

# **FROM LIP SMACKERS TO WRINKLE CREAM**

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## **PRIMING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CONSUMING WOMEN**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine if there is a model of ideal femininity communicated through advertising in girls' and women's magazines. To assess the representations of women in magazine advertisements, a content analysis of advertisements appearing in three top-selling, demographically-defined women's magazines (*Girls' Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan*) was conducted. Using feminist theory and hegemony theory as critical lenses, advertisements were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Each advertisement was assessed using five criteria: physical characteristics, social context, personality and attitude, and subtext. Using this data to establish the dominant representations of women, it was determined that there is a model of ideal femininity which is developed through establishing common ideals shared by all three magazines and by gradually introducing new ideals which correspond to shifts in real-world interests and experiences of women. It was concluded that a model of ideal femininity is developed through advertising in girls' and women's magazines, this model is used as a guide to direct girls and women towards specific ideal preferences, attitudes and behaviours, and this model continues to emphasise traditional cultural values and gender ideals which are not necessarily reflective of the range of roles women assume in today's society.

Key words: Advertising, Content Analysis, Feminist Theory, Gender Representations, Hegemony, Ideology, Magazines, Tweens, Teens, Women

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. INTRODUCTION

Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1989, p. 267) argued that the formation of a woman's identity is a process of becoming, explaining, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature [...] which is described as feminine." In other words, the process of becoming is largely influenced by the shared beliefs, values and ideals of a society – its culture. Culture is communicated through various channels – through language, through rituals and traditions, through institutions and governments, through built environments and social interactions, and through material objects and art. As Gerbner and George assert (1976, p. 173), each of these channels serves to explain "how society works" by emphasizing and exaggerating those ideas, values and beliefs meant to be understood as the norms, serving to regulate opinions, behaviours and social relationships. Accordingly, advertising may be considered a tool for communicating cultural ideals and for establishing and maintaining social norms regarding (among other things) gender roles and expectations. By combining easily recognizable (culturally-based) visual and textual references to reality and fantasy, advertisers construct ideal gender representations which are "directly associated with collective meanings, power relations, status hierarchies, resistance, alliances or conflicts that may exist in the public sphere" (Pazarzi & Tsangaris, 2008, p. 29). Over time and through repetition of similar ideas or themes, these representations come to serve as "references for 'what' a woman or a man should do" or who a woman or a man should be or think in a particular society (Soloaga, 2007, p. 2).

Though there is a considerable amount of literature focused on gender representations in the media and the effects these representations have on individuals and their real world experiences, there appears to be a gap in the research when assessing the "becoming" process in terms of how mediated gender representations develop and change (or do not change) during the course of an individual's life. To address this gap, then, I assessed the representations of women in advertisements in popular girls' and women's magazines to establish how the becoming process is constructed in the media and to determine if there is a model of ideal femininity being communicated through these advertisements. A model of ideal femininity refers to shared general notions of what constitutes the perfect example of "woman" – what she looks like, how she behaves, what role she fulfills in society. However, it also refers to the evolution of womanhood and how this ideal changes or develops throughout the different stages of a woman's life. By collecting data from three of the top-selling general interest magazines in their respective demographic markets (*Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*) and categorizing each advertisement included in the sample according to physical characteristics, social context, personality

and attitude, and subtext, mediated representations of women were classified according to the specific role in which they are portrayed. This data was then used to assess the existence of priming to determine if and how advertisers do or do not encourage women to accept and assume specific ideal appearances, behaviours, interests and preferences – a process which begins in childhood and develops during adolescence and into adulthood.

I begin this paper with a detailed discussion of my theoretical framework, focusing on how the power relations within a given society influence the dominant ideologies of that society and how these ideologies are reinforced by mediated representations of reality. I then discuss the use of gender stereotypes in the media and how these generalizations are a concern from a feminist perspective as they ultimately limit the possibilities and opportunities for women. This is followed by a historical analysis of the representations of women in advertisements which focuses on portrayals of women as wives and mothers, as sex objects, and as competent employees. Next I discuss the use of feminist rhetoric, and specifically the use of non-politicized, individualized feminist ideas (faux feminism), by advertisers as a tactic to appeal to a broader consumer market while continuing to support the established social hierarchy.

With this background information provided, I explain my methodological approach and research design, presenting my hypothesis and detailing my two phases of data collection and analysis using purposive sampling, systematic sampling, and a carefully constructed coding process. The following sections present my findings. I begin with quantitative data, focusing on the most frequently advertised product categories in each magazine and discussing the variations and commonalities in this data. Presenting qualitative data, I focus on the representations of women, both those shared across all three magazines and those specific to a certain demographic. I also discuss an anomaly in the data and the presence of faux feminism in advertisements.

Finally, I conclude with a summary of the ideal representations of tweens, teens, and women as portrayed in advertising in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, a discussion about how these representations ultimately contribute to a model of ideal femininity (developed through shared dominant ideologies and gradual ideological shifts), and a consideration of the influence that real women have on mediated representations of gender.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To assess the representations of ideal femininity in advertisements in girls' and women's magazines, I am approaching my study with a hegemonic framework and a feminist lens. I propose the hegemonic composition of a society determines the dominant ideologies of that society. These ideologies are reinforced by mediated representations of reality which rely upon stereotypes to simplify prescriptions of ideal behaviours and opinions. These stereotypes in turn inform individual and social norms and expectations which are ultimately a concern from a feminist perspective as they serve to limit the possibilities and opportunities for women.

### II.1 HEGEMONY & ADVERTISERS' INFLUENCE ON THE ACTIVE AUDIENCE

For Gramsci, power – be it political, economic, and/or ideological power – is not achieved through dominant groups *imposing*, or forcing, a set of values and rules upon those in subordinate positions. Rather, in democratic societies, power is achieved and maintained only when dominant groups are able to gain and sustain *consent* to exercise power from the very groups they desire to dominate (Jones, 2006, p. 4). Accordingly, Gramsci (1988, pp. 205-6, 211) explains hegemony as a “continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria...between the interests of the fundamental groups and those of the subordinate groups” which requires “account be taken [by those in dominant positions] of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised.” Particular interests may be economic needs, legal rights, or even material goods. By first acknowledging and then acquiescing to at least some of these demands, those desiring power begin to bridge the gap between their own concerns and the concerns of the general public. This compromise which recognizes subaltern groups' interests in turn serves to encourage and grow public consent for a specific leadership and keeps in motion the hegemonic process. As Jones (2006, p. 49) explains, “A ruling power that ensures that its subordinates have enough to eat, are in paid employment and have adequate access to healthcare, childcare and holidays has gone a long way towards winning their hearts and minds.”

When applied to the advertising industry, hegemonic compromise functions to persuade consumers to think and act in ways which will support both the ideological and economic goals of the marketplace. Though early researchers typically perceived audiences as passive and powerless “‘victims’, ‘consumers’ or commodities sold to advertisers”, easily persuaded to think, act and consume in specific and deliberate ways (Webster & Phalen, 1997, as cited in McQuail, 2000, p. 394), since the 1970s, there has been a shift to consider the *active audience*. Unlike the passive audience member, the “active” individual is largely in control of how, when, and why they use the media and draws from a

variety of lived experiences and social relationships *as well as* mediated representations to form a worldview which ultimately influences their decision-making (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008; Bramlett-Solomon & Roeder, 2008; Coleman, 2008; Lee & Murray, 1995). Moreover, beyond simply *using* media content as a source of entertainment, information, or fodder for social interaction, the active audience also *interprets* media content. This means the active individual engages in processes of negotiation with media texts, drawing from previous knowledge and experiences to decode the messages or meanings communicated visually, aurally, and/or textually (Harrison & Barthel, 2009). Therefore, I argue that the more control an audience possesses and exercises over use and interpretation of media texts, the more important compromise is to those, like advertisers, who *want* to control use and interpretation to achieve ideological and economic goals.

In order to achieve this hegemonic control and to effectively persuade consumers, advertisers must understand how individuals receive their messages, which requires them to attempt to understand the subjectivities of their target audience. Subjectivity, as Weedon (1987, as cited in Currie, 1997, p. 455) explains, refers to “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.” This means that, while every word, image, colour, and even medium possesses a literal (denotative) meaning, they also are imbued with a secondary meaning (connotative) by the individual who is influenced by “cultural, ideological, and personal implications” (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010, p. 17). As Hall (1980, p. 133) explains, the connotative is rooted in ideology and therefore its “fluidity of meaning and association can be more fully exploited and transformed.” This means that certain words or images may come to signify different meanings depending on how they are incorporated into media texts *and* depending on the current established ideologies of the society in which they are being interpreted (Hall, 1980, p. 133). This also means that advertisers need to have a strong understanding of the meaning systems of their target audiences if they are to construct media texts which not only balance consumer wants and needs with corporate goals, but which also communicate these messages in a way that corresponds with the interpretative framework of the target audience.

In order for those few in dominant positions to effectively communicate in ways which will persuade the mass population, Gramsci asserts a shared ideology must be established. Since Gramsci understands hegemony as not only political or economic domination of one group over another, but rather also as “‘cultural, moral and ideological’ leadership over [...] subordinate groups”, he argues that hegemony requires the construction of a “new ideological ‘terrain’” which connects different groups of people by effectively combining what are often competing social values, ideals and goals, and

developing a shared world view, or a collective “common sense” (Forgacs, 1988, p. 423). As Jones (2006, p. 9) explains,

For Gramsci, common sense is a confused formation, in part drawn from ‘official’ conceptions of the world circulated by the ruling bloc, in part formed out of people’s practical experiences of social life. Despite this unevenness, it offers a deeply held guide to life, directing people to act in certain ways and ruling out other modes of behaviour as unthinkable.

In other words, common sense refers to a shared ideological guide (or guides, since Gramsci (1971, p. 326) acknowledges the existence of multiple common senses, asserting that every social group has its own common sense which is “continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life”) that appears to accommodate the best interests of the whole. This may only be accomplished if these ideologies are rooted in the existing culture of a given society and connects to established meaning systems and value systems (Jones, 2006, p. 7).

From an advertising perspective, creating and maintaining a shared ideology is critical to effective communication and hegemonic power. Accepting that ideologies are rooted in personal experiences and relationships as well as cultural and social ideologies, advertisers are able to consider their target audiences as sharing a specific ideological framework. As Putoni, Shroeder and Ritson (2010) explain, members of a specific social group – defined by a combination of age, gender, race, ethnicity, and so on – draw from a shared pool of knowledge. In other words, various social groups share, to an extent, a common culture, a common dominant ideology, and similar social experiences. As a result, members of these groups have similar intellectual, ethical and experiential frameworks with which they may negotiate meaning and understand media texts and are likely to make similar interpretations (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010, p. 6). If advertisers gain access (through, for example, consumer research) to the information that makes up this shared pool of knowledge (or *common sense*), they can then incorporate meaningful symbols derived from it. As Jones (2006, p. 7) explains, “To do otherwise, to reject an embedded culture and impose something entirely new, would point to a division between the culture of the people and their [...] representatives.” Not only does this give the appearance that the media text come from within that social group, but by nurturing a shared ideology, advertisers are able to enhance communication with that particular audience (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010, p. 6).

For my research, acknowledging the active role the individual has in interpreting media content *and* advertisers’ use of the cultural framework used during this meaning-making process is critical to understanding how advertisers may create an ideological model of ideal femininity. While media texts

should be considered sites of struggle in which ideological messages may be deliberated and reconstructed over and over again by the active individual (Gough-Yates, 2003; Kehily, 1999; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001), I argue that a carefully constructed media text that incorporates cultural and social ideology with specific consumerist objectives may effectively influence the individual towards an interpretation that supports the advertisers' aims because the overall framework appeals to the individual's core worldview, or personal ideology. In other words, it is ultimately by understanding who their target is and how they think and act that allows advertisers to relate to their audience, create continuity between their messages and their audience's real-world experiences, and subtly lead consumer opinions and behaviours in specific directions which support the hegemonic order.

## **II.2 DOMINANT IDEOLOGY & MASS MEDIA**

As Gerbner and Gross (1976, p. 173) explain, the process of communicating ideal cultural norms has become "increasingly professionalized, industrialized, centralized, and specialized." Today the mass media is arguably the most powerful channel to communicate ideology, establishing those who own the media as a significant part of the "cultural leadership" in North America (Curran, 2006, as cited in Cooky, Wachs, Messner, & Dworkin, 2010, p. 143). Be it through newspapers and magazines, radio and television, or the Internet, those in control of the media are able to effectively and continually communicate specific ideas regarding values, ideals and expectations across societies, aiming to gradually persuade their audiences into accepting standardized thoughts and behaviors that best suit the needs and wants of those in leadership positions.

However, achieving and maintaining social influence through mass media requires the careful construction of stories (verbal, aural, and/or visual) to appeal to the public consciousness and encourage individuals to, over time, accept the represented norms and "standards of judgment on which conclusions are based" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 173) and integrate them into their own lives. Therefore, the more those in control of the media understand who their audience is and recognize what their realities as well as aspirations are, the better prepared they are to construct texts which incorporate elements of the identity of the masses while still supporting the core ideas of those in control of the dominant ideologies and channels through which to communicate these ideologies. Perhaps one of the most flexible and ubiquitous media tools used to communicate cultural ideals and to establish and maintain social norms is advertising (print, broadcast, virtual). As Lin and Yeh (2009, p. 61) explain,

Good advertisements [...] are like magic mirrors in fairytales – creatively using an intimate knowledge of cultural contexts and the magic of modern technology, they portray just the right blend of cultural meaning, societal values, and personal dreams to appear to reflect the wants of individuals while still reaching wide audiences.

Of course good advertisements ultimately aim to sell a product or a service, but the successful incorporation of a shared ideology is critical because these beliefs, these principles are what serve to connect that which is being sold to the (real or perceived) needs and desires of the potential consumer's life and motivates action (Hoyer & Macinnis, 2008; Lamb, Hair Jr., & McDaniel, 2008).

### **II.3 SIMPLIFYING IDEOLOGY: USE OF STEREOTYPES**

In order to clearly communicate the values and expectations associated with a specific ideology, those in control of the media need to carefully construct their texts to include only those elements which will attract and persuade their target audience. Accordingly, it is generally accepted that the reflections of reality in media texts, like advertising, are distorted. Scholars argue that mediated representations of culture, society and individual and collective ideals are intensified or exaggerated portrayals of reality, focused more heavily on “some aspects of our lives and hiding others” (Patterson, O'Malley, & Story, 2009, p. 10) in order to communicate a clear prescriptive lifestyle that values certain behaviours and attitudes over others (Stern, 1992, p. 9). What is emphasized and what is concealed varies depending on what the dominant ideology of a society is and what the needs of the masses are. As Pazarzi and Tsangaris (2008, p. 29) explain, mediated representations are “directly associated with collective meanings, power relations, status hierarchies” and as a result “reflect the social, cultural, political and economic values of the society that produced them.”

According to Rumbo (2002), one reason for the use of these exaggerated representations of reality is to simplify the complexities of life in order to gain attention in a cluttered marketplace. For advertisers competing with numerous sources of information and entertainment, the message needs to be simple, direct, and attention-grabbing. Quite simply, advertisements that are louder – or more straightforward – with their messages (at least upon first sight) are understood more quickly than advertisements that muddle their messages in layers of subtleties and tend to garner more attention (positive or negative) than more conservative advertisements (Patterson, O'Malley, & Story, 2009; Rumbo, 2002). One way in which advertisers can simplify and intensify their messages (both to support the existing social order and encourage consumerism which is supported by this order) is through the use of stereotypes.

A stereotype is simply a generalization shaped not by actual lived experiences, but rather by exposure to simplifications and exaggerations “told by other people or by the media” (Karan & Khoo,

2007, p. 4). Different social groups may be stereotyped according to any number of factors, such as race, age, sexual orientation, or (the focus of this paper) gender. It is important to note that just because stereotypes do categorize individuals and groups according to very selective characteristics, this does not mean stereotypes are inherently negative. Rather, stereotypes can help us make sense of ourselves, others and society as a whole (Karan & Khoo, 2007, p. 4). Like Frith and Mueller (2003, as cited in Karan & Khoo, 2007, p. 4) argue,

At root, a stereotype is an expression of a mental schema that people use to organize information, and to which meaning is attached. As such, stereotypes do not, by definition, carry negative or positive values. It is when we imbue the stereotype with a certain type of meaning that it becomes positive or negative.

According to this explanation, stereotypes in and of themselves should not warrant particular concern but rather should be considered simply as useful tools (for the media in particular) to clarify meaning. However, whether they are used to emphasise positive or negative ideas, stereotypes – be they gender stereotypes, sexual orientation stereotypes, racial, ethnic, religious, age, or ability stereotypes – present oversimplified definitions of various social groups, ultimately reinforcing incomplete and inadequate ideas and ideals. Furthermore, when these stereotypes serve to limit or denigrate a certain group (and especially when they are used to attack a certain group and used to spread hate and discrimination) the use of these generalizations becomes increasingly disconcerting as these stereotypes can contribute to the stigmatization of that group. Stigma, according to Goffman (1963, p.3) “is the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” and is “reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” So, while stereotypes may simplify mediated messages and improve the efficiency with which ideas are communicated, these generalizations may ultimately be detrimental to not only the individuals associated with a given stereotype (and as a result excluded from society in one way or another), but also detrimental to the society as a whole that is exposed to these simplistic ideas and encouraged to accept them as truths, inhibiting equality and acceptance and fuelling prejudice and discrimination (Phelan, Link, & Dovidio, 2008).

### **II.3.a GENDER STEREOTYPES**

Nixon (1997, as cited in Patterson, O'Malley, & Story, 2009, p. 10) argues that gender identities “‘are invented categories. They are the product of the cultural meanings attached to certain attributes, capacities, dispositions and forms of conduct at given historical moments’.” In other words, gender is a concept not linked to biology, but rather linked to social constructions of masculinity and femininity. As a result, gender identity should be considered flexible, fluctuating according to social determinants of the moment and place. This suggests that gender identity is fluid then, opening the possibility that there

are multiple gender identities which exist along a spectrum of masculinity and femininity (Raphael-Leff, 2010; Smith, Johnston-Robledo, McHugh, & Chrisler, 2010; Spence & Buckner, 1995; Wood & Eagly, 2008). Accordingly, to effectively communicate specific gender ideologies which support the dominant ideologies of a given society, those in control of the media *need* to simplify what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman in order to accurately communicate their preferred definition of masculinity and femininity and the relationship between the two. This need to define gender in the media, then, often leads to the use of gender stereotypes.

Briefly, gender stereotypes simplify what it means to be a man or a woman by presenting certain roles, behaviours, opinions, and appearances as inherently feminine or inherently masculine. As Soloaga (2007, p. 2), explains, these representations serve as “references for ‘what’ a woman or a man should do,” should be, should think in a particular society. For example, Lin and Yeh (2009, p. 63) argue that, in an attempt to maintain order in society, some common gender stereotypes presented by the media function to reinforce traditional “gender role responsibilities.” These include men portrayed as “independent, assertive fathers” and women portrayed as “gentle, caring, attentive, and loving mothers” (Lin & Yeh, 2009, p. 63). These traditional ideals are often criticized for carefully compartmentalizing social expectations for each gender and supporting gender ideologies and social hierarchies that neglect to recognize the range of roles both men and women currently occupy (Lin & Yeh, 2009, p. 63). More specifically, the media are frequently criticized for perpetuating gender stereotypes which unfairly and unrealistically restrict women physically, intellectually and emotionally (Morris, 2006, p. 14). Some scholars, like Kyung-Ja Lee (2002, as cited in Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005, p. 59), argue these stereotyped representations have become such a staple of mass media the world over and have become so commonplace that women are now “desensitized to their own inferior portrayal.”

## **II.4 STEREOTYPES & IDENTITY FORMATION**

From a social learning theory and cultivation theory perspective, when media stereotypes create boundaries around what it means to be male or female, black or white, straight or gay, these representations become a concern, particularly from a feminist perspective, because they serve to limit the real-world possibilities and opportunities of individuals. Both social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994) have frequently been used to assess how different groups are portrayed in the media (including Bailey, 2006; Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008; Bramlett-Solomon & Roeder, 2008; Clark, Martin, & Bush, 2001; Dohnt & Tiggeman, 2006; McCullick, Blecher, Hardin, & Hardin, 2003). Each theory posits that mediated depictions of the roles and expectations of members of a certain group may have strong influences on

both individual and social real-world perceptions and attitudes of this group, affecting not only how others perceive the group but also group members perceive themselves.

Briefly, social learning theory suggests that people learn how to behave by observing others. Though Bandura (1977, pp. 24-28) breaks the process down into four stages (attention, retention, reproduction and motivation), the overall notion is that the individual observes others to determine what behaviours or attitudes are expected or appropriate in day-to-day life. He or she may then choose to model or mimic these behaviours accordingly. References to model, however, do not come solely from real-world interactions with others. Models also come from the media. As Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006, p. 142) explain, socio-cultural norms and ideals are “transmitted and reinforced via a number of different socio-cultural mechanisms” including family, peers, and the media. This means that – even though media representations of gender, race, age, and so on, are often criticized for being too restrictive or too unrealistic – the media actually provide meaningful texts which inform men and women about specific gender expectations in terms of “roles and conduct, self-evaluative standards, and self-efficacy beliefs” (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008, p. 132). This also means that the ways in which women are portrayed in the media – from advertising to music videos to movies – influences how men perceive women, how women perceive women, *and* how women perceive themselves. And while some scholars argue media’s influences on perceptions can be counteracted by increasing real-world experiences, others argue the repetitive and omnipresent nature of these representations, particularly advertising, intensifies social boundaries, directing individuals to identify with and mimic the images and ideas that “invade their psyche” (Levy, 2006, p. 79). In fact it is this repetitive quality that cultivation theory is concerned with. Stemming from Gerbner’s work in the 1970s on the relationship between television exposure and perception of the real world, cultivation theory proposes not only that perceptions of reality are linked to exposure to mediated images and texts, but also that the frequent repetition of specific images and texts can gradually lead to distorted ideas of what is real or true or expected (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Levy, 2006; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008).

Taking into consideration these perspectives, then, when media rely on stereotypes to communicate clear ideas about gender or race or sexual orientation, they may be simplifying their overall messages, intending to improve the efficiency with which they are communicated and understood. However, a major consequence is that these simplifications also restrict men and women of all different backgrounds and lifestyles in terms of what are expected (as well as what are acceptable) behaviours, attitudes, and appearances for each. Therefore, when media rely on stereotypes, they reinforce social classifications of groups that support the dominant hierarchies by emphasizing

boundaries around identity. In turn, the repetition of these boundaries serves to encourage individuals and society at large to conform to specific notions of what is normal for or expected of each of these groups.

## II.5 FEMINIST LENS

The gender boundaries reinforced in the media through the use of stereotypes are of particular concern from a critical feminist perspective. Described by Gough-Yates (2003, p. 9) as “little more than an agent in the service of patriarchal capitalism,” the women’s magazine industry may be considered a tool of the dominant groups to communicate specific ideological messages about the roles and expectations of girls and women. They are texts which control representations of femininity (that often contrast with real-world experiences and identities) in order to reinforce and naturalize gender differences and inequalities and reproduce and maintain the status quo, a status quo that reinforces a world for women in which “physical beauty, sexual attractiveness, and product consumption...supersede intelligence and creativity” (Thiel Stern, 2007, p. 3). Accordingly, by approaching these texts through the critical lens of feminist theory, not only can a range of representations of femininity identified, but they are identified within the context of a hegemonic society and within a framework that allows negotiated meanings to emerge.

Feminist theory, as defined by Rakow and Wackwitz (2004), is “explanatory, political, polyvocal and transformative” in nature (Olsen et al., 2008, p. 108). This means that feminist theory focuses on the lived experiences of women, assumes society is discriminatory and in need of change, allows “multiple, and at times contradictory” voices to be represented, and aims to explain the connection between what is communicated about reality and what is actually reality (Olsen et al., 2008, p. 108). In other words, feminist research focuses on women’s “situations and the institutions that frame those situations,” tending to focus on women’s experiences, concerns, and ideas and the social, cultural, political and economic factors that influence each (Creswell, 2007, p. 25). In view of this, approaching advertisements with a feminist lens helped direct analysis of the incorporation of hegemonic power and dominant ideologies into these texts and (in tandem with social theory) helped structure discussions on the potential influences of these representations on individual and social perspectives of gender.

More specifically, however, I approached these texts from a gender rebellion feminist perspective. Gender rebellion feminism challenges gender boundaries between men and women and takes the post-modernist stand that gender and sexuality “are fluid, shifting, multiple categories” which are created and maintained by “asymmetrical power relations” (Kark, 2004, p. 170). Accordingly, this perspective emphasizes that there is no single way to be a woman, no “essential nature of women”

(Chakarova, 2003, p. 46). So, rather than find ways in which women can function within and contribute to society while confined by the established social order, women should confront and object to these boundaries and refuse to allow social norms to dictate or negatively influence their decisions (Kark, 2004). This does not mean that women cannot live full and satisfying lives within the socially-constructed gender boundaries. It simply means that if a woman desires more than what is offered to her, more than what is ideologically prescribed to her, she should feel empowered to break the mould. As Rowe-Finkbeiner (2004, pp. 89-90) asserts,

An oversimplified timeline might say that the first wave won the right to vote; the second wave won the right to enter the professional workforce; and the third wave combines previous efforts, modified by a woman's right to choose what works best for her – either “traditional” female roles, “nontraditional” roles, or a combination of the two.”

