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Advertising, Gender and Health Advice: the Case of *Men's Health* in the Year 2000

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Abstract

This article examines the potential influence of advertising in health magazines through detailed analysis of advertisements contained in 12 issues of the US magazine *Men's Health* from the year 2000, in the context of the articles which surround the advertisements. Tensions are explored between the role of the magazines in constructing male consumers to deliver to advertisers, and the dispensing of genuine health advice. Tensions are particularly apparent when health advice would go against typical images of hegemonic masculinity, for example advice to drink less alcohol, eat less meat, eat less convenience food, or reduce involvement in risky behaviour. The conclusion considers whether in constructing a male consumer, which in itself threatens traditional masculine images since it involves an interest in fashion, shopping and grooming products, there is potential for magazines to compromise health advice by avoiding further threats to traditional masculinity.

Keywords: masculinity, health, advertising

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Publicidad, Género y Consejos de Salud: el Caso de *Men's Health* en el Año 2000

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Abstract

Este artículo analiza la influencia potencial de los anuncios en las revistas de salud a través de un estudio detallado de los anuncios que se incluían en los 12 números de la revista americana Men's Health desde el año 2000, en el contexto de aquellos artículos que están rodeados de anuncios. Se estudia las tensiones entre el papel que tienen las revistas para ofrecer a los anunciantes potenciales consumidores masculinos, y la oferta de consejos de salud en dichas revistas. Las tensiones aparecen cuando dichos consejos van en contra de las típicas imágenes de la masculinidad hegemónica, por ejemplo los consejos para beber menos alcohol, comer menos carne, comer menos comida preparada, o reducir las conductas de riesgo. Se concluye que si bien se construye un consumidor masculino, que en sí mismo pone en cuestión las imágenes tradicionales masculinas porque implica un interés por la moda, por ir de compras y por los productos de cosmética, estas revistas tienen un potencial en el campo de los consejos de salud para evitar las futuras amenazas de la masculinidad tradicional.

Palabras clave: masculinidad, salud, anuncios

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In 1992, Ronald Collins produced a report entitled 'Dictating content: How advertising pressure can corrupt a free press' which provided detailed case studies of the powerful influence that advertisers can have over the content of media. This influence is a particular concern in the area of health magazines, where people rely on the health advice given by magazines in making decisions which can influence their short or long-term health.

As McLoughlin (2000, p. 39) points out, magazines are 'a vehicle for promoting various commodities through advertisements because this is where the real revenue lies'. The typical health magazine, for example Natural Health, is aimed at women and is full of advertisements for diet products, supplements, health foods, medicines, cosmetics and anti-ageing treatments. In Natural Health, the articles provide a favourable environment for the advertisers by, for example, allowing advertisements for vitamin pills to appear next to articles which extol their virtues (Consumer Guide, 2001). The line between advertisement and article is sometimes blurred by special advertising sections where advertisers supply their own articles to explicitly promote their goods (Davies, 2001).

The role that advertisers play is sometimes ethically questionable. For example, there is the problem of high protein fad diets such as the Atkins diet, criticised by the American Dietetic Association (2001) for encouraging a low nutrition diet and then selling vitamins pills to compensate. The fact that Atkins is a major advertiser in *Natural Health* raises the question of whether the editors of the magazine are free to criticise the Atkins diet. When Time magazine decided to produce an issue entitled 'The Future of Medicine' sponsored by the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, the special-projects editor felt 'Troubled by…having…big advertisers on subjects where the advertiser is in the same business' (reported in Kuczynski, 1998).

The ethics of health advertisements themselves are examined by McLaren (1999), who points out that 'Advertising sells both ills and e'. Against this background of health magazines aimed at women, which sell a wide range of cures, giddily blurring the lines between medicine, nutrition and hygiene. Treatments and ills, both in advertisements and the articles which support them, has come a new kind of magazine, *Men's Health*. This article examines the role of advertising in the US

version of *Men's Health* magazine in the year 2000, a time when the gender ideology in the magazine was particularly strong. The discourse of the magazine has, of course, changed and developed since then and future research which compares the findings of this paper with the current discourse of Men's Health magazine, both in the US and in its international editions, would be useful.

