

does size **matter?**

*Dominant Discourses about Penises
in Western Culture*

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— THE JOYS OF A LARGE PENIS

Ally McBeal and her friends are discussing the massive penis of a nude model at their sculpting class. Georgia's husband, Billy, is not happy about this:

Elaine: Ally has a date with Long John Silver!

Ally: Elaine!

Billy: Look at you all! Can I ask you something? Does size really matter?

Ally: No.

Georgia: No.

Elaine: No.

Renee [cocking her little finger]: All I need.

[They all smile.]

Billy: So bigger is better?

Ally: No.

Georgia: No.

Elaine: Of course not.

[Renee simply holds up her little finger again.]

Billy: Bunch of schoolgirls.

[He leaves; the women burst into laughter.]¹

No means no. Sometimes. But not when the question is 'Does size matter?' The man knows that he shouldn't even ask this question. When he does ask, the answer is an emphatic 'No',

and yet he continues the conversation as though the answer had been an explicit 'Yes'. *Ally McBeal* is not alone, and 'Cro-magnon' is not an isolated example of this rhetorical move; rather, I take it to be, as I will argue in this article, exemplary. Surrounding us in Western cultures we can find examples of this line—'size doesn't matter'—always inflected to mean 'size does matter; the size of a penis matters; the size of a penis matters to women because a larger penis means greater sexual satisfaction'.

The information that size *doesn't* matter, but that in the saying we insist that it *does*, is commonsense. It is widely known. It grounds jokes like the trailer that advertised the Hollywood production of *Godzilla* in the same year as *Ally* disavowed her interest in Long John Silver: 'Size does matter' was the tagline for that film, making the audience I saw it with laugh precisely because they knew it was not the size of monsters from the deep, made large by careless nuclear testing, that was being referenced here. The commonsense understanding that size doesn't matter (meaning that size *does* matter) similarly explains the hysterical overemphasis on the size of their penises by men writing into pornographic magazines explicitly to make public the fact that they have nothing to worry about:

I'm writing to ask if you need any sex men to photograph for your magazine. My 8" prick is admired by many people, especially the women who have been privileged to feel its electrifying sexual effects.²

It explains why the heroine of an erotic novel, written by women for women, can defeat an attacker simply by drawing attention to his genitalia:

Marisa's mind crept tantalisingly over all the backstreet cant she knew by way of revenge, but she rejected it all as being too subtle a form of insult. Instead she said pityingly, 'I mean, of course, that it's quite evident that you must have a very small penis.' His face seemed to blaze.³

In short, the fact that a large penis is important for giving women sexual pleasure is a dominant discourse—even though it must never be spoken—in Western cultures. And this is an interesting fact, for many reasons. It is interesting for making us think about how discourses work, and how we may know them to be dominant. It suggests that a discourse that is almost never spoken publicly may still be a dominant one. It suggests that there is at least one dominant discourse in Western culture that is in the hands of women, and that can be extremely powerful against men when used correctly. And it suggests—to me, at least—that in cultural studies we should pay more attention to the discursive resources in the culture's

that surround us, and the ways in which they might be used, rather than insistently looking only to academic writing for ways to progress particular political ends.

— WHO PUTS THE 'DOMINANT' INTO 'DOMINANT DISCOURSE'?

The Foucauldian concept of 'discourse', where discourses are understood to be regimes of sense-making associated with particular institutions, has proven a useful one for cultural studies, as it does not rely on the centralised and unitary models of culture implied by concepts such as 'ideology' and 'hegemony'. But in order to retain a focus on the functions of power, it is common to speak of 'dominant discourses' in society as though it were obvious that certain groups still in some way control the circulation of discourses in a disproportionately powerful way.⁴ But how does one spot a dominant discourse? What makes it dominant? How many examples must one find, by whom must they be spoken, in order to make a discourse dominant?

I tell my students, as a rough guide, that the degree of difficulty in arguing the opposite position to a proposition can be used to measure degrees of dominance. It is possible to argue against right-wing politics in Australia, but extremely difficult to argue that economics is not a good measure of a nation's health. Two levels of difficulty are relevant here. First, it is difficult to find the discursive resources to make the argument against the importance of economics: there's no simple statement within much public debate that expressly denies the importance of economics and which rings with the convincing sound of commonsense. And second, there are very convincing resources easily available and generally circulated to mock and dismiss those who attempt to make counter arguments: 'not living in the real world' and, in Australia, the phrases 'chattering classes' and 'intellectual elites'.

