1984, 1989) to the anxiety created by the disjuncture between the ideal phallus and the ineptitudes of the real penis (Potts, 2000). It is possible that

this theme may be related to the current situation in South African society where some men may feel emasculated without their patriarchal and decision-making power (Morrell, 1998, 2001), and need to find ways to assert and reclaim their sense of masculinity.

It is important to note that the arguments developed in this article are limited to the authors' interpretation of the data and the texts sampled. There is considerable scope for further research in the area of men's sexuality. For example, this research could be extended to investigate the relationship between text and practice, by exploring whether an endorsement of the views of *Men's Health* magazine is linked to particular practices or patterns of behaviour. Further research could also examine other male interest magazines and other forms of media to understand how male sexuality is represented, and whether these representations change when the target readership is of a different culture or socioeconomic status to that of the current study. The construction of male sexuality in women's magazines could also be considered to infer whether comparable power relations are working in such texts.

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