Men's Health Magazine

Men's Health is different from traditional health magazines in many ways, and ethical issues concerning the relationship between advertisements and content have yet to be explored. Wachs (2000) describes the way that health magazines in general are 'driven by advertisers who are interested in selling the latest exercise fad, whether it be a new diet or a piece of equipment that promises to get your body closer to its gender ideal'. While this seems to be true for women's magazines, it is not true for *Men's Health*, since health or fitness related products make up only a small fraction of the advertisements. According to the magazine itself, the top 5 advertising categories are '1) Apparel 2) Fragrance/Grooming 3) Automobiles 4) Accessories and 5) Footwear' (Advertisers pack, 2001). This is probably because of men's general lack of interest in health as a subject, and unwillingness to acknowledge they have medical or body-image problems (Courtenay, 2000, p.83).

However, just because the advertised products are in a different domain from health does not mean that advertisers exert no influence on the health advice given by the magazine. In fact, this paper explores the hypothesis that the entire way that *Men's Health* magazine constructs the notion of male health is related to the commercial interests of its advertisers. In the case of *Natural Health*, it is easy for readers to notice potential influence and be suspicious of, for example, articles describing alleged deficiencies in diet followed immediately by advertisements for supplements to compensate. In *Men's Health,* the influence of advertisers is less direct, making it harder for readers to be critical.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the commercial influences in the construction of health by *Men's Health* magazine. Influence is not something that can be shown directly, so what is investigated is intertextuality between the discourse of advertisements and articles

(Fairclough, 1992, p. 101). Qualitative and quantitative analysis of a sample of 14 issues, from June 2000 to October 2001 was conducted. Since the majority of space in the magazine, particularly the ads, consists of pictures and photographs, visual analysis was conducted using the framework described in Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (henceforth K&V).

Discussion

Men's Health claims to be the 'Most influential men's magazine in the world' (Advertisers Pack, 2001), and it probably is, given its worldwide circulation of 3,530,000 and (claimed) readership of 15 million men (Advertisers Pack, 2001). The magazine can influence the health choices, and hence the health of its readers, so an important question is who, in terms of advertisers, has the potential to influence the advice given by the magazine?

There were 584 main advertisements in the sample analysed, not counting the occasional small ad and ads in separate supplements. The breakdown of types of ad is shown in Figure 1.

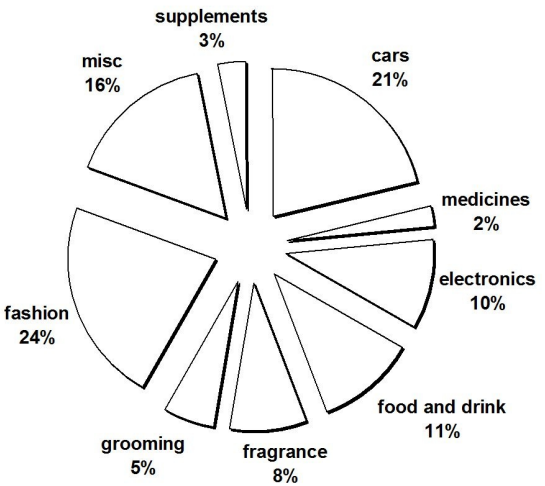

Figure 1. Distribution of ads in Men's Health (June 2000-October 2001)

The majority of ads in the fashion, cars, fragrance and electronics sections are for top-of-the-range, high prestige, luxury goods. This reflects the high income of the readers of the magazine, whose median income is $59,270 (Advertisers pack, 2001). As the Advertisers pack (2001) puts it: *'Men's Health* delivers an affluent, educated, professional reader'. Health related products make up only a small percentage of ads, with medicines and supplements combined making up only 5%, although some of the food and drink ads do mention vitamins or other health related information.

