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Selling HIV/AIDS prevention: a case of mixed messages

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This paper reports on a content analysis of three youth magazines, undertaken in order to establish whether the messages of *loveLife* are diluted, contradicted or reinforced by such examples of popular youth culture. *SL*, *Blunt* and *Ymag* were sampled over a period of six months (July-December 2003) in an attempt to identify and analyse the content and perceptions that these magazines convey to their readers. The relationship between the message content of the three magazines and the core values of *loveLife*'s educational campaigns is then explored.

Die verkoop van MIV/VIGS-voorkoming: 'n geval van gemengde boodskappe

Deur middel van 'n inhoudsanalise van drie tydskrifte wat gerig is op die jeug, stel hierdie artikel ondersoek in na die moontlikheid dat die boodskappe van *loveLife* afge-water, weerspreek of versterk word deur hierdie stortvloed van populêre jeugkultuur. Ons kyk na *SL*, *Blunt* en *Ymag* as 'n steekproef van die populêre jeugkultuur oor 'n tydperk van ses maande (Julie-Desember 2003) en probeer om die inhoud wat hierdie tydskrifte aan hulle lesers oordra, te identifiseer en te analiseer. Ons verken dan die verhouding tussen die kommunikatiewe inhoud van die drie tydskrifte en die kernwaardes wat *loveLife* se opvoedkundige veldtogte onderlê.

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Having access to HIV/AIDS prevention information does not necessarily bring about behaviour change. As Campbell (2003: 7) states:

The forces shaping sexual behaviour and sexual health are far more complex than individual rational decisions based on simple factual knowledge about health risks, and the availability of medical services.

South Africa has the highest rate of HIV infection in the world: one in two adolescents is likely to become infected (*loveLife* 2004). This scenario is highlighted in the Summertown case study in which Campbell (2003: 123) found that young people living in this community had a reasonably accurate knowledge of HIV/AIDS as well as of prevention measures. However, the incidence of high-risk sexual behaviour, such as having multiple partners and low or inconsistent condom usage, did not change much as a result of having this information. Such examples have come to disprove the cognitive behaviour model, which ascribes behavioural change to rational individual decision-making, based on acquired knowledge (Morrell *et al* 2001: 91). The cognitive behaviour model emphasises the individual's

(1) recognition of risk, (2) commitment to change, and (3) acquisition of skills which can lead to help seeking, condom use and other risk reducing behavioural change (Harrison *et al* 2000: 286).

It is also the model on which many AIDS campaigns have been based. The youth of South Africa have been exposed to a fair amount of HIV/AIDS information — so much so, that a general apathy or fatigue in relation to the subject has even been recognised (Walsh *et al* 2002: 107). Another dimension adding to the complexity of HIV/AIDS awareness among the youth is that

... many young people either take the attitude that they are going to 'get it anyway', or that the campaigns have nothing to do with them: AIDS is about 'blacks' or 'gays' or 'township youth', or just 'somebody else' (Mitchell & Smith 2001: 60).

While the youth are being exposed to information about HIV/AIDS, they are also receiving messages from the mainstream media about sex and sexuality. Such messages are mediated via youth culture, such as television, magazines, advertising and popular literature. They are sometimes in conflict with the ABC approach (abstain, be faithful, condomise) of conventional AIDS prevention messages (Walsh *et al* 2002: 107).

The 2001 National Youth Survey pointed out the rapidly increasing media consumption habits of young South Africans after the democratisation of 1994 (The 2001 National Survey of South African Youth 2002: 11). *loveLife* has found that while in the past the youth were mobilised around political issues, today a less political youth culture has emerged, built around music and sports icons, television programmes, popular entertainment, brands and consumer goods (*loveLife* 2004). In many ways, youth culture continues to influence young people's understandings of themselves and their relationships with others, especially members of the opposite sex. Despite this, few studies have explored the relationship between the messages of popular youth culture and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns.

