

"If It Weren't For The Magazines,
Why Would She Think That?":
A Study of Reader Response to the Text of Seventeen Magazine

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is designed according to grounded theory methodology. In this study, the reader responses of adolescent females to the text of teen magazines was examined. Females aged 13-15 who were self-declared regular readers of teen magazines were the focus of this study. A textual analysis of 16 issues of *Seventeen* magazine, the top-selling publication in the teen magazine market, was also conducted. Thus a component of this study involves an examination of various aspects of the magazines' content, and the inclusion of quantitative data concerning the textual analyses.

The participants' responses to the text of the April 1998 issue of *Seventeen* magazine were examined through the use of two response tasks. First, the participants were given a copy of the text and a response log in which to record their responses to the text for a period of one week. Once the logs were collected and examined by this researcher to identify themes that emerged from the participants' responses, the participants met with me to discuss the themes that emerged from the response logs. This meeting was tape recorded and transcribed. The transcripts from the discussion groups were analysed for salient themes that emerged.

Based upon the discussion group and reader response log data, this study concluded that the participants read the text more critically and thoughtfully. Indeed, they demonstrated considerable sophistication in their reading of various aspects or components of the magazine. This sophistication was evidenced in a number of ways. For one, the participants made different uses of the text's components. They used some parts of the text for information, and others for light-hearted entertainment. They also

used the components of the text that they found offensive or irritating as opportunities for debate and opinion formation.

Another way in which the participants' reading of the text demonstrated the complexity of their responses was evidenced by the ambivalence with which they regarded certain aspects of the text, namely those which they found offensive or potentially harmful to the reader's self-esteem.

Recommendations have been made to researchers to investigate more seriously the complexity and sophistication that young readers of teen magazines bring to the reading event. Suggestions for teachers and curriculum developers have also been provided. These include a number of ways in which the methodology employed in this study can be used in the classroom to engage students in meaningful investigations of popular media in all of its forms.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to
Adrian Gamble, Cecile Giese, David Hill, and Mavis Jones
with thanks for their love and support.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the reader responses of adolescent females aged 13-15 to the text of teen magazines. This is a qualitative, exploratory study that has been designed according to a grounded theory approach. Its purpose is to provide a description and analysis of the participants' responses to text-focussed tasks. In particular, reader responses to the monthly publication, *Seventeen*, will be investigated. *Seventeen* has been selected because, as the highest selling magazine of its type in North America (*Ulrich's Periodicals Directory*, 1997), it serves as an industry standard for this type of publication. Indeed, since its inception in 1944, *Seventeen* magazine has dominated the teen magazine market and thus has set the standards for the genre, centering primarily on fashion and beauty features and teen celebrity information (Ceffalio, 1995; Daley, 1988).

The Need For Research In This Area

To date, research dedicated to adolescent females and the magazines they read has been sparse. Considering the enormous popularity of teen magazines among young adolescent girls, and the fact that they willingly devote both spare time and limited disposable income to this pursuit, curiously, very little interest has been invested in this aspect of teenage girls' literacy practices.

But is this so curious? Given the tendency in our society to trivialize the period of adolescence and to dismiss pop culture as 'low' culture, perhaps it's not at all surprising that adolescent girls' interest in teen magazines has largely escaped our notice.

Quite often, adolescence is viewed as an unfortunate developmental stage, a phase that marks the rite of passage between childhood and adulthood. Frequently, the adolescent period is parodied as a trial by fire apprenticeship into the world of adults (Felman and Elliot, 1990; Takanishi, 1993). En route, all manner of evils befall the unfortunate teen, from acne and perplexing physical metamorphosis (the infamous voice change for the male and the training bra for the female) to social awkwardness and unrelenting cycles of lovesickness and subsequent heartbreak. This fatalistic notion of the teen years as a period of *sturm und drang* (storm and strife) is certainly not new. It was coined in 1904 by S.G. Hall (as cited by Danesi, 1994), one of the first researchers to write about adolescence, and this notion has been retained by numerous researchers who study and work with teens (Danesi, 1994; Felman and Elliot, 1990). Even Nancy Atwell (1987), a champion of middle school students, has suggested that both being and working with teenagers can be very difficult. In her book, *In the Middle*, Atwell writes, "Surviving adolescence is no small matter; neither is surviving adolescents. It's a hard age to be and teach." (1987, p. 25).

The popular culture artifacts of one's adolescent period or phase have at times received similar treatment. With almost conspiratorial condescension teen culture is portrayed by those who've passed through it, as little more than a revolving door parade of faddish haircuts and costumes, indecipherable lingo, and deafening music. This being the case, teen magazines are, quite understandably, unlikely to elicit much serious regard

from parents and educators. Indeed, conceived as nothing more than frivolous reading, teen magazines are the stuff of a Norman Rockwell painting with giggling girls belly-flopped across a twin bed, legs kicking behind as they pour over the latest fashions and boy celebrities.

Thus, at first glance, the omission in the research of the study of girls' teen magazines may appear to be a very reasonable and appropriate oversight. Just as it is the popular pastime of many adults to chuckle indulgently about adolescence as an awkward and irrational phase that one outgrows, some might argue that teen magazine reading merits little consideration; it occurs during a limited window of time in one's spare moments, during one's teen years. In this sense, the practice of reading teen magazines could be regarded as just one more transitory symptom of the adolescent phase.

The present study has arisen primarily from a deep concern that more needs to be known about the relationship between adolescent girls and the popular print media they read. The lack of investigation in this field is exacerbated by the difficulty in locating studies that have been conducted with Canadian adolescent girls and teen magazine reading. It is my contention that the lack of investigation in this area is problematic for several reasons.

For one, the popularity of the genre of teen magazines merits investigation. Circulation figures for *Seventeen* alone are impressive. In a telephone conversation with the executive editor of *Seventeen*, Roberta Caploe, I learned that 2.5 million issues are sold monthly in North America (personal communication, April 23, 1997). Ms. Caploe elaborated that shared readership figures were even more considerable. According to focus group studies routinely conducted by *Seventeen* staff, a monthly readership figure

(including both sales and shared readership statistics) much closer to 13 million has been calculated. I should mention here that the practice of sharing and trading magazines with peers has been documented as a common practice in the literature concerning adolescent females and the magazines they read (Duke, 1995; Finders, 1996; McRobbie, 1978).

Similarly, references to sharing and swapping teen romance fiction have also been made in studies of adolescent girls' and their literacy practices (Cherland, 1994; Christian-Smith, 1993; Finders, 1997; Moffitt, 1987).

Concerning the popularity of teen magazines, while this study focuses specifically on *Seventeen*, there are a number of other publications in this genre. Indeed, to illustrate more accurately the popularity or reach of teen magazines, I suggest the sales figures for North America's second and third top-selling teen magazines, *YM (Young and Modern, formerly Young Miss)* and *Teen* are also considered. According to *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory* (1997), in 1997, sales of *YM* numbered 1.82 million copies, while sales of *Teen* numbered 1.36 million copies. This may belabor the point, but if actual readership is 5-6 times the sales figure (based on calculations made by *Seventeen* editor, Ms. Caploe), then total readership figures for these 3 top-selling teen magazines is considerable. Combined sales for the three amount to 5.68 million copies; when multiplied by 5, this yields a total of over 28 million copies.

According to population statistics for Canada and the United States, approximately 13.5% of the population in both countries are females between the ages of 10 to 19. Given that the combined population of these two countries is approximately 310 million, this means that there are roughly 42 million girls aged 10 -19 in North America. If we consider magazine sales figures for the three top-selling teen magazines,

then approximately 14% of females in this group are buying these particular publications. However, if we consider shared readership statistics, then over half of the girls in this segment of the population are reading these publications. If this seems an unreasonable estimation, consider then, the readership statistics for Australia's top-selling teen magazine *Dolly*. It is estimated that one out of every four females aged 14-17 in Australia reads *Dolly* (Fabrikant, 1987).

The second reason that I feel more research is needed in the area of girls' teen magazines is closely related to their popularity. Findings pertaining to the dedication of both time and discretionary income on the part of teen magazine readers (Duke, 1995; Finders, 1996; McRobbie, 1978; Pipher, 1994; Wray and Lewis, 1993), I believe, warrant further investigation. As a middle school teacher, I can confirm the observations of colleagues and parents who find that girls routinely choose to read teen magazines not only during leisure time, but during school hours, and often at the expense of school work and other reading experiences. Moreover, considering that not every adolescent female, particularly one between the ages of 12 and 15, has a large amount of discretionary income at her disposal, the price of a teen magazine is not inconsiderable. *Seventeen's* monthly cover price is \$3.95 (\$4.55 with tax), while an issue of *YM* costs \$3.25. Given that teen magazine readers choose to expend both time and money on this pursuit suggests that reading material with that kind of appeal is worthy of closer scrutiny.

Thirdly, the lack of investigation into the world of adolescent girls and their magazines reflects perhaps, a general disinclination to include media awareness and media literacy in our consideration of literacy practices. Until very recently--in the early part of this decade, in fact--instruction in media literacy was not afforded even a small

share of the teacher's agenda. The inclusion of media literacy skills in the 1996 Integrated Resource Packages published by the B.C. Ministry of Education, signals that media awareness issues are becoming increasingly important.

Fourthly, I believe this is an area that warrants further inquiry because the media in all forms have been implicated in exerting a strong socializing influence, particularly on its younger audiences. In works such as *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (Steinberg and Kinchloe, 1997), a wide array of articles address the impact of the media on children and teens. In a similar vein, those researchers who have concerned themselves with teenaged girls and their magazines, have been unequivocal in their indictment of these magazines in the socialization of their readers. For one, Peirce (1993, p. 66) suggests that teenage girls may be dependent on teen magazines for information because in no other medium do they find so much material targeted solely to them. Hence, I am interested in investigating the reader responses of teen magazine readers in order to gain insight into the socializing influence the text exerts on its audience.

The fifth concern originates from my review of the literature. As stated, it is difficult to locate studies that address teen girls and magazine reading. Compounding this difficulty even further, however, is that in those few studies that have been located, there is a pronounced division in the focus of the research. In effect, the research located to date has focussed solely on either an analysis of magazine content, or on reader response to magazine text. I found that problems emerged from both approaches. Researchers who investigated magazine content (Evans, 1990; Evans, Rutberg, Sather, and Turner, 1991; McRobbie, 1978; Peirce, 1991), could only speculate on its effect on

the reader, while those who studied reader response (Duke, 1995; Finders, 1996; Frazer, 1987) failed to provide an analysis of the text to which the participants were responding. Thus, in response to this dichotomy in the reviewed literature, the present study has been designed to investigate reader response as well as to provide a detailed content analysis of *Seventeen* magazine.

Reader Response Theory

Rosenblatt has been credited for pioneering the study of reader response (Herber, 1994; Many, 1994; Pearson and Stephens, 1994; Squire, 1994). Indeed, with the publication of her text, *Literature in Exploration*, in 1938, Rosenblatt directed the attention of researchers and educators to the role of the reader in the comprehension process (Squire, 1994). The emphasis placed by reader response theory on the role of the reader, has resulted in a greater valuing of the individual reader's interpretation of the text (Many, 1994).

In her pivotal work, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* (1978), Rosenblatt described the relationship between the reader and the text as a transactional process through which meaning is created (Herber, 1994; Rosenblatt, 1994). Meaning resides neither in the text, nor in the reader, but is created from the union of the two. To this reading event, the reader brings the influence of her background, schooling, selective attitudes, interests, and purposes for reading. Rosenblatt posited that the reader's purpose or stance falls somewhere along a continuum between *efferent* reading (reading predominantly for

information) and *aesthetic* reading (reading predominantly for the literary or poetic experience).

Hence, reader response theory sets forth the value of individual interpretations. Researchers in this field have investigated numerous facets of the reader's characteristics and background and how these impact upon the meaning-making process called *reading*. Studies have investigated how the reading event is affected by the reader's prior knowledge and experience (Anderson, 1994; Bransford, 1994); maturity in terms of the capacity to critically analyse textual elements (Many, 1994); socioeconomic and racial background (Heath, 1983); and gender (Barrs and Pidgeon, 1994; Bleich, 1986; Flynn and Schweikart, 1986; Sarland; 1992) to name only a few.

Reader response theory has played an important role in the design of the present study. Above all, the investigation of reader response calls for a qualitative and naturalistic theoretical framework. Rosenblatt (1994) noted that

the transactional model especially indicates the value of ethnographic or naturalistic research because it deals with problems in the context of the ongoing life of individuals and groups in a particular cultural, social, or educational environment. (p. 1089).

Furthermore, reader response theory has served as a driving force behind the decision to employ grounded theory methodology in particular, in the present study. Reader response theory insists that no two readings of a text are identical—in effect, that the text takes on different meanings in transactions with different readers and even with the same reader in different contexts or at different times (Rosenblatt, 1994; Squire, 1994). Therefore, it is of critical importance that the study of reader response is conducted via an exploratory framework, one in which the researcher's interpretation of the text that is used in the study, is divorced from that of the participants. More will be

said regarding the use of grounded theory methodology and how it served to accomplish these ends in Chapter Three.

The Inclusion of Textual Analysis in the Present Study

While those who work in the field of methodological design tend to discourage the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, some have sanctioned the mixing of these two approaches with the stipulation that the researcher exercises caution (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Crabtree and Miller, 1992; Cresswell, 1994). Certainly an important aspect that must be considered when combining qualitative and quantitative methods is that the relationship of these components is clarified from the outset of the study (Cresswell, 1994).

The primary focus of the present study is the investigation of reader response. As established, this study is a qualitative one, designed according to grounded theory methodology. However, also included in this research is a detailed textual analysis of *Seventeen* magazine, which involved the use of quantitative methodology and the reporting of a considerable amount of quantitative data in Chapter Four. The following discussion has been included in order to clarify the role of this quantitative component, as well as to explain the rationale behind its inclusion in this body of work.

As far as the theoretical framework of the present study is concerned, the inclusion of qualitative data is not incompatible with either grounded theory methodology or with reader response theory. In fact, the impetus for including a detailed textual

analysis arose primarily out of my concern for remaining true to both of these theoretical frameworks.

Beginning with the appropriateness of including a quantitative textual analysis in a grounded research study, I have drawn heavily on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) who have been credited for developing the grounded theory approach (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Carspecken, 1996; Crabtree and Miller, 1992; Cresswell, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990), Strauss and Corbin discuss the role of grounded theory methodology as a means of exploration and discovery. They note that investigators who employ a grounded theory approach often do so in the interest of theory building; in other words, this methodological framework is, in part, employed as a means of gathering information that contributes to our knowledge and understanding of the area under investigation. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that:

The purpose of grounded theory method is, of course, to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study. Researchers working in this tradition also hope that their theories will ultimately be related to others within their respective disciplines in a cumulative fashion, and that the theory's implications will have useful application. (p. 24).

In light of the exploratory nature of the grounded theory paradigm, as well as its endorsement of cumulative contributions from individual studies to the pool of understanding in any given area of investigation, the inclusion of a detailed analysis of the content of teen magazines, as presented in *Seventeen* magazine, is appropriate for a number of reasons. For one, an exploration and thorough description of the text, quite simply, adds to the body of information we have concerning the content of teen magazines. Secondly, the textual analysis component honours the notion that grounded

theory research is a cumulative process and thus seeks to build upon previous work, and subsequently provide a foundation for future studies. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, my own analysis rests in good part on previous content analysis research, and certainly, my hope is that my analyses will inform future investigations in this area of study. Thus in keeping with the theory building goals of grounded research, the inclusion in the present study of textual analysis is a fitting endeavour.

As I have noted, the inclusion of a quantitative textual analysis component is also compatible with reader response theory for a number of reasons. Foremost is that reader response theory is based on the notion that the reader and the text together create meaning; thus, an investigation of both the reader's responses to the text, and the text itself, seem to me to be in order. Furthermore, since there are so few studies dedicated to content analysis of teen magazines (more will be said about this in the review of the literature), this is an especially fertile and important facet to explore.

Another rationale for the inclusion of content analysis, is closely linked to the first. Given that teen magazine reading is largely practiced outside of the influence or control of adults such as teachers and parents (Duke, 1995; Finders, 1997). I would argue that very few adults are informed as to the contents of these publications. My own experience as a classroom teacher, coupled with indications in the literature, suggest that magazine reading is largely regarded as being of low literary merit by most educators and parents (Finders, 1997; Wray and Lewis, 1993). Thus, it may not be likely that many adults take these publications seriously enough to read them and see what they contain. Further to this, the scarcity of content analysis research in this area suggests that very few researchers have investigated the content of teen magazines. Hence the general lack of

information in this area has provided much of the impetus to include textual analysis in the present study.

The third rationale underpinning the inclusion of content analysis arises out of a concern to portray the polysemous nature of teen magazines. If we are ever to understand the relationship between readers and the text of teen magazines, we have to first understand that these publications are comprised of a wide variety of individual components, and not just one type of text as is a traditional novel. Naturally, these independent article and features are loosely clustered around the central themes of the teenzine genre, but this does not mean that we can view the text as a seamless, unified entity. This is important because, as discussed, Rosenblatt (1994) maintained that readers approached the reading event with different purposes: *effere*nt reading was aimed at extracting information from the text, while *aesthetic* reading focussed on the literary or poetic facets of the reading experience. The text of teen magazines offers both types of reading to their audiences and only a detailed examination of the text's content can provide insight into the types of reading experiences that are offered.

Fourthly, I included a content analysis component in this study both in support of, as well as in reaction to, previous reader response research. As noted, the work of previous researchers has provided a jumping off point for my own investigation of the text's content. The culmination of all of these contributions will hopefully accomplish the broadening of our understanding of the genre of teen magazines. However, some investigations of textual content have been conducted in ways that have isolated targeted segments of the text (Frazer, 1987; Peirce, 1993) and they have used these elements as representative of the whole text. In her study of reader response, Frazer (1987) used one

story that she selected from *Jackie* magazine and drew conclusions regarding her participants' responses to the entire text of *Jackie* from their responses to this one excerpt. Similarly, in her study of the content of teen magazines, Peirce (1993) analysed only the fictional stories in teen magazines but nonetheless generalised her findings regarding the content of these stories, to the entire texts. Thus, in reaction to this, my own analysis has been conducted so that it demonstrates the distinct and independent facets of the magazine text.

Lastly, the purpose of the content analysis was to provide information about the text that was used as a response probe with the participants in this study. It is my contention that in order to investigate and subsequently report the data gathered from a reader response study, it is incumbent upon the researcher to illustrate that the chosen text is a representative one. Therefore, one of the aims of the content analysis of numerous issues of *Seventeen* over a two-year period, was in part, to demonstrate that the April 1998 issue of the magazine that was read by the study participants, was representative of the publication.

Overview of the Study Design

The study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, a questionnaire concerning reading practices was administered to a group of female students aged 13-15, at each of two different junior high school sites. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify regular readers of teen magazines for participation in the subsequent phases of the research. In the second phase of the study, I met at each site with the small group of

participants that were identified from the questionnaire results. Six participants were identified at each site.

Participants were asked to complete an individual response task. I gave each of them a copy of the April 1998 issue of *Seventeen* and a reader response log in which to record their responses to the text for a one week period. At the end of the week, I collected the response logs and identified the themes that emerged from them.

The third phase of the study involved a group task. I met with participants to discuss the themes and ideas that had emerged from their logs. The discussion group meetings were tape recorded and each lasted for approximately one hour. Excerpts from the transcripts of the discussion group meetings, as well as from the reader response logs, were used in the reporting of the data.

Three to four weeks after meeting with the two groups, I visited the participants at each of their schools and gave each of them a letter to inform them of my progress and to thank them again for their contributions to the work. In the letter, I reminded participants that I would contact them when the study was nearing completion and I would then share the findings with them. A final meeting was scheduled with the participants during which they had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and discuss the experience of being involved in the research work.

As stated, the present study also involves a textual analysis of a number of components of the text of *Seventeen*. This aspect of the study is elaborated upon in the following section.

Methodological Considerations: How the Present Study Differs From Previous Research

The inclusion of a textual analysis component in the present study is designed to serve several purposes. For one, it will provide more up to date data regarding the content of *Seventeen* magazine. In previous content analyses of teen magazines (Evans, 1990; Evans et al., 1991; Peirce, 1991) the most recent issues examined were published pre-1990. While Peirce (1993) did investigate 1991 issues for themes in short fiction stories, this was not a comprehensive content analysis.

The textual analysis component of this research involves a study of several aspects of the magazines' content based on 16 issues selected from the period of July 1996 - April 1998. My analysis of *Seventeen* includes an investigation of several aspects of its content and layout. For one, the feature topics were analyzed by calculating the percentage of editorial copy dedicated to categories which include fashion and beauty, relationships, health, and popular culture personalities, to name a few. I also calculated the percentage of advertising content per total number of pages per issue; the representation of human photographic models listed by race and gender; model activity by gender; and finally conducted an exhaustive categorization of products advertised in the magazine. More will be said about this aspect of the investigation in later sections of this thesis.

The design of this study also differs from previous reader response studies in its use of both an individual reader response task and a group task. In the literature that I have located that describes reader response studies, reader response logs have not been used. To elaborate, Frazer's (1987) study involved meeting briefly with informal groups of girls to discuss a story she selected from *Jackie* magazine, while Duke (1995)

conducted one to one interviews with participants in her study. In contrast the present study uses a combination of data collection methods to create a more intensive and multi-faceted investigation of reader response in order to explore what this yields. Thus the participants in the study were asked to respond to the text of *Seventeen* through both the use of an individual task -- the completion of the reader response log, and a group task -- involvement in a discussion group.

The decision to include a group task in the research design also reflects my belief that since teen magazine reading is quite often carried out in a shared reading context (Cherland, 1994; Finders, 1996; Griffin, 1985; Pipher, 1994), it is valuable to explore reader response in the context of a group setting. If the experience of magazine reading is largely communal, then conducting a discussion of the text as a community will be advantageous to the investigation of reader response.

Research Questions

The intention of this study is to explore the reader responses of adolescent females to the text of *Seventeen* magazine. For the purpose of this investigation, the key questions have been articulated as follows:

- 1) In what ways do females aged 13-15 who are self-reported regular readers of *Seventeen* magazine, respond to the text?
- 2) What are the categories or themes that emerge from the participants' responses to the text?
- 3) How do the participants' responses compare with the relevant literature on the topic?

Definitions

Some terms require clarification. As used in this study the following terms are defined as follows:

- 1) *text* - reference to the text of *Seventeen* magazine encompasses all aspects of the publication. All of its components have been considered as a cohesive whole including photo layouts, covers, advertisements, features and articles
- 2) *teen magazine* - this magazine genre typically contains fashion and beauty features, information and stories about developing heterosexual relationships, articles about popular young celebrities in the film and music industries, and a variety of advice columns addressing health and relationship issues. Teen magazines are specifically targeted to a teen-aged readership.
- 3) *teenzine* - this term is an abbreviated form of *teen magazine* and has been used interchangeably with that term throughout the study. Teenzines like *Seventeen*, *'Teen* and *YM* are distributed through a well-established network and enjoy a wide circulation. They are published by corporations that manage production costs largely through the sale of advertising space in the magazines.
- 4) *zine* - the term *zine* is used synonymously with *teenzine* in the literature as a short form, for example in Finders (1997). However in this study, *zine* has not been used interchangeably with *teenzine* because elsewhere in the literature there is an important distinction drawn between the two. Generally, *zine* refers to an underground, non-mainstream publication, quite often compiled, produced and distributed by a single individual. According to Green and Taormino, the editors of *A Girl's Guide to Taking*

Over the World (1997), zines range "anywhere from Xeroxed handwritten rants and cut-and-paste collages to professional design" and girl zines are defined as "do-it-yourself publications made primarily by and for girls and women" (p.xi). The term *zine* also serves to draw a boundary around a body of work that seeks to differentiate itself from the mainstream magazine realm: in that sense, the designation *zine* indicates opposition to the status quo.

5) *adolescent, teen, teenager*- these terms have been used to describe a person between the ages of 12-19 as this is commonly the age range given for adolescents in the research (Finders, 1997; Gilligan, 1990) .

CHAPTER 2

Review of Content Analysis Research

It seems appropriate that a review of the literature concerning the study of popular teen magazines for adolescent females begin with a discussion of the ground-breaking work of British researcher, Angela McRobbie. A prominent feminist in the field of British popular culture studies, McRobbie pioneered the first detailed study of the genre of girls' magazines two decades ago.

In the latter half of the 1970s, McRobbie conducted an analysis of the content and textual conventions employed in Great Britain's top-selling teenzine, *Jackie*. In her article, "*Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity*" (1978), McRobbie claimed that patriarchal, traditional and stereotypical values encoded in the magazine text manipulated its young readers and indoctrinated them into conventional feminine pursuits--romance, domesticity, beauty, and popular music culture. Indeed, in McRobbie's view, *Jackie's* readers were "being presented with an ideological bloc of mammoth proportions, one which *imprisons* them in a claustrophobic world of jealousy and competitiveness, the most unsisterly of emotions, to say the least" (p. 265).

It is hardly surprising that McRobbie's impassioned views concerning the power of mass media to socialize adolescent females has since elicited both the support and criticism of subsequent researchers in the field. Indeed, within the scant body of work that does exist on the subject of popular magazines for adolescent females, McRobbie's work with *Jackie* magazine is cited without exception. Moreover, whether embraced or contested, her research has served as a jumping off point for further investigation by her contemporaries.

Perhaps the most contentious aspect of McRobbie's analysis of *Jackie* was her vehement proposal that the impressionable teen reader was acutely vulnerable to the ideological influences of the magazine. While she acknowledged that adolescent popular culture was shaped to a significant degree by a young male working class that exerted its influence through purchasing power and re-appropriation of forms, McRobbie insisted that in contrast, adolescent females maintained little or no control over their own popular culture. Instead, according to McRobbie, teen girls "play[ed] little, if any role in shaping their own pop culture and their choice in consumption [was] materially extremely narrow" and further, those forms that were marketed to them made re-appropriation difficult (p. 267). Moreover, although McRobbie conceded that *Jackie's* readers occasionally used the publication in subversive ways--to demonstrate boredom and disengagement with school, for instance--she maintained that this detracted in no way from the magazine's overarching capacity to exert a strong ideological influence on its audience (p. 268).

It is precisely this claim of McRobbie's that drew the criticism of her peers. For, while tribute is paid to McRobbie for drawing attention to adolescent popular print media, other researchers have passionately refuted her allegation that young women are passive recipients of the ideologies presented to them in the magazines they consume (Ceffalio, 1994; Duke, 1995; Frazer, 1987). However, in several instances where McRobbie's position provoked criticism of this nature, crucial elements of her discussion were overlooked.