Advertising, masculinity and health

Magazines rely on advertising revenue, and have traditionally been targeted at women because of the image of women as 'consumers' and men as 'producers' in patriarchal society. The first men's lifestyle magazine was *Esquire*, which Breazeale (1994, p.1) calls 'the first thoroughgoing, conscious attempt to organise a male consuming audience'. The 'commercial orchestration of…readership' (Greenfield et al., p.462) continued with Men Only, a magazine which 'embodied great risks, as it involved addressing men as consumers when this role was often disparagingly associated with women' (Greenfield et al., p.463).

Men's Health embodies even greater risks: reading lifestyle magazines, looking at pictures of semi-naked muscular men, picking out fashionable clothing, and showing concern with health and looks are anathema to the kind of masculinity which is hegemonic in current US society. *Men's Health* seems to compensate for this through articles saturated with images of extreme masculinity, for example, models who have, in the words of Trebay (2000), 'a washboard stomach and a massive torso'.

Masculine images are also used in ads. Medicines and supplements are probably the least masculine of products to sell to male consumers, which explains why the few ads for medicines which appear contain images from the highly masculine arena of sports. In an effort to say 'real men take medicine too', the athlete's foot cure has pictures of Grant Hill in a baseball game, with superimposed arrows tracing the movement of the ball to show dynamic action (MH2000:6, p.109)[1],

an allergy cure shows a baseball game with the batter poised to hit the ball (MH2001:5:p101), and an ad for a prostate health supplement shows a huge screaming sports fan painted like a devil, next to the words 'It's a guy thing' (MH2000:7/8, p. 67).

Although images of extreme masculinity are found throughout the magazine, in ads as well as articles, hegemonic masculinity is associated with a number of negative health behaviours. These include smoking, dangerous sports, over-consumption of meat, reliance on convenience food, over-consumption of alcohol and unsafe sex (Courtenay, 2000). *Men's Health* magazine, of course, does not encourage smoking or dangerous sports. However, as argued in Stibbe (2004), the magazine includes frequent positive images of meat, convenience food, alcohol and unsafe sex, and only occasional warnings as to their dangers. Thus *Men's Health* magazine, while containing a certain amount of useful health advice, also appears to promote a type of masculinity that is associated with negative health behaviour (Stibbe, 2004).

Evidence that the magazine is using masculine images to compensate for placing men in the position of consumers can be seen in an issue of *Men's Health* which contains a 56 page 'Guide to Style' (MH2000:9). The editorial in this issue deliberately tries to distance itself from other fashion magazines:

> Why We Wear the Pants…Note how we don't use the word "Fashion". "Fashion" is a word you find in "fashion" magazines…populated by underfed male models…those snotty stick figures' (MH2000:9, p. 26)

The 'underfed…stick figures' contrast with the Men's Health models, who, with their huge muscular bodies, are the epitome of hegemonic masculinity. This suggests that the masculinity of the models is being used in an attempt to compensate for the fact that the magazine revolves around fashion.

The images of masculinity in its muscular form can, in turn, influence the health advice given. For example, throughout sample analysed, the magazine gave the message that eating meat, particularly beef, is masculine and will make muscles bigger: 'Remember: Meat

is Muscle…and buying it satisfies your primal urge to boss around big guys in bloody aprons' (MH2001:1/2, p. 88). This is despite the link between animal fat and both heart disease and prostate cancer, two diseases men are particularly likely to suffer from (Courtenay, 2000, p.90). Given the obesity problem among American men, being 'underfed' is one condition that the 'affluent' reader is unlikely to be suffering from. Thus the orchestration of masculinity to sell fashion appears, at least in this case, to be correlated with health advice which fails to address a well known area of concern about men's health.

Meat and class

The promotion of meat by the magazine is far from subtle. For example, in the 'Men's Health Char-Broil' promotion, a full page colour photo of four beef burgers on a barbecue grill is accompanied by text which reads 'Win everything you need for a perfect BBQ: A char-broil grill, some beef, and BEER!'(MH2001:7/8, p.136). The words 'some beef' are in the centre, over the largest burger, which is tilted towards the viewer on a spatula as if been offered, the spatula itself forming a vector pointing at the burger.