Therefore, the openness and flexibility of this feminist perspective allows me to consider the representations of women in these texts as distinct yet related portrayals of the multiple roles women may occupy. This allows for a holistic analysis of the texts while still permitting resistance towards some but not necessarily all of the prescribed roles. It is the understanding that there are multiple ways to be a woman and multiple roles that women fulfill, none being inherently good or bad, that ultimately helped shape my analysis of advertisements and my discussions of power relations, dominant gender ideologies, and representations of ideal femininity as communicated through contemporary mass media.

To briefly summarize, the hegemonic composition of a given society dictates the dominant ideologies of that society. In order to communicate specific values and social expectations to the general public, one of the most effective tools today is the media. By incorporating carefully constructed stereotypes into advertising, ideological messages may be simplified for easy consumption and retention, prescribing certain ideals for both men and women to aspire. When successful, these ideology-laden models serve to persuade individuals both to consume the promoted product (the goal of advertising) and to accept the associated ideology. From a feminist perspective, it is when stereotyped gender roles and behaviours are unquestioningly accepted that there is a problem since, while they improve communication between advertisers and audiences, gender stereotypes ultimately serve to limit the possibilities and opportunities available to men and women.

Therefore, in the following section, I present a historical analysis of these stereotypes to assess the roles and characteristics prescribed to women over time through advertisers' representations of ideal femininity.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some of the most influential work assessing how gender stereotypes were portrayed in the media was conducted by Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman. During the early stages of scholarly research on the representations of women in advertising, Goffman analyzed more than 400 print advertisements from magazines and newspapers for his work *Gender Advertisements* (1979). He argued these texts provided prescriptive stereotyped portrayals of gender roles and relationships which relied heavily upon communicating the “disparities with regard to power, status, and agency” (Wainwright, Nagler, & Serazio, 2007, p. 6). Accepting that advertisements simplify and exaggerate social realities, to understand how these realities are communicated through mass media, Goffman developed categories with which to analyze and classify the portrayal of these relationships. These categories are based on the presentation of the human figure, including posture, expression and placement (Luther, 2008, p. 4), and how it communicates the power dynamics of gender and “the female (and the male) role in society and the family” (Beetles, 2005, p. 399). Goffman argued the scenes depicted in advertisements were “‘hyper-ritualizations’ of social scenes,” or exaggerations of real-world experiences (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 204). Typically these texts, he claimed, were portrayals of everyday experiences manipulated to contain “the common denominator of which was ‘female subordination’” (Bell & Milic, 2002, p. 204).

Goffman concluded that, in advertisements, men tend to be presented as authority figures while women tend to be presented as “appendages to men,” lacking any kind of independent power and confined to “stereotypical settings and positions” (Koernig, 2006, p. 84). Moreover, he argued that when women were presented in positions of power, the advertisement incorporated some element – be it an expression, the body position, a certain colour or type of clothing – which acted to undermine this authority, thus presenting the women as “less serious” than their male counterparts (Morris, 2006, p. 15). These findings have been repeatedly supported by scholars and Goffman’s coding categories continue to be used to analyze gender representation, though some scholars have expanded upon the original six categories. For example, Kang (1997) incorporated body display (the degree to which the body was exposed) and independence or assertiveness (the extent to which poise and self-confidence is communicated) for analyses of gender representations in the media (Lynn, Hardin, & Walsdorf, 2004, p. 338; Wainwright et al., 2007, pp. 6-7).

#### III.1 THE (IDEAL) ROLE OF WOMEN

With Goffman’s (1963, 1979) work in mind, in this section, I present a historical review of literature analyzing the roles and characteristics prescribed to women through advertisers’ representations of ideal femininity. Specifically I discuss the representations of woman as wife and

mother, as sex object, and as competent employee. This review also includes a discussion of advertisers' incorporation of feminist rhetoric into their texts, a tactic meant to acknowledge changing social and political relationships in order to broaden product appeal.

### III.1.a WOMAN AS WIFE & MOTHER

As Levy (2006, p. 77) explains, for generations there has been a clear "gender bias in advertising" and studies have repeatedly found a reluctance to change this bias. Consequently, for more than half a century, despite major social changes, perhaps the most frequent, most consistent representation of women in advertising remains that of the domestic and dependent housewife, concerned with the wellbeing of her children, the cleanliness of her house, and getting a healthy, hearty meal on the table for her husband. From magazine advertisements of the early 1900s to commercial advertising and government propaganda of the interwar period to contemporary advertisements, representations of women as wives and mothers have consistently been incorporated into media texts, influencing gender expectations by "resisting social change," by emphasizing "traditional values," and often gendering consumer products in an effort to encourage specific social behaviours (Marcellus, 2006, p. 103).

The roots of the happy housewife ideal may be found in essays published in the first women's magazines printed in England in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. These essays, found in *The Female Tatler* and *The Female Spectator* and later in North American magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Godey's*, though entertaining, ultimately served to convey prescriptive definitions of femininity by emphasizing specific behaviours, attitudes, and interests as associated with the ideal woman (Marcellus, 2005, p. 554). Over time, this ideal often was connected to specific and gendered consumerism. For example, in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Ladies' Home Journal* emphasized not only the responsibility women held as nurturers of children and caretakers of the home, but also the responsibly women held "as the family's primary consumer" (Ramsey, 2006, p. 95), accountable for purchasing such goods as groceries, cleaning supplies, clothing, and other items designed "to increase family harmony" (Cott, 1987, as cited in Ramsey, 2006, p. 105).

Even as women's roles in society began to change and grow, this image of the dutiful wife and mother endured in advertising. For example, during the World Wars, women were tasked with two competing roles: they were expected to support the "stability and morale" of the family by continuing to uphold their traditional roles as wives and mothers yet they were also expected to support the war effort by working jobs previously held by men (Clampin, 2009, p. 66). Because advertisers were (and still are) ultimately concerned with selling products and services, acknowledging the reality that many

women who committed themselves to war efforts outside the home *were* married women, many of whom did have children, simply meant selling products in a new way: by emphasizing how it could ease adjustment to and accommodation of the contradictory nature of these roles (Clampin, 2009, pp. 66-7). For example, in an advertisement for Mrs. Peek's Puddings, a woman laments that her domestic duties have suffered since taking a job outside the home. The advertisers assure her their product "offers a way to combine being a good wife with the war," insisting she can "balance these two demands" (Clampin, 2009, p. 67). However, this notion of balancing responsibilities was abandoned following the end of wartime and the return of men to the workplace. Instead, mediated representations of women emphasized the willingness, the enthusiasm, and even perhaps the *relief* women should feel now able to return fulltime to their domestic responsibilities. Common imagery incorporated into these advertisements included "navy chapel weddings, shopping trips for electric appliances, and family togetherness," not-so-subtly indicating where women's interests and concerns should be concentrated (Yesil, 2004, p. 113).

Though women's roles in society expanded considerably in the following decades, and second-wave feminists' challenged both government- and media-supported gender inequalities, when Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) assessed contemporary advertising and the representations of women nearly three decades after the end of WWII, they found little had changed regarding advertisers' prescriptions of what should constitute women's concerns and social roles. Comparing gender representations in general interest magazines such as *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) found a tendency to sell women "inexpensive products that pertained to their person, their children, and their homes" (Mastin, 2004, p. 232). Additionally, they found that when advertisers were selling more expensive items (like furniture or automobiles) women were consistently accompanied by men – if women were even included at all (Mastin, 2004, p. 232). Moreover, yet another thirty years later, research has again confirmed the continued tendency to encourage traditional ideals by emphasizing specific gendered consumer behaviours in advertising. For example, Stern and Mastro (2004), after analyzing television commercials, assert that traditional gender expectations in terms of responsibilities, interests and competencies may be identified by simply comparing the types of products being sold to women and those being sold to men. By regularly choosing to sell cars and computers to men (more expensive, more complicated products often associated with independence, travel, and work), and "cleaners and cosmetics" to women (inexpensive, superficial products associated with self-presentation and the home), advertisers imply what each gender should be interested in and what each gender should be knowledgeable of, as well as what each gender should *not* be interested in or knowledgeable

of (Stern & Mastro, 2004, p. 218). The ultimate consequence is that these messages inform “consumers’ attitudes about appropriate spheres of knowledge [...] largely confining women to issues related to the home” and reinforcing the long-established (yet incongruous with social realities) boundaries constructed around gender (Stern & Mastro, 2004, p. 218).

### III.1.b WOMAN AS SEX OBJECT

One of the most contentious representations of women in advertising is the portrayal of women as sexual objects (Frith et al., 2005, p. 57).<sup>1</sup> There is a tendency, particularly in North America, to incorporate sex into advertisements for all kinds of products (Brook, 2008, p. 145). However, whether using sex to sell cigarettes or chocolate or cars, what is common to these representations “is the basic assumption that, within patriarchal societies, women’s bodies are the object of ‘the male gaze’” (Frith et al., 2005, p. 58, citing Shields, 1990). Still, some researchers, like Blair, Stephenson, Hill, and Green (2006), posit that sex appeals in advertising just as frequently present women to other women. The primary difference between presenting women to men and women to women is that when the female form is presented to women, sexual appeal is not used to fuel desire, but is used to persuade women to *identify* with the depictions of female ideals, encouraging them to aspire to “be like the beautiful, sexy models” (Blair et al., 2006, p. 113). This theory of presenting women to a female gaze rather than a male gaze is supported by various scholars who argue women learn who they should be – what they should look like, how they should act, what their preferences, values, and opinions should be – from mediated portrayals of their gender (Bandura, 1977; Festinger, 1954; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). From either perspective, however, women in these representations are reduced to their external appearance. They have no intellect, no emotion, and no control. They are merely beautiful, intriguing things on display to be admired and appreciated for their aesthetics (Pazarzi & Tsangaris, 2008, p. 46).

Given that representations of gender in the media are influenced by social and political shifts, it may be anticipated that how women have been sexualized in the media has changed over time. For example, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the sexualized woman in advertising was much more subtle by today’s standards, focusing attention on the need to present oneself as feminine and desirable in order to attract male attention for the purpose of fulfilling traditional gender expectations (marriage and child-bearing). For example, during the Second World War, concern that women could “lose their femininity” as they increasingly left the home to occupy masculine roles in the

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to acknowledge here that men are also portrayed as sex objects in some contemporary advertisements, often in attempts to empower the women included in these images (Blond, 2008; Johnson, McCreary, & Mills, 2007; Kimmel & Tissier-Desbordes, 1999). However, even as the power dynamics in these texts are reversed, woman as sex object continues to be a dominant representation of women and therefore it continues to be a topic of popular and scholarly discussion.

public workforce lead the Office of War Information to encourage media outlets to take preventative measures and increase emphasis on traditional gender expectations and the importance of women retaining their feminine qualities – namely “physical beauty and attractiveness” (Yesil, 2004, p. 112). While these early advertisements do not necessarily exploit a woman’s body in order to sell a product, they do use physical attractiveness to draw the female gaze to the advertisements and to emphasize that women needed to present themselves as “both alert and alluring,” maintaining an image of intense, saturated femininity even in the most masculine of environments (Yesil, 2004, p. 112).

The notion of femininity and desirability remained a major focus for advertisers in the following decades. However, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were two notable shifts in how physical attractiveness was portrayed in the media. The first shift occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. No longer was the emphasis merely on traditional beauty ideals and presenting oneself to attract male attention; the female body was increasingly being used in advertisements purely as an ornament, an attractive yet ultimately superficial object to be visually consumed (by both men and women). For example, after comparing advertisements in *Vogue*, *Mademoiselle* and *McCall’s* magazines, Kang (1997) found that between the late 1970s and early 1990s, women were increasingly depicted “mentally drifting from the scene” (essentially an amputation of intellect and emotion to concentrate attention on the body) and “wearing revealing or scant clothing” (enhancing vulnerability by exposing the body) (Levy, 2006, p. 77). During this period women were also more frequently reduced to their body parts – a form of objectification frequently exemplified by the notorious June 1978 cover of *Hustler* magazine which depicts a woman being fed through a meat grinder, only her legs left intact, but a form of objectification that may also be found in numerous contemporary advertisements which reduce women to lips, eyes, “legs, breasts, or posterior” in order to sell a wide variety of products from fashion to cosmetics to food (Levy, 2006, p. 77).

The second shift in the mediated representations of women as sexual objects occurred during the 1990s. No longer perceived as victims of masculine oppression (a popular reading of the objectification of women during the 1970s and 1980s), the sexual representations of women, it is argued, were meant to convey women as subjects rather than objects, active and in control of their bodies and sexuality (Wainwright et al., 2007). Though this perspective is meant to communicate a more positive, liberated portrayal of women, it is arguably weakened by dominant traditionalist (masculine) ideologies. Consequently, this shift in perception of representations of the female body may have actually led to competing messages about femininity and sexuality. As Kilbourne (1999) explains, on the surface, women are told that their bodies and sexuality are empowering. For example, a Hanes

advertisement features a beautiful African-American woman with glowing skin and toned arms and legs in a powerful pose: arms crossed in front of her chest, one hip popped, and feet in a wide stance, positioning her firmly on the ground. Her sense of defiance and control are emphasized by a low angle shot (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 152). Ostensibly, this is a depiction of a woman who challenges any kind of restraint on what she can do and what she can be. She is proud, self-confident, and makes her own decisions. However, according to Kilbourne (1999, p. 152), this image of self-controlled sexuality is “completely undercut by the brevity of her dress and the focus on her long legs.” Moreover, since the only power she is actually exercising is her power to choose a brand of pantyhose, “her ‘attitude’ is nothing to fear – she’s just another sex object” (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 152). Similarly, Pazarzi and Tsangaris (2008, p. 46) assert that even representations of women in control of their bodies and sexuality tend to emphasize a sense of voyeurism which ultimately conveys the message that images of the female body are “provocative and ‘sinful’”, thus reinforcing “patriarchal moral values.”

### **III.1.c WOMAN AS COMPETENT EMPLOYEE**

In order to effectively appeal to and persuade the general public, advertisers cannot ignore changing social roles and gender relationships. Instead, they must in some way incorporate these shifting dynamics into their representations of gender ideals to reflect a more relatable image of reality which will connect with their audience. Therefore, a third common mediated representation of women is that of the working woman.

Initially, commercial advertising neglected to depict women as skilled and valuable employees. As Koernig (2006, p. 83) explains, by portraying certain roles as more suitable, or even *exclusively* suitable, for one gender and not the other, often according to perceived gender ability (or inability), advertisers supported the dominant ideologies which aimed to limit men and women to traditional and socially acceptable norms. Accordingly, despite the successes of the first wave of feminism in North America in the early 1900s and despite the expanding opportunities for women in the public sphere, advertisers typically portrayed female employees as subordinate to men in the workplace, sometimes even depicting them as machines rather than people (Marcellus, 2006, p. 105). For example, representations of women in clerical positions were consistently shown sitting at typewriters with the accompanying text (typically provided by a male supervisor) accentuating the woman’s machine-like qualities, such as speed and accuracy. This focus on mechanical skill rather than intellect served to dehumanize a female employee and reduce her to “a mere typewriter,” an objectification Marcellus (2006) compares to Charlie Chaplin’s character in *Modern Times* (1936). Like Chaplin’s factory worker,

not only did women in these advertisements “lose individual identity,” they also were not considered part of the professional world (Marcellus, 2006, p. 105).

The general idea that the workplace was not the proper place for women continued to permeate advertisements even as women were encouraged to leave the home to help with war efforts during World Wars I and II. As Yesil (2004, p. 108) explains, underlying commercial advertising and government propaganda that encouraged women to “demonstrate their physical strength and mechanical competence” was the message that women were nevertheless expected to remain “feminine, attractive and dependent on men.” These advertisements, then, simultaneously encouraged women to take on new social roles while also reinforced the notion that employment was not meant to be obtained to satisfy personal ambition, to confirm emancipation, or to earn extra income. Participation in the workforce was portrayed as an act of “patriotism, national duty and personal responsibility” (Yesil, 2004, p. 110). Women in these texts were portrayed as capable – both physically and intellectually – to work in occupations previously held primarily by men, yet the underlying message, both during wartime and after, was the notion that occupation of these roles was only temporary because the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers were more important to the order of society as a whole (Yesil, 2004, p. 108, 110). Consequently, in commercial advertisements and government propaganda, female workers were often depicted as unmarried girls (rather than women) who were expected to eventually leave the workforce to marry and start families. Some advertisements even implied that, by contributing to war efforts, women could win “the approval of men,” and thus improve the likelihood of a marriage proposal (Yesil, 2004, p. 110). Additionally, once it became clear that men would be returning home from war, the image of the working woman faded away and was replaced by the “mythical homemaker” and “idealized notions of domesticity, home and family” (Yesil, 2004, p. 108, 110, 113).

In the following decades as intense social and political movements spurred ground-breaking debates about gender, including debates influenced by second wave feminists concerned with reinterpreting the ideal roles of women to accommodate new opportunities and experiences, the image of the working woman in the media was similarly challenged. For example, in 1963, Betty Friedan claimed the limitations placed on women were “reinforced by advertisers aiming to sell products” and suggested that women needed to dispose of these limitations and create their own identities (Starr, 2004, p. 296). The argument was that for life to be ““meaningful”” women needed to enter the workforce and develop skills and opinions that would allow them to contribute to society and to become valuable resources beyond (but not necessarily excluding) that of wife, mother, or lover (Starr, 2004, p. 296). A

decade later, Courtney and Whipple (1983) formally assessed gender stereotyping in advertising. Though they found some evidence to suggest advertisers were slowly “incorporating gender role changes in society,” more often women were portrayed (just like generations before them) as limited by gender and dependent upon men, working only a very restricted range of jobs which “tended to be low status occupations” (Nam, Lee, & Hwang, 2007, p. 3).

Current research, however, indicates that mediated representations of working women are catching up with real-world experiences, with advertisers frequently depicting women as professionals in a range of occupations (Strieter & Weaver, 2005). What remains a concern (particularly from a feminist perspective), however, is that these representations still tend to limit women in terms of intellect and ability with advertisers typically portraying working women either in female-dominant workforces (where they are granted both power and competency) or, like Courtney and Whipple (1983) found, in lower-level, support staff positions that serve the needs of a male supervisor (Pazarzi & Tsangaris, 2008, pp. 46-47; Stern & Mastro, 2004, pp. 219-220). Consequently, the message being communicated is that women may possess authority and ability in their own *separate* sphere, but a woman who works in a male-saturated environment must subordinate herself to her coworkers. An additional problem is that the ideal modern woman, like the wartime worker of generations past, is still expected to balance her professional life with traditional ideals of marriage and motherhood. This emphasis on ‘doing it all’ has led researchers to ask if mediated representations of working women actually acknowledge changing social realities and encourage different life choices, or if these images simply add to traditional ideals and increase the “responsibilities, duties and obligations” women are expected to fulfill (Pazarzi & Tsangaris, 2008, p. 47; Starr, 2004, p. 302).

### **III.1.d EMPOWERED WOMAN & FAUX FEMINISM**

While the previous three representations of women function to regulate gender in one way or another, in order to appeal to women, magazines and advertisements need to acknowledge – to some degree – social changes and the expanding role of modern women. In order to reinforce patriarchal ideals while also attracting women, advertisers, according to Gupta, Zimmerman and Fruhauf (2008), need to achieve some sense of balance in their texts. This balance may be achieved through the careful blend of “destructive content...with constructive messages” (Gupta et al., 2008, p. 250). This means that representations of women in the media combine both dominant (patriarchal) ideologies with feminist ideologies in such a way that the more obvious message is one of self-empowerment, yet the overall text continues to reinforce established gender boundaries. This integration of feminist themes into media texts is what I refer to as faux feminism, or what Goldman (1992, as cited in Gill, 2009, p. 149)

calls “‘commodity feminism’ – a bid to incorporate feminist ideas whilst emptying them of their political significance and domesticating their critique of gender relations.” This means advertisers take feminist rhetoric and ideals and void them of any actual power by recasting feminism and female empowerment as an individual pursuit (rather than a collective movement) based on “female narcissism” and “private desires” (Douglas, 1994, as cited in Gill, 2009, p. 149). This effectively removes the threat of feminist ideologies because it means women are not working together to create change, rather women are acting in their own self-interest to realize individual needs.

Though the ways in which women are “empowered” by the media vary, here I focus on three approaches: purchase power (empowerment through consumption of specific products), pretty power (empowerment through modifying appearance), and provocative power (empowerment through self-controlled sexuality).

### ***III.1.d.i PURCHASE POWER: THE MASCULINISED PRODUCT AS EMANCIPATOR OF WOMEN***

One of the earliest methods used to incorporate themes of female empowerment and liberation into advertisements was to feminize products which had been typically marketed to men, such as bicycles, cars, and cigarettes. This technique required careful consideration of both traditional ideals of femininity and contemporary feminist rhetoric in order to attract a range of female consumers. For example, to sell automobiles and bicycles as products useful for both traditional and modern women, advertisers would carefully incorporate feminist rhetoric of the suffrage movement as well as traditional ideals in a single text, leaving the woman viewing the ad to decide for herself why she would buy the product: “to make a better home for her family or to expand her political, social and economic freedoms” (Ramsey, 2006, p. 97). This allowed advertisers to sell to young single women, new wives, and busy mothers alike, asserting that each of these women needed their own mode of transportation to help them meet their unique goals and fulfill their varying responsibilities. Similarly, tobacco companies combined feminist ideas and behaviour with traditional imagery, in order to market cigarettes as symbols of female emancipation. Previously considered a masculine activity, during the 1920s some feminist women started to smoke to demonstrate their equality with men. Advertisers decided to appropriate the behaviour of these women and integrate it with images of “confident and sophisticated fashion models” in an attempt to broaden the appeal of tobacco products (Tinkler & Warsh, 2008, p. 116). Within 10 years, smoking had been transformed into “a gesture of respectable, modern womanhood” and cigarettes were part of the overall image of the independent, confident and stylish woman used to sell a variety of other products, including new fashions and cosmetics (Tinkler & Warsh, 2008, p. 116).

This technique of marketing “masculine” products continues today. Some companies opt for rather blatant repackaging to appeal to women (i.e. GirlyLock and Tomboy Tools market pink tool kits, hard hats, and tool belts to women) while other companies opt to emphasize the internal strengths and abilities of their targeted female consumer (i.e. A 2007 Nike Women ad, features tennis pro Serena Williams alongside a list of criticisms she has received as an athlete. This list concludes, however, with the statement: “I don’t need sympathy to get back to No. 1. I need opponents.”). And though the decision to feminize masculine products may be perceived as evidence that manufacturers and advertisers recognize significant changes in society and women’s increased “desire for control of their gender and destiny” (Tinkler & Warsh, 2008, p. 126), these deviations from patriarchal ideals were (and continue to be) ultimately superficial. Advertisers incorporate what is considered the “more acceptable and accessible rhetoric of liberation” into their advertisements, focusing on representing the ideal woman as abstractly equal to men in order to access new markets (Ramsey, 2006, pp. 96-97). The public role they create for women is not the same public role men occupy. It is a middle ground – a place where women may have new experiences by consuming different products, but a place that continues to emphasize traditional gender boundaries nonetheless (Ramsey, 2006, p. 96).

### **III.1.d.ii PRETTY POWER: USING FEMININE APPEARANCE TO DECLARE INDEPENDENCE**

Perhaps one of the most frequently used means to incorporate themes of female empowerment into advertisements is selling a product as an external expression of internal qualities. By emphasizing certain attitudes, opinions, or values, even advertisements for products meant to alter a woman’s appearance to conform to social and cultural ideals of femininity can convince women that the product will allow them to become the person *they* wanted to be, will allow them to become their *true* selves. Though the idea of becoming one’s authentic self by *changing* may seem counterintuitive, this seemingly contradictory message has been used by advertisers for decades, according to Gus and Banim, who explain that makeovers, a “by-product” of the ever-growing cosmetics industry, have been portrayed as a way for women to transform themselves from “‘the woman I am most of the time’ to the ‘woman I want to be’” since the early 1900s (Gus & Banim, 2000, as cited in Gallagher & Pecot-Hébert, 2007, p. 74). Since then, the notion of female empowerment based on superficial alterations has remained at the core of much female-targeted media. For example, popular women’s magazines of the 1960s and 1970s often emphasized that “identity was something that could always be reworked, improved on, and dramatically altered” – not through new experiences, education, or relationships, but through consumption of specific products (Gallagher & Pecot-Hébert, 2007, p. 59). Additionally, in the decades following, this message was frequently integrated into popular talk shows’ (i.e. *The Jenny Jones*

*Show, Ricki Lake*) and eventually became the premise of a variety of reality television shows (i.e. *What Not To Wear, Extreme Makeover*) based exclusively on the notion that self-empowerment comes – if not exclusively, then initially – from changing one’s appearance. Here the makeover was depicted as a process of “self-discovery, feminine identity, and personal happiness” required for women to “look and feel normal” (Gallagher & Pecot-Hébert, 2007, pp. 74-5).

