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Masculine identity and the projection of 'male images' in mass media: towards a pastoral hermeneutics in theory formation

ABSTRACT

Human identities in general - including gender and sexual identities – have recently become more diverse and malleable. This is to a great extent because of the pervasive influence of the mass media and popular culture, which proposes to offer important tools to help men (and women) adjust to contemporary life. Some parts of popular culture are reasserting traditional forms of masculinity, whilst others are challenging them - telling men what they are now 'supposed to' look like, act like, be like.

Media representations can be viewed as influencing our socialised schemata of interpretation for gender identities. This is also applicable to theological schemata of interpretation concerning commercialised men and masculinities. We drew upon work in variety of disciplines, such as cultural and media studies, sociology, theology and psychology, in order to examine issues concerning masculinities within this information era, influenced by the prescriptive role of mass media. In this way more insight was gained in terms of the dominating discourses reflected by images of men and masculinities in the global mass media, and how this can be investigated critically, from a pastoral hermeneutical perspective.

Magazines were also viewed as crucial media to analyse in order to understand male identity in a more comprehensive way. Therefore we chose our own South African cultural context within which we suggest the critical assessment of the influence of certain mass media representations – particularly displayed in magazines - on various expressions of masculinity. This was suggested in order to promote and co-create men and masculinities that focus on life-giving intimacy, vitality and human dignity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of practical theology[1], including the practice of pastoral hermeneutics[2], is constantly challenged to understand pastoral actions against the background of contemporary life issues,

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1   In broad terms practical theology (with pastoral care as subfield) can be defined as a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions, and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming. Woodward and Pattison (2000:13-17) explicates various essential characteristics of the scope or field of practical theology. Two of these main traits are also critically important to highlight at the start of this article, namely its (1) interdisciplinary and (2) dialectical nature.

2   Woodward and Pattison (2000) suggest that there is no one view about which of these terms ('pastoral' versus 'practical' theology) should predominate over the other. Practical and pastoral theology can thus both be seen as genuinely practical/pastoral and authentically theological. We would however simultaneously like to maintain the distinction which Graham (2000) makes, i.e. between 'practical' denoting the generic activities of Christian ministry and 'pastoral', the more interpersonal levels of care. Cf. Louw (2008).

e.g. international communication (Louw 2000). It is on the basis of this assumption that the human soul can no longer just be seen as a private entity, but that is growingly becoming a "global entity". According to Poling (2004:182) one of the three core questions for the revision of pastoral theology, care, and counselling in a time of global market capitalism is: How can we improve the quality of pastoral care across lines of gender[3], race, and class?

A pastoral hermeneutics should therefore be continually in discussion with culture as expressed in international discourses, concerning the understanding of our being human within a global paradigm. In this regard a 'critical existential realism' should be adopted, i.e. to evaluate critical paradigms influencing human self-understanding, very specifically paradigms within the gender debate and their impact on identity. Consequently a pastoral hermeneutics has the task to: (1) probe critically into the different schemata of interpretation which controls our contact – as humans from differing race, class and gender backgrounds - with the contemporary world; and (2) contribute towards theory formation for a pastoral anthropology on being male.

If pastoral care still wants to operate within the traditional and historic paradigm of *cura animarum,* 'soul care', and if we can work with the pastoral anthropological presupposition that 'soul' is not so much a substantial entity within human beings, but the reference to the quality of our being human (relational networks) within the presence of a living God, determined by the spiritual formula: to love God and fellow human beings; social and cultural analyses within specific contexts becomes paramount. One such context within a postmodern society is the realm of the social media and its impact on our being human and self-understanding.

This is where the need for a *gender sensitive pastoral hermeneutics* becomes clear, because it can perform the dual function of addressing issues of culture, whilst being critical of that culture from a gender-sensitive pastoral perspective[4]. Pastoral hermeneutics thus seeks to find ways to raise questions of accountability of the society (and the church) to women and men, and the accountability of those men and women in taking responsibility for their lives. Due to the so called 'male crisis', the constant criticism on patriarchalism from a gender perspective, and confusion about male identity within the quest for equality, the article will focus on issues concerning masculinities[5].

Men have also in recent times been depicted as the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence, and as captives between traditional and new ideas and perceptions about masculinity.

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3 Charles Sherlock (1996:175) explains the complexity of the concept gender in three subcategories, which is helpful in trying to understand it. Firstly gender can refer to gender identity (attempts to describe the differences between men and women). Secondly, it can indicate gender relations (the patterns of power, norms, customs and roles which govern women and men's lives). Thirdly, it can connote gender representations (the ways in which gender concepts help to organize ideas about culture, nature, knowledge and social perspectives). In this article we work with a notion of gender as a set of social and cultural meanings assigned to biological (sexuality) differences. 'Gender' therefore becomes an analytical tool enabling us to probe deeply into our everyday practices as women and as men within the context of our religion, culture and history. See also Van der Watt (2007:45-63).