But even here, what interests me is that there *a re*, despite the power of economics in the Australian public sphere, still *dominant* discourses available in Australian culture that contradict economic rationalism. It isn't always easy to see them, as the link is rarely made as explicitly as it might be, and the areas of the public sphere in which they function are rather different. But these discursive resources do exist, and they are available. For we all know, and we all see repeated to us in the public sphere (both in entertainment and in factual debate), that 'money can't buy you happiness'. Not all dominant discourses support each other. Not all dominant discourses are contradictory to the political projects of cultural studies. And no dominant discourse has a single essential meaning that cannot be changed by resituating and deforming it.

Ally McBeal on penis size makes me think about the dominant discourses that currently circulate about gender roles and about power. For what does this tell us about gender in Western cultures that one of the dominant discourses of the area is that most men's penises

are too small to pleasure a woman, and that men should be worried, embarrassed and ashamed of that fact?

— POTENCY

Cultural studies has long held a fond interest in penises, thanks to its use of psychoanalysis and the question of the relationship between the phallus and the penis. But most of our thinking on this topic has focused on the nature of the phallus: there is, actually, remarkably little research into how penises are represented in everyday culture. What we notice when we begin to examine such representations is the range of different discourses about the penis that circulate in different cultural venues. Popular culture, like psychoanalytic theory, is fascinated by the relationship between penises and power. In certain areas in Western cultures the equation of penis and potency is insisted upon—they tell us that possessing a penis is the same thing as being powerful. These are, by and large, the areas where men speak to other men, in contexts that are not about sex. I am thinking here, in particular, of business communities. In an article in *Cleo* magazine, John Davidson suggests that:

a ‘big swinging dick’—that was what the biggest deal makers on Wall Street started calling each other in the 80s. Now whenever you listen to property developers, brokers, movie moguls—people concerned with power—you will eventually hear someone say ‘Well, it just comes down to who’s got the biggest dick’.⁵

Similarly, in a sketch from the Australian comedy show *Fast Forward* two businessmen are preparing for a meeting. They wear business suits—and strapped to their groins, large feathered penis sheaths. ‘As I’ve told you before’, says one, ‘this is the very latest in power dressing. I got them from the New Guinea natives . . . it represents power, youthfulness, ambition’. They go into their meeting, only to be confronted with another businessman, wearing an even bigger sheath (about three-feet long). The latter whops his sheath onto the desk, saying ‘Quite frankly, I don’t think your company is . . . big enough’.⁶

Here, possessing a penis is the same thing as being powerful. And this is spoken quite openly. But also openly shown—here, between men—is what is otherwise hidden in our culture. Or rather, what is insistently spoken into existence by its very denial. Size, it seems, does matter. One does not become powerful simply by having any old penis: rather, one must possess an *extraordinary* penis, a penis big enough to swing, a penis three-feet long that can be shown without shame in public. In short, even here, men tell other men that having a penis doesn’t make you powerful.

It is when women speak that we find the ambivalence of the relationship between penis and power becoming most apparent. For it is women who are endlessly enjoined to say ‘size doesn’t matter’, which, every time it is spoken, means ‘size does matter’. In forums where women speak to women, we hear the insistent repetition of ambivalence: size doesn’t matter; do not say anything else; everyone knows that it’s not true, but that doesn’t stop it being true ...

Magazines aimed at younger women—*Cosmopolitan* and *Cleo*—instruct their readers in precisely how this discourse operates. A front cover story in the May 1998 Australian edition of *Cosmopolitan* is entitled “Is It In Yet?” (And 10 Other Things *Never* to Say in Bed). This represents well the tone of these magazines. Obviously there is an issue here—the discourse of penis size has made its mark—but it is, emphatically, unspeakable:

‘The first time I was with my husband’, recalls Alison, 24 ... ‘we were having sex sort of lying sideways, and I couldn’t really feel it. So I asked, “Is it in yet?” He totally lost his erection ... I didn’t mean that it was so small that I couldn’t feel it, but I can see why he took it that way. I felt really bad.’⁷

Cosmo offers a ‘face saving strategy’: ‘make it clear that you were referring to position, not size (even if you were)’.⁸ Whatever you do, says *Cosmo*, do not say that size matters. This is an explicit instruction in a woman’s lifestyle magazine. With a different tone, *Cleo*’s article on penis size, in 1992, is headlined ‘Does Penis Size Really Matter? We Dare to Ask’. This language of ‘dare’—of transgression, of saying that which should not be said—seems slightly odd in a magazine that regularly runs cover stories with titles such as ‘Sure-fire Orgasm Secrets: How to Come like a Man Every Time’⁹ and ‘Do Nice Girls Swallow?’¹⁰ To discuss penis size is to ‘dare’. The dominant discourse—that penis size matters—is transgressive even to speak. For women, as this discourse should never be spoken, the ‘factual’ basis of the question—does size matter?—is always answered, insistently, as ‘Yes, of course!’ and as ‘No, of course not!’