Specifically, McRobbie clarified emphatically at several points throughout her analysis that her investigation dealt solely with textual conventions and content, rather

than with an examination of reader response. Indeed, from the outset, she maintained that hers was an investigation of the form and layout of the genre; an exploration of the code or discourse of romance that dominated the publication. Despite her zealous belief that magazines socialized and indoctrinated readers into the hegemonic codes of femininity, she qualified this by maintaining that oppositional readings were not impossible. It is not entirely unlikely that McRobbie's intention was to draw attention to the media's power, far more than it was to deny female agency. Moreover, in McRobbie's concluding discussion, she restated unequivocally that her analysis of teen magazines, based purely on content and sales figures, was insufficient, and her work merely a preliminary step in gaining understanding of the reader's interpretation of the text's form and messages:

This whole ideological discourse, as it takes shape through the pages of *Jackie*, is immensely powerful....Of course this does not mean that its readers swallow its axioms unquestioningly. And indeed until we have a clearer idea of just how girls 'read' *Jackie* and encounter its ideological force, our analysis remains one-sided. (p. 282)

My concern with those who have since discredited McRobbie's work because of the one-sidedness that she herself acknowledges, does not arise out of a simple loyalty to McRobbie's foundational contributions to this area of study. Certainly it is appropriate to express concern over certain elements of McRobbie's work. To begin with, McRobbie branded *Jackie* quite simply as one more weapon in the pop culture arsenal that as a whole held immense ideological sway over its female audience. *Jackie's* messages were anything but new, and basically the publication served as a training manual for the girls' socialization:

Jackie introduces the girl into adolescence outlining its landmarks and characteristics in detail and stressing importantly the problematic features as well as the fun. Of course *Jackie* is not solely responsible for nurturing this ideology of femininity, nor would it cease should *Jackie* stop publication. (p. 264)

Secondly, McRobbie's convictions regarding the capacity of the magazine to shape the lives of its readers and their corresponding inability to resist the text's ideologies were problematic. Claims such as these that dismissed the possibility of resistance by young females to popular culture messages certainly merit comment. That said, however, I am concerned that a preoccupation with these statements coupled with a disregard for McRobbie's own admissions regarding these difficulties, has only served to eclipse the vastly more significant contributions of her early ground work with teenzines.

Essentially, McRobbie's study emphasized the fact that in Britain, working class adolescent females opted to spend their limited pocket money to purchase, and their limited leisure time to read popular media magazines like *Jackie*, far more often than they chose to read books and newspapers, or to pursue other leisure activities (p. 268-269). Further, McRobbie's research revealed the cohesive and relentless themes of romance and personal attractiveness in the magazine, while it also provided the first analysis of the form and structure of the genre--its appearance, style, layout, language, and philosophy. Finally, McRobbie called not only for further studies of reader response, but additionally petitioned "feminist teachers and youth leaders to involve girls in the task of 'deconstructing' this seemingly 'natural' ideology; and in breaking down the apparently timeless qualities of girls' and women's 'mags'" (p. 282). McRobbie also advocated the joint production by concerned adults and teens of alternative publications for adolescent females:

a magazine where girls are depicted in situations other than the romantic, and where sexuality is discussed openly and frankly; not just contraception, masturbation, and abortion, but the social relations of sexuality, especially the sexism of their male peers. (p. 282)

It is my opinion that a disregard by subsequent researchers of the issues so central to McRobbie's work, in favour of critiquing the elements of her position regarding the reader's lack of agency, is an unfortunate case of "throwing the baby out with the bath water." Further research in this area would benefit from building on the strengths of McRobbie's work. With this said, we turn to a discussion of the subsequent literature and contributions to the study of the content of popular magazines for female adolescents.

Chronologically, North American researchers Kate Peirce (1990, 1993); Evans (1990), and Evans, Rutberg, Sather, and Turner (1991) were the next to research popular teenzines for girls. Again, rather than an investigation of reader response, these researchers produced articles addressing the *content* of top-selling magazines for adolescent girls.

In her article, "A Feminist Theoretical Perspective on the Socialization of Teenage Girls Through *Seventeen* Magazine," Kate Peirce (1990) analysed 12 issues published in each of the following years: 1961, 1972, and 1985. After counting the number of editorial copy pages per issue (advertising content was not considered in this study), Peirce calculated the percentage of these pages devoted to topics by categories: appearance (beauty and fashion), home (decorating, food, and crafts), male-female relations, and self-development.

Peirce found that in each year, both appearance and home concerns dominated the editorial pages, constituting roughly 60% of the content. In sharp contrast, as can be

observed in the following table (Peirce, 1990, p. 489), pronounced differences appeared in the coverage of the latter 2 categories.

Table 1. Percentages of Editorial Pages Given to Selected Topics in *Seventeen*

Publication Year	1961	1972	1985
Categories			
Appearance	48.0	52.0	46.0
Home	9.0	10.0	11.0
Male-female relations	7.0	2.7	6.5
Self-development	7.5	16.6	6.8

Note. The data are from "A Feminist Theoretical Perspective on the Socialization of Teenage Girls Through *Seventeen* Magazine," by K. Peirce, 1990, *Sex Roles*, 23, (9-10), p. 498.

Peirce (1990) found that in 1972 the percentage of pages devoted to male-female relations fell, while self-development content increased markedly. She suggested that "the feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s had an effect on the editorial content of *Seventeen* [in that] messages of self-reliance and independence increased during that period." (p. 498).

That both male-female relations and self-development categories in 1985 resumed similar proportions to their 1961 figures, signaled to Peirce that any changes in editorial focus in the magazine attributable to the feminist movement were short-lived. *Seventeen* magazine, she reported, resumed its conventional emphasis on beauty, fashion and male-female relationship concerns.

Three years later, Peirce conducted a content analysis of *Seventeen* and *Teen* magazine, this time investigating the role and portrayal of heroines in the magazines' short fictional pieces. In "Socialization of Teenage Girls Through Teen-Magazine Fiction: The Making of a New Woman or an Old Lady?" (1993), Peirce reviewed all of the fictional stories printed over the five year period from 1987-1991 in both publications. In total, 104 stories were found. Peirce analyzed these stories according to two factors: the degree of dependence demonstrated by the heroine (determined by whether the heroine solved her own problems or depended on others to solve them), and the degree to which characters' occupations reflected stereotypical, non-stereotypical, or neutral portrayals.

Peirce reported that in 62% of the stories, the heroine depended on someone else to solve her problems. Conflicts revolved around male-female relations (43%), family (27%), other (17%), and friends (13%). In terms of stereotypical portrayal of occupations, of the 42 distinct occupations noted, 10 were determined to be neutral, 2 non-stereotypical, and 30 stereotypically portrayed, with women placed in traditional professions such as nursing, and social and secretarial work, while men were employed as doctors, lawyers, and judges.

Peirce also investigated both fictional and non-fictional elements of popular women's magazine's such as *Redbook*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *McCall's*. It was her contention that while in some newer publications for women, non-fictional elements were becoming more sympathetic to the feminist perspective, nonetheless these same magazines continued to portray women in traditional dependency roles in fiction pieces.

Peirce concluded that the fiction pieces in both women's and teen's popular magazines perpetuated a conventional image of the protagonist as male-dependent.

Moreover, Peirce asserted that in teen magazines, messages about what it means to be female are consistent between non-fiction and fiction texts. Both, she claimed, taught adolescent girls that male-female relationships were more important than anything else in their lives; that girls shouldn't act, or be aggressive, or solve problems because others would do these things for them; and finally, that there really were male and female professions (p. 65).

Far more relevant to my own investigation of teen magazines, however, is Peirce's discussion regarding media dependency. She cautioned, in effect, that to unearth blatant examples of looks-focussed, romance-centered, and stereotypical text in these magazines is one thing. It is quite another matter, however, to conclude that the readers of these publications internalize these messages, or that they are merely passive recipients of the traditional views expressed. Indeed, echoing the beliefs of McRobbie (1978), Peirce herself conceded that a content analysis could not predict levels of reader dependency and acceptance. Notwithstanding, Peirce argued that it was not unreasonable, given that teen magazines are one of the few, if not the only, medium tailor-made to suit the needs and concerns of teen females, to entertain the notion that readers may in fact depend on these publications for socialization (p. 66).

Based extensively on previous research by Evans (1990), Evans et al. (1991) also investigated the content of popular teen magazines for girls. Evans et al. (1991) analyzed *Sassy*, *YM (Young and Modern)*, and *Seventeen*, surveying 10 issues of each magazine published between January 1988 and March 1989. Content was coded under three

headings. Primary articles (features, regular columns, fictional stories) were examined in terms of topic, with feature articles further analyzed for identity-related topics. Secondly, advertisements were categorized according to product or service orientation, size of ad, and percentage of total pages per issue devoted to advertising. Lastly, human photographic content came under scrutiny to determine the racial representation of human models portrayed in these three publications.

Evans et al. (1991) found that among the primary articles, fashion proved the predominant topic. As for the content of feature articles, most addressed interpersonal relationships, dominated by heterosexual dating concerns. Regarding advertising content, the mean percentage of ads per total pages in all 30 issues examined was 46%, with *Seventeen* leading the pack with 57% advertising content. On sale were fashion and beauty products (32%), music and entertainment, and personal services (7%), health and hygiene items (4%), and lastly, education and career services (3%).

In terms of human photographic content, white females dominated the pages of all three publications. Overall, Evans et al. calculated that white females constituted 65.2% of the human photographic content, white males 24.5%, non-white females 7.7%, and non-white males 2.6% (p. 109). Of the three publications, *Seventeen* contained the smallest percentage of non-white models (8.5%).

In their discussion of these results, Evans et al. (1991) responded critically to the findings, stating that,

although ostensibly governed by the theme of self-improvement, these publications seem to approach the topic largely through fashion dressing and physical beautification, with some modest attention to guidance articles about normative problems in the interpersonal domain--mostly female-male relationships. (p. 110)

Critical of the magazines' preoccupation with physical appearance and the need to pursue beautification techniques to attract and secure male attention, Evans et al. noted that even the supposed health articles were primarily focused on weight loss and body toning, rather than legitimate medical concerns.

Concerning the feature articles dedicated to identity development, equally disconcerting themes emerged from the research. Evans et al. found that rather than addressing achievement and personal growth (i.e. academic, artistic, and athletic pursuits, involvement in political issues), these articles elevated the attainment and maintenance of heterosexual romantic relationships to a place of central importance in the personal development of the reader.

The racial representation of human photographic subjects further elicited concern from the research team. Considering that 30% of the United States high school students at the time of the study was non-white, a percentage of non-white models hovering near the 10% mark was highly questionable.

Voicing similar concerns to those of Peirce (1993) and McRobbie (1978), Evans et al. (1991) cautioned against bringing to bear conclusions from their content analysis to predict the responses of the publications' readers. Instead, they advocated that a much deeper investigation of teen literacy patterns and abilities, the interplay of other media influences, and greater scrutiny of adolescent purchasing behaviors be conducted before conclusions could be drawn regarding audience receptivity to these messages.

Review of Reader Response Research

Largely out of reaction to the work of McRobbie (1978), Frazer (1987) conducted what she believed to be the first study of teen readers' responses to *Jackie* magazine. Frazer gave several groups of females aged 13-17 a copy of a short story she had selected from *Jackie*, titled "It's My Nasty Mind." (Frazer met regularly with these groups to discuss topics such as TV programs, movies, books, and advertising.) Frazer asked the participants to read the story, and then to discuss them; according to Frazer these discussions were 20 minutes in length.

Frazer disagreed strongly with McRobbie's contention that *Jackie's* readers were passive recipients of the text's ideologies. Instead, in an article titled "Teenage Girls Reading *Jackie*," Frazer reported--despite the fact that she had given participants only one story from the magazine to respond to--that study participants constructed text meaning in very distinct and individual ways. Frazer also posited that these participants read *Jackie* reflectively, and consciously exercised their prerogative to reject, modify, or accept its messages.

The work of Lisa Duke (1995) provided the next challenge to the content analysis camp. Duke strenuously challenged the scant research previously conducted on teen magazines for adolescent females. The focal point of Duke's work was precisely that which was lacking in the research thus far conducted: reader response. Duke expressed serious concerns regarding the work of researchers Evans (1990); Evans et al., (1991)

and Peirce (1990, 1993) for focussing exclusively on content analysis, rather than on a consideration of the ways in which readers responded to the text.

In her article, "From *Seventeen* to *Sassy*: Teen Magazines and the Construction of the 'Model' Girl" (1994), Duke reproached Peirce for her suggestion that teen magazines had the ability to socialize readers in femininity, stating that this theory was "based on little more than supposition" (p. 1). Peirce, she argued, failed to substantiate that her content analysis could be brought to bear on the reader's reaction to the text, and yet maintained that popular teen magazines socialized their readers.

Despite her condemnation of other researchers for assuming that magazines indoctrinated their readers into the codes of femininity, Duke herself could not entirely resist the pull to portray teen magazines as powerful forces of adolescent female socialization. In fact, she herself argued that, "teen magazines, with their emphasis on makeup, hair, weight, and clothes, are natural vehicles for indoctrinating girls into the ideal...that to look young, to be thin, and eternally (hetero)sexually attractive *is* to be female" (Duke, 1995, p. 4). In addition, although Duke's initial agenda centered on reader response and refuted assumptions regarding the indoctrinating power of the text, ultimately she reported that the girls she interviewed resisted the magazines' messages to a lesser extent than she had anticipated.

Significantly, Duke's (1995) study is the only one I have been able to locate that is dedicated entirely to an exploration of how young North American females read and respond to teen magazines. Her methodology involved in-depth individual interviews with ten 12 and 13-year-old girls who read teen magazines on a regular basis (the criteria being set by Duke as at least 6 times per year). After providing participants with money

to purchase a teen magazine of their choice, Duke met with each girl in her home and followed a prepared discussion guide to discuss the content of the magazine and the girl's response to certain features. Duke qualitatively assessed responses to feminine conventions within the texts: the beauty and fashion imperative, the pressure to engage in self-beautification, etc. She examined transcripts "for instances of language, descriptions of content, particular uses of text and 'units of information' " (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 344) that would next be grouped into categories (e.g., self-expression through artifice) (p. 51).

Duke discovered that while participants occasionally resisted the standard of beauty and thinness depicted in the magazines, most often they were learning from the reading to "analyze their bodies for ways in which they deviate from the ideal" (p. 58). Indeed, several respondents shared a certain degree of sheepishness when admitting that they compared themselves to magazine models and were concerned with falling short, despite their realization that these models were idealized illusions.

This kind of mixed reaction on the part of these readers to the messages in popular magazines is hardly surprising. As far as audience susceptibility to the medium, even many of the mighty have feet of clay. Indeed, some of the most vocal opponents of looks-centered media for teens and women admit to their own vulnerability to these same products. Feminist writers like Naomi Wolf (1991) and Peggy Orenstein (1994) suffered as teens from horribly poor self-esteem and eating disorders. Susan Douglas, author of Where the Girls Are, as angry and frustrated as she is by popular culture maxims regarding thinness and eternal youth for women, nevertheless confesses that she too

"must be perfectly honest and admit [her] own vulnerability to these really preposterous ploys" (1994, p. 250).

Embedded in the ambiguous and often two-sided responses of Duke's participants, lies the undeniable reality that underpins the study of audience response and interpretation, namely that it is complex, multi-layered and consistently saturated with contradiction. For me, Duke's findings are particularly intriguing given that she had so vehemently insisted that the magazine text not be imbued with the power to manipulate its analytically adept audience.

Duke's participants also revealed a high degree of vulnerability to the code of beauty supplied in the magazines they read. The text, it seemed, taught its readers to dissect and grade themselves in parts or sets of facial and body features, thereby disabling them from having a holistic picture of themselves as complete beings. Duke aptly referred to the body image portrayed in the magazines as an "excluding ideal" as it created for its audience both the sense of being other than that ideal, and the conviction that for them the ideal would remain unattainable, at least in full (p. 15). Not surprisingly, when Duke asked her respondents how they might improve teen magazines, they conferred that they would like to see more non-model types, more girls that looked like they looked (p. 16).

Duke also discovered that her participants actually maintained very negative images of the models whose appearance they most coveted. Indeed, the extremely attractive models in the magazines were held in suspicion by the girls who described them as likely to be unkind, unfriendly, untrustworthy, and arrogant. In effect, anyone

whose looks were so superior was suspected of being "interpersonally flawed" because she made others feel bad about themselves by comparison (p. 17).

Undeniably, Duke observed varying degrees of analysis and resistance in the girls she studied. Still, a strain remained for the participants between acceptance and resistance of the magazines' messages. Perhaps an observation made by Gilligan and Brown (1991) might be pertinent here in that it offers some rationale for tension between Duke's expectations of girls' resistance, and their self-reported impressionability to the magazines' messages:

While some girls wonder how a perfect girl could be possible, much less desirable, and how adults and other girls could fall for what they see as clearly fraudulent, other girls seem transfixed by the idea of her. Poised at the edge and suspecting that people prefer the 'perfect' girl to the real one, these girls experiment with her image and the protection and security and happiness she promises. (p. 100)

Perhaps this offers some relief as we endeavour to understand the complexity inherent in analytical readings of popular teenzines by their audiences. It is precisely this element that renders an understanding of the reader's response to these texts anything but straightforward. Indeed, it is my suspicion (which has yet to be shaken by any of the literature I have read) that if we are to investigate the responses of teen magazine readers, we have to expect these responses to be both complex and intricate. Thus, not only will reader responses and reactions to the text vary from one *reader* to the next, but, most probably, these will vary within any one *individual's* interaction with the text from one *reading* to the next.

While Margaret Finders, author of *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High* (1997), also addressed teenzines and their readers, unlike Duke's research (1995), hers was not a study focussed on this particular genre. Instead, Finders' intention

was to examine teenzines as just one facet, among many, of the reading and writing practices of teenaged girls.

Finders' work includes a fairly lengthy examination of teenzines as one aspect of her subjects' literacy practices. She conducted a longitudinal study of middle school girls in an affluent, well regarded community school. Specifically, Finders observed and conducted interviews with a group of girls in one of the grade six classrooms. Although I believe that Finders' observations should be included, I have some very serious concerns not only about her depiction of the girls she studied, but also about several of the conclusions that she draws in her research.

Most significantly, Finders begins by exposing to parents, teachers, and researchers the danger of viewing teenagers as a homogenous grouping. For Finders, to fail to understand each teen individually, and to instead consider all teens under umbrella terms like 'typical teenager', was highly detrimental because it homogenized teens and consequently rendered many of their behaviors invisible to others (p. 30). She herself admitted to grappling with an internalized image of adolescence that included assumptions about the primacy of friends in the lives of adolescent girls.

I have taken the time to elaborate this because my initial response to Finders' introduction was, understandably, one of appreciation for her commitment to the individuality of each subject. Immediately, I recognized how important it would be to apply her advice when conducting my own research. As I read further, however, discomfort and then confusion set in, as it became apparent that Finders neglected to heed her own admonitions. Dismayingly, quite early in the study, Finders severed her participants into two groups, and graced them with the unfortunate labels, the "social

queens" and the "tough cookies". These labels, she derived from conversations with the mothers of a couple of girls in the study: one of girls' mothers described her as a 'tough cookie' who was fiercely independent, another participant's mother referred to her socially active daughter as a 'social queen'. Finders then adopted these labels--sometimes paring them down to "cookies" and "queens"--and used them to elaborate the features that precluded membership into these distinct groups. Essentially, the tough cookies were trailer park girls whose distance from the school often meant that they could not participate in after school events, and the social queens were the popular girls who lived in close proximity to the school and could therefore take part in any available after school events.

Naturally, after these categorizations were assigned, it was impossible to maintain even the slightest shred of objectivity as a reader. With visions of queens and cookies (tough ones) dancing in my head, gaining useful insights into the relationship between these girls and their magazines became an improbability. Adding to the "homogenization" of the girls in her study (the danger that she had warned against), Finders next distilled both groups down to only their most popular members, and reported on the literacy practices of only three out of the nine social queens, and two out of the five tough cookies. Further homogeneity resulted because the three queens were best friends and reported as being very much alike, and the two cookies were best friends and similarly deemed very much alike. Finally, the death knoll to objectivity rang when Finders discovered that the three queens voraciously read teenzines, but the cookies did not. The repercussions of this, of course, and the cause of my concern regarding citing Finders' data, are that Finders' discussion of the girls and teenzines rested strictly on the

practices of only the three social queens who were, according to Finders, so alike that they may as well have been one person.

Having expressed these concerns, I would like to include in my discussion some of Finders' observations that I feel are applicable. Three of Finders' insights into the world of the girls and their teenzines that I want to touch on are: the use of teenzines as personalized *how-to* manuals for adolescent femininity; the reading of teenzines as a collaborative practice; and lastly, the readers' application of text messages to their own lives.

Finders discovered that the three social queens "turned to the [magazines] for advice on their appearance" (p. 57) and "to learn culturally specific ways of being a woman" (p. 59). The girls also believed that adults had nothing to do with these publications and "never acknowledged any adult presence behind the youthful images, and most often considered the models to be the authors" (p. 57). In many instances, the girls kept their reading private from parents who tended to find the magazines a little too mature for their 12 year old daughters, and they also read them frequently during school time, sliding them in between the pages of school textbooks. Like McRobbie (1978), Finders felt that the covertness of this reading event, and the reading of magazines when school work was to be done, both signified this practice for the girls as an act of rebellion and defiance to adult authority.

The second intriguing aspect of Finders' observations was the social nature of teenzine reading. She wrote:

Zine reading was fiercely social. Groups of girls crowded together on a bed, in a large recliner, or in the corner of the school library to devour the cherished possession and negotiate a unified front as to their collective opinion of each

article and advertisement. Oftentimes, the arrival in the mail of a teenzine necessitated a "sleepover" to "hang together and look at our magazines." (p. 59)

With what I consider enormous bravery, Finders actually attended one of these sleepover marathons in order to observe the girls while they read and dissected *Sassy* and *Seventeen*. The girls all attended to a single magazine while its pages were discussed one by one. They deliberated each page together, judging whether each product, outfit, and model was 'cool' or 'cute' or not. "The girls rarely disagreed, and, when they did, they argued until a consensus was reached" and "no page was turned until the girls all agreed about fashion or face, beauty or body" (p. 60).

The three social queens seriously applied what they learned from these teenzines to their own lives. Finders reported that, using their magazines to check and test their own behaviours as blossoming adolescents, the girls compared themselves and each other to the magazine models. Conforming to the standards of 'coolness' and female attractiveness, the girls incorporated the focal points of the magazines into their own concerns and modeled their experiences and practices as teenagers after those depicted in these popular publications.

From Finders' work then, it can be noted that for at least some girls, the reading of teenzines is a very serious business indeed. Considered the handbooks for both adolescence and femininity by the social queens, teen magazines did indeed play a crucial role in indoctrinating them into the hegemonic codes of "femalehood". However, for the purposes of my own study, the applicability of these findings is limited. The three social queens smitten by teenzines, were, as I have stated, so uniform in motivation, personality, socioeconomic background, appearance, and popularity, that any generalization to other readers is rendered next to impossible.

Nevertheless, Finders' work with the girls she referred to as the social queens offered an important glimpse into one type of reader response. Certainly, the clear and detailed picture painted by Finders of the literacy practices these particular girls employed when consuming teen magazines, constitutes the only research that I have found that includes an observation from the sidelines, of girls reading magazines together. For the three social queens in Finders' study, teenzines proved to be a dominant force in the passage into womanhood. As a handbook for coming of age as an adolescent female, teen magazines offered them invaluable advice and standards for appearance and behaviour to guide them through this confusing transition. Yet, while the queens' reading of magazine text suggests that these magazines can socialize their readers, I believe that the *most* we can say is that for some readers, teenzines provide much sought-after advice and in those instances, it appears that their messages are very much taken to heart.

Review of the Research Concerning Alternative Magazines for Teenaged Girls

While not directly applicable to either content or reader response analysis of *Seventeen* magazine, I think it is important to include a discussion of research pertaining to alternative or non-mainstream magazines for teen girls. To date, I have accessed the work of two researchers who have examined this type of publication: Debra Ceffalio (1994) researched the controversial release of *Sassy* magazine in the U.S. in 1988; and Joan Livingston-Webber (1994) explored the oppositional world of *grrrl zines*. Although these studies deviate from the discussion of popular mainstream teenzines, they can be seen to inform my own research in several important ways.

In her article, "Teenagers Get *Sassy*: An Analysis of the Current Teen Magazine Market," Ceffalio (1994) investigated the roller coaster career of *Sassy* magazine, introduced to the North American market in 1988 by Australian executive Sandra Yates of John Fairfax Ltd. Patterned after Australia's popular *Dolly* magazine, Yates envisioned *Sassy* as a much hungered-for alternative to 'nice girl' magazines like *Seventeen*. Indeed, *Sassy's* first issue sales exceeded its publisher's wildest hopes. American adolescent females responded positively to the magazine's frank approach to girls' sexuality and features that addressed career and educational concerns as well as current events. (This description of *Sassy* recalls a few of McRobbie's (1978) ingredients for a more well rounded and sexually explicit magazine for young women.)

Sassy next joined the *Ms. Magazine* conglomerate, and soon after became the target of a fundamentalist letter writing campaign after printing some frank stories on teenage sexuality. The pressure on advertisers by incensed right wingers caused several of them to withdraw their ads from *Sassy*. According to Susan Faludi (1991, p.110), both *Sassy* and *Ms.* were consequently threatened with financial collapse, and male publisher Dale Lang took control of the both magazines in October 1989, shutting down the publication of *Sassy* until he could remodel its editorial content.

What is significant here is that while North America's young women embraced the publication, *Sassy* faltered in an environment where religious fundamentalism exerts a hefty influence on the market. Indeed, the near demise of *Sassy* was the result of fundamentalist pressures. *Sassy's* editors were forced to either tame their messages regarding young women's sexuality, or to watch the publication come to premature end. Ultimately, *Sassy* buckled under pressure and moderated its tone and 'whitewashed' its

editorial sufficiently to be granted unction by the fundamentalist opposition. Not surprisingly, *Sassy's* make-over left it looking like a clone of *Seventeen* or *YM*. Instantly sales plummeted.

How does this study inform my own research? Firstly, it substantiates the claims common to all of the literature cited thus far on the content of teen magazines, by illustrating the hegemonic nature of top-selling magazines. Secondly, the instant popularity and eager reception of a franker, hipper magazine for young women revealed the appetite of this populace for more controversial and feminist material. In my opinion, the rise and consequent plunge in sales of *Sassy* verifies the existence of a market for an alternative to the current top-selling teen magazines, since once *Sassy's* format mimicked that of *Seventeen* magazine, its initial popularity dropped because readers were looking for something different.

It may not be far from the truth to extrapolate from this, that at least some of the readers of popular magazines like *Seventeen*, read them simply because alternatives don't exist. Peirce (1993) suggested as much when she hypothesized that girls read teen magazines for lack of a better choice. I assume further that a number of these readers are probably critical and dismissive of at least some of the content they encounter in mainstream magazines.

Alternative publications for teen girls have also been explored in the work of Joan Livingston-Webber (1994). Indeed, the creation of girl-positive publications, headed by feminist teachers and researchers in conjunction with young women, was one of the calls to action given by McRobbie (1978) nearly two decades ago. Undeniably, the past few

years have witnessed a substantial increase in the number and variety of alternative magazines for young women (Green and Taormino, 1997; Livingston-Webber, 1994).