4 In conjunction with Bonnie Miller-McLemore's view on pastoral care (1996; 2000), the object of study in this pastoral theological undertaking is the 'living human web'. Within this framework pastoral care still entails practical religious, spiritual, and congregational care for the suffering, involving the rich resources of religious traditions and communities, contemporary understandings of the human person in the social sciences, and ultimately the movement of God's love and hope in the lives of individuals and communities.

5 To understand how these issues are situated within the relation between masculinity, embodiment and power, as well as within the reciprocity between masculinity and Christian spirituality, see Van der Watt (2007).

Moreover (amongst others) new social prescriptions about fatherhood[6] within a framework of masculinity and child care, have come to the fore. The dynamics of change in masculinity therefore takes place within the greater arrangements of, and reciprocity between (big) changes within both the public and private spheres of the society. Changes in the labour market, on the political playing field and in domestic spheres (within a globalising culture) have forced men to explore and internalise new concepts of masculinity.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER WITHIN A PASTORAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Critical gender perspectives have made a significant difference to most academic fields, including the study of religion (and theology). Yet many scholarly publications on religion still seem to give little or no recognition to the profound epistemological, methodological, and substantive changes that contemporary gender studies, especially women's scholarship and feminist theories, but also the growing field of men's studies in religion, have produced over the last thirty years (King 2005). Thus, the engendering of religions and their study provides a great challenge to contemporary practical theological research, and therefore we deem it necessary to take cognisance of its impact in this article.

Furthermore, to state the obvious (which is often ignored): gender is simply a central feature of social life – one of the main organizing principles around which our lives as human beings revolve. We come to know ourselves and our world primarily through the prism of gender and it therefore shapes our identities and the institutions, in which we work, live, play and exist. Our gendered state of being in life mostly happens unconsciously, and especially men were rarely in history understood through the gender-lens. Gender, together with race and class, is therefore a central mechanism by which power and resources are distributed in our society and one of the main concepts out of which we design the meanings of our lives. According to Bowie (2005:3420): 'While age, ethnicity, class, and many other factors also have culturally prescribed norms, gender is the most universal and salient social organizing principle.'

We suspect that the contemporary, globalising culture (generally termed postmodernism) has made the question of masculinity acutely problematical in many different cultural contexts. It is

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6 Fatherhood is an integral element in the construction of masculinities, but it is interpreted in different ways. Although the connection between fathers and masculinity seems patently obvious, it is, in fact, a complex subject. One researcher that recognizes this complexity is R.D. Parke (2000), who assumes a developmental focus to provide a psychological perspective on the complexities of father involvement. Since men's increased involvement in care-giving, there has been a change in the nature of fatherhood as it is continuously 'shaped and reshaped according to cultural context, work and family relations' (Brandth and Kvande 1998:2). For men who accept that fathering goes beyond their contribution to conception, there are many ways of interpreting fatherhood. It may be understood as negotiating a responsibility to provide and protect, or it may be interpreted as an entity in which one's children become part of one's identity – "I am my children". Masculinities which value both responsibility and care can and should be fostered. Such masculinities should steer clear of the claim that fatherhood gives men power over women and children and justifies authority and tyranny. Basically, '…fatherhood can make a contribution to the lives of men. It can give meaning to their lives and open up unexplored channels of emotional engagement. When men accept the fatherhood role, in whatever form, they also contribute to the broader goals of gender equity. Fatherhood should be a role that integrates men into families, rather than separating them from children, women and other men.' (Morrell 2006:23). Other important questions to attend to are: How does fatherhood feature in the way men understand masculinity? How does/did race and class shape fatherhood? How do/did understandings of fatherhood change over time? See for example, Hewlett (2000), for a brief overview of anthropological approaches and studies of father involvement with insights into how father involvement is conceptualized in the USA (and has changed over time). See also Corneau (1991:12-13) and Van der Watt (2007:95-101).

assumed that this is mainly because of a diversity of images and projected representations in the mass media that confuse men in their search for a meaningful masculine identity. The problem which will subsequently be addressed is the suspicion that the meaning of their masculinity is often not experienced in a healthy and coherent manner by many men. Rather, they experience confusion in terms of their identities and role functions as men, also influencing attitudes within relational networks (e.g. within their families, and marriages where applicable).

By qualifying it holistically and relationally, the non-negotiable need to view masculine identity not only philosophically or phenomenologically, but out of a pastoral anthropological perspective, becomes clear. In such a pastoral anthropology we opt for an inclusive anthropology which operates with both the mutuality of relationships (*relatio*) as well as the identity of being qualities (*substantia*), rather than merely with the predominance of *substantia.* The outcome of this argument is an inclusive and normative anthropology, which determines healing due to the fact that the questions 'How do I see myself?', 'Who is the other?', 'How do you understand and perceive God?'; determine one's approach to life. (cf. Louw 2008)

Within a pastoral anthropological paradigm the quality of our being human □ which is an indication of our human dignity □ is given out of the re-creation in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Such a paradigm has implications for all dimensions of being human – also for the meaning and value of pastoral care to men. Therefore, the theological foundation of pastoral anthropology is that a Christology gives the human person a new quality of being human (human dignity) through a pneumatology[7].

