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Investigating Issues of "Corporeal" Identities in  
Contemporary *Men's* and *Women's Health* Magazines

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## 1. Introduction

It is nowadays hard to ignore that representations of athletic and supposedly healthy bodies have increasingly begun to invade the media landscapes of most modern and modernizing countries. Surfing the internet, turning on the television or walking past a local newsstand will inevitably confront one with the phenomenon of the “fit body”, which now appears to emerge within a pastiche of advertising, articles on self-help and images of eroticized corporal discipline. The uniformity of the bodily shapes of the models is usually accompanied by sets of simple and enticing linguistic messages, seeking to persuade recipients that self-mastery, the right choice of commercially available products and the following of “expert” advice will bring the perfect healthy body vis-à-vis an immaculate self within the orbit of everyday life.

Prominently placed on the newsstand, we find *him*. He is usually young, tall and his muscular body suggests that he has engaged in fitness workouts for many years. The cover model’s cut six-pack abs and well defined upper arms signify the idealized male body as he smiles at us from a cover of one of the men’s health and fitness magazines. Next to him, we find *her*. She poses as his imagined counterpart on the cover of one of the women’s magazines. She is lean and decidedly compact, presenting her well toned body in a tight athletic outfit. As Dworkin and Wachs have observed, the difference between the two is striking. He is big and massive, while she is little and contained. However, there are similarities too: both models are usually white and signify the presumably active, consumption oriented life-style of the Western middleclass that is overshadowed by the conflation of health discourses with consumer culture and narrowly defined bodily ideals (1-2). Gender, health and economic forces arguably appear to lie at the heart of things, suggesting that complex socio-cultural and politico-economical factors underlie modernity’s “corporeal” issues.

This thesis takes this as a point of departure and endeavours to explore common discourses related to the body, analysing *Men’s Health (MH)* and *Women’s Health (WH)* magazines from the last decade. In the remainder of this introductory section, six cover story titles from *MH* and *WH* magazines, published between 2003 and 2013, are briefly discussed to illuminate how representations of the body might privilege certain ways of envisioning our physical selves. As this thesis will argue, they and other representative examples from the publications referred to above exemplify the complex relationship between the discursive production of

corporal identities in the popular media, the self-management techniques of individual bodies in everyday life, and the socio-cultural conditions of late modernity in general terms.

To approach these potential intricacies in an introductory form, it is instructive to establish a common analytical denominator that is identifiable in all six examples I will discuss below, namely the concern of how media representations of modern “corporealities” structure and are structured by men’s and women’s bodily performances and interactions. What is at stake in this regard first and foremost are the issues of intelligibility and recognition. As Butler notes, the possibility to achieve the intelligible status of an individual crucially depends on a set of normative conceptions that necessarily must precede one’s existence. These semiotic modalities of recognition may confer a particular status to some individuals, while they may simultaneously deprive others of the possibility of being recognized in benevolent ways (*Undoing Gender* 2). The discursive site of recognition thus functions as a nexus of power and knowledge by which the human is continuously and differently produced, so that issues of embodiment and identity are unthinkable without relating them to socially articulated sets of arbitrary and contingent norms (idem 27-28). It is this thesis’ contention that media representations of the body continuously reproduce and contest these norms.

Approaching the first cover story title “Sexual superpowers – be her man of steel” (MH, February 2003, p.7) with Butler’s comments in mind, it can be observed that “sexual superpowers” are explicitly linked to heterosexual desires. Once such ostensible erotic capacities have been associated with a male individual, recognition may be conferred to him as “her man of steel”. The unsaid referent in the text, the left-out homosexual other, is precluded from the argued reproductive norm that is presented in the frame under survey. The second caption, “Sculpt sexy curves – four moves for lean legs and a tight tush” (WH, December 2011, p.3) teleologically confirms this binary logic of heterosexual bodily attraction and reifies the woman’s performance of “sculpting of sexy curves” as an act of body work that is implied to naturally belong to the signifying economy of a heteronormative social semiotic of courtship practices from which gays and lesbians are excluded. Arguably, the constitution of heteronormative subject positions is not only privileged by the two representations, the inculcations played out in both samples effectively constitute a bipolar cultural force that reproduces particular types of gendered embodiment in ways that readers are invited to understand how distinct corporal identities are supposed to socially interact.

That is, heteronormativity is assumed as naturally given and the “fit body” is reified as one that is not gay<sup>1</sup>.

Encountering the second pair of cover story titles “Do you need statins? – these cholesterol lowering drugs might be right even for perfectly healthy men” (MH, September 2005, p.14) and “Live longer – why even young women need to protect their hearts” (WH, September 2011, p.7) introduces us to the notion of the “uncertain body”. Social theorists have described late modernity as an increasingly reflexive and post-traditional period that is characterized by the prevalence of capitalist market economies vis-à-vis the omnipresence of mediated risks and existential uncertainties, leading to a condition in which the negative consequences of modernisation and industrialisation can no longer be reliably controlled by scientific means (Beck; Bauman; Fukuyama). As Shilling explains, this has had several effects on how we conceive of our bodies. While science and medicine have endowed us with the means to exert an unprecedented control over our bodies, we have also come to live in a time where serious doubt has been cast on the consequences of this control and the various practices we have come to associate with it (67). As the two quotes illustrate, it can no longer be taken for granted that young people are at a lower risk for cardiovascular disease; and besides, there is always the possibility that even “perfectly healthy men” are in need of cholesterol lowering drugs. The “modern” body is becoming less of a given and more a phenomenon of choices, interpretations and interventions. As Crawshaw has suggested, this echoes modern discourses of neoliberal health care that place the responsibility for promotion of wellbeing and prevention of disease with the individual, who is both willing and able to maintain his or her correct bodily state of being (1606).

Finally, the two captions “Party time – best cocktail dresses for your party” (WH, December 2011, cover) and “Own a pair – a guy’s guide to buying the ultimate jeans” (MH, October 2013, p. 13) lead us into the realm of the complex interaction between the gendered individual and the cultural practices of western consumer societies. As Featherstone has argued, consumer culture has given rise to a range of practices and technologies that facilitate various

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<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Dworkin & Wachs have observed that popular fitness and health magazines generally seek to represent a very limited image of the healthy ideal, which is one that coincides with dominant moral and civic values. As a consequence, no specific references to gay readers are made (56-57). However, some body images presented in the heterosexualized space of the magazines may implicitly convey messages that might invite gay readers’ identification (*gay vague*). The assumed overall goal of this strategy is to commercially target both heterosexual and gay audiences in a way that the heteronormative orientation of the publications is not put into question by heterosexual readers, who may not be aware of the alternative possibilities of reading the magazines’ contents might offer (idem 57-59).

modifications and enhancements of the body, which help individuals construct a desired appearance and expression of the self. Transformational techniques promise to result in a renewed body and self that can more successfully navigate through social space and better enjoy various lifestyle opportunities that are commercially offered (195-96). The idea of the customizable body is thus connected to the context of everyday life. Indeed, as the last two captions suggest, it appears that even a body that has been vigorously sculpted in countless hours of effort remains forever a project in progress, attuned to the mechanism of commercial supply and demand. Regardless of an individual's sex and how well shaped his or her physique may be, the proliferation of socially acceptable corporealities seems to be intimately bound up with the matter and capacity of becoming a consumer of gender specific brand products.

To summarize the introductory thoughts of this paper, the discussed textual instances illuminate our era's concerns with risk and uncertainty, underlying rationalities of individualised health care and the proliferation of consumerism vis-à-vis a seemingly compulsory regime of heterosexual conduct and reproductive desire. To that effect, this thesis will investigate the relationship between the body, discourse and identity within the semiotic nexus of popular culture and late modernity.

## **2. The body in social theory and everyday life – media images and appearances that matter**

There is wide scholarly agreement that the body has become a contested site within an increasingly mediated and reflexive age (Baumann; Patterson and Elliott; Shilling; Williams; Woodward). As Williams points out, the immense upsurge of interest in the human body within the sciences, the increase of social reflexivity in both academic and everyday life and the deployment of new technologies designed to discipline and mediate individuals' corporal conduct have cast serious doubt on what the body is and what it might become (1041).

As Bauman has noted, with the advent of an increasingly uncertain stage of modernity – which he metaphorically describes as liquid – “[f]lexibility has replaced solidity as the ideal condition to be pursued of things and affairs” (ix). Consequently, individual identities are seen as hybrids of multiple and even contradictory subjectivities that materialize as results of specific discourses in which human existence is implicated (Patterson and Elliott 232). To this

effect, our experience of subjectivity includes the sense of ourselves and involves thoughts and emotions which constitute the perception of who we are in a particular social context. Subjectivity therefore allows us to locate ourselves within the flow of available discourses, so that the discursive positions we take up and identify with constitute the building blocks of our ever nascent selves (Woodward 39). To this end, both our bodies' malleability and the potential aura of uncertainty that has began to environ late modernity's affairs have had important consequences for modern individuals' senses of who they are in terms of their own embodied biographies. There has been a tendency, therefore, for the body to be seen as a constant project of identity formation (Shilling 69).

A considerable amount of research has so far addressed the body as a contested site through which the broader concerns of modernity and social life are being played out (Boni; Bordo; Bourdieu; Coffey; Featherstone; Hammer). Bourdieu's seminal study *Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* is concerned with the body's implication in social class and its functions as a form of social capital. For Bourdieu, the appearance and conduct of the individual body is always linked to the conditions of its employment and reproduction, rooted in the social stratification of society. Thus, the body schema that is dominantly articulated with a particular class, field of occupation or status influences the perception of other bodies, the conduct of one's own body (including the management of one's appearance, the selection of food, the ways of talking) and of course, the symbolic evaluation of any bodily performance one might be concerned with in the social field (190-91). Bourdieu's insights are valuable since they suggest that the individual body is symbolically implicated in the wider socio-cultural semiotic, playing a role in the production of societal norms through meaningful inscriptions and the enactment of difference and similarity. In this context, it is widely accepted that society is learning about "normal" roles of men and women via the mass media. There, codes of culturally approved behaviours are transmitted in the form of stereotypes, myths and "controlling images" that serve to communicate and reify society's expectations for personal conduct, physical appearance and ways of life (Hammer 204-05). Stressing the importance of lifestyle magazines in this regard, Boni asserts that these media types represent one of the primary sites for the construction of socially desirable body images (466).

In her influential essay "Reading the Slender Body", Bordo has demonstrated how the popular media promotes the imagery of slenderness, a hegemonic preoccupation that continuously ensures the production of self-disciplining individuals, who are sensitive to any departures



from the norms and habituated to self modification in the service to cultural ideals (186-87). Importantly, in Bordo's analysis, the specificity of the individual body's construction is not to be separated from the larger conjuncture of the entire social fabric. She notes that the slender and well managed body encodes the moral requirements of social life that are to be observed by its owner. Since modern-day social power has increasingly been connected to the ability to manage the resources and the capacities of others, the desiderata of cost efficient control and lenient management are superimposed on the human physique, rearticulated in the code of a well managed and disciplined outer appearance (Bordo 191-92). In this context it is often assumed that men and women must attend to their bodies in an instrumental manner since social status and the accordance of individual capabilities crucially depend on how a person looks (Featherstone 195).

The specific act of attending to one's body by means of exercise has been defined as body work. Body work does not only resonate the output orientation of neoliberal economies imposed on the body, according to Coffey, it comprises a range of practices that aim to alter or maintain specific aspects of the human physique, often informed and guided by aesthetic considerations (Coffey 4). As Coffey further explains, it is precisely through body work techniques that notions of gender are continually constructed and reproduced (3). Exploring body work as mirrored in the popular media is thus a way of investigating the specificity in which gender is embodied and reasserted. Taking into account that controlling images are indicative of the widespread corollary in media culture that the body should be modified and that regimes of body work can be used to construct a beautiful appearance vis-à-vis a socially estimated self, I will subsequently discuss studies that have addressed these issues with regard to the spectrum of men's and women's health and fitness magazines.

### **3. Research on men's and women's health and fitness magazines**

A considerable body of research has addressed the interplay between the body, subjectivity and discourse in lifestyle magazines (Alexander; Boni; Crawshaw; Dworkin and Wachs; Frith, Shaw, and Cheng; Gough; Hollow, Newman; Rundstrom-Williams; Willis and Knobloch-Westerwick). I begin this section with a brief review of research that has focused on *Men's Health* magazine. Alexander has investigated constructs of masculinity in *MH* (covering the period from December 1997 and December 2001), arguing that male identities are increasingly represented as based on consumption, a role traditionally associated with

women, rather than on production. Particularly helpful for this paper is her insight that the apparently hybrid constructs of masculinity in popular culture might easily obscure the common structural condition that most versions of masculine identities are stimulated by corporate brands (Alexander 552).

Boni's analysis of the Italian edition of *Men's Health* (the corpus being the issues of the year 2000) has taken a multifaceted approach and suggested that masculine identities are increasingly linked to the embodiment of active and individualized health care, heterosexuality and the commodification of the male body (465). Crawshaw's study of the UK Edition of *MH* has further elaborated Boni's notion of individualized health responsibilities and suggested that the magazines' representations of masculinities are indicative of neo-liberal discourses of health care that promote men as active consumers of health advice (1606).

Gough's study of men's health discourses in the popular media investigates how men's consumption of health advice is organized against the backdrop of hegemonic masculinities. Gough argues that conventional images of dominant "risk-taker" masculinities would preclude men from actively seeking help advice from experts since such behaviours would be considered as feminine (2483). Male-centred health care thus appears to leave men's images of traditional masculine roles intact by reaching readers with advice in their homes where they feel comfortable and safe. The essentialised definitions of masculinities signalled by the format and content of the men's health literature thus imply that men are not encouraged to change their identities in significant ways (idem 2484). However, Gough also points out the importance to investigate differences in the interplay between the lifestyles of individual men and tabloid representations of hegemonic masculinities in terms of social class, age and sexual orientation (2486). This thesis will attempt to assume such a comprehensive position and follow Gough's advice to acknowledge that there are potentially meaningful differences between and within groups of men (and women) in relation to representations that may be aimed at an alteration of their behaviour and understanding of themselves (2487). As the introduction of this paper has already suggested, the idealized notions of fit and healthy bodies propagated by *MH* and *WH* magazines seem to privilege the construction of subject positions within a heterosexual context.

Finally, Newman has taken the approach to investigate readers' letters to Australian *Men's Health* in order to analyse individual responses to the above thematized discursive imperatives (fitness, health, socio-economic potential). Newman's study suggests that the readers' responses playfully challenge the deployment of the body that is conducted in the magazine, mainly by using localised vernacular that might be interpreted as an act of resistance to the colonializing forces of global media masculinities (299). Newman's findings and the above mentioned studies have guided the analytical scope of this paper by suggesting that the ongoing discursive constructions of masculine identities in the men's health literature are multifaceted and potentially contested by contradictory forces of hegemony and resistance. It will thus be interesting to explore how the ensuing masculinities coincide with the socio-cultural and politico-economic field of today's world.

I now turn towards research focusing on women's health magazines and the notions of the body as related to constructs of femininity. The topic has been extensively addressed; however, exhaustive research for this paper did not reveal a single, thematically relevant study that has exclusively dealt with *Women's Health* magazine alone. In order to establish a general perspective, it might therefore be instructive to begin this section with a brief review of Rundstrom-Williams comprehensive dissertation on *The Textual Construction of Femininity in Women's Health Magazines*. Rundstrom-Williams has included *Women's Health*, *Shape*, *Fit*, *Self* and other relevant sources in her analysis and identified these publications as carriers of language that encodes and communicates contemporary ideologies of femininity. It is her contention that the magazines function as a voice of hybrid discourses that perpetuate both beautification and empowered subjectivity, oscillating between modern and more traditional forms of femininity (iv).

Willis and Knobloch-Westerwick have directed their focus on women's fitness and health magazines too, but adopted a somewhat different perspective. Their study has investigated body-shaping and weight loss messages in a corpus of approximately five thousand magazine pages of top selling U.S. publications from 2010, arguing that there is an emphasis on appearance over health, vis-à-vis a priority on exercise related behaviours over dietary issues (1). As I will argue, Willis and Knobloch-Westerwick's findings may be indicative of the discursive tensions identified by Rundstrom-Williams as they appear to suggest that the promotion of an empowered type of femininity, recognisant of traditional traits, needs to be

particularly concerned with the self-reliant development of the body with regard to aesthetic ideals.

Finally, the study of Frith, Shaw and Cheng assumes a cross-cultural approach and explores how beauty is encoded in popular magazines from the U.S., Taiwan and Singapore. Their findings suggest that beauty images in the U.S. may be constructed rather in terms of fashion and the body, whereas in Asia, the defining factors are more frequently associated with the face (1). The valuable insight of Frith, Shaw and Cheng's study for this paper lies in their implicit validation of the specificity of the socio-cultural semiotic of late modernity that shall underlie my analysis. Since the notions of *late modernity* and *reflexive modernity* are mainly theorized in terms of economically developed late-industrial societies, the specificity of discursively constructed subjectivities in those conditions can only count as such if there is evidence that it differs from that of non-western conjunctures.

Regardless of the specific focus of the above discussed studies, they all have in common that they tend to focus exclusively on either end of the gendered literary spectrum – thus, they either investigate how issues of masculinities are configured in the men's health literature or explore how notions of femininity have been contested or sustained in popular fitness and lifestyle magazines that address women. I found the abundance of unilaterally oriented studies somewhat striking since the concepts of femininity and masculinity discursively reinforce each other, so that one would want to consider both in order to account for the reproduction of their respective specificity in the wider social context the human body is intertwined with. Indeed, following Reeser, the term masculinity only exists by virtue of its dependence on femininity as its opposite – that is, it derives its meaning via the concept against which it is defined (37). The performance of masculinity and femininity has been described as “doing gender”, which means that men and women competently perform activities deemed appropriate for their respective sex classes. To be recognized as either masculine or feminine therefore presupposes distinct but interrelated sets of knowledge that define and differentiate the types of behaviour that are dominantly associated with the membership in a sex category (West and Zimmerman 127-27).

In this respect, Erving Goffman's essay, “The Arrangement between the Sexes” illustrates how modern societies are culturally structured along a parallel organization of their sexes, with the consequence that upon this initial grouping of individuals, specific types of

behaviour and conduct are normalized, approved and learned in gender specific ways. Currently available ideals of masculinity and femininity thus excuse, justify, approve and disapprove of the behaviour of a gendered individual, depending on the sex group in which the person has been placed (Goffman 303). As Goffman further notes, this initial distinction in sex-classes *inter alia* finds its expression in courtship rituals carried out in everyday life. Once the applicable rules of pre-marital engagement are in place, they define the circumstances and manner in which the courtship complex is supposed to take place, for which members of which sex classes it is acceptable, the principle of the female's discretion of bestowal of sexual favours and the man's "right" to withdraw his attention at any point (309-10). What Goffman intimates here, I think, is that the way in which people are socialised into their gender departments cannot be discussed comprehensively without looking at both sides of the gendered spectrum – that is, without taking into account what Goffman has defined as "the arrangement between the sexes". After all, what sense would it make to teach men the virtues and vices of appropriate courtship if the perceptions and actions of the supposed female counterparts would not be positively attuned to the scheming the men have learned? As Judith Butler has insightfully observed in this respect, the argued gendered achievement "[y]ou make me feel like a natural woman" requires a differentiation from the opposite gender - "[h]ence, one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (*Gender Trouble* 22). As research has shown, it is precisely through such repeated enactments of gender that culturally constructed differences between men and women come to appear natural and normal (Montemurro 10). By implication, it is difficult to imagine how the relevance of the category gender in terms of the construction of the body in the popular media might be comprehensively investigated without comparatively taking into account men's and women's magazines.

There have, however, been some rare instances of recent research that have simultaneously addressed both worlds of gendered representations in the popular fitness and health media. Hollow has investigated *FHM* (men) and *Red* (women) magazines in order to identify common tropes that communicate utopian impulses of an idealized world and promises of a better life. It is central to Hollows' argument that lifestyle magazines function like utopian texts that seek to disconnect the readers from their miserable present and guide them to some imagined place where a fulfilled life should become possible (27). While Hollows' decision to focus on both representational ends of the gendered world suggests that a social utopia cannot

be adequately sustained without taking into account both men's and women's ways of doing, he somewhat neglects to pursue an inquiry into the possible interplay that might emerge between the two sexes and their presumably gendered acts, aiming at the establishment of a "better world". As Kumar cautions us in his essay "Aspects of the Western Utopian Tradition", "utopia cannot descend into the realm of the fantastic; there has to be a certain relation to reality, a certain understanding of what might be possible in the given conditions" (65). Following Kumar, this supposed link between text and reality would presumably have to materialize in the magazines' implicit and explicit suggestions of how a particular form of symbiosis between men and women could be achieved. Unfortunately, this opportunity has not been taken up by Hollows. Addressing instances such as the offerings of dating advice, instructions on how to sculpt "sexy curves" and sex specific health counselling might have added to the scholarly understanding of how contemporary popular media constructs what Foucault has described as *combinatory individualities* – that is, bodies that may be articulated on others in order to achieve a desired composition of social forces (*Discipline* 164).

Dworkin and Wachs' *Body Panic*, published in 2009, is the only work I could locate that examined both women's and men's fitness media with regard to the relationship between consumer culture, gender, the body and health. Their book-length manuscript investigates how femininity and masculinity are relationally constructed in popular health and fitness magazines (23), drawing from empirical research data collected over many years, focusing on the period between 1979 and 2002 (184-86). Dworkin and Wachs' analysis suggests that there has been in a tendency in men's and women's magazines to reproduce dominant gendered bodily ideals of strong and active men vis-à-vis lean and more passive women (49). While men's exercises tend to be linked to the masculinised professional sphere (law enforcement and the military) and focus on building upper body strength, women's workouts tend to focus on toning and shaping the body with light weights, often in the context of supposedly feminine activities such as house work and shopping (162). The authors further hold that despite these differences, there are noticeable areas of convergence between the fit and "healthy" female and male individual. Body fat is represented as the main enemy for both sexes, men and women tend to be presented in a more similar, objectified manner (as objects to the gaze), and both constitute an important demographic for the marketing of diet nutrition, grooming and care products, though in gender specific ways (34), which leads the authors to the conclusion that the magazines mostly privilege affluent, white and heterosexual participants of consumer culture (163).

Taking into account the insights gained from the literature above, this thesis carries out a parallel reading of both *Men's Health* and *Women's Health* and argues that the discursive positions advanced in the magazines (the happy consumer, the health-conscious citizen and the attractive heterosexual) are constructed in highly gender specific ways, aimed at the production of combinatory gendered individuals that shop, flirt and keep fit in ways that invest them in the heteronormative machine of neoliberal consumerism, overshadowed by anxiety and risk. In brief, I strive to explain the two magazines' simultaneous offerings of gender specific advice as an overall discursive deployment that seeks to discipline and govern the social fabric in its entire spectrum. It is the contention of this paper that *MH* and *WH* magazines concerted shape – and are shaped by – the socio-cultural conditions of heteronormativity, consumerism and risk, in which the identity formation of assumed readers is likely to take place. I will thus suggest that the media under review functions as a powerful synoptic force that promotes a triangular constitution of subject positions as:

1. Consumers → (the **commercialised body**)
2. Responsible healthy citizens → (the **disciplinary body**)
3. Fit heterosexuals → (the **reproductive body**)

My analysis will be guided by the following **research questions**: firstly, I will investigate what types of discourses of embodiment are promoted and which forms of gendered identities might emerge in the magazines under survey; and secondly, I will explore how the ensuing “corpo-realities” are supposed to interact with each other in the contemporary socio-cultural and politico-economic field of late modernity. The method of this enquiry will be Critical Discourse Analysis.

Prior to investigating these issues in due analytical detail, I will begin with a theoretical departure towards the matters that are at stake: how can the constitution of subjects and their ways of doing be understood, by what mechanisms and technologies do we become subjected to particular discourses and how do these regimes of power and knowledge interrelate with the contemporary conjuncture in which all the above described processes are argued to be set?

#### 4. Bodies, technologies of the self and risk – Setting the analytical stage

There has been an unprecedented proliferation of interest in the human body in recent years. It has been scientifically interrogated by the medical profession, shaped and disciplined by a never ending stream of media images that circulate through advertising and consumer culture and eventually taken apart by social (de)constructionists and cultural theorists who offer possibilities of an alternative understanding of the links between our experienced fleshly physicality and social processes that actively mould what we have tended to perceive as natural and biological facts (Shilling 65).

This thesis makes its contribution to the contemporary attempts of deconstructing fictions of essential corporal realities by closely examining instances of how the body is figured discursively within the arena of media representations, focusing on *MH* and *WH* magazines. In order to investigate the types of discourses that are promoted and their possible effects on the constitution of subject positions, I will draw from Foucault's insights described in *Discipline and Punish*, *The Use of Pleasure* and "Technologies of the Self". I will discuss possible limitations of Foucault's early concept of the *docile body* and suggest that his late conceptions of a 'hermeneutic of the self' vis-à-vis Butler's analysis of gender as performative compose a viable theoretical framework to approach the issues this paper is concerned with. In addition, much is owed to Thomas Mathiesen's insightful exploration of the interaction between Foucault's mechanisms of *panopticism* (surveillance and the ensuing internalisation of discipline) and the workings of the *synopticon* (the mass media and its structuring effects on our consciousness). It is Mathiesen's contention that both deployments have a reciprocal function in the control of individuals – the panopticon by the power of the disciplinary gaze and the synopticon by the coercion of the mind (215). As I will demonstrate, issues of modern corporealities cannot be analysed convincingly without taking into account both mechanisms.

Subsequently, I will explore how the ensuing "corporealities", constituted and performed at the nexus of media consumption and everyday life are supposed to interact with each other in the wider social fabric, and discuss how they might relate to the contemporary socio-cultural and politico-economic field of late modernity theorized in terms of Ulrich Beck's notion of the *Risk Society*, Zygmunt Bauman's concept of *Liquid Modernity*, David Harvey's analysis *A*



*Short History of Neoliberalism* and Anthony Giddens' reflection on the redistribution of "Risk and Responsibility" in the crisis of the welfare state.

#### **4.1. The subject – Discursively (dis)figured while forever becoming**

In exploring the notion of the human being post signification, I was guided by Foucault's intimation that human bodies may not exist anterior the nexus of power and knowledge, and the ensuing deployment of practices and techniques that are meant to define, characterize and discipline them. As Foucault explains, the ongoing formation of the social body at the onset of industrial modernity replaced the old power over life and death that had once represented sovereign dominance. The ensuing regime of *biopower* was based on a twofold intervention: The careful management of birth-rates, mortality and the level of health of the general populace focused on the individual body as a machine in order to optimize its capabilities and integrate it into a system of efficient economic controls; and it focused on the body endowed with the mechanics of life in order to enhance its capabilities to procreate (*History of Sexuality Vol. One* 139-40). The deployment of the body was to be put into practice by an entire series of disciplinary methods that assured the constant subjugation of the body's forces, so that the human physique could be trained, manipulated and optimized accordingly (Foucault *Discipline* 136). The rationality of this disciplinary control materialized in the architecture of the *Panopticon*. In Jeremy Bentham's 18<sup>th</sup> century blueprint of the modern prison, a watchtower stood in the centre of a circular cellblock, ensuring that all inmates could be observed without them being able to see the wardens in charge of their control. The major effect of this was to induce in the inmates a consciousness of permanent visibility, inciting them to adjust their behaviour on their own (idem 200-01). Similar arrangements were soon adopted in the hospital, the factory or the school (209).

