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# Mediated intimacy and postfeminism: a discourse analytic examination of sex and relationships advice in a women's magazine



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**ABSTRACT** This article uses a discourse analytic perspective to analyse sex and relationship advice in a best-selling women's magazine. It identifies three different interpretative repertoires which together structure constructions of sexual relationships: the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire, organized around plans, goals and the scientific management of relationships; men-ology, in which women are instructed in how to learn to please men; and transforming the self, which calls on women to remodel their interior lives in order to construct a desirable subjectivity. The article considers each repertoire in turn, and also looks at how they work together in order to privilege men and heterosexuality. Discussion focuses in particular on the postfeminist nature of the advice, in which pre-feminist, feminist and anti-feminist ideas are entangled in such a way as to make gender ideologies more pernicious and difficult to contest.

**KEY WORDS:** *discourse, feminism, intimacy, magazines, media, postfeminism*

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to examine sex and relationship advice in a popular women's magazine. *Glamour* is the UK's best-selling women's monthly magazine, targeted at women in their 20s and 30s and selling nearly 600,000 copies, as well as gaining 8 million page 'hits' on its accompanying website, each month. Along with fashion, beauty and celebrity news, sex and relationship advice constitutes one of its major selling points, with features promoted prominently on the cover of each issue, for example, 'How good are you in bed? 300 men tell you what your partner won't', 'Other people's sex lives: explicit, honest details', or 'We're coming to your sexual rescue: the *Glamour* Guarantee: never be bored in bed again.'

The approach taken here is a discourse analytic one, concerned with identifying the key representations, themes and discourses which constitute *Glamour's* sex and relationship advice, and exploring the ways in which these

may be connected to enduring gender inequalities. The focus is on contemporary magazines and particular attention is paid to constructions of feminism and postfeminism, in this moment of flux and contestation in which many young women actively disavow or repudiate a feminist identity (Scharff, forthcoming) and in which feminism is frequently signified not only as unnecessary and obsolete but also as politically regressive (McRobbie, 2004, 2007). The article argues that a distinctive *postfeminist sensibility* (Gill, 2007a, 2007b) is evident in the magazines' approach to heterosexual relationships. I do not intend to give a comprehensive definition of postfeminism at the outset, since the aim of the article is precisely to open this up for exploration. Briefly, however, I see postfeminism as a sensibility characterized by a number of elements: a taking for granted of feminist ideas alongside a fierce repudiation of feminism; an emphasis upon choice, freedom and individual empowerment; a pre-occupation with the body and sexuality as the locus of femininity; a reassertion of natural sexual difference grounded in heteronormative ideas about gender complementarity; the importance placed upon self-surveillance and monitoring as modes of power; and a thoroughgoing commitment to ideas of self-transformation, that is, a makeover paradigm. This article is part of a wider project concerned with mediated intimacy – that is, the ways in which different kinds of intimate relationality are constructed in different media sites – from news reports about forced marriages and celebrity motherhood, to 'chick lit' and parenting programmes.

The article is divided into four sections. In the first, a brief discussion of contemporary literature about magazines is presented. Next, the discourse analytic approach taken by this project is set out. The third and biggest section of the article comprises the analysis, organized around exploring three discourses or repertoires which together structure consideration of intimate relationships in the magazine. These are the 'intimate entrepreneurship' repertoire, based on the language of goals, plans and strategies, applied to intimate emotional life; 'men-ology', organized around discourses of studying and learning about men; and 'transforming the self', which exhorts women to 'makeover' not simply their bodies and sexual practices, but their psychic lives too, in order to become confident and adventurous sexual subjects. Finally, there is a discussion which pulls together the main findings in relation to constructions of feminism, and argues that the sex and relationship advice in this popular women's magazine is intimately connected to postfeminism and neoliberalism.

### 1.1 WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

Women's magazines have been the object of considerable attention over the past four decades. Much of the research has been feminist in orientation, and has seen magazines as a key site (or even source) of cultural ideas about women, men and gender relations (Ballaster et al., 1991; Coward, 1984; Currie, 1999; Douglas, 1994; Ferguson, 1983; Gough-Yates, 2003; McCracken, 1993; McRobbie, 1977, 1991; Tincknell et al., 2003; Winship, 1978, 1987). Most research has been critical of magazines, pointing to them as a locus of ideological messages that serve to legitimize and naturalize unequal relations, and which offer a narrow and restrictive template of femininity constructed around fashion, beauty and

'how to get a man'. Magazines are charged with promoting the 'beauty myth' that damages women's self-esteem and with supporting harmful social practices ranging from dieting to cosmetic surgery (Bordo, 1993; Greer, 1999; Ussher, 1997; Wolf, 1990). In addition to promulgating pernicious gender ideologies magazines have been indicted as texts which are deeply classed, racialized and hetero-normative (Bhattacharyya, 2002; Gill, 2007a; Jeffreys, 2005; Onwurah, 1987).

Despite the apparent similarities in analyses of women's magazines a number of key debates and points of difference have emerged in the literature about them. One concerns the conflict between two ways of analysing magazines – as vehicles for pleasure or as purveyors of oppressive ideology. Very often these are treated as mutually exclusive options, with scholars exploring *either* the ideological features of magazines *or* the pleasures they offer. Janice Winship prefaces her groundbreaking critique of women's magazines with a confession of her secret enjoyment: she is a 'closet reader'. Although Winship does return insightfully to this point at the end of her book, reflecting on the need to integrate analyses of ideology and pleasure, it exemplifies the trend to keep discussion of the enjoyment experienced in reading magazines firmly bracketed off from the 'real' analysis – something that has become known as the 'guilty prefaces phenomenon' (see Gill, 2007a). A more productive way of thinking about this relationship is to see pleasure and ideology as intimately related. As Ballaster and colleagues (1991) put it:

The construction and maintenance of any social order entails the construction and maintenance of certain pleasures that can secure consent and participation in that order. That any cultural form is pleasurable and ideological is, then, neither surprising nor worrying – what else could pleasure be? And how else could ideology work? (p. 162)

This relates to a broader issue – namely the tendency to search for one stable, single meaning in texts. Yvonne Tasker (1991) has argued that despite the increasing theoretical sophistication of media studies and a recognition that texts are polysemic, the search for fixed and unitary meanings has not disappeared. Critics hunger for 'the' ideological messages or 'the' radical or subversive possibilities in texts, and look longingly to texts that can be characterized as unambiguously progressive. This search leaves no room for ambivalence or audience creativity and makes no distinction between the kind of reading that is akin to 'browsing' and that characterized by complete commitment (Moore, 1991). Moreover, the audience is entirely neglected by this focus.