To what extent are practical theologians and pastoral caregivers cognisant of the above mentioned realities? How are current pastoral-theological research and care initiatives intently directed to attend to these important issues in theory formation for the pastoral ministry?

3. INTERPRETING THE PARADIGMATIC FRAMEWORK OF THE INFORMATION AGE

'Over the past three decades, digital technologies have powerfully changed our lives. They are woven into the very way we understand and relate to the world around us. We are now a digital culture. We are no longer who and what we were just a few decades ago.' (Tim Challies 2011:10)

People living in the twenty-first century inhabit a *digital information* and *consumer* society, where the manufacturing and dissemination of information has become an essential facet of modern democratic and commercial processes. Shifting to the cultural realm, we see the emergence of a similar pattern of networking, flexibility, and symbolic communication, organized around electronic media (including computer-mediated communication networks). According to Castells (1999), cultural expressions of all kinds are increasingly enclosed in or shaped by this world of electronic media[8] . But the new media system is not characterized by the one-way, undifferentiated messages through a limited number of channels that constituted the world of mass media. And it is not a global village.

'Instead of a global village we are moving towards mass production of customized cottages. While there is oligopolistic concentration of multimedia groups around the world, there is at the same time, market segmentation, and increasing interaction by and among the individuals that break up the uniformity of a mass audience.' (Castells 1999:404). These processes induce

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7 See Van der Watt (2007:247-272) for a detailed discussion of the basic dogmatic tenets of a pastoral anthropology.

8 The term 'media', in the established sense, usually refers to 'communication media' and the institutions and organisations in which people work (the press, cinema, broadcasting, publishing etc.) and the cultural and material products of those institutions (the forms and genres of news, road movies, soap operas which take the material forms of newspapers, paperback books, films, tapes, discs). (Lister et al. 2000:9-10)

the formation of what he calls *the culture of real virtuality*. It is called so and not virtual reality, because when our symbolic environment is, by and large, structured in this inclusive, flexible, diversified hypertext in which we navigate every day, the virtuality of this text is in fact our reality, the symbols from which we live and communicate.

It has become a truism to observe that we live in media-saturated societies. Media production is now one of the largest and most lucrative industrial sectors in the global economy[9]. Yet for all of its dominant presence in our lives, there is a feeling that this kind of media saturation is not a 'good' thing. The media, and in particular television, have been credited with 'fabulous' powers to change people and have been blamed for contributing to most social ills. It has been blamed for the undermining of trust in politics, the decline of religion, the increase in crime and violence in society, the dumbing down of popular culture, the growth of permissiveness, and as, generally speaking, having the power to corrupt and deprave[10]. (McCullagh, 2002; Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort (eds.), 2003)

The social significance of the mass media within this current information and consumer society therefore cannot be understated. The media-saturated contexts we live in are built upon an emerging, dominant social structure: the Network Society – which is (according to Castells, 1999:398-399) in turn characteristic of informational capitalism, as constituted throughout the world. Media of communication are extraordinary diverse, and it sends targeted messages to specific segments of audiences and to specific moods of the audiences. These media are increasingly inclusive, bridging from one to another, connected throughout the globe and yet diversified by cultures, constituting a hypertext with extraordinary inclusive capacity. *These media networks also transform power relationships.*

In light of this background, it becomes clear that within the current globalising world context and the (above-mentioned) Network Society, the mass media are of central importance to the maintenance of modern culture[11] and the reproduction of contemporary societies. Different forms of media culture such as magazines, television, film, popular music, and advertising provide role and gender models, fashion hints, life-style images, and personality icons. The narratives of media culture offer moral messages, ideological conditioning, and various patterns of proper and improper behaviour, 'sugar coating social and political ideas with pleasurable and seductive forms of popular entertainment'. (Durham and Kellner 2001:1)

Likewise, media and consumer culture, cyber-culture, sports, and other popular activities engage people in practices which integrate them into the established society, while offering pleasures, meanings and identities. Different individuals and audiences respond to these texts disparately, negotiating their meanings in very complex and often paradoxical ways. Learning to live and think as Christians in our time therefore requires learning to engage with media and culture. Hence it is also particularly important for practical theologians and pastoral caregivers to become aware of the power of images, and find both the tools to explore and critique these images as well as the opportunities to shape that which so thoroughly (albeit subconsciously) shapes us.