While the number of disciplinary institutions has since then increased, their inherent repertoire of control is no longer restricted to their internal panoptic arrangements. As Foucault points out, our society has become attuned to the order of surveillance in a way that individuals have internalized the disciplines up to a point that they have become parts of the panoptic mechanism themselves (*Discipline* 217). Therefore, "[h]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes the play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he

simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (idem 202-03).

Indeed, it can be argued that modern practices of normalizing and disciplining individuals’ bodies by means of body work routines bear stark resemblance to Foucault’s intimations. As Foucault has argued, the power of the norm appears through the disciplines. That is, through techniques that function to make individuals useful (*Discipline* 211). The normal is established via principles of coercion that, on the one hand, impose homogeneity on the social fabric; and on the other hand, individualize subject positions by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels and establish a deficit perspective in terms of how far the given differs from the desired standard (ibid 184). Individuals would thus adjust their conduct to the available norm, considering and fearing the possibility of constant observation by the panoptical gaze.

In brief, following Foucault, it is the ever-present control of the panoptic principle that is conducive to the normalization of modern individuals and their bodies. Having worked and trained in a gym for more than a decade myself, I tend to agree. I am familiar with the diagnostic and classificatory techniques that compartmentalize the body in normal and critical areas (problem zones), which are subsequently targeted by vigorous training programmes that exemplify the normalizing routines of body work, deployed to discipline the individual’s unruly physique. In most gyms, all this is augmented by the circular layout of the training machines encircled by mirrors and the central position of the trainer, whose constant gaze regulates the order of events at the various client-machine interfaces.

However, besides the power of the gaze, there is another force of coercion that exerts its power on individuals today, namely the mass media<sup>2</sup>. As Mathiesen has convincingly argued in this respect, there is something important missing in Foucault’s analysis of the disciplinary society (219-20). Foucault neglected that parallel to the development of techniques of surveillance and the spread of panoptical institutions (where the few can keep a strict watch

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<sup>2</sup> It may be worth noting that for me as a personal trainer, it would appear somewhat counterintuitive to assume that bodily norms are solely imposed on my clients via the disciplining force of my supposedly professional gaze. After all, what exact norm is my gaze supposed to enforce, where does its underlying rationale come from and more importantly, why do my clients want to reach it so desperately? In this respect, I have made the following observation: It regularly occurs that people approach me on the floor with a copy of one of the industry’s popular health magazines, asking me for advice how they might become able to achieve the body that is shown on the front page.

on the many) during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there took place the development of the system of the mass media, referred to as the synopticon (where the many see the few). Consequently, both mechanisms now seem to act in concert to control modern societies by targeting two distinct spheres of people's individualities – on the one side, our awareness about the intersecting panoptical gazes disciplines our behaviour; and on the other side, the discursive mass employment of media messages controls our thoughts and our consciousness. The *Totalgestalt* of the mass media thus inculcates society with a general understanding of the world, with the consequence that the “truth effects” of this understanding appear so natural that they henceforth legitimate the norms that are enforced by panoptical means (Mathiesen 229-30).

In order to account for individuals' bodily performances against the background of modern-day media culture, this thesis will carefully explore the joint-venture of panoptic and synoptic deployments in the construction process of corporal identities. In this respect, it appears instructive to reiterate Foucault's notion of the workings of *power and knowledge*. As he has famously taught the human sciences, “power and knowledge directly imply one another, [so that] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time the constitution of power relations” (*Discipline* 27). In Foucault's view, the individual who is fabricated by the disciplinary technologies of power comes henceforth to play a twofold role. Firstly, he or she is a “fictitious atom of the ideological representation of society” and secondly, he or she represents a material reality that is manifested in both bodily form and conduct. Foucault thus advises us not to understand the effects of power in a negative way. Power neither excludes nor represses but actively shapes forms of reality by producing “domains of objects” and “rituals of truth” (idem 194).

As Nixon explains, these forms of “reality” are essentially *subject positions* which create the spectrum for individuals to act or function in relation to particular social practices (315). The central mechanism which subjects people to these discursive positions is the above described operation of power via discourse. In Foucault's early concepts of power and knowledge, the constitution of subjects is described as follows: “power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth without depending on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, it isn't through having it first to be interiorized in people's consciousness” (*Power/Knowledge* 186). The somewhat misleading point of this argument is

that the individual's consent or identification is not required. Power is thus said to form individuals without the necessity of being internalized and/or agreed to first.

It has clearly been identified as a weakness of Foucault's earlier work that insufficient attention is paid to the ways in which individuals might resist the subjugating forces of power and knowledge (Nixon 316). After all, what happens if people recognize that they disagree and how can one account for the failures of specific regulatory attempts to police and subdue deviant practices of resistance? As Stuart Hall points out, Foucault's earlier concept of the "Docile Body" advanced in *Discipline and Punish* has failed to explain by what exact mechanism individuals are summoned into place within the discursive structures and what processes of recognition might be necessary to occupy particular subject positions ("Identity" 10-11). As the individual is hailed into place by discourse, he or she begins to perform the conduct associated with a particular subject position – what remains unclear, however, is how the individual can perform the appropriate act without being theoretically vested with the cognitive capacity of recognizing the type of performance that is discursively required (idem 8).

Fortunately, a more comprehensible account of subjectivisation is offered in Foucault's later work. In *The Use of Pleasure*, his second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault recognized that disciplinary operations necessarily need to coincide with mechanisms of subjectivity that function as an individual's response in its process of constitution. What he conceptualized, therefore, was to be an enquiry into "the history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture" (Foucault, *Pleasure* 4). Broken down into these components, the deployment of sexuality (and any other matter) could henceforth be analysed from three distinct angles: first, the bodies of knowledge that name and define it (discourse); second, the operations of power that regulate its praxis (disciplines) and third, the capacities by which individuals are able to recognize themselves in the roles they assume (technologies of the self). In more specific terms, Foucault's newly acknowledged "technologies of the self" provide us with the analytical purchase to investigate the mechanisms that "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, "Technologies" 18).

Foucault's late concept of a hermeneutics-of-the-self was taken up by theorist Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, an important work that made some of the insights more accessible for the purposes of critical enquiry. Butler's analysis of gender as performative has impressively demonstrated that there is no *a priori* subject that might pre-exist the gendered deed it is said to "naturally" perform but that concrete individuals can be linked to particular discursive formations based on their semiotic reiterations of specific discursive norms (*Gender Trouble* 32-33). Since gender is a matter of doing, it follows that its enactment in everyday life requires a performance that is continuously repeated – and this "stylized repetition of acts" is made intelligible and available by sets of norms and meanings that are already socially available (idem 140-141). Relating this to Mathiesen's influential analysis of the "Viewer Society" discussed above, it seems evident that the formation, approval and circulation of meaningful social codes is facilitated via the mass media. Media images precisely serve the purpose of what Foucault lately permitted into his analysis as "the help of others" ("Technologies" 18) in the construction of individuals. They tell us who we should become and set the codes of iterability, so that we can structure our performances accordingly.

Within this spectrum of performative practices and techniques of the self theorized by Butler and Foucault, I would like to suggest – following Nixon (323) – fall techniques of body work, shopping, grooming, the individualised responsibility for the management of health and the rituals of courtship. It is the communication of these modalities in *MH* and *WH* magazines that will interest the analysis in the main section of this paper.

Before, however, I will turn towards the wider social condition in which the disciplinary and performative formations of individuals are set. That is, I will discuss notions of risk and uncertainty (Beck; Bauman) and what has been identified by David Harvey, Anthony Giddens and Stuart Hall as the neoliberal "revolution".

## **4.2. Risk, uncertainty, health care and shifting responsibilities**

Let me begin this section by exploring the relationship between the notion of risk and the conjuncture of contemporary Western modernity as theorized by Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman. Both authors have described the recent condition of *late modernity* as an epoch where the old certainties of tradition and believe, once associated with industrial modernity and enlightenment thought, are continuously dissolving. As Bauman argues, the era between

the early 19<sup>th</sup> and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was largely perceived as a phase of solidity in which one could trust and which would make the world predictable and manageable (3). The Fordist factory functioned as the period's epistemological anchor and reflected the self-consciousness of industrial modernity. Its construction was a onetime matter which depended on the trust in unchangeable location factors that had to accommodate the management of massive work forces, heavy machines and huge factory buildings. As a consequence, capital and labour became immobile constituents of an accumulation process that was tied down to a specific place on a long-term basis (idem 56-57).

The present day situation emerged out of a radical melting of these solid patterns and configurations. Global processes of deregulation, liberation and flexibilization vis-à-vis a gradual collapse of early modern illusions, including the myth of stable economic growth, the hoped for prosperity of the welfare state and the narrative of the attainability of a just and conflict-free society within a predictable future gave rise to a systemic revolution which has disintegrated the bonds that once locked individual biographies in collective projects and socio-economic determinants. The burden of responsibility shifted from institutions to individuals, with the consequence that setting the coordinates for one's life has become an unpredictable task of self-construction labour that is forever to remain in progress (Bauman 29).

The liquefaction of solidity and trust is tantamount to disorientation and risk. Nothing can be done with certainty, while everything could happen. Once, nation, class and gender provided supposedly safe guidelines for people's endeavours and choices; in the risk society individuals have to be constantly on the move and always prepared to anticipate the worst. In an attempt to account for this contemporary condition of uncertainty, Beck has influentially argued that modern societies have entered into a stage of *reflexive modernization*, meaning that there has developed a growing awareness that the gains from progress are overshadowed by the production and communication of risks (*Risk Society* 12-13). In Beck's account, risks are defined as the probabilities of damage due to given developments. They generally remain invisible and are based on causal interpretations that only exist in terms of scientific and non-scientific knowledge. Since risks have largely become a matter of mediation rather than an issue of actual experience, they can be dramatized or minimized in favour of the social interests that are involved (idem 23).

As probabilities within fields of knowledge, risks are essentially projected dangers of the future. They differ decisively from the common hazards of early industrial modernity such as hunger, poverty and natural disaster, which were issues that could be directly addressed as they emerged (Beck, *Risk Society* 51-52). In this respect, I would argue that Marx often quoted 19<sup>th</sup> century conviction “[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; [...] but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (5) loses its validity in reflexive modernity. Since the centre of risk consciousness lies in the future, the past loses the power to determine the course of action of the present. The yet non-existent and fictitious has thus become the driving force of human intervention, policy making and anticipation (Beck, *World Risk Society* 137). As there are no reliable ways to measure or interpret future probabilities, risks challenge the sciences’ prior monopoly of rationality and credibility. Claims to be able to determine objectively future harms are doomed to failure since speculative assumptions can hardly be supported by hard evidence and statistical facts (Beck, *Risk Society* 29). The drawback of this is that everything can become risky, effectively leading to an “overproduction” of risk factors that might supplement or outdo one another. On the future agenda of risks to be avoided may be tea, possibly contaminated with DDT or other supposedly harmless things like pasta, wine and cake, which may one day turn out to cause cancer (idem 53).

Fact is, one cannot know for sure and precisely this is what turns risk into commerce. As the awareness about risk is increasing, the business with risk and uncertainty is growing. Unlike hunger and poverty, risks can neither be satisfied nor alleviated; they are like a bottomless pit of constant demand that can never be covered. New markets can be created, especially those which address the demand for the avoidance of harm. The infinite productivity of hazard definitions parallels the number of opportunities that are designed and marketed in the name of prevention (Beck, *Risk Society* 56). The main source of late modernity’s profit is therefore no longer the material commodity known as *the good* but the immaterial concept of *the idea*. Ideas, whether they promise salvation from risk or other prospects of a better life, have to be produced only once and then continue to generate income; depending on the number of individuals they manage to attract (Baumann 151).

It is not surprising that marketable ideas in the guise of scientific and medical discourses have come to permeate the realm of popular culture and everyday life, where they carry authority and appeal. The promise of supposed experts to master the environment of uncertainty is

offered through talk shows on television, newspapers and magazines. Knowing one's proficiencies and weaknesses vis-à-vis one's personal risk factors constitute the modern techniques of the reflexive self, which to a large extent are informed by scientific advice in the public sphere (Urla & Terry 15). We can certainly see such tendencies in the health politics of Western societies. The development of increasingly complex statistical data on health and sickness has produced a powerful set of ideas about risk factors and hazardous forms of behaviour that individuals have increasingly internalised. The way in which these ideas have been commercially exploited have reinforced the notion that good health through associated types of behaviour is something within individuals' power to achieve as long as they exercise discipline and control of their impulses (Benson 123). Following Bauman, the notion of health as a stable form of being is therefore losing its relevance. Fitness and wellness have taken its place, implying that the body must be flexible and adjustable, ready to encounter circumstances not yet experienced and impossible to specify in advance (77).

An example of this tendency has lately been provided by Medicare, the national medical insurance programme for U.S. citizens above the age of 65, and younger people with disabilities. The American Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently updated their recommendations with regard to the content and process of the *Annual Wellness Visit*, the routine health check provided by the programme, suggesting that it should focus on a personalized prevention plan that improves health outcomes by identifying patients' modifiable health risks and the provision of follow-up behaviour change interventions:

The Annual Wellness Visit is to encourage individuals to take an active role in accurately assessing and managing their health, and consequently improve their well-being and quality of life. This refocusing on an individual's active role in health care is accomplished by evaluating beneficiaries' current health and wellness behaviors, followed by advice and counsel on ways to become healthier and remain healthy for as long as possible. (CDC 14)

Crucial information for the patients' counselling is provided by the patients themselves. Questions about diet and fitness habits supplement data collected through physical examination, biometric measures and laboratory testing, so that an overall assessment of the individual's health status becomes possible (CDC 22). The final goal is that of a shared decision-making process between practitioner and patient. This is to be achieved by gathering relevant information from the patients and then using this information to promote the patients'



clear understanding of their individual health risks and the necessity of behavioural change (idem 26).

The here observed entanglement of the patient in medical discourse was inaugurated by the workings of the *medical gaze*. As Foucault has argued in *The Birth of the Clinic*, modern medicine has fixed its date of birth when the organization of medical perception and intervention became largely influenced by clinical bodies of knowledge (xi-xii). Since then, the doctor's gaze has become increasingly dependent on the guidance of medical discourse in terms of where to look, what to see/say and what to treat. Problematically, however, this newborn corpus of encyclopaedic knowledge resembled a de-contextualized account of hypotheses that did not necessarily coincide with the patient's situation it was supposed to cure (idem 55-56). The sign discovered at the patient's bed no longer spoke solely the natural language of a disease manifest in the patient's body but assumed its shape and value within frames of pathological possibilities (Foucault, *Clinic* 162). Consequently, the medical gaze was no longer the intense look of the practitioner on the patient but that of an observer, guided and justified by the discourse of the clinical institution. As Foucault explains, this marked the birth of a gaze that is always receptive to the deviant and one that is not limited to observe what is self-evident and present – the medical gaze henceforth has become a calculating measure that makes it possible to outline the chances of future risks (*Clinic* 89-90).

This blurring of the distinction between health and illness by the introduction of probability meant that health care could no longer focus exclusively on the patient's body in the hospital bed. The actual focus has shifted towards the spread of probabilities in a potentially infinite number of clinical cases to estimate what disease pattern may follow from whatever kind of current situation (Bauman 80). Medical discourse thus left the hospital and permeated into the consciousness of the general population in the form of modern "surveillance medicine" (Armstrong 398). The tactics of surveillance medicine and the medicalisation of everyday life are hinged on the pivotal concept of risk. Health and illness no longer exist apart from each other as a binary pair but are mutually constitutive, depending on the future illness potential of risk factors that are associated with particular ways of life (idem 400). As Armstrong further notes, concerns with dieting, exercising and the avoidance of stress function as the prime vehicles for encouraging the community to survey itself (399). It follows that under surveillance medicine, concepts of health and diseases are rendered a matter of perpetual

becoming – delineating a new temporal risk identity within the environment of a precarious normality of wellbeing and fitness (idem 402-403).

As a result, medicine has secured the ability to discursively produce clinical states within all aspects of everyday life. Through the power-knowledge nexus of the diagnostic process, everyone can be declared as sick or prone to become sick – quite independently of how a person actually feels. Since sickness no longer speaks a “clear” language, the need of the individual as an “auxiliary doctor” has increased in order to perform the preventive role (Beck, *Risk Society* 205). The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sums up the issue succinctly: “The best way to stay healthy is to live a healthy life. You can live a healthy lifestyle and prevent disease by exercising, eating well, keeping a healthy weight, and not smoking” (HHS 2).

With this in mind, it is interesting to explore how the World Health Organization’s (WHO) practical guide to chronic disease advocacy *Stop the Global Epidemic of Chronic Disease* addresses the issues of awareness raising and communication in terms of global health problems. In addition to confirming that chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke and cancer are caused by risk factors (e.g. high blood pressure) and associated types of behaviour (lack of exercise), the WHO’s document promotes processes of influencing people at different levels to create change (13). On the national level, such campaigns can be implemented top down, assuring that ministries of health promote health advocacy among the general population by using educational materials and maintaining a continuously working relationship with the media. This may be achieved by “producing attractive news stories and running mass media programmes to inform and educate the public” (idem 20).

So noble and necessary the WHO’s cause may be, the mechanisms it promotes exemplify the workings of Mathiesen’s “Viewer Society” in a medicalized environment of surveillance, uncertainty and risk. The self-awareness of people as individuals at risk is purposefully produced. The several steps of the discursive formation of health-conscious individuals amalgamate in a joint-venture that comprises exterritorial bodies (up to level of the United Nations), governmental organizations (national institutions, including ministries of health), and the pervasive force of the ever-present synopticon (the mass media).

Publications like *Men's* and *Women's Health* do not only play an important role in this process, their popularity as a source of medical advice seems indicative of the reconfiguration of responsibility between the individual and the state. As Giddens explains, the welfare state of industrial modernity was founded against the backdrop of continuity and positive science. National health provision was thus understood as a solidary means to protect individuals from external risks that could harm them in the form of contagious diseases, unforeseeable events or accidents. At the bottom of this lay the understanding that a person got in harm's way due to reasons beyond his or her responsibility ("Risk and Responsibility" 7). With the advent of risk and uncertainty, however, the coordinates of collective and individual responsibilities shifted. Since risks only effectively exist when there are decisions to be taken, the responsibility for these decisions had to shift to those who presumably stood in the centre of risk. That is, as particular practices and behaviours became associated with diseases and dangers, external risks gave way to internal and individual risks that had to be addressed by the supposedly affected individuals themselves. The active assumption of responsibility has thus become part of the definition of late modernity's manufactured risk situations (idem 8-9).

Given the declining welfare state's notorious predilection for collective responsibility, it is not surprising that it has become the arch enemy of the neoliberal project. As David Harvey's explains in *A Short History of Neoliberalism* (11),

[n]eoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices [...] But beyond these tasks the state should not venture.

It is paramount that the state must never interfere with the free entrepreneurial individual, who has the right to pursue liberal freedoms and accumulate personal wealth. Thatcher once summed up the neoliberal credo in all brevity, matching the shortness of the time left for the British welfare state: "Let me give you my vision: a man's right to work as he will, to spend what he earns, to own property, to have the state as servant not as master: these are the British inheritance. They are the essence of a free country and on that freedom all our freedom depends" (Thatcher quoted in Hall, "Neoliberal Revolution" 706).

In its material sense, neoliberalism is a type of political rationality that attempts to subordinate the social domain to the requirements of the market by effectively reducing the welfare state's services to the increasing demand for deregulation, self-care and self-responsibility. The supposed harmony of the neoliberal chain of being can be traced in both the individual body and the collective bodies and institutions that extol their leanness, fitness, flexibility and autonomy. This suggests that the neoliberal deployment has succeeded in replacing the mechanisms of social engineering and collective regulation by a dispersed network of technologies of self regulation and consumption (Lemke 203).

Exploring the ensuing dualism between the social and the physical body, Mary Douglas has influentially argued that the former constrains the way in which the latter is perceived, so that each reinforces the categories of the other. The care a particular body is to be given in acculturation, feeding and therapy vis-à-vis the theories about what it needs in terms of sleep, exercise and procreation correlate closely with the broader conjuncture in which social life is implicated. The individual body thus functions as a symbolic constituent of the social fabric, meaningfully inscribing upon itself and reproducing the perceived requirements of its very inscriptions (69). As Bordo has similarly argued in her essay "Reading the Slender Body", the toned corporal fashion of our age reflects and reifies the predicament of the consumerist conjuncture. While everything appears to be commercially available, one must never capitulate to temptation. Individuals are responsible for the totality of their choices, ideally encoding in one body what seems impossible to achieve: the well managed self in which is all kept in order and moderation, despite the contradictory forces and possibilities offered in the do-it-yourself world (199-00).

At the very heart of this arguably lies the individual who is left alone. The endemic uncertainty that marks contemporary life denotes a basic ambivalence between the "neo-cultural" requirements of self-fulfilment and the new rationality of supposed economic liberty and risk. What was yesterday celebrated as a reflexive do-it-yourself biography may tomorrow signify social decline and morbidity (Beck, *World Risk Society* 12). In this (brave?) new world of individuals, society as we knew it has ceased to exist. Commercial advice has taken the place of mutual solidarity and collective organisation, with the consequence that one's actions depend on the examples of other individuals from which ways of dealing with one's own life may be deduced (Bauman 30). The most common troubles of today are no longer additive as was the Marxist struggle of the working classes against the ruling classes,

modern troubles are similar in a way that the advantage of the company of other sufferers is to reassure each person that the tedious task of corporal self fashioning is a mission of highest priority that everybody must accomplish on his or her own devices. Thus, refusing to participate in the collective state of the individualizing game is the only thing that is not on the agenda (idem 34-35).

Even though Foucault has thoughtfully cautioned us that modernity's investment in the panoptic machine has rendered us much less Greeks than we might believe – the argued absence of brutal public spectacle being the main reason for this (see *Discipline* 217) – the old Delphic maxim “know thyself” appears to be gaining new importance nevertheless. It may be appropriate to make a short excursus into Hellenistic mythology at this point. As Wilkins reports, on the old temple of Delphi, there were three inscriptions: *Know thyself*, *Nothing too much*, *Give a pledge or give security and trouble is at hand*, with the first of the three being of most significant influence both in ancient and modern times (2). In Aeschylus' *The Prometheus Bound* – according to Wilkins one of the earliest references to the Delphic maxim in literature (49) – we are presented with the tale of Prometheus, who persists in his course of serving mankind contrary to the intentions of Zeus. Zeus consequently punishes him but Prometheus does not see the fault on his side, cursing the ingratitude of Zeus who could only gain Heaven's throne through Prometheus' help. Okeanus then offers his services in effecting reconciliation with Zeus, urging Prometheus:

First, know thyself; get thee another fashion  
Of thoughts; another King bears rule in Heaven.  
But if thou fling such grievous-girding speech,  
Edged iron, Zeus, for all he sit so high.  
May haply hear and make the measure of wrath,  
Wherewith thou art exercised as now, a jest. (Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 309-314)

According to Wilkins, the plea is evidently that Prometheus shall know the measure of his strength when pitted against that of Zeus, and that he shall know his place as the king's subject (49). But that is not all; there is also the advice to reconsider present thought and behaviour as a necessary precondition to chart out future improvements. As Foucault explains, in Greek and Roman texts, the injunction of having to *know oneself* assumed the role of a technical advice, meaning that one had to take care of oneself before the Delphic principle could be brought into action. Without adhering to this principle, the oracle's advice

would not work. This precept was one of the main rules of social conduct and the art of life in ancient Greece (“Technologies” 19-20).

With the recent proliferation of “do it yourself” discourses reverberating through the media channels of the neoliberal project, the Delphic maxim’s original notion of being preoccupied with the care of oneself has arguably gained new popularity. Its modern-day appropriation “check yourself out”, I argue, constitutes a crucial skill of late modernity’s *technologies of the self*. Indeed, David Zinczenko, the U.S. editor of *Men’s Health* incites us to do just that in order to successfully improve our lives. We learn that we need to “check ourselves out” in order to find out whether areas of our professional and private life are out of balance and possible steering down the breakdown lane:

This month, as you plan your yearlong life-improvement agenda, *Men’s Health* is offering a series of self-tests that will help you grade your whole life. Find out if you have the kind of obsessive personality that makes your life goals possible – and your relationship impossible (page 77). Test whether you’re as fit you’d like to believe (page 116). Assess your sex life (page 124) – is it all it can be? Check your nutrition strategy to see whether it’s fully cooked or half-baked (page 130). And as you’re re-examining your goals for 2005, remember, objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear. (MH, January/February 2005, p. 14)

The extract both justifies and summarizes the theoretical scope I have claimed for this thesis. Individuals are encouraged to know themselves in order to effect particular operations on their bodies and souls to succeed with their seemingly mandatory yearlong life improvement agendas. Technologies of the modern self are in the centre of this continual transformation, assuring that the knowing subjects-to-be can recognize themselves and their deficiencies in relation to the discursive positions they are to assume as communicated by the media’s advice. The coordinates for the annual metamorphosis are clearly set: the disciplining and improvement of fitness, health and heterosexual pursuits.

To briefly recapitulate this section, Bauman’s concept of *Liquid Modernity* and Beck’s *Risk Society* thesis have been discussed in order to investigate the wider conjuncture in which issues of contemporary corporealities and health care are set. I have argued that late modernity’s general consciousness of affliction and uncertainty has led to a reconfiguration of science, politics and medicine, shifting responsibility from the collective to the individual. I have concluded that neoliberalism and media culture are the socio-political rationalities of this

conjuncture, in which gathering advice for the “do-it-yourself game” becomes a crucial technology of the modern self. The discussion of the theoretical frameworks required for my analysis is therefore complete. In the next section, I will introduce the research methods and define the objects of enquiry.

## 5. Methods and objects

*Men's Health* and *Women's Health* magazines have been identified as the objects for this study. A representative corpus of 17 *MH* and 9 *WH* magazines from the last decade (2003 – 2013) has been selected based on random choice. *MH* was launched in 1987 and has now reached a total circulation of between 1,800,000 and 1,900,000 copies per issue, literally dwarfing similar publications like *CQ* and *Men's Journal* with average circulations of 950,000 and 715,000 respectively (Alliance for Audited Media quoted in *MH*, *Media Kit*). *MH* claims to be the world's largest men's magazine with 40 editions worldwide and prides itself on being the number one source of information for and about men, defining itself as a brand for active, successful and professional men who want better control of their mental, emotional and physical lives (*MH*, *Media Kit*).

*WH* magazine has an impressive total circulation per issue too, reaching 1,500,000 in 2013; however, this about equals the statistics of *Fitness* and *Shape* with 1,500,000 and 1,600,000 copies per issue (*WH Media Kit*, *Circulation*). Similar to *MH*, *WH* claims to be a “must-have action plan for today's modern woman”, offering advice with regard to beauty, fitness and style. Besides, the *WH* brand constitutes a major economic force, driving more than 17 million consumers to buy products associated with making changes in their lives (*WH Media Kit*, *Mission Statement*).

The influence and popularity of both magazines focusing on health, fitness and lifestyle suggest that they provide readers with a view of the world and themselves that might be more appealing than that presented in other sources. Both publications are thus considered as representations that are capable of exemplifying current discourses relevant to issues of embodiment in terms of consumption (the commercialised body), self-responsible health care (the disciplinary body) and fit heterosexuality (the reproductive body). Accordingly, my analysis is divided in these three areas of investigation, exploring each of the three tropes in both magazines. I will trace the discourses of embodiment that promote these tropes,

investigate which forms of gendered body identities might emerge through which technologies of self-constitution and finally examine how the ensuing individuals are supposed to interact with each other, most notably by scrutinizing each publication's sections of relationship advice.