This paper addresses the central question: to what extent the messages of *loveLife* are contradicted, reinforced or diluted by the stiff competition that popular youth culture offers. By means of content analysis this study explores this competition by scrutinising three youth magazines, namely *SL*, *Blunt* and *YMag*. The paper begins with a brief analysis of the *loveLife* brand, followed by a discussion of the research design and the key findings.

1. The *loveLife* brand: selling HIV/AIDS prevention messages

loveLife is a multifaceted South African AIDS prevention campaign that was launched in 1999 and attempts to speak to the youth in voices reminiscent of all the aspects that make up and influence youth culture. It uses advertising strategies similar to those designed to sell products to a brand-conscious youth market. While one of its founding elements was to encourage openness about sex by encouraging young people to "talk about it", the campaign today also tries to promote specific behavioural values aimed at encouraging behaviour change. These core values are:

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| Love - | self-esteem and confidence in oneself, love for one's partner based on mutual understanding and commitment. |
| Respect - | for one's elders, respect for oneself, and others. |
| Dignity - | pride in being who and what one is, never degrading oneself through irresponsible behaviour, protecting |

the dignity of others.

Responsibility - knowing that responsibility is a shared commodity and recognising one's share, behaving as if one wants the world to be a better place, and it is not someone else's responsibility (*loveLife* 2004).

These values have been packaged in a number of colourful, entertaining advertising campaigns featured on billboards and taxis as well as other public places. *loveLife* is clearly trying to do more than simply provide information. It recognises that behavioural change is based not only on rational decision-making, but also requires a change in values. *loveLife* recognises that the primary problem is not a lack of information, but a failure to internalise and personalise the risks involved in a sexual relationship (*loveLife* 2004). The *loveLife* campaign has therefore tried to work within the structure of youth culture to convey its message. This has involved marketing the campaign as a new lifestyle brand for young South Africans, a brand which will compete directly with "Nike, Diesel, Coke and other major brands for their attention and brand association" (*loveLife* 2004).

The *loveLife* brand epitomises a lifestyle founded on a number of principles. It is young, vibrant and has attitude; it reflects interpersonal relationships based on honesty, trust, mutual respect, gender equality, informed choice, shared responsibility and fun; it reflects the youth as ambitious, independent and proud of where they come from, and it encourages leadership qualities that empower young people to work towards their futures and an AIDS-free South Africa (*loveLife* 2004). These messages compete directly with the representations of "normal adolescence" and gender relations found in popular youth culture.

Clearly, the values embodied by the *loveLife* campaign are essential for the creation of a more positive, healthy lifestyle for young people. This is illustrated by Campbell's Summertown case study, which highlighted a number of value-based behaviours that were not changed by conventional AIDS information. Behaviour was often heavily gendered: for example, young men saw condom use in a relationship as the woman's responsibility, yet most young women felt that they were not in a position to negotiate condom use, either because it could indicate a lack of trust in a relationship or because carrying condoms could give them the reputation of being "easy" or promiscuous (Campbell 2003:

124-6). Peer norms were also gendered in that the young people in the case study saw men as active and sexually predatory, sleeping with as many partners as possible, while women were seen as more passive, especially in relation to sex. It was also deemed wrong for women to have many sexual partners. A further peer norm was that sex was seen as an integral part of any relationship. Boys who did not have sex with their girlfriends were taunted by their peers (Campbell 2003: 125). These gender stereotypes have been in existence a long time and should not be seen as belonging only to the specific population group of the Summer-town study. In today's media-saturated society, messages about what men and women should or should not, do when it comes to sex are all around us. Amid these messages, *loveLife* is trying to challenge the social construction of gender to promote healthier relationships in which condom use can be negotiated. As Campbell (2003: 133) states:

Sexual behaviour change is more likely to come about as the result of the collective renegotiation of young people's gender and sexual identities than through individual decisions to change one's behaviour.