Since women's magazines first became a topic of scholarship there have been a number of attempts to remedy the exclusive focus on textual analysis (Currie, 1999; Frazer, 1987; Hermes, 1995). McRobbie's (1977, 1991) early research was very important in showing how magazines were used as part of girls' culture, and, in particular, how an emphasis on femininity could be used by teenage girls to challenge the class-based oppressive features of their experience at school. *Jackie* readers rejected the official ideology for girls (diligence, weakness, quietness and passivity) and substituted a more feminine and sexual code which operated as a form of resistance in the schools context (although it might be understood in

terms of complicity in the wider ideological context). By contrast Dawn Currie's (1999) study of 48 Canadian teenagers found little evidence that girls used magazines to combat school ideologies or employed as a form of resistance to authority. She found instead that appearance was used as a vehicle for creativity and self-expression, and as an indication of group membership and of social status. Magazines played a crucial role in furnishing information about what is hot and about the significance of very small details of appearance which could be used to mark inclusion/exclusion. Another important study of magazine reading was conducted by Joke Hermes (1995) in the Netherlands, using what she characterized as a postmodern approach. She found that women's responses were organized around two types of response. On the one hand there was a practical knowledge repertoire in which women stressed the magazine's role as a 'professional journal' for the home, featuring recipes, patterns, tips, and so on, and informing them about important topics from film and book reviews to new beauty products. On the other there was the repertoire of emotional learning and connected knowing, through which women stressed that the magazine offered education in learning about other people's emotions and problems and about their own feelings, anxieties and wishes. It is clear from reading *Glamour* that this is the orientation of many of the articles, particularly about sex and relationships.

Another key debate in the literature about women's magazines concerns the extent to which magazines articulate a coherent ideology. Research studies have been split on this issue. Some scholars argue that magazines are little short of endlessly repeated 'advertisements' for commodified femininity (McCracken, 1993), while others point to the contradictoriness of the messages on offer in any single text (Macdonald, 1995). For example, Janice Winship's (1978) study of *Woman* magazine argued that it operated not by offering a single coherent image of womanhood, but through a dazzling kaleidoscopic array of different kinds of femininity. Winship argued that women's magazines perform 'ideological juggling acts' in which entirely contradictory elements coexist through spatial separation in different parts of the magazine. Thus, Winship showed that marriage may be a topic for humour in the letters page; for sentimental idealization in the 'real life' triumph over tragedy stories; for distress, pain and desperation in the problem pages, etc. As long as they are kept spatially distinct the inconsistencies do not threaten the overall flow of the magazine – and the task for analysis becomes unpacking and deconstructing the contradictory ideologies of femininity.

In an attempt to move beyond this impasse more recent research has argued that coherence and contradiction need not be counterposed; the contradictoriness of women's magazines may in fact be a central part of the coherence of their ideological message. David Machin and Joanna Thornborrow (2003) explored the similarities and differences between the 44 local versions of *Cosmopolitan* magazine that are produced globally. They argued that not only is there a coherent discourse or ideology within editions produced for each national context, but, moreover, that the brand as a whole 'constitutes a set of values that works worldwide in spite of local variations'. *Cosmopolitan* as a global

brand is constructed around the idea of the 'fun fearless female' in which agency is linked to sexuality and the body, and problems are easily solved with the help of *Cosmo's* 'hot tips'. The ideology is built from themes about independence and taking control, transgression ('naughtiness') in relation to sex, and pleasing men. Women are presented as fundamentally alone in the world, and must hold their own by using the power their bodies and sexuality afford them. Machin and Thornborrow argue that despite *Cosmopolitan's* emphasis on taking control 'the main goal of sex for the fun, fearless female remains pleasing men'.

Machin and Thornborrow's study notwithstanding, there has been very little research which has looked explicitly at discursive constructions of sex in women's magazines; indeed, attention has been focused disproportionately upon visual images and questions about beauty, body size and shape (Baker, 2005; Cusumano and Thompson, 1997). The notable exception to this has been the interest in advice and problem pages in magazines aimed at teenage girls (Carpenter, 1998; Duke and Kreshel, 1998; Jackson, 2005). These are understood as playing a key role in offering sex education and guidance for girls embarking on relationships, and thus receive attention from youth researchers, health educators and people interested in a developmental framing of sexuality, as well as media scholars. It is somewhat surprising however, given the prominence of sex and relationship advice in magazines aimed at women in their 20s and 30s, that this has received so little attention (but see Boynton, 2006). Annie Potts's (1998) analysis of 'Mars and Venus in the Bedroom' offers a valuable take on contemporary mediations of intimacy in self-help writing, and Pantea Farvid and Virginia Braun (2006) have produced an important and insightful thematic study of constructions of sexuality in the New Zealand versions of *Clio* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. Their research shows that men are positioned as easily aroused and satisfied, while women's orgasms are presented as rather complicated or difficult to achieve. Moreover, the deployment of 'male sex drive' (Hollway, 1989) discourse depicts men as 'needing' lots of great sex and women as having to develop sexual skills in order to satisfy their partner and keep him from straying. Farvid and Braun argue that the prevailing version of heterosexual relationships found in these magazines lacks diversity and tends to privilege men (see also Gadsden, 2000). These findings resonate with the analysis presented here, which aims to make a contribution to understanding contemporary sex and relationship advice for adult women and to theorize this in relation to feminism and postfeminism.

## 2. Data, methods and approach

The analysis presented here is based upon a rigorous examination of articles about sex and relationships in *Glamour* magazine. Launched in 2001 *Glamour* is the UK's best-selling monthly glossy, and is targeted at upwardly mobile women in the 18–34 age group who are 'successful, independent, modern women who know how to have fun, how to dress and how to spend', according to publishing director Simon Kippin. In a brochure produced to sell the magazine to potential

advertisers, it is claimed that *Glamour* has attracted more than half a million readers like this (predominantly, but not exclusively, white and in socioeconomic groups A, B and C1), and that it is a trusted source, indeed, a 'friend' with whom readers have an intimate relationship. Between 250 pages and 500 pages in length, each issue of *Glamour* features articles about celebrities, fashion, health, beauty, sex and relationships, and women's 'real life' stories about topics such as rape, breast cancer, or acts of courage or heroism. The cover each month features a picture of a beautiful female celebrity, as well as promotions for content, in which sex and relationship advice, along with fashion, feature prominently.

The data corpus on which this article is based comprises 36 editions of *Glamour* – that is, all the issues published in the UK between April 2005 and March 2008. Each monthly edition contains an average of four substantial articles about sex and/or relationships (plus short features), which has produced an overall data set of more than 140 articles. In order to narrow this down and produce a more focused analysis, I have selected 20 articles from the larger data set to use as my sample for analysis here. These are taken from five issues of the magazine, randomly selected from the three-year period. Examining this large data set it is easy to see that the magazines have a formulaic character, with articles of the same generic type appearing in most issues. It is possible to identify a number of fairly standard types or genres of article about sex and relationships; four seem to be recurrent. These are:

- 1) The survey report, which describes the results of a major survey, for example, the *Glamour* sex survey, women's x-rated confessions, and surveys about the prevalence of different kinds of sexual fantasies.
- 2) The article about what men do/want/think/talk about when 'you' are not there. This type of article focuses on revealing men to *Glamour*'s female readership, for example, 'Will he call? Commit? Cheat? Men tell us what they can't tell you.'
- 3) The 'how to' article: how to get great sex/make a man fall in love with you/improve your sexual skills.
- 4) The feature article – usually focusing on a particular type or group of women – for example, women who are determined to meet and marry a man within six months, and women who learned sex tips from porn stars.