In advertising, this message of empowerment and self-fulfillment through aesthetic modifications is often communicated by personalizing the product to a woman’s (real or desired) personality, lifestyle and experiences. Advertisements emphasize personal choice (Conair: “Go straight. Go curly. Or go straight to the curl. You style.”), self-confidence (Ban: “Twisted vanilla girls believe in themselves”), self-acceptance (Olay: “Love the skin you’re in”), and – above all – enhancing what a woman has to make it better (John Frieda: “Inside every blonde is a blonder blonde waiting to get out”). Recently, some companies have gone one step further. Rather than relying on simply incorporating empowering rhetoric, these companies have attempted to intensify the message and increase their appeal by also using “real” models in their advertisements. For example, in 2005 Dove launched their Campaign for Real Beauty. In an attempt to broaden society’s definition of what beauty is, the ads feature women of all ages, races, sizes and shapes. By emphasizing self-acceptance and self-confidence rather than improvement, Dove’s overall aim is to have their products associated with these internal qualities so purchasing these products becomes an act of self-empowerment (Duffy, 2010).<sup>2</sup>

At the core of this type of empowerment is the notion that if a woman changes her appearance to better reflect her true self or her best self, others will immediately understand who she is and what she stands for because her external reflects these internal qualities. Like the modern corset reflected a progressive attitude in the 1920s, today dark-framed glasses and skinny jeans may reflect an indie spirit, reusable shopping bags may reflect the inner environmentalist, and smoky eye shadow may reflect an otherwise hidden sexuality. The message is: dress the role and not only will you be perceived as occupying it, but you will attract that which you are after – be it respect, envy, or (as advertisers originally emphasized) a man. Still, by empowering women by emphasizing external modification to communicate internal authenticity, I (and others, including Aubrey (2010), Gauntlett (2002), and Kilbourne (1999)) argue advertisers ultimately activate destructive self-awareness, fuelling a constant desire to improve.

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<sup>2</sup> Dove has been criticized for not being “real” enough. As one critique wrote, “These Dove ads say it’s cool to be round and hefty...so long as your skin is taut and firm and perfect” (Stevenson, 2005, para. 10). Additionally, in May 2008, fashion photography retoucher Pascal Dangin revealed he had retouched the women featured in the Dove ads, an admission which serves to reinforce the message that even “real” beauty needs to be improved (Collins, 2008).

### **III.1.d.iii PROVOCATIVE POWER: USING SELF-CONTROLLED SEXUALITY TO EMPHASIZE POWER**

#### **POSITION**

A third way in which advertisers attempt to empower women is by emphasizing the strength of female sexuality. While I have discussed how advertisers have used female sexuality and women's bodies in several different ways in the past to sell to men and women, the integration of sexuality with messages of empowerment during the 1990s requires additional attention. Influenced by a revival of feminism in the form of riot grrls and girl power, as well as magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Playgirl*, interpretations of the sexualized woman were under construction during this period (Gill, 2009; Sivulka, 2009). Moving away from "discreetly sensuous" representations of women (Sivulka, 2009, p. 358), advertisers began to incorporate more overt images of sex and female sexuality into print and television ads. Often presenting sex as a "fantasy or dream," one of the most influential creative minds of this time was Rochelle Udell, the creative power behind a series of Calvin Klein television and print ads in the early 1980s (including Brooke Shields' commercial in which she asks, "You know what comes between me and my Calvins?") (Sivulka, 2009, pp. 358-9). Udell's depiction of women as just as in control of their sexuality as men in her ads earned strong approval among female consumers (Sivulka, 2009, pp. 360-1). "There's a difference between women in tight jeans – where the ads are aimed at pleasing men – and ads [...] where a man and woman are in positions of equality," explains feminist and activist Gloria Steinam (as cited in Sivulka, 2009, p. 361). In the latter, notions of independence and confidence are communicated through "active, desiring, sexual *subjects*," or more specifically a "woman who knowingly and deliberately plays with her sexual power" (Gill, 2009, p. 148). By portraying women as active subjects, advertisers are able to emphasize that the models are *choosing* to think, act, or dress in a certain way that best accommodates their personal interests and preferences (Gill, 2009, p. 148).

Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of a media creation that encouraged personal choice in the 1990s was the British pop group the Spice Girls. Rather than presenting themselves as a group unified by their similarities, they presented themselves as individuals defined by their unique qualities, and emphasized the importance of being true to oneself. As exemplified in their song lyrics, the group told young girls "all you need is positivity" ("Spice Up Your Life") since "she's a power girl in a 90's world and she knows just what to do" ("The Lady is a Vamp") (Spice Girls, 1997). During this period, similar messages emphasizing uniqueness and personality were incorporated into advertisements targeting women of all ages. For example, a 1997 Calvin Klein ad implored women (and men) to "be hot. be cool. just be.", while Ecco Domain encouraged individuality with the declaration "Forget the rules!".

Yet, as important as choosing which Spice Girl you liked best may have been for tweens in 1997, as Hains (2008, p. 217) explains, this type of empowerment message nearly always associates *choice* with *product choice* rather than real decisions about individual behaviours or opinions. For example, if a young girl identified with Sporty Spice, she may be persuaded to go out and buy Adidas track suits and neon sports bras. If she identified with Ginger Spice, she may be persuaded to streak her hair and buy anything and everything embellished with a Union Jack. And no matter which Spice Girl one identified with, the ultimate symbol of girl power was a pair of 4-inch platform running shoes. Likewise, advertisements targeted at older demographics connected self-empowerment with product choice. For example, a four-page 1997 ad for Sears features images of a young woman in various settings and outfits accompanied by the tagline: “You gotta believe in your dreams. You gotta stand up for yourself. You gotta be there for your friends. But hey, first you gotta have something to wear. Gotta have the clothes”. While this advertisement encourages young women to accomplish their goals, to voice their opinions, to develop healthy relationships, the ultimate message is clear – empower yourself, but make sure you look good *first*.

Still, if female empowerment of the 1990s “used fashion as a shorthand for identity” and “the power wasn’t in a girl taking her clothes off, but in being brave enough to wear the clothes that expressed her personality” (Givhan, 2007, para. 13), in today’s media it appears as if personality is being confused with provocation. Female sexuality in the 1980s and 1990s was meant to communicate strength, self-confidence, and independence. Today, the message is not as clear. For example, in 2009, a Calvin Klein billboard featured what some news outlets described as “an orgy” (CBS, NY Daily News, Adweek) – a young woman in only a pair of jean shorts lying on top of one man, kissing a second man while a third man reclines on the floor (Armaghan, 2009; CBS, 2009; Cullers, 2009). Some may interpret this ad as a woman taking charge of her sexual desires and fantasies; others may interpret it as disrespectful to women, perceiving the woman in the ad as an object for male sexual satisfaction. Similarly, recent American Apparel advertisements use the image of a young woman reclining in the backseat of a car, the camera positioned between her legs, to sell high-waisted shorts and a series of images depicting a woman unzipping a body suit, the final frame revealing her bare breasts and stomach. As Gill (2011, p.258) explains, “What is on offer in all these adverts is a specific kind of power – the sexual power to bring men to their knees. Empowerment is tied to possession of a slim and alluring young body, whose power is the ability to attract male attention and sometimes female envy.”

Images like these – in tandem with a celebrity-obsessed culture that seems to associate promiscuity with power, success and popularity (i.e. Paris Hilton’s popularity following her sex tape

(Ogunnaike, 2006), Audrina Patridge announcing her transition from reality star to serious actress after nude photos were leaked online, and 17-year-old Miley Cyrus, who earned \$48 million dollars in 2009 (“Audrina Patridge,” 2008; Hughs, 2009), declaring she prefers hot pants and lingerie-style tops because “I feel more comfortable dressing with a little less” (Rose, 2010; US magazine, 2010)) – seem to signify a sharp return to the portrayal of the sexualized woman as an object. As Dr. Leonard Sax, founder of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education contends, “So many girls are using their sexuality in an instrumental way, in order to accomplish some other end such as raising their social status, but not as an expression of their own [feelings and desires]” (Fillion, 2010, p. 20). This runs counter to what mass media emphasized just ten years ago – that empowered women could embrace their individuality and use fashion, cosmetics, and so on to enhance their appearance and their sexuality in a way that would specifically convey their unique personalities. This does not mean that *all* representations of sexualized women in the 1990s were empowering, nor does it mean that *all* representations of sexualized women today are disempowering, but suggests that the majority of sexual images of women in the media today connect sexuality with external validation rather than internal authenticity.

Ultimately, reframing sexuality to empower women is a difficult undertaking for advertisers. Not only do these representations have to compete with dominant ideologies that traditionally consider the female form to be a passive, vapid sexual object, these texts also must contain a strong feminist rhetoric to convey the message that the woman is an active, intellectual being. If this deeper meaning is not clear, then the message of empowerment is weakened and the representation of the sexual woman may be perceived as exploitation of the female form rather than as celebration of women and femininity.

### III.1 SUMMARY

While Cummings (2008, p. 10) argues that, despite considerable social changes, women’s magazines have hardly changed at all over the last 60 years and there remains “an overemphasis on romantic relationships, physical beauty and body image, fashion, celebrities, and dependency on men”, I posit the same holds true for advertising. More specifically, based on the review of literature, I propose there are three primary representations of women in advertising: the happy and nurturing wife and mother, the inferior and powerless sex object, and the confident and competent (yet not-quite-as-successful-as-her-male-coworkers) employee. Though there have been some shifts in how women have been represented in advertisements, this review indicates that the core values of a patriarchal hierarchy remains as the major influencing force that prescribes, to both men and women, ideal roles, behaviours, attitudes and opinions.

By often relying on traditional ideals, one of the primary social roles of women as depicted in advertising has consistently been that of wife and mother. These representations have served, at minimum, to persuade generations of women that their most valuable function and contribution to society is in the home. While being someone's partner in life and raising children are absolutely important and meaningful roles, the representations of women as naturally suitable to fulfill these roles and therefore *expected* to fulfill these roles is a concern, particularly from a feminist perspective. They are a concern because they place the responsibility of family and family harmony on women and women alone and emphasize that even if women have other obligations, family needs should take priority. Ultimately, I argue, this message detracts *both* sexes from this stereotype of the happy housewife and the ideological connections between domesticity and family and women ultimately limit both genders by reinforcing out-dated and unrealistic social barriers and discouraging men from taking a more active role in the home.

In addition, representations of female sexuality have undergone considerable change over time as advertisers seek to adapt to social and political shifts, however the objectification of the female form has remained relatively consistent. Even when presented with an empowering feminist rhetoric<sup>3</sup>, sexualisation ultimately serves to limit a woman by focusing both individual and social attention on the development of her body (not in addition to but rather in replacement of intellectual or emotional development), emphasizing that it is through maintaining an ideal appearance that women will experience happiness and achieve their goals.

Alternatively, representations of the female worker have continually supported traditional gender ideals by depicting employment as, at most, a secondary role for women. Often portrayed as optional and temporary, female employment has frequently been depicted as something women may pursue, time and need permitting. Moreover, even contemporary representations of the female worker (which may grant women the desire, determination and ability to pursue a career) continue to support traditional ideals and established hierarchies by portraying women in roles which are unthreatening to men and by emphasizing a woman's multiple responsibilities rather than focusing on her role in the workplace and professional development.

Lastly, incorporating themes of female empowerment into advertisements – through consumption of specific products, through modifying appearance or through self-controlled sexuality – is a concern from both an advertiser's perspective and from a social perspective. From an advertiser's

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, feminist rhetoric refers to messages of empowerment and self-actualization which emphasize qualities such as independence, strength and control (physical, emotional, intellectual or sexual) as well as the importance of self-expression and individuality (Sowards & Renegar, 2004).

perspective, there is a need to acknowledge social changes and the expanding role of modern women in society in order to attract women consumers, yet there is also the desire to reinforce patriarchal ideals in order to maintain the established social hierarchy. This often leads to the use of faux feminist ideology – non-threatening, de-politicized and individualized feminist ideas. From a social perspective, this technique is a concern because messages which may initially be perceived as empowering, as evidence that manufacturers and advertisers recognize social changes and women's power within society, are often ultimately superficial texts using simplified or vague feminist ideas in order to access new consumer markets

To summarize, then, the dominant trends in the portrayal of women in advertisements, I argue, suggest a stagnation of gender representations in advertising that communicates very specific cultural values which inform women about how they should act and react in a society that does not even really exist. As I have shown in this review, these contemporary representations of women in advertising often are neither remotely modern nor demonstrative of the current real world experiences and responsibilities of women – even when they incorporate feminist rhetoric; rather they echo the stereotyped gender representations of the past. Neglecting to acknowledge women's multiple and significant roles at home, at work, and in the community, these representations serve to limit both the ability and the intellect of women, ultimately limiting their perceived opportunities and power in society as well.

# METHODOLOGY

## IV. METHODOLOGY

### IV.1 PROBLEM/HYPOTHESIS

The aim of this research is to assess the representations of women and girls in advertisements in three demographically-defined magazines to determine if a model of ideal femininity is established across tween<sup>4</sup>, teen, and women audiences. Because media content is so intrinsically linked to culture and ideology, I posit advertisers encourage readers not only to purchase certain products and services but also to accept certain ideas (and ideals). By carefully constructing their texts, advertisers may simultaneously promote a product *and* influence individual attitudes and behaviours both towards that product and the lifestyle surrounding it. For example, advertisers may influence an individual to participate in certain activities, to choose certain role models, or to have certain opinions or ambitions all for the ultimate goal of shaping her needs and wants according to specific preferences which will, sooner or later, benefit the company.

These attempts to shape audience attitudes and behaviours target all age groups, including (perhaps most importantly) tweens. The tween audience is particularly attractive to marketers because it is this demographic that has a foot in both childhood and adolescence and is searching for a comfortable middle ground that satisfies their current needs but also anticipates their future interests. “The magazines and marketers know that girls are future consumers,” explains Levy (2006, p. 79). “So establishing brand-name recognition and developing a feeling of dependency in the girl will help insure that product manufacturer survives.” The general idea is that, “It’s easier to start a habit than to stop one” (Hill, 2002, quoted in Levy, 2006, p. 79). This means that the sooner a potential consumer is appealed to by advertisers, the sooner that individual is likely to become a consumer – a consumer of products *and* a consumer of ideology. Therefore, I argue advertisements serve as ideological guides that attempt to prime individual and collective attitudes and behaviours gradually over time with the ultimate goal of guiding these audiences to similar purchases, behaviours and attitudes in the future. Accordingly, my hypothesis is:

There is a model of ideal femininity communicated through advertising in girls’ and women’s magazines from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood.

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<sup>4</sup> The term “tween” generally refers to those aged between 8 and 12 years old. During the late 1990s, television networks experienced an increase in competition to attract young viewers. This competition ultimately led to the creation of a “new niche target audience” – the “tween” (Hains, 2009, p. 90). Today this audience is a major focus of not only product manufacturers but also the mass media.

I attempted to show this model exists by collecting advertisements from three of the top-selling magazines in their respective demographic markets (*Girls' Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan*), analyzing these ads using to a detailed coding system, and answering the following questions:

- 1) What representations of women are consistently being communicated across all three magazines?
- 2) What representations of women are specific to a certain demographic?

This allowed me to determine what ideologies (or ideal representations of femininity) are prescribed to each group of readers and how these ideologies change or do not change over the course of a lifetime.

## IV.2 SAMPLE POPULATION

Advertisements used in the content analysis were gathered from three magazines – *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan*. These magazines were selected based on their genre (general interest/lifestyle magazines), audience demographics (all target girls and women in distinct yet overlapping age groups), and circulation rates (each is a leading magazine in its respective genre and demographic categories).

### IV.2.a BRIEF BACKGROUND ON MAGAZINES

*Girls' Life* magazine was first published in August 1994 as a bi-monthly magazine that combines both “fun stuff and valuable information” tailored to the tween audience (*Girls' Life*, n.d.). It is now the #1 magazine for girls aged 10 to 15, the recipient of a Parents' Choice Gold Award (1996), several Parent's Guide to Children's Media Awards (1999-2002, 2006), and supports the Girls Scouts of the USA as the organization's “official magazine of choice” (*Girls' Life*, n.d., *Girls' Life Media Kit*, 2009).

*Seventeen* magazine, with its tagline “It's fun to be Seventeen” has catered to adolescent girls since 1944 (Hearst Corporation, n.d. b). One of the longest-running teen magazines, it is also one of the top-selling magazines and highest rated among adolescent girls between 12 and 19 years old (*Seventeen Media Kit*, 2009). Though the magazine predominantly features articles on fashion, beauty and entertainment, it also provides numerous articles that address “the complex real-life issues that young women face every day” ranging from concerns about relationships with family and friends, education goals, and health questions (Hearst Corporation, n.d. b).

*Cosmopolitan* magazine is for the “fun, fearless females who want to be the best they can be in every area of their lives” (Hearst Corporation, n.d. a). Though it has undergone changes since first established in 1886, today *Cosmopolitan* is the #1 lifestyle magazine among women aged 18 to 34 and 35 to 49. Perhaps best known for offering advice on sex, love, and relationships, the magazine also

provides information on physical and mental health concerns, covers fashion and entertainment news, and includes features highlighting real women in everyday situations (Cosmopolitan Media Kit, 2009).

### IV.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

To assess the presence of priming and interpret the representations of girls and women in advertising, I conducted a content analysis of advertisements appearing in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. As the focus of this study is primarily on representation and identifying patterns of representation, this analysis was more qualitative in nature than quantitative and as such it relied heavily on coding and inductive reasoning.

#### IV.3.a CONTENT ANALYSIS

Krippendorff (2004, p. xvii) explains content analysis as an “empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent.” He states,

The content analyst views data as representations not of physical events but of texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings, and must therefore be analyzed with such uses in mind. (Krippendorff, 2004, p. xiii)

It is because of this focus on interpreting meanings that I have chosen to conduct a content analysis of advertisements in girls' and women's magazines to assess the representations of ideal femininity. I have, however, chosen to focus on qualitative analysis rather than quantitative. Though qualitative analysis has in the past been criticized for its subjectivity that some argue compromises the accuracy and validity of research findings, the subjectivity involved in the analysis process does not have to be considered a downfall. As Kracauer (1952, p. 637) argues,

The terms “qualitative analysis” and “quantitative analysis” do not refer to radically different approaches. Quantitative analysis includes qualitative aspects, for it both originates and culminates in qualitative considerations. On the other hand, qualitative analysis proper often requires quantification in the interest of exhaustive treatment. Far from being strict alternatives the two approaches actually overlap, and have in fact complemented and interpenetrated each other.

He continues to explain that, though qualitative analysis is “inevitably subjective” and therefore “cannot ascertain the accuracy and validity of its findings in the manner of an exact science,” this does not mean that qualitative research analysts are research anarchists, making random and uninformed assumptions and conclusions (Kracauer, 1952, p. 641). Rather, qualitative (or interpretative) content analysis requires researchers to understand that meaning is subjective to the individual and therefore meanings are multiple and varied. Accordingly, how one researcher analyzes a text and interprets a text may be

different from how another researcher approaches the same problem. As Krippendorff (2004, p. 22) explains,

One can count the characters, words, or sentences of a text. One can categorize its phrases, analyze its metaphors, describe the logical structure of its constituent expressions, and ascertain its associations, connotations, denotations, and commands. One can also offer psychiatric, sociological, political, or poetic interpretations of that text.

In each instance, the findings may vary, but just because they vary does not mean they are not valid (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 22).

Still, what is essential for content analyses is developing an organized and detailed method to record and code the data in order to create a concrete version of the interpretive process and permit replication of the study (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 84). Therefore, in order to ensure the quality and replicability of my research, I have developed a detailed and systematic method which utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze the representations of ideal femininity in advertising.

#### **IV.4 DATA COLLECTION**

Collection of advertisements for this research was done in two phases, with the first phase (quantitative data collection and analysis) informing the latter (qualitative data collection and analysis). For both, I employed purposive sampling. As Krippendorff (2004, p. 119) explains, when using purposive sampling, “units of text are not meant to be representative of a population of texts; rather, they are the population of relevant texts.” Due to the nature of my study, these relevant texts were different for the quantitative and qualitative phases of my research and as a result the selection criteria and sample size were different for each as well.

##### **IV.4.a PHASE ONE: QUANTITATIVE DATA**

###### **IV.4.a.i SAMPLE**

Originally, data for quantitative analysis was to be collected from all issues of *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan* published between December 2009 and November 2010 (one years-worth of magazines), a total population size of 28 issues (6 issues of *Girls’ Life*, 10 issues of *Seventeen*<sup>5</sup>, and 12 issues of *Cosmopolitan*). The decision to begin with December 2009 issues (rather than January 2010) was due to the fact that both *Girls’ Life* and *Seventeen* publish a single magazine for the months of December and January (*Girls’ Life* does this because it is a bi-monthly magazine while *Seventeen*

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<sup>5</sup> Though *Seventeen* is a monthly magazine, double issues are printed for December/January and July/August, resulting in 10 issues annually.

produces a double issue for these months). Additionally, since the editorial content of the December/January issues of *Girls' Life* and *Seventeen* appeared to be focused primarily on the holidays (specifically Christmas and New Year's celebrations), it seemed impractical to compare advertisements in these magazines to advertisements in the January issue of *Cosmopolitan* (which was not holiday themed). Therefore it was for these reasons that I decided to begin with December 2009 issues of each magazine.

However, since *Girls' Life* is a bi-monthly magazine, in order to obtain a total population of advertisements comparable in size to those obtained from *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, I decided to draw data from two years of *Girls' Life* magazine instead of one. When selecting the additional magazines, I was somewhat restricted by both availability and my timeline to complete my research. In terms of availability, I had issues of *Girls' Life* from April/May 2009, which provided me four magazines that preceded the original sample population (December 2009 to November 2010). In terms of my research timeline and a need to move onto my analysis of the data, I chose to use two magazines that followed the original sample population. By selecting magazines that both preceded and followed the original population sample, I was able to maintain a sense of continuity that may not have been as strong had the additional magazines all pre-dated or post-dated the original population. Ultimately, including additional issues of *Girls' Life* provided me with a larger population (a total of 12 issues published between April/May 2009 and February/March 2011) to select my final sample of advertisements.

When selecting advertisements to include in my quantitative analysis, I employed a purposive sampling strategy to select only those advertisements which were easily identified as such and clearly discernable from editorial content. More specifically, the criteria for inclusion in the unit of analysis were simple: the ad must be  $\frac{1}{4}$  page or larger and sell a specific product, product line, or company. This allowed me to omit classified advertisements and pages that cluster various products together without specifically promoting any (e.g., Cosmo's Hot List). Though this resulted in a rather large sample, the number of advertisements suitable for qualitative analysis was reduced during the coding process which classified advertisements based on what type of product or service was being sold.

#### **IV.4.a.ii CODING OF SAMPLE**

Allowing for additional categories to emerge during the coding process, categories included, but were not limited to the following:

|                                             |                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Apparel                                     | Hair Care (products/dyes/ styling tools/accessories) |
| Awareness (advice, research)                | Health (medication)                                  |
| Beauty (cosmetics/fragrances/nail polishes) | Home (garbage bags, cat litter, laundry detergent)   |

|                                             |                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Charity/Volunteer                           | Hygiene (soaps/body washes/feminine hygiene)                 |
| Diet (weight loss programs/ supplements)    | Literature                                                   |
| Education                                   | Skin Care (moisturizers/acne treatments/anti-aging products) |
| Entertainment (music/TV/movies/videogames)  | Technology (cell phones/laptops)                             |
| Food and Beverage (non-diet, non-alcoholic) | Transportation                                               |
| Footwear                                    |                                                              |

(See Appendix A: Coding Used to Categorize Advertisements for the complete list of categories used)

Because editorial and advertising content varies according to season (Firminger, 2006; Hetsroni, 2007), in order to select advertisements for in-depth qualitative analysis evenly over the 12-month period, I initially coded each issue of each magazine separately, ensuring consistency in the coding process with the help of a detailed guide outlining what products fall into each category. This allowed me to first organize the information monthly and then integrate these findings to identify the most frequently advertised product types *overall*. More specifically, this allowed me to answer the following questions:

1. Which products are advertised most frequently in each magazine?
2. Do the products advertised most frequently differ for each magazine? If so, how

From here, I determined what the three dominant advertised product categories were and used this information as a guide to select relevant advertisements for qualitative analysis.

#### **IV.4.b PHASE TWO: QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

##### **IV.4.b.i SAMPLE**

Using the three most frequently advertised product types overall (as determined in the quantitative analysis phase), I returned to my data organized by month and used purposive sampling once again to reduce the unit of sample. The criteria for inclusion for these advertisements were: ads must be one to two full pages, must include both image and text (not just the brand/company name), and must feature at least one female model. Additionally, because (as I have noted) advertised products and services vary in their frequency according to season, I grouped the monthly data sets accordingly to ensure advertisements are selected evenly over the 12-month<sup>6</sup> period:<sup>7</sup>

*Girls' Life*: Winter – December/January, February/March  
 Spring – April/May  
 Summer – June/July  
 Fall – August/September, October/November

<sup>6</sup> Or 24-month period, for *Girls' Life*

<sup>7</sup> Because *Girls' Life* is a bi-monthly magazine, grouping the magazines according to season is somewhat more arbitrary than grouping a monthly magazine like *Cosmopolitan*. Similarly, because *Seventeen* has two double issues, both the winter and summer seasons consist of two issues rather than three.