In her article "How *Sassy* are Grrrl Zines?" Livingston-Webber (1994) explored the recent explosion in the production of grrrl zines--magazines written for girls by girls. Livingston-Webber adopted a decidedly hopeful position on this trend and posited that the rising tide of grrrl zines heralded the growth of long-overdue resistance on the part of adolescent women. Nevertheless, she conceded that as pedagogical opportunities or models of resistance, the powerful form of grrrl zines were, by nature, too raw and extreme for use in classrooms.

While popular mainstream magazines--with *Sassy* cited as representative of the genre--are discussed, Livingston-Webber's purpose is more to illustrate the alternative, underground appeal of grrrl zines, than to engage in a comparison of the two forums. For my own purposes, this article is important because it raises the issue of the young female's expression of resistance to traditional messages contained in mainstream magazines. Livingston-Webber's work also chronicled that the number of resistant young females who author alternative publications for the likewise disgruntled consumer of popular print media is decidedly on the rise. Hence, Livingston-Webber's article illuminates one possible active and defiant response taken by adolescent females in reaction to mainstream ideology as presented in top-selling teen magazines. Worn and repelled by traditional, conventional magazines, many young women have opted to produce their own zines and comics for girl audiences who crave a radical, rebellious voice.

The New Wave of Zines

A recently released text compiled by editors Green and Taormino (1997) provides a collection of excerpts taken from girl zines. In *A Girl's Guide To Taking Over the World: Writings From the Zine Revolution*, 41 different selections give the reader a taste of the kinds of materials that are currently holding sway in the girl zine realm. A quick glance at the table of contents reveals a list of titles ("Learning to F---," and "Menarche Hell," for example) that instantly betray the frankness inherent in the genre that brought Livingston-Webber (1994) to conclude that many zines, would be too raw for the classroom.

While many new zines are indeed too explicit for use in schools, there are some new alternative magazines for girls would serve as excellent resources in the classroom. Especially noteworthy are three publications all produced by Women Express Inc., a nonprofit, volunteer organization that operates out of Boston, Massachusetts. Through the support of a number of sponsors, Women's Inc. publishes *New Moon* for girls aged 10-14, *Teen Voices* for teens aged 12-16, and *Hues* for older teens and young women. All three are written *by* girls and women, *for* girls and women. Indicative of the kind of material that is featured in these publications, a promotion for these magazines reads, "Free self-esteem with each subscription!" After reading several issues of each of these magazines, I am convinced that the writers and publishers have fulfilled this promise; the publications are intelligently female-positive and all three promote and model self-confidence and self-advocacy to their readers.

While certainly not directly applicable to my own study, this rising trend in the production of alternative magazines serves at least to demonstrate that young girls are capable of resisting dominant messages in the media, and of acting out resistance through both speaking out and creating their own publications.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This is a qualitative study of reader response to the text of teen magazines. It is designed according to a grounded theory approach. As well, quantitative data have been included in the discussion of the content analysis I conducted of *Seventeen*, and in the reporting of the data gathered from the questionnaire that was administered to study participants. As elaborated in Chapter One, the inclusion of quantitative data in this portion of the study is consistent with the exploratory nature of grounded theory methodology.

The Use of Grounded Theory Methodology

Before proceeding to a description of the methodology employed in this study, I want to discuss further the assumptions that underpin grounded theory. According to Bogden and Biklen (1982, p. 29), in grounded theory, the categories and analysis of the data emerge from the bottom up, from disparate pieces of collected data that are interconnected. Furthermore, Cresswell (1994) explains that in a qualitative study, instead of beginning with testing or verifying a theory, "consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may emerge during the data collection and analysis phases of the research or be used relatively late in the research process as a basis for comparison with other theories" (p. 94-5).

The decision to employ grounded theory methodology to investigate reader response emerged largely out my concern that in previous reader response research (Duke, 1995; Frazer, 1987), investigation had been conducted in a way that ran contrary to the paradigm of qualitative research, and certainly of grounded theory methodology (as espoused above). Indeed, these researchers approached the study of reader response with both preconceived theories and hypotheses to test with regards to reader response. Hence, they narrowed or distilled their investigations of reader response to one consideration, namely, the degree to which magazine readers were socialized by these texts.

Both Frazer (1987) and Duke (1995) concerned themselves with the fact that in content analysis studies, it was posited that teen magazines exerted a strong socializing influence over their readers. They were interested in demonstrating that, to the contrary, teen magazine readers were quite capable of resisting this influence and that individual readers had very different readings of the same text. Although admirable and sorely needed as a counterbalance, these concerns about demonstrating the critical abilities of teen magazine readers, ended up driving the research and consequently constrained the ability of either researcher conduct an open exploration. Because they approached the research with hypotheses to prove, rather than with questions to ask, concerning reader response, neither Duke nor Frazer actually focussed on the readers themselves.

The decision to employ grounded theory methodology reflects my desire to avoid approaching the study of reader response with preconceived ideas. Concerned with preempting the use of my own limiting questions or hypotheses with regards to reader response, I felt that the grounded theory paradigm offered the kind of exploratory framework that was needed.

Accordingly, in this study, the information gathered from the participants in the response logs, and the tape recorded data from the group discussion were used to form a theory about reader response to the magazine text. The findings also were used to examine the theories concerning reader response that have been located in the reviewed literature.

Aimed at discovering categories that arise out of the data, the research model of grounded theory ensured in large part that I approached the work from an exploratory stance, rather than with a set of hypotheses to test. And certainly, one of the most exciting challenges of this study was the process of unraveling and making sense of the data that were collected from the questionnaires, reader response logs, and discussion group meetings. It necessitated a recursive process in which the methodological framework and the nature of the study, along with the data were revisited repeatedly in order to tease out patterns and categories.

Research Methodology: Phase One

Before beginning the study, I obtained permission from the University of Victoria Human Ethics Committee. I also obtained permission from the Victoria School Board, and from the Principals at each of the High School sites where I conducted the research. Each of the participants received a Letter of Understanding to take home to their parents or guardians. Copies of these communications have been included in Appendix B.

In Phase One of the study, descriptive survey methodology was used. A group of adolescent females aged 13-15 in each of two local high schools (hereafter referred to as Sites A and B), were asked to respond to a questionnaire regarding their out of school reading practices. The reason for administering the survey was to identify a group of 5-6 participants at each site, of self-reported regular readers of teen magazines for participation in the two subsequent phases of the research. In consultation with administrators and classroom teachers at each of the school sites, it was decided that it would be least disruptive to administer the survey in classrooms where the students were all females, since only females would be participating in the survey. As a result, the survey was administered to Physical Education classes containing only female students at both high school sites.

While I had initially intended to work exclusively with grade 9 girls, at Site A the Physical Education classes were run as double classes consisting of both grade 9 and 10 students. Consequently, I administered the survey to 46 participants at that site. At Site B, however, single Physical Education classes were run and I was able to administer the survey to 23 grade 9 girls. Although 24 girls actually completed the survey, one of them spoiled her survey and I have used a group number of 23 in all of my calculations involving the survey data.

Given my interest in reader response and in consideration of socioeconomic factors, the two local High Schools selected for this study draw students from different ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. In this decision, the researcher drew on findings in the reviewed literature that suggested that socioeconomic status influences the literacy practices and experiences of readers (Cherland, 1994; Heath, 1983; Radway, 1984). The

advice of local High School and Middle School principals was sought to aid in the selection of the two sites.

In Phase One, I met for 5-10 minutes with the participants at their respective schools to administer the questionnaire during the first few minutes of class time. At Site A, the participants filled out the surveys on the gymnasium floor; at Site B, we convened in an empty foyer where, again, the girls completed the survey while sitting on the floor. I reiterated that completion of the questionnaire was optional and explained briefly that the study involved teenaged girls and their reading. A copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix A.

To each of the questionnaires, a slim strip of paper was stapled that served as a consent form on which the respondents could indicate their willingness to participate in Phases Two and Three of the study. I explained that I was looking for certain reading practices and once I read through the questionnaires I would contact the girls who had both indicated the specific area of interest I was investigating, and had completed the consent form attachments. I explained that I would make arrangements to meet with the participants who met these two criteria the following day, at the beginning of the lunch hour. This would be accomplished through either posting the list of names outside the office door or having the names read over the afternoon and morning announcements. When we met, I explained, I would elaborate the tasks that would be involved in the next two phases or parts of the study.

After collecting the questionnaires, I read through them to identify participants whose responses fulfilled certain criteria. Naturally, the first of these was the completion of the consent form attachment. From the collection of questionnaires with completed

consent forms, I identified participants who indicated in response to question 2, that they read teen magazines and, in response to question 4, reported that they subscribed or purchased magazines regularly. Finally, I looked for those respondents who identified *Seventeen* magazine in question 6, as one of the magazines that they bought or read. I also accepted the titles of the next two top selling teen magazines, *YM* and *Teen*, but I was pleased to find that a large number of participants cited *Seventeen*.

As it turned out, I was able to identify several more candidates than required. At Site A, 20 participants were identified and at Site B, 18. As stated, I submitted the list of names of the girls who were eligible for participation in Phases Two and Three to the school administrators who arranged to have the names read over the PA systems both later that afternoon and the following morning. Together, we also negotiated a convenient time and place for a brief meeting on the following day with the eligible participants.

Description of The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed so as not to be onerous or invasive. It was broadly framed and very straightforward so that it would not be perceived as 'test-like'. To this end, I also chose to print the questionnaire in a single column so that it took up only half the width of the page, but covered both sides. This achieved an appearance less formal than a full sheet. The consent attachment, on which interested participants could sign their names, was an even slimmer strip of paper stapled to the questionnaire. Rather than including a tear off section on the bottom of the actual questionnaire sheet, I felt that this format physically separated the consent form from the body of the questionnaire, the

rationale for this being that it allowed participants greater freedom in choosing whether or not to be involved in the subsequent phases of the study. Had the consent form been more visibly a part of the actual questionnaire, this might have obligated participants to fill out the consent so as not to leave part of the sheet incomplete. This procedure also ensured that the participants' names were not written on the questionnaires, but were submitted on a sheet that could be removed.

Concerning the questionnaire items, these were kept to a minimum of seven. The key identifier questions that served to identify those who read teen magazines regularly were simply embedded. It is important to clarify the designation of 'regular' reader of teen magazines: I have defined this as someone who reads these publications at least six times a year. This decision is based in part on research conducted by Duke (1994) who used a benchmark of six or more times per year to designate regular readership. It also takes into account the amount of disposable income that teen girls of this age might have to spend on magazines in that a regular reader might only be able to purchase a copy six times a year rather than on a monthly basis.

The assumption underlying the use of the questionnaire to determine regular readers is that the participants will respond to the questionnaire truthfully when they provide information regarding their reading behavior. Thus this method carries all of the limitations of self-reported data. The questionnaire was reviewed and revised before the final format was achieved.

Phase Two

In Phase Two of the study, I met with the participants identified from the questionnaire results, the day after it had been administered. I elaborated on the next

phases of the study in greater detail and asked which girls were interested in participating further. At Site A, 16 of the 20 possible candidates that I had listed, attended the meeting. After explaining the tasks involved in Phases Two and Three of the study, I explained that I would require five participants for the next two parts of the study, but would select six in case someone was ill or absent on our discussion group day. I asked interested girls to write their names on slips of paper so I could randomly select six names. All sixteen girls present submitted their names.

After confirming with the chosen six participants that they were indeed eager and willing to participate further, I thanked those whose names had not been selected for taking the time and effort to come to the meeting. Once the others had left, I distributed copies of the April 1998 issue of *Seventeen* magazine and a reader response log to the participants. Each reader response log had a cover sheet with directions concerning how to use the logs and we reviewed these in detail.

Things proceeded quite differently at Site B, as only six of the fourteen participants that I had listed came to the scheduled meeting. I attribute this poor showing to a couple of factors: for one, the participant list was not read over the PA system the previous afternoon; and secondly, several special events were taking place that morning. Notwithstanding, although different in terms of number, the girls who attended this meeting were as enthusiastic as those who had attended the meeting at Site A and all six girls were eager to be involved in Phases Two and Three. I distributed the magazines and response logs to the group, explained the tasks involved, and we scheduled a morning meeting one week later when I would collect the logs.

Reader Response Log Task

In order to guide the reading of the magazine without directing the reading, only one articulated task request was made. Namely, participants were asked to record information for one week about their reading of the magazine in the log. In short, this entailed recording the day of the week on which they read a selection from the magazine, citing the page numbers of these selections, and commenting on the text in the space provided. Note taking, it was explained, could be done at any time and did not have to occur at the time of reading. I clarified that spelling, punctuation, and choice of language (i.e., slang) need not be a concern. The task duration was one week, at the end of which I collected and examined the logs.

Regarding immediacy as important in maintaining participant interest and in keeping the material fresh in the participants' minds, I scheduled our lunch hour discussion group meetings on the same day as I collected the logs. This also ensured that those participants who submitted logs in the morning would be present during the lunch hour of the same day and this lent continuity and relevance to the discussion process.

Phase Three

In Phase Three, I met over the noon hour for 40-60 minutes with Groups 1 and 2. I provided pizza, beverages, and sweets for the participants and we spent the first few minutes of the meeting chatting, which set a relaxed and informal tone. I chose not to eat because I wanted to focus on the discussion. I reminded the participants that I would be audio taping the discussion and that relevant parts of it would be transcribed for use in the

analysis. To provide closure, participants were asked to discuss the experience of participating in the study.

It must be noted that the tape recorder failed to work properly at Site A despite being repeatedly tested prior to my arrival at the school. After several attempts at correcting the problem, I asked the group if I could record the conversation in writing and explained that this would mean I would have to stop the flow of conversation at times to ask for clarification or repetition. The participants seemed not at all bothered by the change and were in fact quite supportive. During the discussion I recorded extensive notes and returned home immediately afterwards to transcribe the data as fully as possible. No technical problems were experienced with Group 2 and that meeting was tape recorded and transcribed.

The data collected from this phase of the study, namely, the relevant portions transcribed from the discussion group meetings, have comprised the major data pieces of this study. The participants' reader response logs have been examined in conjunction with the comments that were made during the discussions. Moreover, in several instances, discussion group comments have been supported by references to the responses that the participants provided in the reader response logs

As a grounded theory study, the categories used in the analysis have been derived from the data and then compared with themes and findings from the reviewed research literature. Both the logs and discussion group data were analyzed for content themes and examined for emerging categories and patterns. Relevant portions were transcribed as needed to support the reporting of the analysis. Themes or topics for discussion that

emerged from the reading of the response logs guided the researcher in directing the discussion in this phase of the study.

Rationale for Participant Selection

Concerning the recruitment of participants for this study, the researcher has chosen to study the reader responses of adolescent females aged 13-15. The rationale for selecting this particular age range was based on a number of considerations, primarily that teen magazine publishers identify it as the most common age of their readers. This decision was further influenced by the reviewed literature in which study participants have been identified as 12-16 years of age, or as grade 6-11 students. The choice of grade 9 participants (aged 13-15) then, falls roughly in the middle of the spread found in the research (Duke, 1994; Finders, 1996; Frazer, 1987; McRobbie, 1978). The exception to this is found in the work of Evans et al. (1991) who noted that the bulk of top-selling teenzine readers are 10 to 14 years old. However, *Seventeen's* readers tend to belong to a slightly higher age range (12-16), with the bulk of articles and features in aimed at an audience whose not-too-distant futures include acquiring driver's licenses and part time jobs. Consequently, selecting the age range of 13 to 15 seemed most appropriate.

The chosen age range also reflects a consideration of the large body of literature concerning adolescent females that suggests that the onset of puberty is a particularly tumultuous time for many young women. According to researcher Carol Gilligan (1991), at the onset of puberty, girls who at age 11 seemed bossy, driven and outspoken, turn inward and go underground at age 12 and 13, becoming, for a period, more susceptible to external voices and influences (p. 11). In effect, the threshold of adolescence seems to be

a critical time in the identity formation of young girls (Douglas, 1995; Faludi, 1991; Orenstein, 1994;). Hence, both the average age of *Seventeen's* readers, and the indications in the literature that early adolescent years comprise a particularly tumultuous period for girls were strong factors underlying my decision to work with participants aged 13-15.

Rationale for Using Groups of Five Participants

As stated, the researcher has chosen to work with a group of five to six self-declared regular teenzine readers in each of the high school settings. This decision resulted primarily from my concerns regarding the nature of the participant/researcher relationship and with the participants' comfort.

Having taught for several years in intermediate classrooms, I've had the opportunity to work with students in a variety of group situations, and understand that several factors must be considered when forming groups in order to maximize the effectiveness of the experience. Hence, the nature or content of the anticipated discussion, and my presence as a stranger and the influence that might exert on the participants' freedom to express themselves, merited serious consideration. Taking into account that a smaller, more intimate group might be oppressive or stifling, and that a larger group might enable non-participation for some members, I concluded that a group size of five would work well. It would be large enough to ensure diversity of input, while at the same time, not *so* small that participants would feel that they were put on the spot to offer feedback, or fill in the silences.

Another consideration was that meeting with the participants in a situation where I was the minority presence, would serve to minimize my influence as the adult or

authority presence in the group. In effect, the balance of five participants to one adult would place me, at least to some degree, in the background. Consistent with this, it felt important to meet with the participants in their schools. Building rapport and making the participants comfortable, I believed, would be facilitated by my status as a visitor or outsider to their school community, and would hopefully contribute to their freedom to express ideas and opinions.

Rationale for Choosing Only Regular Readers for Participation

The option to form mixed groups of readers and non-readers of teen magazines was not chosen as the aim of this investigation was to explore specifically, how regular readers actually read the text of teen magazines. Had the discussion groups included girls who were not regular readers, the possibility existed that this would create a dynamic that might intimidate regular readers and consequently limit or close down the discussion. Were non-readers to express negative opinions of the text or its audience, and thus silence regular readers, I feared the experience that I was interested in exploring would be compromised. Recognizing that my own unfamiliar presence, and the fact that the discussion would be tape recorded might constrain the discussion, I did not wish to add potential dissention or conflict of interest to the mix.

Rationale for the Use of Response Logs

The reading task and response logs were included in the study design with several purposes in mind. For one, the tasks gave the participants a common experience. Secondly, they yielded several themes that were used to support the discussion that

occurred in Phase Three of the study. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the use of the response logs as a data gathering device aided me in conducting the discussion groups in a way that placed me in the role of a facilitator rather than a leader or director. Indeed, according to Carspecken (1996) attention to the role of the discussion group leader is absolutely critical in conducting an effective and successful discussion group.

In his text, *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research*, Carspecken (1996) argues that of central concern is that group discussions should be facilitated, and not led. To this end he insists that "all interventions in the discussion should make references to what someone in the group has said and should emphasize vocabulary used by the participants" (p.163). Thus, a prepared list of discussion topics based on my own concerns was a possibility, but would have been incompatible with a study design aimed at giving participants the opportunity to drive the discussion, and the research, whenever possible. Indeed, drawing discussion topics from the participants' reader response logs enabled the investigation to originate from material that was subject driven rather than researcher driven.

Before I met with the two discussion groups I had determined not to read the April 1998 issue of *Seventeen* because I didn't want to develop my own notions about the articles or features before the participants could express their ideas. Once I received the reader response logs I read through them and looked specifically for the features and stories that the participants had addressed. To guide the discussion groups, I began with the things that the participants had read and remarked on in common. This approach had several advantages. Foremost, it enabled the participants to discuss the things they had already thought and written about. Moreover, because the discussion was generated from

the participants' thoughts and ideas and not from my own, it allowed me to pose questions about the magazine's content in a fairly unobtrusive and neutral way, for example, "A lot of you read the teen pregnancy article. I'd like to hear more about that."

When I met with the second discussion group, I had already heard the input from the first group and consequently had gained some information about what was in the text. Mindful of this difference, I tried to minimize it by not reading or reviewing the transcript of the first meeting and I believe I was able to approach the second discussion group in much the same state of unfamiliarity of the text as I had the first group. The challenge of remaining unaware of the text's content while conducting a series of discussion groups is now something I would like to learn more about. The methods by which researchers counteract the effects of learning things about the text and carrying that knowledge from group to group, I imagine is problematic for all who engage in this type of study.

The discussion groups revolved around the topics that the participants had mentioned in common, or that two or three had addressed. I had a list of these with me to guide the discussion, and I began each discussion group by listing the things that many of them had written about in the reader response logs. Then, I brought up some of the most commonly mentioned articles and topics and let the group take the discussion where it led them. As we moved from topic to topic, the participants jumped at times to other aspects of the magazine and in most instances the discussion was allowed to wander according to the participants' directions. When a topic appeared to be exhausted or we strayed quite far from the text, I referred back the notes I had taken from the participants' response logs and initiated discussion on another of the topics written there. When I wanted elaboration on something that a participant had mentioned, I asked for more detail.

To maintain the flow of conversation during the discussion groups, I also decided against having participants complete discrete paper and pencil tasks, such as Likert Scales, during the discussion group meeting. Not only would such tasks be researcher-driven, but they might have instilled a certain formality or resembled school tasks too closely. Choosing not to break the flow of conversation with discrete, individual tasks, and utilizing the themes that emerged from the data provided a flexible, and malleable discussion framework.

In this sense, the study is grounded in the data provided by the subjects. As a bottom-up design, the study explored the participants' perspectives in order to generate data that were both individual (response log task) and collective (discussion group) in the sense that the participants have the opportunity to respond to text themes together.

This reader response log task was designed to be an open-ended response probe. To avoid constraining or unnecessarily limiting the participants' responses, an effort was made to keep the instructions for completing the log to a minimum. It also allowed participants to read and reflect on the text at their leisure. Notwithstanding, I acknowledge that this task was not a naturalistic one and as such, observer effect was unavoidable. However, it is hoped that the task was sufficiently open-ended to permit a reasonably natural and relaxed reading situation for participants.

Opportunity for Providing Feedback from the Study to Participants

At the end of the discussion group sessions I invited participants to meet with me once I had written up my findings to discuss the research further, because I believe it is vital that participants have the opportunity to reflect on the study and their own

contributions to it. The purpose of reconvening was not for data collection, but rather to give the participants the opportunity to share their perceptions of the study, ask questions about the research or to discuss teen magazines further. In the interim between the Phase Three and the completion of the study, I delivered a letter and small treat to the girls and thanked them again for their input.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study

One of the strengths of this study is the way in which it differs in design and focus from those reviewed in the literature. For one, while other studies have dealt solely with either text analysis or reader response, this exploration includes both components. As stated previously, the researcher believes that both components are critical to a well-rounded and comprehensive look at the reader and text relationship.

Another strength--and this could also be considered a limitation-- is my own experience as a former dedicated reader (and subsequent non-reader) of teen magazines. In many ways this experience with the text has given me insight into the format and characteristics of the genre, the appeal it has for its audience, what it offers to them, and also a familiarity with how *Seventeen* has changed over time. Naturally, personal experience with the text could be seen as a limitation, especially since at some point in adolescence I made a conscious decision to stop purchasing and reading teen magazines. However, if this experience has interfered, I think it has only made me more aware of the need to avoid allowing my own perceptions of the text, positive or negative, to bias the study.

Close on the heels of the issue of personal experience with the text, is the effect of having expectations regarding the participants' responses to the text. Perhaps a strength of this study was that I did not have any particular expectations concerning the participants' responses to the text. What I did expect to find, however, was contradiction in all aspects of their responses: contradiction between the actual text and its interpretation; between the participants' understandings and readings of the same material, between what a participant wrote in her log and what she said during discussion, and contradictions voiced within the individual comments themselves. Finally, I expected contradiction because none of the research conducted thus far has been able to produce a single picture of teen interpretation of magazine text. Indeed, even when the girls in Duke's study (1995) resisted certain messages, they were later found to have internalized them to a marked degree.

In the reviewed literature, concerning popular print media for teen girls, several researchers expressed the belief that young girls may be very vulnerable to the messages contained in teenzines (Duke, 1995; Evans, 1990; Evans et al., 1991; Finders, 1996; McRobbie, 1978; Peirce, 1991, 1993; Pipher, 1994). Incidentally, as stated earlier, some of these same researchers also suggested that oppositional readings of magazine text, while perhaps not likely, were not impossible (Duke, 1995; Evans, 1990; Evans et al., 1991; McRobbie, 1978; Peirce, 1991, 1993). Those who have researched romance fiction for teens also propose that this mass genre exerts a powerful socializing influence over its audience (Cherland, 1994; Christian-Smith, 1993; Radway, 1984).

But there is another viewpoint, and that is that readers of teenzines are not as susceptible to print media messages as believed (Ceffalio, 1994; Livingston-Webber,

1994; Frazer, 1987). These researchers have upheld the notion that teenzine readers, in fact, pick and choose the messages they absorb from the text and thus take a much more active role in interpreting and filtering the text messages.

I tend to align myself with this camp. My own assumptions regarding the nature of the responses to the text are based in large part on my own experience with teenzines and how I read and responded to them. Certainly, I absorbed some of the messages I encountered, but never accepted the text *carte blanche*. Several prominent feminist writers (Douglas, 1997; Faludi, 1991; Orenstein, 1994), share this same experience of both accepting and resisting messages in popular print media, describing these messages as being at once appealing and repulsive, irresistible and laughable.

Another strength of this investigation is the consideration that has been given to researcher-participant interaction. I invested a great deal of effort in speaking with colleagues who have conducted research using small group discussions. Reviewing the methodology of focus groups (Frey, Botan, Friedman and Kreps, 1991; Jensen and Jankowski, 1991) has been helpful in describing how to form questions and to initiate discussion with as little leading as possible. Consultation with Communications Instructor, Ms. Mavis Jones, of Simon Fraser University has also been instrumental in gaining an understanding of the type of questioning and guidance that allow for the most effective discussions, while preserving the voice and direction of the participants.

There were strengths and limitations inherent in the data gathering methods that I selected and these must be addressed. I drew heavily on the work of John Cresswell (1994) in considering the merits and drawbacks of these methods, and consulted his work concerning qualitative methodology data collection types and their advantages and

limitations (p. 150-1.) As to the use of reader response logs, Cresswell suggests that the advantages of using documents such as journals or logs are that they enable the researcher to obtain the language and words of the informants and provide access to data that participants have approached with thoughtfulness. The disadvantages are that participants might not provide authentic or accurate information or complete the exercise thoroughly.

As for the use of discussion groups, several advantages were given. For one, they allow the researcher to gather information when direct observation of the informants is not possible. Secondly, discussions provide the opportunity for participants to provide historical information. Lastly, this method gives the researcher some control over the line of questioning.

In *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (1996), P.F. Carspecken describes some distinct advantages of the use of group discussions or interviews, over single subject interviews (p. 163). He suggests that a single subject may have trouble finding words to express views in her own vernacular. In a group of peers, however, she may be able to express ideas more effectively and with greater ease due to the opportunity to bounce ideas back and forth with those who share her culture.