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9 According to McCullagh (2002) thirteen of the 100 richest people in the world are media magnates. 'Media consumption is the predominant activity in the domestic sphere in industrialised societies, and second only to work in terms of the time spent on it.' (McCullagh 2002:2)

10 For an in-depth discussion on the power of the media, see *Media and Power,* James Curran (2002).

11 The historical development of the media has subsequently been instrumental in the emergence of what we understand as modern social and cultural life. O' Sullivan (et al.) (1998) identifies three key aspects of their presence: 1. They represent the emergence of large-scale systems of *public* communication, linked to what has been called the *public sphere;* 2. Simultaneously, these developments have also had important implications for the *private* sphere and everyday life 'at home'; 3. The media and mass communications have interacted with pre-existing cultures, forms and values in a number of significant ways. Of these, perhaps the most central has been in the development of *popular* culture…' (O' Sullivan 1998:29)

We contend that when we explore media such a films or magazines theologically we are busy with practical theology as hermeneutical culture-analysis, thus describing the phenomena in our globalising culture in theological language, and interpreting material in these media as symbolizations of fundamental themes in the society. In others words, *theological perspectives on the content of, e.g. films or magazine can and should enrich the dimension of meaning-making and the co-creation of (gendered) identities in life that are essentially healthy, and promote human dignity.*

The power of mass media[12]
Within this proliferating image and media culture, in which new technologies are changing every dimension of life from the economy to personal identity, fresh critical strategies are needed to read cultural texts, and to interpret the conjunctions of sight and sound, words and images - that are producing seductive cultural spaces, forms, and experiences.

Therefore it is imperative - also for practical theologians and pastoral caregivers etc. - to understand and analyse the cultural environment if one wants to get a grip on these phenomena's impact on people's daily lives. There is not a single approach that contributes the 'golden key' to cultural and media criticism. All given theories and methods have their limitations as well as strengths, their illuminating perspectives as well as their blind spots. A critical reading of media texts can reveal a wealth of meanings, values, and messages, often contradictory.

In short, *the mass media constitute a primary source of definitions and images of social reality and the most universal expression of shared identity.* O' Sullivan et al. (1998:3) gives attention to the importance of *ritual interaction* with modern media. This means that forms of media consumption - reading, watching, listening etc. – are particular ways of creatively participating in the life of modern culture. In this manner, the media have been termed '*consciousness industries*', involved in the manufacturing or management of the public sphere, of consensus and consent. That is, in providing images, interpretations and explanations of events occurring in the wider world, the modern media do not simply and neutrally provide information about that world, but actively encourage us to see and understand it in particular ways and in certain terms. Therefore it is important to be cognisant of the fact that '*Technology, media, performance, play, consumption, family and gender relationships are all intertwined.*' (Lister et al. 2000:279).

One of the biggest debates about the social impact of the media can be boiled down to one question: do the mass media have a significant amount of power over its audience, or does the audience ultimately have more power than the media? In other words, do the media simply give a reflection of the social realities of life or do they create a particular reality independent of life itself in order to influence its receivers? These questions are also relevant for pastoral theologians and caregivers to engage with critically, in order to gain more insight concerning the reciprocal relationship between media and masculine identities.

We, in following the cues from some media experts (like Durham and Kellner, 2001; McQuail 2000; and Devereux 2003), would advocate the usefulness of a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of media, culture and society. However, through this article we suggest a particular pastoral hermeneutical perspective to analyze cultural and mass media influences, which can for instance be applied constructively via an empirical analysis of different media like magazine.

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12 The mass media can be divided into 'old' media such as film, magazines, newspapers, radio and television, and 'new' media such as the Internet, digital television, and WAP-based technology. According to Lister et al. (2000:9-11) the term 'new media' is a blanket description that subsumes a whole range of different practices and processes. 'New media' can therefore not be used as a collective singular noun as if it referred to a more or less coherent entity. It rather immediately suggests something far less settled, known and identified.

Mass media do not merely portray a world; they propagate a worldview. The worldview and values propagated by the cinema[13], magazines, TV etc. – however subtly or implicitly this may occur – should be assessed critically by practical theologians and pastoral caregivers, through a posture of constructive engagement rather than a silent standoff.

4. MEDIATED IMPRESSIONS OF GENDER[14] REPRESENTATION AND RELATIONS

Susan Bordo (1999:215) asserts that: 'we live in an empire ruled not by kings or even presidents, but by images.' Thus, attempting to talk about such a broad topic, the images of men and (women) within such a broad field - 'the media' - is a very big task. Each week a new set of movies is released. Every day, television programmes, documentaries, children's entertainment, game shows, chat shows, lifestyle programmes, films, soap operas, music videos and more are broadcasted. Magazines, the internet and World Wide Web, newspapers[15] and adverts all contain images of men (and women), and even songs on the radio (or played in shops and cafes) might feed into, or challenge, our ideas about gender.

How does media content reveal unequal relationships of power? Does the predominance of a hegemonic discourse about class, race or gender have a bearing on what audiences believe about the social world? Cultural studies scholar Douglas Kellner asserts, 'Radio, television, film and other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless…media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and its deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil'. (Kellner 1995:1)

This assertion affirms the prevalence of the array of messages within media content which people daily read/see about gender roles. Do these messages challenge or perpetuate what are currently viewed as the 'appropriate' gender roles in a specific social setting or cultural context? What do these messages tell people about masculinity and femininity? What sorts of assumptions are inherent in these media messages about being a 'man' or a 'woman' in the early twenty-first century? What aspects of being male or female are downplayed or ignored altogether in these media messages? If one was to compare how these messages concerning gender politics vary with those reproduced in the mass media, for instance, twenty years ago, how do they differ, and why?