In this case, the aim is to advertise BBQ equipment, but the frequent positive images of meat cannot be explained by meat related ads alone, since such ads appear only 3 times in all 14 issues. In addition to the muscle tie-in, meat may be promoted because it is, itself, a symbol of extreme masculinity, requiring the death of animals.

There is, however, a third possible reason why meat is being promoted. A clue to this can be seen in an article in the magazine which describes the personality associated with ordering various dinners: the 'Filet Mignon' is described as 'Classy, likes to indulge' (MH2001:09, p. 49). As Adams (1990) points out, 'Dietary habits proclaim class distinctions…people with power have always eaten meat'. Since meat requires far more resources to produce than vegetables, it is a symbol of conspicuous consumption, and hence class, just like the oversized gas-guzzling luxury cars advertised in the magazine.

The Advertisers Pack (2001) asks the question 'Who reads Men's Health?' and then answers it: 'ambitious, educated and affluent…men

who want to look good and who spend the most money on prestige brands'. Notice that the description of the Men's Health reader did not include 'wants to be healthy'. The diet of 'ambitious' men in current US society is a diet of power, centred around meat, showing 'affluence' through indulging in luxury. A magazine which pointed out the health dangers of meat and insisted on reducing meat consumption would not create the right environment for selling 'prestige brands'. Therefore, as well as masculinity, class seems to be a dimension in the commercial influence on health advice.

Using Muscles to Sell

According to McCracken (1997, p. 97), the cover of women's magazines provides a 'Window to the future self', the self the reader will become if she follows the advice of the magazine. Men's Health, too, seems to provide such a window. All the covers are slight variations of a prototypical format, where a hugely muscular man appears on the right hand side of the cover, the position associated with the 'new' (K&V, 1996, p.187). On the left side, associated with the 'given' (K&V, 1996, p.187), messages using the pronoun 'you' appear in large font. These messages suggest that the man on the right hand side could be 'you' if you follow the advice of the magazine. For example 'Your new body is here!' (MH2001:9, cover), 'Find your abs' next to a picture of a man with huge abdominal muscles (MH2000:10, cover), and 'Build this body' with an red arrow pointing towards the model's torso (MH2000:12, cover).

The composition of the picture reinforces the idea of the 'future self': The man is in black-and-white, which reduces the photo-realism and hence modality, showing that the photo is symbolic, rather than just being a picture of a particular man. The background is completely white, which also reduces modality and makes the model in the picture 'become generic, a 'typical example', rather than particular' (K&V, 1996, p. 166). The horizontal angle is frontal, suggesting engagement rather than detachment (K&V, 1996, p.142), and the shot is medium-close, positioning the viewer in social distance, but not intimate personal distance (K&V, 1996, p. 134). The vertical angle is eye level, suggesting equality (K&V, 1996, p. 46), and in all but one of the covers

the model is looking directly at the camera, forming what K&V (p.122) call a 'demand' picture, demanding a relationship with the viewer.

The vertical angle, the horizontal angle and the direction of gaze are all consistent with looking in a mirror, with modality reduced to show that the person in the mirror is not the current self, but the future self. Presumably the current self is not good enough, and certainly not muscular enough, as revealed by the imperative statements ordering the current self to 'Pack on Muscle!' (MH:2001:6, cover), 'Muscle up in three weeks' (MH:2001:3,cover), and get 'Hard Muscles Fast!' (MH2001:9, cover). The message is clear, if you read the magazine you will 'Pack on Muscle' and become what appears on the right hand side of the cover, which is not a photo of a particular man, but the 'cultural icon of masculinity' (Schuler, quoted in Trebay, 2000).