This study, then, used content analysis to explore how HIV/AIDS prevention messages are marketed in competition with other lifestyle messages which the youth receive from magazines. The purpose of the research was not to report on each of the magazines individually, but rather to focus on how the three magazines collectively represent a "slice of popular youth culture". However, in certain cases the authors found it necessary to highlight the content of certain magazines. In attempting to establish to what extent the messages in *SL*, *Blunt Magazine* and *Ymag* reinforce, contradict or dilute the messages of *loveLife*, the following research questions guided the content analysis:

- What is the content?
- Is there a relationship between the content and the core values of *loveLife* (love, respect, dignit, and responsibility)?
- In what ways does the content contradict, reinforce or dilute the core values of *loveLife*?

In the section which follows the methodology of content analysis used in this study will be explained in more detail.

2. Content analysis

Content analysis is a systematic method of summarising and analysing the characteristics of messages and is usually used for a careful examination of public documents, particularly editorials in newspapers and magazines, advertisements, letters, political speeches and annual reports (Neuendorf 2002; Weber 1990). "Content" refers to words, written texts, symbols, verbal interactions, visual images, characterisations, themes, sound events, or any message that can be communicated. Content analysis, then, is particularly well suited to the study of communication and to answering questions relating to communications research: "Who says what, to whom, why, how and with what effect?" (Babbie & Mouton 2001). As indicated in the introduction, this study sprang from the authors' interest in the ways in which magazines aimed at the youth contradict or reinforce *loveLife's* messages about behavioural and value changes.

A cluster sample of youth magazines targeted at 15-24-year-olds was used, attempting to get as representative a readership as possible in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on. The South African Advertising Research Foundation's magazine readership figures are not given by age-groups, so it was impossible to establish what percentage of readers belonged to our targeted category (SAARF 2003). Accordingly, we selected those magazines marketed to the age group between the "teen magazines" such as *Teen Zone* and "adult magazines" such as *FHM* and *Cosmopolitan*. While 15-24-year-olds no doubt read such magazines, our research was limited to magazines aimed at the same target age group as the *loveLife* campaigns. As a result, we selected *SL*, *Blunt* and *Ymag* and examined the issues covered over the period from June to December 2003.

The editors provided the following statistical information about the magazines' readerships: *Blunt Magazine* does not target any racial group and would prefer to see itself as targeting a certain subculture: board sports, specifically skateboarding. The majority of the readership is white and male. *SL* is aimed at students and young professionals. It claims a 50:50 male and female readership and is manifestly multi-racial and middle class. *Ymag* considers itself a magazine that speaks to the youth as a whole, rather than targeting any specific race group.

Although *Ymag* appears only every two months, the format of the three magazines is relatively similar, with the following features: front cover, feature articles, regular items (such as book, film and music reviews; letters to the editor; competitions, and events diaries) and finally advertisements.

In designing this study, the following were used as the units of analysis or message components as they occurred in all three magazines. First, the feature articles, as they are the main means of disseminating information in magazines. Secondly, the letters to the editor, as they represent the main dialogue between the magazine editors and their target audiences, as well as reflecting the issues, problems and opinions that are of concern to the youth. Thirdly, the magazine covers, as they are eye-catching and convey the magazine's lifestyle messages in a visual manner. Fourthly, the editorials, as the editors' direct channel of communication to the readers.

All the feature articles, letters to the editors, magazine covers and editorials were subjected to content analysis. First, coding categories were established, on the basis of the units of analysis or message components themselves. Each message component was studied in detail to allow both researchers to become familiar with the content. A list of initial codes to label each message component was then drawn up. Both researchers then reviewed all the message components, and assigned one or more of the initial codes to each. At the completion of this initial coding, the list of coding categories was reviewed. Areas of overlap were combined and categories that were ambiguous or vague were clarified. Throughout this process the objective of the coding was not to manipulate the message components into pre-defined categories, but to allow the categories to emerge from the content of the magazines. Accordingly, the letters to the editor, magazine covers, editorials and feature articles (or message components) were classified into eleven categories: (1) sport, (2) HIV/AIDS, (3) sexuality & reproductive health, (4) current South African issues, (5) music, (6) relationships, (7) lifestyle, (8) fashion, (9) health and body, (10) celebrities, and (11) other (cf Table 1). "Other" included content that was not sufficiently consistent to comprise another category. For example, readers' complaints or praise relating to the magazine's format or the feature articles did not warrant the creation of a new category.