Of course there are also limitations associated with the use of discussion groups. Certainly, they do not permit data gathering in a natural field setting. The constraints of the designated setting, any tasks given, and the presence and input of the researcher all convey the risk of biasing responses. Finally, that not all members in a group are equally articulate, perceptive or willing to express ideas and opinions, presents difficulties.

In order to contend with these constraining factors and the implications they have on the validity and reliability of the data collected, triangulation was used in the methodological design. The use of triangulation, or finding convergence between different data sources, different collection methods, different researchers and their findings has been suggested as a means to lend validity to a study (Cresswell, 1994; Frey, et al., 1991; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). Designing this study so that I could collect reader response data in two distinct ways--through an individual written task and a group discussion task--was aimed at eradicating some of the problems inherent in each separate method. In effect, participants had the opportunity to elaborate on the data in the response logs during the discussion group meetings and conversely, data gathered from the discussions were considered along with the response log entries.

To achieve triangulation, Cresswell (1994) further advises researchers to discuss with participants, plans to receive feedback or, "take the categories or themes back to the informants and ask whether the conclusions are accurate" (p. 158). In this study, I have utilized themes from the response logs to generate discussion in the small group setting. This allowed participants the opportunity to expand upon, clarify, and revise data provided in the logs.

In summary, the combined use of textual analysis, individual and group tasks, and the analysis of both documents and group discussions have been included in this study design to minimize the disadvantages inherent in any one method, and to permit the advantages of each data collection design to enhance the findings.

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CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion

In reporting the findings from this study, I have organized the data into three separate sections. The first of these is comprised of the data derived from my content analysis of *Seventeen*. Subsequently, in the second section, I have reported the data gathered from the questionnaires that were administered in Phase One of the study. In the final section, data collected from the discussion group meetings, supported by that gathered from the reader response logs, have been reported.

Content Analysis of *Seventeen*

As stated in the review of the literature, research in the field of adolescent girls and teen magazines seems to have been split into two camps: the study of magazine content (Evans, 1990; Evans et al., 1991; McRobbie, 1978; Peirce, 1991,1993), and the study of reader response (Duke, 1995; Finders, 1997; Frazer, 1987). Also elaborated in that section were the various reasons for my concern that this dichotomy in the research is problematic. Consequently, because I believe it is vital to couple textual analysis with the investigation of reader response, I have examined several aspects of *Seventeen*. The analysis was conducted on 16 issues published between July 1996 and April 1998. In addition, because the April 1998 issue was used in the study, and responded to by the participants, I have included a description of its content at the end of this section.

As a starting point for my own content analysis, I drew heavily on the work of Evans et al. (1991) who studied the content of issues of *Sassy*, *YM*, and *Seventeen* that were published in 1988-1989. As detailed in Chapter Two, Evans et al. (1991) investigated the following aspects of these magazines: the topics dealt with in the primary articles; the types of products that were advertised; the percentage of magazine space given to advertising; and the racial representation of models portrayed in these publications.

While in my own textual analyses, I have investigated similar areas to those of Evans et al., in most instances my methods for analysing these features has differed, as will be explained in greater detail in the following.

Analysis of Magazine Content by Topic

To begin with, like Evans et al. (1991), I also examined magazine content by topic. However, instead of analysing the articles and features listed in the magazines' tables of contents as they had done, I chose to pay attention to the feature articles listed on the magazine covers. The rationale behind this decision is that the magazine is a product and as such, it is marketed first and foremost by its cover. Hence, what *Seventeen's* publishers believe will attract readers/buyers will be displayed there, like a heart on the magazine's sleeve, so to speak.

In Table 2, the results of the analysis of cover articles by topic are given. I have divided the topics into four categories. The *Physical Appearance* category includes articles pertaining to fashion, beauty, make-up, hair, and body image. The *Heterosexual Romance/Relationships* category includes articles on romantic love, boys, dating, and the

romance stories of teens and celebrities. In the *Other Relationships/Social Issues* category are features about friends, family, self-growth (i.e., personality, goals developing interests), and social issues (i.e., teen pregnancy, homelessness, substance abuse). Lastly, the *Entertainment Industry/Celebrity Profiles* category includes articles about popular music, movies, TV series, and interviews with celebrities. In total, 126 features were listed on the 16 magazine covers.

Table 2. Distribution of Feature Articles Listed on the Covers of Seventeen Magazine Categorized By Content Themes

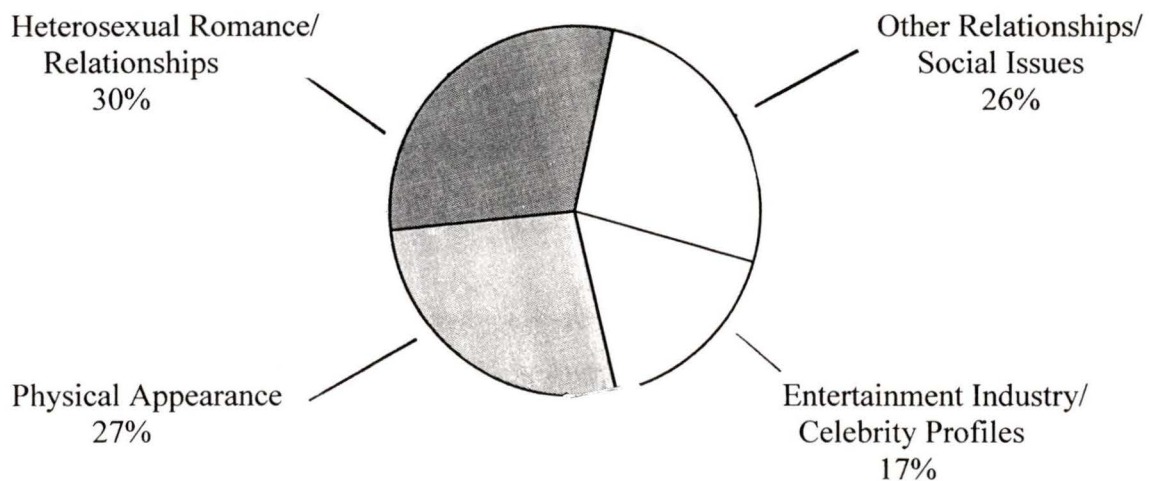
Issue dates	July 96	Aug 96	Sept 96	Oct 96	Dec 96	Feb 97	Mar 97	May 97	June 97	Aug 97	Oct 97	Nov 97	Dec 97	Fbe 98	Mar 98	Apr 98
Features Pertaining to Physical Appearance and Fashion									Total Number of Articles in this Category = 34							
Fashion/Beauty	††	††	†				††		††	††	††		†	††	†	††
Makeup	†				†							†			†	†
Hair		†	†	†	†	†	†	†								
Body Image			†						†		†					
Features Pertaining To Heterosexual Romance/Relationships									Total Number of Articles in this Category = 37							
Love/Boys	††	††	††	†	††	††	††	†	†	††	†	†	†	††	††	†
Dating						QZ	†						QZ	†		
Romance Stories		†	†	†		††								†		††
Features Pertaining To Other Relationships, Social Issues									Total Number of Articles in this Category = 33							
Friends and Family			QZ			†					†				†	
Self-growth/ Personality	†	QZ	†	QZ	QZ	†	QZ	†		††	QZ	††		†		
Social Issues or concerns	†	†	†	††	††			††			†	†	†		†	†
Features Pertaining To Celebrities And The Entertainment Industry									Total Number of Articles in this Category = 22							
Music/film/TV			†		†			††	†	†			†			
Celebrity Interview Or Profile	††			M	†		†	M	†	†		M	†	†	††	†

† = One Article or Feature QZ = Article Or Feature Is A Quiz M = Interview Features A Female Model

Note. 16 Issues Dated Between July 1996 And April 1998 were analysed. (Total Number of Feature Articles = 126)

To graphically illustrate the distribution of articles by category, I have converted the information from Table 2 into a pie chart (see Figure 1) that shows the percentage of the articles in each category. From their own investigation, Evans et al. (1991) concluded that fashion and heterosexual dating concerns dominated each of the publications. My findings concur as the categories pertaining to appearance and heterosexual relationships together comprise 57% of the cover features listed.

Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Distribution of Articles Listed on Seventeen Magazine Covers by Content Themes



Note. Sixteen issues of Seventeen dated between July 1996 and April 1998 were analysed.

Analysis of Page Space Dedicated to Advertising in *Seventeen*

I also investigate the percentage of magazine space occupied by advertising. Of the three publications surveyed by Evans et al., *Seventeen* had the highest percentage of page space dedicated to advertising, at 57%. My analysis revealed that the page space given to advertising in the 16 issues analysed ranged from 36.9% to 57%, with an overall average of 50.7%. Thus, half of the publication is dedicated to advertising space (see Table 3).

Table 3. Analysis of Advertising Content of *Seventeen* Magazine

Issue Date and Total Number of Pages	#of pages of ads	# of pages of content	Percentage of pages of ads to total pages	
July 1996	130	48	82	48/130 = 36.9%
August 1996	270	145	130	145/270 = 53.7%
September 1996	270	154	116	154/270 = 57.0%
October 1996	190	102	88	101/190 = 53.2%
December 1996	168	94	74	94/190 = 56.0%
February 1997	144	58	86	58/144 = 40.3%
March 1997	254	118	136	118/254 = 46.5%
May 1997	176	97	79	97/176 = 55.1%
June 1997	168	87	81	87/168 = 51.7%
August 1997	252	126	126	126/252 = 50%
October 1997	202	114	88	114/202 = 56.4%
November 1997	192	101	91	101/192 = 52.6%
December 1997	178	92	86	92/178 = 51.7%
February 1998	150	60	90	60/150 = 40.0%
March 1998	254	113*	141	113/254 = 44.5%
April 1998	192	104	88	104/192 = 54.2%
Total Pages	3192	1618	1574	1618/3192 = 50.7%

Note. The total number of pages includes front and back covers, both sides. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Analysis of Products Advertised in *Seventeen*

An examination of the types of products advertised in *Seventeen* was also conducted by Evans et al. (1991), the results of which are detailed in Chapter Two. Their analysis, however, provided a general, rather than specific description of the products advertised in the magazines they investigated. Evans et al. divided the advertised products into four broad categories: fashion and beauty, entertainment, personal services, health and education. In my own analysis, an effort has been made to list the products specifically as can be seen in Table 4.

For this particular aspect of the content analysis, I surveyed only 9 of the 16 issues selected since this task was quite labour and time intensive. I listed and then made a tally of the different types of products advertised in each of the 9 issues. By this I do not mean that I listed each brand name, but rather I considered the type of product advertised. For example, one of the product types listed is perfume, so each time I encountered an advertisement for a perfume of any brand, I entered it on the chart. Subsequently, I subdivided these products under the headings *Fashion/Beauty Items* (clothes, make-up, bath products, and weight loss products), and *Interests and Activities* (sports wear, equipment, entertainment, books, food, and travel).

I have also included a category designated in Table 4 as *Back pages-small ads*, for the products and services that are advertised in the small ads pages located towards the end of the magazine. Typically, this section is comprised of 8 to 10 black and white pages each holding 3 to 10 small ads, and the same ads appear each and every month. In fact, I have to add that without a word of exaggeration, I am certain that I can recall some of the ads in this section from my own magazine reading days. While this rather

cluttered and unattractive section of the magazine is, I suspect, skimmed over by its readers, I have included it in the analysis both to be thorough, and also to show something of the nature of this particular segment of the magazine's advertising content.

From the tally of advertised products, I found the totals for each of these three categories quite revealing. In the 9 issues examined, there were 680 advertisements in the *Fashion and Beauty Items* category and 123 in the *Interests and Activities* category. In the microcosm of the small ads section, 366 products or services were advertised, and of these, 145 pertained to fashion and appearance (modeling agencies and schools, beauty contests, fashion colleges, cosmetics, and jewelry) and an astounding number of advertisements (78!) were for weight loss camps. Again, the predominance of beauty products evident in my findings, echoes those of Evans et al. (1991) who noted the fashion and beauty ads far out-stripped those for any other product types.

Table 4. Products Advertised in *Seventeen* Magazine: An Analysis of 9 Issues Dated From July 1996 to June 1997

Issue Dates	Jul 96	Au 96	Sep 96	Oct 96	De 96	Fe 97	Mr 97	Ma 97	Jn 97	Totals
Fashion/Beauty Items										
Makeup	4	15	16	14	7	10	8	15	22	111
Cleansers/acne products	3	9	11	7	8	2	8	13	6	67
Toothpaste		1	2	2		1		1		7
Perfume	2	8	11	15	13	4	10	8	11	82
Feminine products	5	3	5	3	1		3	4	7	31
Hair care/appliances	8	15	14	15	13	11	14	8	14	112
Hair removal	6	10	5	2	2	1	1	5	5	37
Deodorant	1	1			1			1	1	5
Contact lenses		3	4	1	1		2	2	1	14
Weight loss, fitness	1	1						1		3
Breast pad inserts		1			2		1			4
Nail polish	1	5	2	4	1	3	4	4	4	28
Jewelry	1	1	2	2		2	1	1		10
Clothes		27	66	13	21	12	37	15	8	119
Shoes	3	7	7	1	3	2	5	3	2	33
Bras/underwear		2	2		2		2			8
Watches			2		4	2		1		9
	Category Total = 680									
Interests, activities										
Sportswear/bras		1	2	1		1		3	2	10
Sports shoes	2	4	2	1	1	1		2	1	14
Sports equipment		1								1
Seventeen subscriptions			2	2	1	2	1	1	2	11
Books	1				2		1		1	5
Tv programs		1	5	5						11
Film/ video	1	1				2				4
Music		5	4	3	2	1	1	1	1	18
Backpacks		3	2	1	2					8
Food/Drink*	2	2	2	4	4	2	3	3	1	23
Travel			1							1
Cars									1	1
Furniture/household**		1	1		1	1	1			5
US Army Recruitment							1		1	2
Children's Fund Charity	1	1	1			1	1			5
Miscellaneous	1	1	1					1		4
	Category Total = 123									

Table 4.

Back pages-small ads										
Interests, Activities										
Priv.schools/exchanges		4				2	3	2		11
H/Sch diploma program	3	4				4	6	3	2	22
Adoption agency	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	1		11
Writing/poetry/art contests	2	2			1	2	2	3	3	15
Photos		3			1		3	2	2	11
Miscellaneous	1	3	2	2	2	5	6	5	2	28
Camps	9	2	7	9	7	5	3	2	1	45
	Category Total = 143									
Fashion/Beauty										
Weight Loss Camps	13	2	10	14	12	3	8	8	8	78
Beauty Products/Fashion	2	3	1			6	7	6	8	33
Model/fashion school/beauty contests	3	15	4	2	1	16	19	12	9	112
	Category Total = 223									
	Total Number of Products in Back pages Category = 366									

Note. * foods advertised include milk, soft drinks, candy, and chocolate chips
 ** furniture advertised includes hope chests, and silverware

Analysis of Human Photographic Content By Racial Representation

The final component of my content analysis of *Seventeen* concerns the human photographic content of the publication in terms of the race and gender of the human subjects featured within its pages. Again, the work of Evans et al. (1991) inspired the decision to examine this aspect of the magazine, and again, my analysis of this aspect of the text has been conducted quite differently. Evans et al. (1991) counted the number of females and males that were white and non-white and determined that in all three of the publications they surveyed, the human photographic presence was overwhelming white and female. They also found that of the three, *Seventeen* contained the smallest percentage of non-white photographic subjects (8.5%).

After conducting a straightforward tally of white and non-white photographic subjects, I found that the percentage of non-whites was between 15% and 21%, with an overall average of 22% (see Table 5). This is an increase from the 8.5% found by Evans et al. (1991).

Table 5. Analysis of the Percentage of Non-White Human Photographic Subjects in *Seventeen*: An Analysis of 16 Issues Dating Between July 1996 and April 1998

White subjects	Non-white subjects	Total of all subjects	Non-white subjects/total subjects
3212	895	4107	$895/4107= 22\%$

Notwithstanding the discovery that one-fifth of the human photographic subjects were non-white, after scanning each issue, I was left with a strong sense that the non-white presence was still extremely rare. To better understand this overriding impression, I designed a different way to approach the analysis of the racial representation of human photographic subjects that departed from a simple tally of the white and non-white subjects in the magazine. In my own analysis, I separated the investigation of human photographic content into two parts: race and gender. First, I looked at racial representation in the magazine.

I divided the magazine content into 4 sections (*ads, fashion and beauty features, other content* which includes celebrity and music information, and the *School Zone* feature). I then tallied the white and non-white subjects in each of these sections, with interesting results (see Table 6). The bulk of the non-white subjects were featured in School Zone and celebrity and music sections. Significantly, the layout format for these two sections is such that 5-25 people can be shown on one page. For example, one page in School Zone contains a photo of a 23-member male swim team gathered around the pool; a page in the music section shows the members of 4 different rap groups (28 people).

In contrast, the full size and thus full impact photos of individuals tend to be found in the ads and fashion spreads sections where only 1-3 subjects appear on a page. I contend that despite the fact that a simple count of the race of the photographic subjects in the magazine revealed that the non-white presence in the publication has increased, this is deceptive. Ultimately, the visual impact of the magazine rests on the impressions

made by the full-page photos, and this leaves the reader, at least this reader, the sense that the predominant presence in *Seventeen* remains overwhelmingly white.

Table 6 reveals that the non-white presence in the *ads* and *fashion and beauty* categories is comparatively low, 14% and 15% respectively. While this is an increase from the 8.5% calculated by Evans et al. (1991), it is not as pronounced an increase as an overall tally of racial representation revealed. As indicated previously, I found that 22% of the human photographic subjects in the magazines I examined were non-white. In sharp contrast, the percentages for non-white subjects in the *other content* and *School Zone* sections are quite high; 26% and 43% respectively.

Table 6. Racial Representation of Human Photographic Subjects in 4 Distinct Content Areas of *Seventeen* Magazine

Magazine Sections/ Content Areas	White Photographic Subjects	Non-white Photographic Subjects	Total Photographic subjects	Percentage of Non-white to total subjects
Ads	1321	214	1535	214/1535 =14%
Fashion and Beauty	536	95	631	95/631 =15%
Other Content	1100	396	1496	396/1496 =26%
<i>School Zone</i> Feature	255	190	445	190/445 =43%

Analysis of Human Photographic Subjects By Gender And Activity

The final content analysis concerns the gender of the photographic subjects in the magazine. While Evans et al. (1991) tallied the number of female and male photographic subjects, I felt that an analysis of the activities engaged in by female and male subjects would prove a more revealing examination of the portrayal of gender in the publication. My own count of females and males in the magazine revealed that in every *Seventeen* issue, there are a number of male photographic subjects, in fact 20 - 25% are male. Far more significant however, is that females and males are often shown in stereotypically gendered activities.

I conducted this particular analysis by counting the number of inactive versus active poses shown for each gender. I considered inactive poses to be those in which the subject's face, upper body, or full body were shown and the subject was engaged in no other activity aside from posing for the camera in a standing, sitting, lying, or crouching position. I categorized active photos quite liberally, as those in which the subject is engaged in *any* activity other than simply posing. Hence, I have included holding something, eating, straddling a bicycle, and even boy watching as active poses.

In Table 7, I have charted the data concerning model activity by gender from two of the issues that I analyzed. As this is a very lengthy and detailed analysis, in the interest of space, I have opted to include only the data from the May 1997 and April 1998 issues. Including the April 1998 issue also serves to present a more detailed picture of the magazine that the study participants read and responded to.

Table 7. Activities of Human Photographic Subjects by Gender in the May 1997
and April 1998 Issues of *Seventeen* Magazine

Activity of Photographic Subject May 1997 issue of <i>Seventeen</i>	# of Female Subjects Engaged in Activity	# of Male Subjects Engaged in Activity
Inactive Poses		
Photo of Face	45	14
Standing	81	18
Sitting	32	4
Crouching	2	2
Lying	1	1
Total Inactive Poses	151	39
Poses Involving Activity		
Hugging a female/placing arm on shoulder	11	5
Hugging a male/placing arm on shoulder	3	
Holding a boy's hand	2	
Holding a girl's hand		3
Hugging daughter (article on models and their mothers)	9	
Hugging mother	9	
Kissing a boy	1	
Dancing	8	
Touching eyelashes	1	
Looking at teacup with lipstick stain on it	1	
Touching own newly shaved legs	1	
Putting on lipstick	2	
Being made-up by makeup artist	2	
Selecting clothes/wardrobe	5	1
Touching own face makeup	2	
Putting on a hat	1	
Pointing to the ceiling	1	
Holding a globe	1	
Holding a book	1	
Holding a violin, laughing	1	
Leaning over violin player, laughing		1
Kicking soccer ball	1	
Running on soccer field	1	
Holding plush toy	2	
Admiring at a girl's hair		1
Doing leg stretches	2	
Winking at the camera	1	
Holding purse	1	
Holding up a tampon	1	

Holding up both fists/play fight manner	3	
Doing calisthenics/warm-ups	8	
Sitting holding a golf putter	1	
Sitting holding a skateboard	1	
Skateboarding in mid-air jump		2
Holding a volleyball	1	
Pointing to parts of TV studio	4	
Whispering secret into girl's ear	1	
Looking surprised by the secret	1	
Playing hackey sack		1
Writing in a notebook		1
Wearing silly blond wig		1
Sadly watching 3 couples embracing	1	
Balancing a cotton ball on the end of nose	1	
Bent over laughing holding cokes	3	
Rock climbing		1
Serving fast food for summer job	3	
Wearing costume for summer job		3
Touching hat brim	1	
Reading newspaper		1
Listening to walkman	2	
Floating underwater in pool	1	
Holding a puff of hair styling foam	1	
Checking hair and makeup in bathroom mirror	4	
Playing in school band	3	
Walking	3	3
Riding a scooter		1
Checking sharpness of fingernails	1	
Holding surfboard	3	
Surfing	7	
Paddling on surfboard	2	
Running holding surfboard	4	
Sun tanning	6	
Rinsing sand off skin	2	
Playing guitar	1	
Jumping	1	
Watching a girl dig in the sand	5	
Digging in the sand	1	
Touching daughter's hair	1	
Poking daughter playfully in ribs	1	
Looking at own modeling photos	2	
Eating ice cream	2	
Putting in mother's earrings for her	1	
Making funny faces	1	6
Leaning into friends laughing	3	
Total number of active poses	158	31

April 1998 Issue of *Seventeen*

Activity of Photographic Subject April 1998 issue of <i>Seventeen</i>	# of Female Subjects Engaged in Activity	# of Male Subjects Engaged in Activity
Inactive Poses		
Photo of Face	44	14
Standing	65	19
Sitting	24	11
Crouching		
Lying	7	1
Total Inactive Poses	140	45
Poses Involving Activity		
Hugging a female/placing arm on shoulder	8	5
Hugging a male/placing arm on shoulder	9	1
Holding a boy's hand	3	
Holding a girl's hand		3
Kissing a boy	1	
Holding end of bikini top string behind back	1	
Walking	4	
Touching own lipstick	1	
Combing fingers through hair	2	
Looking at a display in an art gallery	5	4
Walking down model runway	1	
Playing pinball	1	
Holding bag full of beach gear	2	
Swinging hair	1	
Adjusting antennae on TV		1
Lying on bed reading magazines	1	
Holding huge flower	1	
Holding a bouquet of flowers	1	
Looking angrily at boyfriend	1	
Draped over another girl's boyfriend	1	
Looking guiltily at girlfriend		1
Sitting in an army helicopter	1	
Crawling in tall grass in camouflage makeup	1	
Giving self tattoo with markers	1	
Jumping	1	
Jogging		1
Playing basketball		1
Rollerblading	1	
Cycling	1	
Sitting holding a soccer ball	1	
Singing into microphone	1	
Having a pillow fight	3	
Playing golf	1	

Training for track and field	3	
Running a race	2	
Cheating on a test	1	
Looking nervous/ scared of using tampons	1	
Bent over laughing holding cokes	3	
Pushing girls in a canoe		2
Being pushed in a canoe	2	
Dancing	3	3
Eating ice cream	1	
Straddling a bicycle	1	
Shopping at a mall	8	
Eating at the mall	2	
Holding a basketball	1	
Covering mouth, smiling	1	
Standing, but wearing some sports gear	2	
Total active poses	87	22

A glance at the figures provided in Table 7 reveals that females and males are portrayed in stereotypical ways in *Seventeen* magazine. Girls apply and touch up makeup, *hold* sports equipment more than they *play* with it, hug their female friends and hug and kiss their boyfriends, do calisthenics, and shop and try on clothes. Boys almost never touch or embrace their male friends, but they often hug their girlfriends. Boys don't wear makeup, but do occasionally pick out a shirt to wear, and they tend to actually use the sports equipment they pose with.

Further to this, the manner in which girls are portrayed when they do engage in a sport-related activity warrants closer scrutiny. To elaborate how females are shown in terms of activity, the May 1997 article on surfer girls offers a particularly telling example. I deliberately began the analysis of human photographic subjects by gender and activity with the May 1997 issue because it offered a feature on girls engaged in a sport. Under the impression that this promised a portrayal of active girls, I expected to find females shown in active poses.

In total, the issue contained 309 photos of females. However, in only 17 of those were the girls engaged in anything to do with surfing. (Incidentally, in all issues surveyed, 17 photos in one active pose category is the highest figure I've found.) Yet this was hardly a representation of active, sporty girls surfing. In truth, only 8 of the 17 poses in the surfing category showed the girls actually surfing. In the remaining photos, the "surfers" were shown rinsing sand off their skin, leaning against or carrying the surfboards, and sun bathing and relaxing on the beach or on the beach house porch. Essentially, the feature was a fashion spread with surfing as a backdrop to the real action, which was *wearing* surfing fashions. Each bikini and surf wear label was prominently displayed with captions like "beach bums," "bikini

babes" and "petal power" flanking the photos. Under these captions came information on prices and shopping locations where each bathing suit, pair of shorts, hat, sandal, and barrette could be purchased. Tellingly, not one surfboard price or outlet was listed. It was obvious that girls' fashion, and not sport, was on sale here.

Description of Content of the April 1998 Issue of *Seventeen* Magazine

The cover of the April issue is busy with multicoloured text. The title in fluorescent orange nearly matches the flowered dress that cover model Tyra Banks is wearing. Just above the title, *Seventeen*, a conspiratorial heading reads, "ppst! 25 things you gotta know about Leo," referring to actor Leonardo DiCaprio, one of the current Hollywood leading men and teen heartthrobs.

Underneath the title, the cover stories are listed. Running down the left-hand side of the page and flanking the contours of Tyra's photo, the cover stories are: *real-life couples: how they got together; hitting the mall: the clothes, the guys, the food court; spring fashion: great steals for \$40 and under; "I'm pregnant": 4 girls tell what they're going to do; and why we love matt damon and ben affleck*. Written just to the right of Tyra's picture and superimposed in part on her arm and torso reads: *book exclusive: Tyra on her bad dates and feeling great, win this dress; and the zit files; insta-fixes and real cures*.