*Seventeen*: Winter – December/January, February  
 Spring – March, April, May  
 Summer – June/July, August  
 Fall – September, October, November

*Cosmopolitan*: Winter – December, January, February  
 Spring – March, April, May  
 Summer – June, July, August  
 Fall – September, October, November

From these new populations, I conducted a systematic sample to select advertisements for qualitative analysis. I selected six advertisements per season per product category – a total of 24 advertisements per category selected over 12 (or 24) issues. To do this, I used a complete list of the advertisements that met the criteria for qualitative analysis (sorted by season and by product category). Then I determined both a random starting point and a sampling rate. To select a random starting point (and the first advertisement to be included in my qualitative analysis), I used an online random number generator. To determine the sampling rate, I divided the total number of advertisements in a single product category during one season of one magazine by the total number of advertisements I wanted in my final sample (Stewart, 2002, p. 57). For example, if one of the top three product categories for *Cosmopolitan* is apparel, with a total of 60 advertisements in the magazine's winter issues coded as such, and I want to select six advertisements from these issues for my final sample, then my sampling rate is 10. This means, after selecting a random starting point between 1 and 10, I will include every tenth beauty ad in my unit of analysis until I have selected a total of six advertisements. I will repeat this process to select beauty ads from the spring, summer and fall issues of *Cosmopolitan*. Then I repeated the entire process for *Seventeen* and *Girls' Life*.

#### **IV.4.b.ii CODING OF SAMPLE**

I took an interpretative approach to content analysis for this study in order to find patterns in the advertising messages being communicated. Ahuvia (2001) asserts that interpretive content analysis is different from traditional content analysis primarily with regards to the coding process. He explains, "Traditional content analysts may not code the entire focal text; instead they may focus on a part of the text, such as the headline in a magazine ad," however interpretative content analysis requires "a holistic approach [which considers] how the rest of the text would influence the interpretation of the part being coded" (Ahuvia, 2001, p. 145). Accordingly, when coding the elements to be interpreted, each element is not considered separately from the others, but rather is considered as a part of the whole. Though this process is highly subjective, I, as Berg (2007, p. 250) suggests, attempted to "systematically and objectively [identify] special characteristics of messages" by employing very specific criteria for analysis.

To develop a detailed coding system that considered both the visual and the textual elements that form the advertisement, I drew from previous research by Aronovsky and Furnham (2008), Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008), Dixon, Dobbinson, Wakefield, Jamsen, & McLeod (2008), Karan and Khoo (2007), and Thomas and Treiber (2000). Ultimately, this code was used to assess the social context of the ad (environment, background characters, projected social status), the physical characteristic of the model (age, race, appearance), and the role of women as depicted by the model in order to reach conclusions about what constitutes ideal femininity in these advertisements. I also considered the subtext of the advertisement as informed by the textual elements of the ad, specifically the product promise (See Appendix B: Coding Representations of Women in Advertisements for details).

#### **IV.4.b.iii CONDUCTING ANALYSIS**

In order to conduct my qualitative analysis in the most efficient, systematic way, I numbered each advertisement and created a simple spreadsheet document that listed every ad included in the analysis, organized by magazine.<sup>8</sup> Additional spreadsheets were created for each coding category (ex. physical characteristics, social context), again divided by magazine. Using ones (indicating the given element is included in the advertisement) and zeros (indicating the given element is *not* included in the advertisement), each ad was carefully coded. By using numbers, calculating the frequency with which specific elements were integrated into advertisements was simplified as totals were easily calculated and converted into percentages. Additionally, space was provided next to each advertisement to record any important notes during the coding process.

Following the natural progression of the typical magazine reader, I began my analysis with *Girls' Life* then progressed to *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*. Once I coded every advertisement selected from *Girls' Life*, I reviewed my findings and made preliminary notes on dominant themes/ideas. This allowed me to develop a general assessment of the representations of women in these ads before moving onto the next magazine.

After every advertisement in the sample was coded, each coding category was then compared across all three magazines. This served to identify patterns in the representations of women and allowed me to answer the following questions:

1. What representations of women are consistently being communicated across all three magazines?
2. What representations of women are specific to a certain demographic?

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<sup>8</sup> At this stage, advertisements were no longer divided by product category. The purpose of coding ads by product category was a strategy to determine the types of ads which appeared most frequently in each magazine in order to select ads for qualitative analysis that would be representative of those to which readers were most frequently exposed.

I then used this information to assess the overall representations of women and ideal femininity to determine if there was, as I hypothesized, a model of ideal femininity communicated through advertising in girls' and women's magazines from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood.

## QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

## V. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

### V.1 FINDINGS

After coding each issue of each magazine separately, I organized the information into monthly charts, calculating the total number of advertisements in each product category. I then integrated these findings into a single chart to establish the overall distribution of advertisements according to product category for each magazine, thus answering my first research question:

1. Which products are advertised most frequently in each magazine?

Charts 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1 display the data used to answer this question. The far left column displays, alphabetically, the various product categories which appeared in the given magazine. Each subsequent column, labelled with the month and year of each issue included in the sample, displays the number of ads in that given issue that were identified as belonging to each category. The bottom row displays the total number of advertisements per magazine issue, while the far right column displays the number of advertisements in the entire sample identified as belonging to each category. The shaded cells indicate the top three (or more, if several categories had the same number of ads) product categories each month, with the top three product categories overall indicated in the final column.

Charts 1.2, 2.2 and 3.2 extrapolate the data concerning the overall top three product categories from charts 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1 and display the three most frequently advertised product categories in the given magazine in two ways: first as the total number of ads in the entire sample which were identified as belonging to these product categories and as a percentage of the total number of ads in the entire sample.

**1.1 Distribution of Advertisements in *Girls' Life* by Product Category**

|                            | Apr/May<br>2009 | Jun/Jul<br>2009 | Aug/Sept<br>2009 | Oct/Nov<br>2009 | Dec/Jan<br>2010 | Feb/Mar<br>2010 | Apr/May<br>2010 | Jun/Jul<br>2010 | Aug/Sept<br>2010 | Oct/Nov<br>2010 | Dec/Jan<br>2011 | Feb/Mar<br>2011 | Total<br>Number |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Product Category           | # of Ads        |                 |                  |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                  |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| Accessories                | 0               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 1               | 0               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 0               | 1               |
| Apparel                    | 0               | 0               | 2                | 2               | 1               | 1               | 3               | 3               | 4                | 2               | 2               | 1               | 21              |
| Awareness                  | 1               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 1               | 0               | 0               | 2                | 0               | 0               | 0               | 4               |
| Beauty                     | 1               | 0               | 1                | 1               | 1               | 1               | 1               | 1               | 1                | 2               | 1               | 2               | 13              |
| Entertainment              | 1               | 3               | 5                | 13              | 6               | 2               | 7               | 4               | 5                | 7               | 13              | 5               | 71              |
| Food & Beverage            | 1               | 2               | 1                | 1               | 1               | 1               | 1               | 1               | 1                | 1               | 1               | 1               | 13              |
| Footwear                   | 3               | 2               | 3                | 0               | 0               | 2               | 1               | 1               | 1                | 2               | 0               | 2               | 17              |
| Hair Care                  | 0               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 1               | 1               |
| Health                     | 1               | 1               | 1                | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 0               | 3               |
| Hygiene                    | 3               | 2               | 4                | 4               | 2               | 2               | 6               | 7               | 4                | 4               | 4               | 2               | 44              |
| Literature                 | 2               | 10              | 1                | 1               | 3               | 4               | 4               | 5               | 2                | 6               | 1               | 0               | 39              |
| Other                      | 1               | 0               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 0               | 1               | 0               | 0                | 1               | 1               | 1               | 5               |
| Promotion                  | 1               | 1               | 0                | 1               | 0               | 1               | 0               | 1               | 0                | 0               | 1               | 1               | 7               |
| Skin Care                  | 3               | 1               | 2                | 0               | 1               | 0               | 1               | 3               | 0                | 0               | 0               | 1               | 12              |
| Technology                 | 2               | 2               | 1                | 0               | 3               | 2               | 1               | 1               | 1                | 1               | 0               | 0               | 14              |
| <b>Total Number of Ads</b> | <b>20</b>       | <b>24</b>       | <b>21</b>        | <b>23</b>       | <b>18</b>       | <b>18</b>       | <b>26</b>       | <b>27</b>       | <b>21</b>        | <b>26</b>       | <b>24</b>       | <b>17</b>       | <b>265</b>      |

**1.2 Most Frequently Advertised Product Categories in *Girls' Life***

| Category      | Total Number of Ads | Percentage of Total Population |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Entertainment | 71                  | 27                             |
| Hygiene       | 44                  | 17                             |
| Literature    | 39                  | 15                             |

**2.1 Distribution of Advertisements in *Seventeen* by Product Category**

|                            | Dec/Jan 2010 | Feb 2010  | Mar 2010  | Apr 2010  | May 2010  | Jun/Jul 2010 | Aug 2010  | Sept 2010 | Oct 2010  | Nov 2010  | Total Number |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| Product Category           | # of Ads     |           |           |           |           |              |           |           |           |           |              |
| Accessories                | 2            | 0         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 1            | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 8            |
| Apparel                    | 18           | 3         | 10        | 11        | 5         | 9            | 11        | 22        | 14        | 3         | 106          |
| Awareness                  | 2            | 0         | 0         | 3         | 1         | 2            | 1         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 11           |
| Contest                    | 1            | 0         | 1         | 0         | 2         | 1            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 5            |
| Beauty                     | 8            | 7         | 15        | 16        | 13        | 11           | 9         | 17        | 22        | 12        | 130          |
| Education                  | 1            | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1            | 1         | 1         | 2         | 2         | 14           |
| Entertainment              | 2            | 5         | 0         | 4         | 0         | 4            | 1         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 20           |
| Food & Beverage            | 0            | 2         | 1         | 3         | 2         | 3            | 3         | 4         | 3         | 4         | 25           |
| Footwear                   | 7            | 0         | 0         | 3         | 4         | 5            | 5         | 8         | 4         | 6         | 42           |
| Hair Care                  | 4            | 6         | 0         | 2         | 3         | 3            | 4         | 6         | 5         | 4         | 37           |
| Health                     | 0            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1            | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 4            |
| Hygiene                    | 4            | 4         | 5         | 10        | 14        | 15           | 9         | 9         | 9         | 8         | 87           |
| Literature                 | 0            | 1         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 2            | 1         | 1         | 0         | 2         | 12           |
| Other                      | 0            | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0            | 2         | 2         | 1         | 0         | 6            |
| Promotional                | 0            | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 1            | 0         | 0         | 1         | 0         | 4            |
| Recreation                 | 0            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1            |
| Room decor                 | 0            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1            | 2         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 5            |
| Skin Care                  | 1            | 2         | 2         | 6         | 8         | 7            | 8         | 9         | 7         | 4         | 54           |
| Technology                 | 2            | 1         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 0            | 0         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 11           |
| Transportation             | 0            | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0            | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1            |
| <b>Total Number of Ads</b> | <b>52</b>    | <b>35</b> | <b>42</b> | <b>62</b> | <b>55</b> | <b>67</b>    | <b>60</b> | <b>89</b> | <b>72</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>583</b>   |

**2.2 Most Frequently Advertised Product Categories in *Seventeen***

| Category | Total Number of Ads | Percentage of Total Population |
|----------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Beauty   | 130                 | 22                             |
| Apparel  | 106                 | 18                             |
| Hygiene  | 87                  | 15                             |

### 3.1 Distribution of Advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* by Product Category

|                            | Dec 2009   | Jan 2010  | Feb 2010  | Mar 2010  | Apr 2010  | May 2010   | Jun 2010   | Jul 2010   | Aug 2010   | Sept 2010  | Oct 2010   | Nov 2010  | Total Number |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|
| Category                   | # of Ads   |           |           |           |           |            |            |            |            |            |            |           |              |
| Accessories                | 2          | 0         | 1         | 2         | 1         | 2          | 2          | 1          | 1          | 2          | 1          | 3         | 18           |
| Alcohol                    | 1          | 1         | 0         | 1         | 3         | 3          | 6          | 7          | 3          | 2          | 1          | 3         | 31           |
| Apparel                    | 7          | 3         | 4         | 10        | 11        | 13         | 9          | 3          | 7          | 12         | 8          | 7         | 94           |
| Awareness                  | 2          | 0         | 1         | 2         | 4         | 2          | 1          | 0          | 2          | 2          | 0          | 1         | 17           |
| Contest                    | 0          | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1          | 0          | 1          | 2          | 0          | 0          | 0         | 5            |
| Beauty                     | 36         | 13        | 25        | 25        | 17        | 29         | 25         | 11         | 16         | 16         | 40         | 27        | 280          |
| Diet                       | 0          | 0         | 3         | 1         | 3         | 1          | 1          | 2          | 2          | 3          | 3          | 3         | 22           |
| Education                  | 1          | 1         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 2          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 0          | 1          | 0         | 13           |
| Entertainment              | 3          | 3         | 2         | 1         | 2         | 1          | 2          | 1          | 5          | 1          | 2          | 1         | 24           |
| Finance                    | 0          | 0         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1          | 1          | 2          | 2          | 1          | 3          | 2         | 16           |
| Food & Beverage            | 4          | 1         | 4         | 7         | 6         | 14         | 12         | 13         | 14         | 12         | 5          | 5         | 97           |
| Footwear                   | 1          | 1         | 0         | 1         | 2         | 2          | 1          | 1          | 2          | 4          | 4          | 2         | 21           |
| Hair Care                  | 7          | 6         | 7         | 11        | 14        | 14         | 11         | 13         | 14         | 23         | 21         | 12        | 153          |
| Health                     | 4          | 5         | 4         | 3         | 1         | 1          | 2          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 3         | 27           |
| Home                       | 5          | 1         | 3         | 2         | 2         | 4          | 2          | 2          | 2          | 4          | 3          | 4         | 34           |
| Hygiene                    | 10         | 7         | 3         | 5         | 13        | 21         | 21         | 20         | 20         | 17         | 13         | 13        | 163          |
| Other                      | 0          | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0          | 0          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 1          | 0         | 4            |
| Promotional                | 2          | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0         | 5            |
| Sexual Health              | 5          | 4         | 5         | 5         | 4         | 3          | 2          | 2          | 3          | 1          | 2          | 2         | 38           |
| Skin Care                  | 7          | 7         | 7         | 12        | 11        | 13         | 18         | 14         | 17         | 14         | 9          | 5         | 134          |
| Technology                 | 4          | 1         | 1         | 1         | 2         | 3          | 3          | 2          | 1          | 0          | 1          | 1         | 20           |
| Transportation             | 4          | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 1          | 2          | 2          | 1          | 2          | 1          | 1         | 16           |
| Volunteer/Charity          | 1          | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0          | 0         | 1            |
| <b>Total Number of Ads</b> | <b>106</b> | <b>56</b> | <b>75</b> | <b>92</b> | <b>99</b> | <b>133</b> | <b>122</b> | <b>100</b> | <b>117</b> | <b>118</b> | <b>120</b> | <b>95</b> | <b>1233</b>  |

### 3.2 Most Frequently Advertised Product Categories in *Cosmopolitan*

| Category  | Total Number of Ads | Percentage of Total Population |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Beauty    | 280                 | 23                             |
| Hygiene   | 163                 | 13                             |
| Hair Care | 153                 | 12                             |

Further analysis of these charts allows me to answer my second research question:

2. Do the products advertised most frequently differ for each magazine? If so, how?"

Martins and Brooks (2010, p. 89) explain that, when considering marketing from a demographic perspective (which I am since I am assessing the representations of ideal femininity in advertisements across three age groups), "the life cycle is a useful organising [...] framework that lends itself to the analysis of factors that influence consumer priorities and preferences" at various ages and stages. They assert that, over the course of a lifetime, an individual's consumer needs and wants shift according to changes in their lifestyles. These changes may include shifts in personal relationships, living environments, education levels, or financial situations (Martins & Brooks, 2010, p. 90). Accordingly, variations in the types of products being sold to the different age groups targeted by *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* are expected. Furthermore, acknowledgement and discussion of these variations is important because, though the focus of this research is on representations of femininity

and not on the types of products sold to different age groups of women, the types of products being marketed to each demographic are indicative of the (real or prescribed) lifestyle – the priorities, interests, and concerns – of that particular audience.

Here I discuss where differences in advertised products surfaced in the data, giving possible reasons for these variations. This is followed by a brief examination of the similarities in the data and how these common threads are important for the next step in the research: qualitative analysis.

### **V.1.a VARIATIONS IN THE DATA**

#### **V.1.a.i PRODUCT CATEGORIES WHICH ONLY APPEARED IN COSMOPOLITAN**

Several of the variations found in the types of advertisements that appear in *Cosmopolitan* and not *Girls' Life* or *Seventeen* can easily be explained by the lifestyle factor: according to Hearst, the typical *Cosmopolitan* reader is the single (46.4%), well-educated (62.5% have attended or graduated college), working (68.6) woman with a median age of 30.7 years (*Cosmopolitan Media Kit*, n.d.). Since the typical *Seventeen* reader is 16.4 years old and still in school (86%), possibly with some kind of financial independence (54.4% are employed) (*Seventeen Media Kit*, n.d.), and the typical *Girls' Life* reader is 12 years old, also still in school and too young for regular part-time employment (*Girls' Life*, n.d. b), it is clear that the day-to-day priorities, as well as opportunities and interests, will vary among these three demographics. Based solely on the age of the target audiences, it is obvious that advertisements for alcohol may appear in *Cosmopolitan* but will definitely not appear in the other magazines whose target readers are under the legal drinking age. However other advertisements that appear in *Cosmopolitan* – for credit cards, insurance, and even practical home items like laundry detergent or toilet bowl cleaner – do not appear in *Girls' Life* or *Seventeen* because the lifestyle of the typical reader does not demand these products.

Other advertisements which appeared exclusively in *Cosmopolitan* include ads for various sexual health products (most often birth control, including the pill, condoms, and emergency contraception like Plan-B) and diet aids (programs, meal replacements, or supplements). Considering research shows that 46% of high school students in the United States have engaged in sexual intercourse (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, p. 20) and that between grade 6 and grade 10, the percentage of Canadian girls who think they are “too fat” increases from 25% to 40% with 12% to 25% claiming to be “doing something to lose weight” (Boyce, King, and Roche, 2008, p. 48, 50), this variance may seem to suggest that advertisers inaccurately consider both sexual activity and enhanced awareness of the body and self-regulation to be concerns of women and not tweens or teens. However, this variation is better explained by North American regulatory standards that restrict companies – and specifically

pharmaceutical companies – from advertising certain products, including prescription and non-prescription drugs, to tweens and teens. At the federal level, the Federal Trade Commission (2009, p.8) regulates print and broadcast advertising in the United States and “enforces the law with respect to advertising directed to children [and youth] to ensure that it is truthful and non-deceptive”. Additionally, there is the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (2009, p. 3) of the National Council of Better Business Bureau which encourages voluntary compliance to self-regulatory policies “to assure that advertising directed to children is not deceptive, unfair or inappropriate for its intended audience”. Accordingly, whether or not companies want to advertise sexual health products to younger audiences, they are restricted to do so by both legal and ethical standards, resulting in the variation found in data collected from *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines.

#### **V.1.a.ii PRODUCT CATEGORIES WHICH APPEARED IN COSMOPOLITAN AND SEVENTEEN, SEVENTEEN AND GIRLS’ LIFE**

Because the targeted and real demographics for each of these magazines do overlap, along with the differences in reader lifestyles, there are of course some shared interests and priorities that advertisers are able to use to sell the same or similar products to different demographics.

For example, since the target audience for *Cosmopolitan* is 18+, and the typical reader of *Seventeen* is nearing high school graduation or has recently graduated, both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* readers are at a stage in life where they are considering (or re-considering) their future. Accordingly, advertisements for post-secondary education and career-training are found in both magazines. Similarly, *Seventeen* readers are approaching or are at an age where they can get their license, so it is not surprising that advertisements for cars first appear in *Seventeen* (albeit in small number) and increase in frequency in *Cosmopolitan* as more readers become licensed drivers and more readers have the income (as well as need) to purchase a car.

Additionally, just as some needs and wants of *Seventeen* readers are shared by *Cosmopolitan* readers, some interests of *Girls’ Life* readers are shared with *Seventeen* readers. Specifically, the data shows that advertisements for various fiction and non-fiction books appear in both *Girls’ Life* and *Seventeen*. For these age groups, reading is offered as an affordable, portable and enjoyable leisure activity that does not require transportation, a later curfew or valid ID. What is important to note, though, is the frequency of these types of advertisements. While literature advertisements appeared so regularly in *Girls’ Life* that they ranked as the third most frequent product category overall in the magazine over the two-year period, these advertisements ranked 10<sup>th</sup> (out of 20 categories) in

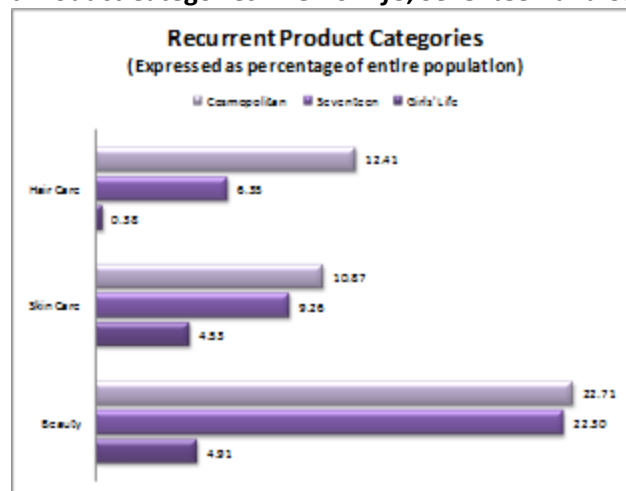
*Seventeen* and did not appear at all in *Cosmopolitan*.<sup>9</sup> But these variations make sense when the lifestyles of the target audiences are considered. As girls (and boys) grow up, their interests change, of course, but more importantly, responsibilities change and responsibilities increase. While a tween girl may be responsible for going to school, finishing her homework, and doing a few chores around the house, older teens often have the additional responsibility of part-time jobs, and adults balance a variety of work and family responsibilities. So, in general, the younger the individual is, the fewer responsibilities she is assumed to have, and the more leisure time is available to engage in extracurricular activities, be they sports teams or social clubs or reading.

### V.1.b COMMONALITIES IN THE DATA

The idea that certain behaviours or attitudes or preferences are gradually developed over the course of a lifetime is the focus of this research, so determining common threads across all three magazines is critical. Although I am not specifically focusing on what products are sold to girls and women, but rather I am focusing on the images used to sell these products, understanding which product categories increase and decrease in recurrence across all three magazines is important data to analyse because it helps formulate a clearer image of how the three demographics are similar and dissimilar and where their (real and prescribed) interests or concerns are focused at various stages.

Across the three magazines, there are three product categories for which advertisements increase in recurrence from *Girls' Life* to *Seventeen* to *Cosmopolitan*. These categories are hair care, skin care, and beauty.

#### 4 Recurrent Product Categories in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*



<sup>9</sup> Entertainment advertisements (which include TV and movie promotions, music releases, videogames and computer games, as well as art supplies and dolls) follow a similar pattern: highly concentrated in *Girls' Life* (26.8%), fewer ads in *Seventeen* (3.4%), and even fewer in *Cosmopolitan* (1.9%).

Briefly, hair care advertisements include ads for various products (shampoo, conditioner, hair spray, gel, mousse), colourants (permanent or semi-permanent hair dye), styling tools (brushes, flat irons, curling irons, blow dryers), and accessories (clip-in extensions, wraps, clips). Though only a single advertisement appears in *Girls' Life* (for shampoo and conditioner), a range of hair care products appear in *Seventeen* including a variety of basic products, dyes and accessories. Then, the number of advertisements increases so significantly in *Cosmopolitan* that the product category actually ranks in the top three most frequent advertised. Skin care advertisements follow a similar pattern. This category includes ads for acne treatments, moisturizers and anti-aging creams and serums. While these products account for less than 5% of the advertisements in *Girls' Life*, the number doubles in *Seventeen* and (slightly) increases once again in *Cosmopolitan*. Lastly, beauty advertisements include a wide variety of cosmetics (mascaras, eye shadows, lipsticks, blushes, foundations and powders) as well as nail polishes and fragrances. These products account for less than 5% of the advertisements in *Girls' Life*, however, beauty products rank number one overall in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*.

What is important to note about these common threads is that they do not suddenly appear in one magazine nor do they appear in great quantity from the beginning. Rather these advertisements gradually increase in regularity across the three magazines with advertisers slowly developing a presence by introducing new products in stages which correspond to the stages of their target audiences. For example, beauty products advertised in *Girls' Life* are limited to colourful and easy-to-use lip glosses and balms (often candy-flavoured), while *Seventeen* features a wide range of affordable products, and *Cosmopolitan* integrates advertisements for more luxurious (better quality, higher price) products. This tactic introduces young girls to beauty products in a way that is fun and age-appropriate and that encourages them to make minor changes to their appearance. This is, then, the foundation upon which advertisers are able to encourage further experimentation with beauty products as these girls become teenagers. And the more tweens and teens are conditioned to pay attention to their appearance and altering or “improving” their appearance, the more, as Levy (2006, p. 79) explains, dependent they become on the products that allow them to do so and the more inclined they are to continue purchasing these and similar products as adult women.

Though this quantitative data provides interesting and useful information about advertising to three different yet similar audiences, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes, behaviours, and preferences prescribed as “ideals” to girls and women, qualitative analysis of these advertisements is needed. In the following section, I explain how a sample of ads for qualitative analysis

was drawn from the top three product categories for each magazine and how each ad was coded to assess the various ideal representations of femininity. I then present my qualitative findings.