Table 1: Content analysis of editorials, letters to the editors, feature articles and magazine covers of *YMag*, *SL* and *Blunt Magazine*, July-December 2003

Category	Editorials	Letters to the editor	Feature articles	Magazine covers
Sport	4	4	23	3
HIV/AIDS	2	0	6	0
Sexuality & reproductive health	2	6	6	0
Current issues in South Africa	4	10	9	0
Music	0	20	31	1
Relationships	0	3	3	0
Lifestyle	1	2	5	0
Fashion	0	3	4	3
Health and body	0	0	3	0
Celebrity profile	0	0	6	7
Other	4	40	9	2
Total	17	88	105	16

3. Discussion

Four themes emerged from the content analysis. First, there was the “bubble phenomenon” — HIV/AIDS as a non-issue: either not mentioned or not dealt with as a problem directly affecting the readers. Secondly, there was the “babe phenomenon” — being sexy was presented as essential for women, with a one-dimensional picture of women emerging. Of course, sexiness also sells magazines. Thirdly, there was the “condomise sexuality phenomenon” — sex presented as separate from relationships, as an end in itself, with no consequences and little information on negotiating a relationship in a real context. Here, AIDS prevention went no further than “use a condom”. Lastly, there was the “lifestyle values phenomenon” — exploring the specific lifestyle of each magazine and considering the values that form part of this culture.

3.1 The “bubble phenomenon”

SL and *Blunt* offered no articles or information explicitly relating to HIV/AIDS, although they did mention safe sex. The assumption seemed to be that their readership was not affected by this problem or that enough information was already in circulation and any more would therefore only add to “AIDS fatigue”. *Ymag* was more direct in its dealings with HIV/AIDS awareness, as the issue was usually mentioned in either the editorials or the feature articles.

On the whole, very few of the magazines’ editorials were used for any kind of social awareness of HIV/AIDS issues. As may be seen from the table above, the emphasis tended to be on sport, current South African issues (excluding HIV/AIDS) and other aspects such as a new format. Clearly, in order to achieve the *loveLife* values of love, respect, dignity and responsibility, the editorials need to take a stand on values and lifestyle choices (in much the same way that newspaper editorials take a stand on a variety of issues). From the content analysis it emerged that many of the magazine editorials diluted the *loveLife* messages with the “bubble phenomenon”.

One of the editorials published during November dealt with the issue of “erotic visuals” — pictures of girls wearing little or no clothing. The conservative argument that young people should be sheltered from such images was countered by the argument for openness allowing young people to ask questions about sexuality so that they can make informed decisions. An unattributed survey stating that young people of the present generation are less promiscuous than the previous one was used to argue that “erotic visuals” do not negatively affect the youth. While this editorial presented an opportunity for an open, honest discussion of HIV/AIDS, the topic was not mentioned. The intentions of the editor were good, namely to inform the magazine’s readership, but the effort appears to have been misdirected and the survey somewhat token, since not a single article dealing honestly and openly with sex and sexuality was published during the six months of the study. Moreover, the magazine did not have a problems page where readers’ questions on such topics could be answered. So, while it claims to educate its readership on these issues, no such effort was visible during the period of the content analysis.