Compared with the covers of the other 15 issues analyzed over the course of this study (July 1996 to April 1998), there is nothing at all out of the ordinary about the offerings presented on this particular cover. Stories about "hot guys" like Leo, real-life couples, fashions, profiles of models and details of their personal lives, and a

social issue article (this time it's teen pregnancy) along with words like *gotta* and *instafixes* and celebrity names written in lower case letters, are all standard fare.

What is remarkable about this cover, however, is that model Tyra Banks is black, and that she alone graces the magazine's front page. To date, I have seen only one other black woman on the cover of *Seventeen* (June 1997) and she was one of an ensemble of five models, three of whom were white and one Asian. Incidentally, I have seen no other Asian models on the magazine covers during the interval of this study.

In terms of advertising content, there are 192 pages in the April issue and over half of these, 54%, are taken up with advertising. Again, this is hardly remarkable; the average percentage of pages dedicated to advertising per issue is 50.7% (see Table 3). More information concerning the content of the April 1998 issue can also be gleaned from Table 7 in which the activities of all of the human photographic subjects in the issue have been detailed.

Questionnaire Data

As discussed, the use of the questionnaire in Phase One of this study was designed rather simply as an identification tool aimed at locating regular readers of teen magazines for participation in the subsequent phases of the research. Indeed, I had little intention of using the data from the survey for anything more than that. However, I did not anticipate the wealth of information that the questionnaire would yield about the participants' reading practices.

Questions that related directly to magazine reading choices and practices (2, 4, 6, and to a lesser extent, 7) were mixed with questions that concerned the girls' reading behaviors in a more general way (1, 3, and 5). Consequently, information gathered from the more general questions has less direct relevance to this particular study.

Notwithstanding, the responses to these more general items yielded data regarding the girls' reading that I found interesting and believe bear mentioning. In the discussion of the questionnaire data, the findings from these more general items will be addressed first. Subsequently, questionnaire data for questions 2,4,6 and 7 will be discussed.

Responses to Question 1

In question 1, the respondents were asked how much time they spent reading on an average day. Most girls in Group 1 responded that they read between 30 to 60 minutes per day, while in Group 2, most claimed that they read for less than 30 minutes per day (see Table 8).

Table 8. Questionnaire Data: Responses to Question 1

Question 1: On an average day, how much time do you spend reading? Do not count the reading you have to do for school.

a) Less than 30 minutes b) 30 minutes to 60 minutes c) More than 60 minutes

	a) >30 min	b) 30-60 min	c) <60 min	Don't read	No answer
Group 1 (N= 46)	37% (17/46)	46% (21/46)	13% (6/46)	2% (1/46)	2% (1/46)
Group 2 (N= 23)	65% (15/23)	22% (5/23)	13% (3/23)		

Responses to Question 3

In question 3, the participants were asked to provide information regarding how often they purchased reading material on a monthly basis. Purchasing reading materials proved to me a more common practice than I had anticipated. In both groups, over 60% of the respondents reported that they purchased something to read once per month (see Table 9). In fact, in Group 1, only 6.5% of the respondents did not indicate that they purchased reading materials, while in Group 2, every respondent indicated that they purchased reading materials at least once per month.

Table 9. Questionnaire Data: Responses to Question 3

Question 3: Check the space that describes you best.

- a) *I buy something to read once a month* b) *I buy something to read twice a month*
 c) *I buy 3 or more things a month to read*

	a)Once per month	a) Twice per month	c) 3 items per month	Don't buy	No answer
Group 1 (N=46)	69.5 % (32/46)	13% (6/46)	9% (4/46)	6.5% (1/46)	2% (1/46)
Group 2 (N=23)	61% (14/23)	26% (6/23)	13% (3/23)		

Responses to Question 5

In question 5, respondents were asked to compare their own enjoyment of reading with that of their friends. While this question has little direct relevance to the present study, I have included the data from this questionnaire item for the sake of thoroughness. The majority of girls in both groups (87%) claimed that they enjoy reading as much as or more than their friends do (see Table 10).

Table 10. Questionnaire Data: Responses to Question 5

Question 5: If you compared yourself to your friends, would you say that you like reading...?

- a) *less than they do* b) *the same amount as they do* c) *more than they do*

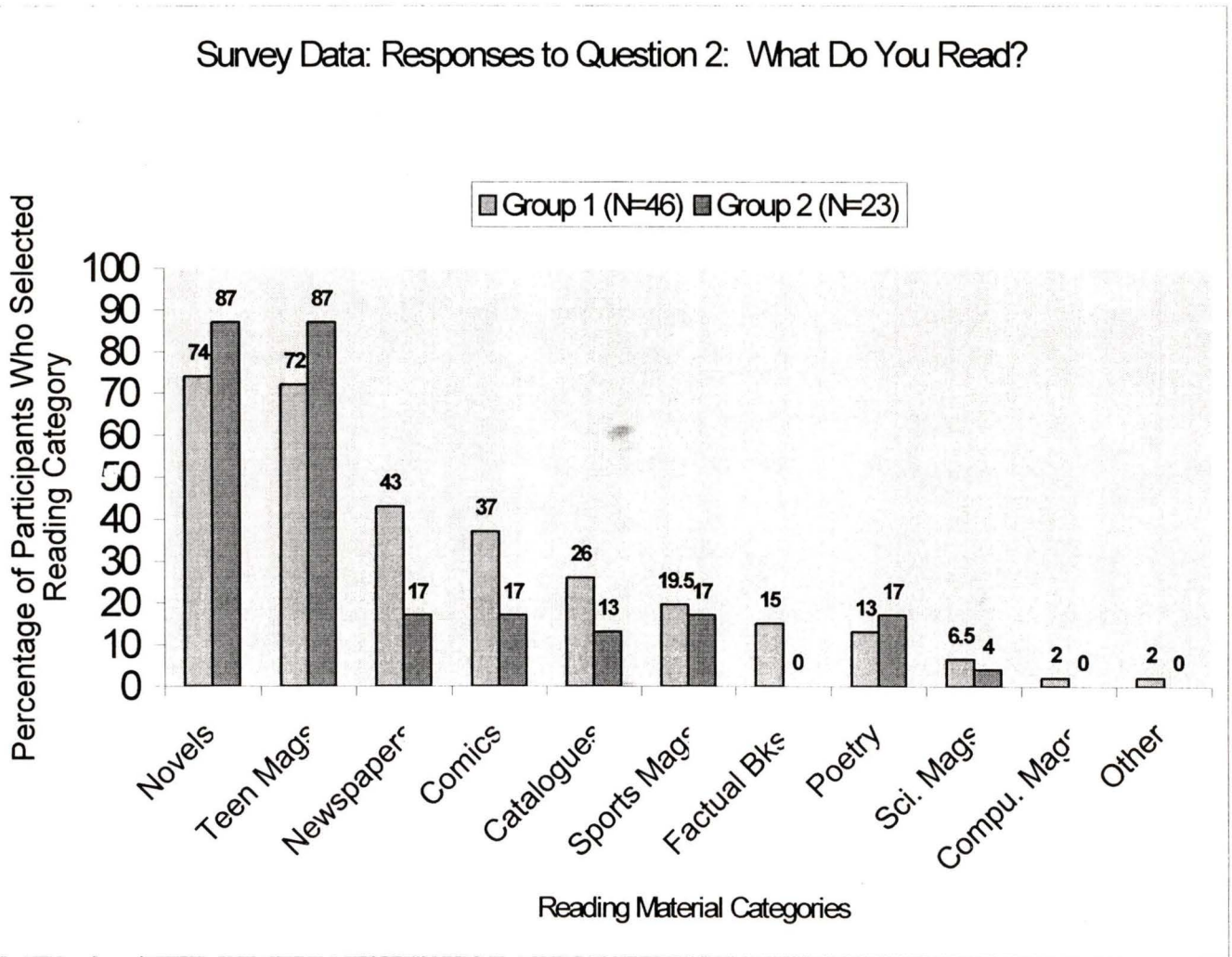
	a)less than	b) same	c) more than	Don't read	No answer
Group 1 (N=46)	13% (6/46)	46% (21/46)	37% (17/46)	2% (1/46)	2% (1/46)
Group 2 (N=23)	13% (3/23)	61% 14/23)	26% (6/23)		

Responses to Question Two

Turning now to the survey data pertaining to questionnaire items that more directly addressed magazine reading, these yielded data that I found intriguing. In question 2, participants were asked, "What do you read?" They were directed to check items from a list of 10 different types of reading material. These were: novels, newspapers, sports magazines, teen magazines, catalogues, poetry books, factual information books, comics, science/nature magazines, and computer guides or magazines. There was also a choice designated as "other" with space provided to list materials that I might not have included. No restrictions were placed on the number of materials that respondents could select from the list, and most selected more than one type of reading material. The results can be seen in Figure 2 that shows the reading selections indicated by Groups 1 and 2.

Figure 2. Participants' Reading Material Selections By Category: Responses to

Questionnaire Item 2



As can be seen in Figure 2, participants in Groups 1 and 2 selected both novels and teen magazines more often than any other type of reading material. In Group 1, 74% of participants indicated that they read novels and 72% indicated that they read teen magazines. In Group 2, 87% of the participants selected novels and 87% selected teen magazines.

While participants in both groups selected novels and teen magazines in high numbers, a higher percentage of Group 2 participants selected both novels and teen magazines than did those in Group 1. There were also some differences in the reading selection patterns of the two groups in terms of the other reading choices that were indicated. A glance at Figure 11 might suggest that Group 1 selected a wider variety of reading materials than did group 2 since a higher percentage of Group 1 respondents selected newspapers, catalogues, sports magazines, factual books, science magazines, and computer magazines. Further to this, the difference between groups for selecting the categories of newspapers (43% of Group 1 compared to only 17% of Group 2) and comics (37% of Group 1 compared to only 17% of Group 2) is quite pronounced. One must be cautioned however, that the difference in the size of Groups 1 and 2 renders making conclusions about the comparative reading ranges of the two groups impossible. As Group 1 is twice the size of Group 2, much greater opportunity for variance exists in the range of responses.

Responses to Question 4

Questions 4 dealt directly with the practice of reading magazines. Participants were asked how frequently they purchased or borrowed magazines. A

high percentage of respondents in both groups indicated that they read magazines on a monthly basis, acquiring the magazines through purchase, subscription, or by borrowing them from peers (see Table 11).

Table 11. Questionnaire Data: Responses to Question 4

Question 4: Check the space that describes you best. (You can check more than one.)

- a) *I have a magazine subscription* b) *I buy a magazine every month*
 c) *I buy a magazine every other month (5-6 times in a year)*
 d) *I borrow magazines to read, or read them with friends once or twice a month*
 e) *I don't read magazines*

	a)subscribe	b) buy 1 each month	c) buy every other month	d) borrow 1-2 each month	e) don't read magazines
Group 1 (N=46)	24% (11/46)	35% (16/46)	17% (8/46)	65% (30/46)	2% (1/46)
Group 2 (N=23)	39% (9/23)	30% (7/23)	13% (3/23)	30% (7/23)	4% (1/23)

Since participants were given the option to select more than one response for question 4, it is not possible to determine the percentage of participants that selected each of the responses. However, what can be said is that comparatively few of the respondents in either group--less than one fifth in total--selected choices c) or e) and these were the choices indicating either that respondents read magazines every other month or not at all. In Group 1, 17% reported that they bought a magazine every other month and 2% claimed not to read magazines for a

total of 19%. Similarly, in Group 2, 13% reported that they bought a magazine every other month, and 4% claimed not to read magazines for a total of 17%.

Responses to Question 6

In Question 6, participants were asked to list the titles of the magazines they read. Three blank lines were provided for the participants' written responses. The results from this question can be seen in Table 12 on which every magazine title cited on the surveys is listed along with a tally of the number of times the each title was cited. I have divided the magazine titles cited by participants into the following categories: *Teen/Adult Fashion Magazines, Music and Celebrity Magazines, Humour/Comics, Special Interest, Science and News, Sports and Fitness* and *Miscellaneous*. Similar to the results from Question 2 regarding reading choices, it also appears from Table 6 that Group 1 participants read more widely than those in Group 2. In fact, Group 1 listed 33 different magazine titles while Group 2 listed 16. Group 1 also listed more titles than Group 2 under the categories: *Teen/Adult Magazines, Music and Celebrity Magazines Miscellaneous, Special Interest, and Science and News Magazines*. However, the difference in the size of the two groups does not permit one to draw any conclusions regarding differences between them pertaining to the range of reading choices they have reported.

Table 12. Titles of Magazines Read By Participants in The Study

Magazine Categories and Titles	Number of Participants Who Listed Magazine Title	
	Group 1 (N= 46)	Group 2 (N=23)
Teen, Fashion Magazines		
Seventeen	26	18
YM	27	12
Teen	14	5
Teen Beat	1	
The Source	3	3
J17	2	
Jump	2	
In Style	1	1
Vogue	7	1
Vanity Fair	2	1
Glamour	1	
Cosmopolitan		1
Marie Claire	1	
Brio		1
Total Number in Category	87	43
Music, Celebrity Magazines		
Teen People	1	
People	4	2
Spin	2	1
Twist	2	
Rolling Stone	7	2
Hip Hop	1	
Globe	2	
Select	1	
National Enquirer	2	
Option	1	
Total Number in Category	23	5
Humour, Comics		
Archie	2	
Mad		1
Total Number in Category	2	1

Table 12.

Special Interest Magazines		
Skateboarding	2	
Surf Magazines	1	
Horse Magazines	1	
Total Number in Category	4	0
Science, News Magazines		
Maclean's	1	
National Geographic	3	
Astronomy	1	
Total Number in Category	4	0
Sports/Fitness Magazines		
Sports Illustrated	1	1
Sports Illustrated for Kids		1
Sports for Women	1	
Total Number in Category	4	0
Miscellaneous		
Adbusters	1	
Skynews		1
Internet	1	
Reader's Digest	1	
Internet	1	
Total Number in Category	4	1

Responses to Question 7

In Question 7, participants were asked to list the titles of the 3 or 4 items they read most recently. When I examined the responses to this questionnaire item, I was interested in the citing of teen magazine titles, specifically the top 3 selling publications, *Seventeen*, *YM*, and *Teen*. In Group 1, 19 respondents, or 41.3%, indicated the title of one of these teen magazines and in Group 2, 15 participants, or 65.2%, listed the title of one of these teen magazines among the list of materials most recently read. For the purposes of this study, further analysis of the responses given to Question 7 has not been conducted, as I believe this would not be directly relevant to the present discussion.

Analysis of Data Gathered From the Discussion Groups

Several themes emerged from my analysis of the discussion group data. Of these, I want to focus on themes that I found the most salient, namely, those that gave rise to most discussion and debate by the participants, and those that had the greatest relevance to previously conducted research in the area of adolescent females and teen magazines. As stated, in fulfillment of the design of this study, the discussion group topics were derived from the responses given by the girls in their reader response logs. Because of the rich data collected from these logs, excerpts from them have been used alongside excerpts taken from the discussion group data.

Above all else, the structure of this chapter is designed to reflect the concern that the participants' voices be heard over my own. This approach is consistent with participatory research and is in keeping with the nature of this study. From the outset, the use of the reader response log task was designed to provide each participant with the opportunity to read and respond to the text as an individual, without external influences from peers, and with only minimal influence from this researcher. It was designed to afford them privacy and time to express their thoughts independently and to revisit or rethink their ideas about the text. Secondly, data collected from the logs were used to drive and direct the discussion groups and this also positioned the participants' interests and concerns with the text at the forefront. Thirdly, while I maintained a peripheral position (by *peripheral*, I mean that I adopted a facilitator role; this role is further elaborated in Chapters Three and Five), during the discussion group meetings, the girls

directed and shaped the dialogue and explored issues to the extent that they felt was necessary.

My desire to ensure the centrality of girls' voices has shaped the reporting of the data and how they have been structured. Hence, the inclusion, at times, of lengthy excerpts, has placed the participants' voices at the centre of this work. Further to this, only a brief introduction to each excerpt from the reader response logs or the discussion group meetings is provided, and the commentary and analysis is placed after the provided excerpt. Again, this reflects a deliberate decision to position the participants' comments before my own analysis of them.

Themes that Emerged from the Discussion Group Data

That the data have been organized under five themes or headings, should not suggest that the findings fell neatly into discrete thematic categories. Rather, the data gathered from the discussion group meetings are complex, rich, and layered. In most instances, multiple thematic threads were present in the excerpts from the girls' discussions.

Of the themes identified, the most pervasive was the participants' perceptions regarding the believability of the text. As will be elaborated, this theme proved to be an overarching concept that was woven through all of the others. Other themes that have been identified for this discussion are the following: the magazine as an information source; anger in response to elements of the text; the perceived power of the media; and the ambivalence expressed with regards to the teen magazine genre. For the sake of

clarity, bold type is used for the discussion group excerpts, and bold, italicized type for reader response log excerpts. In the discussion group excerpts I have used my initials, C.G., and pseudonyms have been substituted for the participants' real names.

Believable Text: The Real and the Fashioned in *Seventeen* Magazine

As stated, the girls' perception of the believability of the text was a pervasive and overarching theme. However, the terms *believable* or *believability* as used in this discussion require further definition. I must first explain that the participants themselves did not use these terms; rather they conveyed this notion by defining different facets of the text as "real" versus "made up". I've chosen, however, to use the terms *believable* and *believability* to refer to those aspects of the text that the girls described as real, and uncontrived.

For these participants, believable text was seen as being free from fabrication or falsification; believable text aroused no suspicion as to the possibility of manipulation or untruthfulness on the part of the author. The girls read these parts of the text unquestioningly; the elements in the text that they judged to be believable were those that rang true to them, when measured against the background of their own experiences as adolescents. If the participants perceived an article as believable, or "real", it signaled to them that the article was constructed purely and accurately based on fact, and thus could be accepted verbatim, should the reader choose to do so.

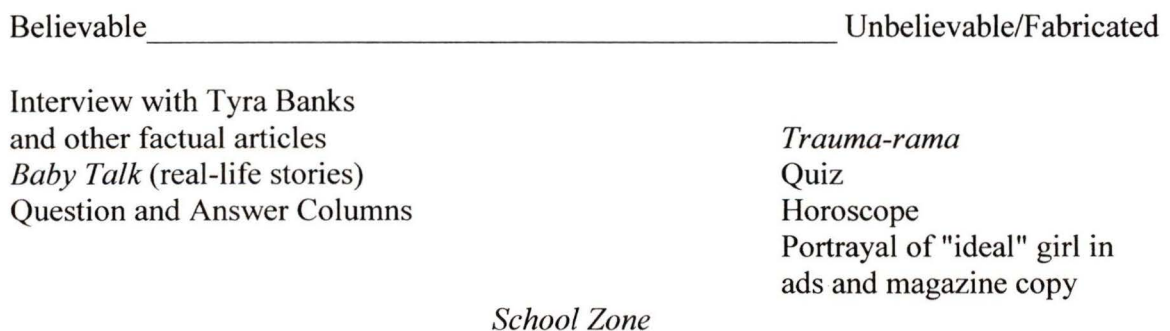
For every feature, article, or selection of the magazine discussed, participants questioned and strenuously judged the text regarding its believability. Throughout the dialogue, participants constructed a dichotomy of the 'real' versus the 'made-up', or in this

discussion, the believable and the unbelievable, of different magazine components.

Participants categorized the following components of the April 1998 issue as believable: factual articles including the Tyra Banks interview, a feature concerning severe acne, and a one-page biography spotlighting an up and coming young painter; 'real-life' stories and issues articles such as *Baby Talk* (teen pregnancy); and lastly, the monthly question and answer columns such as *Sex and Body*, *Beauty*, *mail*, and letters to the editor.

Conversely, participants challenged the believability or realness of the ads, the physical appearance of many of the female models portrayed in both the ads and in the magazine copy, the monthly feature *Trauma-rama*, and the quizzes and horoscopes. Moreover, a number of girls viewed the *School Zone* feature as overly staged and contrived. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of how the theme of believability has been organized in this section.

Figure 3. Graphic Representation of the Participants' Perceptions Regarding The Believability of Various Aspects of the April 1998 Issue of *Seventeen*



As discussed, the girls' perceptions of the text's believability emerged as an overarching theme in both the reader response logs and the discussion groups. In effect, the degree of perceived believability of each article or aspect of the magazine determined the kind of relationship that the participants had with the text. For these girls, the perception of a piece of text as believable/real versus made up/contrived played a crucial, pivotal role in the way they related to its messages and how they responded to the text. The participants consistently and unanimously respected, and ascribed value to text that they perceived as believable. When dealing with these components, the girls spoke reflectively, seriously, and respectfully. Conversely, they treated the magazine components that they felt were unbelievable or fabricated with anything from conspiratorial indulgence to contempt.

I believe that the practice of dichotomizing the believable and the unbelievable in the text served these readers in some important ways. Essentially, establishing whether an aspect of the magazine was believable or not, determined the degree to which the girls invested trust in a particular article or feature. Hence, trust played a central role in the ways that the girls perceived the text's ability to inform, guide, and to speak to them, if you will, with their best interests in mind. The participants valued the articles that provided 'real' stories and experiences, and advice columns that contained what they believed to be the voices of real readers with real concerns and questions. These were the facets of the magazine that they claimed helped them, informed them, and made them feel that their concerns were universal (i.e. the concerns of real girls). Again and again, the participants expressed that it mattered to them that the girls they read about were like them, with similar problems, embarrassments, and awkward personal questions.

On the other hand, participants condemned advertising and photographs of skinny or highly made up female models (whether shown in ads or in copy) as fake, computer-enhanced, and manipulative. They agreed that the "ideal" body image portrayed for young women ultimately inflicted a sense of inadequacy on the average girl. As such, these components were viewed as self-serving and fraudulent, and as having little to do with the happiness or best interests of real girls like themselves.

Naturally, all of the magazine features did not fall neatly into the categories of the believable and therefore helpful and benign, and the unbelievable and therefore manipulative and beguiling. There were features that the participants placed in the realm of the "made up", that they nonetheless enjoyed and treated with a sense of indulgence. These were the *Trauma-rama* feature, the quiz, and the horoscope. More will be said about these in the following discussion.

The analysis of the discussion group data begins with an examination of those aspects of the text that the participants felt were believable, beginning with the article on cover model Tyra Banks. Secondly, under the theme of the magazine as a source of information, both the teen pregnancy article, *Baby Talk*, and the question and answer columns will be addressed. The following excerpts from the response logs and discussion groups provide a window into the girls' appreciation of, and even respect for, the facets of the text they considered believable. They also betray the girls' unquestioning acceptance that these features are above suspicion with regards to potential manipulation on the part of their authors. Indeed, not once do the participants question or doubt the realness of these elements of the text.

The Believable or 'Real': Interview with Tyra Banks

In this article, supermodel, Tyra Banks discusses her family, romance history, and her views on her own appearance. Photos of Tyra as a young teen, and family album snapshots lend a down to earth feel to the article. Several participants wrote about the Tyra Banks article in their response logs and in every instance, they spoke very favourably about her and expressed pleasure in having an opportunity to learn more about the person behind the glamorous face. Clearly, it mattered a great deal to the participants that someone like Tyra Banks had problems. The following excerpts from the reader response logs are revealing:

Marsha: Reading about Tyra and finding that she had problems is so fun to read about. It tells you that even the most successful people had problems during their life.

Kathy: The Tyra Banks article was really good and was a good confidence booster cause we share a lot of the same habits and stuff-and look where she is!

Karen: I think Tyra Banks is pretty cool for a model and she's not totally superficial, this article made you see her as more of a person than someone totally obsessed with their looks.

Linda: The article on Tyra Banks was good because she wrote about her life and how it's not really all that perfect and how she has problems too.

Ashley: Loved it. It totally makes a point that you don't have to stop eating to be beautiful. She has a positive attitude and she's natural, eats when she wants, doesn't starve herself. She sends out positive messages.

Kristen: I think she is really pretty and intelligent. She went through a lot, like boyfriends, families and etc. She points out to me that it doesn't matter to be alone as long as I'm not lonely. When I am alone, I can still enjoy everything!

Group 2 Reader Response Logs

The girls appeared to derive a kind of comfort or reassurance from this article; and again, not once do they question its validity or accuracy. Linda, in fact, believed that Tyra herself wrote the article. Furthermore, once an investment was made by the participants in the believability of the article, they were primed to absorb lessons, information and even inspiration from it.

In the following excerpt from the Group 2 discussion, participants expressed similar sentiments. They recalled in detail the things that Tyra's boyfriends did and said, her parents' divorce, and the difficulties she experienced as a result of being drastically underweight as a young teen. The participants spoke earnestly and sympathetically about her romance troubles.

C.G: So, it makes you think more about things? Do you ever approach the magazine with one idea and change it? Like Tyra Banks. Did any of you have an opinion about her?

Ashley: I didn't like her at all. I thought she was one of those models who didn't eat (group laughter) and totally like that. So when I read it I got a better opinion on her and I liked her better after I read the biography.

(Here, Charlene discussed another biography she read about an actress, after this I renewed the subject of Tyra)

C.G.: Let's talk about Tyra again. Everybody really liked it. It seemed a lot of you shared that feeling about...she was a certain way in your mind but then you read the article and thought very positive things about her.

Marsha: It's neat to find out how she sees things-before when she was younger, like she had problems too.

C.G.: What were her problems?

Marsha: She was really skinny. Her mom had to take her to the doctor.

C.G.: She wasn't starving was she? I haven't looked at it. (several girls say, "No")

Linda: She *ate* and everything. It was just her growth. She ate normally.

C.G.: (I open the magazine to find the picture of Tyra that they are referring to. She is emaciated.) Oh! Yes. She looks ill. What about her family?

Linda: She has divorced parents-so her family's not perfect either.

C.G.: What about boyfriends?

Kristen: She had three. They're all jerks!

C.G.: Ok. Jerks. How come?

Linda: They showed off. She was really annoyed because they showed off. They asked her why she went out with them.

Marsha: They didn't really like *her*, just the way she *looked*.

Discussion Group 2

From both the response log and discussion group excerpts provided above, it is evident that several of the participants experienced a sea change with regards to their attitude towards this supermodel. In effect, Tyra's imperfect life, failed romances, and the confession (along with the provided photograph of her looking positively emaciated) that she experienced an ugly duckling phase at one time, all seemed to act as a leveler that earned Tyra a place in these participants' sympathies. More will be said about this in the following chapter.

Seventeen as an Information Source: *Baby Talk*, The Teen Pregnancy Article

Another theme that emerged from the discussion group data was that the participants endowed certain aspects of the magazine with the ability to inform teens. Indeed, when asked what *Seventeen* offered its readers, participants in both groups listed "information" as one of the items. As mentioned however, in order to discuss the notion of information provided by the text, the overarching theme of believability has to be first addressed because here again, the perceived believability of the text was pivotal. In effect, participants adhered to a simple, but rigid standard of evaluation whenever they assessed the information provided in an article or feature in the magazine. If they judged the article to be believable, they endowed it with potential to inform teens in ways that were valid, applicable, and reliable.