## **QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

## VI. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### VI.1 SELECTION OF ADVERTISEMENTS

A total of 210 advertisements were selected to be included in the final sample – 72 advertisements from *Cosmopolitan* (24 ads from each of the top three product categories), 72 advertisements from *Seventeen* (24 ads from each of the top three product categories), and 66 advertisements from *Girls' Life* (21 ads from entertainment, 23 ads from hygiene, and 22 ads from literature – the top three product categories). Despite using 12 issues of *Girls' Life* (the equivalent of 2 years) in an attempt to increase the population from which ads were selected, there was still a deficiency in the number of ads which met the inclusion criteria. Though this did not pose a significant problem for two of the three categories (which were short just one and three ads from meeting the desired number), for the literature category it did present a challenge as only six ads met the inclusion criteria. Consequently, an exception needed to be made and an additional 16 literature advertisements were selected which did not meet the required criteria to include living models. While these advertisements do not contribute data to the assessment of the representations of women, by repeatedly *not* using a model to sell the product, these ads do suggest that, for young girls, there is a stronger emphasis on developing the internal self than on improving the external self. Additionally, these advertisements, like those selected from *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, still provide relevant information in terms of social context (the type of lifestyles promoted as determined by the style of the ad and the environment in which the product is featured) and subtext (The textual elements, primarily the product promise, of these ads contain important connotative meanings. Though these elements may focus on the benefits of the product for the consumer, these “benefits” are implicitly connected to the prescribed interests and roles of that consumer). These ads are further discussed later in this paper (See ‘An Anomaly in the Data: Literature Advertisements’).

### VI.2 CODING ADVERTISEMENTS

Each advertisement in the final sample was carefully coded by assessing the physical characteristics of the model, the social context in which the model is depicted, the personality and attitude of the model, the overall role of the model, and the subtext provided by the textual elements of the advertisement. This information was then organized according to magazine in order to determine the total number of ads within each category. This number was then calculated as a percentage of the

total number of ads per magazine.<sup>10 11</sup> This allows for comparisons to be made according to age demographic which, in turn, allows an assessment of which characteristics are common to all demographic and which a certain demographic. These patterns ultimately served to answer the original research questions:

3. What representations of women are consistently being communicated across all three magazines?
4. What representations of women are specific to a certain demographic?

### VI.3 FINDINGS

#### VI.3.a PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

For the first part of my analysis of advertisements in *Cosmopolitan*, *Seventeen*, and *Girls' Life*, I examined the physical characteristics of the models featured in order to determine the prescribed ideal look for a woman. Overall, across all three magazines, I found that the majority of the models were light skinned women with long, straight brown hair, brown eyes, a thin body type, and demure dress (See chart 5).

**5 Dominant Physical Characteristics of the Typical Advertised Woman**

|                       | <b>Girl's Life</b>               | <b>Seventeen</b>                 | <b>Cosmopolitan</b>              |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Age</b>            | Teen (51.5%)                     | Teen (54.9%)                     | Young Adult (75.7%)              |
| <b>Complexion</b>     | Lighter Skinned (73.5%)          | Lighter Skinned (68.4%)          | Lighter Skinned (77.5%)          |
| <b>Hair Colour</b>    | Brown (50%)                      | Brown (42.5%)                    | Brown (62%)                      |
| <b>Hair Style</b>     | Long (54.4%)<br>Straight (40.5%) | Long (48.1%)<br>Straight (36.2%) | Long (63.2%)<br>Straight (44.4%) |
| <b>Eye Colour</b>     | Brown (56.4%)                    | Brown (57.6%)                    | Brown (50.9%)                    |
| <b>Body Type</b>      | Thin (63.8%)                     | Thin (70.2%)                     | Thin 58.3%)                      |
| <b>Style of Dress</b> | Demure (83.6%)                   | Demure (61.3%)                   | Demure (45.5%)                   |

Analyzed by category, however, other patterns emerge.

##### VI.3.a.i Age

The approximate age of the primary model was determined by using five age-range categories:

- Tween: under 14 years old
- Teen: 14 years – 18 years
- Young adult: 19 years – 34 years
- Middle-aged: 35 years – 50 years
- Elderly: over 60 years old

<sup>10</sup> When calculating these percentages, the 16 literature ads which did not met the original criteria for inclusion were omitted from physical characteristics, personality and attitude, and role. As a result, percentages were based on a total population of 50 advertisements, not 66.

<sup>11</sup> In the text, when three percentages are listed in a row, they always follow the order *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan*.

Models categorized as tweens were the most easily identifiable. Beyond simply the physical development of their bodies and style of dress (tweens were depicted as more childlike and less womanly), other features (such as braces, freckles, full cheeks and a lack of makeup) indicated the youthfulness of these girls. These models also tended to be featured alongside more youthful products, including video games, candy, and Bonne Bell cosmetics<sup>12</sup>. Teens were somewhat more difficult to categorize, however, by using images of models depicted in the fashion spreads of *Seventeen* (which often include the ages of the models, typically ranging between 14 and 20 years) as a guide, the process became somewhat easier. These models were more physically developed and taller than tween models. They also tended to have perfect (or near perfect) teeth, slimmer faces, styled hair, and wore light makeup (typically mascara, blush, and lip gloss). The most challenging age group to categorize was the young adult group since it was often difficult to determine whether the younger models were teenagers or young adults and whether the slightly older models were young adults or middle-aged. What helped considerably with the coding of this group was the frequent use of celebrities whose exact ages were easily found online. For less recognizable models however, the style of dress and the social context were useful. These models tended to wear more revealing clothing and higher heels than the teen models, yet wore more colourful accessories and makeup than the middle-aged models. They also tended to be depicted in social environments (at parties, on the beach, shopping with friends). Middle-aged models (of which there were very few) were depicted as more affluent than younger models, tending to wear more neutral colours, simple jewellery, and softer makeup. There were no models in the elderly category.

Overall, the age of the models featured in the magazines has an aspirational element attached to it. As I've mentioned, the typical *Girls' Life* reader is between 10 and 15 years old, and though tweens are represented in advertisements found in the magazine (20.6%), the majority of the models featured in ads were classified as teens (ages 14-18). Hains (2009) asserts that the tween audience is particularly attractive to marketers because it is this demographic that has a foot in both childhood and adolescence and is searching for a comfortable middle ground that satisfies their current needs but also anticipates their future interests. Consequently, tween girls are highly influenced by what they see and read and are particularly interested in observing teen behavior from a distance to learn what their lives will soon be like and what they should be interested in next. Finders (1996) explains that magazines, like *Girls' Life*, serve as a type of guidebook that provides information about appropriate or ideal appearances and

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<sup>12</sup> Bonne Bell is a cosmetic line targeted at a younger demographic. Products include sparkly eye shadows, coloured mascaras, and flavoured lip balms.

behaviors, therefore it makes sense that the advertising in the magazine would feature representations of teenage girls, representations of the next stage in the typical reader's life which begin to establish an ideal femininity for young girls to identify with and attempt to achieve.

A similar trend is found in *Seventeen*: while the typical reader of the magazine is between 12 and 19 years old, advertisers incorporate both teenage (54.9%) and young adult (39.4%) models in their texts. Here, the images of teenagers serve to connect with the needs and wants of the average reader and to provide cues on what other girls of the same age are doing – how they dress, how they act, what they're interested in. On the other side, though, the images of young adults mimic the technique used in *Girls' Life* as they serve to inform teenage girls about how they should be after high school, how they should be when they become women.

Rather than emphasize the future and informing girls about how to grow into women, advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* appear to reinforce the notion of staying young. While readers range from 18 to 49, as previously mentioned, women in advertisements tend to be young adults aged between 19 and 34 (75.7%). This may be because, as Nolan and Scott (2009) assert, in today's society, youth is associated with power and relevance, especially for women. Male authority, they argue, is rooted in financial success and social status. Consequently, aging may function as an indicator of experience and, presumably, be suggestive of accomplishment for men. On the other hand, stereotypically, a woman's influence is largely dependent on her physical appearance, and so "aging undermines women's traditional source of power emanating from sexual attractiveness" (Nolan & Scott, 2009, p. 135). By using younger models, then, advertisers use this stereotype and are not only selling a product, they are also selling the promise of a youthful image and the qualities associated with that image – strength, vitality, desirability.

### **VI.3.a.ii Race**

Though there was an attempt made to classify models according to race to determine if one race appears more frequently in advertisements than others, this classification was ultimately abandoned. With more and more people identifying not only as biracial but also as multiracial today, determining race using physical features such as skin colour, hair texture, or the shape and size of eyes, lips and noses seemed ineffective. Basing race on a few traits simply does not provide enough information to make a precise assessment. That said, a more generalized approach to race allowed distinctions to be made between light-skinned models (porcelain, ivory, pink or peachy complexions)

and darker-skinned models (beige, olive, caramel, chocolate complexions)<sup>13</sup>. Though this data does not determine if models of a particular race dominate ad space, it may be used to ascertain if there is a preferred complexion.

Though neither *Girls' Life* nor *Cosmopolitan* provides information on the race or ethnicity of their readers, *Seventeen* does include this information in their demographic analysis of their audience. According to the data presented in *Seventeen's* 2009 media kit (the most recent information available), readers of Spanish or Hispanic origin make up 14.1% of the magazine's total readership, African Americans make up 11.6%, and "other" makes up 14.7% (Seventeen Media Kit, 2009). Though they do not specify numbers for their Caucasian audience, using this information it may be reasoned that 59.6% of *Seventeen's* readership is Caucasian. Based on this information and acknowledging that the target audience of the three magazines used in this research is similar, it is not unexpected that the majority of models featured in advertisements are light-skinned (73.5%, 68.4%, 77.5%). If the percentage of Caucasian readers is similar for all three magazines, averaging about 60% of the entire readership, it is important to note that advertisers over-represent this light-skinned demographic by 8 to almost 18%.

#### **VI.3.a.iii Hair Colour & Eye Colour**

The most frequently represented hair colour across all three magazines was brown (50%, 42.5%, 62%) (No distinction was made during the coding process between light, medium, or dark shades.). Similarly, the most frequently represented eye colour was also brown (56.4%, 57.6%, 50.9%). This is perhaps because dark hair and eye pigmentation are universal traits. By this I mean they naturally occur across all races and ethnicities, unlike, for example, blonde or red hair and blue or green eyes which occur primarily among Caucasian populations. This alone suggests that ideal beauty is not stereotypically one race or ethnicity, but rather regardless of origin or skin colour, ideal beauty is characterized by dark, even perhaps exotic, features. However, the second most frequent hair colour across all three magazines was blonde (30%, 25%, 26.8%) and the second most frequent eye colour was blue or hazel (21.8%/18.2%, 27.3%, 13.6%, 17.0%/24.5%), pigmentations naturally found primarily in Caucasian populations. Consequently, this emphasis on light hair and eyes, in tandem with a high concentration of light-skinned models, suggests a tendency across all three magazines towards a Caucasian ideal beauty.

#### **VI.3.a.iv Hair Style**

Across all three magazines, long hair was the most frequently represented length (54.5%, 48.1%, 63.2%) and the most common hairstyles was straight (40.5%, 36.2%, 44.4%). Long hair has long been a symbol of femininity, signifying such desirable qualities as youthfulness, fertility and sexuality. As

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<sup>13</sup> Tanned skinned could be classified as either light or dark, depending on the intensity of the tan.

Synnott (1987, p. 393) explains, “Hair is not just hair, it is a sex symbol; and voluminous chest hair [on a man] is therefore the equivalent of long, glossy, wavy head hair on a woman.” Yet hair is not only associated with gender, it is also associated with sexual orientation. Levin Russo (2007, p. 169) asserts, “The whole convoluted history of gender, sexuality, and mass media can be reduced to a neat equation: long hair = feminine and straight, short hair = butch and lesbian.” So beyond simply reinforcing a traditional ideal of physical beauty and femininity, the prevalence of long, luxurious hair in advertisements found in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan* simultaneously reinforces a heterosexual norm.

### VI.3.a.v Body Type

The majority of models featured in advertisements in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan* were classified as having a thin body type (48.4%, 47.7%, 58.4%). Subcategories of thin body types include thin (slender limbs and torso, average or unknown height), thin/tall, thin/petite (small frame, short stature), curvy/thin, curvy/thin/tall, curvy/thin/petite, and thin/petite/athletic (muscular arms and legs) (See chart 6.1 for complete breakdown of the distribution of thin sub-category body types).

**6.1 Thin Body Types**

|                     | Thin | Thin/Tall | Curvy/Thin | Curvy/Thin/<br>Petite | Curvy/Thin/<br>Tall | Thin/Petite | Thin/Petite/<br>Athletic |
|---------------------|------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 22.7 | 18.2      | 31.8       | 0.0                   | 0.0                 | 27.3        | 0.0                      |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 20.3 | 39.0      | 5.1        | 3.4                   | 10.2                | 22.0        | 0.0                      |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 40.5 | 14.3      | 11.9       | 7.1                   | 9.5                 | 14.3        | 2.4                      |

Based on existing research, thin bodies were to be expected. As Wainwright et al. (2007, p. 8) explain, representations of a thin ideal for women have increasingly been incorporated into media texts over the past thirty years and now “the mass media (particularly magazines and television) serve as a central vehicle” for this model of femininity “by promoting the thin ideal and, in turn, influencing women’s body image formation.”

Overall, second most frequent body type was curvy (27.5%, 21.6%, 16.8%). Curvy body types, identified as having full busts and hips, were further classified as curvy (average weight), curvy/thin, curvy/athletic (full bust and hips, muscular arms and legs), and curvy/petite (small frame, short stature), curvy/thin/petite and curvy/thin/tall<sup>14</sup> (See chart 6.2 for complete breakdown of the distribution of curvy sub-category body types).

<sup>14</sup> To achieve the most accurate data, several categories by necessity overlap.

### 6.2 Curvy Body Types

|                     | Curvy | Curvy/Thin | Curvy/Athletic | Curvy/Petite | Curvy/Thin/<br>Petite | Curvy/Thin/<br>Tall |
|---------------------|-------|------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 7.7   | 57.7       | 30.8           | 3.8          | 0.0                   | 0.0                 |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 0.0   | 17.6       | 35.3           | 0.0          | 11.8                  | 35.3                |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 21.1  | 26.3       | 15.8           | 0.0          | 15.8                  | 21.1                |

What is important to note, however, is that after further classification, more than half of the “curvy” models are also thin models (57.7%, 64.7%, 63.2%).

Another pattern in the data concerns representations of women with athletic builds. Overall, women identified as having an athletic build decreased in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan*, from 13.2% of the population to 5.7%. This suggests that a strong, muscular build – decidedly unlike the stereotypically feminine body characterised by narrow shoulders and torso, “higher bust-to-under-bust ratios [...] and longer, more slender legs than men” – is undesirable, or at least less preferable than the more frequently depicted thin and curvy female body (Brown et al., 2008, p. 12939).

#### VI.3.a.vi Style of Dress

Across all three magazines, models were most frequently dressed demurely (83.6%, 61.3%, 45.5%). “Demure” here does not necessarily mean “conservative” or “modest” apparel but rather, like Karan and Khoo (2007, p. 10) define the term, demure simply refers to “everyday clothing.” This tendency may be a reflection of the interests of the predominantly female readership who may be more concerned with wearable fashion trends than with sex appeal. However, as chart 7 indicates, representations of partially clad and suggestively dressed models increase gradually from *Girls' Life* to *Cosmopolitan* suggesting that as girls mature and become more aware of and interested in their own sexuality and sexual experiences, advertisers progressively incorporate sex and sexuality into their texts. Whether these portrayals are empowering or objectifying requires further analysis which is presented later in this paper (See ‘Faux Feminism?’).

### 7 Style of Dress of the Typical Advertised Woman

|                     | Demure | Suggestive | Partially<br>Clad | Nude |
|---------------------|--------|------------|-------------------|------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 83.6   | 7.5        | 9.0               | 0.0  |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 61.3   | 17.3       | 16.0              | 5.3  |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 45.5   | 18.2       | 24.2              | 12.1 |

### VI.3.b SOCIAL CONTEXT

#### VI.3.b.i Social Status

By analyzing a subject's style, including clothing, footwear, jewellery and hair, Thomas and Treiber (2000) assert that it may be determined whether that subject is meant to represent the affluent population, the trendy population, or the everyday population.

Advertisements coded as "affluent" depict privileged or lavish lifestyles associated with financial prosperity, social and/or professional power. These ads emphasize sophisticated taste and luxury. Visually, these ads tend to have a clean, simple design. Similar to the affluent, advertisements coded as "trendy" depict individuals who are able to afford up-to-the-minute fashions, the latest technologies, and new and exciting experiences. However, these individuals are less conservative than the affluent in both style and interests. As Thomas and Treiber (2000, p. 362) explain, they represent the "fashionable 'in-crowd'." Accordingly, these ads tend to play with colour, pattern, and cropping to create more dynamic visuals. Lastly, advertisements categorized as "everyday" depict individuals with casual and relaxed styles. These ads tend to focus on the day-to-day activities of the middle classes.

After assessing advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, depictions of social status appear to be connected with the average magazine reader's economic situation rather than other social or cultural factors. As chart 8 shows, the "everyday" and "trendy" are emphasized in *Girls' Life* and *Seventeen*, while ads depicted an "affluent" social status increase significantly between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan*. This suggests that, as age and disposable income increase, so too does an individual's ability (and, if advertisers are successful, desire) to lead a more lavish, privileged lifestyle. By gradually increasing depictions of affluent lifestyles, decreasing depictions of everyday lifestyles, and using depictions of trendy lifestyles as the bridge between the two, advertisers adapt to their target audience's changing economic status and encourage the transition from casual day-to-day activities to fun, new and cool commodities to more precious and decadent products and experiences.

**8 Social Status of the Typical Advertised Woman**

|                     | Affluent | Trendy | Everyday |
|---------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 7.6%     | 54.5%  | 37.9%    |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 13.9%    | 50.0%  | 36.1%    |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 47.2%    | 31.9%  | 20.8%    |

#### VI.3.b.ii Environment

The most frequently depicted environments across all magazines were Other/Unknown (39.4%, 40.6%, 65.3%) and Leisure (40.9%, 52.2%, 30.6%). While a leisure setting – a park, a beach, a restaurant – emphasizes a carefree, fun and relaxing lifestyle, by purposely avoiding to incorporate a specific

environment into an advertisement and relying on colour or pattern instead, it could be argued advertisers place the focus more heavily on the product and less on the feeling associated with that product. In order to compensate for this, other components of the ad must provide context, such as the textual elements which are discussed later in this paper. Alternatively, it could be that in these advertisements, by providing no immediately distinguishable environment, the advertisers create a new place. By providing no place they provide any place, allowing the viewer to develop an imaginary world accessible only through the advertised product. As Newton (2010, p. 58-9) explains, “Advertisements featuring Other World motifs portray a world different from our own. This is often an idealized Utopia, conveying the idea that by using certain products, watchers could enter this world.” In this world, consumers can go wherever, do whatever, and be whomever they desire.

Other noteworthy findings were depictions of women in the home as well as depictions of women in the workplace (or school), both of which decreased between *Girls’ Life* and *Cosmopolitan* (15.2% to 4.2%, 4.5% to 0%). Possible reasons for fewer representations of women in domestic environments may be simply the type of magazines which have been selected (presumably advertisements in more family- and home-centric magazines like *Chatelaine*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Women’s Weekly* would more frequently incorporate representations of domesticity) or the shift could be indicative of the increased freedom and mobility girls gain as they grow up and become more independent from their parents.

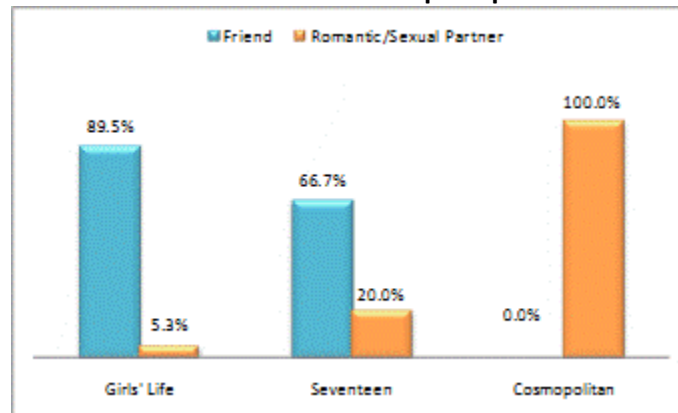
Decreases in the depictions of women in the workplace/school, however, are more of a concern, particularly from a feminist perspective. There are no depictions of women in work environments and, though few in number, the representations of women in school environments do not actually depict the women as students in the classroom, but as friends on campus. Now, while depictions of women in the home may be explained by arguing that *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan* are general interest magazines more focused on fashion, fun, and friends, considering that the target audiences of *Girls’ Life* and *Seventeen* are all school-aged, neglecting to represent girls as students seems to be neglecting to recognize a major part of the audiences’ lives in favour of focusing on fantasy rather than reality.

### **VI.3.b.iii Background Characters & Relationships**

In each magazine, there was a selection of advertisements which included both a primary model and (predominantly female) background characters. Though there was not always interaction between the models, among those ads which did depict a direct relationship, there are two trends to note. First, girls and women depicted as friends with another female decreased significantly between *Girls’ Life* and *Cosmopolitan* (See chart 9). Replacing this relationship is the romantic/sexual relationship. This increase

makes sense considering that as girls grow up they become interested in dating and developing new relationships. However, by consistently reducing the number of representations of friendship between women, the importance of these social and personal bonds is diminished and instead women are encouraged to seek out male attention.

### 9 Shifts in the Dominant Social Relationships Depicted in Advertisements



Additionally, though there is an emphasis on social relationships in advertisements found in *Girls' Life* (60.3% of the ads include background characters), this emphasis decreases significantly as advertisers shift focus to models depicted alone (39.7%, 69.6%, 83.3%). This may serve a practical function since it 1) allows advertisers to keep the focus on the product rather than the relationship between the models, and 2) allows the camera to get closer to the individual wearing the product (this is particularly beneficial for beauty advertisements). However, Chang (2010) asserts that there may be another reason for advertisers to focus on one model rather than two or three or more.

Chang (2010) explains that there are two main self-concepts: independent and interdependent. The independent self-concept "is rooted in the idea that individuals are composed of unique collections of traits, values, and goals and that their behaviour is primarily determined by these internal attributes" (Chang, 2010, p. 400). Alternatively, the interdependent self's "internal attributes vary as social contexts change. In other words, one's behaviour is determined by one's perception of how others will feel about the behaviour" (Chang, 2010, p. 400). Though most researchers contend that both these self-concepts exist simultaneously in any individual (which one will be accessed depends on the types of cues advertisers incorporate into their texts), there is also general consensus that the independent self-concept tends to be emphasised in Western cultures while in Eastern cultures, it is the interdependent (Chang, 2010, pp. 400-1).

An advertisement which aims to access the independent self-concept will emphasize the autonomous nature of the consumer, concentrating on the "benefits of product purchase" for the

individual as well as the range of product choice (Chang, 2010, p. 402). As Aaker and Lee (2000) explain, “focus on the unique characteristics that distinguish [the individual] from others” is essential to targeting the consumer who is “motivated by self-regulatory goals to maximize personal achievement” (Chang, 2010, p. 402). Consequently, as girls are growing up and trying to figure out who they are, and as they become more independent (and financially independent), it makes sense that advertisements (particularly those for beauty products which accentuate the need for self-improvement) feature a single model: if the goal is to connect to the self-interested consumer and not the relationship-oriented consumer, advertisers need to focus on one person using/wearing/consuming the product being sold. By incorporating other characters into the ad, the focus shifts away from the individual and her own need/desire for the product to a focus on how that product will function in her larger world, possibly diminishing its necessity.

### **VI.3.c PERSONALITY & ATTITUDE**

#### ***VI.3.c.i Body Position***

The three most frequently depicted body positions were: open/relaxed (41.3%, 26.9%, 31.9%), confident (22.2%, 25.9%, 27.5%), and aggressive/oppositional (27%, 16.7%, 17.4%). In advertisements in all three magazines, women were most frequently portrayed as being open and relaxed (tilted head, arms and legs uncrossed, casual and slightly slouched posture). In both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, the second most frequent body position communicated a general sense of confidence (squared shoulder, wide stance, hand on hip), while the second most frequently depicted body position in *Girls' Life* was one that communicated aggression or opposition (straight back, clenched hands, arms crossed in front of chest, chin tilted upwards). Each of these positioning may be considered positive representations of women as they emphasize her comfort with herself, her self-assurance, and her overall control of the situation.

#### ***VI.3.c.ii Facial Expression***

The dominant facial expression across all three magazines was one of happiness (41.8%, 28.7%, 24.8%) and pride (15.4%, 20%, 21%). Characterised by features including direct eye contact, relaxed brow and smiling, these emotions, like body positioning, convey an overall impression of wellbeing and self-confidence.

Still, there were some variations in the representations of other facial expressions. For example, depictions of flirtatiousness increased in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan* (4.4% to 27.6%). Like the increase in depictions of romantic/sexual relationships, this is likely explained by an increasing interest in the opposite sex and relationships. On the other hand, depictions of women as

intimidating or (usually playfully) devious both decrease in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan* (13.2%/7.7% to 3.8%/1%). This suggests that younger girls are encouraged to express themselves and exercise their independence, but as they become women they are expected to reign in these impulses. This notion is also supported by depictions of boredom progressively increased in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan*, suggesting preference for a more subdued attitude (0% to 8.6%).