Some of the other editorials focused on what the magazine had to offer, rather than on raising social awareness. When commentary on current issues was included in the editorial, it focused on topics such as South Africa being a positive place for young people and overseas countries not necessarily being better (July); excessive drinking and people's drunken experiences (September), and voter apathy among the youth (December). No mention was made of HIV/AIDS or gender issues, notably in the context of the editorial on excessive alcohol consumption. However, HIV/AIDS was addressed in some, for example, when the editor saluted Fana Khaba *aka* Khabsela (a radio personality) for disclosing his HIV-positive status. In another issue condom use over the festive season and the dangers of HIV/AIDS were mentioned. While HIV/AIDS was dealt with in a more direct fashion, accepting that it has become a part of South African life, it was not dealing with relation to values such as respect, gender equality and responsibility (the *loveLife* core values). These editorials tended to take the more conventional AIDS prevention line of "condomise", without expanding any further on this message.

The letters also revealed a kind of "bubble effect", showing that the readers were not "talking about it" as the *loveLife* message instructs. In the six months of the study, only two readers wrote letters specifically about HIV/AIDS. First "David" (July) complained about the government spending so much on the arms deal when the more pressing danger of HIV/AIDS was facing the country. And secondly, "Liam" (October), saying, the *loveLife* campaigns were not hard-hitting enough: "Our youth needs the shit scared out of them".

In terms of the feature articles, an avoidance of HIV/AIDS-related issues were conspicuous by their absence. The *SL* features provided the widest variety of issues and topics, discussing them in a creative, intelligent way, with the attitude that readers should make up their own minds. While the magazine also promoted gender equality and challenged gender stereotypes, there was little direct engagement with HIV/AIDS, except in relation to drug use (October) and an article on Hlubi Mboya, who plays an HIV-positive character on TV (August).

Blunt Magazine is aimed at a very specific subculture, board-riding enthusiasts, so it does not deal with health, fashion and the like. Its feature articles were factual and informative and were written in a manner

accessible to young people of that subculture. Other aspects of the subculture's lifestyle such as music were also dealt with. The lifestyle was presented as detached from any real context and except for articles on pollution (August) and on the social identities of Afrikaans youth (October), no other social issues were discussed, even if such issues as HIV/AIDS could well affect the readership.

The feature articles of *Ymag*, although predominantly concerned with music, dealt with a wide range of issues and topics that face the youth of today. They did so with a positive outlook about South Africa, and without any visible effort at distancing itself from the hardships and problems with which readers might be dealing. Social problems from poverty and unemployment (October/November) to condom use and HIV/AIDS (December/January) were dealt with. In the June/July issue, the effect of HIV/AIDS on the life expectancy of South Africans was briefly discussed in an interview with Thabo Mbeki. However, the president's response was that the statistics were incorrect. *Ymag* certainly does not shy away from bringing the reality of HIV/AIDS into the world of the magazine's readership. In the article "Living positively" the popular DJ Khabsela's disclosure of his HIV-positive status was dealt with. It was clearly designed to promote responsible behaviour among the young people who follow his career and to get them to establish their status. He said:

People, especially young people, need to know that AIDS will kill all of us if we are not careful. For me this is not just slogans or meaningless messages, this is real and I can testify to that (Mpye 2003: 40).

This is also an indication of the fact that conventional awareness and prevention messages are not working, but that articles about personal experiences such as this one could help support the *loveLife* value of taking responsibility for one's own future.

3.2 The "babe phenomenon"

In this section the *loveLife* values of love, respect and dignity are addressed, including the way women are portrayed in the media and how relationships develop in reality. All three magazines presented the reader with images of women as primarily sex objects, from the cover to the fashion pages. Some emphasised this more than others, for example by referring to "hot babes" even when the article was not about women —

such as when a writer reviewing a sporting event made a point of describing the cheerleading squads and promotional girls as “hot”. Within this context, a surprisingly conservative definition of masculinity emerged, which included fearlessness in sports, being tough and unemotional, and seeing women predominantly as sexual beings (as can be seen from “bonus babe” pictures in the magazines, the constant references to “eye candy”, and so on). The only exceptions were the few women who participated in the various board-riding sports. No attempt was made to be more open about real relationships with girls or to represent girls and women beyond the one-dimensional level of the sexy “bonus babe”. Almost no reference was made to long-term relationships, being monogamous and faithful, respecting one’s partner, or the other *loveLife* values. Women were generally depicted simply as sexy, providing opportunities for ogling and, in some cases, for casual sex. Clearly such messages will dilute, if not contradict, the lifestyle brand that *loveLife* wants to promote.