The method of this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as proposed by Fairclough and Gee. Since the three discursive tropes I seek to trace in this thesis are mediated through linguistic text, language arguably lies at the heart of things. As Weedon notes, language is the site where our subjectivities as well as the existent and imaginable forms of social interaction are defined and contested (21). Sharing this perspective, Cameron and Kulick define language as a shared social semiotic that is used creatively to construct and enact particular identities and social positions (102). Using the resources of language does therefore not mirror a reality that is already given but create a particular perspective with social and political implications (Gee 3-4). From this point of view, texts are understood as social events that encode particular sets of social possibilities by linguistic means. As the selection of certain semantic, grammatical and referential combinations in texts may exclude others, the various networks of social practices in their language aspect are continually reproduced or contested (Fairclough 23-24). In this process, texts can be seen as performing political work by assuming and representing as normal certain configurations of supposed textual and extra-textual "realities" that might either challenge or support a particular status quo (Gee 2). The critical purchase of CDA for this paper therefore lies in the method's suitability to trace discursive tropes that may reside within the structures of particular texts, implicitly and explicitly propagating the signifying economies I seek to account for.

A large body of research is comfortable with the above outlined view of texts as artefacts that both shape and are shaped by socio-cultural and politico-economic realities. CDA has established itself as an interdisciplinary approach that is pursued and theorized in numerous academic journals, including *Discourse and Society*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, and *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* (Poole 138). As Wodak points out, one crucial advantage of the method is to make some of the language related complexities of social interaction more accessible to researchers, offering them an interdisciplinary framework to account for the manifestation and reproduction of power relations played out at the nexus of text and discourse (187).



The concept of CDA has come under fire too, with Widdowson being one of the more persistent critics. While he acknowledges that CDA “is linguistics with a conscience and a cause”, seeking to expose how language is used in the exercise of power and the violation of human rights (Widdowson 136), he accuses the model of being an “*ad hoc* bricolage” which borrows from several linguistic and cultural theories whatever concept that appears useful (137). In pointing out the lack of one overarching theory of CDA as a shortcoming of the approach, Widdowson’s ignores that CDA is conceptualized as a research program with a strong interdisciplinary focus, incorporating numerous different methodological and theoretical approaches. As Gee points out, it is important to understand that CDA is not designed to function like an arithmetic procedure that can be followed step by step in a linear mode to get guaranteed results. The method’s goal is rather to adopt and adapt specific tools of inquiry and formulate strategies for implementing them, depending on the specificity of the situation. It follows that the tools and strategies of CDA must remain flexible to be continually adaptable to specific purposes, problems, and contexts of study. As the framework is applied in practice, it is by its nature continually transformed (6). For example, concepts such as *assumptions* (e.g. whether something is accepted as existing, good or bad), *intertextuality* (e.g. which voices are included or excluded in a text) and *evaluations* (preferred ways to interpret a text) will be particular helpful for this thesis.

Widdowson’s case against CDA is further based on the allegation that the concept neglects to specify which textual items should be selected for analysis as potential carriers of covert ideological tendencies. As he argues, the choice and interpretation of textual features is subjective and therefore only provides evidence of what the analyst reads into it, rendering CDA a partial endeavour without a clear conceptual scheme, so that “all [critical discourse analysts] can do is interpret other discourses on their own terms“ (Widdowson 149). As Wodak suggests, such an understanding ignores the fact that “a right interpretation” of texts does not exist and that therefore a hermeneutic approach like CDA becomes necessary. Interpretations of texts are always individual and they can only be more or less plausible but never universally true (187). CDA seeks to account for possible ways of reading texts, acknowledging both its necessary selectiveness and lack of exhaustive explanations. As in any social analysis, certain questions about certain texts are rather asked than others and the choice is ultimately up to the researchers and his or her focus of inquiry (Fairclough 14). As Poole has noted in this regard, “CDA can further any cause” (149-50) – but this only gives the

concept a bad name if one pursues the fantasy of research findings that are immune to alternative interpretations.

Following Wodak, Fairclough and Gee, this thesis considers CDA as a valuable method to expose possible ways of reading and understanding the discursive structures under survey. It is not my goal to offer one “right” interpretation of the textual representations I am interested in but to suggest how they plausibly might facilitate the readers’ understanding of their bodies and their selves. I will thus trace what Cortazzi and Jin have described as the *evaluation* of a text, meaning the way in which the point of the narrative may be understood (103). As Cortazzi and Jin remind us, the process of evaluation is not to be dismissed as an irrelevant matter. Making sense of stories is a major technology of both individual self realization and collective identity. Since our life stories exemplify ways of narrative construction, the evaluation of them helps us understand ourselves and the world around us (118-119). In this regard, Howard Gardner’s seminal work *Leading Minds* has pointed out that the successful communication of narratives about group identities, value systems and shared meanings is a vital component of social leadership that operates via the manipulation of the human mind (42-43). These are issues to be investigated in the following sections.

## **6. Analysis and heuristics**

Taking the perspective of CDA in a paper with a theoretical framework that is partly based on Foucault’s concept of *discourse* makes necessary a brief distinction between two concepts of discourse and also a short discussion of their interrelation as far as relevant for this thesis. I borrow here for practical reasons Gee’s distinction between discourse with a little “d” and discourse with a capital “D” (6). Discourse with a capital “D” refers more or less to the sets of social processes that Foucault has described as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 49). In the Foucauldian sense, capital “D” discourses are organized and organizing bodies of knowledge that enable us to speak meaningfully about the world and create meaning at the same time. Little “d” discourses, on the other side, refer to the various acts of speaking and writing as they are deeply implicated in the various performances of social life. This *language in use* is in a co-constitutive relationship with discourse with capital “D”. As we use language and interpret the language use of others, we sustain, reproduce, transform or shatter the meaningful categories that permeate and shape human existence post signification (Gee 7).

Having stated that this paper is concerned with language as a social practice relevant to issues of subjectivity and identification, I will henceforth differentiate between *text* (meaning language in use) and *discourse* (meaning shared bodies of knowledge). I will trace current discourses in *MH* and *WH* that are relevant to issues of embodiment in terms of consumption (the commercialised body), self-responsible health-care (the disciplinary body) and reproductive sexuality (the reproductive body). My analysis is divided in these three areas of investigation, exploring each of the three tropes in both magazines. I will investigate the discourses of embodiment that promote these tropes in the texts, examine which forms of identities might emerge through which technologies of self-constitution and finally analyse how the ensuing individuals are supposed to interact with each other. The latter will be done by scrutinizing each publication's sections of relationship advice.

The selected magazine articles are considered representative textual instances of the issues under review. Tracing the discourses I have outlined above will involve asking questions about how language in the texts is used to construe the aspects of the situation network of the socio-political conjuncture in which the formation / reception of the texts is argued to take place (risk, consumerism and heteronormativity) and how aspects of this situation network simultaneously might give meaning to the texts (Gee 92). What I am interested in is thus not only a description of language but the tandem between language and action, ways of thinking and valuing, and technologies of self-fashioning that might plausibly constitute the link between texts, ways of self-understanding and experienced "realities" of everyday life. Gee's proposed heuristic course for this analytical undertaking suggests the investigation of six areas that may elucidate how a particular textual representation is interwoven with the wider social fabric (12):

1. *Meaning and value*: How does the text accord meaning and value to instances of social interaction?
2. *Activities*: What activities are represented in the text?
3. *Identities and relationships*: What types of socio-cultural identities and relationships are represented, normalized or discouraged in the text?
4. *Politics*: What forms of behaviour are legitimated and who is licensed to act in which way?
5. *Connections*: What forms of logical and semantic connections are favoured / discouraged by the texts?

6. *Semiotics*: What types of signifying economies are sustained or challenged in the text?

The subsequent analytical step entails the investigation of how the above listed aspects converge with linguistic elements in the texts. Taking into account *situated meanings* and *cultural models* is helpful in this regard. Situated meanings are those adapted each time to the specific context they are used in (Gee 50). For instance, the injunction “sculpt sexy curves” in a women’s lifestyle magazine may arguably provoke the image of a particularly formed female body in the making, whereas the road sign “dangerous curves ahead” would probably not be understood to refer to curvy women at the side of the road other than in jest. What is important to observe here, is that all situated meanings depend on the larger cultural models they are associated with (idem 50). The heteronormative background knowledge of the “sexy woman” renders the injunction intelligible and the road sign (probably) funny. Analysing text will thus involve picking relevant key words and phrases in the data (e.g. sculpt sexy curves) and asking what situated meanings these elements appear to have in the data, taking into account the overall context in which the data has occurred. The goal is then to establish a link between the situated meanings in the text and the cultural models these meanings appear to implicate (Gee 97).

In less obvious ways, linguistic details may be indicative of how situated meanings and cultural models are encoded in textual data. Textual properties such as *existential assumptions* (whether something exists) or *value assumptions* (whether something is good or bad) can play an important role as they allow for the construction of coherent semantic relations in accordance with the orders of discourse they may be associated with (Fairclough 55-56). For example, a caption reading “Fight fat – and win” assumes as given that readers have issues with fat and that fat is necessarily unwanted since it is represented as an enemy that must be fought. The social option of appreciating fat as a natural part of one’s body is effectively excluded in the text and a particular understanding of the ideal human physique as the slender body is promoted.

This necessitates a reflexion on the issue of validity. CDA is not constituted as valid by arguing that a particular interpretation of text reflects reality (Gee 94). It is rather that the analytical interpretation of data should be validated against related sets of data and other researchers’ findings, addressing similar issues with regard to similar questions. The larger the degree of convergence, the higher the validity of the results will be (idem 194-95). For

example, if I argue that the textual instance “Fight fat – and win” promotes the discourse of the idealized slender body by means of a particular combination of linguistic elements, situated meanings and cultural models, I should be able to support this hypothesis by referring to other research, such as Bordo’s essay “Reading the Slender Body”, which has arrived at similar conclusions.

In summary, CDA requires an initial localisation of the general discursive themes relevant to the texts under review. Then, the language choices in the texts are scrutinized in order to investigate how discourses may be recognized or reworked in the data. The approach I have chosen is thus twofold. As a first step, I will draw from Gee’s heuristic outlined above and define the discursive structures relevant to the magazine texts:

*1. Discourse, activities and identity*

- a) What discourses of the body are drawn up and what types of identification are promoted by the types of interaction and activities represented in the texts?
- b) What norm-value systems are sustained and how do they relate to the wider conjuncture of late modernity?

Secondly, I will turn towards combinations of linguistic elements in the texts and ask how they might relate to the larger discourses identified above. Where applicable, this will be done by the following analytical resources proposed by Gee (50) and Fairclough (191-94):

*2. Situational meaning, difference, intertextuality, framing and assumptions*

- a) Which types of situational meanings might be indicative of particular cultural models?
- b) Is there a bracketing of difference or recognition of difference?
- c) Which other texts or voices are included or possibly excluded?
- d) How are these voices contextualized and framed?
- e) Are value assumptions and existential assumptions made in the text that might be indicative of any such inclusions and exclusions?

*3. Modality, evaluation and calls for action*

- a) What are the markers of modality in the text and what level of commitment on side of the authors may be inferred?

- b) To what values do the authors of the text commit themselves and how should these values be realized in terms of calls for action?

Finally, the results will be discussed and validated with regard to relevant findings in the research literature. Where instructive, images will be taken into account as well. The complete methodological framework for the enquiry conducted in this section can thus be presented in the following form:

**Table 1: Methodological Framework for the Analysis of *MH* and *WH* Magazines**

<b>1. Identification of general tropes concerning the body in terms of the</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commercialised body</li> <li>• disciplinary body</li> <li>• reproductive body</li> </ul>	<b>2. Difference, Intertextuality, Framing and Assumptions</b>	<b>3. Modality and Evaluation</b>
<p>.-What discourses of the body are drawn up in the texts and what types of identification are promoted by the types of interaction and activities represented in the texts?</p> <p>.-What norm-value systems are sustained and how do they relate to the wider conjuncture of late modernity?</p>	<p>.-Which types of situational meanings might be indicative of particular cultural models?</p> <p>.-How is difference handled in the text?</p> <p>.-Which voices are included, how are they framed and what may be the implications?</p> <p>.-What types of assumptions can be identified in the text?</p>	<p>.-Markers of modality in the text and commitment of authors?</p> <p>.-What types of evaluations are promoted, what actions may follow?</p>
<b>4. Discussion and contextualization of findings with regard to prior research addressing similar issues</b>		

A preliminary survey of the samples has revealed that individual texts often encode more than one of the tropes I seek to trace. For instance, textual choices that may signal the implication of the body in networks of individualized health-care may simultaneously relate to discursive structures of compulsory consumerism and heteronormative attraction. As I will show, the resulting hybridity of all three tropes supports the overall hypothesis of this paper: namely that a triangular subject constitution via means of popular culture is under way. The first part of this threefold intervention will be investigated in the following section, which deals with the “making of the commercialised body” in *MH* and *WH* magazines.

## **6.1. Fashioning the commercialised body**

Opening just any of the *Men's* or *Women's Health* magazines under survey will instantly confront one with the “body on display”, which Kirk has identified as a modern corporeality that is visually represented as part of a larger commercial layout. The combination of values concomitant with particular body shapes and products thus effectively repackages associations between bodies, consumer goods and cultural capital in a way that the various economies of choice that underlie late consumer societies are continuously reproduced (83). By this means, consumer culture represents the “good life” as available for purchase and encourages people to stitch together goods and experiences that shall help them lead socially meaningful and seemingly acceptable ways of life (Featherstone 200). For Giddens, such tendencies are indicative of the compulsory nature of consumer oriented lifestyles in our time. As he holds, people are no longer just allowed to lead a particular lifestyle; consumer culture literally forces them to do so in order to give material form to a particular story of self-identity (*Modernity* 81).

### **6.1.2. Men's magazines**

In *Men's Health*, the story of customizable self-identities is frequently linked to fashion and the body. In the September issue of 2005, under the rubric “Icons of Style”, Donnie Deutsch's personal fashion history is revealed (58). Deutsch is introduced as the host of CNBC's successful format *The Big Idea* and the article about him is titled “Dress like the top dog”. The text gives a brief overview on Deutsch's celebrity career and explicitly links his professional development to lifestyle and fashion, implying that the two are connected very closely. Readers learn that Deutsch worked in his father's advertising agency at the beginning of his career. During that time, he describes himself as “a young kid fresh out of college” with the desire “to prove to the world that he was a serious businessman”, wearing “preppy suits with braces and wingtips”. After his father had retired, he eventually became “the guy”. In order to underscore his top position, he “immediately switched to three-piece suits from Ralph Lauren Purple Label to dress the part”. Later in his career, however, as his company was named “Agency of the Year” by *Advertising Week*, Deutsch's attitude towards fashion changed: “I finally felt successful in my own right. That's when I said to myself, you know what – I can dress any way I want.” Instead of suits, he now opts for a more casual outfit, including “a cool pair of pants and a pullover sweater.” As it appears, the top position in the

advertising industry has granted Deutsch more freedom with regard to his sartorial options. But has it also in terms of commodity value? We learn that “quality is [still] the key to his fashion choices”. Deutsch continues: “I don’t want to say that I’m extravagant, but yeah, I’ll spend a lot on a funky libertine shirt, a shearling jacket, or a great pair of jeans. That’s how I chart my course. And you know what, people kind of like it. They see me as the guy who’s a bit out of the box, not a typical CEO” (idem 58).

The extract exemplifies the magazine’s commonly observed theme of consumption-related transformation through the elaboration of distinctive activities and cultural styles. As Featherstone suggests, this ability to alter one’s appearance by means of consumption is a central concern of consumer culture, which implies that the combination of particular choices is a fundamental condition for a positive self-image and a better quality of life (197). As Deutsch’s narrative illustrates, the motivation to opt for a particular type of wardrobe is correlated with distinct socio-economic positions, so that each level of participation in the social field is associated with a particular self-image vis-à-vis a range of more or less adequate things to do and clothes to wear. However, as individuals advance in societal recognition, they appear to be granted more freedom. Those on top of the social ladder can afford “dressing the part of the top dog” by underscoring a tendency of understatement in order to be “out of the box”. Clearly, the imperatives of consumer culture nevertheless remain in effect. In the text, the understated presentation of the self is represented as an art of life, linked to clever choices of expensive products and the ability to integrate what one is doing into a personal story of success. The extract’s ending “at the end of the day, it’s not who (the brand) you are wearing, it’s how you’re wearing it” hints at what Giddens has identified as one of the existential challenges of self-identity in the late modern context. The nature of a person’s identity is not so much found in the specificity his or her behaviour but in the ability to keep a coherent narrative about these choices going (*Modernity* 54).

It follows that questions about fashion and bodily appearance are no longer exclusively regarded as a private matter. In this context, *MH*’s October issue of 2005 exemplifies how style may affect an individual’s progress on the corporate ladder. In an article titled “What should I wear to work – eight sartorial strategies straight from 50 of the nation’s top business leaders”, men are taught which clothes they should wear in particular work-related settings, ranging from formal dinners with clients to acceptable looks for casual Fridays (200-07). Particularly striking is the link that is made between fashion and attitude at the workplace,



which indicates that in consumer culture, appearance may quickly be associated with moral standing: “Who wants a sloppy employee in an era where you can go to jail for reporting incorrect financial data?” asks Tom Markert, global chief of marketing at ACNielsen (idem 201). As Featherstone points out, such articulations are concerning since they literary force individuals to buy specific products in order to avoid social stigma (195). By implication, those who cannot afford or do not wish to wear the “right” clothes are put at a considerable disadvantage.

The next example foregrounds the link between fashion and the body. The article under review is part of the magazine’s section “Your Best Year Ever” and presents several self-improvement strategies for the New Year. The article’s caption reads “Change your clothes – change your body” and the subtext below promises men “five shape-shifting strategies for fine-tuning [their] image” (MH, January/February 2005, p.140). As can be observed in the text, the “New Year” is linked to strategies of sartorial restyling that shall promote a better image of the body. Transformation is thus foregrounded as a necessity to make the coming year the “best year ever”, implying that readers are neither satisfied with their bodies nor their clothes. To address these supposed issues of the magazine’s readership, men are advised on how to “dress taller”:

Muted, dark-toned ensembles blur your silhouette, creating a long look. Let pinstripes stretch your frame even further: They fool the eye. ‘When the eye is directed along the stripe, the body appears more vertical,’ says Marilyn DeLong, Ph.D., who teaches design and aesthetics of the University of Minnesota. Make sure your suit jacket covers your butt without extending much farther down: A short jacket will emphasize the line of your legs, making you appear taller. Conversely, a jacket that is too long will shrink your legs. (idem 141)

The language used in the text arguably carries connotations one might rather associate with women’s lifestyle magazines than the men’s media. There are references to “dark-toned ensembles” that shall create a “long look” by blurring the supposedly lacking “male silhouette” in order to “stretch the frame even further”. Furthermore, there is a clear emphasis on the potential of jackets to either emphasise “the line of legs” or “shrink the legs”. As Dworkin and Wachs point out, such playful language and imagery is indicative of recent tendencies in consumer culture to represent male subjecthood in an objectified manner, with the consequence that both men and women are increasingly treated as objects to the gaze (33). For Alexander, this mirrors a general shift of masculine identities from an active role in

production (the professional sphere in earlier days) to a form of objectified and feminized subjectivity that is increasingly based on the consumption of brand-name products (536).

Indicative of this argued shift in the representation of masculine identities towards less action driven and more feminized subjectivities is the recommendation to “dress slimmer”, taken from the same article I have discussed above:

Okay, you have logged the gym time and you want to show off what you’ve built. Just don’t go too crazy flaunting your musculature. ‘It’s a turnoff for most people, says Mark-Evan Blackman, chairman of menswear design at New York City’s Fashion Institute of Technology. ‘It’s the same reason Speedos aren’t popular and board shorts are: A little mystery goes a long way in a physique. (MH, January/February 2005, p.142)

As can be observed, the text initially presents a more traditional concept of masculinity that is equated with the display of power and physical strength (see Hanlon 1). It is assumed that men attend to their bodies at the gym, so that they can subsequently “show off” what they have built. However, quite contrary to this notion, there is also an explicit warning that an overemphasis on the display of musculature may turn people off vis-à-vis the hint that less can be more when particular visual strategies are observed. Consequently, the evaluations that are promoted by the two extracts are ambiguous. On the one hand, there is the assumption that men engage in supposedly masculine activities “by logging gym time” and “showing off what they have built” – which reifies the image of an unproblematic and powerful masculinity – and on the other hand, this masculine image is represented as unwanted besides the concession that the male body may be imperfect, so that commercial-cum-sartorial strategies are required in order to make up for the perceived lack of physical appearance. Following the article’s advice shall thus help men to either dress “taller” or “slimmer”, which implies that the ideal male physique is narrowly defined and therefore difficult to achieve. This overall uncertainty hints at what Chesebro and Fuse have described as a common tension underlying contemporary masculinities:

[M]ost men continue to be attracted to, hope to find solace in, and believe that masculinity is a centrally and critically defining self-conception. At the same time, they recognize that masculinity is now problematic [...] Rather than providing a respected and enabling emblem and socially sanctioned blueprint for behavior, masculinity is now recognized as an issue—if not a problem—men must grapple with, predominantly on an individual level. (206)

As the quote suggests, contemporary men may still cling to the imagined ideal of a supposedly undisturbed masculine past, while they increasingly become aware that they have to adapt to newly emerging cultural forces. Concerning the body, major changes in the socio-economic setting of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have displaced the need for brute strength and the powerful labouring body, while the image of the well shaped masculine physique has begun to invade the arena of popular culture. The body for hard use, as it was once associated with manual labour of the working class, has thus been superseded by the fit “body for display” (Benson 144-45). This newly embodied and gazed-upon icon of consumer culture has come to maintain a keen interest in its appearance, ultimately protecting its self-designated dominance via the communication of a new masculine ideal, notwithstanding its *de facto* objectification. (Patterson and Elliot 235).

Arguably, the proclaimed feminization of the male body and its incorporation into advertising and consumer culture may imply a constant tension between actual bodies and the ripped and toned ideal that is featured on contemporary magazine covers; however, the ways in which the idealized types of magazine masculinities present and sustain themselves suggest that the powerful imagery of the cover model may hint at a new type of hegemonic masculinity that carries with it strong patriarchal and economic power over other men and women (Dworkin and Wachs 66). As I will discuss in the remainder of this subsection, this becomes evident with regard to the magazines’ tendency to represent (white) men as strong economic players, who appropriate high-toned consumer choices in order to underscore their seemingly privileged standing in the social field.

In this context, it is instructive to return to the concept of “gay vague”, which I have briefly mentioned at the beginning of this manuscript. Gay vague refers to the implicit use of gay imagery in explicitly heterosexual contexts (such as *MH*), with the goal to attract the financially potent demographic of gay consumers (Dworkin and Wachs 56). Recapitulating the two extracts from the article discussed above, I would argue that it is possible to read them as a reference to non-heterosexual readers: “Muted, dark-toned ensembles blur your silhouette, creating a long look. Let pinstripes stretch your frame even further: They fool the eye” (*MH*, January/February 2005, p.141). As it appears, the image of the (straight?) male body is ironically deconstructed as inappropriate and subsequently recomposed frivolously to please the scrutinizing gaze. Similarly, gay audiences may be implicitly invited to understand the textual reference “a little mystery goes a long way in a physique”, combined with the two

signifiers “Speedos” and “board shorts” (ibid) in a subculturally specific way that may not be immediately accessible to heterosexual mainstream readers.

**Figure 1: An example of “gay vague”**



This ad of men's underwear exemplifies the notion of „gay vague“. The cut-out male torso promotes a clear focus on the model's crotch area in a way that “those in the know” may be encouraged to identify subcultural codes, hinting at a male object of desire that invites other men to gaze upon. (MH September 2004, p.23)

The ambiguity between supposedly heterosexualized representations of the body and differently oriented subcultural codes may also be observed in the following example. In an article titled “The secrets of smart style” (MH May 2004, p. 189-93), men learn about “the secret of the naked Greek guy”:

[T]here is an ideal male physique; not for function but for fashion. The Western icon of maleness is 6'1", 185 pounds, ripped through the middle, with a V-shaped torso. He's Middle Man – tall enough to be a presence in any room but not large enough to frighten the kids. Neither too muscled but too thin, he's the guy who posed for those statues in ancient Greece. Even as you affirm the wonder of you, keep Mr. Perfect in mind. (idem 190)

Besides the possibility to identify non-heterosexual connotations in the imagery of naked guys posing for statues in ancient Greece (an image men are encouraged to keep in mind), it is further noticeable that the ideal male physique is explicitly exalted as one for fashion and not for function. While this confirms Patterson and Elliot's finding that the body for hard use has

made way for the body for display (234), the article's construction of the perfect body can also be identified as indicative for the general tendency in consumer culture to incite individuals "to take an instrumental attitude towards their bodies, to scrutinize themselves for imperfections and to measure-up to the ideal bodies presented in the advertising media" (Featherstone 207). So, if it is true that "gay vague" plays a role in the meaning making potential of mainstream men's health magazines, the upshot is that the hegemonic ideal of the fit and V-shaped body has come to address and affect the behaviour of wider audiences than previous research might have expected<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the plausibility of "gay vague" in *Men's Health*, it should be pointed out that the main target audience of the magazine is heterosexual and that the readers' consumption habits are predominantly linked to supposedly heterosexual pursuits. As I have noted, research has argued that practices of consumption are still predominantly associated with femininity (Alexander 536). However, since male identities are increasingly based on consumption too, there has developed a tendency to "masculinise" consumer practices and products that specifically target men by linking them to activities that are conventionally accepted as masculine, with the goal that men lose their argued fears to engage in cultural practices around their bodies that have hitherto been associated with women (Dworkin and Wachs 49).

As the following example illustrates in this regard, sartorial expertise is represented as an important strategic factor in the process of courting women. Readers are advised to "seduce women with style" (MH December 2005, p.172-79) and learn "what a man should wear if he wants his clothes torn off" (172). The article teaches men how to dress on a first date, which pants and underpants women may find attractive, which shoes are appropriate for what occasion and finally, what men should consider wearing when meeting their partner's parents. The layout of the article's text is interwoven with images that present white men in different wardrobes, accompanied by respective footnotes which indicate the prices of the products and where they may be bought. Scrutiny of the price tags immediately reveals that the majority of items is targeted at a wealthy demographic. The sartorial range includes cashmere sweaters for 770 US-Dollars, Dolce & Gabbana shoes for 680 US-Dollars and True Religion Brand Jeans for almost half of that price. It is thus implied that the heterosexual pursuits represented in this context are likely to be successful if men are prepared to spend considerably amounts

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<sup>3</sup> As I have noted in section 3 of this thesis, many studies on men's magazines (e.g. (Alexander 535, Boni 476, Crawshaw 1608) focus on the analysis of messages directed at supposedly heterosexual audiences, while they do not investigate how gay readers may appropriate such codes in sub-culturally specific ways.

of money on their outfits. Consequently, the limited frame of the white heterosexual consumer excludes individuals from less affluent financial backgrounds and non-white ethnicities.