### **VI.3.c.iii Overall**

Considering both the body positioning and the facial expressions, the overall personality or attitude conveyed by women depicted in these ads tends to be one that emphasises self-satisfaction and self-confidence. However, there is an underlying tendency to gradually reduce obvious expressions of deviance in favour of more sexually-charged representations of women. Therefore, further analysis is needed to determine if the visual representations of strong, capable women is supported by the accompanying text. This analysis is presented later in this paper (See 'Faux Feminism?').

### **VI.3.d ROLE**

Determining the ideal role of women as depicted through advertising in these magazines requires consideration of all the previously discussed data. Looking at the sum of the parts of each ad individually, the women may then be sorted into categories: wife/mother, sex object, empowered woman, competent employee/student. To aid this process, some of these categories require sub-categories. To determine if a woman was being depicted as a sex object, she needed to fit into one of the following groups: reduced to body parts, contained/restricted, impeded vision, glazed and unfocused look/eyes cast downward, touching body, or diminished size. Each of these categories in some way removes power or control from the woman in the advertisement and treats her as a thing rather than as a whole person. Similarly, to determine if a woman was being depicted as an empowered woman, she needed to be depicted as: physically strong (often depicted as athletes), liberated (often depicted with arms open, moving freely through space), assertive/confident (body position and facial expression primarily used to determine these characteristics), or sex subject (while she may be acting sexual, she is in control of herself – she is not distracted or unfocused, is not weak or delicate). Each of these categories serves to emphasize the physical, emotional, intellectual and/or sexual strength and ability of the woman.

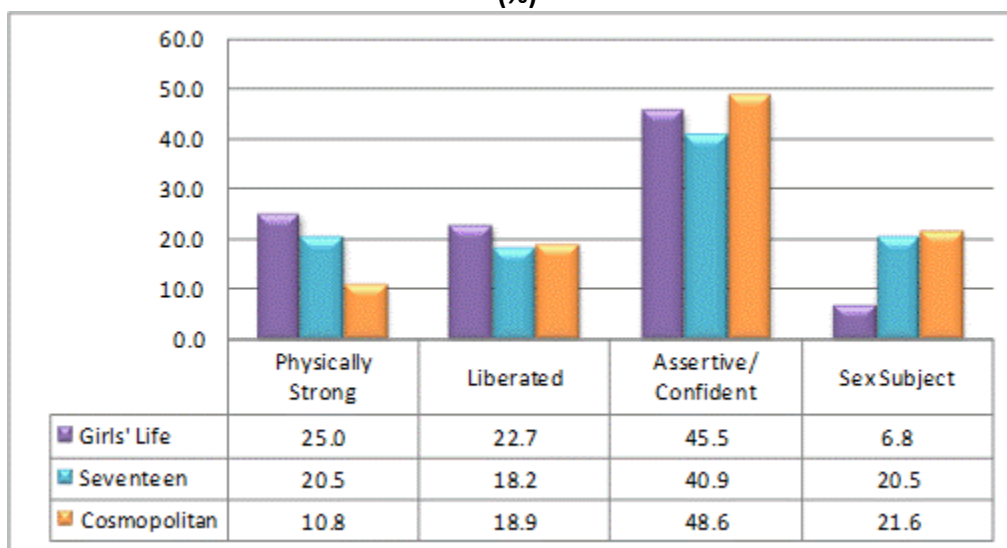
After assessing and coding the ads, there were no depictions of women as competent employees/student, and there were nearly no depictions in these advertisements of women as wives/mothers (There was a single ad representing 1.4% of all ads in *Cosmopolitan* which portrayed a

woman in a nurturing, mother-like role.). This means women were depicted in one of two ways: as empowered women or as sex objects.

### VI.3.d.i The Empowered Woman

Careful analysis of the overall ideal roles of women as depicted in advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* indicates that the empowered woman is portrayed in three distinct ways: the confident woman, the liberated woman, and the sexual woman. Here I discuss each of these portrayals.

#### 10.1 Depictions of Empowered Women in Advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* (%)



#### VI.3.d.i.1 The Confident Woman

The empowered woman was the most common depiction across all three magazines (88%, 62%, 52.1%). As chart 10.1 shows, the strength and control of these women were most frequently portrayed through assertive or confident body language. Drawing from Beebe, Beebe, Redmond, and Geerinck's (2007) discussions of non-verbal communication skills, assertive or confident body language is characterized by a strong body position: head held high and often slightly tilted to one side, squared shoulders, chest out. Arms are either resting at sides or hands are resting in lap or on hips. There are also key facial expressions which convey confidence or pride: direct eye contact or an upward gaze, full or half smile, and either a relaxed brow or a single raised eyebrow. Women positioned in this power stance appear in advertisements for a range of products, from beauty products to apparel to entertainment. For example, in *Cosmopolitan*, an advertisement for CoverGirl's Outlast Lipstain + Shineblast products features a woman (actress Dania Ramirez) who appears not only confident, but (considering the positioning of her hand and her eye contact) also deep in thought. Though this

advertisement is selling a lipstick, instead of focusing just on the woman's mouth, the advertisers use direct eye contact to connect with readers. Furthermore, by positioning the woman with her shoulders back, her head held high, and her chin resting on her clenched fist, emphasis is on her sense of confidence and her pensive demeanour. She is not portrayed as a vacant woman, eyes wandering and cheek resting on her hand. She is poised, in control, and self-assured. Similar techniques are used in an advertisement in *Seventeen* for JC Penney's clothing line Decree. In this advertisement, a teenaged girl wearing a cropped leather jacket, ripped jeans and motorcycle boots stands with her shoulders back, her pelvis slightly forward, and one knee bent. Her arms are resting casually at her sides. Her head is held high, her eyes make direct contact with the reader, and she is just slightly smiling. This positioning (along with the fashion) conveys a kind of laidback, or relaxed, confidence that emphasizes the model's unaffected self-certainty. Lastly, even when very young models are featured in advertisements, these power stances are used to convey assertiveness and confidence. For example, in an advertisement in *Girls' Life* for Tulip's One-Step Tie-Dye Kit, a girl of six or seven years old is positioned with her head held high and her shoulders back. One hand rests her hip, while the other is raised, showing off a tote bag she has tie-dyed herself. She has direct eye contact with the reader and a big smile on her face. This advertisement reinforces both the happy confidence of the young girl, but also her pride in her accomplishment. If the advertisers wanted to simply show what could be made with the product, they could have shown the young girl wearing a tie-dyed t-shirt (which she is) or skirt. If they wanted to specifically show a tie-dyed bag, they could have simply shown the girl carrying the bag. By having the girl hold the purse in a raised hand, displaying it for others to see, the advertisers emphasize acknowledging personal skills and successes.

#### VI.3.d.i.2 *The Liberated Woman*

The next most frequent portrayals of empowered women are images depicting liberation. These advertisements emphasize carefree movement and freedom from any external forces. Models are typically portrayed with open arms and big smiles, and often are spinning or dancing in place. For example, a Secret Clinical Strength antiperspirant ad in *Cosmopolitan* shows a smiling young woman in a ruffled blue party dress dancing with her arms above her head. Though her head is tilted slightly back, she maintains eye contact with the reader. A similar ad for Playtex Gentle Glide tampons in *Seventeen* features a smiling woman in a strapless sundress with a full skirt. She too is dancing with her arms above her head, her skirt twirling. Again this image is repeated in *Girls' Life* in an advertisement for Nintendo DS's Style Savvy videogame. A happy tween girl in a cardigan, full skirt, and running shoes is spinning on one foot, her arms loose and spinning with her body. Her face is tilted upwards, her eyes toward the sky,

and she is smiling. Each of these images conveys empowerment through a sense of openness and free expression.

#### VI.3.d.i.3 *The Sexual Woman*

Lastly, depictions of the empowered woman as a sex subject – a woman in control of her body and sexuality – increases in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan* (this makes sense, considering the age, sexual maturity, and interests of the readers of each magazine). In these advertisements, women are depicted as active sexual beings. This means women are in aware of their interests and in control of their experiences, as opposed to being pressured by external forces (i.e. social expectations) to behave a certain way. For example, in an advertisement in *Cosmopolitan* for Revlon's Just Bitten Lipstain + Balm, a romantic moment between a man and woman (actress Jessica Biel) is used to sell the product, with the tagline "Have you been bitten?". However, the woman in the ad is the one in control of the situation. The woman is warmly lit and surrounded in a yellow and pink haze. She makes direct eye contact with the reader and stands with her shoulders back, her head held high, and a flirtatious smile on her face. Meanwhile, the man in the ad is a secondary character. He is cast in shadow, turned away from the reader, his eyes cast downward and focused on the woman. The orientation of the two models, then, indicates that, though this is a romantic relationship, the woman is in the position of power, controlling what happens. A similar technique is used in an advertisement in *Seventeen* for ABC Family's *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* TV series. In this ad, a young woman wearing a tight red dress is the focus. She stands with her shoulders back, her chest out and one hip popped, her hand resting on it. She makes direct eye contact with the reader and has a flirtatious smile. Her body position exudes cool confidence. Moreover, though there are two young men in the background, it is important to note that they too are making direct eye contact with the reader rather than staring at the woman, objectifying her. In another ad, female sexual empowerment is dealt with by turning the tables on sexual objectification. Appearing in *Seventeen*, an ad for Walmart's OP clothing line features a young woman (actress Jessica Szorh) wearing a pair of short shorts and a bright pink bikini top. Though she is standing tall, makes direct eye contact with the reader, and is laughing, this type of depiction could be categorized as sexual objectification, yet there is one important element that changes this: the woman has a camera and is turning it back on the photographer. This simple action serves to reclaim power. No longer is the woman a mere subject of admiration, she is a sexual being who is actively refusing to be objectified by another person. This is further emphasized with the type of paper the ad is printed on – a mirrored paper that reflects the viewer's face.

### **VI.3.d.ii Woman as Sex Object**

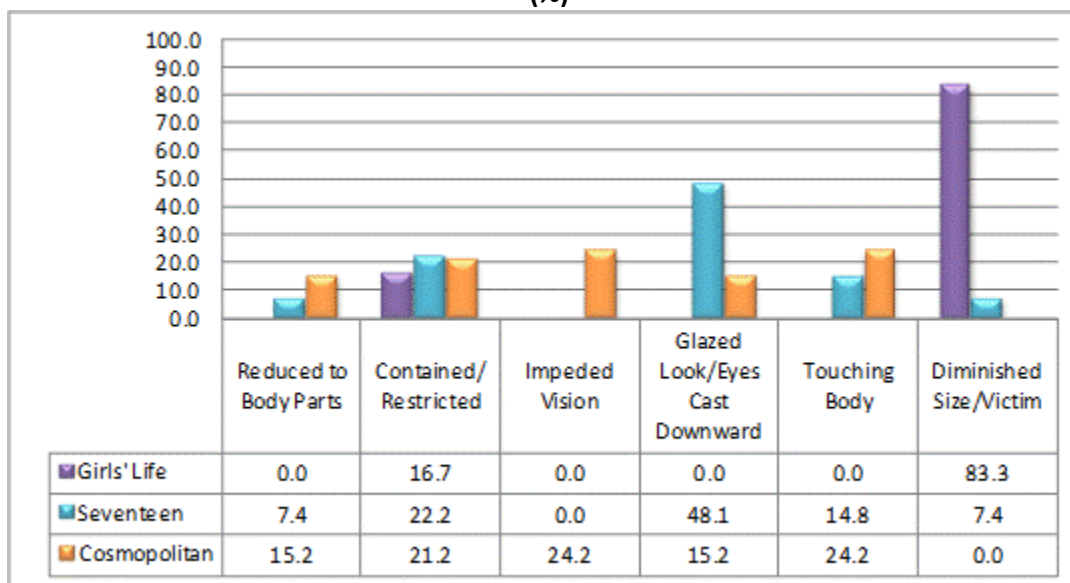
The second most common depiction of women is as sex object, which increases in frequency from *Girls' Life* to *Cosmopolitan* (12%, 38%, 46.5%). What is important to note is that how objectification and sexual objectification are portrayed varies from magazine to magazine. In fact, in *Girls' Life* the majority of advertisements coded as depictions of sexual objectification are actually depictions of objectification, meaning there is no sexual nuance associated with the representations. As chart 10.2 shows, advertisements in *Girls' Life* tend to objectify women by portraying them as smaller than or victims of another person (male/female/unknown). However, though these ads do portray women as smaller and less powerful than their counterparts, it is important to note that the power or control being enforced in these advertisements is not of a sexual nature. Advertisement that met these criteria were ads for Tampax tampons. In these ads, the focus is on a woman portraying Mother Nature. Mother Nature is depicted bringing girls their unwanted "Monthly Gift" (represented with a red and pink wrapped present). Mother Nature is either shown as an ineffective match for the Compak Pearl tampons which claim to "Cut Mother Nature down to size" or as an (unsuccessful) interruption to a good night's sleep. In the former, the woman is shown cowering from a dragon-like shadow on the wall (actually the shadow of a woman's hand holding a tampon vertically between her thumb and forefinger) or is depicted as smaller than the actual tampon being held by the woman. In the latter, she is shown trying to wake sleeping women by tickling either tickling her face with a huge pink feather or by playing a trumpet. So although these representations *do* depict a woman as weak and ineffective, upon further analysis, because she is meant to be a fictional character and other women are the ones exercising power over this fictional character, these depictions should not necessarily be considered representations of women as victims.

Nevertheless, clearer representations of the sexual objectification of women are found in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*. Specifically, advertisements in *Seventeen* tend to depict the objectified woman as one with a glazed, unfocused look or with eyes cast downward or as a woman contained or restricted in some way, while (as chart 10.2 shows) advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* tend to objectify women in a variety of ways – from portraying women with impeded vision to showing women touching or caressing their bodies in a submissive manner to depicting women as contained or restricted by an external source. Here I discuss three dominant ways in which the woman as sex object is portrayed: the disconnected woman, the self-objectified women, and the captive woman.

#### **VI.3.d.ii.1 The Disconnected Woman**

Depictions of women with glazed or unfocused eyes or downward cast eyes suggest the women are unengaged and/or unaware. As previously discussed, these types of ads, where women are not entirely present, essentially amputate the body from the intellectual and emotional, concentrating all attention on the physical (Kang, 1997; Levy, 2006). These women are considered “not entirely present”

### 10.2 Sexual Objectification of Women in Advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* (%)



because, while they are physically present, there is no connection between the woman and the product, between the woman and the environment, between the woman and other models in the ad, nor between the woman and the reader. She appears to be separated from all that surrounds her and makes no emotional, intellectual or physical connection with anything or anyone. Examples of these ads in *Seventeen* include an ad for CoverGirl's LashBlast Length Mascara with Nylon, an ad for Maybelline New York's EyeStudio Lasting drama gel liner, and an ad for RocaWear apparel. The CoverGirl ad features actress Drew Barrymore completely disengaged from the reader, not only because her eyes cast downward but because her vision is also obscured by unnaturally thick and long lashes. Similarly, the Maybelline ad presents a closely cropped woman's profile shot from below. In this image it is unclear if the woman is thinking or feeling or even gazing down at anything all because her face is void of any kind of emotion. Lastly, in the RocaWear ad, a woman on a rooftop is shielding her eyes from the sun. Again, it is unclear if she is thinking about anything or feeling any emotion because her face conveys no emotion. Her face is numb, unaffected. Though this expressionless portrayal may be perceived as a representation of a calm and cool woman in control of her emotions, her body language (her other arm is held stiffly at her side, slightly crossing her body, her shoulders appear hunched forward, and her

head is turned into her shoulder), does not convey the confidence associated with a cool, composed, and in control woman.

Taking this amputation of the inner self from the outer self one step further are ads in which a woman's vision is actually physically impaired. In these ads, either one or both eyes are covered (often by the woman's own hair), hindering her eyesight. By preventing her from seeing who and what is around her, this woman is placed in a dangerous world of the unknown. She is weakened and perhaps even (temporarily) disabled. Examples of these ads in *Cosmopolitan* tended to be for hair products – Aveeno Active Naturals, Aussie, Herbal Essences – and the hair is depicted as so thick, so voluminous, so shiny it literally takes over the woman. This take over is so extreme that not only does the woman lose her ability to see clearly because her hair is cascading in her face, but she also loses some of her identity and personality because her facial expressions, her emotions, are partially covered up. Still, ads for Fekkai and Herbal Essences hair products emphasize that a woman's hair is her “most powerful accessory” and with these products “the styling possibilities just keep getting bigger.” However, accompanying these taglines are an image of a woman with all but her nose and mouth covered with thick, side swept bangs and an image of a woman with hair so big and wavy that you can only see half her face. If hair is an “accessory” it should complement the woman and allow her to better express externally what she is internally. Yet these ads conceal the most telling facial feature – the eyes – and obscure who these women are and what they think and feel, effectively reducing them to beautiful but empty vessels.

#### *VI.3.d.ii.2 The Self-Objectified Woman*

Rather than objectifying women through external forces (for example, revealing clothing or strategic camera angles and image cropping), advertisements which depict the self-objectified woman feature women caressing their bodies in ways which draw attention to particular physical features. While this is not especially disconcerting in itself, when focus is placed primarily on these features and there is a lack of personality, strength, and control in the woman's actions, she ultimately lacks the authority of a sex subject and is consequently presented as merely fragments of the whole, as body parts, rather than as a thinking and feeling individual. For example, in *Cosmopolitan*, an advertisement for Veet Suprem'Essence spray on hair removal cream features a nude woman sitting in a rose petal suspended in the air. Her legs are dangling in the space below her, one knee raised slightly as she trails one hand along her calf. Her other hand rests on her shoulder. Here, the focus is not on the product or even the woman's legs, the focus of many other hair removal ads. The focus is on the woman's naked body as she directs the eye (by the strategic placement of her hands) from her ankles to her chest. Even

the shape of the petal she sits in emphasizes the curves of her body. In another ad in *Cosmopolitan*, this one for John Frieda Sheer Blonde hair products, a nearly nude (a flesh-toned bra strap is the only visible clothing) woman tilts her head back, letting her hair fall in face. Her eyes are half closed; her mouth is half open. She gently touches her bare shoulder with her fingertips. Instead of the focus being on getting the blondest hair possible (the purpose of the product), the focus shifts to the woman's lips and tanned skin. Similar ads are also found in *Seventeen*. For example, an advertisement for cosmetics at Target features a young woman in a bohemian, beach-like setting. She stands amongst hanging lanterns, one arm across her body with her hand resting tentatively on her shoulder. Though she makes direct eye contact with the camera, her facial expression neglects to convey any kind of emotion. Though these ads share some similar elements to those depicting women as sex subjects, there are important distinctions between the positioning of their bodies. Unlike sex subjects, women shown caressing their bodies are not portrayed with confident, assertive body language. Rather, they tend to be depicted turning their bodies inward – shoulder are raised or drawn forward, legs are pulled toward the body, arms cross the torso. Additionally, they purposely place their hands (gently, because a firm grip would indicate the woman is in control) on their bodies to redirect attention from the woman as a whole person to the specific body parts.

#### *VI.3.d.ii.3 The Captive Woman*

As mentioned, advertisements depicting women contained or restrained were found in both *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*. In these ads, the woman's movement is controlled by an external force. This force may be something physically incorporated into the photography or it may be something incorporated later with computer graphics. For example, an advertisement in *Seventeen* for Always Infinity sanitary napkins, a woman is shown sitting cross-legged in a glass box. One leg is folded in front of her while the other is folded across her body with one foot partially out of the box, a high heel dangling off her toes. Though her facial expression does not show it, this position appears incredibly uncomfortable. Moreover, it appears as though it would be very difficult for the woman to untangle herself within the confines of the glass box, meaning it is nearly impossible for her to free herself without any assistance. An even more extreme version of this kind of containment appears in an ad in *Cosmopolitan*, this one for Olay Ribbons Body Wash. In this ad, a strong, athletic woman poses nude with silk ribbons wrapped around her arms and legs. If these were not enough to restrict her movement, she is then enclosed in a glass snow globe. Though she is depicted in a sprinting action, she is restricted by both the ribbons and the walls of glass around her. She cannot escape. While this snow globe is most likely an element that was added during photo editing, another example of how advertisers can restrain

women through the use of computer graphics is found in an ad from *Seventeen* for Maybelline New York XXL Pro 24HR Bold mascara. This advertisement uses an extreme close up of a woman's face. The woman is then bounded through the strategic placement of an oversized tube of mascara, which runs diagonally along the side of her face, and a semi-transparent horizontal black stripe that covers a third of her face. Therefore, not only is this woman pushed to one side of the ad, but she is then divided into pieces. Overall, whatever form the containment and restriction, women in these ads are involuntarily controlled by external forces. Furthermore, once they lose control over their bodies and actions, they are no longer perceived as whole people, but are objectified. In these particular ads, the women are transformed into a jack-in-the-box-like toy, a snow globe, and mutilated (but still beautiful) body parts.

Because these dominant roles – the empowered women and the sex object – may be considered contradictory (on one hand women are presented as capable, confident and independent individuals while on the other hand they are presented as powerless and vulnerable), further analysis is required to determine if the depictions of empowered women are genuine or examples of faux feminism. This analysis is presented later in this paper (See 'Faux Feminism?').

### VI.3.e SUBTEXT

While so much information is communicated through the images advertisers use, the text which accompanies these images is also important. By assessing the type of product promises advertisers include in their texts, general notions of what the potential consumer “should” be interested in and looking for may be identified. As chart 11 shows, the types of product promises vary from magazine to magazine. Nonetheless, there are some patterns which emerge.

**11 Types of Product Promises in Advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan***

|                     | Good Times | Practical | Appearance | Self-Empowerment | Celebrity Identification | Sex-Romance | Customized for You | Reveal True Self | Do-It-Yourself | Family-Marriage |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 32.8%      | 10.0%     | 7.2%       | 18.3%            | 15.0%                    | 2.8%        | 8.9%               | 3.9%             | 1.1%           | 0.0%            |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 22.3%      | 16.8%     | 21.3%      | 20.8%            | 7.6%                     | 4.1%        | 3.0%               | 3.6%             | 0.5%           | 0.0%            |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 11.0%      | 27.1%     | 23.8%      | 11.6%            | 12.2%                    | 7.2%        | 2.2%               | 2.8%             | 2.2%           | 0.0%            |

To begin, family or marriage is not used in any of the advertisements as a means to persuade purchases. This may be explained by the age of the readers (tweens and teens are certainly not at an age where they are thinking seriously about family or marriage so these types of promises would not likely connect with them) and the type of magazines selected (while *Cosmopolitan* is not specifically a magazine for single women, it tends to focus more on sex, fashion, and fun rather than family life). Additionally, (as discussed in 'Background Characters & Relationships'), there is a tendency for

advertisers to focus on the individual and her particular needs and wants, not her social and familial relationships and the needs related to these relations.

Those categories of product promises which increase in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan* include appearance (the promise that the featured product will improve or restore the consumer's attractiveness), sex-romance appeals (the promise that the featured product will create or improve intimate relationships), and practical use (focus is on the utility of the product). Alternatively, product promises of self-actualization (the promise that the featured product will help reveal the consumer's true self and the notion that the featured product is customized for *you*), self-empowerment (focus is on the strength and authority of the consumer), and good times (selling featured product by emphasizing its relation to a carefree lifestyle that emphasizes friendship) decrease in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan* (See chart 11 for percentages).

By considering both those product promise categories which increase in frequency and those which decrease in frequency, certain shifting (prescribed) interests and needs come into sight. Here I discuss some of the most significant shifts.

#### **VI.3.e.i Self-Actualization vs. Practical Use**

For example, as readers age, the practical use of a product becomes increasingly emphasized while focus on self-actualization through product purchase decreases. More specifically, advertisements in *Girls' Life* frequently emphasize that the featured product is customized for *you* and often promise that the product will help reveal the consumer's true self. Several of these ads are for entertainment products and services, including those for Radio Disney ("Your music. Your way.") and PlayStation ("The Hannah Montana PSP Entertainment Pack lets you enjoy your favourite stuff wherever and whenever you want"). However similar messages are used to sell a range of other products, including Venus Embrace razors ("Reveal the goddess in *You*"), Always Infinity sanitary napkins ("Bends with you. Twists with you. Rolls with you."), and even Arm & Hammer's Kid's Spinbrush (My teeth. My brush. My way!), which comes with stickers to decorate the toothbrush to reflect the interests of the user. These types of messages that focus on the individual and her specific and unique wants and needs are overshadowed in *Cosmopolitan* with an increasing number of advertisements that focus instead on the practical use of the product. These ads tend to emphasize either the quality of the product or the ease with which the product can be used. For example, Maybelline New York promises its Super Stay Makeup is superior in quality to other foundations because it is capable of "Resisting heat, humidity, sweat, dryness, motion, touch, life", while CoverGirl promises its Smoky ShadowBlast eye shadow is so easy to use that it's "Like having a makeup artist at your fingertips!" Beauty ads are not the only ads which incorporate these

types of messages. L’Oreal promises its Feria hair dye offers “Multi-faceted colour with triple highlights in 39 salon-calibrated shades” and its Excellence-to-Go hair dye is so quick and easy to use that women are just 10 minutes away from richer, healthier hair (“10 minutes to rich colour. 10 minutes to better conditioned hair.”).

Overall, the transition from focusing on the emotional benefits to the practical benefits of a product suggests that as women get older, more abstract promises like revealing one’s true self becomes less important while concrete information on the usefulness of a product to achieve specific results is more important.