In addition to these four main generic types of article, there are many short articles on sex and relationships, which sometimes feature quizzes, book reviews or contrasting advice from counsellors or sexologists. A great deal of the remainder of the magazine is also directly or indirectly concerned with sex. In constructing my sample, I have decided to exclude those articles in which sex and relationships are discussed as part of a wider story – usually about a celebrity marriage, for example, David and Victoria Beckham's sex life – in order to avoid an unwieldy volume of material and to keep focused on those articles which have sex and relationships as their primary topic.

The approach taken here is a discourse analytic one, which draws upon the method and perspective elaborated by Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1992) in the social sciences, sometimes known as discursive psychology, as well

as upon the 'critical' orientation found in other discursive traditions (Fairclough, 1995; Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Lazar, 2005; Van Dijk, 1997; Wodak and Meyer, 2001). The focus found in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on *ideology* is important here, understood as 'the ways in which meaning is mobilized for the maintenance of relations of domination' (Thompson, 1984: 5). This fits with an otherwise poststructuralist Foucaultian-influenced approach, which places emphasis upon power's material-discursive effects, rather than on a distinction between ideology and truth. The analysis is a feminist one, by which I mean that it is animated by the desire to understand how cultural constructions – in this case, sex and relationship advice in women's magazines – are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression.

The salient aspects of the approach are (briefly) the following: first that its focus is on *discourse itself*, rather than seeing this as a means of 'getting at' some reality which is deemed to lie behind or beyond the text – whether social, psychological or material; second, that *language is constructive*, which highlights the fact that we deal with the world in terms of constructions, not in a somehow direct or unmediated way – that in a very real sense, texts of various kinds construct our world; third, that *discourse is action orientated* and best understood as a social practice; and finally that discourse is *organized rhetorically*, in order to combat alternative formulations and make itself persuasive (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In terms of the analytic strategy adopted here, these ideas are key, but one other notion is also important: namely, the interpretative repertoire.

The interpretative repertoire has been elaborated and debated in detail elsewhere (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Broadly speaking, I understand repertoires as being a unit of analysis that allows scholars to go beyond individual or discrete expressions to begin to identify patterns across and between texts, and to connect these to wider contexts and social formations. The notion speaks to the same phenomena that other discursive traditions regard as 'discourses' (e.g. consumer discourse, legal discourse), but does so in a way that allows for dynamism and change. Drawing on Stuart Hall's (1982, 1988a) work it leaves space analytically for processes of *articulation* (and dis-articulation and re-articulation), rather than assuming that discourses are singular entities which map neatly onto particular domains, for example, medical discourse, environmental discourse.

In the analysis presented here I have identified three broad interpretative repertoires, which structured discussion of sex and relationships in *Glamour*. These are the 'intimate entrepreneurship' repertoire, based on the language of goals, plans and strategies, applied to intimate emotional life; 'men-ology' organized around discourses of studying and learning about men; and 'transforming the self' which exhorts women to 'makeover' not simply their bodies and sexual practices, but their psychic lives too, in order to become confident and adventurous sexual subjects.

## 2.1 INTIMATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: TAKING A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

In this first repertoire, relationships are cast as work, using analogies from finance, management, science, marketing and military campaigns. Whilst an

assumption of heterosexual 'true romance' underpins many articles, with the notion that for every woman there is a perfect male match out there – repeatedly depicted as 'The One', 'Mr Perfect' or 'Mr Right' – this repertoire is sceptical of the idea of the 'coup de foudre', of love striking unexpectedly. 'Fate' is treated with derision as something 'fairy tale-like': wonderful in stories but unlikely to happen in real life. As one article put it: 'Face it: the man of your dreams is not about to appear in your living room brandishing a Tiffany box while you're watching *Eastenders*. You've got to go out and find him first – and that requires a plan' (October 2005). Nevertheless a 'happy ever after' is possible for those prepared to put in the necessary effort. Finding a partner, maintaining a relationship and having satisfying sex are depicted as 'goals' which require research, planning and strategy. An article entitled 'The art of tactical dating' (October 2007) asserts:

'Having relationship goals is a good thing' says psychologist Sheila Panchal, author of *Turning 30: How to get the life you really want* (Piatkus £7.99). 'We tend to assume our love life should just magically happen. But it's far more effective to think about what you want and how to *make* it happen.'

Analogies with work are deployed repeatedly in this repertoire: 'I actually put more effort into my (Internet dating) profile than I did my CV, but I used the same principles for both' Nafsika Thalassis is quoted as saying. Meanwhile Charlotte Lipinsky, 25, treats 'every date like a job interview, researching the venue she is going to and the man himself' (October 2007). Discourses of finance and consumerism are also evident, with talk of 'investments' and of 'snapping up' a man (as if he were an item for sale). The repertoire additionally builds on the idea of scientific management: women are advised to build detailed checklists of what they want in a partner, taking in every aspect from physical appearance, to occupation, to emotional characteristics. Here a relationship becomes something to be minutely broken down into quantifiable features, whose presence or absence can be 'ticked off' in encounters with potential partners:

'Today's generation of women aren't interested in waiting for fate' says Dr Victoria Lukats, psychiatrist and relationship expert for Parship.com, a website that matches people scientifically using psychometric tests based on 40 years of study on compatibility between couples. 'We advocate that approach – what's the point in wasting time?' continues Dr. Lukats. 'If you want to meet someone, you have to think of yourself as a product that needs to be marketed. You have to write your profile as you would your CV, shortlist the responses, then systematically work through men you like the sound of. I know of one woman who did this, and by date seven, she'd met her husband.' (October 2007)

Similar lists can also be employed to read men's feelings. In 'Date me! Love me! Marry me! How to make all three happen in the next three years', women are advised:

'Check his behaviour too. Does he call when he says he will? Has he introduced you to his family? Are Saturday nights automatically your nights? Does he talk about the future with you? If he ticks all the boxes, it's likely this man is falling in love with you'. (October 2005)

In this repertoire, women are depicted as knowing what they want, and then as using every strategy available to them, to get it. A sense of certainty, confidence and determination is pervasive:

'I'm working to a schedule', says Charlotte. 'I'd like to be married at 28 and have children when I'm 31. I don't want to wait for someone to come along, as I don't believe that will happen.' Meanwhile Sally, who tried the art of 'tactical dating', seeing 70 men in as many days, says: 'I decided it was time to stop coasting. I'm very traditional – I wanted to get married. I realised I'd been naive in waiting for the right man to find me. I needed to get out there and find him.'

The sense of female agency, even empowerment, conveyed is striking. Women are constructed as active and autonomous and as 'taking control' of their intimate lives. A feminist tone suffuses much of this repertoire, but, perhaps paradoxically, the language of rights and equality is here drawn on to attain 'goals' that are – as many women in these articles put it – 'very traditional', such as having a white wedding. (I will return to this point in the discussion.)