The monthly inclusion of articles like *Baby Talk*, 'real stories' about 'real teens', was something the participants felt should remain unchanged because these pieces provided information. The participants praised the delivery style of these features. The appeal of such features seemed to be that they informed teens about important issues through stories and profiles of 'real teens' going through the 'real experiences.' As Candice wrote in her reader response log, "You get to see how things are going for other teens." Indeed, the firsthand account tone and look of *Baby Talk* complete with pictures of four young mothers (one father was shown) whose stories were told, seemed to matter a great deal to the girls.

Members of Group 2 detailed the reasons why learning about teen pregnancy through this article was preferable to acquiring the same information via other pathways including teachers or parents or textbooks on the subject.

Kathy: You get sources of information for teens, like the *Baby Talk* thing. That's really important, but you don't want to go and look it up in a book. I think it's great they put it in the magazine.

C.G.: That's neat what you said about the book? Why...what's 'the book'?

Kristen: You wouldn't actually go and buy or borrow a book on pregnancy, right?

C.G.: Why not? Is it too much?

Ashley: I don't think we'd be interested in that unless it came up in something like this...we wouldn't go out of our way to look it up...

C.G.: (looking around the circle) Is that what you think? You wouldn't go to the library, that *here* (point to magazine) it's ok, it's just kind of short?

Kathy: It's *there*.

Marsha: And the *way* they write about it

Kathy: Yeah, the personal experience.

C.G.: So personal experience matters? (Marsha and Kathy nod.) Anything else? You've said information...

Kristen: Instead of a teacher talking to you about it, it's actually the real person.

C.G.: So it's like real life, instead of a teacher talking to you. (Kirsten nods.)

Discussion Group 2

The strength of the impression made on Group 2 participants was reflected in the fact that we returned to the topic and discussed it at much greater length as will be seen in the following excerpt. I found the process by which the girls analyzed and discussed the topic fascinating. They vacillated between the spheres of the public and the private, one moment reflecting from a removed stance on the problems of teen pregnancy and engaging in sexual activity at too early an age, and the next sharing their own shyness with regards to talking with their parents about sex.

C.G.: The other thing you talked a lot about was the teen pregnancy article so let's talk about that.

Marsha: I think it's good because if people are wondering about that and stuff, they don't have to go and ask their parents. They can see what other teens did.

C.G.: Is this easier than going to your parents? (Some general agreement.)

Linda: Not really-

C.G.: I mean sex in general...

Ashley: They'd be like, what do you want to know *that* for? (Laughter.)

C.G.: So, you couldn't say, "I would like to have sex, so can you tell me about birth control?" That would be Ahhhh! (I make a silly expression with this noise). (Laughter.)

Ashley: I'd be grounded. Grounded for *life!*

C.G.: (laughing) Ok, grounded for life!

Kathy: I think it's a really good warning. Some teens I know-well, not that I know-but they're thinking about it so it's a good warning for those people. A lot of teens read that so it's good access, so it's good they know.

Linda: If you don't want to know about it, if it's there then you just read it. If it's interesting.

C.G.: So this just makes it more comfortable than sitting down and having that "big talk"? (Nods, agreement.)

Marsha: It makes you think that it really can happen to you.

Kristen: People might not really be that conscious of "What are we doing?"

C.G.: They aren't really quite aware of it--birth control?-

Marsha: People don't think it can happen to them.

Linda: Well some don't learn. That one was 13 and she had 3 kids or something.

Kathy: Exactly. She kept going

Ashley: I don't think people care about sex like they did in the old days. I know people in grade 9 who are gonna have sex with people they hardly know and I think that is so dumb.

C.G.: You mean they don't think about it in a *serious* way?

Ashley: They don't get to know the person well enough, they don't take precautions. Before, it was you don't have sex until you're married and now you just do it whenever.

C.G.: And why aren't people using birth control, do you think?

Kathy: It's like Kristen said, they just aren't really aware. They don't think Im gonna have that baby. They don't make that connection. They're not mature enough.

C.G.: So you think this article was valuable?

(Agreement, nods, yes's all around.)

Charlene: It told one from a guy's point of view.

C.G.: Oh yes. That was neat. I noticed that. I also noticed-

Kathy: Yeah, it's supposed to be harder for them.

Kathy: All their parents were divorced, or they were just living with their moms.

C.G.: Do you think that makes a difference? (Nods all around)

Lisa, Marsha, Charlene: I do.

Ashley: Kind of.

C.G.: How's that?

Charlene: I think in a situation like that you really need a family to support you about it. You'd feel really alone.

C.G.: What if it's just a solid mom maybe or a dad raising you but they're there?

Kathy: If someone's living with a mom, then they've never had a man in the house, so this is some kind of guy and they are getting attached to him for more reasons than one.

C.G.: What if you're raised by a father with no mom in the house?

Ashley: She might think I want to be a mom. I don't *have* a mom so I can *be* a mom.

C.G.: So you think having a balance with a mother and father in the home is a little easier? (Nods.) Do you think girls are less likely to get pregnant if they don't have a mom or dad?

(General dissent.)

Marsha: No. It's not a totally big thing.

Linda: It's just a part of it.

C.G.: Just a factor? (Several nods.)

Discussion Group 2

The participants began the discussion of this topic by explaining why they felt the article was valuable. By virtue of its appearance in a widely circulated publication aimed at teen audiences, its personal tone and its "true story" approach, the article was deemed highly accessible. Participants agreed that this article was more likely to attract teen readers' interest and attention on the subject than any other presentational format. The girls related their own disinterest in finding this information out through researching the topic in a library, and their embarrassment or discomfort in seeking information about sex and birth control from parents. Finally, they verbalized their concerns about people in their own peer group becoming sexually active--obviously, this was something that was causing them some unease and confusion. Together the girls worked to construct an understanding of the factors that lead to teen pregnancy. In this way, the girls interpreted the information and applied it to their own observations and concerns regarding sexual activity among their peers. This also proved to be another instance in which I was impressed by the degree to which the participants recalled details from the article.

Incidentally, Group 1 members, while they didn't raise the issue as fully in their response logs, voiced similar thoughts and indicated that this article served as a sound warning to teens. Amber wrote, "It's like a wake up call. It makes people kinda realise

the pain pregnancy may cause." Kathleen noted in her log that she "thought it was sad to read about teenagers having children."

Question and Answer and Advice Columns: Teens Getting Answers to Their Questions

The participants' views on the monthly question and answer features of the magazine paralleled those expressed about *Baby Talk*. These girls communicated in both the logs and the discussions that they appreciated having a place where they could read sound advice about their bodies and about romantic relationships, particularly about the sexual aspects of relationships. Participants agreed that it was often too uncomfortable to discuss a lot of the things they were curious about with parents.

C.G.: Tell me about the sections where readers write in or ask questions, like the medical questions, sex questions, makeup? The stuff at the very beginning?

Marsha: They get answers to their question. Like that foreskin thing. You wouldn't go up to your mom and say that.

C.G.: So some of this stuff is too embarrassing to ask your parents about?

Charlene: Well, not usually the beauty stuff. You can ask a friend. You don't need to write in about how to pluck your eyebrows! (Laughter.)

Kristen: Sometimes you ask your friends, you get different answers so you don't know to believe them but if you write in to some professional you get a certain answer so you think it's right.

C.G.: So there's a professional tone? (Kristen nods.) So, this is kind of personal but does *anybody* feel they can talk at home about those things?

(Laughter, shaking heads and "no" said all around with emphasis.)

C.G.: So you're shy about it and your parents are making it impossible or... *they* wouldn't mind but *you're* shy? What's the reason?

Marsha: Your parents would wonder why you're asking in the first place.

Ashley: They would blow it all out of proportion.

Kathy: Yeah. Mine always do that! (Laughter.)

Discussion Group 2

As evidenced in the previous excerpt, the participants expressed the need to have somewhere to go for sound information and advice. It also appeared that the ability to read about issues in privacy mattered to the participants. Thus the question and answer columns addressed their concerns and queries in a way that allowed them to explore the issues free from adult scrutiny and potential interrogation.

The Unbelievable in *Seventeen*: The Fashioned and The Phony

There were elements of the text that the participants perceived as unbelievable or fabricated. These included the regular monthly feature *Trauma-rama*, the quiz, the Horoscope feature, and the portrayal of the "ideal girl" in certain advertisements and portions of the magazine copy.

Trauma-rama: "They Can't Be Real"

In the regular monthly column, *Trauma-rama*, *Seventeen's* readers submit testimonials of their most embarrassing moments. Typically these traumas involve some

hokey mishap in which the writer is caught in some state of undress in a gymnasium full of onlookers, or somehow manages to trip and fall into her "crush's" plate of fries in the cafeteria. These tales invariably end with phrases like, "I was so embarrassed, I thought I would die!" Fittingly, the April *Trauma-rama* feature was dedicated to the confessions of April Fool's Day prank victims. The girls determined that it was an especially ridiculous installment of the column.

I approached this aspect of the discussion indirectly, by asking the participants if they would consider submitting a letter to *Trauma-rama* or other such features. The dismissive and indulgent attitudes of the girls towards this feature--importantly, one they regard as fabricated--can be seen in the following excerpts:

C.G.: Would you ever write to the magazine? Send them one of the "can you believe this guy?" things, or an embarrassing moment story?

Karen: No.

Kathleen: No

Candice: No. Those are made up anyway.

Karen: Who would bother writing? (very disdainful of the possibility)

Amber: It would take so much time. I don't have time now, I have so much homework.

Carolyn: They're all made up anyway. They can't be real. I've thought about making one up to send. (Girls laugh.)

C.G.: So how do they seem made up?

Amber: Well the one about the peanut butter girl is so stupid. She gets peanut butter stuck in her mouth and freaks out.

Candice: Who would do that?

Amber: Yeah. She freaks out and they have to get her parents.

Candice: They call her the peanut butter girl after that.

**Karen: If it is true, it's pretty pathetic, that story.
(Girls laugh and nod.)**

(The conversation moves to other topics for a few minutes and then I returned to the subject of *Trauma-rama*.)

C.G. Ok. Embarrassing stories. You say they're made up but you still want them in?

Several participants: Yeah! (There are nods and smiles.)

C.G.: Even if they're "dumb" as you say?

Amber: They're entertaining, they make us laugh.

Discussion Group 1

The participants regarded *Trauma-rama* with varying degrees of indulgence. For them, these embarrassing stories provided light-hearted entertainment. In several instances the stories seemed to them to be fabricated, but this was overlooked in light of their understanding that this particular element of the text was there for the simple purpose of providing fun and pleasure. Thus, in this case, believability was not at issue for the participants, because they knew they would not be turning to the feature for anything more than a light-hearted laugh.

The Quiz: "You can fix them, you know?"

When we discussed magazine quizzes, most participants agreed that these were an indispensable regular feature. Almost all of the respondents wrote in their logs that they completed the quiz, "Do you act your age?" and that they achieved the rating, *perfectly primed*. As for the believability of the quiz, however, the general consensus was that it was quite enjoyable, but undeniably contrived, as can be seen in the following excerpts from both of the discussion groups.

C.G.: Ok, what about the quiz?

Karen: I always get the middle one. There's always one choice that's reasonable.

Candice: Yeah. Me too. I got the middle one. Do you act your age?

Kathleen: Me too.

C.G.: Why do you think they have quizzes?

Kathleen: They're fun. We like them.

Amber: They're in there to get you more involved with the book.

Karen: They're there to reassure you. Like the one on, "Are you a good girl friend?" tells you that you are so great to your boyfriend and that you are really nice and good to him and doing things right.

Amber: Yeah. They tell you what you want to hear about yourself.

Candice: You can fix them you know?

C.G.: Fix them?

Candice: Yeah. Sometimes I do them over.

C.G.: You mean if you don't like the first result? (mimics a response) "Hey, wait a minute, I know I'm not *that* one!"

Candice: Yeah. (laughs)

Discussion Group 1

C.G.: Ok. Who took the quiz? (Smiling and quoting the quiz categories) Do you "behave like a kid?" Are you "grown up" or "mature" or what?

(Girls giggle and tease each other about scores and ratings.)

Linda: (Laughing) I failed! (We all laugh.)

C.G.: Failed! How do you fail it? (Girls laugh.)

Marsha: You can practically choose your answer though, 'cause they're SO obvious! Like, "If you're going to a sleepover, would you sit and watch a movie or run around the house naked?" (Everyone laughs.)

Kristen: You can choose your answers.

C.G.: So you think it's pretty cheesy?

Charlene: Well, *this* one!

Kathy: Some are fun.

C.G.: So who always takes them? If you get a *Seventeen* magazine, who for sure will take the quiz? (Nods all around.)

Ashley: Well if it's something I'm interested in. If the topic interests me.

Lisa: Yeah. Like that psychic one. I liked that.

C.G.: Anything else about the quiz? Why do they have them in there? They've been doing quizzes for years and years.

Ashley: Interesting.

Kathy: Learn more about yourself.

Kristen: Find out something. You find out all by yourself.

Charlene: Maybe people are asking questions about that. In a way, you're still asking a question but *you* get to answer it.

Kristen: You get to answer the question yourself. You try to find out for yourself.

Charlene: They're popular.

Kathy: It's an activity. You're not just reading. It gets your mind into it more. It's now you're involved in the book, you're not just *taking* in the information, you're taking a quiz.

Linda: Yeah. Doing something.

Discussion Group 2

As evidenced in the preceding excerpts, although participants unanimously agreed that the quizzes had little credibility, this hardly acted as a deterrent and the quiz still proved to be a popular draw. The girls approached the activity with a sense of humour about themselves and the about quiz results. In fact, one participant confessed that she takes the quiz over whenever she doesn't like the results, while another admitted through peals of laughter that she had "failed" the quiz.

As to the reason that quizzes were included regularly in the magazine, the participants felt that they offered some light-hearted self-analysis, personal insights occasionally (even though at times the quiz "told you things you want to hear"), and the opportunity to become more involved in the text. Amber in Group 1 and Kathy in Group

2, also noted that completing the quiz meant a departure from just reading text; it was doing something active with it. It was intriguing for me that when they discussed this issue of greater involvement, these same two participants referred to the magazine as "the book" at this point in the conversation.

The Horoscope: "It kind of cheers you up."

The participants' reactions to the horoscope feature in the magazine closely paralleled their responses to the quizzes. Indeed, like the quiz, the horoscope was perceived by the participants as being completely contrived, another silly pleasure that they used for light-hearted fun.

R: All right! You also *all* liked the horoscopes.

(They all nod. A couple say they don't believe them but like them.)

R: Ok. So how many of you believe them?

Candice: I kinda do.

Kathleen: Not really.

Amber: Not really.

Karen: A bit. Well they're so bleak. They're vague. They're not detailed or anything. So the chance of them happening is good. I mean they'll say that you'll have a good day in the middle of the month or have a great conversation with a relative...but that is easy to happen. They just tell you what you want to hear.

R: But you still all read them. Why?

(Some shrugs)

Karen: I don't know. Something to do.

Kathleen: They're fun.

Karen: Kind of cheers you up. If you are having a bad day and it says something neat is going to happen.

Discussion Group 1

School Zone: "I bet you that's like *all* made up, seriously!"

In the monthly feature *School Zone*, *Seventeen* highlights a different North American secondary school each month. Typically *School Zone* includes pictures of students around the school engaged in various activities. All of the students' names and ages are given and in some instances a short statement made by the student about life at the school or plans for the future is added.

In terms of its believability, *School Zone* adopted a curious role in the discussion. Its reception by the participants was mixed and views regarding its believability were varied. In addition, I was surprised by the participants' reactions when I mentioned the *School Zone* feature. In both groups, the initial reaction was a confused pause, and several girls asked me what *School Zone* was. This response hardly echoed statements made by *Seventeen* Editor, Roberta Caploe, regarding the success of *School Zone* (personal communication, April 23, 1997). Ms. Caploe had explained that in focus groups regularly conducted by *Seventeen*'s staff, the feature received extremely high ratings from readers and was in fact emerging as the "favourite" component of the publication among its audience. I expected that these participants would express similar appreciation of the feature but in fact, only one person in Group 1 mentioned it in her response log, and the few members of Group 2 who wrote about the feature, referred to it

by page numbers, rather than by its title. I was interested in why an article so highly praised by the magazine's editor had largely escaped the notice of these readers.

From the reader response log data, I found that the participants liked the feature, but not overly. A couple of participants expressed that it was interesting to see kids from other schools and cultures and to learn about their latest fads. Of greater relevance to this discussion however, are the participants' opinions regarding how *School Zone* was constructed and how they evaluated its believability, because again these qualities determined the degree to which they felt they could relate to the article. In the following excerpts, participants in both groups discussed the feature and its composition at length.

C.G.: No one mentioned *School Zone*. Do you like it?

(Shrugs)

C.G.: Should it stay? In other things I have read, *School Zone* is everyone's favourite part.

(They frown, and look at each other and shake their heads.)

Kathleen: Well it gets boring after a while. Maybe if it was just 2 pages.

(Nods of agreement)

Candice: Yeah it should be shorter.

C.G.: Well, tell me about the kids in *School Zone*. Are they typical?

Karen: No.... Well, they aren't all *models* and I like *that* part?

C.G.: Are they like kids at this school?

In Chorus: No! (Very adamant tone.)

Amber: All the schools are from the States. They're different.

C.G.: Well what's different? How do you think they pick the kids to be in it?

Karen: Well they can't pick everyone so they just go for the ones that aren't the best looking, but the ones that dress in the most interesting clothes-

Amber: The coolest ones.

Kathleen: They get the ones who say they want to.

C.G.: Are they like kids here then?

Amber: No. They still have them all made up.

Karen: Yeah. Even the guys have on make up. You can see it.

Amber: In one they showed behind the scenes at *School Zone* and it showed how they were all getting made up and their hair done for it.

C.G.: So they aren't just grabbing kids in the hall and saying let me get your picture?

Karen: Oh no! They get them all *ready* for it.

Discussion Group 1

Participants in Group 2 also expressed mixed views with regards to the universality of the *School Zone* kids:

C.G.: Can we talk about *School Zone*? (There is silence since many of the girls don't know what *School Zone* is for a few moments. I describe it to them.)

Ashley: Oh. I hate that!

Kathy: That's cool I think.

Ashley: Waste of paper. What's it for?

Kathy: It's cool. You learn about a different culture.
You learn about another school

Kristen: I didn't read it. I just looked at the pictures.

Charlene: You learn about different schools.

Kathy: You learn about their lifestyles. They go out.
They cross the border after school.

C.G.: I want you talk about these people in *School Zone*. Is there a difference between these *School Zoners* and the rest of people in the magazine?

Kristen: They're like us. They're not just... they're usual school people.

Marsha: They're people like we hang around with.

Linda: But they're *all* pretty, Marsha.

Ashley: Not all.

Kristen: They're like normal people.

Charlene: They're not normal.

Ashley: I bet you they don't even go to the same school.
I bet you anything they don't. I bet you that's like all made up, seriously.

Charlene: I think it's real. I think it's a real school.

Marsha: It's St. Augustine's School...

C.G.: What do they do to get the pictures? Who do you think they pick, Linda?

Linda: Pretty girls and good looking guys. Most of the girls are all pretty. They don't look like that after school. They're all done up.

Kathy: Exactly. Obviously if they knew *Seventeen* was coming to take pictures of them. Their hair's perfect. I don't look like that after school.

Ashley: Well they take them in and do photo shoots of them.

C.G.: Could they do a *School Zone* here?

Ashley: I doubt it. I can't see anyone in this school making that magazine except maybe X. (At the mention of this person's name, several girls mumble in agreement.)

Kathy: They pick the best looking people and get them,...dress them up definitely.

Marsha: They don't really interview them at all. We just know that she doesn't mind a uniform and her age.

Kathy: They're all done in the States. (Nods of agreement all around.)

Discussion Group 2

As the participants debated the believability of the *School Zone* piece and worked through whether or not the students shown were regular, average teens, the overall impression that this feature seemed to make was one of "other-ness". While it promised to offer a glimpse of real kids at real schools, ultimately it was assessed by each of the participants as contrived and fabricated to varying degrees. Some believed that the students shown were hand-picked by virtue of either good looks, or cool style. Even Kathy, Charlene, Kristen, and Marsha who reported in their reader response logs that they really enjoyed the feature, still agreed that it wasn't an entirely believable picture of the student body. In fact, the most vocal advocate of the article, Kathy, argued nonetheless that it was clearly contrived.

The Theme of Anger: "Sometimes I hate the magazines"

The theme of anger in response to the text also comes under the umbrella of the theme of believability. Indeed, the two are tightly interwoven, in that certain aspects of the magazine, perceived by the girls as unbelievable or fabricated aroused their frustration and anger. Specifically, the portrayal of the ideal body and the standards of beauty conveyed in many of the advertisements and magazine copy, as well as the portrayal of some females as looks-obsessed, shallow, and even empty-headed angered the participants.

Indeed, the issue of body image unleashed feelings of frustration and hostility. Participants uniformly condemned the use of females in both ads and magazine copy, whom they felt were skinny, heavily made-up, or 'sleazy' looking. Conversely, the appearance of natural looking girls wearing little or no makeup, and with uncontrived hairstyles and healthy looking body shapes earned the participants' respect, trust, and praise. The participants' views regarding these two types of portrayals of females is reflected in the following comments made in the reader response logs.

Linda: the ad on p. 122 for sunscreen shows 4 girls in bikinis when not everyone looks like that.

Marsha: Hawaiian Tropic - I hate this ad because the girls look disgusting.

Karen: herbal essence ad, it was very over-exaggerated.

Ashley: hated p. 162-167 the women look unhealthy and gross.

Linda: The Gap ad is ok because it has an average girl, wearing jeans and a t-shirt. The ads for colours of

Benneton are good because there are average girls modeling for them.

Kathy: p. 31 I liked this ad because it says "Beauty is an interpretation" - which is totally true. P. 50-52 - I like how these girls have almost no makeup on - they're just natural. I think that creates a more realistic look for girls.

Reader Response Logs

Similar sentiments were even more aggressively stated during both group discussions. In the following passage, Karen directs our attention to a nail polish ad titled, "She Sells Seashells." The laughing model is dressed in a bathing suit top and a pair of extremely short shorts. She is leaning forward, holding up a seashell and exposing rather a good deal of cleavage and thigh, while her seat barely rests on her sales stall along with her other wares, the seashells.

Karen: I noticed this one. I hate it.

C.G.: Let's look at it together. "She sells seashells." What do you think?

Karen: She's just flaunting herself.

Amber: Not *really* slutty, but slutty.

Candice: She looks ditzy.

Karen: She's got on that *teeny* top and *short* skirt and she looks *so* posed and fake. I can't see *anybody* would get that excited about nail polish.

C.G.: What about the models?

Amber: They disgust me.

Kathleen: They're anorexic.

Candice: They're too thin. Way too made up.

Amber: The model doesn't attract you to the product. It's just the product you want and she's there.

Candice: Way too skinny.

Karen: I have to admit though that *Seventeen* is better than the others. It *does* have some normal size models in it.

Amber: I hate the models. They're too perfect and too skinny.

C.G.: What would you like to do about that?

Amber: Slap them! (Laughter.)

Karen: Yeah! You can tell they're so computerized too. They're so fake. You can tell the ones that have been done with the computer.

Amber: I totally believe that Tyra Banks isn't that pretty-it's all fake and computerized.

Candice: No. I saw her on Oprah and she isn't that pretty.

Kathleen: (Nods at Candice and agrees with her.)

C.G.: Why do they use models like that then?

Amber: They do that to make you think that if they're so attractive in it, then I will be too. And you don't even realize what you're seeing. You think that you just liked the product, but really you liked the girl's hair and that it was so shiny.

C.G.: Is advertising *tricky* then? (They all laugh and nod.)

Karen: There are *tons* of subliminal messages.

C.G.: What's subliminal?

Candice: Like you don't even realize why you want to get the product, you just do.

Amber: You aren't really thinking. It just goes in.

Discussion Group 1

I brought the discussion back to the topic of body image because it had aroused such heated dialogue and I sensed that the participants had more to say on the subject. I asked the girls in Group 1 if the body image portrayed in the advertisements differed from that portrayed in the magazine copy. It seemed that they viewed the magazines models with only slightly less disapproval.

C.G.: Okay what about the models in the features. The ones that aren't in the ads. Let's take a look at them. Let's look at page 150. Tell me about her.

Amber: Well... she doesn't have a perfect stomach.

C.G.: What's perfect?

Amber: You know, totally flat (there is a chorus of the words "flat", "toned") and a nice colour.

Candice: She has an outside belly button ...that's not *bad* really.

Karen: I hate that necklace! It's so annoying! I mean if you're really hot, why would you have to advertise it?

C.G.: What about her hair?

Kathleen: I like it. It isn't perfect.

C.G.: What isn't perfect about it?

Kathleen: It's messy, in her face.

Karen: Ugly jacket.

Amber: She's not wearing it properly.

Kathleen: But that's because they want to show she's got on a tank under-

Amber: Still it doesn't look good. It's off her shoulder with sparkles.

C.G.: (showing page 151) What about this?

Amber: I love that bathing suit!

Karen: That's a great suit.

Kathleen: She's ok. She's not loaded with makeup.

Candice: Besides the sparkles, she's not all done up

C.G.: (showing page 163) What about this one?

Amber: She's pretty.

Karen: Yeah. Not a lot of makeup.

Amber: She doesn't like what she's doing.

C.G.: Why do you say that?

Amber: She doesn't look happy. Her smile isn't real. She is laughing but not meaning it.

Candice: She's really skinny.

Amber: I think her suit is slutty.

Karen: I would never wear a suit like that. Too slutty (Nods)

Discussion Group 1

On the subject of body image and the portrayal of some of the females in the magazine, the participants in Group 2 also expressed a great deal of hostility and anger. The *Polo* ad discussed in the next excerpt features a model pressing forward against a

white column, holding the column with one hand. She is turned slightly, with her back to the camera, but she is looking directly into the camera with what seems to be a solemn, even seductive expression. The strings of her bikini top are undone and she is loosely holding them behind her back, offering the reader a slight glimpse of her right breast where the bathing suit top has slipped off. She is wearing a pair of white *Polo* shorts.

C.G.: Ok. Another thing you guys all mentioned was the *Polo* ad.

Kathy: YES! THAT'S retarded! (An uproar ensues.) It's so stupid. It's pointless. That's pointless advertising. Girls read it.

C.G.: Ok. Ok. Wait a minute. Let's look at it- (I locate it in my copy and show it to them.)

Marsha: It's almost as retarded as the Hawaiian Tropic one! Ok, you (to Marsha) find the Hawaiian Tropic one for me. (I hand Marsha the magazine.)

Kathy: Rip it out right now! I think we should write to the magazine and tell them it's absolutely retarded!

Linda: Only girls read this magazine! Why would-

Marsha: Only girls read it!