### **VI.3.e.ii *Good Times vs. Sex-Romance Appeals***

As previously discussed in ‘Background Characters & Relationships’, as tween girls move into adolescence and adulthood, there is a shift away from emphasis on having fun with friends towards emphasis on developing and nurturing romantic relationships. This pattern is repeated here as product promises of good times gradually decrease and use of the sex-romance appeal gradually increases. Advertisements classified as promising good times are identified as those which sell a product by emphasizing its relation to a carefree lifestyle, typically associated with friendship, fun and freedom. For example, in *Girls’ Life* advertisements for video and board games emphasize the fun to be had when playing with friends: Sony claims “Everywhere just got better” and uses an image of five friends in a limo laughing and waving their arms in the air while one friend plays a dance videogame. Similarly, Hasbro uses an image of four friends laughing and tossing board game pieces in the air to sell the Girl Talk dare game. The tagline pulls the reader in as a fifth player, exclaiming “Next time it’s your dare!”. It’s not only games that use friendship to sell products, though. Gillette, for example, sells razors using the tagline “Goddess of Friends Forever” and an image of three happy young women posing for a photo to capture their day together.

Still, there are other ads which use the promise of good times, but do not include a large group of friends. These ads offer a more generalized idea of enjoying everyday life. For example, a Scholastic advertisement for its Candy Apple fiction series asserts “Summer is sweeter with Candy Apple!” While this is an obvious play on the title character’s name, the core message is that by spending the time to read this book, the reader’s summer vacation will ultimately be more enjoyable overall. The book contributes to her “good times”. Other advertisements (predominately those for antiperspirants and feminine hygiene products) also use this generalized message of being able to get the most out of day-to-day life, using taglines like “Fearlessness. Apply daily.” (Secret) and “Serena Williams doesn’t let Mother Nature’s Monthly Gift interrupt her game” (Tampax). These ads emphasize using the product to

get out in the world and do whatever it is that makes the reader happiest – whether it's figure skating and dancing (depicted in the Secret ads), playing tennis (Tampax), or something else.

These types of messages decrease in frequency over the three magazines while advertisers increasingly use the sex-romance appeal to sell products. These appeals promise that the featured product will create or improve intimate relationships. For example, an ad for Nivea A Kiss of Smoothness lip balm in *Cosmopolitan* states simply, "Soft lips. Weak knees." while ads for Gillette's Venus Embrace razors explain, "It's our closest shave for your closest moments. Because it all starts with an embrace." While these ads purposely play with the name of the product and the physical act of embracing someone, they further reinforce the message that this product will intensify love relationships by creating a series of ads that depict various romantic situations. For instance, the "Goddess of I Love You" ad features a couple enjoying an outdoor picnic at night, the "Goddess of I Missed You" ad shows a couple reuniting on a tarmac, and the "Goddess of He's Mine" features a young couple hugging on a dock at the lake.

In essence, by progressively diminishing the importance of friendship, advertisers convey to women that while friends are important during their formative years, as they mature they should focus on attracting and retaining male attention.

### **VI.3.e.iii Self-Empowerment vs. Appearance**

Lastly, the shift away from messages of self-empowerment and towards messages focused on improving one's appearance implies that as women age, advertisers attempt to create or exploit women's insecurities. For instance, advertisements in *Girls' Life* and *Seventeen* frequently emphasize the strength, authority and value of the consumer to sell anything from videogames to prom dresses to perfume. Sony sells PlayStation Portable to tween girls by asserting "Girlz play too"; Macy's sells prom dresses by telling teenage girls "It's your turn to rock the party"; Vera Wang's Princess perfume is for young women who were "Born to rule". However, perhaps the most enthusiastic ad campaign featured in *Girls' Life* and *Seventeen* (and even in *Cosmopolitan*) features tennis champion Serena Williams for Tampax tampons. In these ads, a strong and confident Williams is depicted challenging Mother Nature on the tennis courts. With taglines like "Serena shuts out Mother Nature's monthly gift," "Mother Nature has met her match," "Serena delivers the smackdown," the message is clear that this woman is someone who is not only skilled but powerful and unstoppable. Moreover she is someone to admire and strive to be like. Other hygiene advertisements similarly use this technique of empowering women by emphasizing all the different things they are capable of (once they gain control over their bodily functions). For example, an ad for Secret Clinical Strength Sport antiperspirant encourages young

women to possess “Fear of Nothing” while an ad for Playtex Sport tampons emphasizes “It’s your world. Own it with confidence. Be Unstoppable.”

Alternatively, advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* increasingly incorporate promises that a given product will improve or restore the consumer’s attractiveness. The most obvious examples of these promises are found in beauty ads. Sally Hansen promises women they can “Spray on perfect legs in an instant” with its Salon Airbrush Legs product; CoverGirl promises women can amp up their sex appeal with its Liquidline Blast and Smoky Shadowblast eyeliner and eye shadows (Now you’re really smokin’!); Rimmel London’s The Max mascara transforms your eyelashes from “Skinny to fat in 10 seconds flat”. Though these promises are frequently incorporated into beauty ads, they are certainly not limited to beauty ads. For example, Crest promises “heads will turn” if you whiten your teeth with its 3D White teeth bleaching products, John Frieda encourages blondes to “Go lighter. Go brighter.” with its Sheer Blonde shampoo and conditioner (implying that just being blonde is not good enough, women need to be blonde-er), and David’s Bridal promises any teenage girl can “Be the perfect 10” if she purchases the right prom dress.

These contrasting patterns are indicative of advertisers using ideal images of beauty to undercut self-confidence. By reducing messages that encourage individualism, fun experimentation, and customization, advertisers are able to promote products (especially beauty products) as the solutions to invented or exaggerated “problems”. What is of particular concern is that this is a gradual shift: young girls are encouraged to be themselves and purchase products that are tailored to their needs and interests. Yet once these girls grow to be teenagers and adult women, whatever confidence they have in their appearance and abilities is suppressed as their “flaws” are increasingly identified and they are urged to fix these flaws in an attempt to meet society’s ideal standards of femininity.

Overall, then, I argued that the dominant messages communicated through product promises support traditional conceptions of what it means to be an “ideal” woman. By turning focus away from being oneself and enjoying life, away from messages of strength, independence, freedom and fun, and concentrating on altering one’s appearance to fit the prescribed ideals of youth and beauty and on finding love, the central messages are reminiscent of the traditional values and stereotypes discussed previously in the literature review section of this paper.

### **VI.3.f AN ANOMALY IN THE DATA: LITERATURE ADVERTISEMENTS**

Considering that the three magazines selected are targeted at three different audiences, it was not unexpected that there was an anomaly in the data. Each of these magazines must tailor their

editorial content and advertising to their specific demographic – taking into consideration the needs, wants, interests and preferences of their typical reader at her particularly stage in life – in order to increase the magazine’s appeal to these readers. So while there is certainly overlap in the themes and ideas presented in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* (which creates the model of ideal femininity that is the focus of this research), there are – by necessity – variations among these themes and ideas as well.

The most significant anomaly in advertisements in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* were advertisements classified as literature. As mentioned previously, one of the most frequently advertised product categories in *Girls’ Life* is literature – both fiction and non-fiction. However, these advertisements are unique in that the vast majority – 72% – do not use a (living) model to sell the product, favouring instead to focus the cover of the book, sometimes accompanied by colourful and eye-catching pop art-style graphics and cartoons. Though this is a problem for the focus of this research as it means the representations of women cannot be assessed using these ads, these differences also contribute valuable information: these advertisements suggest that, for younger girls, there should be a greater emphasis on developing the internal self rather than on improving the external self. Certainly other advertisements in the magazine use models to help sell various products that *do* focus on the external, but given that advertisements for books rank as the third most frequent product category in *Girls’ Life*, there is clearly an alternative (though simultaneous) message being delivered to young girls. By encouraging girls to read a range of genres – from fantasy (Witch & Wizard series, The Soul Screamers series) to humour (Dork Diaries series), chick-lit (Allie Finkle’s Rules for Girls, Candy Apple series) to mystery (Sammy Keyes series) – and by encouraging girls to read either to educate themselves about a particular topic of interest (through historical fiction such as the Dear America series, though self-help guides including Scholastic’s Guide to Being the Most Amazing You and the Ultimate Guide to Surviving Middle School, and through non-fiction essay collections, like Girls Gone Green) or simply for pure entertainment purposes, the key message of these advertisements is one that accentuates the need to develop as a person with real interests and opinions. This type of message, however, is not carried over with the same presence in *Seventeen* (2% of all ads) or *Cosmopolitan* (no ads fall into this category).

If the aim of advertisers, as Hill (2002, as quoted in Levy 2006) asserts, is to develop a habit early, publishing companies appear to attempt to foster a love of reading and a habit of reading from an early age, connecting reading to a trendy social status and promising good times and self-empowerment. By not continuing to advertise literature in *Seventeen* or *Cosmopolitan*, not only does it

seem as though advertisers lose these markets, but other messages – ones that confine and manipulate and weaken women – come to dominate. However, there is another possibility. Perhaps it is not that publishing companies reduce or entirely cease advertising books and reading as a leisure activity for adolescent girls and women. Perhaps there is simply a shift in how these messages are communicated. As Dix and Phau (2009, p. 414) explain, the distinction between advertising and editorial content has frequently been blurred since “the early years of commercial radio as program sponsorship emerged”. Today this merger remains as “advertorials and infomercials”, “product placements, sponsored journalism, and advertiser-produced programming” (Dix & Phau, 2009, p. 414-415). Dix and Phau (2009, p. 415) argue, “Editorial content receives more attention and is better remembered than commercial messages [...]By masking their messages as editorial content, advertisers hope to attract greater attention and retention from readers and viewers”. Therefore, perhaps it is not that books are not marketed to adolescent girls and women reading these magazines. Perhaps it is simply that books are not marketed through traditional advertising. Perhaps books are marketed to these audiences through editorial content that is not only more memorable but also provides more information (for example, in its Hit Lists and Weekend Guides, *Seventeen* recommends a variety of fiction and non-fiction books and provides reviews while each issue of *Cosmopolitan* features an excerpt from a selected book in its Red Hot Read feature). An in-depth assessment of the presence of literature in editorial content, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

However, it is also important to note that the literature franchise contributes to other cultural consumption. For example, several literature advertisement in *Girls' Life*, including the MacKenzie Blue series, Ghost Girl series, Allie Finkle series, and the Dork Diaries series, direct readers to access their online content. Websites for these books provide a range of fun and interactive material, including character background information, Q&A's with the author, games featuring the characters from the books, contests, quizzes, blogs and even podcasts. Additionally, some these websites encourage fans to find the author on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Not only are these “extras” fun for readers, but this interactive use of multimedia appears to be important and beneficial for publishers, too. For example, Scholastic's main website provides links to the various authors' and series' websites to encourage readers to become more involved, more invested in their reading habits, and to expand and extend the original experience. Furthermore, major publishers that also have stakes in other entertainment media can use books to attract audiences to their other media. For example, when Disney Press advertises books based on their popular TV series and movies (*Girls' Life* featured advertisements for books based on *Wizards of Waverly Place* and *The Suite Life* series as well as the

*Princess Protection Program* movie), there is a direct connection between the book and the TV show. This single connection, however, expands to include character-related merchandise that Disney manufactures, including clothes, school supplies, jewellery, games, videogames, dolls, soundtracks and more. Additionally, by creating interest in one series, Disney is able to attract readers to their other TV series and movies. In this way, literature advertisements in *Girls' Life* serve to provide a foundation that draws girls towards other media consumption habits (which, like books, may be marketed to adolescent girls and women through editorial content in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* and therefore is, again, beyond the scope of this paper).

### **VI.3.g FAUX FEMINISM?**

As previously discussed, advertisers often carefully integrate feminist ideologies into their texts in a bid to appeal to modern women and to appear to embrace her needs, wants, values and priorities. However, typically this is done in a superficial way so as to continue to support traditional dominant (patriarchal) ideologies. In these ads, the most obvious message will be one that supports feminist ideas, however the underlying message will reinforce traditional ideals of gender (i.e. ideal appearance, behaviour, role, interests). This means that representations of empowered women in the media need to be thoroughly analyzed to determine if these portrayals genuinely encourage feminist principles and a collective movement towards female empowerment or if these portrayals are merely reconfigurations of traditional ideals cloaked in the rhetoric of feminism and female empowerment but which ultimately continue to support a patriarchal system.

Previously, when the advertisements in this research were coded to determine what role the women were assuming, style of dress, social context, body position, facial expression, and textual elements were considered as a whole. Because there were more visual elements than textual ones, these weighed more heavily on the classification decision-making process. So, when reassessing the advertisements to determine if the “empowered” women truly are empowered, much of the focus shifted to the text accompanying the images already determined to at least visually be depicting strong, capable, confident women.

To distinguish between real<sup>15</sup> and faux feminism, a clear understanding of what each of these terms mean needed to be established. Accordingly, an empowering advertisement places the emphasises on women being capable individuals, on women having an clearly expressed opinion or attitude, and/or on women being free to do whatever they choose to do (re: they are not limited to

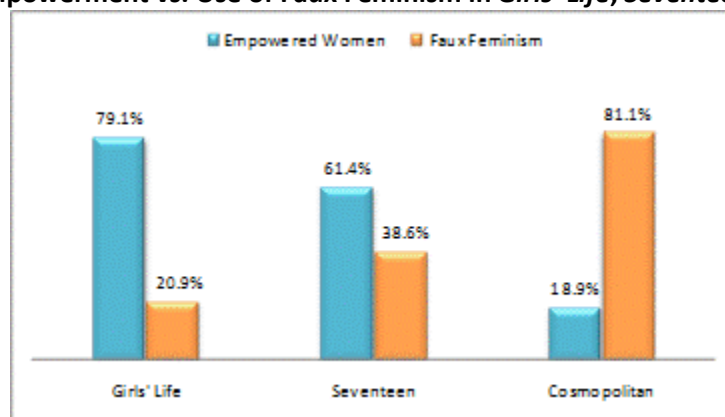
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<sup>15</sup> Here, the term “real” is not referring to factual or true-life depictions of empowered women. Rather the term “real” is being used to refer to honest feminist rhetoric which acknowledges the qualities/abilities of women rather than the qualities/abilities a product provides for women.

what the product *allows* them to do). Faux feminist advertisements use the image of a strong and confident woman, but the focus is not on her self-possessed, self-learned abilities or opinions, but rather the focus is on what the product allows her to do. Generally there is a suggestion that without the product, the woman in the ad would be incapable of accomplishing her goals or fixing whatever “problem” for which the product is the solution. In other words, in these ads, it is the product that contains the strength, the ability, the beauty, not the woman. Therefore in order to possess these qualities, the woman must purchase and use the product.

After reassessing each ad coded as “empowered woman,” a new pattern was revealed: while real depictions of empowered women make up the majority of these advertisements in *Girls’ Life*, as girls grow up, they are gradually exposed to more and more representations of faux feminism and fewer representations of real female empowerment (See chart 12).

### 12 Messages of Empowerment vs. Use of Faux Feminism in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*



This trend is a concern, particularly from a feminist perspective, as it suggests that only younger girls are encouraged to develop as unique and capable individuals with their own interests, their own preferences, and their own opinions. For example, advertisements for the Meg Cabot fiction series *Allie Finkle’s Rules for Girls* (a series about the new girl in school that focuses on “how to be a good sister, student, and friend”, growing up, and making your own rules) promote the books while simultaneously offer girls a role model who encourages them to create their own rules to live by (Scholastic, 2011). Not only do these ads show images of the title character as a happy and confident girl, they also include some of her “rules” (including “Treat your friends the way you’d want them to treat you” and “Just because something is popular doesn’t mean it’s good”). One advertisement even included a space for *Girls’ Life* readers to write down their “Top Five Summer Rules”. In another advertisement, this one for Tulip craft supplies, young girls are similarly encouraged to pursue what interests them. Though the ads promote a certain product, emphasized with personal testimony from the girls and women featured in

the ads with their own creations, the company asks girls “What do you love to create?” This opens up options for girls because the emphasis is on being creative and doing what they enjoy most, not conforming to what the advertisement tells them they should be good at, should be interested in. Similar ads also appear (though in lesser frequency) in *Seventeen*. For example, advertisements for L.E.I., a clothing line by Taylor Swift (who is herself an example of a creative, talented, and successful artist and business woman), focus on empowering young women by encouraging them to develop a strong sense of self based on the three principles of L.E.I. – life, energy, and intelligence. While the clothes are featured in the ads, emphasis is redirected to becoming “the next L.E.I. model citizen,” a title associated with “individuality”, “spirit” and “ambition” and connected to a short video competition which earns the winner a \$100 000 college scholarship.

Though these ads ultimately serve to sell products, they simultaneously encourage girls to explore life and experience new things beyond what the product is for. They sell a lifestyle of choice and freedom. And though this is a positive message, the problem remains: advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* gradually replace these messages of empowerment with messages that serve to limit women. By incorporating feminist ideas (ex. themes of independence, self-confidence and power), advertisers are able to appeal to modern women. However, by connecting these ideals with a product that offers only surface changes, advertisers prevent any real change in the social structure and gender hierarchy. For example, an advertisement for CoverGirl Clean makeup features rapper/singer/actress Queen Latifah asking “Had it with one-size-fits-all makeup? Try lightweight coverage that’s made to fit you!” The incorporation of a strong, charismatic woman with the message that the product is customized “to fit you!” appears to be encouraging women to embrace who they are, to accept the colour of their skin and find beauty within themselves. But, the ad is ultimately telling women they need to cover up their skin with makeup to make it better. CoverGirl’s product, foundations and powders that come in a variety of shades, simply makes this cover-up process easier. So even as women are encouraged to be themselves, they are persuaded to limit how far they take that idea so as not to challenge a society (and economy) that demands (female) physical perfection. Similarly, an advertisement for TRIABeauty at-home laser hair removal features a confident young woman declaring “I’m no longer a slave to shaving and waxing”. No, she has not gone against North American convention and let her body hair grow. She has simply gotten rid of it permanently using a new hair removal system. The remainder of the ad emphasizes the quality of the product and mentions the money- and time-saving benefits. Still, with all that extra time and money, the only other benefit (which is repeated three times) is that after using the product women can “wear what you want when you want”. Therefore,

again, there is no *real* change in terms of personal growth or philosophy or behaviour. The product simply makes it easier for women to fit the mould of ideal standards of beauty.

Some feminist scholars assert that this manipulation of feminist ideologies to sell products effectively works to “undercut feminism” as the producers of the texts are substituting real change with “marginal or cosmetic” change (Durham, 1999: 217). Others, like Winship (1987), argue that these representations of superficial empowerment ultimately act as distractions. By focusing on relatively unthreatening issues (buying a pair of boyfriend jeans does not intimidate the established social order), attention is diverted from those alternative “perspectives deemed radical or ‘too controversial’” and actions that may be more meaningful and significant (Gough-Yates, 2003: 10, citing Winship, 1987).

## **DISCUSSION**

## VII. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to assess the representations of women and girls in advertisements in three demographically-defined magazines to determine if there is a model of ideal femininity communicated to tween, teen, and women audiences. I conducted a two-part content analysis of advertisements appearing in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan* magazines, first focusing on collecting quantitative data to determine which products are most frequently sold in each magazine, and then concentrating on qualitative data to assess how women were portrayed in these advertisements and to identify patterns of representations.

Though quantitative analysis was conducted primarily to determine the most frequently advertised product categories in order to select the most relevant advertisements for qualitative analysis (those types of advertisements to which readers are most often exposed), this data provided some preliminary themes to be further assessed during qualitative analysis. Specifically, when determining the products most frequently marketed to the three groups of women represented in this research, there appeared to be a shift from the internal self to the external self. In *Girls' Life*, two of the most frequently advertised product categories are entertainment and literature, both of which encourage readers to develop their interests and engage with a variety of interesting and fun games, movies, books and creative work. However, the most frequent advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* tend to be those which encourage teens and women to focus on their appearance – beauty products, skin care and hair care products, clothes. Certainly no conclusions about the representations of women in advertisements could be (or were) based solely on these findings alone, but further analysis of the advertisements allowed for expansion upon and exploration of this information.

Accordingly, after analyzing the data qualitatively, it is clear that, though each magazine has its unique model of the ideal woman, a model of ideal femininity is established across *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*. A model of ideal femininity refers to shared general notions of what constitutes the perfect example of “woman” – what she looks like, how she behaves, what role she fulfills in society. However, it also refers to the evolution of womanhood and how this ideal changes or develops throughout the different stages of a woman's life. It is this ideal which prescribes certain preferences and models of behaviour to the typical woman. As previously discussed, because media content is strongly connected to culture and ideology, advertisers encourage readers not only to purchase certain products but also to accept certain ideas and ideals. By considering the dominant cultures and ideologies of a given society, advertisers are able to carefully construct texts which simultaneously

promote a product *and* influence individual attitudes and behaviours (from persuading an individual to participate in certain activities to persuading her to prefer one form of beauty over another). Ultimately, this multi-tiered influence serves to shape the individual's needs and wants according to specific material and emotional preferences which will both benefit the company (and marketplace as a whole) and reinforce the established social hierarchy.

In this section, I discuss my overall findings by first presenting a brief summary of the representations of ideal femininity specific to *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* and then discussing how each of these representations ultimately contributes to a model of ideal femininity.

## **VII.1 REPRESENTATIONS OF IDEAL FEMININITY BY DEMOGRAPHIC**

### **VII.1.a THE IDEAL TWEEN GIRL**

Physically, the ideal tween girl as portrayed in advertisements in *Girls' Life* magazine is representative of a young (teen or young adult), thin, Caucasian population. She is characterized as having brown or blonde hair, brown or blue eyes, and medium to long straight hair. She dresses demurely in casual everyday clothing that is not necessarily conservative, but also does not expose a lot of skin. Socially, the ideal tween girl is part of the trendy population, able to afford new fashions and technologies and willing to experience new things. She is often depicted in leisure environments and, when not alone, tends to be shown interacting with female friends. Though the ideal tween girl is most frequently depicted as open and relaxed, she is also portrayed as unafraid to challenge authority and as a confident and self-assured young woman. She is happy, and also proud. The ideal tween is most frequently associated with products that promise good times and self-empowerment.

### **VII.1.b THE IDEAL TEENAGE GIRL**

Physically, the ideal teenage girl as portrayed in advertisements in *Seventeen* magazine is also representative of a young (teen or young adult), thin, Caucasian population. Again, she is characterized as having brown or blonde hair, brown or blue eyes, and medium to long straight hair, sometimes worn in an updo. She, too, dresses demurely in casual everyday clothing, typically jeans and a printed top or a knee-length skirt paired with a blazer. Socially, the ideal teen girl is part of the trendy population, able to afford the newest fads and eager to experiment and have fun with new styles and experiences. When the environment is shown, she is most frequently located in leisure environments and is most often depicted alone. When she is shown with others, the background characters tend to be female. The ideal teenage girl is portrayed as self-confident as well as open and relaxed and, sometimes, somewhat oppositional or defiant. Like the ideal tween, the ideal teenage girl is happy and proud, but she is also

flirtatious. She tends to be associated with products that promise good times and products that promise to change or improve one's appearance.

### **VII.1.c THE IDEAL WOMAN**

Physically, the ideal woman as portrayed in advertisements in *Cosmopolitan* magazine is also representative of a young (young adult), thin, Caucasian population. Yet again, she has either brown or blonde hair, brown or hazel eyes, and medium to long straight hair. Though she is typically demurely dressed, she is also sometimes portrayed as partially clad (meaning more skin is exposed than is covered). Socially, the ideal woman is most often depicted as part of the affluent population, meaning she is most often portrayed as leading a privileged or lavish lifestyle associated with financial prosperity, social and professional power as well as having sophisticated tastes and desiring luxuries. Still, she is also sometimes portrayed as part of the trendy population. When the environment is shown, like the ideal tween and teen girls, she is most frequently located in leisure environments and most often depicted alone. Unlike tween and teen girls, however, when other characters are included in the advertisements, they are just as frequently male as they are female. The ideal woman is portrayed as open and relaxed, as well as self-confident and sometimes oppositional or aggressive. She is most often portrayed as flirtatious, but is also depicted as happy and proud. Products associated with the ideal woman tend to emphasize the practical use of the product or its promise to change or improve one's appearance.

## **VII.2 THE MODEL OF IDEAL FEMININITY**

The model of ideal femininity is constructed in two ways: through shared dominant ideologies (the most frequently repeated representations of ideal femininity which are common to all three magazines) and through gradual ideological shifts (the steady progression of certain ideas, from minor to dominant representations of ideal femininity).

### **VII.2.a SHARED DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES**

During qualitative analysis, assessments of the physical appearance, social status, and personality and attitude of the models as well as assessments of the subtext (the product promises) accompanying the images served to identify variations in the representations of women. Generally, as previously discussed, these variations occur gradually as advertisers overlap prior dominant ideas/ideals with new ones. However, as chart 13.1 shows, these shifts do not generally affect the overall most frequently portrayed characteristics associated with the ideal representations of women. Though, as previously explained, there are some variations in the data, the most common traits associated with ideal femininity remain consistent across all three magazines:

1. The physical characteristics of ideal femininity consistently emphasize youth, thinness, and archetypally Caucasian traits (light skin, medium to long straight brown or blonde hair, brown or blue/hazel eyes).
2. The ideal woman is most consistently portrayed as having disposable income to spend on the newest fads in fashion, technology, and social experiences.
3. The ideal woman is most consistently portrayed in leisure environments, including parks, beaches and parties, as opposed to domestic or professional environments, emphasising a life of relaxation and entertainment rather than one of responsibilities and challenges.
4. The ideal woman is most consistently portrayed as an individual rather than as part of a larger social group.
5. Ideal femininity is associated with a sense of self-confidence, self-assurance, and approachability. Accordingly, the ideal woman has a clear understanding of herself – her interests and her preferences – and is unafraid to declare and defend these needs and wants.