This repertoire is also notable for being curiously *affectless*. Despite the focus on intimate relationships, there is no space for emotions – particularly negative ones. Excised from this repertoire is any sense of the loneliness, anxiety or hurt that might accompany being single while wanting a partner, or being in a relationship that is difficult or not working out. Even ordinary feelings of disappointment are expunged – such as the disappointment that might be engendered by going on a date but finding you don't like the man. Charlotte who has 'met dozens of men through Match.com' is quoted as saying 'The great thing is, I'm never upset by a date that doesn't work out as I have always got more men in the pipeline' (October 2007). Finding and building relationships is cast as a professional, rational, quasi-scientific affair, described as 'a numbers game' or 'only a matter of time' or of following *Glamour's* 'rules'. It is as if love is the outcome of meritocracy; if you work hard enough you will find it.

So far I have considered how a discourse of business, management and entrepreneurialism is repeatedly found in articles about relationships. This repertoire also pervades *Glamour's* many features about better sex, which, like finding love, can be itemized into its constituent parts: sexy lingerie? Check. Fabulous foreplay? Check. Saucy fantasy? Check. An article entitled 'All day foreplay for your sexiest night ever' (March 2006) captures the tone of many pieces. It starts: 'Forget spontaneity – if it's passion you're after, you need to plan for it. Here, we tell you what to eat, the exercises to boost your libido, and the tricks that will guarantee sex worth waiting for.'

The day of planning starts at 7 am and proceeds with advice on taking a morning bath ('much sexier than a shower'), 'dressing to tease' ('wear something secretly sexy to work, like stockings or silk knickers – it will be a day-long reminder of what's to come'), what to have for breakfast ('eat eggs because they contain steroid substances that enhance the libido'), tidying and preparing the house ('setting the scene' for later), writing your partner a 'sex letter' ('you can keep it as simple as "you've no idea what I'm going to do to you later" or be more imaginative and write-down a full fantasy'). 'Then give him a long, hard

kiss goodbye'. (Yes, it's still only 8:30 am and you haven't even left home yet!) The advice continues throughout the day: you are told to stop off and buy (yet more) sexy underwear ('shop and sizzle' to 'reconnect with your sexy side'), meet your partner for lunch ('flirting in public, holding hands and kissing is going to make the rest of the afternoon and the buildup much spicier and more delicious'), send your partner titillating texts ('tell him the first line of a fantasy or a sexual command you'd like him to perform later on'), go to the gym (as exercise 'leads to more frequent sex and better orgasms'), then it's the 'date with desire' where you should drink champagne and have dinner together (but remember to 'eat light – sex doesn't work well on a full stomach') before going to see a scary movie ('a fright can give you a jolt; it wakes you up. And snuggling up close in the dark is a chance to start what you can finish at home'). And finally it's back home for 'the grand finale': have 'at least one new sex toy ready and waiting', and 'when the action starts, remember variety is the key'. "There are over 600 possible sexual positions" says Tracey, "but almost all of us tend to choose between two or three. Don't let yourself stick with these tonight. I suggest a rule: 30 thrusts in each position, then add another, and another."

## 2.2. MEN-OLGY: LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND, PLEASE AND REASSURE MEN

Coexisting alongside the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire is a second repertoire that I have labelled men-ology. The title is designed to draw attention to two key features of this repertoire: first the emphasis it places upon studying and learning (e.g. finding out about your 'love learning curve', treating unsuitable partners as an opportunity for personal development) and second its pre-eminent focus upon educating women to understand men, to learn to please them, and to take responsibility for the emotional management of relationships with them (through what I will argue is a profoundly asymmetrical division of emotional labour). If, in the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire, women were constructed as assertive, entrepreneurial actors, here they are depicted contrastingly as somewhat uncertain and unworldly about sex and intimate relationships. Like the readers of *Cosmopolitan* in Machin and Thornborrow's (2003) study they are positioned as 'naïve and vulnerable . . . relying on the reaction of men for their self-image and power'. In this repertoire, far from itemizing their desires and designing a strategy to achieve them, women need instruction in how to meet men, how to talk to them and how to form a relationship.

'Expert' discourse plays a key role in this repertoire, just as it did in the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire. Sometimes the experts are men themselves, called on to advise on what's hot and what's not; at other times expertise is dished out by counsellors, sex therapists and authors of self-help books (which are always promoted in the text). In 'How to make any man fall and stay in love with you' (March 2006), the article offers: 'We've quizzed the experts on attraction to discover the tricks that make a man want more, more, more of you.' These turn out to range from the seemingly obvious ('if you like someone it's a good idea to be friendly') to the quasi-scientific ('bananas contain bufotenine, which helps to lift spirits and boosts self-confidence'). 'Friendliness is incredibly attractive to men – such as complimenting someone on their appearance and being generally

thoughtful and kind', says psychologist Sheila Panchal. 'You might think that they are trivial, even unsexy qualities, but they are precisely the characteristics that make men fall in love'. However, be sure to pay the *right* compliments, so pay attention to how you think he likes to be seen: 'If he sees himself as a bad boy, don't tell him your mother would love him. Likewise if he considers himself an intellectual, never refer to him as your "bit of rough"'. Focus your praise on how he sees himself'. Also:

Men love it when you ask their advice or opinion. To make a man fall in love with you, you need to make him feel like you're very similar people' says Tracey Cox, *Glamour's* relationship coach and author of *Superflirt* (Dorling Kindersley £12.99). To achieve this two things are necessary: one is to co-react – so if, for example, he is angry with the boss, you should act angry too. The other is to pick up on any unusual or specific words that he uses, then casually drop them into conversation. 'So if he says something is "unbelievable" – echo it by saying "yes, totally unbelievable"' she advises. 'Using the same phrases that your perfect partner employs within his social circle will earn you a powerful place. He'll feel like he's known you forever, that he can tell you anything and that you're the one for him.

It is interesting to note how this emphasis upon psychological techniques such as mirroring and co-reacting seems to buy into stereotypical notions of femininity as manipulative and deceitful. Moreover, it is shocking that despite decades of critique and comical send-up by feminists, advice which suggests that women should feign or cultivate the same interests as 'him' persists in contemporary magazines. Here it seems that women's own interests and passions are required to be entirely subjugated, as they are exhorted to construct themselves as a fantasy partner for the man.

*Glamour* tells us that attention should also be paid to your gaze (look at him '75% of the time', as this might trigger the release of phenylethylamine, the 'love hormone'), make eye contact, and touch him as 'touching someone causes them to produce oxytocin', another 'love and bonding hormone'. Body language is also crucial, plus 'studies show that if you laugh, the person you are with will tend to laugh too, and immediately feel more connected with you. In a situation like this, another key is to make him feel sure that you'd be delighted to see him again, reveals relationship expert Susan Quilliam' (March 2006).

One similarity with the intimate entrepreneurship repertoire is the emphasis placed on relationships as *work* – in this case women's work. Women are called on to monitor their self-presentation, to break down every element of social interaction, and to learn techniques such as mirroring, co-reacting and strategic touch, not to mention learning to calculate precisely the right proportion of eye contact that is necessary. However, the emphasis is not on women's satisfaction (except in so far as this may help with 'getting the guy') but on men's: the man must feel affirmed, understood, complimented and reassured that you find him attractive and would like to see him again.