In the next example, a similar instance of “masculinisation” of consumer goods can be observed in the form of a leather jacket that is linked to sexual power and supposed masculine ideals. Readers are addressed by the caption “When you want to look sexy show her some skin” (MH October 2013, p. 96). They then learn the following:

A leather jacket speaks to every guy, maybe it mumbles like Brando, sneers like Billy Idol or says nothing – and yet everything – in an impossible cool way, like Steve McQueen. ‘A leather jacket conveys confidence. And its functional history only enhances its cool. After World War II, pilots and military motorcyclists wore their leather jackets as winter coats. They were local heroes and were proud to wear their uniforms’, says Beth Dincuff Charleston, acting curator of the Parson Fashion Archive. Leather was soon appropriated by bikers – the hide protected their own hides from the asphalt and signalled defiance. Beatniks, rock stars and punks later agreed. ‘No matter how you wear black leather, it’s edgy’, says Dincuff Charleston. It’s all about the tactile qualities of leather. Plus, it’s probably the most masculine material a man can wear because it’s so primitive. It’s animal skin. (96)

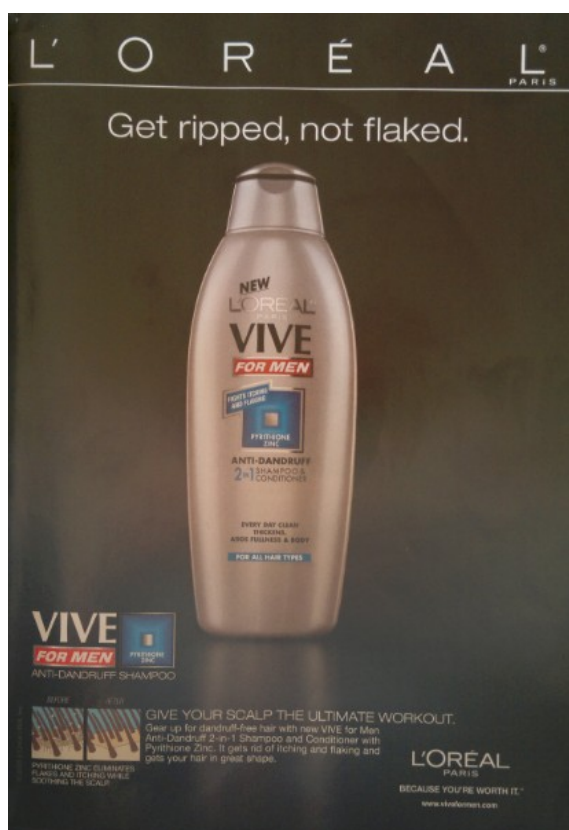
The article continues with an injunction to buy a rugged leather jacket from a Detroit based designer – with a retail price of 2,000 US Dollars – and closes with the remark that the said jacket will reflect some its cool attitude back on its wearer. The text is indicative of linking consumer practices and products to supposedly masculine archetypes and forms of behaviour. Foregrounded is the imperative of coolness that is explicitly connected to celebrities like Marlon Brando and Steve McQueen. The implied common cultural background knowledge of the Hollywood tough guy invites the reader to identify with the “every guy” in the first line, to whom the coolness factor of the said garment shall speak. Furthermore, there is a reference to pilots and motorcyclists. They are described as “local heroes” who use leather jackets to protect themselves from the hostile environments in which their argued pursuits are set. The preferred evaluation of the text – to buy a jacket and feel like a hero – is ultimately promoted by the last two sentences “it’s probably the most masculine material a man can wear because it’s so primitive. It’s animal skin”. The notion of being a “real” man is explicitly linked to primitivism and the wearing of animal skin, which arguably reifies the purchase of an expensive designer jacket as an act of primordial masculine expression that “naturally” relates to the assumed animal instincts of the male magazine readers. By implication, stereotypical associations between men, bravery and brute force are sustained and reproduced.

Besides wardrobe, grooming products are sold in masculinised ways too. Even though some men are said to be “beyond soap and hope”, the same-titled article assures readers that the use of perfume will help them look and smell better all day:

We continue to believe that men should simply shower and strive to smell like soap and hope. But for the woman whose attention we most want, it seems like a trace of fragrance from a bottle, a whisper of citrus, a waft of leather or musk as she cruises by. Apparently, the finishing touch of a scent marks you as a detail guy who might be good at working her details, if you get our drift (MH March 2006, p. 22).

Implying that grooming is not exactly masculine, the author of the article sides with his supposedly heterosexual and possibly sceptic audience by assuring men that among “us guys” (the initial *we* in the text), taking a shower and smelling like soap is all that is required. However, since the overall goal of the article is to incite men to buy perfume (e.g. Bond No. 9 for 185 US Dollars), the voice of “the woman” is introduced in the text as an unspecified but assumedly desired feminine other. This enables the author to argue via *her* voice and persuade male consumers that the supposedly feminine technologies of using scent will further their success with women, a pursuit that is dominantly connoted as masculine.

**Figure 2: Masculinising grooming products**



The tendency to re-appropriate cosmetic products as masculine can be observed in this ad. The cultural ideal of the muscular and ripped body is linked to practices of grooming via the injunction “give your scalp the ultimate workout”, which reifies the notion of the fit male individual who practices both body work and body care. (MH September 2005, p. 63)

In summary, this subsection has dealt with the male body in consumer culture and discussed examples that demonstrate how men are increasingly represented as buyers of brand-name products, a role which has predominantly been associated with women. My analysis has further suggested that male consumption habits are frequently linked to supposedly masculinised fields of experience, such as financial power, physical strength and courting women. Thus, the narrowly defined ideal of the wealthy heterosexual consumer is reified as the desired outcome of informed choices that focus on transforming the body by means of technologies of modification, including body work, dressing and grooming. I have noted that the image of the fit body may also promote counter hegemonic ways of reading. As I have shown, it is possible to interpret contents of the magazines under review as “gay vague”, which means that they implicitly carry cultural codes that may function to commercially target “those in the know”, without the majority of non-gay readers being aware of it. In conclusion, the construction of the idealised male consumer body constitutes a powerful hegemonic ideal that privileges only a small demographic of wealthy individuals who are able to adopt technologies of self-transformation that entitle them to exert cultural power over women and less affluent men (e.g. “dress to seduce her” or “dress like the top dog”). The following subsection will turn towards the entanglement of the female body in consumer culture and investigate which types of subjectivities are produced in that gendered context.

### **6.1.2. Women’s magazines**

It has been pointed out that in contemporary consumer culture, the notion of “doing beauty” is closely linked to the embodiment of a narrowly defined cultural ideal of femininity in terms of body shape, skin complexion, and size (Lazar 37). Feminist scholars have criticised such models as restrictive and oppressive to women, emphasizing that constant watchfulness and strenuous work on the body are potentially harmful procedures which may lead to pathological conditions such as anorexia nervosa and dissatisfaction with the body (Bordo 202). There is, however, another important and hitherto less explored link between contemporary beauty practices and the liberating voice of feminism. As Lazar points out, advertising and the life style media have strategically reshaped the critical dialogue between commercial beautification and feminist perspectives by resignifying the latter as conducive to the embodiment of a novel kind of liberated femininity that shall blend with feminist consciousness. As a consequence, beauty treatments are increasingly marketed as offerings that shall promote a supposedly emancipated feminine self, while they in fact induce a false



consciousness of freedom that disguises women's entrapment in restrictive consumer economies (Lazar 37-38). As I will show, the magazines under survey indeed appear to privilege the busy, wealthy and supposedly emancipated female consumer on a constant quest for self improvement vis-à-vis an underlying consciousness of choice-feminist attitudes. However, the available choices fall within a narrow range. They mostly oscillate between transformations of the body towards preset ideals, the imperative of choosing the "right" brand products and the development of life-skills cum technologies of the self to remain an economically successful player in the consumer world.

Indicative of the conflation of women's supposed agency and compulsory consumption is the editor's letter in *MH's* September/October Issue of 2013. Farrah Storr (the editor) introduces the magazine's "beautiful fashion supplement" as one that contains "more than 20 pages of stunning, wearable fashion for on-the-go women just like you". She continues: "We know that you are busy, whether that means careering about after the kids, doing your job, or even shuttling back and forth to the gym. So we have tried to bring together clothes that work as hard as you do, outfits that can double up as high end sports gear, and trainers that are as acceptable for a run as they are for dinner out with friends" (3). As the text exemplifies, the contemporary woman consumer is represented as an active, hard-working individual who is constantly "on-the-go", either looking after her children or attending to her physique at the gym. It is notable that there is no reference to a male counterpart with regard to childcare, implying that the responsibilities of maternity are assigned unilaterally to women. As Beck holds, this tendency mirrors the emergence of *institutionalized individualism* as a new social rationality within the dissolving solidarity of the neoliberal economy, signifying the obligation for individuals to understand, plan and design their lives as self-responsible individuals, who – should the fail – must only blame themselves (*World Risk Society* 9).

The threat of failure to accomplish the "right" type of bodily appearance is omnipresent in the *WH* magazines I have reviewed. To a greater extent than in the men's media discussed above (notable is the similarity in language though), there is a clear emphasis on sartorial items and beauty products that shall help conceal and/or enhance one's imperfect physique. These commodities range from lace dresses that are "elegant enough for dinner but sexy enough for after dinner dancing" (*WH* September 2011, p. 9) to "business suited, ankle-length pants that are great for showing off shoes" (idem 14). In the "Shop Your Shape" rubric of *WH's* January/February issue of 2012, it is further implied that no female body is ever perfect and

thus in need of commercially available modifications that may flatter suboptimal physical proportions. Women are either advised to buy “drop-crotch styling pants” that shall help them “conceal a bigger bottom and fuller thighs” or to opt for “a tapered relaxed-fit style that creates the illusion of a curvier lower half” (48). The apparent paradox is that curvier women are advised to conceal their curves, while less-than-curve women are incited to buy clothes that create the illusion of a curvier physique.

Besides representations of commodities that promise to liberate the potentially imperfect female body from its perceived shortcomings, one can observe the marketing of products that shall help women master their supposedly insecure inner selves. In the *WH* April issue of 2012, perfume is touted as “liquid courage” that promises “confidence, energy and sex appeal”, functioning as the “best performance enhancer you have ever tried” (26). This claim is then supported by means of including the voices of “scent scientists”, whose “research suggests that the fragrance on your wrist (or wafting through the air) affects far more than your mood: It can actually change the way you behave”. How this all might work is then described by quoting a further expert: Neurologist Alan Hirsch, M.D., of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago, explains that scents trigger neural responses that quickly induce positive changes in people’s moods, so that they appear to view things in a less critical way. As a consequence, the article continues, “you can manipulate your feelings and actions (and those of others!) to your advantage”, implying that the right choice of odour may serve as a strategic asset in everyday life. Why and where such “chemical warfare” may be needed is revealed at the bottom of the page. Readers are confronted with the likely familiar scenario of a job interview. They are reminded that they want to feel and act “self-assured, conscientious and calm<sup>4</sup>” and should thus “spritz a light floral or earthy musk with a hint of orange” since this combination “sends off a relaxed vibe and soothes jittery nerves” (26). The supposed benefit of choosing the right scent is thus represented as twofold. On the one side, it shall help women to present themselves as calm and compliant; and on the other side, it shall put their counterparts at ease, so that possible shortcomings of the female candidate may be overlooked. The upshot of this is arguably that the female figure in the workforce is reified as one that is “naturally” deficient, so that commercial interventions are needed in order to make up for supposed feelings of insecurity and lack.

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<sup>4</sup> It appears instructive to point out the author’s choice of adjectives in this context. Women readers’ preferred appearance in a job interview is represented as “conscientious” and “calm”, attributes that arguably connote a compliant role at the workplace more strongly than the alternative use of words like “innovative” or “far-sighted” would do.

The theme of mastering a job interview frequently occurs in *Women's Health*. It can thus be identified as crucial technology of the self that is indicative of the entanglement of the body in consumer culture and neoliberal ways of life. In this context, applying for a job in person is presented as a task that not only requires the “right” choice of cosmetic products but total control of the body too. In the *WH* September/October issue of 2013, under the rubric of “Life Skills”, the job interview is described as a hazard to the body that can best be mastered by the strategic use of body work techniques in combination with cosmetic solutions (123). Readers learn that stress will play a huge role in an interview situation, so that some biological reactions can be expected: “Clammy hands, racing heart, peeing like a racehorse? Hey, it happens”. Subsequently, women are given advice on how to address their assumed bodily inconveniences: “When the bladder goes crazy, as you are sitting in the waiting room, you should tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing and releasing them one by one. Keep doing this, moving up your leg, then go to your left foot and up into your hips, abs, arms, to your head” and when “you’re sweating a lot, you should try Perspi Shield Ultra Underarm Sweat Liners [...] to keep you clean and dry until your final handshake” (ibid). As this and the previous examples have shown, representations of products vis-à-vis management techniques of the body are directly linked to the promise of a better and more enjoyable life, which sustains a narrowly defined ideal of femininity that shall be sexy, fit and energetic, while still being able “to score a windfall of cash” in the corporate world (WH April 2012, p. 137).

Indeed, the role of the woman reader as successful entrepreneurial figure is foregrounded in the magazines in many ways. Since neoliberalism is said to function as a pervasive technology of governing subjects who are constituted as autonomous and self managing, the embodiment of contemporary femininity is increasingly linked to an emphasis upon self-surveillance, a focus on individualism and the supposedly liberating imperatives of choice and empowerment (Gill and Scharff 4). Exploring the relationship between feminist discourse and neoliberal ideology with regard to consumer culture, Gill and Scharff have pointed out that the self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the freely choosing and self-empowering subject of feminism (7). It thus follows that the credo of free choice has become an important element for both compulsive consumption and the signifying economy of self-empowering subjects. As I will suggest by means of the following examples, the conflation of freedom-to-choose discourses and the imperative of consumption promotes the constitution of the female body as closely related to an entrepreneurial, capitalist subjectivity.

In this respect, the liberating discourse of the self-empowering female subject can be traced throughout the magazines. In an article titled “Master absolutely anything” (WH October 2013, 134), Tim Ferris, author of the three *New York Times* best sellers *The 4-Hour Workweek*, *The 4-Hour Body*, and *The 4-Hour Chef*, gives readers tips that shall help them “acquire any talent in no time”. To do so, they are advised to follow the acronym DiSSS as a guide, which stands for Deconstruction, Selection, Sequencing and Stakes. Each of the steps represents one distinct phase of project management. They involve the identification of one’s and other’s errors and weaknesses, the ability to choose the highest leverage activities and materials (80/20 principle), the readiness to bring your goals into an order, and the determination to accept nothing but success. The overemphasis on achievement by means of do-it-yourself strategies is particularly foregrounded in the text by the use of the second person personal pronoun *you* in combination with verbs like *can*, *focus* or *follow*, signifying an injunction to engage in immediate action in order to reach one’s goals without delay. The text then ends with the author stating: “Trust me, this makes miracles happen”. Readers are thus invited to side with the author, whom they should trust, so that their goals can be turned into reality by means of no-compromise do-it-yourself strategies that widely reflect the neoliberal ideal of the enterprising subject.

It is thus not surprising that *becoming rich* is considered as another important goal. In order to successfully participate in consumer culture, women must learn “how to build a fatter bank” (WH April 2012, p. 137). In an article titled “Rules that’ll make you rich”, readers are reminded that their jobs are by far their greatest assets and that they must know their worth on the open market in order to avoid losing money. In order to allocate their time and money efficiently, they are advised to calculate how much one hour of their time is worth and “count dollars like calories” (idem 138). Particularly interesting is the imperative tone of the captions in the article. Statements like “Your job is your most important investment.” end with a full stop, implying that there is nothing more to say and that the advice qualifies as an instance of common sense. The lack of any markers of modality is furthermore indicative of the stance of the magazine. There is not offered a discussion but a clear manual to follow in order to properly manage the self. The embodied outcome of this process may be observed in a presentation of the five *Women’s Health* Fitness Star Finalists (WH October 2013, p. 91). So says finalist Barao: “I focused on what I wanted to do instead of what I didn’t want to happen. It’s what changed my life”, implying that the supposedly liberating amalgam of choice, advice and entrepreneurial flexibility may indeed promise a better life. Second finalist Kit Rich’s

words echo this neoliberal credo in significant ways but establish a closer link to the body. She says: “For me, fitness is about learning how to master your life. It teaches me, guides me, and wants me to be better. Now that’s what I call a healthy relationship” (ibid). Arguably, this exemplifies the conflation of the *fit body* and *freedom of choice attitudes*, which I have above linked to the feminist agenda. As it appears, the freedom of choice that is granted to women in terms of how to master their lives is inextricably connected with a narrowly defined ideal of the supposedly fit and beautiful body of a handful of finalists that were carefully selected among thousands. This suggests that the supposed plethora of free choices may in fact be much more limited, effectively curtailing women to a range of options that coincide with dominant cultural ideals.

**Figure 3: Constructing the feminine health-ideal of “beautiful performance”**



This ad mirrors the magazines’ tendency to inscribe the narrowly defined cultural ideal of the fit and self-conscious “beautiful performance” on women’s bodies. As the caption in the upper left corner suggests, the buying of particular products is represented as “necessity” in this context. (WH September 2011, p. 17)

Next, there is an important issue I would like to develop with regard to other emancipatory efforts that can be observed in *Women’s Health*. Frequently, the magazines attempt to teach women life skills that shall help them “fatten up” their wallets (WH January/February, p.117) or show them how they might “unmask their inner hero” (WH June 2011, p. 118). In this

respect, it is interesting to observe that the presented range of supposedly emancipating activities is in fact heavily gendered. In the latter article, women learn that “a hero isn’t something you either are or aren’t. It involves a set of skills that you can learn and practice” (idem 119). Somewhat echoing Beauvoir’s famous claim that “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (267), readers are reminded that becoming a hero is a cultural accomplishment. Then, several supposedly heroic strategies are presented: women should “practice empathy”, “practice positive conflict resolution” and “reach out to others” (WH June 2011, p. 118). It is notable that the cultural construction of this particular kind of hero in the magazine strongly differs from the notion of aggressive and risk-taking heroism that is depicted in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. There, the hero is defined as “a celebrated figure [who] transcends ordinary people in skill, strength and courage [...] with war or dangerous adventure [being] the hero’s normal occupation”, all of which arguably implies an active and determined persona. In the magazine under survey, a contradictory construction of the female hero is underway. This becomes particularly obvious in the following passage:

[R]esearch has found that people who volunteer are more likely to be heroes. Find a way to donate some time to helping others and you’ll develop your ability to emphasize, which not only increases the odds of your rising to the occasion when duty calls but also boosts your confidence and happiness. And that’s a double payoff. (WH June 2011, p. 119)

As can be observed, the traditional feminine attributes of helping others and developing the ability of emphasize are linked to the notion of heroism. This claim is given authority by the reference to an unspecified source of research, holding that volunteering and rising to the occasion when duty calls, are heroic attributes. It should be pointed out that the conflation of supposedly feminine traits and social responsibility is not an easily accessible one. In a way, it appears to be immune against criticism since it promises to offer a perspective of reconstructing the lost horizon of solidarity that has been swept away by the disintegrating forces of the neoliberal project. Indeed, if we all acted in solidarity, the socially corroding tendencies of the capitalist economy could be minimised. As Beck holds, gradually emerging fields of alternative knowledge and action could indeed promoted the large scale political activation of citizens and thus furnish a new political culture (*Risk Society* 194-95). However, it would be somewhat naive to assume that a change in politics is necessarily the most plausible implication of the construction of the “woman hero” that is underway in this text. In this regard, it is instructive to observe that there are references to “volunteering” and “rising to the occasion when duty calls”. In the present economic situation, the former equals unpaid

labour and the latter implies the passive role of a woman who is not privileged to choose whether she actually wants to perform a task or not. The addendum, “when duty calls” signifies the plight to get going and engage in action without delay. Somewhat ironically, the last line, “(this) also boosts your confidence and happiness” then suggests that there will indeed be no material reward.

Arguably, the overall effect of the text reifies the role of the woman as a hard labouring volunteer and unpaid family worker. This, however, makes necessary to ask how the representation of the caring and sharing women in an article about supposed self-empowerment corresponds to the increasing emancipatory efforts of the magazines that I have discussed above. As I will argue by means of the following example, the emancipatory strategies that are taught to women in *WH* magazines are sometimes *feminized* (similar to the masculinisation of consumer products for men described in the previous subsection), so that their enactment does not threaten the bipolar order of gender-specific corporal and behavioural ideals that is co-constitutively sustained by the *WH* and *MH* media.

With this in mind, I will approach an article titled “Control the purse strings”, published in the “Life Skills” rubric of the July/August issue of 2011 (111-13). The text begins by stating that “research says females possess better money making traits than men do”, promising women that they can learn to capitalize on their skills (111). In order to add truth value to this claim, the supposed “natural” difference between men and women is carefully constructed. The text continues:

It’s obvious to any woman who has spent more than five minutes talking to a man that the two sexes are not wired the same way. And over the past decade or so, studies have helped psychologists understand exactly why male and female brains process things in such disparate – often opposing – ways. One of the most surprising discoveries undercuts the traditional notion that men are naturally better at managing money than women are. (idem 112)

By resorting to the magazines’ frequently observed strategy of presenting particular perspectives via the voice of unspecified experts (psychologists here), the argued “natural” inequality between men and women is reified as an inevitable consequence of dissimilar brain functions. This claim is further normalized by a reference to common sense in the first sentence, which shall speak to every woman’s experience and thus lead her to the evaluation that the authors are right. Thereby, the ideological stage for the remaining text is set. Women

readers then learn that the argued biological gap between men and women may work to their advantage by being told: “here is how you can harness you inborn tendencies and use them to your cash-accruing advantage” (112). Even though, the overt and somewhat aggressive tone of “using inborn tendencies to ones cash-accruing advantage” may hint at a more radical feminist mindset, the technologies of capital accumulation that are subsequently presented suggest otherwise. Readers are advised “to tap into their caretaking instincts”, “to ask for directions”, “to act all grown up”, and “to keep sharing” (112). How such a caring and sharing mindset may help women to accumulate capital is subsequently explained through a reference to the history of humanity: “Men were the hunters, women nurturers. Fast forward millions of years and today’s women feel just as responsible – for husband, kids, friends, and ageing parents. When it comes to saving money women don’t just think about themselves [but] work toward a goal that will benefit loved ones in significant ways” (ibid). As this suggests, there is an emphasis on teaching women the supposedly emancipatory strategy of “moneymaking”, an undertaking traditionally associated with men; however, I would argue that this overt strategy cleverly masks the less obvious tendency to effectively feminize the taught skills at the same time, so that when women put them into action, they don’t threaten the hegemonic gender order. I would like to point out that this may be a valuable contribution to the scholarly debate on popular health and lifestyle magazines. While prior research has confirmed that men related consumer practices tend to be masculinised in the men’s media (see the previous subchapter and Dworkin and Wachs 48), the feminization of economically biased life skills taught to women in *WH* magazines has to my knowledge not been addressed.

As this subsection has argued, the media under review constructs women consumers as wealthy and apparently autonomous figures that shall strive to embody narrowly defined cultural ideals. In this regard, a positive correlation between the theme of bodily transformation and consumption has been identified. Subsequently, the relationship between the neoliberal credo of the enterprising subject and notions of a self-determined feminist consciousness has been investigated. I have suggested that the magazines overtly attempt to teach women economically biased life skills that shall help them navigate more successfully through the world of consumption and work, subtly linking supposed emancipatory efforts to a wider feminist discourse of liberation and autonomous choice. As I have subsequently argued, the range of options that is represented in the media appears to be rather narrow, so that women are effectively compelled to follow hegemonic ideals of body management and conduct. I have concluded that *Women Health’s* emphasis on giving women liberating advice



cunningly conceals the less obvious tendency to effectively feminize these supposedly emancipatory technologies of the self, so that when women put them into practice, they don't threaten the hegemonic gender order.

### **6.1.3. Conclusion**

This section has traced the constitution of the “commercialised body” in *Men's* and *Women's Health* Magazines. I have argued that both men and women are increasingly represented as wealthy consumers of a wide range of products, including attire and grooming products. I have suggested that with regard to men, the marketing strategies of these products are frequently linked to masculinised fields of experience such as financial power, celebrity figures and heterosexual pursuits, so that men lose their argued fears to engage in cultural practices around their bodies that have hitherto been associated with women. In the women's health literature a similar tendency has been observed. Much of the advice directed at readers overtly carries connotations of a liberating feminist discourse, while it covertly contains heavily gendered messages that reify the secondary role of women as caring, sharing and compliant. In combination with the constant imperative to shape and dress either a sexy female body or a cool and tough male body under the guise of free choice, the magazines appear to sustain traditional models of gender socialisation.

However, it is possible to interpret some contents of the men's health magazines I have reviewed as “gay vague”, which means that they implicitly carry subcultural codes that may function to commercially target “those in the know”, without the majority of heterosexual readers being aware of it. A tendency of “lesbian vague” could not be identified though. Dworkin and Wachs, who have undertaken a similar study of men's and women's lifestyle magazines, could not identify such covert codes either (61). A possible reason for this might be that marketing experts may identify lesbian readers as an economically less powerful demographic than gay men. In summary, the construction of the idealised male and female body-cum-consumer privileges only a small group of economically powerful individuals. While the options presented to both men and women appear to be infinite, they are in fact limited to the embodiment of a narrowly defined ideal that arguably excludes non-white, non-heterosexual and less affluent members of society. In the next chapter, I will turn towards the construction of the “disciplinary body” and investigate how tropes of medicalisation and health care influence the gendered corporealities that might ensue. Since the here discussed

theme of consumerism will likely play an important role in the following sections too, I will add further insights at later stages.

## 6.2. Building and nurturing the disciplinary body

As researchers have pointed out, the fundamental belief that underlies the dichotomous construction of supposedly fit and healthy male and female bodies is that men are naturally big and muscular, whereas women are well-toned and small. Men's and women's fitness magazines reproduce and further naturalize this bipolar cultural ideal by providing readers with detailed instructions for shaping their bodies accordingly (Dworkin and Wachs 74). As can be observed in figure 4, the apparently perfect and healthy female body is articulated with leanness and compact shape, while the representation of the male counterpart emphasizes broad shoulders, overwhelming muscle size and bulging abdominal striations.

Figure 4: The parallel construction of the gendered athletic and “healthy” body



(Sources: WH December 2011, MH August 2006)

In both examples, the images of the cover models' bodies are accompanied by linguistic texts. These prominently placed captions promise to offer readers advice on how to achieve the

bodies that are depicted through technologies of self-transformation. Despite the clear differentiation between the slender female body and the muscular male body, there are striking similarities too.

First and foremost, fat is represented as the main enemy for both sexes. As Bordo has argued with regard to the preferred cultural form of the slender body, its opposite, the soft and flabby physique, has come to stand as a metaphor for anxieties about an inner state of the self that is out of control, signifying a lack of self-containment vis-à-vis an unwanted capitulation to desire in consumer culture. As she suggests, this powerful cultural image has induced the collective consciousness that determined action against fat is not an option but a necessity (189). This is mirrored by the harsh vocabulary used on the two covers above. Women are encouraged to “Fight Fat! (and Win!)”. As can be observed, this injunction does not only rely on the existential assumption that fat is an enemy that must be fought, it also implies that women can satisfactorily transform their supposedly unruly and deviant bodies if they are prepared to follow the advice offered in the magazine. In this context, it is noteworthy that the supposed urgency to fight fat is further intensified by an exclamation mark. Then, to emphasize an additional reward, the practice of sculpting the body is linked to erotic attraction by another caption. The heading “Sculpt sexy curves” thus functions as a *call for action* that reifies the lean female body as one that is sexy and ultimately to be desired.

