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An investigation into the representation of women in South African Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements of 2004

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Abstract

This study investigates the representations of women in advertisements featured in South African *Cosmopolitan* magazine published in 2004 so as to critically analyse the stereotypes of women it presents, the institutional mechanisms behind this and its implications for gender ‘constructions’. By using a random cluster sample, 60 advertisements found in *Cosmopolitan* were analysed to examine the stereotypical portrayals of women within its imagery. In addition, survey questionnaires were distributed amongst female students to determine whether exposure to advertisements featured in *Cosmopolitan* magazines moulds their thoughts with regard to South African women today, as well as to analyse their attitudinal change before and after exposure to a number of advertisements. It was found that even though the majority of respondents claimed to be aware of the stereotypical representations of women found in the advertisements, and did not believe that these portrayals were a true reflection of South African women, various aspects of their lives continue to be affected by these representations in a number of ways. The findings of this study indicate that the trend found in previous studies – that stereotypical images of women prevail in the media – is evident in South Africa too. It was established that the ideologies of both patriarchy and capitalism work together in supporting the pervasiveness of negative, disempowering portrayals of women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements. Stereotypical imagery of women serve as the site at which the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy fuse, drawing on a common, shared notion of the objectified female to further their goals of maximisation of profits and male dominance respectively.

“To look at who is being represented in the media and how they are being presented is to gain unique insight into the nature of power and conflict in contemporary society.” – D. Glover (1986, 47)

Chapter 1

1. Introduction

Despite great strides towards equality, women all over the world are continually disadvantaged and marginalised in society. Much of the literature today points to the fact that among the root causes of gender inequality in society are the socio-cultural and economic systems that exist. It is therefore imperative that the factors that continue to reinforce these inequalities be critically examined. This research topic has thus evolved from my personal interest in gender inequalities in media representations and the prevalent threat it may pose to the position of women in society, and therefore also to justice and stability in society as a whole.

This study focuses on gender inequalities in the South African print magazine media. It aims to investigate how women are represented in advertisements in Cosmopolitan, a popular women’s magazine in South Africa, so as to critically analyse the stereotypes of women that it presents, the institutional mechanisms behind this and its implications for those exposed to them. The study will be limited to Cosmopolitan magazines published in 2004, which was a significant year in South Africa in that it marked the tenth anniversary of our democracy; hence this study will look at how the ‘new’ South African woman is represented by the media and understood by women who are exposed to these representations.

Women’s magazines, I believe, are interesting in that they are media products especially targeted at women and are hence structured so as to shape reader’s notions of themselves and society at large. The female imagery it presents thus aids in readers’ constructions of
femininity – their ideas and notions about what it means to be a ‘woman’ or become more ‘womanly’ (e.g. the clothes, the makeup, etc). Because advertising is such a crucial factor in forming our perceptions of gender roles, systematic analyses of print advertisements are necessary to gain better understanding of the way women are portrayed, its grounds and its possible reciprocal influence.

1.1. Objectives of the Research

Firstly, I aim to ascertain the structural and institutional powers that inform and influence the media and their representations of women. Secondly, I seek to establish the way in which women are represented in advertisements in the 2004 issues of Cosmopolitan magazine to examine the supposed progression towards women’s equality in South Africa, ten years after democracy, in the context of our rapid social transition. Thirdly, I endeavour to analyse and interpret the advertisements in the Cosmopolitan magazines to uncover the stereotypes of women that are projected by advertisers. And fourthly, I aim to investigate the possible or probable effects and implications that these Cosmopolitan advertisements have on women who are exposed to them.

1.2. The Hypotheses

The first hypothesis: women are continually objectified and made to appear inferior and submissive with the use of gender stereotypical imagery.

The second hypothesis: the forces of patriarchy continue to support and legitimate gender inequalities in the media, in effect perpetuating these practices.

The third hypothesis: the ideology of capitalism support the misrepresentations of women in advertisements so as to further its own goals.

The fourth hypothesis: advertisements do not only sell their products but also promote and reinforce ideologies and are therefore extremely influential in manipulating
thoughts, expectations, beliefs and actions, on the part of readers, concerning women in society.

To test these hypotheses, I undertake to analyse advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* magazine that include images of a woman/women. In doing so, I focus on both the overt and subtle indications in the picture content of the advertisements that contain messages in terms of stereotypical female roles. The study also includes the results of a survey distributed amongst female university students who were presented with a number of these advertisements to ascertain its effects on their thoughts regarding the notion of what it means to be a South African woman.

1.3 Motivation for the Study

Gender inequality has been a heated topic of discussion since the inception of our democracy in 1994. The Constitution of South Africa and other related statutes were effected to afford women equal rights to those of men. Affirmative action was introduced as a form of corrective action to address the fact that large groups of our society, including women of all races, were previously disadvantaged by apartheid. Affirmative action or equity-legislation in that sense is an enabling mechanism – largely with regard to employment – to allow previously disadvantaged groups such as women to take up their rightful positions of equality and dignity in society. Yet, ironically, gender inequality still exists in society as can be seen by media representations of women, and one could argue that it is a force that works against the very aims of equality and affirmative action. Hence, gender inequality remains a major area of prejudice and discrimination that needs to be conquered in South Africa. According to MacKay and Covell (1997, 574), exposure to stereotyped gender portrayals in advertisements engender negative gender-role attitudes; and modeling and identification with advertisement portrayals reinforces existing negative attitudes and gender-role stereotypes. Hence, the study of gender portrayals in the media is imperative due to its consequences for society at large.
Media images do not simply reflect the world, they re-present it. Instead of reproducing the ‘reality’ of the world, the media engage in practices that define reality (Hoynes & Croteau, 2002, 168). By shaping and structuring meaning, negative representations of women in the media may have negative consequences for society. The media’s continued misrepresentation of women through negative stereotypes is a significant problem in society that needs critical analytical attention if efforts towards gender equality are to be meaningful.

Positioned at the intersection of culture and economy, women’s magazines on the one hand, as documents unavoidably embodying the values of society in which they are produced and presented, reflect, and at the same time shape women’s sense of femininity; on the other hand, they function as advertisers’ forums to sell products through this shaping, that is, tailoring and reconfiguring of the notion of femininity. The focus underpinning my research stems from the fact that advertisements in women’s magazines are both cultural and economic products. As cultural products, they circulate in a cultural economy of collective meanings, expectations, beliefs and values. As economic products, on the other hand, they are products of the print industry and crucial sites for the sale of capitalist commodities. Hence, to understand women’s magazines and the advertisements that comprise a significant portion of them, one needs to analyse both the implications of its economic status and its cultural status, as well as the convergence of these.

In the context of the profit motive characteristic of capitalism, advertising serves as a highly influential component of the mass media that promotes capitalist interests. Advertising is supposedly created to conform to assumptions about the people who are purchasing the product or viewing the advertisement, but it is in fact far more than this: it also creates new needs and social aspirations on the part of readers or viewers. According to Olivier (2006, 16), advertisements act as sites of identification and libidinal investment on the part of consumers. The images projected by advertisements act as sites for consumer identification – not with the product as such, but primarily with the ‘lifestyle’ or social context projected by the situation in which the product in question is seen as being used by certain individuals. Advertisements appeal to a specific class or to a
specific sex and hence are placed in various targeted spectators’ arenas, in the hope of becoming visible to their ideal (that is, susceptible) consumer. Advertisements in women’s magazines have an immense impact on women’s beliefs and ideas about themselves as the intended target market. Hence, by questioning women who are subjected to these advertisements, one can ascertain to some extent (since a great deal of it is unconscious) the degree to which these advertisements shape their lives.

1.4. Structure

The following chapters will trace the course of my research project. Chapter 2 is a review of the related literature that is of importance to my study. It makes reference to the latest critical and advertising-related literature, and similar topics. The literature review introduces the theoretical background to my study and includes empirical studies on similar research topics. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology involved in undertaking my analysis of advertisements in Cosmopolitan magazines, as well as the perspectives of women and their constructions of gender on presentation of these advertisements with the use of survey questionnaires. Chapter 4 presents the findings of my research. It gives detailed accounts of the advertisements I have analysed as well as the findings of the survey questionnaires. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of my research findings against my hypotheses. Chapter 6 concludes my study and includes references to shortcomings that I experienced whilst undertaking my study as well as recommendations for future research on the topic.
Chapter 2

2. Review of the Related Literature

The literature review includes four areas, namely: 1) theoretical framework, 2) women’s magazines, 3) advertisements, and 4) empirical studies relating to my study.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Representation Theory

The term ‘representation’ refers to the way in which images and language actively ‘construct’ meanings according to sets of conventions that are shared by and are familiar to its producers and target market. ‘Represents’ can be defined as ‘stands for’, ‘states’, ‘announces’, ‘symbolises’, as well as ‘suggests illusionistically’, or ‘gives a snapshot impression of’ (King, 1992, 131). Approaches to representation theory incorporate the way the media use conventions, how readers make meanings from them and how representations work and are used within a cultural context. The study of representation is literally the study of re-presentation, production or construction (Lorimer, 1994, 185). A single picture conveys impressions quickly, without need for verbalisation or text, and in so doing it conveys intended or unintended messages subconsciously. Hence, it is important to look at the ways in which the ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism work together to maintain its power in society through the representations of women found in the media, so as to be aware of the ways it influences us subconsciously when confronted by the images.

In the past, the media was seen as a mirror that reflected social reality. However, in recent years, it has become evident that the media in fact feed into our world-views and help to shape them (Bennett, 1982; Glover, 1986; Hall, 1996). The media can be seen as a definer of social reality. In reporting and presenting events and images, the media propose certain frameworks for the interpretation of those events and images, moulding
or structuring our consciousness in ways that are socially and politically consequential (Bennett, 1982, 287). Thus, the media can be seen as contributing to the contours of social reality – to the logic and direction of its development via the socially articulated way in which they shape our perceptions.

By capturing and reproducing images, that which is found to be important by media producers are singled out and emphasised, underplayed, ignored, exaggerated or distorted. Thus, when visual images of women are presented by the media, they are likely to rely upon, and to bring out the producer’s deepest feelings about female human bodies – which include their deepest stereotypes and prejudices on gender (Lowe Morna, 2002, 8).

When analysing representations of women in the media, it is important to remember that the images are presented in such a way so as to mould and shape our views and perceptions of women. By representing women, the media then construct our reality, our perception of women, and hence by representing inadequate images of women, the media hinder the development of women’s empowerment in society.

To understand the reality-defining role of the media, one has to look at the concepts of stereotypes and ideology that are central to the discussion of representation.

2.1.1.1. Stereotypes

The concept of stereotypes is used to indicate those representations which are misleading or offensive. It is the conventional way of representing someone or something so that our view of them becomes ‘frozen’ or fixed and may give rise to social prejudices (Glover, 1986, 27). Stereotypes mark out the acceptable boundaries of our social world – they typically point to those who do not fully belong.

According to MacDonald (1997, 13), the concept of the stereotype is used to criticise the reduction of the three-dimensional quality of reality to a one-dimensional and distorted
form. Particularly when the group being stereotyped, such as women, is already in a disadvantaged position, the stereotype intensifies the offence. Stereotypes short-circuit or block the capacity for objective and analytical judgment in favour of well-worn reactions which could lead to short-changing (Lazier & Gagnard Kendrick, 1993, 201). It also leads to the first connection to gender concerns: representations of women in the media are consistently characterised by stereotypes.

The media is perceived to be the main instrument in conveying stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity (Van Zoonen, 1994, 27). Women are continually cast as the stereotypical seductress or housewife. The housewife is characterised as submissive, dependent, nurturing, tidy, gentle, and lacking confidence, and is likely to be shown at home, while the seductress is characterised as young, thin, smiling, acquiescent, provocative, and sexually available (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 169). These stereotypes are evidently inaccurate as they fail to present a three-dimensional quality of real women and instead present a one-dimensional, distorted form. The effect of gender stereotyping has been to restrict women to areas where they have fewer material resources and less power to define their own lives or the shape that society should take (Jordan & Weedon, 1995, 181).

Stereotypes are a potent vehicle for ideology – they are a source and support for ideas which legitimate powerful vested interests in society (Bennett, 1982; Glover, 1986). Stereotypes of women presented by the media support the interests and ideologies of our patriarchal and capitalist society so as to reconfirm the superiority and promote the interests of men, and to further the profit motive (King, 1992; Lazier & Gagnard Kendrick, 1993; MacDonald, 1997). The fact that stereotypes so often present attributes as if they were ‘natural’ is not a feature of stereotyping as such, so much as an indication that they are ideological concepts (Perkins, 1997, 22).
2.1.1.2. Ideology

Ideologies are sets of constructed ideas which justify specific kinds of social behaviour and therefore legitimate social disadvantages and injustices that are determined by economic forces. They therefore help to create collective social understanding of the world and everything within it. Ideologies are produced in the domain of what Marxists call superstructures, such as the church and family; however, cultural institutions like the media are also required to cultivate moral and cultural ‘norms’ in society (Hall, 1996, 18). Ideology is a very important concept to understand the dynamics within society, as it helps uncover the ideas and values of the dominant classes which create and sustain the power imbalances in society – those which, today, are necessary for the survival of a capitalist, patriarchal society. According to Bonner et al (1992, 9), all representations are ideological – that which is re-presented expresses a partial truth in the service of the social group in power.

The media thus function as an ideological apparatus that sets the boundaries of thinking about the world – it infiltrates ideas into people’s minds about their place in it and what they ought to do (Hall, 1996, 19). The media pass on society’s heritage – which is deeply sexist – in order to secure continuity, integration and the incorporation of change (Van Zoonen, 1994, 27). This is done through the interplay of meaning and representation that is constructed by the media. Members of society are thus seen as living within the confines of ideology by experiencing, interpreting and making sense of the conditions of their existence using a variety of systems of representation.