It is worth highlighting how much emotional labour is required, but also how unevenly distributed this is. 'Keep expressing your feelings' *Glamour's* 'Relationtips' tells us: 'when communication stops, love dies. Share the important things in your life, and don't just tell him that you love him, tell him

*why* you love him.' Women, then, are called on to communicate, something which in popular stereotype they already do excellently. They must also endlessly pay attention to men's needs – even needs that have yet to be articulated (perhaps even experienced) by men themselves. In an article called 'Banish his bedroom boredom' (October 2005) women are encouraged to take part in a quiz to discover whether he is 'sexually fired up' or actually 'totally fed up'. The article's subtitle asks: 'is he *really* happy in bed?' (emphasis in original), and points out that 'even if a man is dissatisfied, it doesn't necessarily mean he'll stop having sex'. Thus it's really important for a woman to be able to read the signs so she can tell if he's genuinely satisfied, and do something about it if he is not. In stark contrast another article in the same issue warns women 'Don't expect him to read your mind. You want flowers? Tell him.' In the first example, then, it is up to women to be so attentive to men's needs and desires that they can 'read the signs' of sexual dissatisfaction, even if all seems perfectly fine and the man is continuing to want to have sex. Women, it would seem, are constructed in this repertoire as precisely needing to 'read men's minds' (and bodies). Yet they should not expect this to be reciprocated: for in the other example women are warned not to have any expectation of men's ability to know what they want. This pattern is repeated endlessly throughout the sex and relationships articles I have examined. It's interesting to note that there is never any sense of 'blame' being apportioned; it is simply a matter of 'the way men are' and a naturalization of ideas of essential sexual difference. This being the case, the responsibility is placed exclusively on women to manage any problems which might arise.

This inequality is particularly clear in the articles that discuss sex. In a feature entitled 'He's The One – so why does it feel like something's missing?' (May 2006) six case studies focus on individual women's problems in their relationships with male partners. In one, Lucy explains that 'I'm really attracted to my new boyfriend but he doesn't give me what I need in bed . . . Everything he does is too rushed, forceful and methodical . . . I'm hugely disappointed.' The article comments:

If sex between two people isn't great then it's up to both of you to make it better – and that has to be sooner rather than later. 'Grab the bull by the horns' says Natalie Kare, a relationship therapist. 'If you feel trapped by the dilemma, it can be incredibly disempowering. So instead of getting bogged down with it all, what Lucy needs to do is ask herself what is stopping her from taking the initiative and *teaching* him what she wants in bed?'

It is striking in this example how the exhortation that 'it's up to both of you' becomes strategically reformulated so that it becomes up to Lucy – and Lucy alone – to take responsibility for the problem and its solution by teaching her partner what she wants.

Another of the case studies in the same article features Emma, whose distress is caused by the fact that her partner no longer seems to want to have sex with her. She is understandably upset and feels rejected, yet *Glamour's* advice focuses on how she needs to pay attention to the fact that *her partner's* sexual confidence must be 'at rock bottom'. Once again, the onus is on the woman to resolve things, by putting aside her own feelings and being 'kind and rational – and

avoiding blame at all costs'. *Glamour's* relationship coach advises that she 'say "we" as much as possible to share the problem'.

This emphasis upon women taking responsibility and reassuring men is an endemic feature of the regular articles which deal with male impotence. Here, women are told to put aside their own fears or anxieties about having become less attractive to their partner, and to put all their energy into reassuring him that it doesn't matter. Women who do not do this and who express their own feelings of hurt, are accused of being 'emasculating' and – paradoxically – as 'failing to communicate'. Indeed interestingly, even buying sexy underwear or trying to 'spice up' sex – elsewhere, as we have seen, normatively required features of a 'good' sex life – can be treated as blameworthy where male impotence is concerned and recast as trying to 'shock' or 'pressure' the man into sex. In a text box entitled 'Is he off sex?' Dr Catherine Hood reveals the 'do's and don'ts' of how to deal with low male libido. These include: 'Do: spot the early signs', 'Do: be aware of what's happening elsewhere in his life – work, finances, family health.' 'Don't: take it personally. It is not a reflection on how attractive you are.' 'Don't rush out and buy sexy lingerie or use other methods to pressure him. Just give him time.' 'Do: remember its quality rather than quantity.'

### 2.3 TRANSFORMING THE SELF: REMAKING SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY

The 'men-ology' repertoire places emphasis upon constructing a lovable persona, learning to read men, and paying attention to their sexual and emotional needs. This repertoire, by contrast, centres on transforming the *self*, and, specifically, making over one's interior or psychic life. The work required here is not that associated with acting or performing, but, more profoundly, involves remodelling one's very sense of self – particularly one's sense of sexual subjecthood in a manner understood by Foucaultian scholars as connected to 'governing the soul' (Blackman, 2004; Rose, 1990). Four themes dominate this repertoire. These are requirements to: learn to love one's own body; to become confident; to conquer repression and change one's feelings about sex; and to become a sexual adventurer.

#### 2.3.1 *Love your body*

Guys *really* don't care if you're big, small, short or tall as long as *you're* happy with the way you look. Frankly our standards are way lower than yours so don't ever worry that you don't measure up. And girls moaning about their bodies is the biggest libido drainer. If you love your body, we will too. All those curvy bits that you despise? We love them.

What you should do: utilise your assets: whether it's long legs, a cavernous cleavage, a curvy butt, a kick-ass sense of humour or a drop dead gorgeous smile, big yourself up. And don't *ever* ask us if your bum looks big in anything because you'll sound needy and desperate, which is one of the biggest turn-offs for any man. (May 2006)

In this extract loving your body is presented as a key part of being attractive to men. What is crucial, it is asserted, is not what your body is *actually like* (all

women are assumed to have 'assets' of one kind or another) but your *feelings* about your body. It is the psychological dimension that requires work. Women should never worry that 'they don't measure up', because men's 'standards are way lower than yours'. But women *should* – it seems – worry about their *attitude* to their body, since 'moaning about their bodies is the biggest libido drainer' and sounding 'needy' or 'desperate' is 'one of the biggest turn-offs' for men.

Here, then, loving your body is presented as a psychological adjustment that is necessary (as in so much of the previous repertoire) to please men. However, such injunctions are not *only* presented in relation to male desires. In the extract below 'Sex Guru' Hilda Hutcherson suggests you should love your body in order to *please yourself*. She advises: ask yourself 'am I okay with my body?'