A similar scheme can be observed with regard to *Men’s Health*. In the “Special Weight-Loss Issue!” depicted in figure 4, men are encouraged to “sculpt their bodies to lose their gut” and promised that results can be seen in “just nine days”. Excess body fat is equally presented as the main obstacle to a fit body and it is assumed that this “problem” can be solved by putting into practice the appropriate strategies, including body work and “6-minute meals for 6-pack abs”. The combined effects of the caption “More sex better sex – your action packed summer plan” and the message “Look your best now” then establish a link between the argued gains in attractiveness through a ripped body and sexual pursuits. Arguably, this privileges the evaluation that the fat-free and muscular body signifies an erotic and masculine ideal every man should embrace in order to be successful with women.

Second, besides the magazines’ construction of the lean body as synonymous with the attractive body, there can almost always be observed a link to the notion of “health”. The magazines titles, *Women’s Health* and *Men’s Health*, clearly suggest that health-related

matters assume a pivotal role, and the conflation of the narrowly defined ideal of the fit body and the apparently healthy body has been well documented in the literature (Boni 465, Crawshaw 1606, Gough 2006). As the two magazine covers exemplify, the link between fitness and health is indeed foregrounded. Readers of *Women's Health* are promised that by means of “a simple technique” they can “boost health with one breath”, while *MH* readers are reminded that the publication they are about to peruse contains “135 fast health fixes”. That is, readers of both media are led to the preferred evaluation that the learning about and practice of particular techniques and fixes can help them lead a healthier life.

In this regard and with late modernity's unresolved conundrum of existential uncertainties in mind, it is instructive to explore the magazines' conflation of *health* and *fitness* in some detail. As Bauman points out, the advent of consumer culture has replaced the clearly defined dictates and regimes of an older “society of producers”. As he holds, that difference is seminal since life that is organized around the forever elusive role of the modern consumer is less normatively regulated. There are no longer any stable reference points that could serve as a universal benchmark for collective orientation, but instead a constant need of developing the ability to rise to the opportunity as it becomes necessary (76). By this shift, the ephemeral ideal of fitness has gradually superseded the quantifiable and measurable concept of health as the desirable state of the body, signifying a flexible, adjustable and absorptive human nature that is ready to live through circumstances of risk and uncertainty that are impossible to anticipate in advance (idem 77). For Crawford, this is indicative of the magazines' entanglement with new rationalities of neoliberal health care that increasingly construct individuals as active consumers of health advice, effectively promoting a self-organised responsibility for the management of fitness by means of body work techniques and forms of behaviour that shall be conducive to people's wellbeing (1607). In the remainder of the following section, this construction of the actively health promoting individual will be discussed. I will trace the pivotal concepts of fitness, risk and gender, discussing how they may relate to the magazines' advice in terms of managing and constructing the body.

### **6.2.1. Men's magazines**

As noted above, fat is represented as the main adversary in the popular men's health literature. An article in the September issues of 2005, titled “Fat is not fit”, reminds readers that “[o]verweight men who can keep up with skinny guys may be fooling themselves” (58).

According to the text, this is for the reason that “the strongest predicator of cardiovascular-disease risk is fatness, rather than aerobic fitness”. The article then continues:

University of Colorado researchers screened 135 healthy men for 18 heart-diseases risk factors and found that body fat was associated with higher scores in all categories, independent of aerobic capacity. [...] overweight men should [therefore] still strive to lose pounds, says study author Demetra Christou, Ph.D., of the University of Colorado’s department of integrative physiology (ibid).

Both the lack of markers of modality in the title and the specified inclusion of supposed expert voices suggest that the article promotes a “zero tolerance policy” against fat. Besides, there is a reference to “135 healthy men”; however, the same sentence states that these men were screened for heart-disease risk factors. This mirrors the precarious notion of modern-day health discourse, in which the problem is no longer illness per se but the ongoing definition of “pre-illness at-risk states” (Armstrong 401). Adipose tissue is represented – or if one wishes dramatized – as the main indicator of disease and the supposedly associated factors of risk. Regardless of whether a person may be considered healthy or fit otherwise (e.g. display good aerobic fitness), the master category of body fat appears to preclude the possibility of a healthy body that is not lean.

In this respect, it can be observed that *MH*’s “war against fat” is strategically staged. The first part of this intervention constructs the scenario of a deadly threat. It consists of graphic representations of the argued harm that virtually any amount of fat may do to the human body. In an article titled “Do you need statins”, men are advised that even if they are “young, fit and feeling great, the answer might be yes” (*MH* September 2005, p. 130). Cholesterol is subsequently described as “a stone cold killer” and linked to the intake of fat: “Every gram of saturated fat you fork into your mouth eventually ends up in your liver, where it shuts of the filters that pull LDL cholesterol out of your bloodstream and promotes the risk for heart disease” (ibid). The use of the noun phrase *every gram* is interesting in this context. While the measuring unit “gram” is typically used to describe meagre amounts, the quantifier “every” does not allow for an exclusion. Since “every gram” of fat is argued to end up in the liver, the preferred evaluation is that fat can kill in small doses and that readers shall thus take into account dietary adjustments before it is too late.

Another article, titled the “New heart alarm”, suggests that the risks connected to fat intake may be even greater and more difficult to assess than previously assumed (*MH*

January/February 2003, p. 78-81). Quoted is Paul Ridker, M.D., director of the centre for cardiovascular disease prevention at Harvard's medical school, who reminds readers that they are constantly at risk. He says: "If you leave your doctor's office after being told that are cholesterol levels are low and you're in good shape, it hardly means you're not at risk for a heart attack" (idem 78). The reason for this, the researcher is quoted, is a hitherto neglected C-reactive protein named CRP, which is released into the bloodstream when there is an inflammation in the body. The downside of the CRP release is that the protein might break up the already existing cholesterol plaque from patients' artery walls and thus form clots that can cause a heart attack or stroke (81). When asked for the risk factors that are assumed to trigger higher levels of CRP, Ridker answers: "We think that about half of the variation in inflammation is genetic and about half comes from environmental factors such as smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise and obesity [...] The CRP phenomenon does a lot to explain why obese individuals have very high risks of heart disease" (81).

While the article clearly foregrounds the diagnostic potential of measuring CRP levels in order to prevent cardiovascular disease, it also reifies the supposedly dangerous properties of fat. By referring to an expert voice, the text assumes the definite perspective that "all fat is bad" and thus needs to be avoided at any cost, implying that the responsibility to do so rest on the individual first and foremost. However, the inclusion of the voice of another expert indicates a level of uncertainty and suggests that the detrimental effects of lipids may rather be assumed than scientifically proven. When asked how and why external factors like fat intake trigger inflammations in the body, Dr. Jialal answers: "We believe that they activate the cells that cause inflammation. But there are no detailed studies on how" (idem 81). Interpreted in terms of Beck's risk society thesis, this exemplifies that late modernity's risks predominately exist in the uncertainty of scientific knowledge about them. They can thus be dramatized and magnified in the media as the purpose demands (*Risk Society* 23). As another quote from the above article suggests, such a dramatization of risk appears to be underway indeed. Readers are directly addressed and alerted by the text: "You might drop dead that while reading this [...] you might any minute feel that gripping pain in your chest that tells you that it's over" (MH January/February 2003, p. 78).

Equally part of the magazines' concerted intervention against fat is the assumption that this "public enemy number one" is omnipresent in everyday life. This is mirrored in the article "The devil's candy", which teaches readers that food companies are adding an "evil

ingredient” to their products, which may turn people’s bodies into “fat-storing machines” (MH April 2003, p. 118). The main message is that corn syrup contains a type of sugar (fructose), which the body will more readily metabolize into fat. The health conscious audiences are henceforth reminded that fructose lurks everywhere, particularly in soft drinks and bread rolls, and that such products shall thus be avoided. The supposedly fatal link between sugar and fat is then further dramatized in another article, where the issue is spelt out in precarious clarity: “Sugar makes you fat. [...] Eating sugar is like flipping a switch that tells your body to store fat. And sugar is everywhere – not just in soda, candy, and desserts. It’s disguised in refined carbohydrates like bread, rice, and pasta, and even in beer and milk” (MH January/February 2006, p. 90). As Crawshaw has observed, such information constructs the management of health as a calculable and rational pursuit for the reader (1611). In order to competently take responsibility for their wellbeing, men learn about the supposed dangers connected to fat and sugar. They are advised which foodstuffs are risky and should thus be avoided.

Arguably, risk plays a pivotal role. The overall effect of the magazines’ “declaration of war” on fat (and sugar as its perceived ally) is that readers are guided towards the evaluation that their lives vis-à-vis their health are in constant danger. The ensuing urgency to counteract – if one does not want to drop dead while reading about ubiquitous threats – is then precisely what turns risk into business. With the proliferation of risk definitions grows not only the social and economic importance of knowledge that promises to help people addresses their perceived problems, but also the power of those who disseminate it over those who consume it (Beck *Risk Society* 46). This brings me to the second part of the intervention against fat in the name of health. It is the *call for action* in terms of commercially supplied dietary adjustments and exercise plans, which foregrounds neoliberal health care’s emphasis on individuals as responsible for managing their own well-being (Crawshaw 1610).

In a makeover story titled “Fat-proof your life – and your wife...and your kids...and your dog”, the downfall of the Reeves family is presented, followed by a report how *MH*’s “fast fixes got the family off the fat track”. The metaphor of war is used in this context too. Men are reminded that “[t]here is a war on”. The article then ironically continues:

“No not that one. This one hits even closer to home – in our kitchens, at our dining room tables, down at the diner, in the drive-thru lanes – and it’s a struggle for our lives. You have heard the statistics. Nearly two thirds of adult Americans are

overweight. A third of our children followed that example. Complications from all this fat will soon overtake smoking as the leading cause of early death” (MH October 2004, p. 200).

As the extract suggests, the “war on fat” is represented as even more immediate and threatening than the enduringly proclaimed crisis in the Middle East, implying that two thirds of the American population should rise to the occasion and fulfil their supposed duty of defending their country against the dreadful opponent of obesity, which is argued to soon become the leading cause of premature death. This call for action cleverly links notions of nationality with more private concerns, promoting the evaluation that the fate of the nation has turned into “a struggle for lives” that requires citizens to discipline their bodies like military men. The injunction “fat-proof” can arguably be read in relation to *bullet proof*, which further strengthens the assumptions that fighting fat is indeed a question of life and death.

As Dworkin and Wachs have argued, the emphasis on disciplining the individual body by linking it to the needs of the state is not uncommon in times of conflict. Men are advised on how to build a protective and hardened masculine form in order to mirror the argued superiority of their nation (86). In this vein, it can frequently be observed that the male body is constructed as a lean body in a masculinised way. In *MH*’s January/February issue of 2003, an article on weight training, “Big muscles made bigger”, educates men that their “four largest muscle groups deserve greatest attention”. In the next line follows the preferred evaluation of this opening caption, disguised as a factual statement: “First from you and then from anybody else” (68). It is thus implied that readers’ attention to their bodies (by means of bodywork) will make them appear more muscular, and that other individuals will reward these efforts by paying favourable attention. The ensuing value assumption, *muscular male bodies will draw positive attention*, effectively reifies the role of the strong man as dominant in the social field.

This preoccupation of the male body with muscle management and looks is also affirmed in *MH*’s November issue of 2005. There, men are reminded that proper training of their abdominal area will “result in a midsection that performs great and looks even better” (68). This causal relation between performance and appearance is of particular interest, I think. Coffey has argued that the transformation of the body through technologies of exercise needs to be understood as a process of engagement between the body and numerous cultural forces



(12). As such, hegemonic notions of masculinities offer men comprehensive cultural scripts that delineate the diverse contents of desired manhood in a particular society, at a particular historical time (Spector-Mersel 71). The specificity of fashioning individual bodies is therefore related to the commonly idealized masculine trait of displaying physical strength as embodied by the toned and muscular male role models that are increasingly visible in the context of consumer culture (Coffey 11). Gender is thus continuously re-asserted as men are encouraged to build and showcase ripped and big muscles, which arguably shall signify an emphasized form of “healthy” masculinity, connoting dominance, power and strength.

**Figure 5: The muscular man**



This image exemplifies the magazines' attempt to construct the healthy male body in a gender specific way. A preoccupation with appearance and bodily strength is foregrounded through the display of the model's naked upper torso, emphasising strong arms, broad shoulders and lean abs. (MH January/February 2006, p. 103)

The cumulative wisdom that underlies many of the above discussed efforts can be found in David Zinczenko's DVD bestseller *The Abs Diet Workout*. In this programme, the editor-in-chief of *Men's Health* promises readers “the simplest, most effective plan ever developed to strip away belly fat and replace it with lean, toned, head-turning muscle”, which will “boost [their] sex life and keep [them] healthy for the rest of [their] lives” (MH October 2005, p.112).

Of particular interest here is the conflation of health, lean abs and supposedly overarching masculine identity. In a more detailed article about Zinczenko's workout and nutrition plan, it is explained why focusing on the abdominal section is given such high priority in the *MH* scheme: "If you have a bulging belly, it means your internal organs, including your heart, are literally packed in fat. It's like renting a room to an arsonist". Taking advantage of the programme is then presented as a necessity rather than an option: "Whether you want to change your body to improve your health, your looks, your athletic performance, or your sex appeal, this plan offers you a simple promise: It can transform your body so you can accomplish all of these goals. It won't just enhance your life, it will save it" (MH July/August 2004, p. 156).

Once again, we can observe *MH*'s commonly used strategy to directly address the readers with the second person pronoun "you". This reinforces the assumptions that all men have shared interests and issues, and that they will therefore appreciate the generalizing comments that are made with regard to their bodies. The statement "whether you want to improve your body to improve your health..." assumes as given that men are unhappy with their bodies and therefore in need of a transformation. The benefits of this apparently health-oriented makeover are then linked to other aspect of life, in which men are supposedly dissatisfied too, including looks, athletic performance and sex appeal. In other words, the "health-effects" of the advertised workout shall both strengthen the imagined bond between male readers as a group with similar problems and aspirations, and link the desired outcomes of the programme to better performance vis-à-vis a more successful embodiment of a socially approved form of masculinity. The following extract from an abs-diet success-story appears to confirm this tendency. So says Bill Stanton, a security consultant and *Men's Health* reader, who has lost half of his body fat through the programme: "I work out at Sports Club L.A., where people are really focused on looking great. Even there, guys and girls come up to me. One guy said, 'You are kicking butt. Everybody sees that transformation. You're inspiring a lot of people'" (MH July/August 2004, p. 157).

In some important aspects, Stanton's account may be indicative of the negotiation of a new form of *hegemonic masculinity* – described by Connell and Messerschmidt as "the currently most honoured and accepted way of being a man"(832) – in a way that the popular media constructs a discourse of "men only" bodily transformation that promises men masculine predominance and acceptance in the name of health. As Crawshaw has similarly observed in

this regard, the *appropriation of health and it's achievement as a masculine quality* allows for the emergence of new masculine identities that no longer contradict traditional categories of male subject-hood (1608).

In this context, it can be observed that men are instructed to prepare healthy foods in an increasingly masculinised way. In a far more basic manner than in *WH's* long and elaborate recipes (I will come to that later), the focus of the nutrition rubric in *Men's Health* magazines is frequently “on fast and foolproof ways to improve basic freezer fare” (MH October 2005, p. 114-118); or on the preparation of “easy meals” such as egg muffins, turkey roll-ups and broccoli and rice casseroles (MH January/February 2006, p. 110). Besides and with regard to using kitchen equipment, men are somewhat ironically constructs as aliens: “By now you have much mastered the fridge stare-down: Open the refrigerator door, gaze inside, and wonder what there is to eat. Then grab a beer, swing the door shut, and reach for the pizza coupon stuck on the front” (MH October 2005, p. 114-118). Arguably, represented is a supposedly masculine individual who is reluctant to become associated with concerns of healthy dieting and domestic chores. This, however, is represented as a bad trait, which men are encouraged to address in their own interests. So says David Zinczenko: “Abs after all aren't made in the gym – they're made in the kitchen. What you put in your mouth is more important than what you put in your workout [...] I want you to rethink the way you eat. Follow the guidelines and you'll feel what it's like to eat right, stay satisfied, and fuel your body with high-octane energy” (MH July/August 2006, p. 146).

As should be noted, the masculinised field of the gym, the site that the *Men's Health* discourse associates with enhancing health and building big muscles, is cleverly linked to the supposedly feminized realm of the kitchen via the image of the toned male body. It is stated that abs, the supposed signifier of healthy masculinity in the *MH* world, are made in the kitchen, implying that lazy and “unhealthy” eating habits will preclude men from achieving the hegemonic bodily form that connotes manliness and health. Thus, if individuals wish to reap the rewards of a body fuelled with “high-octane energy”, they would have to follow the magazine's advice and familiarise themselves with the cuisine. The traditional masculine taboo of taking responsibility for areas not associated with men is thus subverted by equating eating healthily with the “manly courage” to tackle the problem of an unfit and possibly effeminate male body. As Addis and Mahalik have remarked, men are thus challenged to be “man enough” to alter their behaviour by accepting advice (12). Under neoliberal rationalities,

this arguably hints at the new and socially accepted role of the advice seeking man (Gough 2485), who increasingly embraces feminine concerns like aesthetic health, cooking and counselling but nevertheless wishes to retain an association with some traditional masculine core values (Crawshaw 1608), including (hetero) sexual prowess, physical strength and professional success.

With the latter in mind, one can observe that reaping the benefits of the bodily transformation is indeed represented as stimulus for success in the corporate world. Men are advised to keep a job-performance journal on the days they workout and the days they do not exercise, correlating their ability to work without stopping with the amount of physical training they protocol each week. It's likely, so the article, that readers will find that they perform better at the office on the days they exercise, despite taking time out for the workout (MH January/February 2006, 104). With a similar focus, another article establishes a link between cardio-vascular training and brainpower. Men are encouraged to exercise in order to improve their brains towards "the kind of smart that leads to faster and more accurate decision making, yields greater productivity and inspires innovation [...] the kind of smart that makes you money" (MH October 2005, p. 177). Arguably, the interpellation of the imagined readership resonates the capitalist key concerns of performance and financial dominance. The long existing patriarchal myth of the superior male body and self is thus re-appropriated and re-territorialized in a world of neoliberal preoccupation, in which the image of the powerful and the resilient has long assumed the hegemonic status of an unquestioned ideal. By implication, the icon of the supposedly healthy male body is a narrowly defined one that privileges those who can afford and who are willing to undergo the processes of transformation that may be necessary.

In summary, I have argued that the *Men's Health* media represents fat as the main enemy of the healthy body and that the construction of this supposed threat is cleverly staged. As a first step, men are alerted that lipids in their blood may be lethal, that fat acids are contained in most foodstuffs and that sugars are to be avoided since they may metabolize in body fat. Secondly, counterstrategies are presented in the form of physical exercise and diet change, promising men ways to achieve a lean body vis-à-vis a better and healthier life. As I have argued, this focus on do-it-yourself strategies is indicative of new rationalities of neoliberal health care that position the duty to maintain wellbeing with the individual in gender specific ways. As men are instructed to build impressive muscles and fight fat, they are cleverly

tricked to believe that the former will enhance their masculine nature, while the latter will serve their health. The supposedly healthy male body that ensues is thus one which continues to embody patriarchal key values such as strength and dominance over bodies that fail to “measure up”. It privileges only the small demographic of those who are both genetically endowed and financially equipped to follow the ideal.

### **6.2.2 Women’s Magazines**

Similar to the men’s media, in *Women’s Health* one can trace a positive evaluation of leanness vis-à-vis a negative view of body fat. As Benson has argued, the preoccupation with slimness is no longer solely a question of aesthetic concerns but has become a signifier of discipline and self-management. The ways in which the promotion of do-it-yourself health strategies is structured has therefore produced a powerful and culturally productive set of ideas that induce in individuals an understanding of how they can get sick and how this may be avoided, reinforcing the notion that well-being can be achieved by means of exercise and education of the self (123). In this regard, we can observe that *WH* employs almost the same strategy as *MH*. The first part of this intervention delineates the supposedly imminent dangers to health by outlining the horizon of risk, effectively creating an urgency to counteract. Once this ideological stage construction is completed, women are, in a second step and very much like actors, taught scripts and strategies to minimise the respective risks. As I will show in the remainder of this subsection, these technologies of the feminine self are in fact heavily gendered and aim at constructing the “sexy body”. They reify the secondary role of women in society in many ways, while they appear to offer them physical empowerment in the name of health.

The “death cycle” of fat is a prominent theme in the *Women’s Health* media and often linked to breast cancer. In the October issues of 2013, in an article titled “How to outsmart breast cancer”, readers learn that the disease affects more than 300,000 women each year, killing 40,000 of them (92). Subsequently, strategies are presented to reduce the risk of breast cancer and readers are taught how they may protect themselves:

If it’s the one thing most doctors agree on. If you can do only one thing to lower your lifetime risk, it should be maintaining a healthy weight. Packing too many pounds can increase your breast cancer chances by 30 to 60 percent, says Carolyn Aldige, of the prevent cancer foundation. Particularly worrisome is often-hidden abdominal fat,

which can raise your risk by a stand-alone 43 percent. See, fat cell don't just sit still; they can pump out extra estrogen [...] So, the more fat cells you have, the more estrogen is likely coursing through your body. And the more of that circulating estrogen you have over the course of your life, the higher your breast cancer risk. (WH October 2013, p. 100)

As can be observed in this extract, external voices are included by both specified and unspecified references to experts, who speak in favour of *WH*'s universally observable and content-dominating project to educate women to burn fat and sculpt lean muscles. With this in mind, the combination of "if it's the one thing most doctors agree on" and "if you can do only one thing to lower your lifetime risk, it should be maintaining a healthy weight" privileges the existential assumption that there is an officially acknowledged "lifetime risk" for every women and that therefore "maintaining a healthy weight" is not an option but a necessity in order to live a longer life. This rhetoric of catastrophe is then followed by another expert's advice, which specifies the gains of weight reduction in the language of supposedly value free and objective statistics. Women learn that overweight can increase their breast cancer chances by 30 to 60 percent, and that abdominal fat is particularly dangerous in this regard. It is thus implied that all of *WH*'s other attempts to teach women how to lose pounds, flatten their bellies and firm their butts are in fact serious technologies of the health conscious modern self, who has no option but to follow the advice in order to avoid death by disease. In this vein, the article concludes: "The best thing you can do for yourself – and your breast-cancer risk – in the next 12 months is not to gain any weight" (ibid).

Besides breast cancer, *ovarian cancer* is represented as another omnipresent threat. In an article from the *WH* April issue of 2012, it is defined as "a silent killer, getting louder" (74). Women are directly addressed as an affected population at high risk and alerted that: "Ovarian cancer is a stealth enemy, but you can outsmart it by caring for your body and knowing the ambiguous danger signs" (ibid). The advice that is given on outsmarting the enemy then involves the maintenance of a healthy weight, since women with a higher body mass index are said to be at an increased risk. The link to fat is subsequently established via a reference to research from the National Institute of Health, which indicates that limiting the intake of fat will also limit the risk of the disease (78). As in the previous example, the text foregrounds the notion of the self-responsible individual who should rely on discipline, knowledge and behavioural change in order to promote well-being and health.

In this regard, an instrumental attitude towards the body and self is emphasised. In an article promoting *The Women's Health Diet*, which is touted as “the six-week plan to shrink your belly and sculpt your new body”, strategies are presented to help women turn their bodies into “a fat burning machine” (WH June 2011, 133). As Benson has observed with regard to the machine metaphor, portraying the human in a “language of cyborgs” mirrors the concern of building a body towards a mechanistic end and is thus indicative of an increasingly instrumental attitude towards the self (146-47). In order to become as corporally efficient as the media discourse dictates, the natural appearance and functionality of the body is effectively re-configured by a rhetoric of self-distancing that allows for the appropriation of body parts as machines that can be maintained and fine tuned as deemed necessary (Boni 473).

The image of the body as a machine is then complemented with the metaphor of war. Still in the same article, the recipients are alerted that the battle against their supposedly worst enemy is taking place inside themselves: “Inside your body, a war is waging between the cells that make up muscle and those that make up fat. How can you be sure muscle wins the battle? By following these five slim-down strategies from our new book, *The Women's Health Diet*. You'll drop pounds and earn a lean physique – minus the hunger pangs” (WH June 2011, 131). As Bordo has insightfully observed in this regard, “[t]he real battle, ultimately, is with the self” (198). In the name of health and under the constant threat of risk, women are literally forced to follow the road to self-transformation deep into a personal conflict, in which the self is torn into two incompatible directions. On the one hand, the hegemonic image of slenderness dictates constant watchfulness over appetite, discipline and responsibility; but on the other hand, the overabundant representations of culinary choices in the popular media appear to suggest otherwise (idem 199-02). The fit-appearing and well managed physique therefore symbolizes the victory over the self, signifying willpower, knowledge and morality (Hutson 69).

As can be observed in the magazines in this respect, there does indeed appear to be a tension between the imperative of being slim and the nowadays omnipresent rhetoric of consumption, inciting individuals to buy and eat more. Articles with titles such as “Eat drink and still shrink – the best packaged foods for your waistline” (WH October 2011, p. 5), or “Ciao down – good-for-you pasta recipes (no guilt required)” (WH September 2011, p. 12) suggest that target audiences may indeed be unhappy with their culinary consumer habits and thus in need

of food recommendations that might expel them from their guilt of succumbing to cravings and desire. In this respect, food preparation strategies are presented as tactical moves that shall help women outsmart their enemy fat in the name of health. They learn that pasta is “back and healthier than ever” because “noodles are naturally low in fat and a good source of folate (which women need especially during their twenties and thirties) and only about 200 calories a cup”, as long as they are adequately prepared (WH September 2011, p. 86). In order to take full advantage of the healthy potential of pasta, noodles shall be served with seafood, so that “satisfying omega-3-rich lean protein” is added to strengthen the heart (idem 88). In case one is a “meat lover” and wishes to add flavour to freshly prepared meaty pasta meals, there is advice too: “Pasta dishes are a great way to make meat go a long way, because it can be distributed throughout the sauce”. The health conscious woman reader shall thus add “thinly sliced sausage, nitrate free crumbled bacon, or chopped prosciutto” in order to cook a healthier meal (88). The assumption that the “right” preparation and choice of ingredients is indispensable for a risk conscious cuisine is mirrored by a recipe for lasagne: “Oven-baked pastas are perfect make-ahead dishes for weekday meals or dinner parties, but too many are loaded with saturated fat. The solution: Layer in some antioxidant-rich green veggies, and pump up the protein while slashing fat with smart-skim cheeses” (ibid). That is, even if particular ingredients may be harmful, specific combinations might undo their dangerous effects. It is interesting to observe that there is no recommendation to drop the assumedly unhealthy and fatty ingredients from the menu. Rather, readers are encouraged to mix them strategically with supposedly neutralizing agents, which implies that complex and possibly costly shopping arrangements may have to be made in advance.

As Bauman has noted, the eating more and weighing less paradox is indicative of the conflicting trends in contemporary consumer culture, where individuals are constantly encouraged to consume in order to remedy the negative effects of consumption. In this context, the emphasis on shopping for “healthy” nutrition functions as a “rite of exorcism” that temporarily neutralizes the apparitions of insecurity (and obesity) which may haunt the consumers’ bodies (80-81). As the above example suggests, individuals who take advantage of the commercially supplied advice are effectively led to believe that they are in fact optimizing combinations of risks and benefits in a way that will be conducive to their health. This *de facto* equation of further consumption with the solution to the harms of consumption underscores that only middle-class women are likely to benefit from the magazines advice.



Less affluent subject positions, who are unable to fully participate in the consumption scheme, are marginalized through implicit messages of failure and lack of financial power.