Patriarchy, as ideology, refers to a hierarchical social system and way of thinking where ‘fathers’ and ‘patriarchs’ rule – one that has become a model for every form of domination and subordination in society today. It is a form of social organisation that structures dominance of men over women. Capitalism on the other hand, refers to ideas about economic benefits derived from the importance of ‘free markets’. It is an economic system in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled and is characterised by competition and the profit motive as the driving force. The combination
of these two ideologies is inscribed in media practices – the media produce, reproduce and transform the field of ideological representation itself according to the ideological synthesis of patriarchy and capitalism (Hall, 1996, 23). Hence the combination of these two ideologies function within the media by assigning particular classifications to social groups, for instance women are portrayed as being submissive in the media so as to fit the patriarchal ideology, while their bodies are exploited so as to sell products in the hope of maximising profits, which is a characteristic of capitalist ideology. The meanings created from these representations of women in the media continue to position women in a relation of subordination, passivity and sexual availability (McRobbie, 1996, 173). Hence, in theories of ideology, the media is viewed as a hegemonic institution that presents the capitalist and patriarchal order as ‘normal’, obscuring its ideological nature and translating it into ‘common sense’ (Van Zoonen, 1994, 27).

2.1.2. Feminist Theory

Feminism focuses upon gender as the key factor, whereby social reality and mediated reality (that which is presented to us by the media) are structured for us and experienced by us (Jones & Jones, 1999, 65). Gender is “an analytic category within which humans think about and organise their social activity, rather than as a natural consequence of sex-difference” (Van Zoonen, 1996, 43). There are several branches of feminist thought that exist today – three of which are liberal, radical and socialist feminist thought.

2.1.2.1 Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism stresses the importance of equal gender relations and tends to disregard women’s difference from men (Jordan & Weedon, 1995, 184). Research into gender representation in the media has been mainly carried out by liberal feminists who have undertaken a great number of content analyses. “Sex role stereotypes, prescriptions of sex-appropriate behaviour, appearance, interests, skills and self perceptions are at the core of liberal feminist media analyses” (Van Zoonen, 1991 cited in Jones & Jones, 1999, 65). Their studies have found that media act as socialisation agents – along with the
family – teaching children, especially, about appropriate sex roles and symbolically rewarding them for appropriate behaviour (Van Zoonen, 1996, 34). Liberal feminists believe that the media will change over time – that its representation of women will catch up with their actual social position and the media will present a more accurate view (Jones & Jones, 1999, 66). This study draws on liberal feminist thought in that it attempts to analyse the current stereotypical representations of women as well as the extent to which representations of women have ‘caught up’ with their true social position in society.

2.1.2.2. Radical Feminism

Radical feminists believe that society is constructed as a patriarchy (Newbold, 1995, 389). Radical feminist research investigates the effect that patriarchy has on women (Jones & Jones, 1999, 66). Radical feminist media analyses focus on the power of the media to affect men’s behaviour towards women as well as women’s perception of themselves. Their studies have found that “there can be no doubt that media distortion contributes to a general climate of discrimination and abuse of women” (Van Zoonen, 1996, 35). This study thus draws on radical feminist thought in that it looks at the functioning of patriarchy in representations of women in advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* magazines. It also looks at the effects that patriarchy has on the images in the advertisements as well as the effects they may have on women who are presented with the images.

2.1.2.3. Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism does not merely focus on gender to account for women’s position in society, but also incorporates analyses of social class, ethnicity, sexual preference and disability into the discourse (Jones & Jones, 1999, 67). In socialist feminist discourse power remains located in socio-economic structures, most importantly, through the relatively autonomous level of ideology. The media is perceived by socialist feminists as an ideological apparatus that represents the essential rightness of capitalism as a social
system; within this framework socialist feminists focus upon the ways in which gender is constructed through language and imagery (Jones & Jones, 1999, 67). This study thus traces socialist feminist thought in its study of the ideological dimensions found in the representations of women in *Cosmopolitan* – the way that capitalist ideology in its combination with patriarchal ideology influences the images that we are presented with.

In summary, this study is theoretically based upon the theories of representation and feminism in that it attempts to analyse the way in which images of women are represented in the media. The study investigates the extent to which patriarchy and capitalism influence the images that are presented and how these images inform South African women about what it means to be a woman.

### 2.2. Women’s Magazines

Women’s magazines are part of both an economic system as well as an ideological system by which gender difference is given meaning. Women’s magazines are extremely important when analysing constructions of gender as, according to McRobbie (1996, 172), women’s’ magazines are possibly the most concentrated and sustained media form for the construction of normative femininity. It serves as a multiple site of representation where a range of concerns intersect with each other across the pages.

Although these magazines are first and foremost vehicles of consumerism, many women name them as authoritative information resources tailored especially for their needs (Mastin, 2004, 230). Women’s magazines exist as an interdiscursive space whereby it interweaves various ideologies within its representations (i.e. patriarchy and capitalism among others). These ideologies ‘hail’ individual readers as its subject; hence a ‘subject-position’ is constructed for the reader. This is because readers, as subjects, subject themselves to the power of ideology in that they identify with subject positions or categories of identity which are predetermined within these ideological frameworks (www.las.iastate.edu). This process of identification with identities is called interpellation – a process of (mis)recognition with an identity offered in society (www.las.iastate.edu).
Readers can recognise themselves in the magazine’s repeated interpellations – it is this recognition that creates the magazine as representative and it also produces for its readers a field of pleasure and enjoyment (McRobbie, 1996, 180).

Women’s magazines prosper as vehicles for advertising messages. They deliver demographically identified segments of the women’s market to advertisers (Goldman, 2002, 88). Readers thus become part of a ‘package’ – as potential consumers, they are marketed to advertisers just as other goods are sold.

Advertisements within women’s magazines are not purposely included so as to educate society about appropriate gender roles but rather to stimulate product purchase. However, women’s magazines’ pervasiveness and their documented importance in the lives of many women indicate that they in effect influence readers’ attitudes and beliefs regarding societal norms and hence have real consequences for readers (Mastin, 2004, 240).

As both a cultural and economic product, women’s magazines such as Cosmopolitan, reflect, and at the same time, shape women’s senses of femininity. They function as advertisers’ medium to sell products through tailoring and reconfiguring the notion of femininity. Hence, both forces of patriarchy and capitalism are interwoven into the fabric of women’s magazines, shaping the content and images that it presents, so as to uphold and reinforce its ideologies.

2.2.1. Cosmopolitan Magazine

Cosmopolitan magazine is an international brand, however, the Cosmopolitan referred to in this study refers to the South African Cosmopolitan which is published and distributed locally. The word ‘Cosmopolitan’ is derived from the Greek words ‘Kosmos’ (the world or universe) and ‘polites’ (citizen). Hence, the intention of Cosmopolitan is to appeal to a well-travelled, sophisticated individual (McLoughlin, 2000, 13). Cosmopolitan is known to be amongst the more popular of women’s glossy magazines both in South Africa as well as internationally. The fact that Cosmopolitan is a glossy magazine is important in
that the glossy paper connotes sophistication and glamour which again points to its target market (McLoughlin, 2000, 2). The Cosmopolitan reader is aged between 18 and 34 and is described as putting herself first, being smart and ambitious, a passionate shopper and the ultimate consumer (www.cosmopolitan.co.za). Advertisements within Cosmopolitan magazine are thus targeted towards female consumers since the magazine itself is targeted towards a female readership.

The articles within Cosmopolitan are centred on sex, relationships, fashion and beauty, celebrities, health and careers. Cosmopolitan is geared towards the goal-orientated woman looking for success in both the workplace (public sphere) and in bed (private sphere). A great deal of the contents within Cosmopolitan centre around ‘girl-power’ – women are educated about issues such as gaining the upper hand in a relationship, learning the art of orgasm without having to rely upon the skill of male partners, and being more successful in the workplace.

Women’s magazines have been considered an important aspect of culture for women. They have often been seen as the pivot around which women’s personal and social identities have been created (Jones & Jones, 1999, 69). Thus by looking at South African Cosmopolitan magazine, an idea of South African women’s personal and social identities may be established in that there is reason to believe that women’s magazines shape and mould their ideas, thoughts and cultures.

Interesting to note, in the recent All Media and Products Survey (AMPS), 31% of readers were found to be male while the majority of readers (69%) were women (AMPS, 2006). Importantly, this proves that not only are the messages of the magazine reaching women, but a large number of men as well. Thus, if women are continually misrepresented by the magazine and its advertisements, both women’s ideas about themselves and those of men about women will remain ideologically biased or in a certain sense incorrect, and hence a hindrance to gender equality in South Africa.
2.3. Advertisements

Advertising may be defined as a paid form of non-personal communication about an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor (Hovland et al, 2005). It is a form of persuasive communication. The impact of advertising on audiences is often explained by social learning theory or by theories that are based on it – as people are repeatedly exposed to advertising images, they tend to internalise the advertisers’ views of themselves and others; hence, advertisements act as socialising tools (Frith et al, 2004; Goffman, 1987; Hovland et al, 2005; Lindner, 2004; MacKay & Covell, 1997; Mastin, 2004).

Erving Goffman (1987) is one of the most influential and most often cited scholars on the media with regard to advertisements and its impact on gender relations in society – he emphasised that advertisements often contain very subtle clues about gender roles and may operate as socialising agents. Advertisements portray the roles and attitudes of both men and women in society, and in so doing define social expectations and educates viewers as to acceptable versus unacceptable behaviours. Thus, advertising involves the ritualisation of our social world (Goffman, 1987, 1). The more ubiquitous the images are in advertisements, and the more frequently audiences see the advertisements, the deeper the audience identifies with the images (Hovland et al, 2005, 888). As advertisements use external and socially situated codes, concepts and myths, they are bound up with and construct ideology (O'Donohoe, 1997, 259).

According to Goldman (1992, 81), advertisements are messages motivated and structured by the aims of commerce. To facilitate product sales, advertisers impart meaning into their products. Though advertisers may seek the sale of objects, they accomplish this by situating the meaningfulness of objects in terms of meaningful images of social relations. Hence, advertising is about social relations, not objects (Berger 1972 cited in Goldman, 1992, 81)
Advertising is a key social and economic institution in producing and reproducing the material and ideological supremacy of commodity relations. Advertisements offer a unique window for observing how commodity interests conceptualise social relations (Goldman, 1992, 2). Advertisements dissolve the boundaries between the material and the symbolic, between the economic regime of accumulation and consumption, and the symbolic regime of signification (McFall, 2004, 65).

Advertisements do not only sell their products but also values, images and concepts of success and worth, love and sexuality, popularity and normality. They tell us who we are and who we should be (Kilbourne, 2002, 121). Advertising serves as the foundation of the mass media with a highly influential potential. All social practices and modes of representation, such as advertisements, construct gendered subject positions and modes of subjectivity which involve power relations and have material effects (Jordan & Weedon, 1995, 185).

2.3.1. Capitalist Ideology Informing Advertisements

In an economy organised around the principle of capitalism, the profit motive is the driving force behind production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Advertising legitimises consumption as a way of life (Dines & Humez, 2002, 71). Consumer society orients culture and its attitudes, values and rituals toward the world of commodities. The marketplace and advertising, which is its major ideological tool, is the major structuring institution of contemporary consumer society (Jhally, 2002, 78).

Advertisements are first and foremost a platform from which sellers promote their products. Hence it is inherently capitalist in nature. However, not only is the advertisement itself a product of capitalism but, in addition, the images that it presents is also embedded within capitalist ideology, and in turn reinforces the latter.

Advertisements are linked to capitalism in two ways – advertisements are transparent in their explicit aims to sell goods and to perpetuate capitalist ideologies of ownership and
profit; and secondly, they are the conductors of ideology – they are imagined to be the visible, outer shell of the inner logic of capitalism (Cronin, 2000, 38). Capitalism, like advertisements, promotes artificial needs and wants, leaving consumers craving more and more of what is iconically projected as being desirable to the point of being supposedly indispensable for the buyer (Olivier, 2006, 30).

Advertisements offer an insight into the wants, the hopes, and the dreams of their target market. Advertisements reflect dominant values, attitudes and habits and portray that which society desires (McFall, 2004, 2). However, the ideas reflected by advertisements are distorted so as to serve capitalist interests – advertising mystifies us, deprives us of knowledge and appropriates our real needs and desires to serve the interests of capitalism (Williamson, 1978 cited in Cronin, 2000, 37); it sells a worldview, lifestyle and value system congruent with the imperatives of consumer capitalism (Kellner, 2002, 127). Advertisements promote a materialistic value system, under which personal happiness and success are defined as high consumption and the possession of as many products as possible (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally, 1985 cited in Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 167).

According to Jhally (1990), “the system of capitalist production empties commodities of their real meaning, and the role of advertising is to insert meaning into this hollow shell” (Jhally, 1990 cited in McFall, 2004, 64). The images presented by advertisements are consumed for their cultural meanings, rather than their material characteristics. Advertisements influence consumption through their imbrications in marketing which enable advertising to function as an effective tool of socialisation and persuasion (McFall, 2004, 66). Advertising thus provides a cultural frame for goods which has helped shift the essential function of goods away from satisfaction of wants to the communication of meaning and in this way, the ideology of capitalism is socialised.

A long-standing central concern regarding advertising is that it is a shorthand form of communication that makes contact with the consumer immediately, establishing a shared experience of identification – with the best known method being the use of stereotypical imagery. According to Goldman (1992, 79), there is a ‘demand’ for stereotypical images
of women because they are marketable and are rewarded by mass sales. The use of these stereotypical images of women are of great concern as they are often incorrect (in the sense of ‘out of step with social reality’), casting women as housewives or sexual objects, and hence are detrimental to gender equality.