The cover image links with advertisements throughout the magazine, which portray their product being worn by the 'cultural icon'. The 'future self' is not just muscular, he also wears Nike clothing. The advert for Nike (MH2000:9, p.21) shows two muscular men, naked from the waist up, in black and white, completely white background, echoing the style of the cover, but with the Nike shorts given salience by being in colour. The 'future self' also uses Ralph Lauren fragrance, as the same black and white muscular image of a man appears with white background next to an oversize (and hence symbolic, K&V, 1996, p.110) colour bottle of fragrance. There are many variations of the theme: sometimes the model appears in colour, sometimes the background has full context rather than just being white, sometimes the model wears a shirt, sometimes he is pictured with friends, however in nearly all cases the model is muscular and there is clear intertextuality with the cover.

For the average reader, the size of the model makes the current self appear severely lacking. However, as a plastic surgeon interviewed by Wheeler (2000) points out: 'The images out there are not the norm. The average man is not going to attain that'. This leaves the possibility that the images lead to anxiety about body image. A study reported by Wheeler (2000) showed that 43% of American men are dissatisfied with their appearance, up from only 15% in 1972. Debbie Burgard, a psychologist, believes the dissatisfaction is due to a number of factors,

including the increase in torso size of boys' toys like GI Joe, and 'images in Men's Health magazine' (reported in Wheeler, 2000).
Body image dissatisfaction, while having the potential to lead to eating problems, use of steroids, over-consumption of meat, and low self esteem, also has the potential to help advertisers sell their goods. If men cannot achieve the body that their 'future self' offers, at least they can wear the clothes and use the scent associated with the right image. This is the same as women's magazines, where the cover model traditionally 'sustains our envy and feelings of insecurity, predisposing us to be receptive to the products advertised' (McCracken, 1997, p.98).

The editors of *Men's Health* appear to be aware of the problem of pushing muscles to sell magazines and the products advertised in them. The fitness director, Lou Schuler, in a book review appearing on the internet, talks of 'images of men whose rippling muscles are being used to sell everything from Abercrombie & Fitch shirts to *Men's Health* magazine' (Schuler, 2001a). He even mentions the problems of negative body image in a review of another book, *The Adonis Complex*:

> As a result of this bombardment of pumped-up male imagery, American men have been developing eating disorders, working out to the point of obsession, and taking steroids. None of this is for health or sports performance but rather to develop a physique that matches those seen on the cover of *Muscle & Fitness* … (Schuler, 2001b)

Ironically, Schuler mentions the cover of *Muscle & Fitness* magazine, a competitor, but exactly the same can be said about Men's Health magazine. The difference is that *Men's Health*, as a self-declared health magazine, has greater power to influence the social construction of health, giving the idea that huge muscles are healthy, whatever price they are gained at.

Muscles and powerful cars

Perhaps the clearest connection between muscles and advertising is in car advertisements. The point is made within an article appearing in

Men's Health magazine itself:

> Let's imagine you are a short, bald accountant with no abs…Don't expect a great car to turn you into El Duque or Brad Pitt or any combination thereof. But it will bring you a little closer (MH2001:5, p.80).

The 'short, bald accountant with no abs' is, in fact, the reader that *Men's Health* appears to be aimed at, an 'upscale' reader (Advertising pack, 2001) who needs to 'Drop 20lbs the easy way' (MH2000:9,cover), 'Build abs that show' (MH2000:7/8, cover) and might buy the anti-balding drugs advertised in the magazine.

Before reading the magazine, some readers might not have known that advanced body builders can build a 'six pack' of visible abdominal muscles, let alone that this is a desirable thing to do. They might have been unaware that the ideal arms 'bulge like VW beetles' (MH2000:10, p.45), and might not recognised the need to add '2 inches' to their chest ('Add 2 inches to your chest' MH2000:10, cover). These are set up as ideals in the health advice given by the magazine, but few men have the time or dedication to follow the training schedule of a professional body builder.

However, what readers can easily do is to buy a car that fits the ideal image created by the magazine: a huge, powerful car. Not surprisingly, of all the types of cars advertised in Men's Health the most common one is the Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV), which, along with the similar luxury pickup truck, make up 54% of all car ads. These unnecessary large cars are presented as, in the words of Nomai (2001), 'bigger, tougher, status enhancing freedom machines'. The problem is that the car and the driver's body are two different things, which, as will be described shortly, advertisers go to great lengths to conflate.