Is it true all black men have ‘whoppers’? Are Italians ‘hung’ like horses? ... And does anybody really care? Well, until recently, the last question was the only one to which we really had any answer—yes, *oh yes*. Some people certainly do care about penis size: men ... Where do women stand on the issue? All over the place, it seems. In a sizzling article called ‘The Big Bang Theory’, Julie Burchill declared that ‘The myth of all penises being equal is just that: started no doubt by a sexologist who had the misfortune to be hung like a hamster’. Australian women seem to disagree: a very in-depth survey taken in 1992 by the *Sun-Herald* found that only 35 per cent said penis size matters ... But sometimes figures only serve to fog things up entirely.¹¹

Thirty-five per cent of women say that size matters—but even *Cosmopolitan* recognises what this means—that thirty-five per cent of women say that size matters. This tone of uncertainty and ambivalence is repeated with amazing stability in the numerous articles on this topic aimed at women. As *Cleo* explains:

According to popular myth, women are n't supposed to care about, or even notice, the size of a man's appendage—after all, expert opinion assures us that when it comes to making love, 'Size doesn't matter'. The only trouble is that most of the experts offering these words of wisdom are men. Large penises are supposed to be a sign of virility. However, there is no scientific evidence available to suggest that men with big dicks are capable of having more erections, are more fertile, or that their sex urge is any greater than that of their less well-endowed counterparts ... making love to a man with a very small penis ... can be less satisfying because his penis doesn't rub against as much of your vaginal walls. Put it this way—you can grip around a tampon, but does it turn you on? ... In a purely subjective vox pop we found that, in general, women would rather make love to a man with a penis that is short and wide than one that is like a pencil ... women do not, in fact, like men of massive porno-movie proportions ... but that, given the choice, they would rather not need a magnifying glass to appreciate it either. Basically, when it comes to penises, too big ain't great, very small is a disappointment, and good old Mr Average is best of all. There, we said it!¹²

This ambivalence about what women should say about penis size even extends to the social sciences—to sexology itself. The work of Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson, and Shere Hite put the role penises on the public agenda by making feminine pleasure visible. Sexological research 'discovered' female pleasure, and more than this, suggested that maybe men's sexual ability could itself be a problem:

Brought to the public attention by Kinsey and underscored by the experts' revelation that female sexuality outdistanced male performance in the same way that, physicians confirmed, the female body outlasted the male's, male sexual inadequacy became increasingly visible throughout the decade.¹³

Does size matter? Matter for what? What kind of power does the possession of a penis confer? In men's culture, the 'big swinging dick' is related to business power, the power to control, to earn money, to provide for others. But sexology and its children (the women's magazines cited above) offer another dominant discourse about power, suggesting that the question of a penis's adequacy can be measured in terms of its ability to provide women with pleasure. This is the 'power' of which the question can be asked: 'Does size matter?' And yet even here, the question of penis size is dealt with in ambivalent ways. *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* does not mention penis size.¹⁴ The companion volume on female sexuality,

Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female, asks women for various preferences—do they prefer sex with no partner, with male or female partners, with fantasies, in certain coital positions—but does not ask the women if size is important to them.¹⁵ In the work of Masters and Johnson, penis size begins to enter sexology, inflected in particular ways. In this work, what will be commonsensical in sexologically informed popular culture for the next thirty years is presented as unproblematic fact: penis size bears no relation to female pleasure. Just don't ask the women about it.