According to Olivier (2006, 17), capitalist-consumer space, such as advertisements, comprise metonymic site-chains for consumers to invest their own desires. These desires may also be cultivated by other capitalist-engendered iconic sites of investment and identification such as celebrities (i.e. actors, supermodels, etc) due to their positions of power in the media and society at large. Hence, using celebrities to advertise products is often found in *Cosmopolitan* so as for readers to desire the lifestyle which the celebrity offers or represents, hence reflecting capitalist ideology.

Advertisements offer consumers comprising their target market an idealised, supercharged image of themselves that they can consume through the purchase of a never-ending stream of products purported to be crucial to the lifestyle and values they represent (Lorimer, 1994, 203). Hence, advertisements in women’s magazines are unique in that its target market is essentially always women and thus the analysis of advertisements within South African *Cosmopolitan* magazines offers an insight into readers’ idealised and supercharged image of themselves, or at least, advertisers’ idea of what they may be.

The way in which stereotypes and beauty-typing of women are influenced by capitalist ideology is in the way it is done so as to sell products. The statement “sex sells” encapsulates the idea. In advertising, the female body is consistently the reference point for the persuasion to consume (McRobbie, 1996, 172). Through the use of female imagery depicting sexual availability, women’s bodies are exploited. They are governed by capitalist ideology – to bare all so as to sell more products and hence maximise profits – but at the same time are governed by patriarchal ideology in that they appear vulnerable (and yet, dubiously, ‘sexually powerful’) when baring all, and are hence powerless to male dominance. This is the case because the reduction of women’s power to sex on
patriarchal terms means, ironically, that they open themselves wide to exploitation. After all, their sexuality is not presented as an autonomous power, over which women have control, but is made heteronomous to, or conditional upon, a combination of patriarchal and capitalist interests. That is, the sexual power of women is enlisted and used (abused) in the service of the dominant power of patriarchal capitalism.

2.3.2. Patriarchy informing Advertisements

Advertisers’ mode of address relies on assumptions about their intended target markets. Advertisers address an implied, rather than an actual reader and thus by using women’s magazines as their vehicle, advertisers play a significant role in constructing subjectivities for the female audience. This then results in constructions of feminine identities within advertising discourse that rests on the advertisers’ distorted views of society, especially of women. By offering gender displays, advertisements offer a context within which we attempt to understand and define our own gender relations – they are part of the process by which we learn about gender (Jhally, 1990, 135).

Stereotypes in advertising serve a useful function in that they convey a message quickly and clearly through representations and images, however, the problem lies in the fact that images of women continually portray them in a negative, socially detrimental light, which may (and probably does) result in negative and undesirable social consequences. Advertisements shape society by using stereotypical images to establish shared experiences among consumers, and advertisements also mirror society by promoting stereotypes, biases, and the dominant values of patriarchal society (Cortese, 1999; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Wiles, Wiles, & Tjernlund, 1995 cited in Mastin, 2004, 230).

According to Mastin (2004, 229), women’s magazine advertisements continue to subject women to traditional, patriarchally defined images of women’s lives rather than reflections of their diverse daily experiences and aspirations. Images of women found in women’s magazines typically position them in a relation of subordination, passivity and sexual availability (McRobbie, 1996, 173). Additionally, women’s presence in advertisements has increasingly become of no substantial relation to the product – her
role is merely to be sexy and alluring (Sullivan & O’Connor, 1988; Timson, 1995 cited in MacKay & Covell, 1997).

Results of a study by Kilbourne (1990 cited in Lindner, 2004, 409) revealed that people, after being exposed to advertisements that depict women in stereotypical roles, showed significantly more negative attitudes towards women, especially concerning their managerial skills, than after being exposed to advertisements that depict women in professional roles that require such skills. These results suggest that there is indeed a relationship between the way women are portrayed in advertising and people’s ideas about how women are supposed to behave and the roles they are supposed to occupy successfully within society (Lindner, 2004, 409). As such, negative stereotypes of women in the media impact negatively on audiences who are exposed to such media.

Important to the study of representations of women in advertisements, is the understanding of ‘the gaze’ – referring to the way in which readers are invited to look at the images presented by advertisers. It is believed that women are always presented so as to be looked at, to be put on display. The spectator is constructed as male; women are invited to look at these images from that of a males’ perspective (Bonner et al, 1992; Brown, 1995; King, 1992; MacDonald, 1997; Mulvey, 1975). Thus women in visual images connote ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’, to play the role of being desirable to the male gaze (King, 1992, 135). Women signifiers found in advertisements are often portrayed in the dreamlike context, the coy pose, the averted gaze (which invites speculation and possessiveness) or the wax-like absence of facial expression (MacDonald, 1997, 106). Each denies individuality, refuses access to the woman’s own view of herself, and enables the looker to admire the woman on display as an aesthetic or erotic object (MacDonald, 1997, 106). Hence, the spectator is poised between the contradictions of identification and voyeurism, a characteristic of the ‘male gaze’.

According to McClelland (1993, 221), the misrepresentation of women found in advertisements is more than the obvious use of attractive models to catch the potential consumer’s attention, but also includes:
1. **Objectification.** The woman adorns the advertisement or the product and is perceived as a sex object.

2. **Seduction.** The woman’s role in the advertisement, and the consumer’s fantasy life, is sexually suggestive.

3. **Self-Gratification.** If the target consumer is female, the woman in the advertisement is equipping herself to attract or please a man.

4. **Stereotyping.** If sex appeal is absent in an advertisement, sex-role stereotyping can be present.

Advertisements thus reflect the traditional male power imbalance in society; they reflect the critically important components of culture – its stereotypes, its bigotries, its biases, its dominant values, and the ongoing ideological reproduction of the traditional (Dervin & Clarke, 1988 cited in Lazier & Gagnard Kendrick, 1993, 206). Advertisements, much like the magazines within which they are found, continually uphold patriarchy. The images conveyed by advertising are so sophisticated and persuasive that they organise our experiences and understanding in a significant way (Kang, 1997, 981). Hence, the study of advertisements in South African *Cosmopolitan* magazine will lend insight into how the images it presents are manipulated so as to organise our experiences and understanding of gender constructions.

### 2.4. Empirical Studies

Goffman (1987) conducted a study of gender portrayals in magazine advertisements which has been the basis for many research studies since, including my own. His study of advertisements in the print media demonstrated how advertising functions to display our notions of gender roles, making use of visual meanings, which he accomplished by analysing the subtle and underlying clues in the picture content of advertisements that contain messages in terms of (stereotypical) gender roles. Goffman (1987) found that the most simple gesture, familiar rituals or taken-for-granted forms of address were sources for understanding relations between the sexes and the social forces at work behind those relations. Goffman’s (1987) study concluded that women are weakened by advertising portrayals in six categories: relative size (shown smaller or lower than men), feminine
touch (women constantly touching themselves), functional ranking (occupational), family
scenes, ritualisation of subordination (canting postures) and licensed withdrawal (far-off
gazes). Goffman’s (1987) methodology, however, has been criticised by researchers such
as Kang (1997, 984) as they believe he drew biased samples, choosing advertisements
from newspapers and magazines that showed gender differences that represented his
preconceptions, instead of randomly selecting advertisements to analyse.

While utilising Goffman's model of decoding images to observe women’s role in society,
Mee-Eun Kang (1997) has since done a more objective study in that she has examined
gender displays portrayed in advertisements between the years of 1979 and 1991 using
random samples of print advertisements. In addition to Goffman’s (1987) categories,
Kang introduced two more categories to analyse the gender displays in magazine
advertisements, these being: body display (i.e. body-revealing clothes or nudity) and
independence (self-assertiveness). Kang (1997) examined the messages presented to
society by magazine advertisements about women. Kang’s (1997, 994) study found that
the types of stereotyping had changed since Goffman’s (1987) study, however even
though some advertisers began to feature more powerful and independent women, only
superficial cultural alterations were transferred to advertisements, while the underlying
ideological foundation remained untouched.

Katherine Lindner (2004) recently conducted a comparative study of the portrayal of
women in advertisements in a general interest magazine (Time) and a women’s fashion
magazine (Vogue) that spanned 50 years. The coding scheme used for her analysis was
also based on the one developed by Goffman (1987), which focuses primarily on the
subtle and underlying clues in the picture content of advertisements that contain messages
in terms of stereotypical gender roles. The results of her study showed that, generally,
advertisements in Vogue, a women’s magazine, depict women more stereotypically than
do those in Time, a general public magazine (Lindner, 2004, 400). In addition, Lindner
established that only a slight decrease in the stereotypical depiction of women was found
over time, despite the advance and progression of the Women’s Movement in that time
period (Lindner, 2004, 400).
Baker (2005) analysed the sexual images of women in magazine advertisements in black- and white-oriented, men’s and women’s magazines to compare the images of women’s sexuality that are constructed for each specific audience. Over 600 images of women were analysed based on Goffman’s (1987) categories of gender display. Baker’s (2005) research showed that the images of women’s sexuality varied greatly depending on the race of the intended audience and the race of the women in the advertisements. Advertisements for white audiences were found to portray women in roles and with characteristics that suggest dependency and submissiveness, whereas advertisements targeted to black audiences portray women as independent and dominant. In addition, she found that white women models were sexually objectified much more than black women models in the advertisements that were analysed (Baker, 2005, 13).

For my study, I too, have used Goffman’s (1987) approach – analysing the subtle and underlying clues in the picture content of advertisements that contain messages in terms of stereotypical gender roles – and in addition have incorporated Kang’s (1997) two categories of gender display. An examination of race differences as Baker (2005) has done fell outside the scope of this particular study that analysed advertisements portraying at least one woman in its imagery, regardless of the colour of her skin.

Das (2000) examined the portrayal of women and men in Indian magazine advertisements so as to reveal gender portrayals found in developing countries. She found that most studies on the subject were from developed nations and indicated that women were generally portrayed in advertisements as homemakers, dependent on men, and sex objects while men were portrayed as dominant, authoritative figures (Das, 2000, 700). Her aim was to examine the portrayals of men and women in the Indian media – a developing country, much like South Africa. The results of her study indicate that women and men in Indian magazine advertisements are also portrayed in stereotypical ways, much like those in developed countries (Das, 2000, 700).
Frith, Cheng and Shaw (Frith et al., 2004) examined the depiction of women in advertisements in women’s magazines across cultures. They analysed advertisements collected from women’s fashion and beauty magazines in Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States to compare the ways in which Western and Asian models were portrayed in print advertisements in different parts of the world. Their study revealed that western models were shown more frequently than Asian models in seductive dress and posed more often than Asian models as the seductive beauty type (Frith et al, 2004, 53). Their findings suggest that Western models are used more than Asian models in advertisements which are body oriented, and that Western models are used in advertisements in Asia when the underlying marketing strategy is that “sex sells” (Frith et al, 2004, 54). Millard and Grant (2006) found similar results in their study of the portrayal of women found in magazine advertisements and fashion spreads in Cosmopolitan, Glamour, and Vogue magazines. Their study concluded that the incidence of stereotyping is still prevalent – black models were found to be portrayed significantly less often in explicitly sexual poses, but significantly more often in submissive poses, than white models (Millard & Grant, 2006, 659). Hence, the stereotypes of the submissive or sexually available female prevail – the only difference lies in the varied stereotypes which are established along differences in race, cultural background or ethnicity.

Klokow (2005) examined the extent to which feminism has been appropriated by consumer culture in South Africa. Her study looked at the relationship between consumerism and patriarchy and the way in which it continues to dominate global economic and social practices. Her study concluded that for all the ‘strides’ feminism has made, media images of women are largely traditional, prescriptive or overtly sexualised. My study, too, analyses the South African media – in particular the advertisements in the 2004 issues of Cosmopolitan magazines, the year that marked South Africa’s tenth year of democracy – in an attempt to investigate the extent to which women’s equality is reflected by the representations of women in the media. Much like Das’ (2000) study, this research aims to uncover the way in which women are portrayed by the South African media so as to contribute to a South African body of knowledge in the context of a vast
amount of Western literature found on the subject and comparatively little knowledge on
the subject from the developing world.

Krassas et al (2001) analysed the sexual rhetoric of *Cosmopolitan* and *Playboy* magazines
to consider how sexuality was constructed by sources directed at men and women. They,
too, used Goffman's (1987) categories of gender display in advertisements to compare
how each magazine used its images to provide cues to readers about sexuality and sexual
relationships and to trace changes within each magazine over time. Krassas et al (2001,
751) concluded that both magazines converge on a single construction of sexuality for
women. *Playboy* addresses men and *Cosmopolitan* addresses women, yet the visual
rhetoric of both magazines reflect the male gaze and promote the idea that women should
primarily concern themselves with attracting and sexually satisfying men (Krassas et al,
2001, 751).

For their study, Sullivan and O’Connor (1988) compared 1983 print advertisements to
advertisements of the 1950s and 1970s. Their sample of advertisements was drawn from
a wide selection of print media that were targeted at both men and women. Their study
revealed that the 1983 advertisements reflected the diversity of women’s social and
occupational roles more accurately than did those of the earlier decades (Sullivan &
O’Connor, 1988, 188). There was an increase in women shown as employed and a higher
percentage of women in positions that require meaningful decision making (in the
workplace as well as in everyday situations). However, their study also revealed that the
trend toward gender equality (men and women engaging in more similar activities and
behaviours) was counteracted by an increase in women portrayed in purely decorative
and sexualised roles (Sullivan & O’Connor, 1988, 188).

Lanis and Covell (1995) conducted a study on images of women in advertising and their
resulting effects on beliefs about sexual aggression. Their study revealed that sexually
explicit images of women, as opposed to “non-traditional role-reversed portrayals of
women performing a variety of competent social functions,” resulted in increased gender
role stereotyping and acceptance of interpersonal aggression and violence against women
among the male participants (Lanis & Covell, 1995, 647). These results were further
replicated in a study by MacKay and Covell (1997), which showed that the presentation of women in advertisements as sexual objects encourages, among young adults, attitudes supportive of sexual aggression. In addition, their study revealed that the pervasive and continuous exposure to such advertisements by young adults must be expected to hinder women’s efforts to obtain true equality with freedom from sexual aggression (MacKay & Covell, 1997, 583).