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13 Since the invention of motion pictures a century ago, Johnston (2000:41) observes five differing theological responses that the church has made to film, as it has learned from and has sought to influence Hollywood. He labels these responses avoidance, caution, dialogue, appropriation, and divine encounter. According to Johnston (2000:64) there are (at least) six theological reasons why a Christian should enter into dialogue with film:

(1) God's common grace is present throughout human culture. (2) Theology should be concerned with the Spirit's presence and work in the world. (3) God is active within the wider culture and speaks to us through all of life. (4) Images as well as words can help us to encounter God. (5) Theology's narrative shape makes it particularly open to interaction with other stories. (6) The nature of constructive theology is a dialogue between God's story (Bible, Christian tradition, and a particular worshiping community) and our stories (the surrounding culture and life experiences).

14 Within media content and across a variety of media genres we are presented with a range of representations about gender. Media content plays a hugely significant role in shaping our perceptions of what is to be 'male' or 'female', and it thus reflects changing dominant discourses about femininity and masculinity. It also carries a set of hegemonic assumptions about human sexuality, but its representations pertaining to being 'a man' or being 'a woman' are not fixed entities; they change over time.

15 See Davis (2005) in Van der Watt (2007:462-464) for an example of an article in a South African newspaper that focuses on this issue of the representation (and/or mis-representation) in the media.

According to Lemon (1991:126) media messages convey certain 'preferred meanings' which reflect the interests of the dominant group(s) in society. In this way the media perpetuate and maintain images and world views, such as dichotomous gender divisions, which are compatible with the goals and objectives of the dominant group(s). In this sense, the media play an important role in perpetuating and legitimising patriarchal ideology as well as the traditional male sex role, sometimes with perilous and abusive side-effects (cf. Van der Watt 2011). Because in most developed societies the media are controlled and dominated by (white) men, whose fundamental interests lie in maintaining the patriarchal status quo, the media invariably present a white, male dominated, capitalist perspective.

This is not to say that media content is a mirror image of the realities of gender identities in the social world. The gulf between representations and reality has been much commented upon. Van Zoonen and Costera Meijer (in Devereux 2003:131) for example, argue that: 'It is indeed easy to see that real women are much more different and more diverse than their representations in the media would seem to suggest. If media images were indeed a reflection of reality, 'real' women would be relatively rare in most parts of the real world, and Black, older, disabled, lesbian, fat, poor, or Third World women would be virtually non-existent.'

Notably in response to the women's movement and growth of feminist scholarship, conventions for representing gender in mass media have come under increasing scrutiny during the past two to three decades[16]. Up until the early 1990's however, these efforts have been limited in at least two ways. First, content analyses have focused almost exclusively on women, and men's roles in media have been implicitly viewed as unproblematic. Second, most studies have relied on mainstream sex-role theory, which assumes that mass media transmit stereotypical gender images that shape role expectations and, in turn, inform behaviour and identity. However, sex-role theory oftentimes ignores or underemphasizes power differences between the sexes, the relational processes through which gender identity is socially constructed, and dynamic linkages between gender images and larger systems of ideology and social structure. (Sabo and Jansen 1992:169)

In history then it mostly appears, unsurprisingly, that the mass media used to be very stereotyped in its representations of gender. In his book *Media, gender and identity,* Gauntlett (2002) indicates that, as well as showing men being more active, decisive, courageous, intelligent and resourceful, television and movies also showed a much greater quantity of men, compared to women. There were exceptions, of course - it's not hard to think of the odd clever, brave, or challenging female character from the past – but these remained exceptions to the norm.

But during the early 1990's and into the new century things have been changing quite considerably. Gender roles on television became increasingly equal and non-stereotyped - within some limits - although the majority of lead characters were still male. Men and women are seen working side by side, as equals, in the hospitals, schools and police stations of television-world. Advertisers have by now realised that audiences will only laugh at images of the pretty

16 Media professionals' lack of knowledge of gender and development is one of the major challenges facing not only the international women's movement, but also media professionals who have to be trained. The 1995 Beijing Conference on Women identified the media as one of the critical areas of concern for the advancement of women's equality and development, in an era of globalisation. See the article, Globalisation and gender training for the media: Challenges and lessons learned (2000), wherein Patricia A. Made discusses her experience of developing gender training for media professionals. One local South African example of this growing scholarship is Lizette Rabe (2002). See her article, *Eve-olution: the status of female voice in South African media,* in which she examines the status of women in South African media, both as providers of and subjects in media. The stereotypical representation of women in news is questioned against an historical overview of women as news providers. The need to focus on gender - and specifically the position of black women - in media, is also addressed.

housewife, and have reacted by showing women how to be very sexy at work instead. (Gauntlett 2002:57)

Therefore, *media representations of gender today are more complex, and less stereotyped, than in the past.* Women are seen as self-reliant heroes quite often today, whilst the depiction of masculinity has become less straightforward, and more troubled. Advertising, and the broader world of stars and celebrities, promotes images of well-toned and conventionally attractive women and men. Simultaneously, gay and lesbian characters have started to gain greater acceptance within the TV mainstream, and even in some films and magazines. The images of women and men which it disseminates today may be equally valued, but remain distinctive, and diverse.