Kathy: Do WE CARE if that lady's shirt is undone? (She assumes a mock surprise tone.) "Oh, her shirt's undone! I'm gonna go down to Maple Town and buy me a shirt!" No! It makes *no* sense to me! It makes me so mad!

Linda: Guys who read this are considered weird.

Charlene: Yeah. Perverted.

Michelle: They're geeks.

C.G.: Guys who read it are weird? They're geeks?

Linda: They *know* that too. Why would they put that in?

Marsha: That suit is gross.

Kathy: Why would they (she means males) buy *Seventeen* magazine? It's all girls' experiences.

Ashley: Well maybe they-

C.G.: Ok. So what you're saying is this is no big thrill to you. This is not going to get you to buy the magazine. Is your point that the only reason to have this is to turn on guys?

Kristen: Maybe instead of this article they should put in a picture of a guy like in a bikini. (All laugh.)

Kathy: Unless, if they put in girls, they should create a good image of a girl. Why do they use that image?

Marsha: Sometimes they put in pictures with guys on the beach in shorts and speedos. Why would guys want to read that?

Charlene: Speedos and bullshit.

Ashley: But they're selling *guys clothes*. So you have to see that some guys want them to be like that. And that's a *girls* magazine and some girls want to be like *that*-

Kathy: But they're creating a bad image-

C.G.: (Addressing Ashley) You're saying what if some girls want to know how to look that way?

Ashley: I can totally see someone wearing that in the summer.

(We look at the *Hawaiian Tropic* ad and pass it around.)

Kathy: Why do they have to have that image for having fun? You can wear a full piece suit and still have fun.

Charlene: You can have fun in a one piece.

Michelle: Look at it. It goes up to here! (She motions under her lower rib cage) Might as well be a 2 piece. (Some giggles.)

(Kathy refers back to the *Polo* ad.)

Kathy: Why can't she wear a t-shirt?

Ashley: It's not gonna attract your attention

C.G.: You think it's for shock value?

Ashley: I think if she were just wearing a t-shirt with her shorts people would just over pass it.

(There is a pause while the girls think about what Ashley has said.)

Kristen: Yeah. Like Ashley said, the point is that it got us talking about it *now*, just look at how *we* got talking about it.

Discussion Group 2

In these excerpts it is obvious that these readers are aware of the manipulative nature of the portrayal of many of the females they see in both the advertisements and in the magazine copy. The participants clearly do not believe that real girls and women actually look like those they see in these photos. They are aware that many of these images are computerized and that the models' good looks and flawless appearance can also be credited to the handiwork of an army of hair stylists and makeup artists. They also understand that advertising and fashion industries have a financial agenda and will use sex and shock value to sell products. Ultimately they know that advertising is powerful and has the potential to influence an audience, sometimes without their awareness of the fact.

Anger at the Portrayal of Females as Dumb and Ditzzy: Good Looks but No Substance

As stated, the portrayal of some of the females in *Seventeen* as looks-obsessed and otherwise empty-headed angered the participants. Reacting to a model in an ad for nail polish, Candice dismissed her as "ditsy", while Karen joked that no one should get that excited about something as inane as nail polish. In a similar vein, Charlene spoke of her disdain for 'dumb' girls. Her poor opinion of an actress she perceived as vacuous, was changed only after reading a biography of her in a previous issue of *Seventeen* that had revealed to her a more capable side of the actress.

Of all the participants, however, Karen in particular was inflamed by the dumb or ditzzy girl image she saw in some aspects of the magazine. For Karen, the portrayal of girls as looks and fashion obsessed seemed to be a critical issue. In both her log and the group discussion Karen frequently condemned this depiction of females. In fact, she alone mentioned the article, *Scenes from a Mall*, a play-by-play account of an entire day spent by two friends at a local mall. (Incidentally, in the vernacular of *Seventeen*, a *hottie* is a cute boy.) In her reader response log, Karen wrote:

These girls are the biggest twinks. They go cruise the mall for guys and they think "going to the mall is an adventure" and they think one mall has more "hottie potential" than another. And they go to the mall every weekend. This article was pretty sad.

Karen was also alone in condemning the piece, *Get Sporty*, in which readers are made privy to beauty tips for the sports minded. To give the reader an idea of what the article contains, the following is the introduction given for the article:

The good news: You made the team. The not-so-good news: All that sweating, sun exposure and sprinting is wrecking your looks. Here's how to beat your major sports related beauty probs. (p. 169).

Karen expressed a strong aversion for the assumptions made in the article that girls who played sports make appearance and makeup a priority. The insinuation that girls allow beauty issues to eclipse other interests clearly angered her. Karen's response to this feature is particularly scathing as can be seen from what she wrote about it in her log:

Get sporty -this talks about "sports related beauty probs" but from my experience I don't go and do my makeup at half time when I'm playing a game. It kind of tells girls that, while it's good to play sports, beauty is still a priority which is kind of weak.

The *Get Sporty* article received relatively minor attention from the participants. It wasn't discussed in either group meeting, and only three participants, besides Karen, alluded to it in the response logs. Evident in the following comments made by these three girls, they had a rather positive take on the article.

Ashley: Loved p 168-171 because people forget that girls play sports too.

Marsha: Get Sporty is a great few pages a lot of girls play sports and would love to read this

Kathy: Good tips! I think this is helpful and encourages girls not to let beauty interfere with being active.

Reader Response Logs

Apparently, for these three participants, the *Get Sporty* article's emphasis on beauty concerns was not an issue. Instead, they believed the article acknowledged that girls are active and athletic; they also felt that the article was offering a form of support to

girls who play sports by telling them how to stay active and not shy away from sports because of appearance concerns.

The variation in responses to the *Get Sporty* article that can be observed in Karen's response versus that of the other three girls is particularly noteworthy. That these readers could have such different understandings and interpretations of the same text runs contrary to previous reader response research that suggests that readers react rather uniformly to the text of teen magazines (Duke, 1994; Finders, 1997). Certainly, the sarcasm evident in Karen's condemnation of the article, complete with quoted references to the text itself, reveals a savvy and highly critical reading stance unacknowledged by either of these researchers.

The Power of the Message, the Power of the Medium: "If it *wasn't* for the magazines, *why* would she think that?"

In this section, the participants' perceptions with regards to the text's ability or power to influence its audience are discussed. As noted, the themes that emerged from the data overlap in several instances and the discussion of the text's influence over its readers was interwoven with other themes. For one, the participants' views concerning the power of teen magazines encompassed the whole notion of the believability, or unbelievability of the text. It is also overlaps the theme of anger and the participants' perception of the magazine as a source of information.

The perceived power of the magazine seems to take on the quality of a two-sided coin. The believable aspects carry in the participants' opinions, the power to inform,

reassure, and encourage readers. On the other hand, the body image issues that were raised indicated that these participants are also concerned with the potential of the magazine to negatively affect readers and make some readers feel inadequate:

Karen: (referring to *Seventeen*) It portrays girls badly.

Amber: It shows fake girls-it's a fake idea of girls.

C.G.: So what about that? Does it portray girls that way? Do you think so?

(Instantly, there are yes's and nods all around.)

Discussion Group 1

Participants in Group 2 were particularly vocal about their anger and frustration with the body image promoted by teen magazines, and the whole fashion industry in general. Linda argued that this unrealistically emaciated body type caused some teens to engage in drastic weight loss measures. In the following excerpt, these participants accused the magazines of failing to use their influence to change this by featuring females with healthy physiques in their publications.

Ashley: I think I have never seen an overweight girl in any of those magazines. Ever.

Kristen: They just have stuff telling you to diet and lose 30 pounds.

Marsha: They're all perfect girls.

Linda: They're not like chubby or anything and they're all like skinny.

Kathy: They all have like blond hair.

Ashley: Now I bet everyone here (she motions to the others around her) thinks it's a bad thing to be fat. I don't think it's bad to be fat.

(We digress from this discussion for a moment and then I ask about the motivation of advertisers.)

C.G.: Why do you think advertisers think that way?

Kathy: It's a stereotype.

Marsha: Beauty means being skinny.

Kathy: Magazines like this have the power the change that and I think they should totally take control and-

Ashley: Yeah, they've got *us* thinking!

Kathy: They have that power and they're not using it-

Linda: That's why people are bulimic and like skinny. Because they're trying to look like that.

(The conversation digresses as the girls discuss people they know who are extremely upset about their weight. The conversation comes back to the role of the magazines in creating a situation where some people feel inadequate.)

Linda: You just have to like what you are.

Kathy: Magazines don't promote that at all. Hardly anybody can be that skinny. Hardly anybody can achieve that weight.

Marsha: Do the models actually really *like* the way they look?

Discussion Group 2

The Readers' Ambivalence: Dealing With the Aspects of the Text That They Find

Harmful to Girls?

Perhaps the most telling excerpt with regards to the girls' views concerning the role that the magazine plays in the formation of self image in its readers occurs in the following. After hearing the participants' concerns about the potential effects of the portrayal of the "ideal girl" on the self-esteem of the magazines' readers, I was intrigued by how they themselves dealt with this aspect of the text. After hearing some criticisms of the magazine from the participants I asked why they still read *Seventeen*. In the following excerpt, to better make the point, a portion of an excerpt used earlier in this chapter has been repeated.

Karen: (referring to *Seventeen*) It portrays girls badly.

Amber: It shows fake girls-it's a fake idea of girls.

C.G.: So what about that? Does it portray girls that way? Do you think so?

(Instantly, there are yes's and nods all around.)

C.G.: But you like it still. You agree with those things but still read it?

(There is a little defensiveness; some laughter. Smiles at one another. Shrugs)

Karen: Yeah. It's just something you do. You just read them anyway.

Kathleen: You still like it.

Amber: It's entertaining. It's something to do.

Discussion Group 1

I also asked the participants in Group 2 how they balanced their concerns and even disgust with this body image with their own reading practices:

C.G.: Charlene, do you see any problems with the magazines?

Charlene: Well not for me because I'm not really insecure about my weight or anything and I'm not like saying I have to be like those skinny models and stuff like that.

Me: So it doesn't affect you that way?

Charlene: No

Me: So when you're reading it you just enjoy what you enjoy...?

Charlene: Yeah. I think it's stupid they put such perfect models but it's not like it really affects me that much.

Me: So you can look at it and dismiss it and go on and find the things you like...?

Charlene: Yeah.

Kathy: Yeah.

Linda: Yeah. I don't care if I'm not beautiful-

Ashley: You *are!* (Linda looks a little shy at that and shakes her head at Ashley. Ashley looks at her and gives a big sigh of exasperation.) Hhhhh! See! She thinks she's *so* not beautiful and I don't understand why she thinks that. Like seriously. I'm not kidding, like I don't know. And I think it's *'cause* of the magazines. If it *wasn't* for the magazines, *why* would she think that?

Discussion Group 2

The participants' responses as to why they read *Seventeen* despite their criticisms of it, were extraordinarily complex. For one, it is clear that these participants are aware

that there is an accepted standard of beauty for females in our society, and that this standard also dominates the popular media. Moreover, the girls recognize that this standard is narrow, rigid, constraining, and unrelenting, and it seems to be everywhere.

Secondly, and of extreme relevance to this study, is the fact that the participants recognized that they themselves had accepted this cultural standard of beauty. They were concerned about how the standard might negatively affect them (and their peers). Simply put, the girls were concerned about being concerned with this standard. Related closely to this issue is that the participants were aware that their own of their own complicity in the larger picture. They saw themselves and their peers as influenced, albeit to varying degrees, by the pressure of this beauty standard. Part of this sense of complicity was also communicated in the way that the participants responded when I asked them why they read the magazines despite the concerns they had about the text's messages. Indeed, the sheepishness and defensiveness expressed by some of the participants regarding the fact that they had problems with the magazine, still read it, is noteworthy in light of research conducted by Duke (1995). As described in Chapter Two, Duke also found that participants in her study were sheepish about reading teen magazines despite having serious concerns regarding the texts' messages.

Thirdly, the participants had clearly adopted different ways to deal with this oppressive standard of beauty. For Charlene, it seemed that dealing with this standard was a matter of taking an intellectual stance on the issue. Essentially, Charlene reasoned that being skinny wasn't something she was interested in striving for. Thus, she explained that the skinny girl image didn't *personally* affect her, although she found it irritating and "stupid." Both Kathy and Linda agreed with her.

Complications arose however, in the discussion when Linda explained how she coped with the "ideal girl" image that annoyed her so much in teen magazines. She explained that, in essence, she didn't find herself beautiful and didn't care about not being beautiful. For Linda, this meant that her ability to enjoy the magazine was not impeded by the beauty standard she saw portrayed there. Hence, it seemed that Linda dealt with the pressure of the beauty standard by taking herself out of the competition, so to speak.

Others responded to the beauty standard by feeling and expressing anger. Certainly, this is evident in Ashley's reaction to Linda. Ashley was convinced that Linda's perception of herself as "not beautiful" had much more to do with magazines like *Seventeen* than Linda was prepared to admit.

In the transcript, the following excerpt follows the one above directly. As will be seen the subject of how the text affects readers aroused further debate.

C.G.: So, Ashley, do you think there's any problems with the magazines but you still read them? Is there any tension between the things you don't like and what you like? Do you know what I mean?

Ashley: There's more things that I don't like. Especially like it totally gives you a sense of mind that what's right is like skinny and stuff like that and what's wrong is fat and I don't like that. But I don't read them that often like if I'm on the ferry and I'm gonna buy a magazine I won't buy a novel. I don't read... buy that often.

C.G.: Kathy, do you read them very often?

Kathy: No. Just like that. If I have nothing to do and I see the colours and there's an interesting person on the front, then I'll buy it but if it's all stupid topics I'm not gonna.... I think most girls are like that. Girls don't just-people may think that girls say, "oh I have to be skinny now oh, look at that girl, she's wearing pink makeup!" But most people know better. And I think it really helps girls. I don't think it's so much makes us want to look like that as it makes us, challenges our opinions

and makes them stronger, like, I don't like *that* and so magazines really force that on you that you don't like it so I think that's really good.

C.G.: (Directly to Kathy) Ok, so maybe *you're* coming at that because you have a strong opinion about things. What if you were a weaker person in your personality, you were more vulnerable and you could be convinced of things? You don't strike me as a person who is easily convinced.

Kathy: I think that if you were like teased a lot, you would go to magazines and think you had to look like that. You'd be, "Oh they won't tease me if I do *that*..." (Nods and agreements all around.)

C.G.: So do you guys think it's the *reader* that has the effect on the magazine? (All say, "Yeah.") So if you're a weak personality it might affect you more, if you're a strong personality it might, is that how it works?

Ashley: If you're insecure and you're reading the magazine it's gonna like give you a bad effect more than if you're a secure person and you don't look at the magazine in that way. Like you don't see anything by skinny models...

Linda: Not only that. It's like you go out and you see people like that and you see them as yeeech.

Marsha: If you do have lower self esteem I guess it would affect you more than if you were strong minded and had confidence.

(The conversation digresses. The girls discuss model Kate Moss.)

C.G.: So you prefer natural.

Kathy: Why do they promote that? They know that no girl that reads that magazine goes to school looking like that. They should promote natural teens.

Marsha: Sometimes I hate it because they say things like you should *never* spend hours on your makeup and then they tell you a *million* different ways to do it and how to do it.

Again, it is clear from this discussion, that these participants' view the text as a potentially influential force in the lives of readers. Throughout the discussion regarding the image of skinny and perfect models, the participants emphasized that these standards of beauty imposed unrealistic expectations on many young women. Ashley, in particular, blamed this standard for influencing her peers to feel inadequate, by comparison. Others agreed that the image of the ideal body as a skinny body was extremely harmful to some young women. What was intriguing to me was that throughout this part of the discussion, the girls largely skirted the issue of how the texts affected *them* personally.

When I asked the girls how they negotiated the practice of reading teen magazines with the fact that they had serious concerns about these texts, both groups responded with a quiet pause. After considering the question, several girls mentioned that despite their concerns, they were still able to derive enough from the magazines to make the practice worthwhile. They read them, they said, because notwithstanding the objectionable elements, they were still enjoyable. It seemed that they managed to compartmentalize the parts of the magazines that bothered them, and continued to enjoy the rest.

But there was another very important way in which participants balanced the fact that they read teen magazines, even though they found some of the messages contained within them offensive and even harmful. Quite clearly, the participants developed strategies for dealing with the messages that bothered them.

Of all of the participants in the study, only Ashley, fully examined her own vulnerability to the messages in the text. In fact she was the only participant who mentioned that she recognized her own vulnerability to the beauty standard, and that

furthermore, it made her angry that she had been influenced in this way. In her log book Ashley wrote,

Pgs. 162-167 the women look unhealthy and gross yet it makes me want to look like that.

Obviously, Ashley knows that she is concerned about measuring up to the impossible standard of thinness promoted in the fashion and beauty industries. But, it is important to recognize that she is aware of her own vulnerability and that she is concerned that she has been influenced by something she knows she objects to. Moreover, in several instances during the group discussion, it was Ashley who stressed that the perfect body image had caused many of her peers to judge themselves harshly, and to feel depressed about their appearance.

Another way that the participants addressed the issue of reading the magazines despite recognizing that they are problematic in some ways, was to consider the effect of the reader on the text. Indeed, their analysis of the issue included a consideration of the fact that each individual reads the magazine differently. They believed that the reader's self-concept and background determined the degree to which the text could exert its influence. They reasoned that readers who are needy, insecure, or teased by peers would be more susceptible to the text's messages concerning what it is to be beautiful and that these readers would judge themselves harshly against the beauty standards they see in teen magazines.

During this part of the discussion, Kathy took this line of thought one step further. In her opinion, offensive or unpalatable messages in the text could influence the reader to be a more critical and savvy person. She contended that readers with a strong sense of self, could actually utilize their criticisms of the text to strengthen their own convictions.

She also argued that adults seldom give girls credit for being capable of dealing with these images in mature or healthy ways. For Kathy, "most people know better" than to blindly follow what they read and see, and certainly most girls have the power to confront objectionable messages in the text, with their own convictions and personal strengths.

Romance and True Love Stories: "It gives me something to look forward to."

Among the regular monthly features in *Seventeen* is one called *Truly, Madly, Deeply*. In this feature are pictures of teen couples (all heterosexual) along with their ages, stories of how they met, how long they've dated, and their most romantic moments. Time did not permit a discussion of this particular feature, although it did come up in the reader response logs quite often and all of the participants who wrote about it, did so quite favourably. The following excerpts from the participants' response logs illustrate their views concerning the feature.

Kathleen: Truly, Madly, Deeply - thought that it was neat to read how long they've been going out.

Karen: It was pretty cute and the relationships seemed realistic

Charlene: It was cute to see how all of those couples met and how long they've been together. It's also kind of like, relationships like those actually happen. Sometimes it's a bit depressing to read those kinds of things though, because they're happily coupled, while others are single.

Kathy: p. 60-62 about relationships. It's so weird how some of them have been going out for 2 years. They should have done it with famous people though, because it's a more interesting topic.

Marsha: *Truly, Madly, Deeply - this is one of my favourite parts of my magazine. Reading about these people is fun and it gives me something to look forward to.*

Kristen: *On p. 60-62 are pages that talk about couples that are together for a long time and how they got together in the first place. A long term relationship is really valuable because I think it's sometimes that there are a lot of other influences that make a relationship to be over. Influences like peer pressure, parent pressure, or each other's schedules don't fit together. But these couples are able to stay together for a long time.*

Ashley: *I like it. I think they're so sweet. I like stories about relationships.*

Reader Response Logs

It appears from these comments that these participants are quite enamoured of this feature. For several of the girls, stories of others' romances provide a glimpse of a life experience that they are looking forward to. Kristen admires the longevity of the couples' relationships, given the obstacles that can interfere with young romances. Others remark that these couples and their love stories are *cute* and *sweet*. Charlene alone confesses that sometimes articles like these can make people who aren't involved in a romantic relationship, wistful and even depressed.

The theme of romance is also relevant in light of previous content analysis research as well as my own findings regarding the content of *Seventeen*. My textual analysis revealed that 30% of articles in *Seventeen* revolved around heterosexual romantic relationships (see Figures 1 and 2). Moreover, that in teen magazines great emphasis is placed on romance was discussed in the review of the literature, where it was noted that previous researchers have stressed the prevalence of romance themes in these

texts (Evans, 1991; Evans et al., 1993; Finders, 1996; McRobbie, 1978; Peirce, 1990,1993).

CHAPTER 5

Interpretation and Discussion of the Data

This study was designed to explore the reader responses of adolescent females to the text of *Seventeen* magazine. To this end, three questions were articulated: one, how did regular readers of teen magazines respond to these texts; two, what were the categories and themes that emerged from their responses; and three, how would these responses compare to relevant literature in this field. Having addressed the first and second of these questions in the previous chapter, I turn now to a discussion of the findings from the present study in light of previous research. As well, the implications of this work on future research and on curriculum design and classroom application are addressed in this chapter.

Interpreting Reader Response Data: Listening Carefully Enough to Hear

In previous studies of reader response and teen magazines, assumptions regarding the relationship between the reader and these texts have impeded open-ended exploration. Much of this has to do with the methodology that has been employed. Certainly Frazer (1987) and Duke (1995) brought to their studies serious concerns about the degree to which readers of teen magazines were socialized by these texts. Consequently, their concerns about how participants *would* respond to teen magazine text, constrained their ability to observe how the participants they worked with *did* respond to these texts. Thus the research became a vehicle for hypothesis testing as well as for providing a forum for discovery.

Similarly, without investigating reader response, researchers who conducted content analyses of teen magazines, have nonetheless drawn conclusions regarding the socializing power exerted by these publications. As established, this runs against the grain of reader response theory which holds that we cannot assume that we know how the reader interprets the text.

Replication Difficulties in Previous Reader Response Research

Difficulties in replication have also been a factor in previous studies. The work of both Duke (1995) and Frazer (1987) is limited in this regard as the response probe cannot be replicated. While both of these researchers provide excerpts from their discussions with participants, they neglect to include the texts used, a crucial component in their research design. As noted, Frazer (1987) provides only a brief synopsis of the response probe that she used with her participants, a short story she selected from an issue of *Jackie*. However, she includes neither the issue in which the story can be located, nor her rationale for making this particular selection. Similarly, while Duke (1995) notes that she discussed teen magazines during her interviews with participants, the titles and dates of the magazines are not supplied.

Why Previous Frameworks for the Interpretation of Reader Response Don't Work

The injection of clearly defined expectations on the part of previous researchers regarding the socializing impact of teen magazines on their readers has meant that research in this area has been narrowed or distilled down to the question of whether or not teen magazine readers are influenced by these texts. Certainly, concern with the

readers' susceptibility to the text of teen magazines has driven reader response researchers to adopt a reactionary position and thus focus on proving otherwise. Consequently, rather than asking the more open and exploratory question of *how* readers respond to teen magazines, inquiry in the field has focussed on how readers *resist*, or *fail to resist* the text's messages.

Conceptualizing reader response in these terms is problematic for several reasons. For one, the acceptance-rejection framework is far too limited. Clearly, from my own data, much more was at play in what the girls said about the text. Secondly, the acceptance-rejection framework characterizes these responses as mutually exclusive; the assumption is that the reader will do either one, or the other of these, in response to the text. Again, the present study revealed just the opposite. In fact, one of the most intriguing aspects of the analysis of the girls' responses to the text was that they simultaneously accepted and rejected aspects of text, and did so on a variety of levels.

Thirdly, the acceptance-resistance framework is ineffective because it rests on some crude assumptions about both the readers of teen magazines, and about the texts. The framework assumes a homogeneity in the responses of the readers of these publications. It is evident from the present study, however, that this assumption is erroneous. Participants made individual assessments about each aspect of the text. Further, they clearly understood that the power of the text to influence readers was mitigated by an array of contextual factors. They were aware, for example, that the reader's mindset, attitude, life experiences, and self-concept affected her reading of the text, and that the impact of the text on the reader varied from reading to reading--it wasn't a static or immutable event.

The second assumption underpinning the acceptance-resistance paradigm is that the magazine text is a seamless, cohesive whole. Again, this was not borne out in my own textual analyses of *Seventeen* magazine--one example of this is that the presence of non-white human photographic subjects varied to a marked degree in different components of the publication, from 14% in the advertising category to 43% in the feature *School Zone*—nor was this view of the text held by the participants in this study. Instead, the girls responded differently to different aspects of the text: some they valued, others they dismissed. They were clearly capable of differentiating the value of each aspect of the text in order to determine the ways in which they would use, or discard, each textual component. Some aspects served for example, as information sources, while others were used as light entertainment.

This observation is particularly illuminating in terms of previous reader response studies in this area. As noted, any approach to the study of teen magazines that involves the separating out of individual components of the text is bound to be problematic. I have emphasized that the text is an amalgamation of several kinds of reading; one component cannot be viewed as representative of all the text's offerings. Unarguably, Frazer's use of one story extracted from *Jackie* magazine as a response probe (1987) and Peirce's content analysis research of teen magazine fiction (1993) are valuable for the in-depth exploration they provide of these textual elements. However, it is important that findings regarding these fragments of the text are not construed as representative of the entire text, and that the reader's response to one textual component is not extrapolated to her response to the whole text. In short, studies of distinct components can serve to build

our understanding of teen magazine text, by providing insights into pieces of the puzzle; but they cannot inform our understanding of the text as a whole.

I emphasize the adoption of the view of the text as a collection of distinct components because having this view impacts heavily on the kind of research that can be done in this area. In the present study, I believed it was critical that I provided a full data set, thus, I gave the participants the entire issue of *Seventeen* and included content analysis data as an integral part of this study. This, I believe, permitted the kind of exploration of the reader's approach to the text that I was interested in observing.

The experience of reading a teen magazine for those participants is something quite different than the experience of reading a traditional novel. These participants approached the text much like a smorgasbord of entrees and desserts. As active consumers, they selected various offerings in the text for different purposes, fully recognizing the relative value of the substantive and useful, compared with the insubstantial and frivolous aspects of the text. In effect, the participants were aware that they consumed the sensible offerings (informative articles) along with the merely light-hearted and silly features (*Trauma-rama*), the latter as a kind of indulgent dessert or junk food. Finally, it was evident that the girls found some aspects of the text—the portrayal of some females—unpalatable.

Hence, as the data make plain, reader response is far too complex to unravel neatly into the acceptance-rejection paradigm. Reader response needs to be framed in completely different terms. In effect, in the discussion of the data gathered in this study, it is the complexity and sophistication of the participants' responses that have been emphasized. To do justice to this complexity and to begin to more fully appreciate the

sophistication of the participants' responses, future analyses must be severed from the limiting acceptance-rejection framework that has been employed in previous research. (Duke, 1995; Evans, 1990; Evans et al., 1991; Frazer, 1987; McRobbie, 1978; Peirce 1991, 1993).

Complexity and Sophistication: "Most people know better."

The examination of the intricacy and layered nature of the participants' reader response, has been framed in terms of the following: one, the participants' use of different aspects of the texts for different purposes; two, the girls' ability to critically analyse the text and to go beyond it; and three, the participants' ambivalence with regards to reading teen magazines despite having concerns about some of their messages.