All these studies point to the ongoing sexist tendencies of advertising. Even though there have been remarkable changes in women’s position in society through the years, women are continually represented in an inaccurate (that is, a non-representative, ideologically biased) way as a result of the forces of patriarchy and capitalism. This study aims to build on to the existing body of knowledge with regard to representations of women in the media. By utilising the coding system developed by Goffman (1987) and added on to by Kang (1997), Lindner (2004) and Baker (2005), this study follows the progression of research conducted on similar topics in developed countries. Furthermore, this study follows the ideas of Das (2000) and Klokw (2005) in that it allows for a developing world perspective on the topic, in that it is based on the South African media landscape, and hence contributes to the South African body of knowledge.

As Sullivan and O’Connor’s (1988) study reveals, with improvement to one aspect of the portrayal of women in the media comes a decline with regards to another aspect. Thus, the aim of this research is to investigate the portrayals of women found in South African Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements of 2004 so as to gain a greater insight into the significance of images of women that are presented to South African audiences due to the expected negative consequences that inaccurate, non-representative gender portrayals have on efforts towards gender equality.
Chapter 3

3. Research Methodology

This study includes both descriptive and exploratory investigation. A descriptive study places emphasis on an “in-depth description of a particular research topic and may also emphasise the frequency with which a specific characteristic or variable occurs in a sample” (Mouton & Marais, 1990, 43). Hence, the analysis of Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements, on which this research is largely based, is of a descriptive, but understandably also interpretive nature. The survey questionnaires which were distributed amongst female university students, in an attempt to explore and gain insight into their ideas and thoughts with regard to the representation of women in Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements, are exploratory in nature, and their findings require interpretive analysis. According to Mouton and Marais (1990, 43), exploratory studies aim to “gain new insights into the phenomenon”, “undertake preliminary investigation before a more structured study of the phenomenon”, and “determine priorities for future research” – much like this investigation aims to do.

The study of the advertisements is the main focus of the research and hence it follows that the analysis of the advertisements would be the primary method of research into the topic. However, to approach this research topic from a wider perspective, it was assumed that an investigation into the effects (if at all) that these advertisements have upon readers was needed so as to strengthen and broaden the research. Survey questionnaires were therefore used to gain insight into whether the representation of women in the Cosmopolitan advertisements in fact has an effect on women who are presented with them – to determine whether it moulds their thoughts with regard to South African women today, as well as to analyse respondents’ attitudes and changing attitudes before and after exposure to a number of the advertisements.

The decision to use advertisements from Cosmopolitan magazines as the units for analysis as well as the basis of the survey questionnaire was due to Cosmopolitan’s
popularity in South Africa as the best selling women’s glossy magazine in the country with a readership of approximately 759 721 (AMPS, 2006). Its popularity ensures that a relatively large number of women are exposed to the advertisements in the magazine, with the potential consequently to impact on many women’s beliefs and attitudes about themselves and about women in general. Due to *Cosmopolitan*’s popularity in South Africa, it would be more likely for participants of the survey (part of its target audience in terms of gender and age) to be aware of or to be a reader of *Cosmopolitan* than of any other magazine and this would therefore allow for optimal, more detailed responses (in the likely event of the respondent having read a *Cosmopolitan* magazine.)

Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been implemented in the study so as to approach the topic of research from a wide-ranging perspective. This research is an example of triangulation whereby a “combination of two or more data-collection methods and reference to multiple sources of information to obtain data” is used (Du Plooy, 2002, 39). Through triangulation, theoretical assumptions may be tested in more than one way, thus increasing the reliability of my findings.

The survey questionnaires are an example of quantitative studies with the objective to “predict, describe and explain quantities, degrees and relationships, and to generalise from a sample to the population by collecting numerical data” (Du Plooy, 2002, 82). The objectives of qualitative design are to explore areas where limited or no prior information exists and/or to describe trends or attitudes that are applicable to the units analysed (Du Plooy, 2002, 83). Both the analysis of the advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* magazine as well as the incorporation of open-ended questions in the survey questionnaires lends itself to qualitative methodology. The analysis is qualitative in that it describes and interprets the images of women within the *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, while the open-ended questions allow for an examination of the “values, needs and characteristics that distinguish individuals” (Du Plooy, 2002, 83). The open-ended questions allowed the individuals to give a more detailed and potentially insightful description of their thoughts and ideas, in this way shedding light where limited prior information exists on the topic in the South African context.
3.1. Analysis of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements

For the analysis of advertisements, a cross-sectional design was adopted to analyse the portrayal of women in *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements. However, unlike many other cross-sectional studies which cover shorter periods of time, this study focuses on *Cosmopolitan* magazine publications that span an entire year. The sample consists of all twelve issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine that were published in the year 2004. All twelve months were selected as part of the sample so as to avoid bias with regard to the time of the year the advertisements were published as it may be expected, for example, that advertisements in magazine publications of the summer months include more instances of ‘body display’ as compared to publications of the winter months.

It must be noted that only advertisements were included in this study, which may be defined as “a format designed by a manufacturer to endorse a specific product” (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997, 709). No advertorials, which may be defined as “a format designed by the magazine publisher or editorial staff to promote or endorse specific products”, were included (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997, 709).

An analysis of all advertisements in all the magazine publications was impractical due to constraints of time and costs. There are, on average, thirty five advertisements in a single issue of *Cosmopolitan* which means that by including the entire years’ advertisements I would be presented with an estimated 420 advertisements in total. Having to analyse every single advertisement within the noted constraints would therefore be impractical. To ensure an unbiased sample of advertisements, a random sample was thus used to ensure validity of the findings.

3.1.1 Coding and Categories

To ensure internal and external validity, a cluster random sample was used in creating a sample of advertisements for analysis. Five numbers that were smaller than 100 (100 being the chosen number due to the varying number of pages of each issue – every issue has at least 100 pages) were randomly selected so as to determine the page number of the
advertisement to be analysed. The page numbers: 5, 18, 27, 61, 83 were used; however, if no advertisement was found on that particular page, the closest advertisement to that page number was selected for analysis. Only advertisements that showed one or more women, either in the presence or absence of one or more men, were coded (to be explained later) in this study. Repeated advertisements were not chosen for the sample as the range of the advertisements was important to this study. For example, more than one advertisement for *Vogue* sunglasses using the same imagery was not selected. If an advertisement was repeated or one without a woman in the imagery was found on the page number, the advertisement closest to that page number was selected. In this manner a total of 60 *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements were selected as the sample for this research.

To avoid measurement errors and to ensure reliability and accuracy of the findings, the test-retest method was followed as discussed by Du Plooy (2002, 122). Specifically, two pretests were done before data gathering. The pre-testing clarified the coding categories, instructions, key terms, and definitions and provided familiarity with the coding process. Goffman’s (1987) study was an invaluable point of reference in the pre-testing stage as it included illustrations and helped in clarifying coding categories. Since there was only one coder due to constraints, the sample was analysed three times. A coder is defined as someone, trained by the researcher, to locate the variables and interpret the codes (Babbie, 2004, 418). Three days was allowed between each analysis so as to lessen the possibility of remembering the way in which it had been coded before and hence, ensure validity.

To enable cross-cultural comparisons, this study utilised categories used by previous researchers (Baker, 2005; Lindner, 2004 and Goffman, 1987). The observed characteristics of the sample of the advertisements were recorded, and then the category was established based on those observations. In addition, an inductive method was used to establish another category for a more complete analysis from which to test the hypotheses – that being the category of “Seduction”. According to Olivier (2006, 215), seduction is predicated on a hidden agenda – that of conquest. It is intricately entangled with power – specifically, the quest for power over another and it is an important aspect
of this study when looking at the ways in which ideological forces exert power via the images presented by the media.

Relative size, function ranking, feminine touch, ritualisation of subordination and licensed withdrawal are categories, included in this study, that have been borrowed from Goffman’s (1987) study. Lindner (2004), too, used Goffman’s categories to code her sample in addition to the categories of body display, movement and location, which she borrowed from previous researchers Kang and Umiker-Sebeok. Lindner also included the category of objectification in her study – all of which have been used to code the sample of advertisements for this study, including Baker’s (2005) category of facial/body view. The reason for using their categories is due to the fact that it has been proven, by the results of their studies, and especially by the use of these by many other researchers thereafter, to be effective in attaining interpretive information on the portrayal of women in advertisements. In addition, my research into the representation of women in *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements may serve as a South African example in the light of which to compare previous studies that are based upon the same categories. There are a total of eleven coding categories. The coding categories are conceptually defined as follows:

(1) Relative size: When both men and women are present, the man is taller and/or bigger than the women and takes up more space in the advertisement.

(2) Function ranking. When both men and women are present, the man performs an executive role or serves as the instructor. He is the professional (i.e. wearing a business suit or in a work setting) while she is not, and/or is in control.

(3) Feminine touch. The woman touches herself or her clothes in an unnatural way. She uses her fingers and/or hands to trace the outline of an object, cradle it, or caress its surface. This does not include instances whereby the touching is of a practical nature i.e. grasping, manipulating, or holding objects.

(4) Ritualisation of subordination. The woman lowers herself physically in some form or other of prostration. This includes lying or sitting on the ground, bed, or sofa, canting of
the head and/or entire body. Also included in this category is a woman being embraced by a man, who inhibits her movement, or a woman leaning against a man’s shoulder or holding on to his arm for support, suggesting dependence on, and subordination to the man present.

(5) Licensed withdrawal. The woman removes herself psychologically from the situation at large or is shown mentally drifting from the physical scene. This is indicated by an expansive smile or laughter, covering the face or mouth, or withdrawing her gaze from the scene at large (i.e. averted gaze).

(6) Body display. The woman is shown wearing revealing, hardly any, or no clothes at all. This includes exposing her cleavage, wearing only underwear or bathing suits. It also includes close-up or head and shoulder shots where the shoulders of the models are bare and hence she appears to be nude.

(7) Movement. The woman is inhibited in her movement, which limits the amount of control she can exert on the environment. Included in this category is when the woman is embraced, held or carried by someone.

(8) Location. The woman is shown in a domestic environment such as a kitchen, bedroom, or bathroom. This also includes depicting the woman in a decontextualised situation, that is, an unidentifiable environment that does not allow for any purposeful activities.

(9) Objectification. The woman is portrayed in such a way as to suggest that looking attractive or being looked at is her major purpose or function in the advertisement.

10) Facial/Body view: The woman’s face is hidden or cut off. The woman may be pictured with her body only or one body part only being visible. This includes instances when half or more of her face is concealed.

11) Seduction. The woman is portrayed with a sensual or alluring gaze or facial expression, parted lips or a flirty, playful smile. This also includes depicting the woman
in a seductive pose or performing a sexual act (i.e. kissing or embracing in a sexual way). Hence, she is portrayed as being sexually suggestive.

Each advertisement was coded on a yes-or-no basis according to whether it contained a stereotypical depiction of women in the different categories. Advertisements with one or more women (either in the presence or absence of one or more men) were coded using all of the categories. Advertisements that contained only women (one or more) were not coded for relative size and function ranking.

In addition to the above-mentioned analysis, the study also includes an analysis of the logo inclusion and product-to-female ratio found in the sample of advertisements. According to Klein (2001), capitalism in the age of globalisation is the age of the brand – the logo. Capitalism is seen as constantly renewing itself through advertising and branding images such as the logo (Olivier, 2006, 16). Hence, the inclusion of the logo is of importance when analysing the way in which capitalist ideology influences advertisements. The analysis includes a count of advertisements that include an image of the actual product for sale, and also compares the size of this image to that of the female model so as to determine the emphasis that the advertisers have placed on their models and/or products and in so doing uncover the advertisements’ most sell-able feature – either relatively ‘directly’ in terms of usefulness, or ‘indirectly’, by way of association with the value-invested image of women in the advertisements.

According to Olivier (2006, 17), capitalist-consumer space such as advertisements comprise metonymic site-chains for consumers to invest with their own desires. These desires may be cultivated by other capitalist-engendered iconic sites of investment and identification such as popular film stars and other celebrities due to their positions of power in the media. The use of celebrities to endorse products in advertisements relies on ‘fans’ identifying with these stars and hence points toward the homogenisation of consumer-culture globally (Steger, 2003 in Olivier, 2006, 2). An analysis of the number of celebrities featured in the sample of advertisements was included in the study so as to determine the extent to which global consumer culture has invaded advertisements found in South African media.
3.2. Survey Questionnaires

For the survey questionnaires, a cross-sectional design was adopted in that the research was conducted in a short period of time – three days. A convenient method of sampling was used in that the survey questionnaires were distributed to female students at the University of Cape Town (UCT). Since the majority of Cosmopolitan magazine readers are between the ages of 16 and 24 (AMPS, 2006), a university was found to be the ideal location at which to find females of similar ages. Due to constraints of time, costs and personnel, females from other age groups were not included in the sample. To ensure validity, a representative sample was drawn in that respondents of all races were approached to complete the survey questionnaires.

The survey research aimed to measure and interpret the attitudes and attitudinal change of exposure to advertisements that depict and sometimes stereotype women in Cosmopolitan magazines, to investigate whether exposure to advertisements have an effect on women – on their lives and their thoughts and ideas about women, and to determine whether respondents believed the portrayal of women in the advertisements are a true reflection of South African women today. This process involved both the measurement and interpretation of respondents’ attitudes to the portrayal of women in the advertisements before being exposed to a number of advertisements found in Cosmopolitan magazines; and then measuring and interpreting the respondents’ attitude after exposure. The inclusion of closed-ended questions in the survey questionnaire allowed for the measurement of the respondents’ responses, while the open-ended questions allowed for greater interpretation of the respondents’ thoughts and attitudes.