Masters and Johnson do not present any research on whether, in fact, penis size does have any relation to female pleasure. They do not ask the women they survey this question. Instead, they set the terms in which most sexological work will proceed for the next thirty years: they insist that there exists a *common myth* that size matters—and that this is not true:

[A] widely accepted 'phallic fallacy' is the concept that the larger the penis the more effective the male as a partner in coital connection. The size of the male organ both in flaccid and erect state has been presumed by many cultures to reflect directly the sexual prowess of the individual male.¹⁶

Women are not surveyed about the fact that size doesn't matter. It is simply presented as the obverse of a common myth. The same is true of *The Hite Report*.¹⁷ A late entrant in the sexology tradition, *The Esquire Report: Men on Sex*, is particularly interesting as a publication representing a distinctly male inflection of the sexological tradition. This book does state on the back cover that one of the questions it will address is 'Does size matter?'—and goes on to answer this by surveying *men*: 'Does size matter? Not according to 60 percent of the men ... [Men who combine socialising with fantasy] are least likely to say that size is important to women.'¹⁸

We are surrounded by evidence that women know that it is unspeakable to say that a large penis is better—for their pleasure, which is presented as being an important measure of the potency of a member—but that they would like to do so. The women in *Ally McBeal* manage to spend an entire episode centred around a large penis without ever saying the words 'large penis'. When the model first disrobes, we see Ally and Renee staring at his groin in a series of reaction shots: Renee finally says, 'I might need a touch more clay'. They later discuss 'it' over lunch, as Ally waves a sausage around. According to Elaine, the model has 'a trunk like Dumbo's'. When Billy threatens to close down the ambivalence ('That's what this is about. This model has a big ...'), Georgia cuts him off ('Nose').

In the video *Yards and Yards of Dick*, we hear women talking about penises.¹⁹ This video shows endless shots of male members, while disembodied women's voices discuss penises. There is a sense of informality and spontaneity to the voices and it does indeed sound, as the

video cover promises, like ‘the wildest hen night’. Most of these women agree that size does matter, but they are almost apologetic about this:

‘I’ve experienced good and bad in both ways and I think it’s what they do with them ... yeah, there’s something about the size and the width and the shape, but you can have big dick, if he didn’t know what to do with it ...’ ‘I don’t care what anyone says, but size DOES matter.’ ‘Anyone ever had one that was too big?’ ‘Yeah.’ ‘Yeah.’ ‘Yeaahhhhh.’ ‘I think size does matter actually. It’s got to be fairly thick, and you’ve to feel what’s going on.’ ‘At least seven inches.’ ‘Any man who says that size doesn’t matter has a small one. Cos size is important.’

All of these comments are accompanied by hysterical laughter—supporting the sense that something is being said which does not quite belong in the public sphere.²⁰

Size does matter, but size doesn’t matter. It is true, but unspeakable, and also not true.

— EFFECTS

One might suspect that such a discourse—one that is dominant, but also unspeakable—must be very powerful in order to be so strongly policed. If all women already know that size does matter—that a penis must be large in order to have any potency—then the fact that they are endlessly enjoined not to speak it surely suggests that this dominant discourse puts in the hands of women some kind of power. And indeed, when we examine popular culture for evidence about the effects of speaking this unspeakable truth, we find that this dominant discourse seems to be extremely powerful in its effects. The story of Alison, mentioned above, who rendered her new husband flaccid just by speaking of size, represents a common understanding of the effect on the male body of speaking such a thing. This dominant discourse tells men that not only should their possession of a penis render them powerful and potent, but it never actually does. The penis is never big enough to be powerful. Consider the case of *Black Lace*, a very successful series of sexually explicit erotic novels by women, for women, released by Virgin Publishing. These books, rejecting the delicate circumlocutions of Mills and Boon, represent something quite different from the kinds of culture discussed above. This is culture aimed at women which is forthright, sexually explicit and—uniquely—not afraid to reject the ambivalences of discourses about penis size. Indeed, these books are obsessed with penis size. Some representative examples come from Vivienne LaFay’s *The Mistress*:

it was evident from the satisfying fullness of her vagina that Stephen was particularly well-endowed’ ... Emma shivered with pleasure as she viewed the full extent of his organ as it reared between her legs, the purple glans enlarged almost to the size of a billiard ball ... Emma gasped as the thick penis plunged into her wet and ready cunt, thrilling her to the

core of her being ... Eagerly she touched the Marquis' thick shaft, so much more warm and velvet smooth than the ivory fake, and her loins shuddered ... His penis thrust eagerly upward as it was freed, and Emma could not resist taking it by the sturdy root and examining it with a smile. It was so elegantly shaped, long and straight.²¹