The characteristics of masculinity that the ideal reader is encouraged to want for himself are projected onto the cars in a series of personifications, which give the cars qualities that usually only humans have. The *Hyundai* is 'rugged' (MH2001:1/2, p.21), the *Jeep* has 'legendary off-road prowess' (MH2000:9, p.67) while the *Chevy Tracker* 'things big' (MH2000:10, back cover). The *Nissan Frontier* 'doesn't roll off the assembly line, it struts' (MH:2001:6, p.43).

The owners of the car are entitled to 'brag' about the power of the car in the same way as they can brag about the power of their muscles. According to the Nissan Maxima ad, if readers buy the car, the 17% increased horsepower gives the reader 100% increased 'bragging rights' (MH2000:7/8, p.1). This echoes an article in the same magazine subtitled 'add 20 pounds to your bench press', which will give you 'something to brag about during lockdown' (MH2000:7/8, p.30). If readers buy the *Subaru Outback*, then they will get 'So much power and control it's hard to stay humble' (MH2000:12, p.21). This blurs the line between the qualities of the car and those of the owner.

In the following extract from a *Men's Health* promotion sent out by email to potential readers, the slogan 'Built Ford Tough', which emphasises the toughness of the cars, is deliberately entwined with the personal physical toughness of the reader:

> OK, smart guy: You read *Men's Health*. You can bench press 350 pounds. You dress better than your boss, and your family worships you. We know you're tough. BUT, are you "Built Ford Tough?" Do you have the mental toughness and survival smarts to laugh at adversity? (Email May 24, 2001)

The pronoun 'you' appears 6 times in this extract, addressing an ideal reader who is clearly significantly tougher and more successful than the actual reader. This builds up to the word 'Ford', in a key position which would be given contrastive stress if the sentence was read aloud. Even the 'ideal' reader cannot aspire to the toughness of the Ford cars, so it could be argued that this paragraph intends to create and play on anxieties about physical toughness to sell the cars.

The blurring of the distinction between personal fitness and cars is also apparent within advertisements in the magazine. An ad for the *Ford Escape SUV*, which was written in conjunction with *Men's Health* magazine, reads: 'Your mission: to aspire to a whole new level of fitness…To create the Ultimate Personal Fitness Escape' (MH2000:9, p.27). The name of the car here is deliberately and directly collocated with the words 'personal fitness'.

As Barthel (1992, p.144) points out, 'The male mode of exigence…is most in evidence in car advertisements, where the keywords are masculine: power, precision, performance…As the juxtaposition of shape and power suggests, the car is not simply the Other. It is also an extension of the owner'. This is implicit in all car advertisements, but occasionally appears directly: an ad for the *Saturn LS2* says that 'Like it or not, a car says something about you. Some a lot.' (MH2000:6, p.3), and the Jeep Wrangler ad reads 'Take a ride in a rugged *Jeep Wrangler*…The world will see you like never before. That's because Wrangler says a lot about you' (MH2000:7/8, p.93).

What the cars 'say about you' is that you are tough and masculine, even if your body does not live up to the unreachable ideals of the perfect body pushed by the magazine. The camera angle in most car ads is extremely low; in fact, to view the cars at this angle would require sitting on the road in front of the car (eg, MH2001:4, p.26; MH2001:3, p.65, MH2000:6, p.16). Traditionally, low camera angle is used to make the subject appear more powerful than the viewer (K&V, 1996, p.146). An extreme case is the Frontier advertisement (MH2001:6, p.42), in which the car faces the viewer straight on, forming a 'demand' picture (K&V, 1996, p.122), in this case demanding a relationship of confrontation with the viewer. The angle is such that the viewer is positioned as lying on the road in front of the car, the most powerless of positions. The words of the ad say '210 horsepower. Aggressive new design'. The reader, who may already feel anxious because he does not have the abs and torso of the models in the magazine, is bound to lose the confrontation, but might buy the car in order to sit behind the wheel and put other men in the same powerless position.