The type of survey chosen for the study was face-to-face (or personal) survey questionnaires. Even though data-collection time is longer, face-to-face surveys allow for the researcher to answer questions. According to Mouton and Marais (1990, 93), establishing a rapport with respondents acts to neutralise initial distrust and serves as a control for context effects. From this perspective, the reliability of the research is increased. In some cases, however, the presence of the researcher does not always
function to increase reliability. For example, in the case of subjects from groups occupying a precarious socio-economic position in society – such as sex workers – this would inhibit their responses because of their experience of exposure and vulnerability and the differential power relations between the researcher and the informant. In the case of the present research, however, one could argue that the women interviewed had no reason to feel vulnerable (as both the researcher and informants were female students) and hence the use of face-to-face surveys increased, rather than inhibited, reliability. The researcher’s presence when answering the questionnaires allows for clarification on issues that respondents may be unsure about. This was important in that respondents needed to understand the questions so as to respond to the best of their ability, in an attempt to gain the greatest insight into their thoughts and ideas on the topic. In addition to answering questions, visual and measurement aids could be presented by the researcher while conducting the face-to-face surveys, so as to assess respondents’ attitudinal changes before and after exposure.

3.2.1 Participants

Sixty female students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) participated in this study. Their age range was 17 through 25. The average age was 18.6 years and participants’ self-reported race was 30% Black, 28% White, 25% Coloured and 17% Indian. These participants voluntarily agreed to complete the survey questionnaires when approached by the researcher.

3.2.2 Materials

The questions for the survey research needed to be focused so as to obtain the vital information needed for the purpose of understanding women’s ideas and thoughts on the portrayal of women in Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements. Extracting as much information as possible in a condensed version was vital so as not to discourage participants from participating in the research due to a lengthy, tedious questionnaire. The questions were as follows:
1. Are you a *Cosmopolitan* magazine reader?
   Yes? No?

2. If yes…
   How often do you read them?
   Monthly? Every Second Month? Other?

   What areas of your life does it impact upon? Your notion of…
   Femininity? Fashion? Beauty? Other?

3. How do *Cosmopolitan* advertisements portray women with regard to:
   The way she is dressed?
   Exposed/Bare? Semi-Expose? Fully-Clothed?

   3.1. Why do you think she is presented in this way?

   3.2. Her position in society?
   Powerful/Significant? Powerless/Insignificant?

   3.2.1. If powerful/significant, what gives her this power?
   Body? Brains? Ability to seduce and attract attention? Other?

   3.2.2. If powerless/insignificant, what gives her this lack of power? Her…
   Subordination to men? Constant Objectification? Inability to seduce/ attract attention? Other?

   3.3. Stereotypes?
   The Powerful Businesswoman? Sex Object? Seductress? Housewife? None? Other?

4. Do you believe these portrayals to be a true reflection of South African women today?
   Yes? No?

5. What advertisements can you recall having seen in *Cosmopolitan* magazine?

6. What aspect of this/these advertisements make them memorable to you? The…
   Product? Images? Wording? Other?
7. Looking at these advertisements (Appendix 1), how would you describe this woman? (what are her attributes, what makes her image stand out? i.e. her sex appeal, her beauty, her clothes, etc)

8. Why do you think the advertisers have used these women, presented as they are, for these advertisements (Appendix 1)? (i.e. personification of the product, her: body, sex appeal, ability to attract attention, etc?)

9. What do these advertisements (Appendix 1) tell you about women in South Africa? (i.e. what gives women their powers, strengths, abilities, etc in society?)

10. How would you best describe a South African woman? (i.e. what are her strengths, abilities and powers in society)

11. Do these women (Appendix 1) fulfil this role?
   Yes? No?

Questions 1 through 6 relate to respondents’ thoughts and ideas with regard to Cosmopolitan magazine and its advertisements before exposure; hence their answers were based on their knowledge and recollection of Cosmopolitan magazines that they may have encountered in the past. The majority of questions were closed-ended which made the coding process easier due to the fixed number of options. However, the option of “other” was included so as to allow for an alternative to the closed-ended options so that respondents could include greater insight or alternative answers to the given options if they so wished.

Questions 7 through 11 relate to respondents’ thoughts and ideas with regard to the portrayal of women in advertisements after exposure; hence their answers were based upon the images that they were presented with by the researcher during the face-to-face survey. The majority of questions were open-ended so as to provide respondents with a platform from which to express detailed views and opinions. The allowance for detailed answers was necessary in obtaining qualitative information – that which is varied, in-depth and as experienced by respondents.
“Appendix 1” referred to in the questionnaire refers to a compilation of three advertisements portraying women, which were presented to respondents, upon which their answers to question 7 through 11 were based. Appendix 1 comprised a Triumph Maximizer Bra (women’s underwear) advertisement from the April 2004 issue of Cosmopolitan, a Clarins Sheer Bronze (women’s cosmetics) advertisement from the September 2004 issue of Cosmopolitan and an Edgars Sportswear (women’s apparel) advertisement from the May 2004 issue of Cosmopolitan. The three advertisements were chosen due to their varied portrayals of women. The Maximizer advertisement depicts a woman wearing only underwear, with emphasis on her cleavage. The Clarins advertisement depicts a woman being carried by a man. The Edgars advertisement is a double page advertisement – the left page is a head and shoulders shot of an independent, strong-looking woman dressed in sportswear while the second page depicts four women dressed in sportswear doing exercises on gym mats. The advertisements varied in terms of stereotypical depictions of women. The inclusion of all three advertisements was based on a need for balance in the presentation of advertisements to respondents so as not to inform or precipitate biased responses.

Questions 4 and 11 ask the same question before and after exposure to Appendix 1 so as to determine attitudinal changes with regard to respondents’ beliefs as to whether women portrayed by Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements are a true reflection of South African women today.

Demographics required asked for participant’s age, occupation, and ethnicity.

3.2.3 Procedure

The respondents were randomly selected. However, to maintain equal representation, their ethnicity was taken into account when approached to complete the survey questionnaires. Respondents were individuals who were leisurely sitting at various locations on the UCT campus during lunch hours, who had some free time to answer the
questionnaires. These locations included: Jameson Hall steps, the pavements and seating areas on University Avenue and the lawns next to Residence Road to name a few.

Respondents were not given details as to what the questionnaire aimed to achieve (i.e. test for attitudinal changes, etc) so as not to affect their responses in any way. Instead, they were told that the survey questionnaires formed part of a research study looking at the representation of women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements. Respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire and were advised that it would take approximately ten minutes to complete. Only students who were not rushed for time were able to participate in the study.

Once respondents agreed to participate in the study, they were handed a questionnaire to complete. They were advised to ask questions if they were unsure about anything and to indicate once they had completed question 6 so as to be given Appendix 1 that was required to answer the remaining questions.

It was felt that respondents’ opinions based on a single advertisement would not capture an accurate response to representations of women portrayed in *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements. Therefore, three magazine advertisements, with varied degrees and types of stereotypical depictions of women, were presented to respondents as “Appendix 1”, on which to base their answers to questions 7 through 11. On completion of the survey, questionnaires were collected and respondents were thanked.
Chapter 4

4. Research Findings

4.1. Analysis of Cosmopolitan magazine advertisements

A total of 60 Cosmopolitan advertisements – 5 advertisements from each issue of Cosmopolitan published in 2004 – were coded for this study. Overall, 100% of advertisements contained stereotypical images of women in at least one of the categories. As will be evidenced by the results, the portrayals of women in advertisements continue to depict women in stereotypical ways as found by previous studies of a similar nature (Baker, 2005; Goffman, 1987; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004). The findings by 11 categories are reported in Table 1.

To calculate percentages for each coding category, the number of advertisements that depicted women stereotypically in each category was divided by the total number of advertisements in the sample. Since the categories of “relative size” and “function ranking” were only coded for advertisements that included a male figure, the percentage for these categories were calculated by dividing the number of advertisements that depicted women stereotypically by the total number of advertisements that included a male figure, which were 13 in total.

4.1.1. Findings by 11 categories

(1) Relative Size. Of the 13 advertisements that included a male model, 7 advertisements (53.85%) portrayed the male figure as being taller, bigger or taking up more space in the advertisement frame as compared to the female model. According to Goffman (1987, 28), relative size is used as a means of ensuring that the picture’s story will be understandable at a glance – it suggests male superiority over women. Thus one’s social weight, which is understood as power, authority, rank, office and renown, is expressed though relative size (Goffman, 1987, 28).
(2) **Function Ranking.** Of the 13 advertisements coded, 9 advertisements (69.23%) portrayed the male figure as performing the executive or instructor role, or wearing a business suit while the woman portrayed did not. This too, according to Goffman (1987, 42) is a way in which to facilitate interpretability at a glance – to present the power structure that exists within the union of a man and woman. Hence, 69.23% of the advertisements indicated male superiority/dominance over the female.

(3) **Feminine Touch.** In the sample of 60 advertisements, 17 advertisements (28.33%) depicted the woman touching herself or her clothes in an unnatural way, or using her fingers or hands to cradle or caress an object. Self-touching or caressing or cradling an object, as opposed to grasping, manipulating or holding an abject, conveys a message of delicateness and preciousness (Goffman, 1987, 31).

(4) **Ritualisation of Subordination.** Of the 60 advertisements in the sample, a total of 48 advertisements (80%) portrayed women in postures that indicate submission to control by others. The breakdown of the categories used to establish rituals of subordination is presented in Table 2. According to Goffman (1987, 40), a classic stereotype of complaisance is that of lowering oneself physically in some form or other of prostration, as opposed to standing erect which denotes superiority. Body and head canting as well as leaning on something or someone denotes acceptance of subordination – it is an expression of ingratiation, submissiveness and appeasement (Goffman, 1987, 46). Body or head canting was found to be the most frequently used posture by women in advertisements (60.4%), followed by lying or sitting (22.9%), bashful knee-bending (8.3%), in a man’s embrace (4.2%), dependent on a man (2.1%), and prostrate or lowering herself (2.1%).

(5) **Licensed Withdrawal.** A total of 25 advertisements (41.67%) in the sample portrayed women as removing themselves from the situation at large which included mentally drifting from the physical scene, laughing, smiling expansively, or covering her mouth or face. By averting her gaze from the spectator, the woman in the image invites speculation and possessiveness (MacDonald, 1997, 106). By removing oneself psychologically from a situation at large, one is left disorientated in it and to it, and
therefore dependent on the protectiveness and goodwill of others who are (or might come to be) present (Goffman, 1987, 57). According to Lindner (2004, 413), these behaviours signal vulnerability and a need for protection.

(6) **Body Display.** 26 advertisements (43.33%) within the sample portrayed women wearing revealing or hardly any clothing which exemplifies the beauty/sex-orientated role for women. Revealing or hardly any clothing is often associated with sexualised images of women and hence point to the stereotypes of the seductress and/or sex object (Lindner, 2004, 414).

(7) **Movement.** Women were portrayed as being inhibited in their movement, or carried, held or embraced by someone in 10 of the advertisements (16.67%). According to Lindner (2004, 413), a limit to one’s space and freedom is associated with social power and control and hence the inability to move lends itself to a loss of power and control.

(8) **Location.** A total of 54 advertisements (90%) depicted women in either domestic environments (i.e. kitchens, bathrooms or bedrooms), or in unidentifiable/decontextualised environments which exemplifies the idea of having no purposeful activity (Lindner, 2004, 421). The majority of advertisements depicted women in decontextualised environments and hence they were objectified in that they had no other purpose in the advertisement other than to be looked at.

(9) **Objectification.** All the advertisements sampled for this study depicted women as being the object to be looked at – her only purpose being to look attractive or be looked at. However, only 58 advertisements (96.67%) were coded as such, while the remaining 2 were coded as “unsure” as they included images of both a male and female. It was felt that they were objectified as a couple – the advertisement called for its models to be looked at in equal share and hence could neither be coded as ‘yes’ nor ‘no’ as they were objectified as a couple, as opposed to the objectification of the women alone as was the case in all the other advertisements.

(10) **Facial/Body View.** 8 advertisements (13.33%) within the sample depicted women with half or more of their heads/faces hidden or cut off. According to Archer et al. (1983
cited in Baker, 2005, 19), showing a woman's face emphasises her personality and character and therefore a faceless woman displays no personality. By showing only her body or a body part, she is dehumanised which would thus emphasise the idea that she is an object (Cortese, 1999; Kilbourne & Jhally, 2000 cited in Baker, 2005, 19).

(11) **Seduction.** A total of 43 advertisements (71.67%) depicted women as being seductive – having an alluring or sensual gaze, or positioned in a sexualised pose or act. This category points to the stereotype of the seductress, whereby her power lies in her ability to seduce or entice readers.

Table 1 – Stereotypical depictions of women found in the sample of advertisements
Table 2 – Breakdown of the Ritualisation of Subordination of women found in the sample of advertisements

4.1.2. Analysis of Logo Inclusion and Female to Product Ratio

Of the 60 advertisements in the sample, 51 (85%) included the product for sale within the imagery (i.e. the perfume bottle, lipstick, shoe, etc). 52 (86.7%) included an image of the manufacturer’s logo – either in the absence of the product, or as a separate image in addition to the product. The advertisements without an image of a logo included an image of the product on which the logo was clearly evident. Hence, the logo of the advertiser was evident in 100% of the advertisements.

Of the 51 advertisements that included an image of the product for sale and which also included an image of a woman (as stipulated for inclusion in the sample), 41 depicted the image of the woman as larger than that of the product. However, 14 of these
advertisements were either cosmetics or hair product advertisements and the emphasis on
the model may be due to emphasising the effect that the use of the product may achieve.
10 advertisements depicted the woman as equal in size to that of the image of the
product.