The pervasive influence of mass media on masculine identity
Many of the academic books on 'masculinity' are - for the 'average man on the street' at least - disappointing, as they dwell on archetypes from the past, and have little to say about the real lives of modern men; whereas top selling magazines and popular self-help books - and, to a lesser but significant extent, TV shows and movies - are full of information about being a man in the here-and-now. Some parts of popular culture are said to be 'reasserting' the traditional forms of masculinity, whilst others are challenging them.

The mass media suggests lifestyles, forms of self-presentation, and ways to find happiness which may (or may not) be illusory. According to Gauntlett, 'Our relationship with our bodies, our sexual partners, and our own emotional needs, will all also be influenced by media representations, but (of course) in complex ways which will be swayed and modified by our social experiences and interactions.' (Gauntlett 2002:113-114). Men are daily bombarded with images of masculinities in the mass media. Changing the definitions of manhood will therefore require a serious confrontation with images of power as well as structural realities of power in social life. Social scientists are only now beginning to understand the enormous influence that the media have in shaping our ideas about what it means to be a man. If masculinity is to be conceived of as a social construct, what role do the media play in formulating it? How do men (and women) learn what behaviours are 'manly'?

The mass media thus create artificial standards against which boys (and men) as well as girls (and women) measure themselves and others. According to Kimmel & Messner (2004:505): 'Virtually no men can approach the physiques of the cartoon version of Tarzan or even G.I. Joe... No wonder we often feel like we fail the test of physical manhood. We are constantly 'seeing' masculinity, in the movies, in commercials, in pornography etc. Any effort to understand – let alone transform – masculinity must take account of the ways in which we see ourselves reflected through the lenses that record our fantasy lives.' (e.g. see illustration 1 here below)

Illustration 1 courtesy of www.adbusters.org[17]

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17 Permission given by Adbusters (see Rogers 2006).

Masculine identity as global and local question has been placed in the focal point afresh by these developments. This above-mentioned problem has relatively recently (in the late 1980's and early 1990's) developed (within sociological circles) into a so-called 'crisis of masculinity', where traditional forms of expression as confirmation of masculine identities, are often not readily available to or recognisable by men any longer.

In summary: *media content acts as an extremely powerful source of social meaning.* The mass media are centrally involved in the social construction of reality for audience members, giving them an understanding – however limited – of both their immediate and their more distant social contexts. In this way – in terms of this article's specific focus - *the mass media creates and reflects a diverse variety of masculinity forms and schemata of interpretation to evaluate it.*

5. MAGAZINES AS CULTURAL TEXTS OF LIFE IN A PASTORAL HERMENEUTICS

The realms of both 'religion' and 'the media' are themselves transforming and being transformed. According to Hoover & Clark (2002:2-3), religion today is much more a public, commodified, therapeutic and personalised set of practices than it has been in the past. At the same time the media are collectively coming to constitute a realm where important projects of 'the self' take place – projects that include spiritual, transcendent and deeply meaningful 'work'. Religion and media are therefore increasingly converging, meeting on a common turf: the everyday world of lived experience.

Instead of thinking of it in separated domains, media, religion and culture should be thought of as an interrelated web within society (Hoover and Lundby 1997:3-4). Magazines, movies etc. seek to engage us, their viewers, as whole human beings. They invite – we might almost say, demand – our response. Magazines are exceptionally accessible media forms within a pluralistic society, in which competing issues of public and private life are formulated and represented for consideration and interpretation. Magazines can represent the most intimate and private confrontations of values. Indeed religion and magazines *share* an interest in, and attention to, values. The connection between the two has, however, not always been obvious or simple.

Religion is not confined strictly to what happens in a synagogue or church but is manifested in diverse cultural formations in our society, including popular magazines. If we want to understand popular culture, we need to study different media forms - including magazines - because it indeed has the potential to reinforce, to challenge, to overturn, or to crystallize religious perspectives, fundamental values and ideological assumptions.

When one reflects on the essence of Christian theology, it becomes clearly self-evident that it is not merely the study of Scripture text, but of worldly context. Stone (2000:3) affirms this assertion powerfully by saying: 'When we read the Bible but are not able to read the world, we risk reducing the gospel to either a weapon or a toy.' Theology – especially practical theology - always demands an intimate familiarity with both. Given this double requirement of theology, the world of magazines can be an important dialogue partner for Christians who are interested in thinking seriously about their faith, gender, relationships etc. We are convinced that Christians should be actively engaged with culture: studying it, discerning positive and negative aspects, and working to redeem it. (Romanowski 2001:43)

In summary: *when we explore popular magazines theologically we are busy with theology as hermeneutical space in dialogue with contemporary culture.* In our postmodernist culture our imagination is to a large extent stimulated and formed by the media-driven culture in which we live. What we find interesting and amusing is determined by multinational corporations which earn huge amounts of money if they can give us the feeling that we desire and resonate what they present to us. We encounter this media-world (amongst others) in magazines, which are

rich sources of theological material. As theologians we can utilize it as illustrations for theological reflection, insights and resources. This is also a perspective which can help us to find new ways of transmitting the Christian faith in a mediatized and commercialized image culture.