This is writing, by women and for women, linking large penises with female pleasure.²² And the heroines, unafraid to speak what *Cleo* and *Cosmo* enjoin them to be silent about, discover the power of saying, in a straightforward way: size does matter. In *Ace of Hearts*, when facing down the major villain of the piece, the heroine draws on this dominant, but unspeakable, discourse: 'Marisa gazed at Ormond with scornful deliberation. "I thought you were the one into secret rutting. It's common knowledge, I believe, that you can't get your rather inadequate penis to stand proud unless someone gives you a beating."²³

This is reminiscent of other sites where pornographic discourse is made available to women. For example, in a section of *Australian Women's Forum* entitled 'Erotica: The Wet Spot. All Your Good, Bad and Ridiculous Real-life Lust Tales' is this story, 'Terrible Two':

Late last summer I had a very exciting sexual experience that I'll never forget. My friend Dana and I were walking through a park that led down to a coastal path ... I looked over and saw a young guy sunbathing in the nude ... He looked up, obviously embarrassed and reached for his Speedos ... 'Hey, what are you doing?', he yelled as we both ran at him. Dana grabbed his arms and I dragged him to the ground. 'Rip them off!' Dana screamed hysterically ... [they rape him] ... 'You 'regonna eat my pussy' [Dana] said, 'or we'll throw all your clothes into the water and a lot of other women will get the pleasure of seeing your penis. And it's nothing to be proud of, either.'²⁴

This dominant discourse is available to women who wish to take it up, and its effects in this area of the feminine imagination are to render men powerless. And indeed, there is a fear there to be played upon. Surveys suggest that most men's experience of having a penis is one of 'lack':

Real men with real penises compare themselves to the models and find themselves woefully lacking. Most men believe that their penises are not what they ought to be. They are not long enough or wide enough or hard enough, they do not spring forth with the requisite surging and throbbing, and they do not last long enough or recover fast enough. A recent magazine survey of over a thousand men found that 'all male respondents, with the exception of the most extraordinarily endowed, expressed doubts about their own sexuality based on their penile size' ... The problem is that we think we should measure up to what are basically impossible standards ... Accepting your own merely human penis can be difficult.

You know it is somewhat unpredictable, and, even when functioning at its best, looks and feels more like a human penis than a battering ram, or mountain of stone. Not much when compared to the fantasies you are brought up on.²⁵

In their book, *Sexuality: A Boy's Guide*, Jay Gale and John Porter suggest that 'in a sexuality survey conducted in America, over seven thousand men were asked their feelings about the size of their penises, and "only a few were not concerned with size"'.²⁶ *The Hite Report* similarly notes that 'Most men, in answering this question [Do you think your penis is a good size?] wished over and over again that their penis could be just a little larger ... only a few men were not concerned with size'.²⁷ Responses to this discourse—the insistence that the penis could be powerful, if only it were large enough, but that it was not currently so—vary. Some men, it appears, respond with a hysterical insistence that their own member is big enough to be powerful, as the editor of the porn magazine *Razzle* suggests:

Cock size. Men were petrified about being found wanting. Virtually every other letter we received at *Razzle* mentioned it somewhere. These men were all proud eight-inchers, they had women trembling with the sheer size of their members ... Men are always boasting of their weapons. If the truth is known, they often get frightened.²⁸

Bernard Zilbergeld suggests, jokingly, that 'unless you are contemplating a transplant from a horse, it's the only penis you'll ever have'.²⁹ Although inter-species transplants may be some way off, the phenomenon of penis-extension surgery means that men can now attempt to recreate their bodies in the image of the penis-as-phallus-as-power:

Since a recent television segment on an unnamed lifestyle program, specialist Dr Colin Moore has been inundated by calls from all across Australia seeking penis enlargement surgery. Thousands of enquiries have caused a three month waiting list at all the doctor's surgeries in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.³⁰

As *Cosmopolitan* magazine puts it, 'If the demand for penis enlargements is anything to go by, maybe size does matter'.³¹ Two Australian prime-time lifestyle programs in 1998 presented features on penis-enlargement surgery: *Good Medicine* and *Sex/Life*. In the former, the doctor interviewed refers to the growth in the number of men asking for the operation as 'exponential', and suggests that, in his view, over ninety per cent of the men who have the operation have penises that are already of a normal size. The program interviews one satisfied customer: 'I looked down and it looked so wonderful'. Penis extensions are the medical expression of a desire for bodily reformulation that also has less official variants ('The Penis—Renowned sex doctor Dick Richards tells how YOU can have a bigger COCK in just six weeks

with his proven exercises').³² The sales of vacuum pump machines that claim to improve penis size attest to a sense of inadequacy with which many men approach their penises.