4.1.3. Analysis of Celebrity Inclusion

Of the 60 advertisements in the sample, 9 celebrities were used in 8 advertisements
(13.33%) to endorse its products, 7 of whom are internationally known. Actresses Nicole
Kidman, Scarlett Johansson, Chiara Mastroianni and Catherine Zeta Jones as well as
supermodel Ai Tominaga were used to endorse perfumes while supermodels Natalia
Vodianova and Virginie Ledoyen (who is also an actress – best known for her role
opposite Leonardo DiCaprio in The Beach) were used in advertisements to endorse
cosmetics. South African celebrities KB (singer, DJ and actress) and Mel Jones (DJ and
comedian) were used to advertise apparel.

4.2. Survey questionnaires

There were a total of 60 participants in the study. The participants’ responses to the
survey questionnaires are reported in Tables 4 to 18 in Appendix A. To calculate
percentages for coding purposes, the number of respondents in agreement to each
category was divided by the total number of respondents in the sample.

53 participants (88.33%) indicated that they are Cosmopolitan magazine readers – 30.2%
of whom read it monthly, 24.5 % read it every second month while 45.3% indicated
‘other’ and included statements such as: “every now and then”, “about every third
month” and “once in a while”, which were the three most commonly used statements, to
describe the frequency with which they read Cosmopolitan. A vast majority of
participants were therefore familiar with the magazine and its content.
Of the 60 respondents, only 5 (8.33%) claimed that *Cosmopolitan* did not impact upon any aspect of their lives, while 6 (10%) did not answer. Therefore, 49 respondents (81.67%) claimed that *Cosmopolitan* impacts on various aspects of their lives, in a combination of ways, which are reported in Table 7 of Appendix A. Respondents’ sense or knowledge of fashion was found to be the most affected by *Cosmopolitan*, followed by beauty (45%) and femininity (38.33%). Femininity was understood as “what it means to be a woman” (as defined in the survey questionnaire). “Sex” (6.67%) and “celebrities” (3.33%), were also cited by respondents as being aspects of their lives that are affected by reading *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

With regard to the way in which female models are clothed in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, 70% of respondents stated that the models depicted in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements are semi-exposed. Some reasons given by respondents as to why they believe these women are semi-exposed were: “to look hot so as to appeal to readers”, “in order to sell a product”, and “to put forth an expectation of women’s roles”. 16.67% of respondents believed that female models’ bodies are exposed; some of their reasons being: “to sell the product – sex sells”, “attract male readers”, and “that’s what most of the media portrays – won’t do well in the market if they don’t”. 8.33% of respondents stated that models are fully clothed. Some reasons given by these respondents as to why models are fully clothed were: “emphasis on fashion”, “to show women as they’re generally seen and dressed in public” and “to prevent degrading of women”. Details of these results are presented in Table 8.

83.33% of respondents believed that women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements are portrayed as being powerful/significant, while 8.33% claimed that women are rendered as powerless/insignificant. The ability to seduce and attract attention was found to be the most frequently suggested source of their power as indicated by 41 respondents (68.33%), followed by body (33.33%) and brains (33.33%). Constant objectification was found to be the greatest source of their powerlessness as indicated by 10 respondents (16.66%), followed by subordination to men (8.33%). 5% of respondents indicated that
women are portrayed as a combination of being both powerful and powerless. Tables 9, 10 and 11 present these results in detail.

57 respondents (95%) believed that *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements portray women in stereotypical ways. Most respondents found that *Cosmopolitan* advertisements portray women stereotypically in a combination of ways – the most cited stereotype being the seductress (61.67%), followed by the sex object (53.33%), the powerful businesswoman (40%) and the housewife (3.33%). Only 1 respondent stated that *Cosmopolitan* advertisements do not portray stereotypes of women. Table 12 presents these findings in detail.

When asked to recall advertisements previously seen in *Cosmopolitan*, fragrance and lingerie advertisements were found to be the most memorable by respondents. The images that advertisements present were found to be the most memorable feature of advertisements as indicated by 32 respondents (53.33%), followed by the female model (31.67%), the product for sale (20%) and the wording (6.67). These results are presented in Tables 13 and 14.

When presented with three *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements, the majority of respondents (58.33%) described the female models in the advertisements as “sexually appealing”. Additional words used by respondents to describe the attributes of the women were: “beautifu” (21.67%), “attractive/appealing body” (20%), “sporty/athletic” (15%) and “strong” (15%). Hence, the majority of respondents called attention to the models’ aesthetic attributes as being their most notable features. These results are presented in Table 15.

Respondents believed that advertisers chose the women used in the three advertisements because of “her attractive body” (33.33%), “her ability to attract attention” (31.67%) and “her sex appeal” (20%). Additional reasons given by respondents are presented in Table 16, such as “her ability to personify the product” (16.675%), “readers would aspire to be/look like them (16.67%), and “her appealing look/image (15%).
When asked to describe the messages the three advertisements convey about South African women, respondents stated that “women’s power lay in her looks/sex appeal” (20%), “her beauty defines her” (11.67%) and “her body is her source of success/power/confidence” (8.33%). 11.67% of respondents believed that these women did not reflect true South African women. In contrast, South African women were consequently defined by respondents as being “strong-willed/ having strong character” (25%), being “powerful” (23.33%), “beautiful/attractive (23.33%), and “independent” (21.67%). Tables 17 and 18 present these results in detail.

Table 3 reports the findings of the attitudinal change of respondents before and after exposure to the three Cosmopolitan advertisements. Respondents’ were asked whether they believed that women portrayed in Cosmopolitan advertisements fulfil the role of or reflect true South African women, before and after exposure. Before exposure, 65% of respondents believed that the portrayal of women in Cosmopolitan advertisements was not a true reflection of South African women today, while 32% of respondents believed that they were. After exposure, 38% of respondents believed that the women in the three advertisements fulfilled the role of South African women, while 55% did not and 7% indicated a combination of both agreement and disagreement. Hence, a slight difference is noted – after exposure, the number of respondents who believe that the portrayal of women in Cosmopolitan advertisements is a true reflection of South African women today increased, yet 55% maintained a strong disagreement.
Table 3. Attitudinal Change of Respondents Before and After Exposure

**Before Exposure**

**Q: 4. Portrayals of women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements - a true reflection of South African women today?**

- Yes: 32%
- No: 65%
- No Answer: 3%

**After Exposure**

**Q: 11. Women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements - fulfilling the role of South African women?**

- Yes: 38%
- No: 55%
- Yes & No: 7%
Chapter 5

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the trend found in previous studies – that stereotypical images of women prevail in the media (Das, 2000; Goffman, 1987; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004; Millard & Grant, 2006) – is evident in South Africa too. Because advertising is such a crucial factor in forming our perceptions of gender roles, an analysis of Cosmopolitan advertisements was necessary to gain a better understanding of the way in which women are portrayed to a target market of women – the gestures, expressions and postures of women presented in advertisements reveal an arrangement that embodies cultural values (Gornick, 1987, vii), hence the analysis of gender displays in advertisements reflects fundamental features of the social structure (Goffman, 1987, 8).

In addition to the analysis of advertisements, survey questionnaires were distributed amongst female students so as to gain insight into the thoughts of women presented with Cosmopolitan advertisements. According to Glover (1986, 31), women’s views of themselves and their place in society are to a degree moulded and reinforced by representations found in women’s magazines. This is an ideological process in that it supports powerful vested interests in society – men and capitalists – and so helps maintain the subordination of women (Glover, 1986, 31). The results of the study indicate that the advertisements affect women’s lives in various ways, however they are aware of the stereotypes that are portrayed by advertisements and the majority of whom do not believe that the women in the advertisements reflect true South African women, whom they described as being “strong-willed”, “powerful” and “independent”. Since there is no evidence other than these women’s opinions to suggest that South African women truly display these features, their opinions are probably a projection of their desires, rather than a reflection of social reality.
5.1. The First Hypothesis

The first hypothesis that women are continually objectified and made to appear inferior and submissive with the use of gender stereotypical imagery presented by the media, is supported by the research findings.

Due to advertising’s shorthand form of communication that must make contact with readers immediately, establishing a shared experience of identification, advertisements often make use of stereotypical imagery (Lazier & Gagnard Kendrick, 1993, 200). Gender role stereotyping which is often used due to its ability to establish a shared experience of identification immediately, can have negative consequences in that stereotypes of women presented by the media often lead to negative attitudes toward women and stereotypical ideas about how they are supposed to behave and the roles they are supposed to occupy within society (Kilbourne, 1990 cited in Lindner, 2004, 409).

The analysis of advertisements described in this study is based on a technique developed by Goffman (1987), which focuses on the more subtle clues that provide important messages about gender relations. His coding system concentrates on relative sizes, hands, eyes, knees, facial expressions, head posture, positioning and placing, which when analysed according to the coding categories (i.e. relative size, function ranking, feminine touch, etc) reflects gender stereotyping in advertisements. He argued that these categories are indicative of gender differences in social weight or importance; by analysing representations of women according to his coding and category system, one will uncover who holds social power, influence, and authority in society as projected by advertisers and the ideologies that motivate them (Goffman, 1987).

According to Lindner (2004, 414), stereotyping in terms of “feminine touch,” “ritualisation of subordination,” “licensed withdrawal,” “body display,” and “objectification” are associated with sexualised images of women and more subtle ways of stereotyping, whereas stereotyping in terms of “relative size,” “function ranking,” “movement,” and “location,” is associated with a more traditional way of stereotyping by showing women in positions of inferiority. Looking at the results of the study, it is clear
that there are a number of enduring sexualised and traditional stereotypes that are presented within *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, in varying numbers.

With regard to the subtle, sexualised ways of stereotyping women presented in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, the following results were found:

Feminine Touch – 28.33% (conveys a message of delicateness and preciousness);
Ritualisation of Subordination – 80% (conveys a message of complaisance and submissiveness);
Licensed Withdrawal – 41.67% (conveys a message of vulnerability);
Body Display – 43.33% (conveys a message of sexual invitation and lends itself to the stereotype of the ‘sex object’ or ‘seductress’);
Objectification – 96.67% (conveys a message of dehumanisation, whereby the woman is made to appear as an object to be looked at);
Seduction – 71.67% (conveys a message, not by body-display, of sexual invitation and lends itself to the stereotype of the ‘seductress’).

The traditional ways of stereotyping that reinforce an inferior image of women found in the sample of *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, were as follows:

Relative Size – 53.85% (suggests male dominance over women)
Function Ranking – 69.23% (suggests female inferiority)
Movement – 16.67% (suggests loss of power and control)
Location – 90% (suggests objectification whereby the woman has no purpose or goal other than to be looked at)
Facial / Body View – 13.33% (suggests a lack of personality and hence is objectified)

Overall, the results of this study show that stereotypical images of women are frequently found. It is important to note that all of the magazine advertisements in the sample portrayed women stereotypically with regard to at least one of the coding categories. Stereotyping occurred most frequently with regard to objectifying women (“objectification”), depicting women in decontextualised or domestic settings.
(“location”), showing women as subordinate to men ("ritualisation of subordination"), and portraying women as seductresses ("seduction").

The stereotype of “ritualisation of subordination” reinforces the imbalance of social power between men and women, as stereotyping of women in this category is associated with submissiveness and appeasement. The high frequency of stereotyping with regard to “seduction,” “objectification” and “location” reinforces the idea that women’s role is purely decorative and/or sexualised and hence these categories are associated with women’s power resting in her ability to attract attention, which perpetuates the idea of viewing women as objects rather than subjects.

According to Lindner (2004, 413), a shift has occurred from portraying women as socially inferior and subordinate to men in very blunt and obviously stereotypical ways to images of women that contain rather subtle messages about gender roles and about women's place in the social power hierarchy. This was confirmed in the findings as it was the subtle gestures, postures and positioning of the women presented in the advertisements that pointed to stereotypical imagery, rather than blatant portrayals of women as mothers and/or housewives. However, even though the stereotypical imagery is not blatantly obvious, the subtle gestures, postures and positioning may cause serious damage to efforts towards gender equality in South Africa as women’s power and social standing are diminished by these negative stereotypes.

Negative stereotyping of women in advertisements is of great concern due to advertisers’ tendency to present each advertisement they produce a number of times, with the expectation that the frequent repetition will persuade readers to buy the advertised product. The advertisement is, therefore, a sort of brainwashing that transmits messages unconsciously to viewers, a by-product being that the stereotypical meanings are also transmitted to the viewers (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 166). Continuous exposure to advertisements in which women are shown as objects for sexual gratification may reinforce male attitudes supportive of sexual aggression and oppose women’s efforts to gain equality (MacKay & Covell, 1997, 577).
Stereotypical representations are a source of ideology – individuals and social institutions are depicted in such a way as to confer power on some groups (men and mostly male capitalists) and deny it to others (women). According to Glover (1986, 47), to look at who is being represented in the media and how they are being represented is to gain insight into the nature of power in contemporary society. Hence, the stereotypical imagery found in the advertisements which works to disempower women, can be viewed as part of an ideological process that supports patriarchy and capitalism – and in so doing, perpetuates and reinforces the subordination and objectification of women.

**5.2. The Second Hypothesis**

The second hypothesis that the forces of patriarchy continue to support and legitimate gender inequalities found in the media, in effect perpetuating these practices, is supported by the research findings.

Patriarchy may be defined as a kinship-ordered social structure with strictly defined sex roles whereby males tend to predominate in positions of power (Moghadam, 1992, 35). In a patriarchal society, women are subordinate to their male counterparts. According to Vestergaard and Schroder (1985, 74), in its visual representation of the sexes, advertising functions as an ideological apparatus for the reproduction of gender identities. One could add, then, that a patriarchal society is characterised by institutional structures and practices that systematically privilege masculine interests, in the process cultivating corresponding attitudes that require and promote the subordination of women.