A letter from a 15-year-old girl skater identified the problems of such representation of women. She wrote, “I think it is kak that you only put babes in the magazine”. She argued that the magazine should be male- and female-friendly because girls were also part of the whole lifestyle: “I think that it is totally fucked up that your magazine is only aimed at the male sex”. A reader responded to her: “If you have a problem with *Blunt*, then why are you buying it? Why not rather skip off to your local shop and buy a prissy bitch mag if you want a more girl-friendly magazine?” Clearly such an attitude does not reflect the values, such as respect and dignity, that go into understanding the sexes and that *loveLife* has highlighted as essential for behavioural change in terms of relationships and sex. The reader’s attitude is unlikely to result in girls being treated with respect or viewed as equals.

However, women were not always presented in this way and the complexities relating to the link between gender violence and gender equality were noted in the sample. For example, a feature article included the subheading: “Five things you should know about date rape”. Another article about racism and rape at the University of Pretoria (November), as it was then, offered honest reflection on issues of gender equality, alcohol consumption and the traditional attitudes that could lead to rape. The article claims:

'People go there [Hatfield] to get drunk and pick up someone they know they will have sex with,' says Marius, 25, a politics student, 'It's the culture there, and that's what leads to situations like this [rape]. Till that culture changes, people's behaviour and attitude won't change (Kahn 2003: 37).

However, the article made no mention of HIV/AIDS in relation to the culture of casual sex.

Other articles in which gender roles and stereotypes were challenged included one dealing with women's soccer (December/January) and another on developing women theatre directors (June/ July). A further article dealing with domestic violence (August/September) created awareness of gender issues, although the way in which power relations could impact on HIV/AIDS prevention remained unexplored.

The tendency to depict women more one-dimensionally than men was also evident from the covers. Three of the *Blunt Magazine* covers depicted young men in active sports poses (eg riding bikes, or speed skating down a hill), one focused on a band and two included girls. While most of the covers reflected the active lifestyle that the magazine promotes, it is interesting to note that both girls are in passive poses and wearing bikinis (October and December/January) In one picture, the girl is seen kneeling on a beach with a sign that reads, "Buy this Mag!" (December/January). The *Ymag* covers all depicted more than one person, all dressed fashionably with an edge of glamour. HIV/AIDS awareness does not feature anywhere on the cover (as it might, in the form of the AIDS ribbon, for example). The posture of the people on the covers is also interesting. In three of the four, where men and women are depicted together, the men generally assume stronger, more aggressive postures than the women. For example, the October/November cover shows a man standing with squared shoulders and lifted jaw in front of a woman, partially obscuring her. He looks protective, while she is positioned in a more passive way, with her hand on his chest. The photographers have deliberately set up a relationship modelled on the gender roles and stereotypes in a traditional relationship, which has then been glamourised by the use of fashionable clothing and make-up. These covers could be said to be diluting the *loveLife* messages which attempt to achieve gender equality by breaking out of the traditional pre-defined roles.

SL magazine provided considerable variety in terms of cover concepts, although the images were quite sexualised and there was no representation of HIV/AIDS. It is interesting to note that the October, November, December/January and August covers all depict women in very little clothing, while the only cover with a man on it shows him fully dressed in a formal outfit.

3.3 The “condomise sexuality phenomenon”

All three magazines took what they considered to be the realistic approach that young people are having sex and that their exploration of their sexuality is natural. Some articles engaged further with this exploration, for example in an article on bondage called “Kinky knots”, describing how sexual pleasure can be experienced without the sexual act. While all three magazines mentioned safe sex as important, sex was still situated in a bit of a bubble, within a casual context: separate from any physical or emotional consequences and divorced from any monogamous relationship. The approach seemed to be, “If you condomise, you will be okay”. This approach is part of the conventional “ABC” prevention message but does not address the issue of what it is like to have to negotiate safe sex in a real context (for example, where girls who carry condoms are seen as “slutty” or where trust and emotional issues, or even alcohol and drug use, cloud better judgments).