And yet even when men feel unhappy with their penis size, the articulation of the penis and power that *should* be there—but isn't—makes it difficult for men even to express this dissatisfaction. Another article in *Cleo* notes how difficult it is for men to have such penis implants, because they can't even admit that they need them. One man, for example, insists 'Not that I was small to begin with—my penis was a bit over seven and a half inches long when erect ... But to be honest, every guy would like to be bigger.'³³ But of course, 'not that I was small to begin with' ...

And the worst thing with which men have to contend is the fact that no matter how big their penis is, it will still *never* be big enough to convey real power. The ideal penis—for which all women long, we know, even though it is absolutely not true and size doesn't matter to women—is, as Bernard Zilbergeld puts it, 'two feet long, hard as steel, and can go all night ... Women, we are given to believe, crave nothing so much as a penis that might be mistaken for a telegraph pole.'³⁴ And even when a penis is extraordinarily large and thick and has the ability to stay up for hours at end—even then, this machine for pleasuring women still turns out *not* to be the ideal. It guarantees nothing of any kind of power other than pleasuring women, no matter how much culture now seems to have set this up as the dominant criterion on which to measure how much a penis 'matters', to what degree it is potent and does its job. We see this clearly in the film *Boogie Nights*, and in the life of porn star John Holmes on which it was based. His penis was almost two feet long, it was certainly hard as steel and it went all night; and yet John Holmes and Dirk Diggler (the character based on Holmes in *Boogie Nights*) are shown to be pathetic and powerless characters: drug addicts and failures.³⁵ The dominant discourse—size does matter, size doesn't matter—insists that the penis should be the source of a man's power, that it could be if only it were big enough, but that for you, the individual man, it never will be. Even with a fourteen-inch penis (which is what John Holmes possessed), the penis never guarantees any kind of power.³⁶

— CONCLUSION: THE POLITICAL USE OF AVAILABLE DISCOURSES

The hysterical nature of the insistence that women must not say that size matters seems to me a signal of the potency of this discourse. As a political resource, I think it has potential. The very fact that it matters to men whether or not they can pleasure a woman seems to me to be a remarkable sign of the success of feminism (via sexology). I still remember the old joke (seeming older by the day): How do you give a woman an orgasm? Who cares? The fact that the potency of a penis might be measured by whether or not it is big enough to give a woman pleasure shows a remarkable evolution in thinking about gender and sexual

roles, one which challenges the way in which we think about the relationship between body and power.

As I noted at the start of this article, cultural studies has traditionally been more interested in the phallus than in the penis. A lack of research on how penises are represented in popular culture has led us to assume that, as Kaja Silverman puts it:

Our dominant fiction calls upon the male subject to see himself ... only through the mediation of an unimpaired masculinity ... by believing in the commensurability of the penis and phallus.³⁷

But what if this isn't the case? What if, indeed, one of the dominant fictions in popular culture suggests quite the opposite: that the penis can never be the phallus? Does this perhaps open up a space where feminist politics might insert itself?

This is a dominant discourse—size does matter/size doesn't matter—whose ambivalent status tells us something about the emergent power of women's discourses. It actually matters whether or not this discourse is spoken in public, and the fact that it matters, to me, suggests that it would be a worthwhile cultural experiment to start saying it, saying it publicly, and saying it loud.

Here's a *Cosmopolitan* magazine story on penis enlargements:

Cosmetic surgeon Dr Colin Moore, director of surgery at the Australian Centre for Cosmetic and Penile Surgery, has witnessed an increase in the demand for penis enlargements since the early '90s. Previously the operations that were performed were used to correct birth defects. Dr Moore now does 180 to 200 operations a year.³⁸

Western culture is changing. In part we must acknowledge that bodies are becoming more mutable, that the constant improvement in living conditions for the working classes under capitalism has greatly increased the pool of people who can afford plastic surgery, that capitalism itself has turned the body increasingly into a commodity: all of these points are undoubtedly true. But it is also true that men care what women think of their penises. That in attempting to gain the status of the phallus, it is at least in part the degree to which the penis functions to pleasure women that measures its success or failure.