Institutions such as the media reinforce patriarchal ideologies by portraying women as being passive, meek and submissive. According to Van Zoonen (1994, 27), the media are perceived as the main instrument in conveying stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity. The media passes on society’s heritage – which is deeply sexist – in order to secure continuity, integration and incorporation of change (Van Zoonen, 1994, 27). Confirming this, of the advertisements in the sample that portrayed an image of both males and females together, the majority of advertisements
portrayed the male as being superior, having a higher rank as compared to the woman beside him, signifying patriarchal ideology. 53.85% of the advertisements portrayed the man as being taller, or bigger than the woman, while 69.23% of the advertisements portrayed the male as performing an instructive or executive role. These characteristics exemplify the practices of patriarchy whereby the superiority of men over women is given emphasis.

A core element of western patriarchal culture is the display of woman as spectacle to be looked at, subjected to the gaze of the audience – the objectification of women (Van Zoonen, 1994, 87). The forces of patriarchy are especially evident with regard to the “objectification” of women found in Cosmopolitan as 96.67% of the advertisements in the sample portrayed women as objects to be looked at – her only value being to look attractive for that purpose. Stereotypical representations such as these play a large role in shaping sexist prejudices due to advertising’s repetitive nature (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 180). Thus, the continuous showing in the media of women as submissive objects reinforces the gender hierarchy. As a result, by viewing women from this narrow and restricted perspective, they are treated as less than truly human (Jhally, 1990, 138).

According to Klein (2001, 108), that which holds women back in society is the absence of visible role models occupying powerful social positions, and the media-perpetuated stereotypes which serve to reinforce the supremacy of especially white men. Representation is seen as the key to almost all of society’s problems, which can be traced back to the media and the curriculum, either through their perpetuation of negative stereotypes or simply by omission (Klein, 2001, 108). The narrow and oppressive portrayal of women in magazine advertisements thus contributes to and reinforces patriarchy.

The high frequency of stereotypical imagery found in Cosmopolitan advertisements, as previously discussed, points to an ongoing power imbalance in society, where women are continually degraded by being cast in submissive and objectified roles. South Africa’s efforts towards gender equality are being thwarted by advertisements portraying women in purely decorative and sexualised ways, which serves to reinforce gender disparities.
5.3. The Third Hypothesis

The third hypothesis that the ideology of capitalism supports the misrepresentations of women in advertisements so as to further its goals is supported by the research findings.

Capitalism refers to an economic system in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled and which is characterised by competition and the profit motive (www.countrystudies.us). In an economy organised around the principles of capitalism, the profit motive is the driving force behind production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. According to Kovel (2002 cited in Olivier, 2006, 19), capital – as a process and a state of being – introduces a sense of dissatisfaction so that ‘happiness is forbidden’ under capitalism, being replaced by sensation and craving. According to Olivier (2006, 19), the extent to which popular-cultural images, such as those found in advertisements, are ‘suffused with capitalist values’ is by virtue of the very fact that they comprise ‘sites of subject-identification’ which lend themselves to furthering vested interests (i.e. those of capitalists). Advertisements succeed in causing the audience to internalise consumerist values because people are not consciously aware of the transmission of value-oriented messages in advertisements and therefore are not critical on this level (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 179). In addition, advertising serves capitalism by legitimising and even sacralising consumption as a way of life (Dines & Humez, 2002, 71).

Not only are stereotypical messages transmitted in an indirect, repetitious, and intensive way in advertisements but advertisements also transmit, in this way, messages about desirable lifestyles and the superiority of consumer culture (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 166). In advertising, the commodification of appearance is endorsed as the route to control, power, strength and success. Women’s social power is thus seen to depend on the management of her beauty assets (Goldman, 1992, 123). In all of the advertisements analysed in the sample, the women presented by advertisers were perfectly made-up and aesthetically pleasing thereby portraying a perfect management of their beauty assets. Advertisers portrayed them in an exceptionally pleasing manner, using their beauty to
entice readers into buying the products ostensibly contributing to her impeccable appearance, in this way promoting consumption.

Even though ideas of ‘freedom’, ‘independence’, and ‘pleasure’ may be evident in magazine advertisements, they are reduced to matters of lifestyle and consumption. According to MacDonald (1997, 92), women can now ‘do their own thing’ and take charge of their lives through the purchase of ‘an independently-minded new hairstyle, new look and new bra’. Hence, women’s self-fulfilment supposedly lies in her consumption of consumer products.

Advertisements continue to address women about themselves as malleable surfaces that can be adorned with objects that carry desired attributes via commodities’ powers of signification (Goldman, 1992, 121). They encourage and perpetuate a pattern of seeing women as collections of body parts. 13.33% of advertisements in the sample depicted women with their heads cut off, or showing only her body or body part/s, which emphasises the idea of viewing women as objects. In this way, advertisements encourage women not merely to adorn themselves with commodities, but also to perceive themselves as objectified surfaces (Goldman, 1992, 121).

Women in advertisements are presented as objects of consumption; her desirability – her social power to command attention – is contingent upon occupying this position (Goldman, 1992, 117). According to Carpenter and Edison (2005, 15), women are often portrayed as decorative, useless objects that have no direct relation to the product being advertised. The fact that 15% of the advertisements in the sample did not include an image of the product for sale, but instead only included an image of a woman and the product’s logo, exemplifies the fact that women and their lifestyles are now presented as the object for sale, as opposed to the product. Femininity is thus recuperated by the capitalist form: the exchange between the commodity and the woman in the advertisements, establishes her as a commodity too – it is the modes of femininity themselves which are actualised through commodities and are replaced by commodities (Winship, 1980 cited in Goldman, 1992, 121).
According to Klein (2001, 6), the role of advertising has changed from delivering product news bulletins as was done in the past, to building an image around a particular brand-name version of a product. The brand has become the core meaning of the modern corporation (i.e. capitalism), and the advertisement is a vehicle used to convey that meaning to the world (Klein, 2001, 5). The logo was introduced as an aspect of the brand, a visual image that is designed to cause immediate recognition by the viewer (en.wikipedia.org) and tailored to evoke familiarity (Klein, 2001, 6). The fact that 100% of the advertisements in the sample included an image of the advertiser’s logo exemplifies the importance and all-pervasiveness of brands in our society today.

In addition, 51 advertisements in the sample included an image of the product for sale of which 80.39% depicted the women as being larger than the product, thus emphasising the fact that the women, rather than the product, is its most sell-able feature. Hence, the logos and representations of women, rather than the products themselves, act as the main vehicles of brands to further capitalist goals; they are used by advertisers (in a way judged best as suits their needs) to encourage consumption of branded products.

According to Klein (2001, 49), brands and celebrity stars are the same thing, they are used by advertisers to create brand awareness and promote consumption. Advertisements act as a media-site where identification with capital-serving images such as celebrities occurs. According to Olivier (2006, 17), capitalist-consumer space comprises metonymic site-chains for consumers to invest with their own desires. These desires are cultivated by other capitalist-engendered iconic sites of investment and identification such as popular film characters and other celebrities due to their positions of power in the media. 8 advertisements within the sample analysed, included an image of a celebrity, one of which included two celebrities – hence 9 celebrities were used as iconic sites of identification so as to acquire capital in the sales of its product. Images of celebrities, such as Nicole Kidman and Catherine Zeta Jones (two of the celebrities depicted in the advertisements), are invested with capitalist exchange value and are used to elicit the desire of consumers (Olivier, 2005, 32). Hence, capitalist ideology is employed here by
using the iconic power of the celebrities in creating needs and wants for consumers who wish to emulate their celebrity status.

The results of the study thus indicate that capitalist ideology is used by advertisers to further their capitalist goals which are driven by the profit motive. In doing so, advertisers employ the use of stereotypical imagery of women which can be communicated at a glance. However, these stereotypes are usually based on patriarchal ideology in that, from a broadly feminist perspective, women are portrayed in a negative light, as being submissive and objectified. Hence, these negative stereotypes of women benefit both patriarchy in reinforcing the status quo of male domination, and capitalism in that the objectification of women elicits and promotes consumption of the images, brands and products.

5.4. The Fourth Hypothesis

The fourth hypothesis that advertisements do not only sell their products but also promote and reinforce ideologies and therefore are extremely influential in manipulating thoughts, expectations, beliefs and actions, on the part of readers, concerning women in society, is supported by the research findings.

As discussed previously, advertisements are shot through with ideologies and therefore meanings in the interest of power. However, the process of meaning transfer can only be accomplished by an advertisement’s audience: it does not take place within the advertisement itself (O’Donohoe, 1997, 259). Advertisements juxtapose consumer goods with representations of the culturally constituted world, imbuing products with cultural meaning and relying on audiences to make the connections (McCracken, 1986 cited in O’Donohoe, 1997, 259). Hence, the audience’s viewing and uncritical understanding of the advertisement is the final link in the production process. The ideology embedded in the advertisements has no meaning unless it is absorbed by an audience. Since each individual is unique, the meanings of ideologies are understood and interpreted in many different ways, according to each individual viewer. Despite this unique inflection of the
ideological constitution of consumers’ subjectivities, however, it is arguably the case that a core meaning of the dominant ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism shapes consumers’ behaviour, otherwise the dominance of these ideologies would be hard to explain.

In accordance with feminist thought which believes in giving women voice and a platform to be heard, every thought and idea of each female student who completed the survey questionnaire has thus been recorded and tabulated and has been included in this study, which can be found in Appendix A. By examining their responses, it becomes evident that the meanings embedded in advertisements are interpreted and understood in various ways – sometimes the same but sometimes very differently.

In a capitalist society such as ours, advertising is inevitable, and according to Vestergaard and Schroder (1985, 7), it is inevitably persuasive. Not only does advertising help make products appear as aesthetically pleasing as possible, the advertisement becomes an aesthetic object in itself. Not just the product, but also the consumer becomes aestheticised (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, 9). Through the consumption of goods, human beings satisfy both material and social needs (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, 9). By saying that an advertisement aestheticises the commodity, it means that the ideological message is strengthened, as the aesthetic effect rubs off on the commodity, and hence on the ideological context. Thus the commodity is made to appeal to the consciously or unconsciously held values of the consumer (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, 9), keeping in mind that these values, to the degree that they reflect the dominant ideologies, are continually reinforced by advertising.

According to Goldman (1992, 2), advertisements have socio-cultural consequences and repercussions that go beyond the corporate bottom-line even though it is the bottom-line which motivates and shapes them. A self-confessed 81.67% of respondents claimed that *Cosmopolitan* advertisements impacted on various aspects of their lives, hence confirming that advertisements do in fact influence those who view them.
The dominant image of femininity in advertising is that of the beauty and fashion ideal – there has been a definite transition from the domestic woman to that of the glamorous woman (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, 81). Female priorities have switched from motherhood and childcare to the maintenance of their physical appearance (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, 81). This beauty and fashion ideal has become the new straitjacket of femininity, requiring women to compete through their appearance for the attention of their husbands, lovers, bosses and any other specimen of the male sex they happen to encounter (Vestergaard & Schroder, 1985, 81). Interestingly, the most commonly stated aspect of respondents’ lives affected by advertisements was that of fashion (81.67%), followed by beauty (45%). The fact that 38.33% of respondents stated that Cosmopolitan advertisements impact on their sense of femininity (what it means to be a woman) proves that advertisements do in fact play a role in shaping and moulding women’s beliefs with regard to gender role-typing. Thus, exposure to stereotyped gender portrayals in advertisements may actually engender negative gender-role attitudes, in the sense of women remaining subject to patriarchal-capitalist ideology.

Because of their ability to shape consensual images and definitions of femininity, women’s magazines exert ‘cultural leadership’ in struggles surrounding what it means ‘to be a woman’ (McCracken, 1993 cited in Currie, 1997, 455). This attribution of leadership is based on the claim that these magazines shape both a woman’s view of herself and society’s view of her (Ferguson, 1983 cited in Currie, 1997, 455). In our culture, the meanings affixed to ‘being women’ are increasingly mediated by social texts, specifically women’s magazines as a commercial medium that orchestrates women’s activities in relation to their bodies (Currie, 1997, 460).

There is much evidence to suggest that exposure to gender-role stereotyping, common in advertisements, is associated with more gender-typed views of the world (Signorielli, 1989 cited in MacKay & Covell, 1997, 575). In turn, this appears to be associated with heightened aggressive attitudes toward women, with women’s concerns about body image and with gender-role values. Alternatively as Livingstone and Green (1985 cited in MacKay & Covell, 1997, 575) suggested, identification with advertisement portrayals may reinforce existing negative attitudes and gender-role stereotypes.
Of the respondents, 83.33% believed that the women in the advertisements are portrayed as powerful/significant. However, the ability to “seduce and attract attention” was found to be the most frequently suggested source of their power. The ability to seduce or attract attention is linked to the stereotype of ‘the seductress’ which is a negative stereotype (from a broadly feminist perspective) and its use by advertisers have negative consequences as evidenced by the fact that viewers seem to have internalised the idea that women attain power through their abilities to seduce or attract attention, using their looks and/or bodies. According to MacKay and Covell (1997, 583), the pervasive and continuous exposure to such advertisements of young adults (who make up Cosmopolitan’s largest group of readers) must be expected to hinder women’s efforts to obtain true equality.

Included in the survey questionnaire, was a test to deduce whether exposure to advertisements had an effect on women’s attitudes and beliefs. The test was geared to uncovering respondents’ thoughts about the portrayal of women in advertisements and its likeness to South African women in general. Respondents described South African women as “strong”, “powerful” and “independent” while they described women portrayed in Cosmopolitan advertisements as having “sex appeal”, using her beauty to define her and “her body as her source of power”. Hence, it became evident that women are in fact aware of the stereotypes and disparities that exist in the portrayal of women in advertisements. 95% of respondents stated that women in Cosmopolitan advertisements are portrayed in stereotypical ways. Many respondents stated that the reason these women were used was because of their bodies, beauty and sex appeal which help to sell products. An alternative interpretation of this – respondents’ views about South African women being ‘strong’ etc., and about the stereotypical portrayal of women in Cosmopolitan – may be that they think of power in just these stereotypical terms.