The way you feel about your body directly and profoundly affects your sexuality. One woman I treated had always had a very satisfying sex life – until she had a baby. Then she felt fat, hated the new shape of her breasts and missed her pre-baby abs. When her husband touched those vulnerable places, she pushed his hands away. Eventually, she started avoiding sex altogether. It may sound corny, but I told her to buy a diary, writing in it one positive thing about her body every day. When a month had passed and she hadn't run out of things to write, she finally accepted the truth: her body was worth appreciating, and satisfying, just as it was. (October 2007)

Here, again, it is not the body itself that requires transforming, but one's feelings about it: negative feelings should be banished, through work on the self, with the help of psychological (cognitive behavioural) techniques such as interrupting (self)destructive patterns of thinking and eliciting positive thoughts. The regulatory work (to borrow Foucault's terminology) is not to discipline the body (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Sawicki, 1991) but to discipline *subjectivity* by remaking one's ethical relationship to oneself (Gill, 2008).

### 2.3.2 *Be confident*

This is also clear in the repeated injunction to be confident. Such advice is found in articles like 'A man's guide to getting him hot' (May 2006) which purports to report men's words: 'confident women give off a sexual aura'; 'men love women with a "take it or leave it" attitude. The idea they have no real need to impress us is a major turn on'; 'girls who know their own minds are always more confident – and better fun in bed'. Similar advice is also found in regular features by *Glamour* staff writers. The extract below is a particularly interesting example:

It is possible to make the euphoria of the first date last. 'In the early weeks', says Balfour, 'it's best to be the first to end a date. It leaves him wanting more'. Then remember the golden rules: don't talk endlessly about your ex, be bitter about men or moan about your awful job/family/life. Most men agree a confident, secure, optimistic and happy woman is easier to fall in love with than a needy, neurotic one. 'It's not about "I need to be more sexy for him and he'll love me more." It's about being confident in yourself', says Panchal. (October 2005)

The first part of this extract owes much to the previous repertoires: the talk of rules and planning echoes the themes of intimate entrepreneurship, while the instruction on how to enhance the relationship shares features with men-ology.

Here, though, both behavioural change (don't moan, be bitter, talk endlessly about your ex) and psychological change are suggested, as women are encouraged to transform themselves into 'confident, secure, optimistic and happy' subjects, and (yet again) repudiate any vestiges of neediness or neuroticism. Two features of this are particularly interesting in relation to constructions of feminism and postfeminism. First is the *content* of the advice offered at the start: 'be the first to end the date' as 'it leaves him wanting more'. This advice is redolent of *pre*-(second wave) feminist magazines with their preoccupations with women rationing themselves to increase their value and appeal to men, and it sits uneasily next to the emphasis upon confident femininity. Second, it's interesting to note the disclaimer Panchal employs ('it's not about "I need to be more sexy for him and he'll love me more"'), which seems designed to rebut any potential feminist critique of the implication that women should change to become more attractive to men. It's not about men, she asserts, it's actually about 'being confident in yourself'. The transformation, then, is being effected for *you* – and if, in the process, you win men's admiration then that is a fortunate accident, but was not the intention of this remodelling of selfhood. As I will argue later, it is precisely this uneasy conjoining of pre-feminist, anti-feminist and feminist ideas, together with a focus on pleasing oneself, that marks out such advice as distinctly postfeminist.

### 2.3.3 Transform your feelings about sex

Another theme evident in this repertoire is that of throwing off the shackles of repression, and making oneself over with a 'positive' and 'open' attitude to sex. This is framed in terms of a modified (modernized and upgraded) relationship to the self. In 'Change how you see sex forever' (October 2007) the writer starts with her own 'confession':

I remember being seven years old and hearing my mother spell 's-e-x' while talking to a friend. From her tone, I knew it was something very naughty. As I got older, I was told to 'keep your pants up and your dress down'. I was even told to scrub 'down there' quickly, lest I discovered the pleasure that bathing could bring. I saved my virginity until marriage and I didn't like sex once I had it. I faked orgasms for years. I'd hear friends talk about doing this and that in bed and I'd wonder, 'what the heck is wrong with me?'

She subsequently worked on her attitudes to and feelings about sex, and today has 'a fulfilling and adventurous sex life'. In this article she seeks to pass on her 'secrets' to other women:

Women are supposed to be so empowered these days – in command of our careers, our bank accounts and our sex lives. But if you grew up in a home that taught you sex was shameful, these old messages could be living on in your subconscious, mucking things up in the bedroom. They certainly did to me. To tackle my sexual baggage, I made a list of all the negative messages I'd received and then wrote positive ones next to them. 'Only bad girls enjoy sex' became 'every girl deserves to enjoy sex'. Then, when one of those old thoughts entered my mind, I had a positive one to replace it with. It actually turned into a fun bedroom game with a dual purpose: getting me over my hang-ups and getting me in the mood.

Here, then, women are encouraged to reflect upon their upbringing, and any unconscious messages about sex it may have created. This 'sexual baggage' needs to be dealt with through psychological techniques that will re-engineer one's sexual subjectivity, such that sex can be viewed as something positive that all women 'deserve'. Having transformed one's feelings about sex, it is time to attend in greater detail to one's sexual self. This demands that you learn more about your 'parts', or your feelings about them ('do I have vagina anxiety?'), find out your 'express route to orgasm', write a list of 'your top five touch-me zones', reflect on your previous sexual experiences, 'lift the lid' on your fantasies, and consider 'do I have sex for the right reasons?' (as 'sex is always better and more deeply satisfying when your motivation for doing it is simple and healthy'). Through psychological processes of confession, self-monitoring and neurolinguistic programming one is invited to move from a sexual subjecthood characterized by shame, secrecy and 'hang-ups' to a newly made-over 'open', 'healthy' and 'uncomplicated' (!) sexual subjectivity, in which one's 'sexual potential' is 'unlocked'.

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

But this is not enough, it seems, for throughout life one is at risk of falling into a 'sexual rut' or going into 'sexual meltdown'. Thus, maintaining the correct sexual attitude requires constant ongoing vigilance. Above all, what is needed is an openness to adventure. 'Try something new in the bedroom' instructs one article (October 2007) – even if you don't want to (or perhaps especially if you don't want to). Alice's partner was 'reading one of those 365 positions a year' books: 'He wanted to try The Wheelbarrow – where the woman puts her hands on the floor and the man lifts up her legs . . . I wasn't happy . . . but I finally agreed.' And then Alice discovered that it was worth it, not because she enjoyed it especially, but because of the value of change itself. As she put it: 'The more you experiment in life, the more you learn about yourself, so push yourself a little. At least you'll get a good tricep work out.' In another article, 'Six ways to be better at everything in bed' (November 2005) *Glamour's* relationship coach, Tracey Cox, tells us her 'golden rule' for not getting into a 'sex rut':

Don't ever finish a session where you started, and don't do what you did last time . . . so if you start in the missionary position, end the session upside down on the opposite end of the bed. If you had sex on the bed last time, this time try the bedroom floor. If you had your clothes off last night, leave them on tonight. Another good tip is the 'Lucky dip'. Each write down 10 things that you'd like to try . . . whenever you feel like it put the ideas into a box and pull one out and that's what you try that session. Keep going until you've tried them all.