A final point to note about SUV ads is that many of them, including Ford (MH2000:9, p.27), Nissan (MH2000:9, p.59), and Isuzu (MH2001:63, p.10) ads contain images of extreme sports, including: a man clinging to a cliff above a raging sea (MH2000:9:p59), swimming far out to sea (MH2000:6, p.12), and mountain biking across a log over a white-water river (MH2000:1/2, p.38). This reflects one of the health-related traits of hegemonic masculinity: the idea that it is masculine to risk injury and death for the sake of enjoyment (Courtenay, 2000, p.89). However, the framing of these pictures is relevant: all ads of this kind

contain one large central picture of the car, with small rectangular pictures of extreme sports inserted around the car, clearly framed either by colour contrast or thick black lines. K&V (1996, p.214) describe how framing within a picture leads to the separation of the elements. In this case, the intrepid climber is not shown climbing a cliff next to the car, but separately in an inserted picture. This separation may be to emphasise that this is the image associated with the car, not that 'you' are actually expected to do these things. In fact, according to Brown (2001), 97% of SUV owners never even take their car off-road. If the reader's physical body does not communicate the tough image that the magazine sets up as ideal, at least his car can.

Sex

Since sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are an important cause of health problems and death for men (Courtenay, 2000, p.101), it would be expected that sexual health advice would revolve around issues such as reducing number of partners, using condoms, and providing information about STDs. However, *Men's Health* provides little such health advice, instead concentrating on 'lovemaking tips that will rock her world' (2001:4, p.100), and 'Gold medal sex' (MH2000:9, p.81), all described without mentioning condoms. Wachs (2000) points out that 'Men may get a complex about sexual performance when reading men's magazines'. Since the actual sex which results from taking the advice in the magazine is likely to fall short of the promise, this has the potential to lead to anxiety. Particularly in its sexual form, anxiety is a powerful way to sell products, both directly, in terms of sex instruction videos (eg, MH2001:5:p139), and indirectly in a wide range of advertisements which use sex to sell. As Smith (2000) points out, 'It is clear that sex is a strong appeal to sell certain products such as fragrance'.

Many of the fragrance and cosmetic advertisements show a man with an attractive woman. In most ads there are explicit or logical vectors from the woman to the man within the picture. This shows that it is the woman who is being attracted to the man. For example, in one fragrance ad the man is standing holding a woman whose trailing dress forms a diagonal vector showing that she has jumped up into his arms

In other ads, for example (MH2000:10, p.10) and (MH2000:12, p.117), the man looks off into the distance, while the woman looks directly at him, forming an eyeline vector towards the man (MH2000:10, p.10). Eyeline vectors are part of reaction processes (K&V, 1996, p.66), and in these ads the reaction, seen from the expression on the woman's face, is sexual pleasure.

Other vectors are formed logically, by anchoring the man and putting the woman in a position she must have travelled towards the stationary man to get into. For example, the man is anchored by sitting on a sofa, with the women approaching him from behind (MH2000:10, p.39), or resting her head on his chest (MH2001, p.25). In other examples, the man is anchored by lying on the floor with woman leaning on him (MH2000:12, p.118), standing with the woman holding him from behind (MH2001:10, p.7), and unseen in a room with a naked woman entering the room (MH2000:11, p.103).

With only three exceptions, two of which are in ads for 'his and her' fragrances, the vectors in all ads clearly show that the woman is approaching the man. The product itself, oversized and hence a symbolic attribute (K&V, 1996, p.110), appears at the bottom, the area of the 'real' (K&V, 1996, p.193), showing that the attraction is due to the product. At the top, the area of the 'ideal' (K&V, 1996, p.193), is the face of the adoring woman.

The commercial message is clear – if you use the product then you will attract beautiful women, who, judging by the expression on the women's faces, will derive sexual pleasure. Clearly this message would not be enhanced by health advice suggesting reducing the number of partners, using condoms and describing sexually transmitted diseases in detail.