Different Components, Different Uses, Different Criteria for Judgement

The participants regarded *Seventeen* as a resource that served a wide variety of purposes in their lives. Indeed their approach to the text was decidedly eclectic. This contradicts the assumption pervasive in previous research, that teen magazine readers are passive readers. Further, it flies in the face of the notion that teen magazine readers approach these publications with few, if any, evaluative or critical abilities to apply. Certainly the data gathered from both the logs and discussion group meetings reveal that these participants are not unequipped to manage and critically evaluate the content of these texts.

These participants approached *Seventeen* with expectations and clearly established frameworks for judging both the usefulness and validity of the text. For one, the participants' assessment of an article's believability played a crucial role in determining the relationship that they had with that article. This initial assessment appeared to serve as a filter; once an article was deemed believable, only then were its value and applicability considered.

Once the participants had imbued an article with the ability to inform readers, it was evident that they had criteria in place for judging the worth of these features. Moreover, it wasn't just that these participants were able to state whether an article or feature met the criteria they had in place for assessing its merit; they were also able to articulate these criteria and to explain how they applied them. Illustrative of this is the way in which the members of Group 2 assessed the article *Baby Talk*.

In discussing this article, the participants agreed that *Seventeen* dealt with social issues like teen pregnancy, in ways that made these topics more accessible to teens than did other presentational formats. They attributed the appeal of these pieces, as presented in *Seventeen*, to several factors. For one, the inclusion of personal experiences of other teens brought the issues home to readers. Secondly, the kinds of issues dealt with were relevant to teens, given the kinds of problems adolescents are facing at present. Thirdly, the participants valued the frank and uncompromising tone that was used in these articles. Fourthly, they agreed that by presenting social issues and topics such as sex and body concerns, teen magazines served an important function for teens—especially since most teens were probably as awkward as they were, when it came to talking with their parents about sex or dating. They also noted that they did not get as much out of teacher talks or

textbooks on these subjects. Thus, as the result of several factors, the participants agreed that for teens who needed to be made aware of important social issues, magazines like *Seventeen*, presented this information in a way that was highly accessible.

The Ability to Go Beyond the Text Itself

The fact that participants applied a thoughtful and comprehensive analysis to their reading of *Baby Talk* (and other articles that served as information sources for teens) has another important implication. The participants used *Baby Talk* as a jumping off point for an in-depth analysis of the whole issue of teen pregnancy and sexual activity as it affected them and their peers. Group 2 participants moved from their discussion of the article, to a consideration of why teens have sex at an early age, and to the role of sex in a dating relationship. They returned to the more personal realm by talking about the fears they had about peers who were having sex. Lastly, the conversation shifted to the issue of why some young people might not use birth control, and they considered that emotional immaturity might prevent a teen from really considering the possible repercussions of unprotected sex. As demonstrated, these participants were able to move beyond the text and apply it to their own experiences and assumptions. To this end, they dialogued with the text, reflecting on, and judging its content against their own views on the subject and simultaneously discussed and debated the text with one another. Furthermore, the participants projected what the text said onto their own experiences as well as those of their peers.

From the Tyra Banks article, these readers took something besides information. Although the article gave these readers a behind the scenes look at a famous celebrity and

her family and career, more importantly, it offered readers the sense that the supermodel was more similar to them than they could ever have imagined. From the article, the participants learned that Tyra was quite unattractive as a young teen, that her parents divorced, and that her occasional romantic relationships are typically disastrous. All of this served to narrow the gap that the participants had drawn between the model and themselves. In this way, Tyra's story appeared to convey a double-sided kind of encouragement to the girls. That Tyra experienced some struggles along the road to success, conveyed to some of the participants that obstacles in one's early teens can, and do resolve themselves in time. On the other hand, Tyra's ordinary family and less-than-enviable dating life signaled that good looks don't guarantee romance, or constant happiness.

The participants also applied evaluative criteria to those elements of the text that they perceived as unbelievable. The data suggests that these readers entered into a kind of understanding or open negotiation with the text; the text made no secret of its frivolity, and the participants expected the material in these features to be frivolous. This is clearly evident in comments such as Karen's, about the quiz: "they tell you what you want to hear", again providing evidence that the readers are aware that particular components of the magazine are "faked" to varying degrees. They know this is done for the sake of entertaining readers, and they themselves are entertained.

The feature *School Zone*, however, adopted an unusual place in terms of its believability. Essentially, the kids in *School Zone* were seen by the participants as more interesting looking, more heavily made up, more stylish, thinner, cooler and hipper than the participants' schoolmates. The feeling among participants that *School Zone* only

showed schools in the United States added to this perception of other-ness. (The February 1997 issue of *Seventeen* did do a *School Zone* on Central Technical School in Toronto, but none of the participants mentioned this.) The girls' assessment of *School Zone* limited its ability to offer anything to them; accordingly, they decided to make very little use of this feature.

Reading Teen Magazines With Ambivalence: "There's more things that I *don't*
like, [than I *do* like]"

The portrayal of many of the females in *Seventeen* was also perceived by the participants as unbelievable. This was certainly the most contentious aspect of the text's content, and it generated heated discussion among the participants. It also was an extremely fertile source for evidence of both the complexity and sophistication of the participants' reader responses.

Anger and frustration regarding the portrayal in *Seventeen* of skinny, looks-obsessed, 'sleazy' or 'ditzzy' females was a dominant theme in both the logs and group discussions. Stylized photos of superficial, insubstantial beauties with vacant gazes were particularly offensive to the participants in this study. While some researchers (Duke, 1995; Finders, 1997) have intimated that reactions like these might suggest feelings of inferiority or jealousy among magazine readers, the data in this study do not support that interpretation. While this issue was not a focus of the analyses, the subject clearly warrants further attention and could be a profitable focus in future studies. From the

ways the girls spoke about this presentation of females in the magazine, I had the sense that these participants simply wanted girls to be deeper than skin deep.

The complexity and sophistication of these readers is again evident in the ambivalence they felt about their own teenzine reading practices. The participants demonstrated a keen awareness of the problematic aspects of teen magazines, specifically the standard of beauty promoted by these publications. Many recognized that they have assimilated this standard into their own lives and ways of thinking, and furthermore, that they have developed different ways to deal with this beauty standard. These young women appear well aware that different will be affected differently by the texts' messages.

From the data gathered from both the logs and discussion groups, it appears that these participants have negotiated, and continue to negotiate ways to deal with the dilemma of appreciating and valuing certain aspects of the text, while simultaneously finding other aspects irritating and even repulsive. In effect, they are engaged in a balancing act. On the one hand, they take information, pleasure, and the occasional reassurance or uplifting sentiment from the text, while on the other, they rail against the images of females that anger and frustrate them. Indeed, the participants seem to teeter between these reactions to the text.

This ambivalence and the resulting tension between finding teen magazines useful and entertaining, or irritating and potentially harmful to *some* girls, reflects the complexity of the participants' reader responses. And, this ambivalence is itself complex. It doesn't appear to be the result of simultaneously liking and disliking the text, but rather it arises out of negotiating the pull of what they perceive as good in the text, with the

aversion to what they perceive as bad in the text. For the participants in this study, it appears that as long as the first of these reactions remains stronger than the latter, they will continue to read teen magazines.

Reflections on the Methodological Design of the Study: Directions for Future Research

I was very fortunate to have studies of both content analyses and reader response to draw on for the present study. Having the opportunity to examine how these two facets inform the investigation of teen magazines and reader response, has impressed on me that each approach has much to offer, but that both are strengthened through combination.

Second Thoughts on the Methodology

By and large, the methodology served the goals of this study. Upon reflection, given the opportunity to redesign the study, I would not create the questionnaire myself, but instead would collaborate with a group of teen girls (not potential participants) to design the questionnaire. What signaled this oversight, was that one questionnaire respondent pencilled "internet" below the list of reading material types I had provided in Question 2. I had included a space for participants to list other reading choices in the event that I hadn't included all of the possibilities, but I couldn't believe I had overlooked such an obvious item.

Implications for Educators: Taking a Closer Look at "The Literature Under The Desk"

I have calculated that slightly more than one-half of the girls in North America between the ages of 10 and 19 read teen magazines (as discussed in Chapter One). Clearly, for the participants in this study, teen magazine reading was a very common practice as well. In fact, both novels and teen magazines were by far the predominant types of reading materials selected by the participants who completed the questionnaire at both high school sites. Naturally, readership figures taken from this study cannot be generalized to all adolescent females, but taken in conjunction with other readership figures presented earlier, we can have reasonable confidence that a considerable number of adolescent females read teen magazines. Figures like these warrant our attention.

The popularity of teen magazines suggests that many adolescent females are quite motivated to read these particular publications. For teachers, what may be problematic about this is that magazine reading can eclipse other reading opportunities both in and out of the classroom. In my own experience as a middle school teacher, I have spoken with numerous colleagues and parents about their concerns that many girls choose to read teen magazines over all other types of reading material.

In 1993, Wray and Lewis conducted a study of the covert, in-class reading practices of Junior High School students. They called these materials "the literature under the desk" (p. 258) having found that students frequently kept magazines and comics opened on their laps, under their desks, and thus out of the teacher's view. Another common concealment strategy was tucking the clandestine texts between the pages of a school notebook or textbook.

Wray and Lewis (1993) investigated the teachers' reactions to this literature under the desk. Many educators they interviewed reflected on their students' interest in magazines and comics rather ambivalently; they conceded that although these materials were of a very poor literary quality, nonetheless *some* reading on the part of the students was preferable to no reading at all. (Incidentally, Finders (1997) and McRobbie (1978) also discussed that teachers and parents did not regard teen magazines as quality literature and that this resulted in girls reading teen magazines covertly.) Perhaps it is time to take a closer look at why students go to such lengths to read these materials and what it is that makes them so appealing to their readers.

Educators and researchers would benefit from taking a closer look at the appeal of a genre that strikes so many adults as a poor substitute for good literature. Furthermore, given that the magazine readers in the present study strongly believed that *Seventeen*, and magazines like it, provided teens with valuable information on pertinent issues such as teen pregnancy, this also might prompt teachers to reconsider the value of these publications, or at least the value of individual articles or features.

Certainly, an aspect that warrants closer scrutiny is that readers appear to find the presentational format of teen magazines highly appealing and accessible. As established, according to the participants in this study, teen magazines present information about social issues, and sex and body information in ways that are preferable to and more readily accessible than other presentational formats. In fact, participants agreed that most teens were far more likely to attend to this type of issue when presented in a teen magazine, than they would if the material were delivered by a teacher, parent, or textbook. Thus, educators and curriculum planners might rethink their positions regarding

the usefulness of these texts. At least portions of teen magazines, certainly articles like *Baby Talk*, could provide valuable learning opportunities, especially with regards to social and personal issues that teens want to discuss and feel the need to explore.

In recent years, those who develop curriculum for middle and high school students, have given greater recognition to the centrality of the learner to the whole learning process. When creating curriculum for adolescent students, educators are mindful that the materials they introduce and use, must relate to the students' interests and needs in order for the learning experience to be most effective and valuable. Given that popular culture and media often play a central role in the lives of many North American teenagers, it seems only appropriate to investigate these areas more intently, and to continue to develop curriculum that addresses media literacy skills.

Implications for Media Literacy Education: Curriculum Design and Classroom Practice

The issue of media literacy education is one that warrants examination in terms of both theory and curriculum design, and classroom practice or application. In education, theory and practice have a symbiotic relationship, each informs and shapes the others. Thus, my hope is that the present study contributes to both the theoretical and practical aspects of media literacy education.

Those involved in curriculum design have recently turned their attention to the issue of media literacy. Certainly, there is a growing awareness among curriculum developers and educators for the need to teach students to be critical consumers of the media. Illustrative of this is the recent insertion of issues such as bias, stereotyping, and

gender portrayal in the popular media into the British Columbia Integrated Resource Package for teachers.

Given the desire for media literacy education, explorations of various aspects of the media, such as the present study, will hopefully contribute to our understanding of the media and how best to design and deliver a curriculum to students of all ages. More research in this field can only mean that instructional design in media literacy is taken more seriously, and that it is conducted with greater depth and richness. Similarly, increased attention to this research, on the part of curriculum designers, will equip them in developing instructional materials for media literacy education that are increasingly powerful and effective with each new insight gathered.

In terms of classroom practice, or methods of curriculum delivery, the design of this study has, I believe, some important implications. The first of these is that the design of the present study could be readily replicated for use in the classroom. The second issue that warrants further discussion is the value and importance of providing different opportunities for students to meet and discuss issues, than those that are currently offered in most classrooms.

The present study supports the initiative to include media literacy in the curriculum in that its design could be replicated for use with middle school and high school students. Educators who teach media literacy skills in their classrooms could utilise the same methods used in this study to help students explore not only magazines, but several forms of popular media. Certainly students could create and administer questionnaires that address how their peers respond to popular media, and then evaluate whether certain findings warrant closer investigation.

Students could also adapt some of the content analyses methods used in this study to conduct analyses of popular print media. They could also apply these techniques to the analysis of comic books, magazines, novels, song lyrics, or newspaper cartoons. Moreover, the methods used in this study needn't be restricted to the study of print media; they could also be applied to TV programs, film, music, and certainly the advertising industry. This would likely be a very motivating endeavour for most students, particularly since popular media plays a large role in their lives and peer group activities. The employment of these methods to investigate cross media comparisons could also provide exciting learning opportunities.

Another way in which the methods employed in this study could be used in the classroom, is to have students investigate other groups of media consumers. Hence, instead of employing this method to investigate their peers, this method might prove effective for investigating the media consumption practices of other populations. For example, a middle school classroom might examine the responses of kindergarten children to Saturday morning cartoons, or the response of the school staff to a set of popular song lyrics.

Reader response investigations could also be conducted by students through the use of response logs and small group discussions based on their responses. The willingness of the participants in this study to maintain comprehensive and thoughtful response logs, as well as to discuss the issues so thoroughly, demonstrated the effectiveness of these methods and suggests that they would be very effective with other middle school students. From my own work as a classroom teacher, I know that students need to learn how to debate and discuss issues in healthy and progressive ways.

Structuring and facilitating learning opportunities in which students can meet in small groups to express their concerns and opinions, is an important aspect of the teacher's role.

Aside from demonstrating the effectiveness of small group discussion, I believe this study has implications for educators interested in creating meaningful discussion forums for their students. Certainly, one of the strongest impressions left on me by this study was the participants' enthusiasm and frankness during our discussion group meetings. At least in part, I believe the participants' openness is attributable to the fact that only females were present. Thus the opportunity to meet in gender specific groupings seems to offer the possibility of rich and purposeful discussion and suggests that it is beneficial to provide girls with such a forum. If this discussion group format is as effective and fertile as it appears to be, perhaps deeper analysis of the value of this kind of groups situation is one that curriculum developers and educators may want to address more closely.

Directions for Future Research

Because so little research has been conducted in the area of teen magazines and reader response, it seems that trumpeting the need for further investigation in the field, is simply stating the obvious. Like all researchers who have conducted studies in this area, I have to conclude that we still know very little about this aspect of adolescent female literacy, and that we ought to know much more about it. Certainly, there are no aspects in this area that have been fully explored and there remain countless areas for future researchers to pursue.

One rather obvious pursuit is the investigation of reader response with different groups of participants than used in the present study. The responses of other groups of readers could be investigated in future studies: for example, mixed groups of males and females; older readers with younger readers; regular readers with non-magazine readers or with former magazine readers; and groups of teens and adults. Certainly the new wave of zines has barely been explored and begs for further investigation.

The Need for Longitudinal Study

There were a number of topics that I would like to have discussed further with the participants. As this study was designed, time didn't permit lengthier meetings and understandably, there are constraints upon the amount of time that students can be released from their lessons to be involved in this type of endeavour. Certainly, one topic that begged attention was the whole genre of romance in the magazine text. As noted, several girls mentioned the feature *Truly, Madly, Deeply* in their response logs, and given that romantic relationships are a central theme in *Seventeen*, I regret not having had the opportunity to hear what the participants would say about this subject. Perhaps this indicates that in future studies, it might be beneficial to have a second meeting with participants in order to have ample time to discuss all the issues that arise.

The possibilities offered by the use of longitudinal studies are exciting. Not only would longitudinal study permit the exploration of reader response in greater depth and breadth, but it would also allow researchers to investigate if, and how, reader response evolves over time. Factors such as the reader's age and experience, peer group influences, and interests would naturally come into play in this kind of work.

One area that particularly intrigues me, and that could be examined through the use of a longitudinal study, is the issue of ambivalence. I described the readers in this study as teetering between their appreciation of certain aspects of the text and their dislike of other aspects. Future studies might explore this balancing act and investigate what effect the reader's ambivalence has on her magazine reading habits, if any.

Conclusion

From the present study, I discovered that the participants read and responded to *Seventeen* magazine in highly sophisticated ways. They demonstrated a savvy and shrewd analysis of many of the text's features and their evaluations and judgements of its content were often intricate and complex.

Perhaps one of the strongest demonstrations of these readers' sophistication was the ambivalence they felt with regards to the magazine. I say this largely because this ambivalence, or struggle, with the messages contained in the media, echo the feelings of countless women to whom I have spoken. Indeed, as discussed, stalwart feminist authors Susan Douglas (1997), Susan Faludi (1991), Peggy Orenstein (1994) and Naomi Wolf (1991) have all alluded to experiencing this struggle in their own lives.

The depth of girls' perceptiveness, self-awareness, and sophistication has left a deep impression. It was crystallized in statements such as that which Ashley wrote in her reader response log: "the women look unhealthy and gross yet it makes me want to look like that." It is this kind of response that I hope future investigations of reader response and teen magazines will credit and explore more fully.

Magazine Publications Used in This Study

Teen Magazines

Seventeen.	Executive Editor: M. Berlin. New York: Primedia Inc.
YM.	Executive Editor: L.J. Seymour. USA: Gruner & Jahr Publishing.
Teen	Executive Editor: R. Camron. Los Angeles: Petersen Publishing
Girls' Life	Executive Editor: K Bokram. Baltimore, MD: Monarch Avalon Inc.

Zines

Teen Voices	Executive Director: A. Amoroso. Boston, MA: Women's Express Inc.
Reluctant Hero	Executive Editor: S. Azam. Toronto, Ontario: Published by editorial staff
Border Lines	Editors: J. Creet, J. Jenkinson. Canada: Border/Lines Magazine Society Inc.

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Appendix A

Participant Questionnaire and Attachment Form

Appendix A: Participant Questionnaire

If the following questionnaire is completed, it will be assumed that consent has been granted.

Questionnaire for the Study Entitled, "Adolescent Females and Reader Response"

- *Please answer the following questions by putting a check mark in the spaces provided*
- *These questions do not refer to the reading that you do for school that is assigned by the teacher*

1) On an average day, how much time do you spend reading? **Do not count the reading that you have to do for school.**

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 60 minutes
- More than 60 minutes

2) What do you read? Check the spaces below.

- Novels
 - Newspapers
 - Sports Magazines
 - Teen Magazines
 - Catalogues
 - Poetry Books
 - Factual Information books
 - Comics
 - Science/Nature Magazines
 - Computer Guides or Magazines
 - Other? List them below.
- _____
- _____
- _____

3) Check the space that describes you best:

- I buy something to read once a month
- I buy something to read twice a month
- I buy 3 or more things a month to read

4) Check the space that describes you best. **(You can check more than one)**

- I have a magazine subscription
- I buy a magazine every month
- I buy a magazine every other month (5-6 times in a year)
- I borrow magazines to read, or read them with friends once or twice a month
- I don't read magazines

5) If you compared yourself to your friends, would you say that...?

- you like reading **less** than they do
- you like reading **the same amount** as they do
- you like reading **more** than they do

6) What are the names of the magazines that you read or buy?

7) What are the titles or names of the last 3 or 4 things you read? (list any type of reading material)

Appendix A: Attachment to Questionnaire

If you are interested in participating in the next two phases of this study, please complete the consent form below and hand it in with your completed questionnaire.

If you provide your signature, then I will be able to contact you at school and request your involvement in the next parts of the study.

I am willing to participate in the next two phases of the study entitled, "Adolescent Females and Reader Response" to be conducted by Christine Giese.

Signature: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Letters

Appendix B: Statement of Understanding

STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING FOR PARENTS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE
STUDY ENTITLED,
"ADOLESCENT FEMALES AND READER RESPONSE"

Dear Parents,

April 3, 1998.

My name is Christine Giese and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. My Faculty Supervisor is Dr. Alison Preece. For my Master's thesis, I am carrying out a study about adolescent females and their responses to the texts they read. I am asking grade 9 students to help me by participating in my study.

This study will be done in three phases. The first phase involved the voluntary completion of a questionnaire about reading practices and preferences. There was an attachment on the front of the questionnaire for students to sign if they were interested in participating in the next 2 phases of the study. Participants in phases 2 and 3, will meet in a group of 5 with me, on two separate occasions to discuss reading. Your daughter has expressed a willingness in participating in the study.

In Phase 2, the group of 5 members will meet with me for 10-15 minutes. I will give them a text to read and a reader response log. I will ask them to keep a record of what they read in the text for one week. Based on an average of 10-15 minutes per day, completing the log should take no longer than 1-2 hours in total of after school time during that week.

In Phase 3, I will collect the response logs and review them for themes and discussion topics. Then, I will meet again with the discussion group either that afternoon or the following day for approximately 1 hour to talk about the themes identified. This third meeting will be audio taped. Relevant portions of the tape will be transcribed, or written up, for analysis, and I will also be using excerpts selected from the response logs when I report my findings.

Meetings will be held at the school at a time that is most convenient for participants and their teacher. To cause as little inconvenience as possible, all parts of the study should take no more than 1 and 1/2 hours of school time and the response log task should take less than 2 hours in total of after school time for the week of the activity.

The privacy of all who participate will be respected and carefully considered:

- Although the questionnaires will be completed in class time, doing so is voluntary. If the questionnaire is completed, this will be taken as confirmation that consent has been given
- Questionnaire participants will be given the option to sign the attachment to the questionnaire if they are interested in being participating in Phases 2 and 3

- Audio tape used in phase 3 will be erased immediately after relevant portions are transcribed
- In reporting data, code names will be given to participants
- For students involved in discussion groups, there will be a loss of anonymity, in the sense that group members will hear the views and opinions of their peers. However, when reporting the findings from these discussions, anonymity will be protected by means of using code names.
- All data collected--questionnaires, tape, and response logs--will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Only the researcher will have access to the data
- The responses given in the logs will not be directly referenced or quoted, or identified by author to participants or to anyone else
- Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, should they wish to do so and have the right not to respond to any questions that they prefer not to answer
- The decision to participate in the study will in no way be associated with school grades or other school decisions.

I think that this research is very important because it will contribute to an understanding of the reading practices of young women. I also expect that the sessions will be both enjoyable and interesting to the participants who will be helping me with my research. On completion of the study, findings will be shared with the participants on request. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Dr. Alison Preece. Our telephone numbers are provided below.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator: Christine Giese
472-0562

Supervisor: Dr. Alison Preece
721-7759

Appendix B: Letter to Greater Victoria School Board

Superintendent
Greater Victoria School District # 61
556 Boleskine Road
Victoria, B.C.

Nov. 26, 1997

Dear Sir or Madam:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Christine Giese and I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria. Dr. Alison Preece is my Faculty Supervisor.

My research concerns the reader response of young adolescent females, aged 13-14. I would like the opportunity to work with the female students in one of the grade 9 classrooms at your school.

There are 3 parts to the study. Each will be conducted at a time most convenient to the staff and students. In Phase 1 of the study, I will be asking the participants to complete a brief questionnaire about reading. This should take no longer than 10-15 minutes. For Phases 2 and 3 of the study, I will meet together with a small group of 5 participants, identified according to their responses to the questionnaire. The meeting for phase 2 will take 20-30 minutes, and participants will be given a text and a reader response log in which to record their responses to the provided text for one week. Based on 10-15 minutes per day on average, this task should take 1-2 hours in total of after school time. I will return to the school to collect the response logs and will meet with the participants the next day for a discussion of the themes that emerge from the logs.

This third meeting will take approximately 1 hour. This session will be tape recorded. I will be transcribing relevant portions of the tape and using them when reporting study findings. As well, portions of the response logs will be used in the reporting.

Interested participants will be asked to complete a Consent Form and will be given a Statement of Understanding letter to give to their parents or guardians. In both of these communications, the details of the study, time required of participants, and issues of privacy will be detailed. Participants will be informed that participation in all phases of the study is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so.

I hope that you will contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christine Giese (472-0562)

Supervisor: Dr. Alison Preece (721-7759)

Appendix B: Letters

School Principal's Name
School Address

Feb. 2, 1998.

Dear _____,

My name is Christine Giese and I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria. Dr. Alison Preece is my Faculty Supervisor.

I submitted a research proposal to the Superintendent of District #61 last year and have just received written permission to conduct work with students in this School Board, from Mr. Terry Tabor. I am writing to you to request your permission to work with grade 9 students at your school. Specifically, I am interested in working with adolescent females.

There are 3 parts to the proposed study. Each will be conducted at a time most convenient to the staff and students. In Phase 1 of the study, I would like to meet with a class of grade 9 females. I will be asking the participants to complete a brief questionnaire about reading. This should take no longer than 10 minutes.

I will be using the responses from the questionnaires to select 5-6 participants for Phases 2 and 3 of the study. In Phases 2, I will meet together with this smaller group for 15-20 minutes. At that time, I will give these participants a text and a reader response log in which to record their responses to the text for one week. Based on 10-15 minutes per day on average, this task should take 1-2 hours in total of after school time. I will return to the school at an arranged time to collect the response logs from the participants.

Phase 3 of the study requires the greatest amount of time from the students. The day after I collect the reader response logs, I hope to meet with them over the noon hour so that this will not interfere with class time. During this meeting, we will discuss the themes that emerged from the participants' response logs.

This third meeting will take approximately 1 hour. This session will be tape recorded. I will be transcribing relevant portions of the tape and using them when reporting study findings. As well, portions of the response logs will be used in the reporting.

A letter or Statement of Understanding will be given to participants to give to their parents or guardians. In this letter, the details of the study, time required of participants, and issues of privacy will be detailed. Participants will be informed that participation in all phases of the study is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so.

I realise that schools are very busy places and will put every effort into disturbing both the staff's and the participants' school day as little as possible. I hope that you will contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and consideration. . I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Christine Giese (472-0562)

Supervisor: Dr. Alison Preece (721-7759)

VITA

Surname: Giese

Given names: Christine Diane

Place of Birth: Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Western Ontario 1980 to 1984

University of Western Ontario 1984 to 1985

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. University of Western Ontario 1984

B. Ed. University of Western Ontario 1985

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Title of Thesis: "If It Weren't for the Magazines, Why Would She Think That?:
A Study of Reader Response to the Text of *Seventeen* Magazine.

Author



Christine Diane Giese

June 15, 1998.