Things you might try include libido boosting hormonal patches, anal sex, watching porn together, making an erotic movie, sharing fantasies, sexy role-playing or performing a pole dance in the bedroom. The content of the suggestions is interesting both for what it reveals and what it excludes. Increasingly, strip-tease, pole dancing and lapdancing have been promoted as ways to inject energy into a flagging libido or ways to 'spice up' a 'humdrum' sex life (where, god forbid, you have taken your eye off the ball and forgotten your responsibility to

ceaselessly 'ring the changes'). Paralleling shifts in a wider culture, practices once associated with the sex industry have been progressively normalized in the magazine, with the implication that such skills should increasingly form part of a modern woman's sexual CV. Indeed, in the 2008 *Glamour* sex survey, questions about all these topics were included for the first time.

In stark contrast is the absolute invisibility of any sexualities outside the heterosexual norm. For all the injunctions to be sexually 'open', lesbian desire is conspicuous by its absence, and, over and above the obvious heteronormative framing of the entire magazine, the homophobia of some articles about sex is striking. A case in point is the *Glamour* 'Sex fantasies survey' (June 2007). It reports that '21% of readers fantasise about having sex with another woman' but casts this as a matter of shame ('I'd never admit it', as the women quoted all said), and as posing no threat to women's 'real' heterosexual identities. This, the magazine's sex expert tells us, is because 'girl on girl fantasies are more a sign of what you want from your man than wanting to be with a woman'. A single 'case study' reports on the one woman who made the 'mistake' of trying to turn fantasy into reality: 'I'd always wanted to try lesbian sex and I did it with my best friend. I wasn't impressed! It was a while before we spoke again.' Not only was the experience unpleasant, this seems to suggest, but it may also jeopardize your friendship.

There is much more that could be said about the content of the exhortations to experiment and try new things. However, the key point in terms of this repertoire is that the general advice remains the same: 'push yourself', 'do something new', 'spice up' sex. These things are promoted as positive goods in their own right, less for the pleasure that they will bring, than for the intrinsic value of endlessly updating one's sexual skills and knowledge, propounding variety, and pushing at the boundaries of what is possible, so long as it primarily involves heterosexual penetrative intercourse – as Tracey Cox, *Glamour*'s sex and relationship coach, so vividly puts it: '30 thrusts in each position'.

### 3. Discussion and conclusions

You just have to give sex the same priority you do to everything else in your life which you cherish. Educate yourself, try out new things, and, above all, have the right attitude. Try anything (within reason) once, put some effort into planning, but also don't worry if nothing goes to plan. Great sex stems from sexual confidence and if you feel sexy and believe in yourself, your body and your own ability, you really will be better at everything in bed. ('Six ways to be better at everything in bed', *Glamour*, September 2005)

The interpretative repertoire is an *analytic category*, which points to the patterning of particular constructions, organized around specific themes, terms and metaphors. In practice, of course, repertoires intermingle and coexist in any text or context. In the above extract, for example, each of the three repertoires is evident – the focus on planning and prioritizing sex, the emphasis upon education, and the injunctions to 'have the right attitude' and 'believe in yourself'.

Thus far I have concentrated on examining the repertoires individually, but have paid little attention to how they work together, to constructions of feminism and postfeminism, or to wider questions of ideology. In the remainder of this discussion I seek to examine the entanglement of these representations in *Glamour's* sex and relationship advice, to argue that they offer a distinctively postfeminist articulation of intimate relationships which helps to sustain unequal gender relations and is profoundly connected to neoliberalism.

### 3.1 A POSTFEMINIST SENSIBILITY

As noted earlier, a number of scholars of women's magazines have pointed to their contradictory nature (Winship, 1987) and *Glamour* is no exception; the entire magazine might be seen as a kaleidoscope of contradictory ideas, representations and constructions about gender – thus (to take just one example) we have the endlessly repeated notion that it doesn't matter what your body looks like so long as you are happy with it, sitting side-by-side with page after page of articles and adverts for diets, slimming aids and cosmetic surgery, fashion spreads and celebrity interviews in which all the women are extremely thin and conventionally attractive, and pages of features and promotions which focus exclusively on losing weight, toning and sculpting the body and making oneself more beautiful. Rather than suggesting that appearance is unimportant, these tend to suggest that what you look like is the *most* important thing in a woman's life.

Often highlighting such contradictions has seemed to be the 'endpoint' of analysis of magazines, as if contradictoriness were a finding in its own right. What I want to argue, however, is that more careful attention needs to be paid to the *nature* of the contradictions, to their specificity. They are, it seems to me, not random, but motivated (in the semiotic sense of that term). It is not simply a matter of *Glamour* containing a myriad of different discourses that 'happen' to be in conflict, but of the contradictions doing ideological work. In one sense, the mere presence of multiple contradictions works to disavow the idea that the magazine could be regarded as ideological at all: it appears to lack the singularity and coherence expected of ideological discourse, it does not seem to offer a unitary template of desirable femininity, but a more fragmented set of discourses and aspirations. Yet it is in the precise nature of the contradictions, I want to suggest, that ideological work is effected.

In the discussion of repertoires I've pointed to feminist and non-(pre- or anti-)feminist ideas, but their specific entanglement deserves more attention. I want to argue that what is evident is an attempt to make an articulation (Hall, 1988b) or a suture (Goldman, 1992) between feminist and anti-feminist ideas, in a manner that is distinctly postfeminist. The intimate entrepreneurship repertoire, as we saw, uses a feminist sounding register, one of 'power femininity' (Lazar, 2006), a language of empowerment, equality and taking charge. Yet this repertoire is almost always pressed into service to promote goals that might otherwise be coded as traditional rather than feminist. Women's autonomy and power is called on to help them 'find and keep a man', to 'get him to propose' or to seek out pole dancing lessons to get over a 'libido lull' and feel more powerful.

This seems to be an example of what Angela McRobbie (2004) has called the 'double entanglement' of feminist and anti-feminist ideas that characterizes postfeminist constructions. McRobbie argues that in postfeminist discourse women are imbued with agency and choice so that they can then use their 'feminist' freedom to *choose* to re-embrace traditional femininity – white weddings, hen nights, the adoption of the male surname on marriage, etc. – a point also made by Robert Goldman in his discussion of 'commodity feminism' in contemporary advertising. McRobbie argues: 'what marks out all these cultural practices is the boldness of this activity and a strong sense of female consent and participation' (McRobbie, 2004). Elspeth Probyn (1997) has also discussed this pattern as the emergence of a discourse of the *choiceoisie* – in which choices are treated as devoid of social and political ramifications – in a perfect marriage of postfeminism and new traditionalism.

The notion of choice is central to the postfeminist discourse of *Glamour* magazine. As we have seen (particularly in the third repertoire) women are presented as pleasing themselves. Thus, for example, in the case of Alice, whose partner pushed her to work through his 365 sexual positions book, it is absolutely crucial that she be depicted as *glad* she did so – and, moreover, not glad because she pleased him, but because she 'learned about herself' and 'pushed herself' to 'experiment'.