Before exposure to three advertisements published in Cosmopolitan, 65% of respondents believed that the portrayal of women in advertisements do not reflect true South African women. After exposure, 55% of respondents did not believe that the women in the advertisements were true reflections of South African women, hence showing a 10%
increase in the number of women believing that the women in the advertisements shown to them, reflected South African women. The difference in attitudinal change may be linked to the fact that respondents suddenly had to think about the portrayals of the women in the advertisements and really analyse them as to whether they reflected South African women, whereas in the past they may not have thought about it as intensely since advertisements are usually merely glanced at, and not studied. The difference is also linked to the fact that some respondents did not answer the first question before exposure, since they may not have recalled any *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, yet all the respondents answered the question after exposure since they were then presented with advertisements to discuss. Hence, the 10% difference in attitudinal change is inconclusive. However, the fact that 55% of respondents maintained that the women portrayed in the advertisements do not reflect South African women is important in that their conclusion was a result of seeing and analysing real advertisements presented to them from *Cosmopolitan* issues that were published in 2004.

Many of the respondents were aware that advertisements are used for capitalist gain as seen by their ideas as to why the models are used by advertisers – that “sex sells,” “readers want to be like them” and “women will buy the product to become like the sexy models”. In addition, respondents were aware that stereotypical imagery is used by advertisers in their portrayal of women. However, even though they were aware of the stereotypes, the majority still admitted to having their lives affected by advertisements in *Cosmopolitan*. The study proves that women are influenced by advertisements in ways other than mere product consumption; hence, negative portrayals of women in advertisements have negative consequences in that their meanings are internalised by viewers. Therefore, it can be concluded that ‘positive’ portrayals of women, more in line with actual experiences of South African women, could have positive outcomes for women readers and in turn promote gender equality in South Africa.

5.5. Summary of Findings

According to Faludi (2000, 35), today’s culture, which she refers to as an ‘ornamental culture’, is constructed around celebrity and image, glamour and entertainment,
marketing and consumerism. Its essence is not just the selling act but the act of selling the self. It is sweeping away traditional institutions and replacing them with visual spectacles that benefit global commercial forces (Faludi, 2000, 35). The images produced by the culture, however, still promote the model of an American man who dominates his world (Faludi, 2000, 38), although, according to her, men are increasingly unable to live up to this image of the dominator (in the face of the very same forces that use this image to promote their interests). Hence, both the forces of global capitalism and patriarchy influence the images portrayed by the media.

The ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism, as distinct but related ideologies, work together in producing the misrepresentations of women found in advertisements. Misrepresentations of women serve patriarchal goals in that they reinforce the status quo whereby women are made to appear in positions of subordination. Capitalists have used these images to further their own goals in that images of objectified women serve to increase their profits. However, advertisers have incorporated these ideologies very subtly and thus by using Goffman’s (1987) frame analysis to analyse advertisements, it was found that every advertisement in the sample contained a stereotypical depiction of women. Stereotypes of women were thus found to be ubiquitous – all of which serving to portray women in positions of subordination. According to Van Zoonen (1994, 27), the media can be viewed as hegemonic institutions that present the capitalist and patriarchal order as ‘normal’, obscuring its ideological nature and translating it into ‘common sense’.

The results of the survey questionnaires indicate that many women are aware of the stereotypes and ideologies that are embedded in advertisements. However, the fact that 68.33% of respondents believe that ‘the ability to seduce and attract attention’ gives women their power in society exemplifies the fact that the ideologies inherent in advertisements have been unconsciously internalised by women. It can be argued that advertisers have an ethical responsibility to take these circumstances into account when presenting images of women to society in that advertisements influence women’s thoughts and beliefs about women.
Chapter 6

6. Conclusion

The year 2004 marked the tenth anniversary of South Africa’s democracy. It was a year of celebration, reflection and review, especially with regard to transformation – a look at what had been achieved and what still needed to be done. This study thus serves as an extension of the proceedings of that year – offering insight into the ways in which women were portrayed by the media in 2004, ten years after democracy, by critically analysing the messages that Cosmopolitan advertisements elicited with regard to gender role-typing and to uncover the ideological forces influencing these representations.

The results of the study indicate that the achievement of gender equality was in fact hampered by advertisements such as those published by Cosmopolitan in 2004. There seemed to be a tendency countering progress regarding gender equality in that women were frequently depicted stereotypically in ways that suggested the subordination and objectification of women. When stereotypical images such as these lag behind the increase in equality achieved in other areas of society, they play a regressive role as they prevent people from internalising the changes that have transpired in reality (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 170). Stereotypes such as those found in Cosmopolitan advertisements thus have a negative effect on aspirations of gender equality in South Africa as they are undermining the increasing powers women have gained.

Negative gender role-typing by the media is disastrous for societies striving for gender equality due to the fact that gender relations are socially defined and constructed; its maintenance depends on gender displays presented to society (Jhally, 1990, 134). In its reflection of gender displays, the media, especially, because of their immense power in the process of socialisation, shape the realm of society’s gender constructions. By not reflecting positive gender displays where women are portrayed as equal to men and positioned in roles of superiority and control over herself and her environment, women in society suffer as a result. Negative role-typing of women has negative consequences for society in that these messages shape the attitudes of people and are likely to lead to
discrimination against women, to injury to women’s self-image, and to other harms (Cohen-Eliya & Hammer, 2004, 165).

To understand the reasoning behind the misrepresentation of women found in the advertisements, it was necessary to examine the ideologies that govern them. According to Hall (1996, 24), ideologies operate in discursive chains, clusters, semantic fields and in discursive formations. An interplay of different ideological discourses and formations characterises modern developed society; they contest one another, often drawing on a common, shared repertoire of concepts, rearticulating and disarticulating them within different systems of difference or equivalence (Hall, 1996, 24). It was established that the ideologies of both patriarchy and capitalism work together in supporting the pervasiveness of negative, disempowering portrayals of women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements. Stereotypical imagery of women serve as the site at which the ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy fuse, drawing on a common, shared notion of the objectified female to further their goals of maximisation of profits and male dominance respectively. The danger with ideologies such as these influencing media images is that ideology becomes invisible because it is translated into ‘common sense’, appearing as the natural, apolitical state of things accepted by each and everyone (Van Zoonen, 1994, 24).

Advertising images are not, however, the direct cause of gender inequality, but they do contribute to it by creating a climate in which the marketing of women’s bodies is seen as acceptable (Kilbourne, 2002, 125). By internalising these images, many women then actualise them. This was evidenced by the second part of the study, which examined women’s views about the portrayal of women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements. 81.67% of women stated that *Cosmopolitan* affects various aspects of their lives in a combination of ways including their sense of fashion and beauty. Hence, it is fair to conclude that women internalise the images that are presented to them by the media and subsequently actualise them by, for example, emulating the fashions and beauty ideals depicted by the imagery of the advertisements. 38.33% stated that *Cosmopolitan* affects their femininity – their belief in what it means to be a woman – hence proving that negative, reductive
gender role-typing is hazardous as readers’ constructions of gender are influenced by the images that they are exposed to by the magazine.

As a women’s magazine, published primarily for a readership of women, Cosmopolitan offers a meaning of femininity that is tied to the everyday activities and beliefs of women, who, in turn, bring this meaning into being and thereby sustain it. While women’s magazines such as Cosmopolitan do not determine women’s practices, as a social discourse, they mediate practices of femininity among both magazine readers and nonreaders (Currie, 1997, 460). As a media product, women’s magazines are thus extremely important as they shape and mould the thoughts and social practices of women who are the target audience. The portrayal of women in Cosmopolitan advertisements thus affects readers’ ideas about women and about themselves, since they, too, are mostly women.

Conversely, the results of the study indicate that women in South Africa today have a fairly ‘positive’ outlook on South African women, as respondents described a true South African woman as being “powerful,” “strong” and “independent”, among many other positive descriptions. This positive outlook may be as a result of other media forms or socialisation and transformation processes. However, it is important to note that the descriptions of “beautiful” (by 23.33% of respondents) and “sexy” (by 5% of respondents) may however point to women’s internalisation of messages portrayed by the media – that of the beauty ideal. Besides the fact that women are largely portrayed stereotypically by Cosmopolitan advertisements, the majority of respondents had a fairly positive outlook on South African women, thus indicating that the objective of gender equality in South Africa may in fact be succeeding in spheres other than the advertising in women’s magazine markets such as Cosmopolitan Magazine.

It is thus of paramount importance that advertisers, too, incorporate mechanisms to aid the progression of equality in South Africa by representing women more positively and less reductively, as opposed to the ‘negative’ portrayals found in Cosmopolitan advertisements. The fact that 53.33% of respondents stated that images in advertisements are their most memorable feature could be utilised by advertisers in producing more
empathizing imagery in line with the goals of gender equality. Women should be presented in progressive roles in which they have effective control over their own bodies and are not simply used to sell products.

According to Dervin (1987 cited in Van Zoonen, 1994, 128), the desire to give women a voice in a world that defines them as voiceless is transformative in that it is concerned with helping the silent speak and is involved in consciousness raising. Hence not only does this study aim at contributing to South African knowledge and awareness about the representation of women in *Cosmopolitan* advertisements, it also potentially plays a role in the actual transformative process whereby, by way of the survey questionnaires, women were given the voice to speak, a platform from which to air their views.

### 6.1. Shortcomings and Future Research Directions and Recommendations

The results of this study are based on advertisements published in *Cosmopolitan* magazines only, thus future researchers could benefit from analysing advertisements published in a range of print media sources, which could include, for example, general interest magazines and newspapers, so as to present a broader picture of the representations of women that are prevalent in the South African media. In addition, this study is based on information received from female respondents only and thus future researchers could focus on gaining insight into the interpretations of advertisements on the part of a more diversified group of respondents, by including, for example, older women or school girls, so as to present a broader picture of how media messages are interpreted by a greater diversity of audiences.

The results of this study incorporate an analysis of advertisements as well as an investigation into the thoughts and ideas of women exposed to advertisements. Future researchers would benefit by including an analysis of the thoughts and practices of media producers who present society with misrepresentations of women. The research study would then incorporate all three aspects of the production process – production, distribution and consumption in understanding advertisements and their role in society.
References


**Internet References:**


Appendix 1

Please note: The images above serve as an example of ‘Appendix 1’ that was presented to respondents. ‘Appendix 1’ presented to the respondents included the magazine advertisements in its original form. These have been scanned and resized so as to fit the format of this dissertation.
Appendix A

Table 4

Race classification of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race classification of Cosmopolitan readership (AMPS 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Q: 1. Number of respondents who are Cosmopolitan magazine readers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

Q: 2.1. The regularity at which respondents read Cosmopolitan magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Second Month</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Q: 2.2. The aspects of respondents' lives that 
*Cosmopolitan* impacts upon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity, Fashion, Beauty &amp; Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion, Beauty &amp; Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion &amp; Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity &amp; Other</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity &amp; Fashion</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity, Fashion &amp; Beauty</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion &amp; Beauty</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femininity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

Q: 3.1. The portrayal of models in 
*Cosmopolitan* ads with regard to the way 
that they are dressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models' Appearance</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Exposed</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully Clothed</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 9

**Q: 3.2. The portrayal of models in *Cosmopolitan* ads with regard to her position in society**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in Society</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerless</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 10

**Q: 3.2.1 That which renders her powerful / significant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body &amp; Ability to seduce &amp; attract attention</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brains &amp; Ability to seduce &amp; attract attention</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body &amp; Brains</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to seduce &amp; attract attention</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brains</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11

**Q: 3.2.2. That which renders her powerless / insignificant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate to Men &amp; Inability to seduce &amp; attract attention</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate to men &amp; Constant Objectification</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to seduce &amp; attract attention</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant Objectification</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate to Men</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 12

**Q: 3.3. The portrayal of women in *Cosmopolitan* ads with regard to stereotypes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portrait Type</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seductress</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Seductress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Sex Object</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Seductress &amp; Housewife</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Seductress &amp; Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Sex Object &amp; Seductress</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Sex Object &amp; Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Seductress &amp; Other &amp; All</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful Businesswoman &amp; Sex Object &amp; Seductress &amp; Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 13

**Q: 5. The *Cosmopolitan* ads that respondents found to be most memorable**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertisement Type</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfume/Fragrance Ads</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingerie Ads</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Ads</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmetic Ads</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guess</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DKNY</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHD</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of Respondents
Table 14

Q: 6. That which makes advertisements memorable to respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model &amp; Images &amp; Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model &amp; Images</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model &amp; Images &amp; Product</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images &amp; Wording &amp; Product</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model &amp; Product</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images &amp; Wording</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wording</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Model</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15

Q: 7. The most common words used by respondents to describe the women in the ads presented to them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>No. of times referred to by respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractive/Appealing</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractively clothed</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive/Appealing/ body</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractively clothed/ body</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident/ Strong</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident/ Sporty/ Athletic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident/ Attractively clothed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident/ Seductive</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident/ Thin</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident/ Powerful/Empowered</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16

Q: 8. The words most frequently cited by respondents to explain why these women have been used in the ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>No. of times cited by respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appealing look/image</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her sex appeal</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex sells</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers would aspire to be/look like them</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personification of product</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her attractive body</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to attract attention</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17

Q: 9. The words most frequently used to describe the messages these ads convey about South African women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Message</th>
<th>No. of times cited by respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body is emphasised to attract attention/convey a message</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable of anything / Goals are achievable</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse/Different</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active/Energetic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a true reflection</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her beauty defines her</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her body is her source of success/power/confidence</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are powerful</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womans' power lay in her looks / sex appeal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Womans' power lay in her looks / sex appeal</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18

Q: 10. Words used by respondents to describe a South African woman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>No. of times referred to by respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-Orientated</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong-willed / Strong Character</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful / Attractive</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of times referred to by respondents