Of the three magazines, *SL* seemed best equipped to deal with issues of sexuality and reproductive health, as it had a “problems” page, in a question-and-answer format. Its responses, given by “Pussy Galore” and “Goldfinger” offered a female and a male perspective, respectively. The column was honest and uncompromising, focused on the facts and did not deal with sex as an aspect of a relationship.

Various forms of sex were openly discussed in all three magazines, with a healthy range of approaches, for example from S&M bondage (September) to a humorous and satirical article on how to make your own porn video (December/January). There were also more serious articles such as “Kids who have kids” (June/July), dealing in a very direct and honest way with the issues of teenage pregnancy, why young people let it happen and the choices with which they are faced. This article touched on HIV/AIDS prevention and some of the more complex relationship issues that can lead to unprotected sex, such as relationships

involving a big age gap or the idea that real love doesn't need condoms. It reinforced the *loveLife* values of respect and responsibility on the part of both partners by challenging the role that men play in relationships:

While researching teenage pregnancy, it was difficult to come to any explanations as to why it always becomes such a gendered and biased topic, as this article has deliberately illustrated up until now. After all, the last time I tangoed it took two (Daniels 2003: 47).

While the article was about the prevention of pregnancy, it did at least address the myth that contraception is the woman's responsibility.

The *loveLife* values were sometimes represented more by means of the promotion of the aspirations of young achievers in sport than through the fostering of interpersonal relationships. In some cases, romantic relationships of mutual respect were not the focus of any of the feature articles over the course of the six months of research and gender equality issues were also not raised. A possible explanation for this could be the demographic target market of the magazine, whose members might not be interested in serious relationships. However, sex was still presented as casual and without any consequences. At this point contradictions with the *loveLife* values of love, respect, dignity and responsibility arise. For example, the article "Dumb ass summer guide" does not deal with sport, but rather seeks to provide the readers with suggestions on how to spend their free time in summer. The do's included: "Hit on more than one girl — it's summer, you gotta play the odds if you're looking for a fling" and "Take sunnies [sunglasses], preferably brand name ones — the irony is that as you stare at her tits unnoticed, she will admire your taste in fashionable labels" as well as: "Get some on the beach — no summer is complete without it". The don'ts included: "Don't get some on the beach without a towel"; only later did the article suggest that to "get some on the beach" would require more protection than just a towel. Clearly, HIV/AIDS awareness was a non-issue; the words were not even mentioned.

While for some of the sample HIV/AIDS was a non-issue and was dealt with in terms of the "bubble phenomenon" approach, others tackled it head-on. However, in many cases, they still dictated the conventional prevention strategies, such as condom use. For example, the article "Condom wise" argued for a greater social consciousness about HIV/AIDS among the youth and stated that: "Putting on a condom isn't

the thing that will always help”, yet it did not mention or go into detail about the lifestyle changes and gender relations that are central to *loveLife*'s argument in terms of HIV/AIDS prevention. Another article (June/July) dealt casually with groupies who sleep with their favourite celebrities. Relationships were not dealt with in either article, leaving the readers with little guidance on how to negotiate condom usage in a context where gender equality has not been attained.