Besides dietary advice that shall help women outsmart fat and associated weight gains, they are, like men, continuously instructed to build their bodies in gender specific ways. While men are encouraged to build a ripped and muscular body (as discussed further above), women are frequently advised to build a lean and sexy body. In an article titled “Score a bikini now”, published in the *WH* July/August issue of 2011, readers are reminded that even though summer has already started, it may not be too late to “get strong, lean, and sexy”, if they are prepared to follow the magazine’s “metabolism-revving, muscle sculpting, pound shedding plan” (123). On the following page, the supposed dilemma of the imagined readership is outlined: “You’re all gung ho in the beginning of the summer, hitting the gym like it’s your job and dutifully counting calories. After all, you have the big bikini reveal to prepare for! But once the season hits its stride, it’s easy to fall off the wagon and onto a lawn chair – and before you know it, the heaviest thing you are hoisting is an icy cocktail” (124). As can be observed, the disciplining force of the cultural ideal of the slender body is assumed as given. At the beginning of the summer, women are represented as dutiful agents, who self-responsibly workout at the gym and count the calories of their meals. Then, however, there is a significant shift in the argumentation. The gradual development of a lack of discipline is foregrounded as a given too (though at a later stage), effectively creating an urgency to counteract against what is described as “falling off the wagon”. This is intensified by a reference to what may be at stake, namely the “big bikini reveal”. The solution to the “problem” is then presented in the form of a three-step workout. First, a phase of “total body toning” is introduced. It consists of a fast-paced strength circuit that is designed to target multiple muscle groups at once, helping readers to build “lean muscle and torch a ton of calories in a short amount of time” (126). The second phase, the “fat blasting intervals”, shall then function as the cardio-vascular part of the training. In addition to the strength workout, this set of exercises shall “speed up the heart rate, burn calories and supercharge the metabolism” (127). Finally, this is rounded off by a third stage, the “results enhancing recovery”. This stretch-focused routine shall help relax the whole body and create that “enviable long and lean look”, reminding women that gently stretching shall streamline their physique (129).

This rhetoric of the bikini body strongly differs from the language that is used in terms of strengthening the male body. There are no references to building “bigger, stronger arms” (MH October 2005, p. 13) or advice on how to develop “shoulders that can carry the weight of the world” (MH July 2004, p. 3). Instead, there is an emphasis on toning the body in a supposedly feminized way, reifying the ideal of the “sleek and sexy” feminine physique (WH June 2011, p. 141). It should, however, be noted that some muscle gain is considered desirable in the women’s health world too. In a makeover story about *WH* editor Farrah Storr (U.K. Edition), the delicate boundary between “just right” and “too much” is addressed (WH September/October 2013, p. 35-37). As Storr recounts her successful attempt to transform her body shape with the help of a 12-week exercise programme and a personal trainer, she confesses that she has never enjoyed training with weights: “The merest whiff of a dumbbell and I get mental images of a 1969 Arnold Schwarzenegger: all stewed-tea tan, skimpy budgie smugglers and biceps like steroidal bagels” (35). On the other hand, she continues: “If magazines like the one in your very hands have taught us anything, it’s that muscles are, well...brilliant. Muscle tissue takes up less space than the same weight of fat, they support your joints and burn fat while you do absolutely nothing” (35). However, even though Storr acknowledges the benefits of muscle over fat, she also insinuates that building too much mass is definitely not desired: “By week four, I was noticing serious muscles gain – but not in an Arnie way. My husband said my bottom looked like to handfuls rather than two shopping bags [...] and the most miraculous thing, my back pain had gone. I put this down to my core getting stronger. [...] my stomach was actually flat with a small ripple of muscle. My hips and thighs have shrunk dramatically, and my knee and back issues had cleared up” (37). After stating these benefits, Storr asks the rhetoric question: “Do I look like a man” and answers herself: “Do I heck! Just strong, healthy and very happy” (37).

As we may observe, a number of positive effects is associated with the building of muscles, including a stronger core, stable joints and a visibly ripped body. However, these signifiers appear to connote health and femininity only as long as they are developed in moderation. Thus, possible associations with the male bodybuilder are immediately rejected as the muscle gain of the story’s protagonist is differentiated from the “Arnie way”. That toned and slim muscles are acceptable for women within the assumed heterosexual signifying economy of the magazine and its imagined readership is asserted by the reference to Storr’s husband, who appreciates (if somewhat playfully) his wife’s modest gain in muscular size. In this respect, the tension between the empowering aspects of female muscularity and anxieties about failing

to conform to hegemonic feminine ideals is subtly played out. As Storr acknowledges the apparently feared issue that muscular women may be perceived as men by asking “Do I look like a man?”, she immediately resorts to feminist rhetoric and weakens the importance of that notion, stating that what counts for her is looking (and being?) strong, healthy, and very happy. While this arguably resonates the notion of the self-reliant and enterprising female subject, who seeks to remake herself in the names of free choice, happiness and health related physical empowerment, the concession to popular gender stereotypes cannot be overlooked.

Indeed, both the reassuring reference to the husband and the hint at the possibility of unfeminine muscularity appear to suggest that the formation and the display of the sculpted female body is in fact more strongly governed by the dictates of gender than by discourses of health. As Courtenay has remarked in this regard, health-related behaviours and beliefs simultaneously function to construct and demonstrate what society perceives as gender appropriate. As individuals subordinate their bodies to assumedly healthy ways of life, they effectively define and enact the narrowly specified and often precarious ideals of femininity and masculinity, so that the conflation of gender and health helps normalize both the apparent unity of wellbeing and gender, and the supposedly natural difference between women and men (1388). This, by implication, sustains the broader social structures of power and inequality that subordinate women and privilege men. Under the rationalities of capitalist consumer culture and the privatisation of health risks, women are led to the evaluation that both a happy and a healthy life can be achieved by means of following the magazines’ advice. While the enterprise of fortifying the body against disease carries with it an emancipatory undertone, the rhetoric of the bikini body strongly suggests that the “healthy body” that is produced is in fact a heavily gendered one that is to be appreciated by men. John Berger has aptly summarized this difference in the representation of men and women in popular culture in his statement “men act and women appear” (61). Indeed, my analysis appears to suggest that what Berger took in the 1970s as a fact is still relevant for the analysis of the popular women’s health literature today: “Women are depicted in quite a different way from men [...] because the ideal spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him” (idem 64).

In conclusion, the above discussed examples are indicative of the magazines’ production of an emphasized form of femininity that is increasingly based on a preoccupation with a lean and supposedly beautiful appearance that shall signify health, willpower and knowledge. By

means of medical and dietary advice, women are instructed on how to avoid risk factors, and eat and cook healthily. This is supplemented by exercise guides that instruct them on how to sculpt their bodies in the desired ways. In the name of self-responsibility and health care, an instrumental attitude towards the body is promoted. The ideal female body is thus constructed as a precariously toned body, which oscillates between the feminine dictate of leanness and the medical appropriation of muscular stabilization and enhanced metabolism. Arguably, the body that thus ensues resides in an area of tension between the imperative to build supposedly healthy musculature and the anxiety to look like a man. As a consequence, the embodiment of the precarious ideal of the “healthy” female body carries with it a threefold burden. Firstly, it needs to be lean in order to signify the ideal of self-control despite the contradictions of consumer culture, appropriating the absence of fat as a signifier for the victory over vices such as binge eating and drinking (Bordo 201). Secondly, as I have shown, it should strive to be lean and somewhat muscular in order to demonstrate the victory over disease, this time encoding the absence of fat and the presence of muscle as a token for responsible citizenship with an interest in maintaining health and fighting disease. And thirdly, while observing all of the above, it must display a low-key muscularity, signalling by the absence of fat vis-à-vis the gender appropriate “bikini physique” that victories over vice and disease are embodied all-inclusively with an emphasized stylization of femininity. Those who fail to embody this narrowly defined ideal are by implication excluded from the performance of respectable femininity and the embodiment of good moral and health.

### **6.2.3. Conclusion**

This section has investigated the construction of the “disciplinary body” in *Men’s* and *Women’s Health* magazines. As I have argued, there are key areas – such as the emphasis on appearance, the preoccupation with dietary adjustments and the imperative of sculpting “healthy” and fat-free bodies – in which the construction of the male and female body significantly overlaps. Both men and women are alerted that fat is their man enemy and taught that an instrumental attitude towards the body is required in order to outsmart this argued opponent. In this process, the deterrent imagery of heart disease and cancer functions as a *memento mori* that shall induce in readers of both sexes the consciousness that immediate intervention is not an option but a requirement. Subsequently, an action plan is presented in the form of physical exercise and dietary advice, promising men and women ways to achieve a lean and socially valued body vis-à-vis a happier and healthier life. As has been argued, this

focus on do-it-yourself strategies is indicative of new rationalities of neoliberal health care that position the duty to maintain wellbeing with the individual (Crawshaw 1616).

However, despite these areas of convergence in the construction of the “healthy” male and female body, there are significant differences too. Men, unlike women, are instructed to focus on muscle size. They are taught exercises that shall promote massive shoulders, strong arms and ripped midsections, with the final goal to have a lean and massive body. In this process, traditional gender roles are reified as men are led towards the evaluation that the display of physical strength (which is encouraged) will enhance their masculine nature, while the fat-free body will serve their health. The male body that ensues is thus one that continues to embody patriarchal key values such as physical power and dominance over bodies that fail to “measure up”. As I have argued, this only privileges a small group of affluent (and apparently also white) individuals who are both financially equipped and genetically endowed to embody the ideal.

With regard to women, the ideal body can be viewed as a material effect of the conflation of health related issues, self-constraint and the dictates of gender. Unlike the relatively linear mode of construction of the male body, where an increase in muscles size appears to correlate with better health and a more successful masculine performance, the female body is constantly on the verge of being uneasily pretty and precariously healthy. Since muscle gain is associated with medical benefits such as a better metabolism (which is necessary for the development of a lean physique) and stable joints, building some amount of muscle is regarded as a desideratum. However, the display of too much “healthy” strength is considered a no-go and associated with unwanted masculinity. The dilemma that thus results is that women are advised to build muscles in the name of health, while they are constantly reminded that moderation is required in order to be able to perform adequate femininity. As a consequence, the idealized female body that is constructed by the magazines is one that encodes today’s increasingly contradicting cultural ideals of self-control, femininity and health in the specificity of its precarious attractiveness.

The corollary of this is that the dictates of neoliberal health-care, together with the imperatives of the hegemonic gender order, appear to sustain and reproduce the social structures that privilege men and disadvantage women. As I have shown, this tendency could also be observed with regard to the entanglement of the gendered body in consumer culture.

As the corporal is hailed into the flow of discourse, symbolic capital is inscribed on and enacted by the body in ways that it creates the gendered subjects' positions in terms of attractiveness, health and (economic) power. In the following chapter, it is the construction of the preferred interaction between men and women that will interest my analysis. I will deal with the construction of the "reproductive body" and investigate how the two magazines' gender-specific dating and relationship advice may influence the readers' ideas about (sexually) intimate relationships and structure the forms of embodiment that might emerge in and around the social space shared by men and women.

### **6.3. Caressing the reproductive body**

Central to this section is the concept of *gender socialisation*. By this process, individuals learn attitudes and behaviours that are associated with the proper enactment of masculinity and femininity in a given culture. As research indicates, traditional forms of this role-learning reinforce the image of men as physically strong, self-reliant, competitive and assertive, while they encourage women to be helpful, sensitive and empathic (Carlson-Daniels, Schindler-Zimmerman and Weiland-Bowling 27). As the above section has shown in this regard, such gender stereotypes play an important role in the shaping and sculpting of the body, with the consequence that the emphasized display of physical strength and aggressiveness is reserved for men, whereas women are expected to embody the weak and compliant part. It follows that through the embodiment of gender, these socially constructed differences come to appear natural and normal (Montemurro 10). However, in order to competently enact masculinity and femininity, men and women must not only fashion their bodies in desired ways, they must also learn and observe pre-defined bundles of gender-appropriate behaviour in order to attract partners from the opposite sex (West and Zimmerman 135). In this regard, popular magazines and the self-help literature play an important role. As Hollander holds, they and advertising constitute the most direct and pervasive influence on attitudes associated with romantic relationships and sex (251).

#### **6.3.1. Men's magazines**

The overwhelming amount of articles about sex in the popular men's media suggests that sexuality is constructed as a top priority in men's lives (Spalding et al. 2009). This tendency can be observed in most of the magazines under survey. In every *Men's Health* issue, there is

a rubric devoted to sex and relationship advice, and a column named “guy knowledge”. Both sections feature contents in areas that are deemed particularly relevant to heterosexual men’s sex lives, including dating tips and advice on how to enlarge one’s sexual repertoire. Typically, articles teach readers how to “press her lust buttons” (MH July/August 2006, p. 8), offer instructions to “talk her down” in case she is angry (MH December 2005, p.16), or give general advice on “how to make women love you” (MH January/February 2005, p. 8).

A continuously emerging theme in the magazines is that men are always ready for sex and will eventually get it if they follow the advice offered to them. In an article that teaches men about sex secrets, readers learn:

Most of the bedroom problems boil down to this: Men are microwaves and women are slow cookers. With men, all you have to do is push a few buttons and we’re hotter than a habanero. But with women, it’s an all day process. You have to buy the ingredients, mix them together and put everything in the pot and let it simmer. That’s why we’re offering a microwave mentality for the Crock-Pot reality: quick, easy things you can do to make her heating speeds better match yours [...] The payoff? They’ll quickly adjust her thermostat to high heat. (MH September 2004, p. 168)

At the beginning of the extract, in the form of an existential assumption, there is the concession that bedroom problems may be a worrisome issue in the world of the intended readership. This potentially uneasy truth, however, is immediately linked to the supposedly natural failure of women to take longer to get sexually aroused than men. The preferred evaluation of the text, that men’s sexual capabilities are unproblematic, is privileged by the contrastive metaphorical relation between the microwave and the slow cooker. As women are compared to the latter, men are led to believe that argued female sexual inadequacy can be optimized or controlled by following the advice offered in the article. By implication, the possibility of any male sexual shortcomings is excluded from the frame. Male sexuality is thus reified as normal, whereas the female counterpart is presented as problematic and lacking.

As Rogers has observed, part of this promotion of an unproblematic and ever-ready male sexuality is the idea that women enjoy whatever men do to them (183), and that therefore men should strive to widen their sexual repertoire as “sex forms part of what it means to be a man” (idem 184). Indeed, much of the magazines’ advice on sexuality promotes the image of the male sexual achiever who is knowledgeable about erotic skills. In this respect, readers are

offered “a guide to her pleasure and [theirs]” in the February issue of *MH* in 2006. They learn that “kissing is the entrance exam for the rest of her body: It tells her that you understand how to be subtle, no matter where you are on her body” (126). In another magazine, there is advice on “nipple stimulation”. Men are taught that 82 percent of women find this arousing and thus encouraged to “begin with the side of the breast and graze over the nipple” (*MH* July/August 2006, p. 48). Topics about sexual techniques further include apparently unconventional advice that shall help men to “be her best lover ever”. They are instructed to “direct a fan at her” and “pour peppermint schnapps into her belly button, dip [their] fingers and tongue, and trace her body”; or reminded that the “the washing machine is the biggest vibrator in the house” and therefore an ideal place for sex as the “vibrations will carry through the penis” (*MH* September 2004, p. 172).

As can be observed in these examples, men are constructed as active agents by means of direct injunctions that instruct them to perform certain types of action with or on their partners’ bodies. For example, they are encouraged to “begin with the side of the breast” or “direct a fan at her”, which implies that women occupy passive roles in both the described and the possibly ensuing activities. Such a foreclosure of female agency can also be traced in the texts’ ways to represent choosing personae of activities and locations. Men are instructed to kiss women so that they could get access to their bodies and they are advised to choose the washing machine as a lieu for sexual intercourse in order to enhance their physical endowments. Arguably, this preoccupation with male sexual agency reinforces the patriarchal image of the woman as an object that is owned and manipulated.

This is further complimented by the emphasis on the centrality of male skills with regard to the female orgasm. Men are given step-by-step instructions on how to help women achieve sexual pleasures, while they are encouraged to remain in control: “Insert a finger in her vagina no farther than your second knuckle. Wrap your finger around her pelvic bone and then slowly rock your hand until she starts to rock with you. Stay shallow, create a slow, throbbing sensation, and be gently too” (*MH* January/February 2006, p. 108). Such explicit sexual imagery is not only indicative of Seidler’s observation that non-gay sexuality has increasingly become defined by a man’s ability to make a woman orgasm (119), but it also suggest that the representation of straight male sexuality in the popular media relies on the enactment of power and control over women to ensure that men’s sexual needs are met (Spalding et al. 218).



In this respect, women play an ambiguous role in the *Men's Health* scheme of sexual pleasures. On the one hand, they are constructed as passive and conducive counterparts to male sexual agency, with the consequence that their bodies become the surface onto and into which male sexual fantasies are projected; and on the other hand, this secondary role is somewhat concealed by encouraging men to do things to women that they supposedly like. As I have shown above, such assumptions are sometimes supported by references to statistical data, with the implication that men's preferred ways of doing are constructed as indisputably linked to women's satisfaction. Thus, the ideas about sexual behaviour that might ensue from the magazines' advice privilege men and reify the secondary role of women in the sphere of heterosexual relationships.

The representation of masculine dominance can also be traced in the area of dating and mating advice. Men are reminded that "women love heroes" and that the appropriate "knight moves" will help them "land damsels without distress" in everyday life:

It must have been easier to feel heroic in ye olden days: Castles, steeds, and enchanted swords are better props than Toyotas and tract houses. But she'll willingly yield your Sir Lance-a-lot fantasies if she can see the gleam in your armour: polite, thoughtful romantic gestures delivered with a certain throwback boldness. [...] These heroic deeds lead to good things for everyone – dates for single guys, increased devotion from girlfriends and wives, and more one-eyed dragon slaying all around. (MH January/February 2003, p. 39)

Invoked is the imagined glory of a past, where men were assumingly equipped with powerful signifiers of masculinity, including "castles" and "enchanted swords". This is contrasted ironically with "Toyotas and tract houses" of the present era to insinuate the emergence of the "new man", a figure which Patterson and Eliot have described as more sensitive than the "traditional" man, and in touch with concerns that once were predominately associated with femininity (234). The text's preferred evaluation – that women may favour the old, supposedly masculine style is privileged by the implicit use of sexual imagery. Readers are tempted to believe that their "Sir Lance-a-lot fantasies" will come true if they perform a type of masculinity that coincides with the here constructed ideal of bold knightliness. The reward for such "heroic deeds", men are finally reminded, will involve female admiration and sex (the latter supposedly humorously disguised in terms of the metaphor "one-eyed dragon slaying all around").

On the following page of the same article, the argued female preference for dominant and heroic men is confirmed by an “expert”. So says Ava Cadell, Ph.D., author of *12 Steps to Everlasting Love*: “Women have always been drawn to protective, strong and brave men. Heroic deeds make women feel wanted, secure, and turned on. That gut feeling may be a holdover from caveman days” (MH January/February 2003, p. 40). As can be observed, allusions to the pre-civilized past are utilized to naturalize the stereotypes that are nowadays frequently assigned to men and women. While men are privileged as strong and brave protectors, which clearly shall underscore their argued dominant social status, women are depicted as insecure and weak. This consequently promotes the evaluation that women are “naturally” in need of a male chaperon.

Besides the overt celebration of male (sexual) fantasy-cum-superiority in the magazines’ sex and relationship related contents, a strong tendency of male insecurity could be observed too. In an article about dating issues, the story of a man is presented who contacts a woman (Jodi) through an online dating service. As he (the first person narrator of the supposedly true story) and Jodi meet, he learns that she is only interested in a temporary sex relationship. Jodi explains to him the arrangement: “We’d be available to each other for sex, no strings attached. No dates. No nightly phone calls. [...] We’d be acquaintances – nay, strangers – in every way except one: We’d bang bones” (MH January/February, p. 58). As the story continues, the readers learns that the male protagonist eventually agrees to Jodi’s offer after some debating, and is struck down by disappointment shortly after their first rendezvous. He recounts:

It was fun. Which was terrific, but also horrible, because I knew it was less than I’d need. What good is having without wanting, especially if wanting will mean not having? What’s more, that lick of sentimental possessiveness wasn’t there. It never would be. Like waxing a rental car on a June day. You can still get a groin tickle when you chirp it into fourth, but your heart won’t hold [...] Why keep test-driving the thing if you never take it home. (ibid)

The text is indicative of male *angst* in many ways. As can be observed, there is introduced an interpersonal constellation that reverses the more traditional notion of the womanizer and the female “prey”. It is the woman who takes initiative and invades the field of supposed masculine agency (which the magazines otherwise extol as a supposedly natural male privilege), while the man is *de facto* rendered an object of female desire and lust. It should be noted at this point that researchers have argued that heteronormative gender socialisation does not allow men to decline sex when it is offered to them by women, for this may cast doubt on

both their sexual adequacy and heterosexual credibility (Cameron and Kulick 38). With this in mind, it is not surprising that the male protagonist eventually agrees. What then follows is arguably the lament over the loss of masculine authority. While the protagonist concedes that “it was fun”, possibly unconsciously foregrounding the above discussed fantasy of unproblematic male sexuality, he immediately establishes a connection between the fulfilment of his desire and the idea of patriarchal ownership. As is implied, the sexual intercourse with a partner from the opposite sex can never be truly satisfying for a man, if wanting does not result in having. That is, if the woman subverts male agency by becoming a freewheeling sexual player herself, she effectively precludes the possibility of herself becoming an object that a man may be able to possess. The car metaphor at the end of the extract further underscores this unwanted emancipation of women in the sexual context. They are effectively compared to objects that one can test-drive and subsequently take home.

This perceived conundrum with female sexual emancipation appears to be a recurrent theme in *Men's Health*. It is complained about extensively in an article titled “He and she made easy”, where “comedian and happy bachelor Bill Maher unveils his new rules to help men understand women” (MH October 2005, p.108). Readers are not only informed (again) that women are supposedly different from men; they are also told that women are different than they used to be, especially with regard to sex: “That was the biggest change to come out of the sexual revolution and women’s liberation [...] Women have come a long way as far as allowing themselves to think of sex as something for their pleasure” (112). This argued implication of women’s sexual empowerment is then evaluated by means of a devaluing reference to homosexuality: “They say the difference between heterosexuals and gay men is that heteros say, ‘I have to get to know you before I have sex with you,’ and gay men say, ‘I have to have sex with you before I get to know you.’ Well, as with most social and fashion trends in America, that’s probably where heterosexuality is headed – straight to Fire Island” (112).

Arguably, both women’s liberation and homosexuality are represented as threats to the imagined homogeneity of the signifying economy of American heterosexuality. While women are still presented as exclusively heterosexual – the same article states elsewhere that “bisexuality among women is almost always bullshit” (idem 110) – their emancipated sexual behaviour (including the freedom to choose a man and decide to have sex with him) is depicted as a dangerous instance of moral decline that would threaten to resemble the

supposedly detrimental practices of courtship that are stereotypically associated with the gay community. By implication, both gay readers and emancipated women are excluded from the narrow frame of appreciated and respected sexual desires that is promoted in the media under review. The magazines thus reinforce the traditional heterosexual model of gender socialisation that is hostile against women who refuse to occupy a secondary role in (sexual) relationships.

Finally, I will turn towards the embodiment of male sexuality and investigate how corporeality may be influenced by ideas about sexuality. It is notable that the magazines seek to establish a link between physical appearance and hegemonic masculine roles. In an article on dating advice, men are taught that their supposed social dominance should be mirrored by their sartorial choices. They are instructed to dress in a way that they demonstrate that they are “a leader and not a lemming” (WH October 2005, p. 164). Besides, readers are offered workouts that promise them a “better body for amazing sex” (MH March 2005, p.187). The magazine states: “Exercising to improve your sexual performance requires functional movements that train your entire body to be more functional and resilient [...] It depends on how well your body can push and thrust. ‘It’s the smaller muscles you can’t see or feel that make all the difference when it comes to great sex,’ says Jeff Bell, C.S.C.S., owner of Spectrum Wellness in New York City” (idem 187).

As the extract suggests, the discourse that Rogers has defined “as sexual mode of production” is drawn up into the text (186). The preparation for the sexual act is portrayed in the language of economic organisation, relying on terminologies such as improvement, performance and the functionality of movements, with the goal that total control over the body and its intended use can be achieved by the exact specification and sequencing of linear processes and routines (idem 187). The desired product of the workout is then described as “the payoff”: “A solid core can lead to a great performance in the bedroom [...] The more flexible you are, the more versatility you’ll be able to demonstrate in bed [...] Using endurance exercises that mimic the motions involved in sex can prevent weaker muscles from quitting too soon” (MH March 2005, p.188). Arguably, the extract exemplifies how the fantasy of masculine dominance is inscribed on the male body by means of specific training routines that resemble the logic of an outcomes based industrial organisation. The unilateral focus of this intervention (partner workouts are not presented) and the emphasis on men’s resilience and capability of violent pushing and thrusting furthermore suggest that sexuality as a whole is constructed as a male

dominated pursuit, in which the overdeveloped male body functions to signify the power to control, and by implication to devalue, the female partner. As Spalding et al. have argued, such messages promote the continuity of men's patriarchal entitlements through the normalization of technologies of power and domination that may in the real world have detrimental safety implications for women, possibly laying the ideological groundwork for domestic violence and sexual abuse (219).

In summary, this subsection has discussed examples which demonstrate how *Men's Health* constructs sex as a top priority in men's lives, promoting the idea that male sexuality is always unproblematic. While the magazines acknowledge that men may have sexual problems, my examples have shown how such bedroom issues are linked to the deficiencies of women. Consequently, men are taught strategies to remedy their partners' argued shortcomings, with the implication that the figure of the dominant male lover, with a large repertoire of sexual techniques, is promoted. By implication, male sexuality is represented as dominant and active, while the female part is assigned a secondary and passive role. However, instances of masculine uncertainty could be observed too. I have demonstrated how *MH* presents women's liberation and female sexual agency as threats to heterosexuality, effectively reinforcing stereotypical patterns of patriarchal gender socialisation. Finally, I have argued that traditional notions of masculinity are promoted by specific types of physical training that shall help men achieve bodies that can vigorously thrust and push in sexual intercourse. The ensuing type of embodiment arguably functions to secure men's entitlements through the deployment of physical strength and control.

### **6.3.2. Women's magazines**

With the recent proliferation of risk-related issues in contemporary life, uncertainty has invaded relationships and rendered them a potentially insecure project. The perceived absence of long-term security in most human affairs has given rise to the consumerist imperative of instant gratification, with the consequence that human bonds have become deliberately precarious, effectively resembling "communities of purpose" that are maintained as long as satisfaction lasts (Bauman 162-63). This "liquid" type of partnership of late modernity has brought with it great amounts of confusion, creating a need for advice that shall delineate viable ways to establish and maintain happy and sexually satisfying relationships (Hollander 251). As I will demonstrate, *WH's* preoccupation with *technologies of sexiness* – a term

coined by Hilary Radner to capture contemporary culture's imperatives for women to embody heterosexuality through the disciplined use of the body, clothing and exercise (15) – promises women “solutions” in these regards.