Conclusion

Men's Health magazine has a dual role. On the one hand it gives advice for improving the health of the men who read it. On the other hand its revenue relies on creating an environment suitable for the selling of fashion, luxury goods and expensive cars. This paper has argued that these dual roles are, to a certain degree, incompatible.

The role of consumer in a patriarchal society is associated with women, and in an apparent effort to compensate for this, both the ads

and the articles in *Men's Health* contain images of extreme masculinity. As Courtenay (2000) shows, however, hegemonic masculinity is related with a wide range of negative health behaviours including excess meat eating, excess alcohol consumption, reliance on convenience food, and unsafe sex. With the exception of an article about the dangers of alcoholism (MH2001:4, p.114), the 14 issues of *Men's Health* analysed did very little to counter these negative behaviours, and frequently seemed to give them a positive image. The unrealistic goals of body size set up by the magazine, and the promises of astounding sex are likely to lead to anxiety rather than positive health behaviour. At the same time, the magazine contains numerous ads which show the ideal, muscular, sexually successful man using luxury products which the reader is encouraged to buy to compensate for his own inadequacy.

In addition to the problem of masculinity, there is also the problem of class. The intended readership belongs to a class where indulgence and conspicuous consumption are used as signs of power. In terms of health, it makes no difference whether the watch is a Rolex or a cheap digital; however, in terms of diet, the excess consumption of meat and alcohol are major concerns for health. A physically huge body also symbolises the kind of social power that the *Men's Health* readers both have and want more of. But again, creating a huge body is not necessarily a health goal, especially if getting to the required size involves anxiety about body image, eating excess meat, getting used to eating large amounts of food, or taking steroids.

In addition to the 'meat is muscle' advice (MH2001:1/2, p.88), the off-hand promotion of alcohol 'you should be drinking beer and fishing' (MH2001:3, p.136), the 'TV dinner diet' (MH2001:12, p.133), and advice about how to have 'rock-star sex' which fails to mention condoms, it must be pointed out that *Men's Health* does, in fact, contain some useful health information. The influence of the commercial forces on *Men's Health* magazine is therefore a matter of degree, but this paper has presented arguments that at least to some degree *Men's Health* appears to compromise the advice it gives men in order to create a suitable environment for selling products.

This raises important ethical questions as to how far advertising should be allowed to influence the content of sensitive issues such as health advice. Baker (1994, p.100) argues for legislation to 'outlaw an

advertiser's attempts to use its economic relationships with a media enterprise to influence the enterprise not to print or broadcast content that it would otherwise choose to present'. However, in the case of *Men's Health*, the editors seem to be quite happy to comply with the advertisers, particularly since the same images of masculinity which sell the goods in the magazine also help sell the magazine itself.

Existing legislation is even weaker than that which Baker would like to see. The Federal Trade Commission's position on advertising was summed up in a health and safety symposium as follows:

> You must tell the truth and not mislead consumers…the claims you make must be substantiated…you must not engage in…advertising or marketing that causes substantial, unavoidable consumer injury without offsetting benefit to competition or consumers. (Varney, 1996)

This focuses only on the advertisements themselves, and therefore has nothing to say about the far more subtle level where editors of health magazines may create a suitable environment for advertisers through promoting images of masculinity associated with negative health behaviour.

Legislation to ensure that commercial aims do not interfere with health advice and images of health would be very hard to create, since it is difficult to prove that an image was created in response to commercial pressure. A more realistic approach could be education which encourages readers to be critical. It is easy for readers to be critical of 'special advertising sections' which look like articles but are written specifically to promote goods. However, readers could also be educated to be aware of the way that commercial pressures operate, to realise that there is no firm barrier between advertisements and content in the media, and to consult a variety of sources when deciding on actions which will influence their future health.

Notes

[1] (MH2000:6:p109) refers to the US edition of *Men's Health* magazine, year 2000, month June, page 26. From this point, all references to the magazines follow the same pattern.

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