What is important, then, is that activities which might, in a different moment, be understood precisely as enacted to 'please your man' must be re-apprehended in postfeminist terms, as something you are doing 'for yourself'. Indeed, as we saw in the discussion of the injunction to 'be confident', the notion that this might be to please men is *actively repudiated* and disavowed: it must be represented as self-chosen and empowering. It seems to me that this represents a development of the operation of ideology, its higher and more pernicious functioning in postfeminist discourse. If, in the relationship advice of earlier eras, women were called on to change their appearance or engage in particular sexual practices, this was mostly presented as instrumental behaviour – something they were doing in order to 'please and keep a man'. Today, however, similar injunctions must be understood as self-chosen and being done to please oneself. It is as if what were formerly presented as men's desires have been internalized and must now be understood as authentically women's own.

### 3.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY

The constructions of masculinity in *Glamour's* relationship advice share similar patterned contradictions. In one common construction men are depicted as benign and lovable: if you are happy, they are happy, and, as for sex, the mere fact that you want to do it with them makes them feel just so grateful. This portrayal is a common one, drawing on an older pre-feminist discourse in which sex was presented as something women do (or even 'put up with') *for* men. Whilst such a notion would not be found explicitly today in a magazine like *Glamour*, the emphasis on men's gratitude implicitly draws upon it.

In alternative constructions, however, men appear less easy to please and significantly more judgemental. In an article in June 2007, in which we are invited

to listen in on 'real men' talking about sex, they are vicious in their predatory surveillance of women. Women are treated like commodities in a way that has no parallel for women's discussions of men in the magazine, consumer discourse notwithstanding: 'I always thought you should be able to take a woman for a test drive, like a car', says John. Meanwhile, Nick says chillingly: 'when I'm out with mates we play the "how much would a woman cost to put right" game before we go over and talk to her. If it is over £5,000 I don't bother.' Women's sexual technique is also criticized and their appearance commented on negatively, as Andy puts it: 'I'm not overly fussy, but if a girl's got a muffin top (fat belly), hairy armpits, or if she can drink pints faster than me, I'm out of here.'

Yet this construction is, in turn, seemingly at odds with a further one, also discussed by Potts and by Farvid and Braun (2006), in which men are represented as frail and vulnerable. Their self-esteem and libido are fragile entities, liable to be destroyed by an ill-judged comment or absence of reassurance (see Gill, 2009, for a lengthy discussion of 'frail masculinity' and power in relation to the heroes of 'lad lit' novels).

More generally, a strong motif of what I have identified elsewhere as a postfeminist 'Mars and Venus accounting' (after John Gray's best-selling books) informs articles. This is the idea that men and women are separate, but – crucially – complementary, species, who are metaphorically creatures from different planets. Gray's books offer a seductive repackaging of old notions of sexual difference, which have had a profound cultural impact, particularly on magazines. In *Glamour*, Mars and Venus ideas can be seen in the quasi-anthropological tone that is frequently adopted when female writers discuss men, reminiscent of *National Geographic* magazine or of wildlife programmes in which another member of the animal kingdom is introduced. It is evident in the many assertions of what men are 'naturally' like, which are often expressed in phrases such as 'men are programmed to' (be dominant/want lots of sex/ . . . fill in the blanks). It is also implicit in the repeated constructions of men needing to be 'told' what women want. Indeed, the most prevalent construction of inter-planetary miscommunication is found in the taken-for-granted notion that men will not understand you, will not necessarily know how to satisfy you sexually, and will need clear instructions on what to do at all times!

Perhaps what is most significant about these contradictory postfeminist constructions is the way in which they produce a radical gender asymmetry in relation to power and emotional labour. Men's needs must be recognized, perhaps even anticipated and pre-empted, by women, while women must silence their needs if they wish to win male approval. Male sexual anxieties must be dealt with gently and reassuringly, whilst women's body anxieties are cast as *toxic* to a relationship – they signal neediness and desperation, and should never (repeat never) be expressed. What's more, the starkly unequal gender relations constituted by such advice are systematically rendered invisible by the magazine's discourse of 'mutual respect', 'communication' and the success of relationships being 'up to both of you'. Again, there is the sense here of the ideological work becoming more complicated and entangled in this postfeminist moment.

### 3.3 WOMEN'S INTIMATE WORK AND NEOLIBERALISM

Finally, I want to argue that the repeated injunctions to work on the self constitute another distinctive feature of postfeminism, and one that is intimately connected to neoliberalism. In recent years a number of writers have explored neoliberalism, to highlight the ways in which it has shifted from being a political/economic rationality to a mode of governmentality that operates across a range of social spheres (Brown, 2003; Rose, 1996). Neoliberalism is increasingly understood as constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating and self-regulating – and this would certainly seem to resonate with constructions in *Glamour*. In women's magazines femininity has always been portrayed as contingent – requiring constant anxious attention, work and vigilance, from touching up your makeup to packing the perfect capsule wardrobe, from hiding unsightly pimples, wrinkles, age spots or stains, to hosting a successful dinner party. What marks out the advice considered here as distinctive, however, are three features: first, the dramatically increased *intensity* of self-surveillance, indicating the intensity of the regulation of women (alongside the disavowal of such regulation); second, the *extensiveness* of surveillance over entirely new spheres of life and intimate conduct; and third, the focus upon the psychological – upon the requirement to transform one's self and remodel one's interior life.

I hope here to have shown something of the scope of the intimate work women are expected to perform. This goes far beyond the bodily discipline so vividly depicted by writers such as Bordo, Bartky and Sawicki to encompass levels of *intimate self-surveillance*, monitoring and planning that are previously undocumented. It involves intensive monitoring of one's own feelings, desires and attitudes *and* those of a partner or potential partner. Moreover, it requires that sex be positioned at the heart of a re-modelled subjectivity in a way that involves both physical labour (e.g. trying out new positions, taking lessons in striptease), and ongoing psychological work. To 'compulsory individuality' (Cronin, 2000) we may now have to add *compulsory (sexual) agency*, as a required feature of contemporary postfeminist, neoliberal subjectivity. *Glamour's* advice is designed not simply to reshape behaviour but to get '*inside*' and reconstruct our notions of what it is to be a sexual subject (that is, a subject). Do I have the right attitude to sex? Am I open enough? Have I eradicated shame? Do I push myself enough to try new things? Have I ever had sex for the wrong reasons? Is my fantasy life exciting enough? (and so on).

Writing about the 'modernization' of romance narratives, Hilary Radner has argued that whereas the classical romantic heroine offered 'virtue', innocence and goodness as the commodities she brought to the sexual/marriage marketplace, contemporary romances demand a 'technology of sexiness' (1993, 1999). In the post-*Cosmopolitan* (magazine) West, heroines must no longer embody virginity but are required to be skilled in a variety of sexual behaviours and practices. Radner emphasized the performative aspects of this, but I would argue (and hope to have shown) that a *psychological* transformation is also central to this new disciplinary technology of sexiness, a making over of our very relationship to ourselves.

In *Glamour* magazine women are enjoined to self-monitor and monitor others, to work on and transform the intimate self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present every action – however constrained or normatively demanded – as the outcome of individual choice and a deliberative personal biography. What this example of mediated intimacy offers, perhaps more powerfully than anything, is the perfect marriage (heteronormative metaphor intended!) of postfeminism and neoliberalism.

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