Similar to the men's magazines, *Women's Health* constructs sex and relationship matters as a top priority for its readership. There is a section named “Sex & Love” in every issue, which contains articles with titles such as “Amazing sex secrets” (WH January/February 2012, p.3), “More sex, better sex” (WH October 2011, p.5) or “Is he a keeper?” (WH October 2013, p.5). However, contrary to the abundance of dating advice in *Men's Health*, no such orientation seems to exist in the women's media. Rather, there are articles that foreground the importance of stable relationships vis-à-vis the anxiety that they might not be as perfect or long lasting as hoped for. In this respect, the fear of declining lust represents a recurrent theme which readers are encouraged to address. Women are made aware that “in every coupling, lust tends to wane over time” and are reminded that “love, attachment, and commitment will take over to keep two people together” (WH October 2011, p.109). At the same time, however, they are warned that the emotional work they invest into a relationship may not suffice to keep their partners interested in them. The text continues: “Sex and sexual attraction are healthy aspects of a strong foundation. As long as you can turn up the heat, you should be fine” (idem 109).

Precisely this “turning up the heat” is represented as a woman's responsibility in the magazines under survey. There can be observed an effort to teach women techniques and modes of behaviour that shall help them gain satisfaction and make their male partners feel privileged and good about themselves. For instance, “being more brazen in bed” is recommended to readers as the “ultimate way to keep a relationship strong and protect it from boredom” (WH October 2011, p. 107-08). Since boredom in bed is to be avoided at any cost, women are carefully advised on techniques that shall keep their partners happy. Part of this intervention entails understanding basic functions of male sexual organs, most notably the penis. Women learn: “The penis is a mysterious, magical organ. (Chances are, you're already a fan), but because you don't have the appendage yourself, it can be tricky to find out how to get – and keep – it happy. The deeper your understanding of how it works, the more satisfied and connected you'll both feel. With that in mind, listen to what his penis would say if it could speak for its owner” (WH September 2011, p.100). As is implied, a woman's ability to foster her own pleasure vis-à-vis intimacy and bonding in a heterosexual relationship depends on her ability to accommodate her partner's penis. Accordingly, readers are advised that “the

penis responds most dramatically to direct contact”. They are reminded that they should “not be afraid to give him a good grab”, since “the penis is grateful for pretty much any kind of action”, and that therefore they should “test different grips to see what type of handling [their] man responds to most enthusiastically” (ibid).

Equally part of the magazines’ advice on paying attention to men’s sexual organs is encouraging women to give oral sex to their boyfriends. The claim that this is supposedly rewarding and healthy for the involved female part is supported by a reference to scientific research: “A State University of New York study found that women who regularly give their partners oral sex are happier, less anxious, and able to sleep better and feel more affectionate [...] This is because semen contains mood-enhancing chemicals and antidepressants” (WH September/October 2013, p.103). The cause-effect relation presented here is that women will benefit from oral sex only if they swallow the semen, because otherwise, the supposedly mood-enhancing chemicals would not work. What arguably appears to resemble a stale sexist joke is in fact meant as serious advice from a presumed expert, who has written a book on the topic. The text further suggests: In order to refine their “stroking technique”, women should consider playing music: “It gives [them] something to focus on and helps maintain the rhythmic strokes that will bring him to orgasm”, says Siski Green, author of *How to Blow His Mind in Bed*” (ibid). As can be observed, the women’s sexual efforts (rhythmic strokes) are directly linked to an outcome of pleasure that is outside their own bodies (his orgasm). While this clearly promotes the patriarchal fantasy of the female body as a means to an end, it can also be argued that the text implicitly devalues female satisfaction as a tolerated by-product of the male climax. The preferred evaluation of this and the previous text thus appears to be that women need to please their men in order to experience harmonious and satisfying relationships themselves.

Notwithstanding the magazine’s affirmative position on oral sex, there is evidence that some readers may not like it. In the “Ask the Expert” column, a section oriented towards sex and relationship advice, an anonymous reader confesses that she does not enjoy giving oral sex to her boyfriend and asks whether there are ways to make it more pleasant for her. She is answered: “Many women are concerned about tasting and swallowing semen. If that’s what bothers you the most, bring him to the point of climax and then have him ejaculate outside of your mouth. He can also wear a flavoured condom so that you never come in contact with the semen [...] And if your jaw gets tired, take a break” (WH June 2011, p.105). It is notable that

despite the reader's reluctance to engage in the said sexual practice, she is still encouraged to do so. Her individual disapprobation of oral sex is effectively mitigated by the generalizing assumption that "many women are concerned about swallowing semen". Thus, regardless whether the reader might have issues with oral sex that are related to the taste of semen or not, her supposed responsibility to perform the practice on her boyfriend is not called into question. Her supportive role to his climax-cum-ejaculation is assumed as a given, while her agency is reduced to some amount of self-protection from his semen. Supposedly ironically, the last line "if your jaw gets tired, take a break", hints at the woman's secondary status in the described sexual act. Arguably, it can be interpreted as a sexist pun on her strenuous but supposedly inadequate sexual labour that is assumed to result in her fatigue before his climax has been achieved. The heteronormative fantasy of the unproblematic male sexuality vis-à-vis the potentially lacking female counterpart is thus reified. As Gutpa, Zimmerman and Fruhauf have noted in a similar analysis of sex and relationship concerns in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, such tendencies mirror the respective media's increasingly sexist focus on constructing women as responsible for their male partners' sexual pleasures (256).

Besides accommodating men's sexual desires, women are also given more general advice on how to keep their partners happy and in a relationship. In an article titled "The secret to living a sexier life" (WH January/February 2012, p.36-39), readers learn from celebrity Marisa Miller how to "keep [their] love bonds strong". "'Guys are very visual', says Marisa. So whether it's treating yourself (and him) to some new lingerie or playing dress-up in the bedroom, keeping things fresh can stoke excitement. 'My job is great, because I come home from work every day made over', she says. 'So Griffin can get 20 different women in one month'" (ibid 39). As can be observed, the woman partner is represented in a supportive role, with the goal to keep the male partner interested in and enthusiastic about her. This is to be achieved by technologies of self-transformation (wearing lingerie) and eroticised performances (playing dress-up) that shall please the involved man's gaze. The assumption that men are keen to look at women (and heterosexual by implication) is underscored by the statement "guys are very visual". The promised reward for the woman's sexual labour is then cunningly disguised as a self-serving endeavour. Playing a secondary role is presented as part of the heteronormative deal that is required in order to keep a love bond strong.

Both the explicit use of sexual imagery and the preoccupation with sexual practice in the magazines' advice mirror what Harvey and Gill have described as "the sexualisation of



culture”, a notion that shall capture Western societies’ growing entanglement with sexual discourse in everyday life (53). As pornography has become increasingly influential, practices once associated with the sex industry have been appropriated as porno-chic aesthetic in contemporary popular culture (Attwood 82). As a consequence, Attwood holds, sex has not only largely lost its once blameful and censorable connotations, the stylized idealizations of (hetero) sexual encounters and behaviour also function as a powerful cultural force that disciplines female bodily demeanour by apparently offering an emancipatory vision of feminine sexuality which is in fact geared to suit patriarchal needs (83). According to Harvey and Gill, this has given rise to the figure of the “sexual entrepreneur” (55). This type of femininity is constructed as compulsorily sexy and always ready for (hetero) sexual affairs. She is interpellated through discourses that represent sex as a constant project of the self, which is to be achieved by means of body work (the bikini body I have discussed in the previous chapter) and the refinement of erotic skills (e.g. oral sex). The thus ensuing persona lives under the impression that she has invested her efforts and money in beauty, desirability and sexual freedom, while she may be unaware that her supposedly liberating agenda is in fact heavily policed and objectified (idem 56).

Particularly indicative of the construction of the sexual entrepreneur is the following example. In an article from the *WH*’s April issue of 2012, titled “Twist that’ll make you shout”, women are given advice on how to upgrade their sex moves. Presented are various techniques that shall prepare them and their partners for better sexual stimulation. Included are the “french press” and “the catcher”. The former is meant as a refinement of oral sex and is outlined as follows: “With his penis in your mouth, press your tongue upward and occasionally swallow. This tongue-tantalizing move gives added pressure and suction to take him over the top, says Sonia Borg, Ph.D.” (101). The “catcher”, then, is presented as another sexual upgrade that requires elaborate refinement: “Instead of kneeling on top of him, straddle him in a squat position with your feet flat on the bed or floor. He’ll enjoy the view and you’ll be in better control to hit your G-spot” (ibid).

The text’s suggestion that women should upgrade their sexual techniques effectively promotes the assumption that their sexual repertoires are lacking. As a supposed reward for their efforts, they are promised twists that will “make [them] shout” (ibid). Thus, women readers are expected to perform techniques on their partners’ bodies that presuppose and promote the assumption that female sexual pleasure is necessarily related to pleasing men. There is either

an emphasis on taking him “over the top”, which suggests that women should prioritize male physical pleasure over their own; or, on the other hand, on staying on top, so that he can “enjoy the view” (remembering that guy’s are said to be visual). With this in mind, one can arguably identify allusions to the pornographic genre. In this regard, the precise chronologic scripting of sexual procedures in the text is related to particular sexual outcomes, which arguably implies that sex without such effects is not fulfilling. Consequently, any other forms of mutual corporal attention are excluded from the frame. Thus, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual men and women, who may have different ideas about spending intimate time with their partners, are effectively marginalized via implicit messages that signal to them that their ways of doing sexuality are not right.

Besides the magazines’ emphasis on promoting frivolous notions of sexual entrepreneurship, the female body’s agency is dramatically constrained as it is represented in the context of reproductive concerns. An article titled “The maybe-baby mindset” states: “When it comes to getting pregnant, more women are letting fate decide. But experts say that kind of ambivalence might put you and your offspring in harm’s way” (WH October 2011, p.76). Readers subsequently learn that the emergence of seemingly viable backup plans such as egg freezing and in vitro fertilization has led to a situation where many women no longer deem it necessary to conceive during their younger years. As a consequence, so the article, women in their thirties feel somewhat ambivalent about their baby plans. They are not desperately trying to get pregnant but they are not taking any steps to avoid pregnancy either. However, this “maybe-baby” attitude is presented as problematic: “If a woman had a casual attitude about pregnancy, she might be putting herself – and her potential kid – at risk” (idem 78). The reason for this, so the article, is that women may neglect their pregnancy and engage in supposedly dangerous forms of behaviour: “Women who don’t quickly realize they’re expecting are more likely to engage in no-nos like boozy happy hours and or social smoking” (ibid).

There are two striking propositional assumptions in this text. Firstly, there is the speculation that women, who do not intend to get pregnant, will not know when they are pregnant; and secondly, it is suspected that they will do dangerous things. While it is certainly important to warn women about the damage that alcohol consumption can do to their unborn babies, it is a totally different issue to blame them for abusing intoxicating substances when all they are guilty of is having sex with their partners besides a casual attitude about family planning.

Arguably, this makes one wonder if the above article is not indicative of women's precarious position between the underlying imperative of the lascivious sexual entrepreneur and the clean-living associations that come with the maternal role. If this is so, women are disciplined twice in this regard. Firstly, they are promised sexual self-fulfilment and lasting partnerships as a reward for accommodating men by means of porn-inspired stylizations of their bodies; and secondly, they are reprimanded if they extend some of their apparently granted agency toward the supposedly sacred field of reproductive affairs.

In this context, it should be pointed out that readers of *Women's Health* are quite encouraged to drink moderate amounts of alcohol to protect their hearts: "Drinking one glass of red or white wine a day can decrease the chance of dying from heart disease by 25 percent" (WH September 2011, p.74). As this suggests, responsible drinking is rather promoted than deprecated by the magazines' advice, which arguably leaves an imprint on the readers' ideas about health related behaviours. It follows that drinking alcohol is not contemptible in the women's health world unless maternity is added to the equation. By implication, the shift from non-mother to mother-to-be implies a transition from the scripted ideals of healthy feminine normalcy to those of maternal wellbeing. The tension of this discursive shift becomes obvious in the hybrid space of the "maybe-baby" attitude, I would argue. At this point, women may continue to embody the ideals of health, beauty and social agency that have been defined as appropriate for them in their pre-maternal gender socialisation. However, their reluctance to either decide for or against pregnancy precludes their unproblematic passage to maternity proper, while it also renders inappropriate the scripts of feminine demeanour that would apply if the possibility of getting pregnant was not part of their situation. The "maybe-baby" mindset thus assumes the subversive characteristics of an "outlaw attitude" that makes the women in question impossibly difficult to define. As a result, their agency is more heavily policed, since it may at this point more severely threaten to interfere with patriarchal beliefs about reproductive matters.

In this respect, it is important to note that maternity proper, that is when the mother's pregnancy is confirmed, appears to have emerged from the discursive conundrum that plagues the uncertain mother-to-be. As Tyler has observed, pregnancy has become reconfigured as a neoliberal project of self-realization, with the consequence that pregnant women are no longer exempt from the pursuit of beauty and the pressure to perform sexual availability (27-28). This suggests that the here observed new mode of undecided transition between "sexual

entrepreneurship” and confirmed pregnant beauty-to-be is one that is discursively hard to grasp. As Butler reminds us, the very criterion by which we judge governs the recognisability of what we judge and posits the normative disposition of the criterion as a presupposition of judgement (*Undoing Gender* 58). Thus, a space that avoids recognisability is one that dwells beyond discursive intervention and by implication, resists judgement. The “maybe-baby” attitude of the uncertain mother-to-be therefore operates as a condition of emancipatory consciousness that seeks to evade the norms of intelligibility itself. The self that emerges thus renders herself unintelligible to the norms of the signifying economies that seek to know and control her identity. Butler has noted in this respect that the appearance of the subject at the limits of intelligibility offers a perspective on the ways norms circumscribe and discipline individuals – and by implication, on how norms may be resisted (idem 74). In other words, if an individual succeeds to appear in a space of consciousness that lies beyond the existing realm of signification, a glimpse of freedom – or what Foucault has described as the “de-subjugation of the subject” (“What is Critique” 32) – would come in sight. Bearing this in mind, I will come back to the notion of resistance at a later stage and theorize possible emancipatory ways of reading the magazines contents.

In summary, the above discussed examples are indicative of a particular form of gender socialisation that constructs women as secondary to men. There is an emphasis on teaching them “technologies of sexiness”, to borrow Radner’s terminology here (15), with the goal that they become more able to accommodate patriarchal expectations. As I have shown, this involves a preoccupation with gathering knowledge about men’s sexual organs and the refinement of practices such as oral sex. The ensuing figure of the “sexual entrepreneur” (Harvey and Gill 55) is a type of femininity that is constructed as compulsorily sexy and always ready for (hetero) sexual intercourse. While women are led to the evaluation that the employment of sexual strategies will help them bond with their partners more closely, they may in fact overlook that the price for their supposed sexual desirability is the acceptance of their subordination to a narrowly defined heteronormative scheme of female servility, beauty and attractiveness. I have concluded that the undecided transition from the constructed mode of female sexual normalcy to maternity is heavily tension ridden and discursively difficult to grasp. As the perseverance of female agency in the form of indecision may threaten the patriarchal power-knowledge complex of the reproductive economy, the ensuing subject is policed more strongly, while the unintelligibility of her act offers a perspective on how norms may be resisted.

### 6.3.3. Conclusion

This section has dealt with the construction of the “reproductive body” in *Men’s* and *Women’s Health* Magazines. Central to this has been the concept of individuals’ gender socialisation as far as it concerns the learning of seemingly appropriate ways to attract partners from the opposite sex. I have demonstrated that both *Men’s Health* and *Women’s Health* magazines construct sex as a priority in their readers’ lives and subsequently teach individuals large repertoires of sexual techniques in gender specific ways.

With regard to men, the idea of active and unproblematic sex is promoted. While the magazines concede that men have sexual problems, the examples I have discussed suggest that such issues are linked to the women involved. In this respect, the theme of the supposedly natural failure of women to take longer to get sexually aroused than men repeatedly emerged. As a consequence, there is an emphasis on teaching men strategies and techniques that might help them remedy their female partners’ argued shortcomings. The thus ensuing masculinity is sexually dominant, always ready for sex and well-versed in a large repertoire of sexual techniques, whereas the feminine counterpart is presented as compliant and sexually unresponsive.

Besides the magazines’ preoccupation with sex, men are reminded of their supposedly natural traits of strength and dominance. I have discussed instances of dating and relationship advice that reify the image of the male hero, who is encouraged to engage in supposedly chivalrous pursuits in order to endear himself to women. However, themes of masculine anxiety could be observed too. I have shown how *Men’s Health* represents women’s sexual emancipation as a threat to the heteronormative gender order, and I have argued that this reinforces stereotypical patterns of gender socialisation that privilege men and subordinate women. Finally, I have suggested that dominant ideals of masculinity are promoted by workouts that shall help men achieve bodies that are capable of vigorously pushing and thrusting in sexual intercourse, with the consequence that the ensuing embodiment of powerful masculinity in heterosexual relationships functions to secure patriarchal signifying economies through the deployment of physical strength and control.

Contrary to the construction of men’s sexuality as unproblematic and dominant, women’s roles in relationships are construed as secondary and dependant on men’s approval. There can

be observed a tendency in *Women's Health* to teach women strategies that shall help them appear more attractive and sexually proficient to their partners. The notion of risk plays an important role in this context. As women are alerted that sexual boredom may be a dreaded relationship killer, they are led to the evaluation that it falls within their responsibility to accommodate their partners' intimate pleasures in order to secure lasting and supposedly harmonious bonds. As I have shown, this includes an extensive knowledge about what men may find sexually appealing, ranging from the stylizations of erotic performances to techniques of sexual stimulation.

As I have argued, what appears to be in the self-interest of women, *de facto* masks the underlying patriarchal scheming that is assumingly involved. The heavily scripted sex labour women are expected to perform may appear to them as a natural component of relationship work, while they may be unaware that their efforts sustain and reproduce narrowly defined heteronormative ideals of female subordination and objectification. The ensuing figure of the "sexual entrepreneur" (Harvey and Gill 55), may superficially signal sexual empowerment and female advance; however, the regime of compulsory sexiness and availability stands in stark opposition to the emancipatory efforts of feminist consciousness. As Harvey and Gill have remarked in this respect, "the discourses of self-management produce a feminine subject that is required to be 'up for it' as a response for male needs, in which her own pleasure is a secondary concern" (63). I have concluded that women's *laissez faire* attitudes about family planning signal a hybrid discursive field, in which the tension between argued female sexual normalcy and maternity is being played out. Since both fields are heavily policed by conflicting patriarchal interests, an individual's hesitant-cum-unorthodox transition from the sexy to the maternal is likely to be perceived as trespassing of agency that may threaten the norms of the hegemonic reproductive order. However, the unintelligibility of the act offers also a perspective on how gender hegemony may be subverted.

## **7. Discussion**

This thesis has investigated the role of *Men's* and *Women's Health* magazines in the construction of "corporeal" identities. I have suggested that the discursive positions advanced through the media under survey propagate forms of subject-constitution that are closely related to modernity's argued preoccupation with consumerism, heteronormativity and risk. As Douglas has insightfully remarked in this regard, the categories of the social body

inevitably have their bearings on the defining coordinates within which the individual bodily form is enacted and perceived (69). These “norms of intelligibility”, to use Butler’s terminology here (*Undoing Gender* 41), constitute powerful cultural forces that regulate the entirety of concepts and technologies of self-constitution that are relevant to corporal issues such as beauty, sexuality and health. It thus follows that the specificity of beauty, sex and health discourses, which shall discipline individual bodies in particular circumstances at particular times, relates to the larger conjuncture in which the respective bodies and discursive concerns are situated: the dictates of bodily appearance are closely related to the conjuncture of mass consumption (Featherstone 195); concerns about health care have become more thoroughly influenced by a conflation of neoliberal rationalities and risk (Crawshaw 1606); and sexuality is heavily regulated by patriarchal value schemes (Attwood 83).

This thesis has argued that *Men’s Health* and *Women’s Health* constitute important sites for the propagation and negotiation of such discourses. I have traced the formation of three distinct body types: the *commercialized body* in consumer culture, the *disciplinary body* in an environment of uncertainty and risk, and the *reproductive body* in the signifying economy of heteronormativity. Since the construction modes of all three body types appear to be interrelated and highly gender-specific, I have conducted a comparative analysis of the two publications. Unlike most research on popular magazines that has taken the unilateral perspective of either investigating the men’s or the women’s media, I have sought to explain the offerings of advice in both men’s and women’s magazines as an overall discursive deployment that aims at governing wide areas of the social fabric in their entire spectrum.

In this regard, my thesis has demonstrated that ideas about embodying health and beauty are linked to both gender and consumption, while consumption is heavily promoted through notions of gender. As my analysis has suggested, gender emerges as a “master category” that legitimizes both the distinction and the overlap between men’s and women’s ways of doing, besides governing their preferred ways of interaction. As Baudrillard has argued, the corollary of this is that the structural and hierarchical distinctions between masculinity and femininity largely remain intact, while a convergent space of narcissistic self-indulgence is offered as a source of identification that shall interpellate both men and women in culturally approved ways (*Consumer Society* 97-98). In the following, a summary of the results of my enquiry is provided and the insights are evaluated in terms of their social relevance. Finally, I explore

possibilities for subverting the magazines' contents and suggest a perspective that may illuminate how their socially exclusive frames might be resisted.

*First*, I have traced the production of the “commercialised body” in *Men's* and *Women's Health* magazines. My analysis has demonstrated that both men and women are increasingly targeted as consumers of products and advice that shall help them improve their bodies and their lives. With regard to men, this has involved a shift from traditional masculine breadwinner identities to a more objectified form of subjectivity that has previously been associated with women (Beynon 102-03). With this in view, I have discussed examples that indicate how the magazines deal with men's supposed fears of becoming feminized by linking men's products to masculinised fields of experience, such as financial power and heterosexual pursuits. Thus, grooming and fashion have been culturally appropriated as legitimate technologies of the self for the modern man.

In the women's health media, a similar tendency of gender specificity could be observed. Much of the advice presents itself under the disguise of liberating feminist discourse, while it covertly contains heteronormative messages that reify the secondary role of women in society. I have discussed examples that show how the supposedly emancipatory strategies that are taught to women are *feminized* (similar to the masculinisation of consumer products for men described above), so that the enactment of these strategies does not threaten the hegemonic gender order. In combination with the ever-present imperative to build and fashion either an attractive female body or a fit male body, both *Men's Health* and *Women's Health* appear to sustain stereotypical images of gender socialisation that carry forth the idea of strong men and weak women.

Notwithstanding *MH's* clear heterosexual orientation, it is possible to interpret some of its contents as “gay vague” – borrowing this term from Dworkin and Wachs (57). In this respect, I have identified images and texts that implicitly carry subcultural codes that may function to commercially target “those in the know”, without the majority of non-gay readers being aware of it. Instances of “lesbian vague” could not be identified though. One reason for this might be that marketing industries may identify lesbian readers as a less wealthy target group than gay men. I have concluded that both magazines' construction of male and female consumers vis-à-vis their bodies privileges only a small and wealthy demographic. While the opportunities that are marketed to readers appear to be infinite, their agency is in fact limited to the



embodiment of a narrowly defined ideal that appears to exclude non-white and less affluent members of society.

*Second*, I have investigated the construction of the “disciplinary body” in the magazines under review. As I have shown, there are key areas – such as the emphasis on appearance, the preoccupation with dietary adjustments and the imperative to sculpt “healthy” and fat-free bodies – in which the construction of the male and female body significantly overlaps. Fat is represented as the main enemy for both men and women, with the consequence that they are taught strategies that shall help them “fat-proof” their bodies. In this process, the imagery of cancer and heart disease is presented as a deterrent to convince readers that immediate intervention is required. The magazines then offer counterstrategies against fat, which include exercise and dietary advice, promising readers ways to achieve lean bodies and more enjoyable, healthier lives. As Crawshaw has pointed out, this focus on do-it-yourself strategies is indicative of models of neoliberal health care that increasingly construct individuals as self-responsible managers of their own wellbeing (1617).

Despite shared characteristics in the construction of the “healthy” male and female body, significant differences can be observed too. Men are instructed to focus on muscle size, whereas women should strive to build a sexy “bikini body”. While men’s workouts shall help them build broad shoulders, strong arms and ripped midsections, the preferred woman’s physique is compact and lean. In this process, traditional gender roles are sustained. Men are led towards the evaluation that the display of physical strength and toughness (which is often encouraged) will enhance their masculine nature, while building a mesomorphic body will serve their health. Women, on the other side, should focus on a toned physique and avoid building and signalling too much strength, which is associated with unwanted masculinity. While women are encouraged to strengthen their bodies in the name of health, they are constantly reminded that moderation is required in order to perform appropriate femininity. By implication, the idealized female body encodes today’s contradicting cultural ideals of self-control, femininity and health in the specificity of its narrowly defined, argued attractiveness. Consequently, both the dictates of neoliberal health-care and the imperatives of heteronormativity constitute as powerful cultural force that appears to sustain forms of embodiment that privilege the entitlements of men, while they disadvantage and objectify women.

*Third*, I have traced the making of the “reproductive body”. Central to this has been the concept of gender socialisation as far as it relates to the learning of culturally approved ways of interaction with partners from the opposite sex. My analysis has suggested that both magazines construct sex as a priority in their readers’ lives and teach them sexual techniques and relationship strategies in gender specific ways. In *Men’s Health*, the myth of unproblematic male sex is promoted. Even though *MH* concedes that men may be plagued by sexual issues – in fact much of the magazine’s advice is directed at addressing such issues – men’s bedroom problems are frequently linked to the argued sexual shortcomings of women. As a consequence, men are taught a large repertoire of sex-techniques that shall help them remedy their partners’ argued deficiencies. Thus, men are essentially encouraged to address their problems as their partners’ problems, with the implication that male sexuality is both immunised against criticism and reified as unflawed.

Besides the magazines’ preoccupation with sex, men are assured of their supposedly natural traits of physical power and social dominance. I have discussed examples of dating and relationship advice that encourage men to display their strength and adopt types of behaviour that mirror the stereotypical image of the chivalrous hero. However, representations of men’s anxieties could be observed too. In this respect, *Men’s Health* represents women’s sexual emancipation as a threat to the heteronormative gender order and advises men how to deal with this “issue”. Research has linked this newfound solidarity between magazines and men to the idea of a “crisis of masculinity” (Alexander 551), which is argued to have ensued as a result of women’s liberation (Beynon 78), and which may be resolved by means of overtly demonstrating masculine power (Courtenay 1388). In this respect, I have suggested that images of supposed masculine superiority are inscribed on the body by means of specific workout types. There is a focus on making the male body capable of vigorously thrusting and pushing in the sexual act, with the implication that the ensuing embodiment of masculinity in heterosexual relationships functions to secure patriarchal control via the deployment of physical strength. It is important to note that this intervention functions to secure men’s entitlements in the private sphere, while the further above discussed representation of the commercialised body is closely related to the display of power in the public domain.

Contrary to the construction of men’s sexuality as unproblematic and dominant, women’s roles in relationships are represented as dependant on men’s approval. In this regard, *Women’s Health* teaches readers strategies that shall help them appear more sexually

attractive to their partners. The notion of risk plays an important role in this regard. As women are warned that sexual boredom may break up their relationships, they are led to the evaluation that taking responsibility for their partners' intimate pleasures will help them secure lasting and supposedly harmonious bonds. While women are thus made believe that their sexual efforts serve their interests first and foremost, they may easily overlook that the heavily scripted sex labour that is involved reifies patriarchal models of female subjugation and objectification. While the ensuing figure of the "sexual entrepreneur" may connote sexual empowerment and female advance to a certain degree, the compulsion to be sexy and sexually available stands in stark contrast to the emancipating efforts of feminist discourse (Harvey and Gill 55).