In terms of the covers, different concepts concerning sexuality were exploited. For example, the December/January cover of *SL* showed a woman in a tiny white bikini lying back passively on a fluffy carpet, as if she were tempting the reader, while the November cover showed a woman in bikini bottoms and a vest with Steve Biko's picture on it. Her hand was resting on her hip and her posture seemed to communicate “Look at me”, drawing attention to the image on her top. While this partial nudity and sexuality may be interpreted as being a healthy exploration of one's sexuality and its various aspects, the messages are somewhat ambiguous when there is a constant emphasis on presenting a sexualised image — even if only to attract attention on a magazine rack. Clearly the magazine is still bound to the “Sex sells” argument when it comes to means of increasing readership figures. Sex and sexuality are presented as fun, without consequences, and separate from relationships (as can be seen in the lack of couples on the cover). However, *SL* does try to challenge gender stereotypes in the images it chooses to use. For example, the July cover looks like a normal beauty magazine cover shot of a woman's face, but the woman's face is aggressively distorted and she is biting her thumb.

While safe sex and the use of condoms was a common thread in the content of the three magazines, other aspects, such as those discussed above, did contradict and dilute the *loveLife* messages, especially in terms of the programme's aim to promote sex within relationships of mutual respect and responsibility.

3.4 The “lifestyle values phenomenon”

A certain lifestyle was associated with each magazine and formed part of its image. While this glamourised version of reality was clearly part of the marketing strategy of these magazines, one needs to look at how popular culture in general weighs up the importance of material pos-

sessions and image against other aspects of the individual, for example, beauty versus health, or clothing, shoes, etc, versus values and attitudes. This point needs serious consideration, in view of the worrying trend among young women to engage in transactional sex for luxury goods (cf Cullinan 2003).

The rise in consumer values and materialism within youth culture is highlighted by a letter from a reader:

Yep, this gal is a label slut: Diesel, Guess, DKNY [...] I have to have them — they're social currency.

This also serves as a reminder of the competition that *loveLife* faces in selling the *loveLife* brand. While many letters dealt with rather superficial issues, others reflected the potential of magazines (as one aspect of youth culture) to influence the youth positively. As one reader wrote: "So *Y* is helping to give direction to the 'lost generation', helping to create rooted, active young people that want to make a difference". These are values which support the style *loveLife* is trying to sell to the youth. Here a reader acknowledges that popular culture can support a healthy lifestyle.

4. Conclusion

A number of mixed messages have emerged from the content analysis of these three magazines. The core values of *loveLife* are being diluted by the messages within youth culture, which on the one hand contradict those values by, for example, promoting a sexuality that is not based on a consideration of the consequences or on a conception of monogamous relationships. On the other hand, some magazines explored the issue of the shared responsibility of both partners in a relationship. Thus, the messages, even within individual magazines, both contradicted and reinforced the *loveLife* values and therefore no clear message emerged in terms of guiding young people into a healthy sexuality that can work in a real context.

An immediate counter-argument that emerges is, of course that magazines cannot dictate to the youth how to live their lives and how to conduct their relationships; that in fact, doing so would mean not giving young people the freedom to make up their own minds. This is an important point for consideration, along with the argument that

the youth are already faced with an HIV/AIDS information overload and that this has led to “AIDS fatigue”. We respect these arguments. However, we believe that these views can be challenged.

First, because magazines, like all media, need to take responsibility for messages that will influence their readers’ interactions within the real context of HIV/AIDS and gender violence in South Africa. These three magazines, as a representation of youth culture in general, did not engage decisively with this issue and all too often remained detached from this kind of real social context. While in many cases, magazines represent the realistic views and behaviour of young people (for example, casual sex, or the light in which women are seen), the media in general has the power of “agenda setting” and could challenge such traditional attitudes. Therefore such magazines should take every opportunity to make use of their position of influence in a positive way, exploiting their established relationship with young people.

Secondly, we believe that magazines are creative spaces in which AIDS awareness can take on new and exciting forms from within the youth culture context itself. Magazines need to take up the challenge to use their communication with the youth more creatively so that HIV/AIDS messages do not take on the traditional, rational, cognitive behaviour models from past campaigns, which have clearly not been heard or adopted by the youth. As each magazine depicts a specific lifestyle that speaks to its own subculture, it has the opportunity to include in this lifestyle a healthy and responsible sexuality, based on the *loveLife* brand and the *loveLife* values.

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