Cultural theory has worried that the 'dominant fiction' in popular culture has been that the penis and the phallus should be seen as the same. This survey of contemporary discourses on penis size suggests a more nuanced situation, and one with interesting political possibilities. The penis, insists popular culture, is not the phallus, but it *should* be. And it could be, if only your penis were larger. Then you could really pleasure women, and there would no longer be the need to keep it silent, to keep endlessly attempting to police the speaking

of that terrible phrase: size doesn't matter. How terrifying to live in a culture surrounded by iterations of a dominant discourse that means the opposite of what it says, and works insistently to keep the penis away from the phallus.

We have at our fingertips a discourse already dominant, with proven effectiveness in undermining the relationship between phallus and penis. It is only the degree to which women choose not to hurt men by employing this weapon that keeps its use under control. After speaking to the girls in *Ally McBeal*, and hearing them insist that size doesn't matter, and fully understanding that this in fact means that size does matter, Billy becomes deeply paranoid. He wanders around the unisex toilet with his brow wrinkled:

Georgia: Richard 's trying to suck me into this boxing pool.

Billy: Do you mind driving in case I have a beer?

Georgia: I'll drive.

Billy: I thought we could go early, maybe eat some dinner?

Georgia: That's fine.

Billy: Do I satisfy you in bed?

Georgia: What was that last one?

Billy: Do I? Sexually? In bed?

Georgia [walking up to him]: Where did that come from?

Billy: I don't know. I don't like taking anything for granted ...

Georgia: Our giggling over that model. It's bothering you.

Billy: No! Why would ... yeah.

Georgia: Billy. I am a very satisfied woman.

Billy: Don't you wish that I was ...

Georgia: No! Of all the things that you have to be insecure about, that's the least. That didn't come out the way I meant it. I am very, very happy in bed [excessive performance of sexuality]. Trust me. [She kisses him sexually. Billy smiles and relaxes.]

But supposing that Georgia had been a bad girl? Supposing she had disregarded the instructions of sexologists and women's magazines? Supposing she had learned her lessons instead from Black Lace novels, and discovered a pornographic discourse that refuses the studied ambivalence of the dominant discourse? Supposing—just supposing—that Georgia had told Billy another truth: the one that says, 'Yes. I do wish it was just a little bit bigger. Because size does matter, you know.' We don't have to believe it ourselves. Indeed, whether or not we do is irrelevant. But as a readily available dominant discourse that works, as we see, to support a feminist politics by separating the penis and the phallus, it seems silly not

to take advantage of it and employ it in our cultures. Say it loud and say it proud: size does matter.

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1. David E. Kelley, 'Cro-Magnon', *Ally McBeal* season one, episode 11, 1998.
2. Quoted in Nicholas Whittaker, *Blue Period: Notes from a Life in the Titillation Trade*, Victor Gollanz, London, 1997, p. 97.
3. Lisette Allen, *Ace of Hearts*, Black Lace series, Virgin Publishing, London, 1996, p. 19.
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23. Allen, p. 254.
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25. Bernard Zilbergeld, *Men and Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfilment*, Williams Collins and Sons, Glasgow, 1980 [1979], pp. 35, 36.
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27. Hite, *Male Sexuality*, pp. 390, 395.
28. Whittaker, pp. 183, 107.
29. Zilbergeld, p. 36.
30. 'Big Penis', *Brother/Sister*, 28 May 1998, p. 4.
31. Ylla Wright, 'Boy's Toys: Phalloplasty', *Cosmopolitan*, May 1998, p. 96.
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33. Quoted in Mia Freedman, 'I Had My Penis Enlarged', *Cleo*, September 1995, pp. 90–3, p. 90.
34. Zilbergeld, pp. 30, 33.
35. John Heidenry, *What Wild Ecstasy: The Rise and Fall of the Sexual Revolution*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 236–7; Paul Anderson (dir), *Boogie Nights*, 1998.
36. Although it is outside the realm of this paper, it is worth noting two other axes along which the construction of penis as phallus can be differentiated in popular culture. The first is the black penis: as Kobena Mercer notes the large black penis is still not quite the phallus, imagined in popular culture as something powerful but outside of culture—see Kobena Mercer, 'Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary', in Bad Object Choices (ed.), *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, Bay Press, Seattle, 1991, pp. 169–210. The second is the role of the penis in gay male culture: here the importance of size is spoken far more freely than is the case in other sexual communities. Indeed, we even have a separate identity for people who worship large penises: the 'size queen'—see Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996, p. 210.
37. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992, p. 42.
38. Wright, p. 96.