My findings indicate that both men and women are hailed into the flow of corporeal discourses in both very similar and very different ways. They are led to believe that the exercise of free choice will grant them access to happier and healthier lives, if they are prepared to manage their bodies vis-à-vis their behaviour in (gender) specific ways. While the options that are presented to individuals may appear infinite, their agency is in fact constrained by narrowly defined corporeal ideals, which are aimed at wealthy and otherwise privileged members of the middle class. Despite this significant overlap in both magazines' scheming, men's and women's bodies are constructed in different ways too. While men are advised to display masculine strength in the form of a muscular body, women are encouraged to foreground their femininity by aiming at a physique that is compact and lean. In the magazines' relationship advice, similar patterns of stereotypical gender socialisation can be observed. While men's sexuality is presented as unproblematic, women are led to believe that their sexual and emotional wellbeing depends on their partners' approval. As a consequence, women receive the message that it is their sole responsibility to manage and maintain heterosexual relationships. As Gupta, Zimmerman and Fruhauf have argued, such messages imply that women have to sacrifice themselves in order to be in a relationship (263). The corollary of this is that the joint efforts of *Men's* and *Women's Health* are hostile to a wide range of individuals. The narrowly defined frames of preferred corporealities they produce do not only exclude heterosexual men and women from the lower social strata, they also place at a disadvantage non-heterosexual couples and most women in relationships with men.

Arguably, this decidedly negative outlook does not bode well for women's empowerment and the advancement of social justice in more general terms. However, it promises to be helpful to

interrogate our era's consciousness of uncertainty and *angst* with *MH's* and *WH's* non-inclusive imagery in mind. Precisely this conflation of image and risk, I will argue, may offer a perspective on how the magazines' antisocial frames of supposed bodily perfection may be challenged and subverted.

I have argued that risk and anxiety play a pivotal role in the discursive formation of the body in the magazines under survey. The construction of the *commercialised body* is facilitated via the promise that buying particular products will augment the consumers' control over his or her life; the *disciplinary body* is governed by a preoccupation with risk prevention; and the *reproductive body* is plagued by anxieties about supposedly insecure human bonds. In each case, individuals are confronted with narrowly defined ideals that are difficult to embody. As I have demonstrated, care for health and the body has turned into a permanent war against risk inside the boundaries of the self, while the risk factors one is concerned about have become increasingly difficult to define and to understand. What in the past was considered harmless may in the future be regarded as hazardous, so that the pursuit of idealised models – be it in the form of dieting, beauty or otherwise – is never likely to predict long lasting satisfaction (Bauman 79). An article from *WH's* October issue of 2011 is indicative of this tendency. It states:

Heidi Klum's catchphrase – 'One day you're in, and the next day you're out' – applies as much to food as it does to fashion. Over the years, we've all had favourite eats hit the healthy-food blacklist, but thankfully, some of them are making a return. In fact, recent research has not only redeemed once taboo foods such as steak, eggs (yolks included), and peanut butter but also found that when eaten in moderation, some of them may actually help you conquer the scale. (92)

As can be observed, the text ironically suggests the possibility that much of the magazines' advice – and by implication most other seemingly rational advice – may be subject to doubt. Here is an important connection to be made. Since risks predominately exist in terms of knowledge rather than actual experience (Beck *Risk Society* 23), they relate to modernity's preoccupation with reflexivity and its ensuing production of doubt (idem 21). In other words, in order to become visible or interpretable as risk, a supposed hazard must enter discourse. That is, "[t]he world of the visible must be investigated, relativized and evaluated with respect to a second reality, only existent in thought and yet concealed to the world" (idem 73). By implication, people do not individually sensor what supposedly threatens them; they are made aware about potential dangers via the mediation and orchestration of knowledge, most notably

by means of the image. In this respect, Baudrillard's concept of the *simulacrum* promises to offer instructive insights. He argues that what we perceive as social reality is in fact a cultural construction, mediated by and through the simulacrum, an image that no longer measures itself against "reality" but that has instead severed all ties with its referent. The simulacrum / simulation has thus become a substitute for the "real". It is a *hyperreal* that appears more genuine than the signifier it should initially serve as a signified (Baudrillard *Simulacra* 1-2).

It appears logical that the concept of risk constitutes a simulacrum *par excellence*. As Beck notes: "If we were previously concerned with externally caused dangers (from the gods or nature), the historically novel quality of today's risks derives from internal decision. They depend on a simultaneously scientific and social construction" (*Risk Society* 155). Beck's notion of the social construction of risk exemplifies what Baudrillard describes as an image without origin. While risks, unlike external dangers, are no longer reducible to a referent, they are protected from any distinction between the real and themselves, with the consequence that they henceforth operate as "hyperreal", which is the signified minus a signifier that no longer is one: "Over the whole span of daily life, a vast *process of simulation* is taking place [...] In mass communications, it assumes *force of reality*: reality itself is abolished, obliterated, in favour of this *neo-reality of the model*, which is given material force by the medium itself. (Baudrillard, *Consumer Society* 107). Arguably, the quote suggests that the simultaneous proliferation of simulacra and risk may have severe effects on everyday life. The image of risk appears to have replaced the outdated reality of once feared external dangers by a spectacle of imagery that has induced a consciousness of constant fear. The *totalgestalt* of the messages of the mass media has thus assumed a force of *neo-reality* that is so powerful that it renders useless both the illusory and the real.

It is precisely this *neo-reality of the model* Baudrillard speaks about that has invaded the human body. Under the rationality of simulation, the body has lost its status of an organic organisation of flesh and desire. It has become a "forum of signs" that "is no longer, strictly speaking a body but a shape" (Baudrillard *Consumer Society* 133). As humans have become "instantly legible and overexposed in the light of information", they have been transformed into images themselves (Baudrillard "Violence" 40). The *violence* of this forced visibility aims at making the real behind the body image disappear: "A double symbolic murder: everything today takes the form of an image, while the real disappears behind the profusion of images" (idem 41). Notwithstanding this bleak outlook, Baudrillard offers a glimpse of hope

for resistance: “We forget that the image also disappears under the weight of reality. The violence done by the image is largely offset by the violence done to the image [...] we are still iconoclasts; we destroy images by overburdening them with meaning. We kill images with meaning” (idem 41).

Arguably, the proliferation of risk discourses does not only overload the body with new meaning at a regular basis, it also obscures it with contradictory types of information. The thus ensuing visibility of the body is precarious and the semiotic conundrum it entails might work in the favour of subversion. Body images that are redundant of meaning may cease to be convincing. This might encourage reflections of cause and effect relations between the imagery of risk and the material reality of the referent at stake. In other words, it is precisely the incoherence of the risk discourse that may function as a call for action to reengage with the real dimension of the corpo-real, which the two-dimensional image seeks to delete. As Baudrillard notes in this regard: “Anything that adds a third dimension to the image (relief, time, history, sound, movement, ideas, meaning), anything in fact that reconciles it with the real and representation, is a violence that destroys it as a parallel universe” (“Violence” 44).

Heidi Klum’s catch phrase: “One day you’re in, and the next day you’re out” (WH October 2011, p.92) helps illuminate how the parallel universe of imagery and simulation may inadvertently promote its own reconciliation with the real and by implication, its own destruction. Let us therefore consider an imagined reader of *Men’s* or *Women’s Health*. The individual I insinuate here may have read the advice in the magazines diligently, self-fashioned his/her life vis-à-vis his/her physique accordingly, and reaped the reward of his/her efforts in the form of a well managed and supposedly healthy body, living happily ever after... – until he/she learns that it might have been in vain: “You might drop dead while reading this. Even if you are a model *Men’s Health* [and *Women’s Health*] reader [...] If you leave a doctor’s office after being told that your cholesterol levels are low and that you are in good shape, it hardly means you are not at risk of a heart attack” (MH January/February 2003, p. 78). Clearly, as the quote suggests, Klum’s platitude “next day you’re out” threatens to become true in a very literal sense. No matter how seemingly perfect the shape of the body is, under the conjuncture of simulation and risk, there always looms a further dimension of subversive meaning that threatens to break the imagery’s supposedly harmonious chain-of-being.

With this in mind, I would like to argue that it is definitely thinkable that the subject at stake may be appalled by the texts' apparent contradictions and thus re-engage in a dialogue with the self, establishing a closer rapport with his or her very own body. The result would be a dialogue of critical reflection that adds a dimension of self-experience to the narrowly defined ideal of the two-dimensional simulacrum of corporal health. The driving force for the subject's criticality would be the incoherence of the symbolic power structure itself. As Foucault holds, "[t]he exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" ("Subject and Power" 789), with the consequence that "[t]o govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of actions for others" (idem 790). I think Foucault would agree that if the guided possibility of conduct no longer signalled possible outcomes, or in other words, if possible fields of action were turned into ones that appear impossible instead, the mechanisms of power would collapse.

Such a mode of teleological rupture can be observed in the example of the imagined reader I have discussed above. What sense would it make to embrace the imagery of the "healthy body" when it is conflated with additional meanings that suggests otherwise? The ambiguity of the image overloaded with meaning thus operates as an *iconoclast*, which reduces its own persuasive power by precluding discursive intelligibility. Since subjects may no longer recognize the image as "true", its power to coerce is bound to decline. As Foucault reminds us: "To not want to be governed is not accepting as true [...] what an authority tells you is true, or at least not accepting it because an authority tells you that it is true, but rather accepting it only if one considers valid the reasons for doing so" ("What is Critique" 31). Precisely the availability of valid reasons to accept one's own subjugation appears to founder in the hyperreal conflation of image, body and risk. As the spectacles of simulation have been overburden with risk, their very own images have turned into precarious caricatures of the models they seek to provide, with the consequence that their discourses of truth may increasingly become subject to doubt. The outcome of this questioning of truth effects has been described by Foucault as "the art of voluntarily insubordination", which he sees as the precondition for the "desubjugation of the subject" or escape (idem 32).

I would suggest that the mechanism of resistance Baudrillard and Foucault insinuate can be put into operation with regard to reading the magazines under review. While *Men's Health* and *Women's Health* attempt to construct coherent images of health, beauty and sexuality, they continuously overburden this imagery with contradictory notions of risk that may enable

readers to spot the incommensurability between image-reality and actual modes of being. Arguably, if the image one is concerned with entails greater amounts of risk and uncertainty than it seeks to undo, why should one agree? Is it not possible, or even likely that a statement like “you might drop dead when reading this” (MH January/February 2003, p. 78) may work quite differently than intended? May it not prompt readers to drop their magazine instead and question the health advice they are given? Maybe a new mode of bodily awareness would emerge, which would be one that presupposes the disembodiment of the image as a condition for the re-embodiment of the self. What follows would be in Baudrillard’s words “a reconciliation of the image with the real”, a condition which destroys the image as a parallel universe to the real (“Violence” 44). It is therefore the image’s incapability to establish a correlation with its referent, and by implication its refusal of intelligibility between itself and the body that offers a perspective of resistance. As soon as this play of *différence* becomes obvious, the self may counteract. This process, I have argued, brings into play Foucault’s principles of the exercise of power. If the play of imagery and discourse is no longer capable of presenting valid reasons for the subject’s subjugation, the subject may more readily disagree and desubjugate itself.

Eventually, I hope, a subject might emerge that discovers an aesthetic of pleasurable contemplation when it gazes at the images of supposed beauty and health. It could be a state of knowing that accepts a reluctance of doing. It would mean looking at the images without feeling compelled to inhabit them with the body vis-à-vis the soul. The subject I envision would be critically minded and aware of the power-knowledge complex of body, image and risk as it re-establishes a rapport with the self by doing things differently, effectively discovering the referent of itself not in the image but in the language of the own body. What could be observed then would be a shift from the mode of confession to the image to a rapport with the self. As Foucault teaches us in this regard, the technology of the confession is a specificity of power relations: “The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession” (*History of Sexuality* 61). It has been observed that the principle of the confession also holds true for the health and fitness discourse and its associated media, which functions as means for “confessional bodies” to speak and to receive feedback (Dworkin and Wachs 13).



It follows that new models of meaningful interaction and self constitution would be needed in order to accommodate the self rather than the image. Arguably, one has been provided by Lena Dunham, protagonist and producer of the comedy drama *Girls*. The series focuses on the lives of four young women in Brooklyn, New York. Depicted is a world in which the bleakest outlooks of Beck's risk society thesis appear to have become reality: "Nobody in the 21st century has done angst quite like Dunham. The angst of being unloved, undesired, unattractive, unpopular, unsuccessful [...] Dunham has taken *Sex and the City* and refashioned it for an age of eternal internships, dysfunctional relationships and middle-class disappointment", describes Hattenstone in *The Guardian*. In a way, Dunham's acceptance of her supposedly imperfect body in the series and in everyday life puts into operation the principle of subversion I have outlined above. It replaces the mode of confession to the hegemonic image of beauty by the more inclusive notion of the rapport with the self. When Dunham is asked whether she has an easier relationship with her body these days, she answers: "You know, it gets easier and easier. My fears came true: people called me fat and hideous, and I lived. And now I keep living" (Hattenstone).

As her answer suggests, Dunham has developed a technology of self-reporting and self-understanding that leaves behind the framework of intelligibility by which her body is confined. She emerges as a subject that is free to speak about herself without being tied to a rhetoric of normalization that otherwise governs the social field. Even though her fears have become true and people have called her fat and hideous, she appears to realize that her worth as an individual does not depend on a discourse that is saturated with norms that thoroughly exclude her. Her perceived incommensurability with the image of beauty has not so much misled her to question herself, as it has given her the chance to challenge the image that seeks to violate her. As she rediscovers herself beyond the surface of an image that does not relate to her, she unmask the primal scene of hyperreality and by implication, discovers herself.

Arguably, Dunham's example may offer a perspective on how the cruel beauty images that women are judged against may be subverted. As Claire Danes asserts in her *Time* article: "[Dunham's] unique lack of vanity or shame allows us to consider that we may also be able to accept and express ourselves fully. This is not only impressive, it's important. Because it turns out that girls don't just want to have fun. They also want to be known for who they really are" (Danes).

In closing and with this in mind, further research is likely needed to chart out ways that could enable individuals to follow Dunham's example in both related and different social contexts. Modernity's preoccupation with individualisation, the conjuncture of risk, neoliberal rationalities of health care, consumerism, globalism and heteronormativity are all pressing issues that would offer viable starting points for emancipatory enquiry. Particularly helpful would be interdisciplinary analyses that seek to explore the interplay between the truth effects of power-knowledge economies, the role of popular culture, and the individuals who are at stake. In this context, it promises to be rewarding to further the efforts of joining the perspectives of Cultural Studies, linguistic discourse analysis and critical pedagogy. Together, they may not make the world a better place but they may help (young) people envision how social justice may be achieved in areas where it continues to be precluded.

## **8. Conclusion**

This thesis has investigated issues of embodiment and identity in *Men's Health* and *Women's Health* magazines, published between 2003 and 2013. Unlike most previous research, I have engaged in a comparative reading of the two publications and argued that their combined efforts to advise men and women on fashion, health and relationship matters function as a powerful discursive deployment that governs the formation and interaction of corporealities in gender specific ways. I have thus identified a triangular constitution of individuals as consumers (the commercialised body), health-conscious citizens (the disciplinary body), and appealing heterosexuals (the reproductive body). I have argued that the specificity of the subject positions that may ensue is closely linked to the conjuncture of neoliberalism, heteronormativity and risk, which theorists have observed in Western cultures (Harvey; Butler; Beck).

My findings indicate that all three discursive construction cycles of the body appear to operate in a strikingly similar way. The magazines extol the rhetoric of free choice and self-determination as they promise men and women better and happier lives, which shall find their ultimate expression in the combined form of the healthy and attractive body. Even though the range of opportunities that are presented to achieve such a body may appear infinite, they are in fact heavily constrained. While the attractive body is often linked to high-end sartorial solutions, health is frequently associated with expensive dietary supplements, gym memberships and personal trainers. By implication, the body image that is promoted in the

magazines is a narrowly defined one that privileges only a small and wealthy demographic that is both genetically endowed and willing to embody this ideal.

Besides the magazines' shared interest in targeting affluent individuals from both sexes, men's and women's bodies are constructed in highly gender specific ways. As I have demonstrated, men are encouraged to build muscular bodies that shall signify masculine power and health, whereas women are advised to emphasise their supposed feminine nature by keeping their bodies slender and compact. The bodies that thus ensue function to sustain men's entitlements by reifying the objectified status of women. This tendency could also be observed in the field of relationship advice. While both magazines present men's sex as natural and unproblematic, women are led to the evaluation that their sexual fulfilment depends on the approval of their male partners. Women are encouraged to accommodate their partners' sexual needs as a means to secure lasting and supposedly harmonious bonds, which sends them the message that they need to compromise their sexual and emotional needs in order to be in a relationship. The magazines' advice thus reinforces stereotypical modes of gender socialisation that sustain and reproduce the secondary role of women in society. The corollary of this is that the joint efforts of *Men's* and *Women's Health* marginalize a wide range of individuals. Their narrowly defined frames of preferred corporealities do not only exclude heterosexual men and women from the lower social strata, they also place at a disadvantage non-heterosexual couples and most women in relationships with men.

Despite this decidedly negative outlook, I have theorised a perspective of resistance that may help challenge the non-exclusive frames the magazines seek to sustain. Drawing from Foucault's "The Subject and Power" and Baudrillard's concept of *Simulacra and Simulation*, I have argued that the magazines' preoccupation with risk discourses may function as a modern iconoclast that could be capable of destroying the hyperreality of health and beauty by continuously overloading it with contradictory meanings. This, I have argued, could promote a more critical reception of the magazines' contents and encourage the readers to establish a closer rapport with their selves. Such a model of interaction would accommodate the actual body rather than the image and thus offer a perspective how socially exclusive frames of hyperreality may be subverted. I have pointed out in closing that further research into this direction is likely needed.

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## 10. Appendix

### 10.1. English Summary

This thesis investigates issues of embodiment and identity in *Men's Health* and *Women's Health* magazines, published between 2003 and 2013. Unlike most previous research, it engages in a comparative reading of the two publications and suggests that their combined efforts to advise men and women on fashion, health and relationships operate as a powerful cultural force that governs the construction and interaction of bodies in gender specific ways. This paper thus traces a triangular subject constitution in the media under survey and argues that this complex discursive process interpellates individuals as consumers (the commercialised body), active consumers of health advice (the disciplinary body), and supposedly attractive heterosexuals (the reproductive body). I suggest that the specificity of the subjectivities that may ensue is closely linked to the conjuncture of neoliberalism, heteronormativity and risk that has *inter alia* been theorised by David Harvey, Judith Butler and Ulrich Beck. My findings indicate that all three discursive construction cycles of the body appear to operate in a similar form. The magazines extol the rhetoric of self-determination as they promise men and women better and happier lives, which shall find their ultimate expression in the combined form of the healthy and heterosexually desirable body. Even though the range of opportunities to achieve such a body may appear infinite, it is in fact heavily constrained by the narrowly defined corporal ideals the magazines promote.

My analysis of the *commercialised body* demonstrates that both men and women are increasingly targeted as consumers of products and advice. For men, this has involved a shift from traditional breadwinner identities located in the field of production, to a more objectified form of subjectivity that has previously been associated with women (Beynon 102-03). By implication, there has developed a tendency to masculinise men's consumer products by linking them to supposedly masculine fields of experience, such as corporate success and heterosexual pursuits. In *Women's Health*, similar tendencies of gender specificity can be observed. Much of the advice presents itself under the guise of liberating feminist consciousness, while it covertly contains heteronormative messages that reify the secondary role of women in society.

The construction of the *disciplinary body* in *Men's* and *Women's Health* Magazines is characterized by a strong focus on do-it-yourself strategies that shall enable individuals to

maintain their own wellbeing and fight disease. Accordingly, the magazines' offerings include advice on physical exercise and dietary adjustment that shall help men and women achieve a lean and supposedly healthy body vis-à-vis a happier and more productive life. However, despite these areas of convergence in the construction of the "healthy" male and female body, there are significant differences too. Men are encouraged to build muscular bodies that shall signify masculine power and health, whereas women are advised to emphasise their supposed feminine nature by sculpting slender and compact bodies that shall appeal to men. The "corporealities" that thus ensue function to sustain men's entitlements by reifying the objectified status of women.

A similar emphasis on privileging men over women could be observed with regard to the *reproductive body*. While both magazines present men's sexuality as unproblematic, women are led to the evaluation that their sexual fulfilment depends on the approval of their male partners. Women are thus encouraged to accommodate their partner's sexual desires as a means to secure lasting and supposedly harmonious bonds, which promotes the assumption that they have to compromise their sexual and emotional needs in order to be in a relationship. The magazines' advice thus reinforces stereotypical modes of gender socialisation that sustain the secondary role of women in society. The corollary of this is that the joint efforts of *Men's* and *Women's Health* marginalize a wide range of individuals. Vis-à-vis the dictates of consumerism, neoliberal health-care, and the hegemonic gender order, they produce narrowly defined frames of preferred corporealities that do not only exclude heterosexual men and women from the lower social strata, but also put at a disadvantage non-heterosexual couples and a large number of women who are in relationships with men.

Despite this decidedly negative outlook, I have theorised a perspective of resistance that may help subvert the anti-social frames the magazines promote. Drawing from Foucault's theories of *subjectivity and power*, and Baudrillard's concept of *simulation*, I have argued that the magazines' preoccupation with risk discourses may function as a modern iconoclast that could be capable of destroying the "hyperreality" of health and beauty by continuously overburdening it with contradictory meanings. This, I have argued, could promote a more critical reception of the magazines' contents and encourage the readers to establish a closer rapport with their own bodies. Such a model of interaction would accommodate the actual body rather than the image and thus offer a perspective on how socially exclusive frames of hyperreality may be subverted.

## 10.1. Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit den Fitness- und Lifestylmagazinen *Men's Health* und *Women's Health* und untersucht diese in Bezug auf Fragen der Körper- und Identitätskonstruktion. Die Spezifität dieser interessierenden Aspekte wird vor dem Hintergrund der „Risikogesellschaft“, der Rationalität neoliberalen Gesundheitswesens sowie der Heteronormativität betrachtet. Im Gegensatz zu einer Vielzahl anderer Studien, die einen unilateralen Fokus gewählt haben und dementsprechend entweder das eine oder das andere Magazin untersucht haben, wählt diese Arbeit eine komparative Untersuchungsmethode und versucht auf diese Weise die gemeinsame Wirkung der beiden Medien auf die Konstruktion und Interaktion von vergeschlechtlichten Subjektpositionen und Korporalitäten zu erklären.

Es wird davon ausgegangen, dass in den untersuchten Magazinen eine trianguläre Subjektkonstitution vorangetrieben wird, die die Verschränkung kommerzialisierter, disziplinierter und reproduktiver Körperlichkeit privilegiert. Die so entstehenden Subjektivitäten werden von den Magazinen als KonsumentInnen von Produkten und Ratschlägen adressiert, welche sie dazu befähigen sollen selbstverantwortlich und diszipliniert Gesundheitsvorsorge zu betreiben, sowie im zwischenmenschlichen Bereich entsprechend dominanter kultureller Modelle miteinander zu agieren. Das Idealbild, das dabei von den Magazinen als erstrebenswert vermittelt wird, ist der „schöne“ und vermeintlich gesunde Körper, der in seiner eng definierten Form sowohl den sozio-ökonomischen Stand als auch die Moral seines Besitzers / seiner Besitzerin signifiziert.

Des Weiteren zielen die Magazine klar auf eine heteronormativ orientierte Form der Körperkonstruktion von Männern und Frauen ab. Männer werden dazu ermutigt starke und muskulöse Körper aufzubauen, sowie diese durch ihre Kleidung und ihr Verhalten zu betonen, während Frauen darauf achten sollen durch ihre Körperlichkeit vor allem ihre Femininität zu unterstreichen und Männern zu gefallen. Dies trägt zur Reifikation der sekundären Rolle der Frau in der Gesellschaft bei. Die Konsequenz dessen ist, dass die von *Men's* und *Women's Health* vermittelten Körperbilder und Verhaltensmodelle nur eine kleine, heterosexuell orientierte und sozial privilegierte Gruppe von Menschen begünstigen, die es sich leisten können und wollen diese Ideale zu verkörpern. Weite Schichten der Bevölkerung werden durch die prekäre Verschränkung der Begriffe Schönheit, Gesundheit, Reichtum und Heterosexualität mit ganz bestimmten, sozial wünschbaren Körperformen marginalisiert.

Abschließend untersucht die Arbeit wie die Sprach- und Bildabfolgen der untersuchten Medien subvertiert und in ihrer Bedeutungsmacht eingeschränkt werden könnte. In Rekurs auf Foucaults Diskurs- und Machttheorie sowie Baudrillards Konzept der Simulation werden die in den Magazinen konstruierten Körperbilder als Erfahrung von Hyperrealität charakterisiert, die durch ständige kontradiktionäre Informationsüberfrachtung durch Risikodiskurse schließlich eine Bedeutungsaushöhlung erfährt. Risiko fungiert diesem Verständnis zufolge als moderner Ikonoklast, der den Wahrheitsanspruch der Simulation zusehends zum Erliegen bringen kann.

## 10.2. Curriculum Vitae

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#### Universitäre Ausbildung:

- WS 2008 Beginn des Lehramtsstudium UF Geographie und Wirtschaftskunde, UF Englisch
- SS 2011 Abschluss des ersten Studienabschnitts mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg

#### Schulische Ausbildung:

- 1984 – 1988 VS Kreindlgasse, 1190 Wien
- 1988 – 1997 BG Biondegasse, 2500 Baden
- 1997 Matura

#### Sonstige Ausbildungen

- 1997/1998 Präsenzdienst
- 1999/2000 Ausbildung zum Fitness- und Gesundheitstrainer bei Prof. Dr. Paul Haber, Institut für Internistische Sportmedizin Wien
- 2003/2004 Ausbildung zum staatlich geprüften Triathlonlehrwart an der BAFL Innsbruck
- 2004/2005 Ausbildung zum staatlich geprüften Schwimmlehrwart an der BAFL Innsbruck

#### Tätigkeitsbereiche

- 1999 – 2006 Fitness- und Gesundheitstrainer der Therme Wien Oberlaa
- Mitarbeit bei diversen Fernseh- und Radiosendungen über Sport und Gesundheit
- Vortragstätigkeit zu eigenen Sport- und Reiseprojekten
- 2004 Europameisterschaft im Double Ironman Triathlon, 9. Platz der Alterswertung
- 2004 Weltmeisterschaft im Zehnfachen Ironman Triathlon auf Honolulu / Hawaii, 1. Platz der Alterswertung
- 2006 Weltmeisterschaft im Triple Ironman Triathlon, 1. Platz im Nationencup und 3. Platz der Alterswertung 21-39.
- 2006 – 2008 Selbstfinanzierte Weltumrundung mit dem Motorrad für UNICEF Österreich. Über 23 Monate und 60.000 km in Kooperation mit BMW Motorrad, verschiedene HIV- und Bildungsprojekte von UNICEF in Mauretanien, Namibia sowie Trinidad und Tobago besucht und medial dokumentiert.
- 2008 – 2014 Fitness- und Gesundheitstrainer der Therme Wien Oberlaa
- 2013 – 2014 Redaktionsmitarbeit bei ASEAS (The Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies)
- 2013 – 2014 Mitglied der Curricular AG (Unterrichtsfach Englisch, BEd)

#### Tutorentätigkeit an der Universität Wien

- 2009 – 2012 Tutor am Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik der Universität Wien
- 2013 – 2014 Tutor am Institut für Geographie und Regionalforschung der Universität Wien

#### Forschungsinteresse

- Cultural & Media Studies
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