The public task of practical theology and pastoral care is therefore, amongst others, to interpret the cultural representations in our globalising culture within theological frames of reference. Thus, pastoral anthropological perspectives on the content of magazines can and should enrich the dimension of meaning-making and the symbolization of (male and female) identity in life[18]. In terms of the aim and theme of this article, magazines are also viewed as crucial media to analyse in order to understand male identity in a more comprehensive way. Therefore we choose our own South African cultural context within which we suggest the critical and constructive assessment of the influence of certain mass media representations – particularly displayed in magazines - on various expressions of masculinity.

6. MEDIA AND MASCULINITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXTS

The birth of the 'new' South Africa (27 April 1994) have shifted social configurations. Identities are in the process of being renegotiated and cultural borders are being transgressed. Material power relations[19] weaken against a boundless reshaping of the cultural landscape. In addition, South Africa cannot escape the era of accelerated globalisation that on the one hand impacts on the ways in which culture and identity are being conceptualised, and on the other, hegemonizes locally dominant political and societal discourses.

The political and social changes that South Africa is undergoing can thus be viewed as mediated – by media in a broad sense, thereby including mass media, art and cultural expression. But this mediation takes place within a complex and ever-changing set of power and gender relations, both global and local. This process is further played out on a variety of fronts, ranging from the mass media and new media to mainstream art forms such as theatre or the urban aesthetics of graffiti art, poetry, intellectual property, and uniquely South African forms of *hip-hop, kwaito* (a uniquely South African music genre), television and drama etc.

Therefore, media perceptions represent practices in which the construction of gender identity takes place. The characters in advertising function as textual constructions of possible modes of femininity and masculinity. *The challenge however lies in getting the media to acknowledge the ever wider-growing existence of the diversity of South African women and men.*

Changes in South Africa thus influenced gender relationships in areas of critical importance to gender identity and power – the family, the formal sector, political and civic institutions etc. Apartheid has been viewed for a long time as the reason for the persecution of African people, but the impact of apartheid on gender relationships (and specifically on men) is – as far as we could ascertain - less well researched and documented. Militarization and compulsory national service has for instance at one stage brought about a growing intolerance of differences and diversity. In the arena of sport masculinity and male prowess, the male body became a kind of public image and icon[20]. Physical power is projected as a kind of powerful image for masculinity.

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18 For a more elaborate discussion on related issues, see Ganzevoort and Knegt (2004).

19 Lene Øverland (2003) examined the perpetuation of the dominant patriarchal ideology in advertising. She focused on advertising content and represents a snapshot case study of gender representations in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, and asked the following important questions: do race and class mediate messages that reflect gender and sexual stereotypes? How do members of various communities read and reflect around gendered and sexual stereotypes and what impact do these messages have on people's lives? (Øverland 2003:272-273). For a more detailed discussion of Øverland, see Van der Watt (2007:142-143).

20 According to Burnett (2001:71), "Male only, or 'true' sports, like soccer and rugby, have become

Competitive sport in the media has become a main provider of (hegemonic) masculine images in South Africa[21].

Many people still hold the view that South Africa is one of the bastions of chauvinism. South African men are in many instances stereotyped, and certain aspects of masculinity are isolated and highlighted as representative of all men. This results in the failure to unleash the richness and diversity of different forms of masculinities, e.g. within the diverse forms of so-called (black) African or (white) Afrikaner communities (Van der Watt 2007:104-111). Nevertheless, in many parts of South Africa it is an undeniable fact that very few men are truly caring and mindful of their intimate relationships regarding the way they treat vulnerable people like women and children, specifically in township communities. The fact is that in many townships in South Africa, due to patriarchalism, many women and children are still exposed to violence and male oppression. Due to the abuse of power, an authoritarian stance, men are not concerned about how they treat women and children, they do not reflect on their roles in family life, consciously attempt to create more equal ways of sharing domestic tasks and decisions, or explicitly reject violent methods of resolving conflicts.

According to Sideris (2004:29), 'In many cases a social context persists where traditional notions of the family hold sway. According to these ideas, gender and age hierarchies dictate the rights, duties and obligations of men, women and children in the family. Biology and "God's will" are invoked to justify these structures of hierarchy and in this way they are presented as the *natural* order of family relations. And popular ideas about gender permit the use of violence to maintain authority'. Therefore, the examination of practices of men who transgress norms, and their debates about 'what it means to be a man', in specific historical contexts, is very necessary. (see Sideris 2004[22])

However, a growing body of literature in South Africa details transformations in the meanings attributed to manhood and changes in the practices of men. A collection of papers edited by Robert Morrell (2001)[23] brings together research that explores the varying expressions of masculinity that have been fashioned by South Africa's complex and violent racial and sexual politics – *in order to unleash the richness and diversity of different forms of masculinity.* Without discounting the historical challenges that social, economic and political forces have posed for different sectors of men and the on-going transformation of ideas that define masculinity in South Africa, recent scholarship identifies the transition to political democracy as a moment of

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a domain where masculinity is celebrated and promoted by media and governments at national and international levels as a unifying force."

21 Cf. also Van der Watt (2007:231-237) on the significance of the unique relationship between sport and masculinity.

22 Tina Sideris (2004) documents changes in gender relations in the Nkomazi region, a rural area situated in South-Eastern Mpumulanga province. Drawing on fieldwork and clinical work (as psychologist) conducted over an eight year period, Sideris examines how a small group of men have reflected upon their practices and redefined themselves as 'different'.

23 Morrell's book, *Changing men in Southern Africa* (2001), was aimed at optimizing this potential depth of 'multiple masculinities' in Southern Africa.

significant challenge to men (Morrell 2001; Posel 2005[24]; Walker 2003[25]; Reid & Walker 2005[26]).

It is within this specific South African cultural context that we suggest an analysis and assessment of the influence of certain mass media representations on various expressions of masculinity. This can for instance be done via a pastoral hermeneutical survey of selected magazine editions, which can give a very distinct indication of current popular forms of masculinities, and its main characteristics.

7. CONCLUSION

In this article it was explicated that pastoral hermeneutics has the task to: (1) probe critically into the different schemata of interpretation which controls our contact – as humans from differing race, class and gender backgrounds - with the contemporary world; and (2) contribute towards theory formation for a pastoral anthropology on being male. Researchers in practical theology and pastoral caregivers should actively engage with and analyse popular culture and mass media communications as settings within which masculinities are represented and enacted in different ways, times and places (cultural contexts).

Within a pastoral anthropological paradigm the quality of our being human – which is an indication of our human dignity – is given out of the re-creation in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It was asserted that such a paradigm has implications for all dimensions of being human – also for the meaning and value of pastoral care to men. This is where the need for a gender sensitive pastoral hermeneutics was identified, as well as the need that current pastoral-theological research and care should intently be directed to attend to these important issues, in order to gain more insight concerning the reciprocal relationship between media and masculine identities.

Mass media are providing the shared 'cultural environment' for most people and more so than any other single institution. To a large extent the social media constitutes a primary source of definitions and images of social reality and the most universal expression of shared identity. These media networks also transform power relationships and have the power to shape our values and behaviour, and even our faith. Media content indeed acts as an extremely powerful

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24 Deborah Posel (2005) puts the phenomenon of baby rape and the more general phenomenon of sexual violence into historical perspective, highlighting the manner in which sexuality, particularly male sexuality has become politicised in contemporary South Africa. She tracks the emergence of public scrutiny of sexual violence in media reports and argues that it was the rape of infants that 'focused the spotlight of shame squarely on men' and evoked a sense of moral panic. Rape cases, particularly those involving babies and young children, are highly publicised and become the yardstick by which the 'moral fibre' of the nation is measured. In this discourse of moral shame, Posel shows how it is men – fathers, brothers, sons – who are blamed.

25 Walker (2003) examines young men, perpetrators of abuse, who have joined an organisation that provides support and counselling to men who want to change. Her analysis of their testimony reveals their struggle to remake themselves in contrast to past versions of manhood which they interpret as oppressive (Walker 2003:23). Careful to avoid rigid and premature categorisation of the efforts these men make to come to terms with the process of change, Walker nevertheless suggests the rise of new notions of masculinity.

26 Reid and Walker's (eds.) book Men behaving differently (2005) takes up the challenge of examining the relationship between sexuality and social transition, in different institutional and geographical locations, and look at new masculinities which have been forged in post-apartheid South Africa. The essays in this book reflect on masculinity in a state of flux, reconfiguration and change. 'This includes immediate and tangible changes in South Africa's political landscape, transitions in academic enquiry into gender and sexuality, and also emerging possibilities for alternative sexual and gender identities.' (Reid and Walker 2005:2)

source of social meaning and its representations of gender today are more complex, and less stereotyped, than in the past. Thus, theological perspectives on the content of, e.g. films or magazines can and should enrich the dimension of meaning-making and the co-creation of (gendered) identities in life that are essentially healthy, and promote human dignity.

The problem which subsequently arises is the suspicion that the meaning of their masculinity is often not experienced in a healthy and coherent manner by many men. Rather, they experience confusion in terms of their role functions as men, also influencing attitudes within relational networks (e.g. within their families, and marriages where applicable). We therefore suggest that in order to understand the iconic impact of male images on self-understanding and male embodiment as projected by the social media, selected examples from international men's magazines should be analysed in order to understand how the interplay with the cultural schemata of interpretation could assist practical theologians and pastoral caregivers, to reflect critically from a pastoral anthropological perspective, on current images that determine male identities.

Through such a pastoral hermeneutical survey we suspect a meaningful contribution can be made to pastoral care practices and practical theological theory formation that combat toxic and destructive forms of masculinity, and instead, promote and co-create men and masculinities that focus on life-giving intimacy, vitality and human dignity.

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