Certainly, the frequency with which each of these traits is incorporated into different advertisements varies from magazine to magazine, and sometimes these traits make up less than half of the entire population of advertisements. Nonetheless, these traits are the most frequently repeated characteristics, meaning they are the traits that readers are most frequently exposed to and as a result are the traits which have the most influence on readers' perceptions of what constitutes ideal femininity. As Yaveroglu and Donthu (2008, p. 31) explain, repetition is one of the most basic strategies used by advertisers (and the media system in general) to "break through clutter" and improve "consumers' ability to recall information." This idea of repetition = retention, previously discussed with reference to cultivation theory and social learning theory, suggests that recurrence of specific verbal and visual cues serves to emphasize or reinforce specific related ideologies. For example, repetition of ideal gender roles that prescribe acceptable or preferred behaviours and attitudes serve to encourage individuals to identify with and mimic these roles. Accordingly, I argue, those cues in advertisements to which readers are most frequently exposed have more of an influence on an individual's concept of ideal femininity than those cues which appear sporadically (or which appear regularly but in significantly fewer numbers). Therefore, because many of the most frequently repeated traits associated with ideal femininity in advertisements in *Girls' Life* tend to be the same most frequently repeated traits in advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, these characteristics construct a model of ideal femininity across the three demographically-defined magazines, influencing readers' perceptions of femininity and social expectations from an early age through to adulthood.

Alternatively, rather than assessing each characteristic on its own, the model of femininity may perhaps be established most directly through an analysis of the most frequently portrayed role of women, which takes into account as a whole physical characteristics, social status, and personality and attitude. Despite any variations in the data (which, as discussed in 'Qualitative Findings' generally correlate to social and financial changes associated with becoming an adult), ultimately women are most frequently portrayed as the empowered woman. The empowered woman is conveyed through a combination of strong body positioning, confident attitude, and subtext that reinforces individual choice and ability. Though there are slight variations in body positioning, typically the empowered woman is identifiable through her assertive or confident body language, a "power stance": the woman stands with her feet firmly planted on the ground, her head held high, shoulders back, and chest out. Her arms rest at her sides, often with one hand on her hip. A confident attitude is established through direct eye contact, a smile, and either a relaxed brow or a single, raised eyebrow. The overall effect of the body position and facial expression serves to send the message that the woman is not only physically unshakeable and resilient, but she is also emotionally and intellectually secure in her opinions and attitudes. To support the visual representations of empowerment, the accompanying text must convey a similar message. Through product promises, advertisers connect the product to desired outcomes. These appeals range from the promise that the product will improve attractiveness or will heighten intimacy to the promise that the product will reveal the inner self or will create new experiences of fun and freedom. However, as previously discussed, these textual messages tend not to support the visual representations of the empowered woman.

While there is no single definition of what constitutes female empowerment, generally it refers to women "creating their own unique identities, breaking out of stereotypical models from the past, and pushing the edges of cultural change" (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004, p. 10). Though advertisers ultimately aim to sell a product or service (As Berger (2005, p. 46) explains, "If we didn't know a product existed, we couldn't desire it. Advertising tells us about products and services and, playing upon forces in our psyches, makes us desire them"), they may integrate feminist rhetoric into their texts to encourage girls and women to preserve their individuality and develop new interests/preferences that fit with their unique character. Nevertheless, as previously discussed (See 'Empowered Woman & Faux Feminism') and as this research confirms, in order to reinforce existing (patriarchal) hierarchies and associated ideals while also attracting women, advertisers tend to incorporate feminist rhetoric into texts in ways that simultaneously liberate and limit women. Generally, the quasi-empowered woman assumes similar

### 13.1 Shared Dominant Ideologies in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*

| Girls' Life              |                      |             | Seventeen                |                      |       | Cosmopolitan             |                           |           |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| Physical Characteristics |                      |             | Physical Characteristics |                      |       | Physical Characteristics |                           |           |
| Age                      | Teen                 | 51.5%       | Age                      | Teen                 | 54.9% | Age                      | Young Adult               | 75.7%     |
|                          | Young Adult          | 26.5%       |                          | Young Adult          | 39.4% |                          | Middle-Aged               | 20.0%     |
| Race                     | Light Skinned        | 73.5%       | Race                     | Light Skinned        | 68.4% | Race                     | Light Skinned             | 77.5%     |
|                          | Dark Skinned         | 26.5%       |                          | Dark Skinned         | 31.6% |                          | Dark Skinned              | 22.5%     |
| Hair Colour              | Brown                | 50.0%       | Hair Colour              | Brown                | 42.5% | Hair Colour              | Brown                     | 62.0%     |
|                          | Blonde               | 30.0%       |                          | Blonde               | 25.0% |                          | Blonde                    | 26.8%     |
| Hair Style               | Long                 | 54.4%       | Hair Style               | Long                 | 48.1% | Hair Style               | Long                      | 63.2%     |
|                          | Straight             | 40.5%       |                          | Straight             | 36.2% |                          | Straight                  | 44.4%     |
|                          | Medium               | 35.1%       |                          | Medium               | 38.9% |                          | Medium                    | 28.1%     |
|                          | Wavy/Curly           | 22.8%/22.8% |                          | Updo                 | 26.7% |                          | Wavy                      | 24.4%     |
| Eye Colour               | Brown                | 56.4%       | Eye Colour               | Brown                | 57.6% | Eye Colour               | Brown                     | 50.9%     |
|                          | Blue                 | 21.8%       |                          | Blue                 | 27.3% |                          | Hazel                     | 24.5%     |
| Body Type                | Thin                 | 63.8%       | Body Type                | Thin                 | 70.2% | Body Type                | Thin                      | 58.3%     |
|                          | Curvy                | 15.9%       |                          | Unknown              | 11.9% |                          | Unknown                   | 30.6%     |
| Style of Dress           | Demure               | 83.6%       | Style of Dress           | Demure               | 61.3% | Style of Dress           | Demure                    | 45.5%     |
|                          | Partially Clad       | 9.0%        |                          | Suggestive           | 17.3% |                          | Partially Clad            | 24.2%     |
| Social Context           |                      |             | Social Context           |                      |       | Social Context           |                           |           |
| Social Status            | Trendy               | 54.5%       | Social Status            | Trendy               | 50.0% | Social Status            | Affluent                  | 47.2%     |
|                          | Everyday             | 37.9%       |                          | Everyday             | 36.1% |                          | Trendy                    | 31.9%     |
| Environment              | Leisure              | 40.9%       | Environment              | Leisure              | 52.2% | Environment              | Other/Unknown             | 65.3%     |
|                          | Other/Unknown        | 39.4%       |                          | Other/Unknown        | 40.6% |                          | Leisure                   | 30.6%     |
| Background Characters    | None                 | 39.7%       | Background Characters    | None                 | 69.6% | Background Characters    | None                      | 83.3%     |
|                          | Predominantly Female | 30.9%       |                          | Predominantly Female | 17.4% |                          | Predominantly Female/Male | 6.9%/6.9% |
| Personality & Attitude   |                      |             | Personality & Attitude   |                      |       | Personality & Attitude   |                           |           |
| Body Position            | Open/Relaxed         | 41.3%       | Body Position            | Confident            | 35.9% | Body Position            | Open/Relaxed              | 31.9%     |
|                          | Aggressive/          | 27.0%       |                          | Open/Relaxed         | 26.9% |                          | Confident                 | 27.5%     |
|                          | Oppositional         |             |                          | Aggressive/          | 16.7% |                          | Aggressive/               | 17.4%     |
|                          | Confident            | 22.2%       |                          | Oppositional         |       |                          | Oppositional              |           |
| Facial Expression        | Happiness            | 41.8%       | Facial Expression        | Happiness            | 28.7% | Facial Expression        | Flirtatious               | 27.6%     |
|                          | Pride                | 15.4%       |                          | Pride                | 20.0% |                          | Happiness                 | 24.8%     |
|                          | Intimidating         | 13.2%       |                          | Flirtatious          | 18.3% |                          | Pride                     | 21.0%     |
| Subtext                  |                      |             | Subtext                  |                      |       | Subtext                  |                           |           |
| Product Promise          | Good Times           | 32.8%       | Product Promise          | Good Times           | 22.3% | Product Promise          | Practical                 | 27.1%     |
|                          | Self-Empowerment     | 18.3%       |                          | Appearance           | 21.3% |                          | Appearance                | 23.8%     |
| Role                     |                      |             | Role                     |                      |       | Role                     |                           |           |
| Empowered Woman          |                      | 88.0%       | Empowered Woman          |                      | 62.0% | Empowered Woman          |                           | 52.1%     |
|                          | Faux Feminism        | 20.9%       |                          | Faux Feminism        | 38.6% |                          | Faux Feminism             | 81.1%     |
| Sex Object               |                      | 12.0%       | Sex Object               |                      | 38.0% | Sex Object               |                           | 46.5%     |

This chart provides the most frequently occurring characteristics incorporated into advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. Grey text indicates the second (and in some cases third) most frequently occurring characteristics.

body language and facial expressions as the empowered women; the accompanying subtext is what alters the overall message communicated and shifts the prescribed role from empowered to quasi-empowered. Though the text may assert that women have control over their identities and are capable to make their own choices, these choices tend to be limited to what the product allows the woman to do. Consequently, not only is feminist rhetoric is used to support patriarchal ideals but it is also manipulated to reinforce the overall message that without certain products, women are incapable of fulfilling their true potential and thus remain incomplete. So, while women in advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* are most frequently portrayed in the role of the empowered woman,

it is important to note that this model of ideal femininity associated with confidence and control is also associated with an undercurrent of faux feminism.<sup>16</sup>

Still, considering both the individual assessments of the most frequently portrayed traits associated with ideal representations of women (physical appearance, social status, and personality and attitude) as well as the sum of these characteristics (the social role assumed by the advertised woman), a model of ideal femininity is confirmed to extend from *Girls' Life* through *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*. According to this model, the ideal woman is young, thin, and white, financially independent and fashionable, leads a fun and carefree life, and is both independent and confident.

### VII.2.b GRADUAL IDEOLOGICAL SHIFTS

The second way in which the model of ideal femininity is constructed is through gradual ideological shifts. Beyond the shared dominant ideologies conveyed by the overall most frequently occurring representations of ideal femininity which establish a model of ideal femininity associated with, among other traits, self-confidence, control, and choice, there is the gradual development of a another ideal representation of women. This ideal originates in advertisements in *Girls' Life* and is progressively incorporated into more and more advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* (where it competes with the shared dominant ideologies and particularly with the representations of the empowered woman). I am referring to the gradual sexualisation of women in advertisements appearing in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*.

Qualitative analysis of physical characteristics, social context, personality and attitude, and subtext reveals an ever-increasing tendency to sexualize women. Specifically, women are increasingly portrayed:

1. Suggestively or partially clad (classified as either tight, revealing clothing or as clothing that exposes more of the body than it covers)
2. Involved in a romantic or sexual relationship
3. Behaving flirtatiously (identified largely through facial expressions)
4. Associated with products that use sex and romance to appeal to consumers

Generally, the sexualized woman is depicted wearing revealing and often provocative fashions (including short dresses, tight jeans, low-cut tops, and lingerie), is depicted as involved in a romantic or (hetero)sexual relationship (as opposed to platonic friendships), and is associated frequently with product promises of heightened intimacy with another person. However, perhaps the most important element to analyze when assessing the sexualisation of women in advertisements is the body language,

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<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the use of faux feminist rhetoric in these ads gradually increases from 20.9% to 81.1%.

including the positioning of the body and facial features, which provides information about the personality and attitude of the woman and allows distinction to be made between woman as sex subject and woman as sex object.

As previously discussed, empowered women in advertisements may be depicted as sex subjects. As Gill (2009, p. 148) explains,

Where once sexualized representations of women in advertising presented them as passive, mute *objects* of an assumed male gaze, today women are presented as active, desiring, sexual *subjects* who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their (implicitly liberated) interests to do so.

In these advertisements, the woman depicted in a sexual role may wear revealing clothes, may be engaged in a romantic or sexual relationship, and may be promoting a product with the promise of heightening intimacy. However, the woman as sex subject is differentiated from the sexually objectified woman through her body language. A woman in control of her sexuality is generally depicted in a similar power stance as the typical empowered woman in advertising, however her facial expression tends to be more flirtatious than confident or proud. A flirtatious facial expression is identified by either direct eye contact or a sideways glance, wrinkled lower eyelids, either a full or half smile (open or closed mouth) or a slight pout, and a relaxed forehead, often with eyebrows slightly raised. Confident body positioning and flirtatious facial expressions produce depictions of women as active sexual beings in control of their sexuality and their sexual experiences. "Women are presented as not seeking men's approval but as pleasing themselves, and, in so doing, they just happen to win men's admiration," argues Gill (2009, p. 148).

Alternatively, a sexually objectified woman, as previously discussed, may wear revealing clothes, may be depicted in a romantic or sexual relationship, and may promote a product with the promise of heightening intimacy, however she lacks the confidence and assertiveness of the empowered woman. Instead, the objectified woman tends to be depicted in ways that disempower her: physical obstacles (impeded vision, restriction by an external force, smaller and less powerful than counterpart), intellectual and emotional amputation (eyes cast downward preventing direct connection, vacant and unfocused expressions), and submissive behavior (touching or caressing objects or own body, rather than being assertive in her actions). Furthermore, the body positioning of woman as sex objects reinforces passivity: shoulders are hunched, legs are drawn towards the body, and arms often cross the body in an almost protective manner. Often the placement of hands or strategic cropping of the image serves the additional purpose of directing focus away from viewing the woman as a whole person and towards viewing specific body parts.

Nevertheless, both representations of sexualized women are gradually incorporated into advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* and consequently these representations become part of the model of ideal femininity prescribed to young girls and women. Specifically, representations of women in the role of sex subjects increase from 6.8% to 20.5% to 21.6% and, more significantly, representations of women in the role of sex objects increases from 12% to 38% to 46.5% (See chart 13.2 for increases by individual characteristic).

Since increased sexualisation is expected as young girls grow up, mature, and develop romantic and sexual relationships, representations of women in control of their bodies and sexuality may be perceived as positive and empowering portrayals. However the increased sexual *objectification* of women is a concern, particularly from a feminist perspective. As Hetsroni (2007, p. 201) explains, previous research on sex and sexuality in the media suggests that mass media play an important role in shaping “viewers’ conceptions of sexuality and, particularly, the perception of sexual conduct among sexually inexperienced spectators.” This means that the dominant representations of sexuality in advertisements, particularly those in *Girls' Life* and *Seventeen*, inform what young girls and women perceive as normal, desirable, and expected with regards to ideal gender roles and behaviours. Consequently, when the dominant representations of sex roles portray women as passive objects rather than active participants, these readers are receiving messages that reduce their sexual power and limit their control over sexual experiences. This is not just conjecture: recent research connects exposure to sex stereotypes and representations of sexually objectified women with the general acceptance (by men and women) of these stereotypes and a tendency to believe that women are sex objects assuming a passive role in sexual relationships while men take on a more aggressive, controlling role (Ward, 2002, Ward & Friedman, 2006, Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006).

According to Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008, p. 587), “Backlash against women’s increasing power in society may serve as one explanation for the pervasiveness of sexually objectifying imagery...in advertisements.” As women increasingly pursue higher education<sup>17</sup> and make professional and economic gains, they effectively threaten male dominance in the workforce and in society in general. To counteract women’s progress, then, mass media (including advertising) reduce women to sexual

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<sup>17</sup> Research shows women currently outnumber men in undergraduate enrolment in Canada and the United States (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011; Voorhees, 2011), women outnumber men at most medical schools in Canada (Maclean's, 2010), and women outnumber men earning advanced degrees in the United States (Yen, 2011).

**13.2 Gradual Ideological Shifts between *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan***

| 2012 Cultural Ideological Shifts Between Girls' Life, Seventeen and Cosmopolitan |                                         |                         |             |           |              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|
|                                                                                  |                                         |                         | Girls' Life | Seventeen | Cosmopolitan |
| Physical Characteristics                                                         |                                         |                         |             |           |              |
|                                                                                  | Style of Dress                          | Suggestive              | 7.5%        | 17.3%     | 18.2%        |
|                                                                                  |                                         | Partially Clad          | 9.0%        | 16.0%     | 24.2%        |
| Social Context                                                                   |                                         |                         |             |           |              |
|                                                                                  | Relationship with Background Characters | Romantic/Sexual Partner | 5.3%        | 20.0%     | 100.0%       |
| Personality & Attitude                                                           |                                         |                         |             |           |              |
|                                                                                  | Facial Expression                       | Flirtatious             | 4.4%        | 18.3%     | 27.6%        |
| Subtext                                                                          |                                         |                         |             |           |              |
|                                                                                  | Product Promise                         | Sex-Romance Appeal      | 2.8%        | 4.1%      | 7.2%         |
| Role                                                                             |                                         |                         |             |           |              |
|                                                                                  | Empowered Woman                         |                         | 88.0%       | 62.0%     | 52.1%        |
|                                                                                  | Sex Subject                             |                         | 6.8%        | 20.5%     | 21.6%        |
|                                                                                  | Sex Object                              |                         | 12.0%       | 38.0%     | 46.5%        |

objects, and reduce women's bodies to "property that can be evaluated, ogled, and touched at the whim of men's [and, arguably, women's] desire" (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008, p. 587). These representations of sexual femininity ignore and disconnect women from any real world power and control they may have, encouraging women to "become servants to popular images of beauty and sexuality" rather than encouraging women to explore (and expand) the ever-increasing opportunities available to them (including sexual empowerment) (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008, p. 587). By creating a dominant representation of women that emphasises vulnerability, passivity, and subservience (qualities unthreatening to men), even as women continue to make strides academically, professionally, and economically, male and female perceptions of gender roles are influenced by these dominant messages. Ultimately, women's roles and power in society are weakened, allowing men to maintain dominance in the long-established hierarchy.

**VII.3 AUDIENCE INFLUENCES ON MEDIATED DEPICTIONS OF GENDER****VII.3.a REAL WOMEN AND MEDIA STEREOTYPES**

As previously discussed, today's audiences are *not* passive victims of media content, and in order for advertisers to appeal to their target audiences, they must carefully construct texts which balance their own objectives with the cultural and social ideologies of these audiences. As Kozar (2010, p. 273) explains, "In general, consumers today have been characterized as being more sophisticated than in previous years and more likely to disregard marketing messages that seem irrelevant or impersonal." Consumers want to feel like advertisers know who they are and what they want.

Accordingly, through market research, advertisers must learn about their audiences. They may learn about their values, their relationships, their habits, their day-to-day lives, their aspirations, their needs and their desires. By understanding the belief systems which guide the meaning-making and decision-making processes of their target audiences, advertisers are then able to construct texts which balance corporate messages of persuasion with elements derived from the meaningful ideological framework of their audiences in order to increase product appeal.

Consequently, I argue that, through market research, the opinions and beliefs of real girls and women ultimately influence the gender stereotypes which advertisers incorporate into their texts. While these gender stereotypes are intensified or exaggerated portrayals of reality meant to quickly and efficiently communicate straightforward prescriptions of ideal lifestyles that value certain behaviours and attitudes over others, these representations should also be understood as a reflection, however distorted it may be, of what advertisers learn from women themselves. Perhaps the frequent use of “empowering” advertisements in *Girls’ Life* and *Seventeen* simply reflects the desires of tween and teenage girls to feel a sense of control over their own lives – control over their likes and dislikes, the ability to make their own choices – at a time when many of their choices are made for them by their parents and teachers. It may not be that adult women do not have the desire to feel strong and confident and in control; it may just be that these are not qualities that they are struggling to gain. Grown women already have control over their lives – they decide what they do and when they do it. Likewise, the gradual use of sex and sexuality in advertisements in *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* may be advertisers’ response to women’s changing needs and wants. It may not be that women are always thinking about looking and acting sexual, but sex and sexuality plays a larger role in their lives as teenage girls mature into young women and develop romantic and sexual relationships. Consequently, though advertisements in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* may not *evenly* reflect the numerous roles women occupy in society, the roles that are represented – whether the empowered woman or the sexualized woman – *do* represent *some* of the roles women occupy. Furthermore, these are roles which women *accept* as at least part of their overall identities.

### VII.3.b REAL WOMEN AND SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION

While the most frequently depicted gender stereotypes incorporated in advertisements in *Girls’ Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* may portray only *some* elements of the typical woman’s reality, they at least do not overtly limit women by portraying them as less than others. Still, I argue that what may be perceived a detrimental shift (occurring between advertisements in *Girls’ Life* and *Cosmopolitan*) towards the sexual objectification of women in advertising cannot be blamed entirely on the media

system, but rather this shift may be considered representative of the existing beliefs and preferences of the established social system and women in general. A study by Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008, p. 77) which draws from previous studies on the attitudes towards and effects of sexual content in advertising (by Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom (1991) and Mittal and Lassar (2000)), finds that though young women (college students) today feel that women are treated as sex objects, they “reported being less offended by the portrayal of women in advertising than the sample in Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom.” Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) argue that this suggests that the portrayal of women as sex objects has become so common that women expect these representations and have become largely indifferent to them. They explain, “It does not matter whether the advertisement is ethical or morally right because they [young women] accept sex as part of their culture, consistent with the attitude of today’s third wave feminists” (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008, p. 77). In other words, simple repetition of these types of portrayals may make them less contentious, less important for the average woman in today’s society because they are considered just another image in a world full of images. Like Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008, p. 76) assert,

They see so many of these images every day that it did not negatively affect them...Chances are if the respondents were to see this advertisement while casually flipping through a magazine, they may not have even looked twice at it.

This research also found that women will continue purchasing a preferred brand even if the company uses women as sex objects in their advertising. Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008, p. 77) explain, “Because these offensive advertisements are an accepted part of their culture, they do not think negatively about the companies that use them.” They suggest that this lax attitude toward sexual objectification in advertising may be indicative of a “more sophisticated” consumer who understands advertisements as “creative art attempting to make a sale, not depictions of real life” (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 2008, p. 77).

So, though the sexual objectification of women in advertisements may, as Hetstoni (2007) asserts, shape society’s perceptions of expected and desired sexuality and sexual conduct, and may, as Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) argue, be the reaction of a male-dominated society attempting to diminish female empowerment, among young, educated women (and within the third wave feminist movement) who have grown up in a society which continuously objectifies women in the media there may be a new understanding which accepts the presence of these images but dismisses these representations on the basis that they do not represent reality. Perhaps, after decades of repeated media representations of women as sex objects, women have become more accepting of sexualized images of themselves. Perhaps women understand that the media portrays a fantasy world, one that

does not show the day-to-day experiences of real women. Perhaps women do not expect to see true representations of the range of roles, responsibilities, and abilities they possess in the real world in mediated versions of themselves and their realities. However, I argue that a lenient attitude towards sexual objectification simply allows advertisers to continue to incorporate these themes into their texts, thus sustaining a society which not only allows the depreciation of women but which also permits young girls to continue to be raised in a culture in which these images are so ubiquitous that they become normal and expected.

#### VII.4 OVERALL MODEL OF IDEAL FEMININITY

Considering both the shared dominant ideologies and the gradual ideological shifts, then, the model of ideal femininity constructed through advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines combines both constructive and destructive content. As previously discussed, to appeal to women, mass media representations of gender roles and relationships cannot be unambiguously patriarchal, sexist, and marginalizing. Rather, to attract women, mass media texts need to acknowledge and incorporate the current real world experiences and responsibilities of women. This includes (but is not limited to) acknowledging women's ever-increasing and diverse academic, professional, economic and social opportunities, acknowledging women's multiple roles (at home, at work and in the community), acknowledging women's physical and intellectual strengths and abilities, and granting women power through individuality and personal choice. Yet, to reinforce traditional (patriarchal) ideals and hierarchies, mass media texts need to incorporate stereotyped gender representations, namely the sexual objectification of women but also faux feminist representations of female empowerment. Rather than encourage women to fulfill their full potential as equal and contributing members of society, these representations of women function to limit women either by 1) reinforcing feminine ideals associated with passivity and subservience which do not threaten the established system, or 2) reducing individual power and control to consumption-based power (For example, when advertisers assert that external modification allows women to communicate internal qualities, the power resides in the product, not the individual, who is encouraged to become more self-aware and to develop a constant desire to improve under the guise of expressing her internal self.)

Accordingly, the model of ideal femininity as established through advertising in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* balances two distinct ideals: On one hand, the model of ideal femininity communicated across all three magazines emphasizes a woman who is in control, who is capable, who is a unique individual, and who has the ability and desire to make her own decisions. On the other hand, the model of ideal femininity emphasises consumption-based identities (which grant women power not

through ability and intellect but through product purchases) and the depiction of the sexualised woman as a sex object (which portray women as sexually desirable things rather than as independent and self-motivated persons). Taken together, then, the model of ideal femininity established through advertising in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* suggests the ideal woman may be characterized as a sexually attractive and sexually available, thin, white woman who has clear ideas about what she likes and what she wants, is independent and confident, but who ultimately does not challenge the status quo.

## CONCLUSION

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to address a gap in the existing literature on mediated gender representations and to establish if there is a model of ideal femininity communicated through advertising in girls' and women's magazines from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. As discussed, advertisers operate with the general idea that, "It's easier to start a habit than to stop one" (Hill, 2002, quoted in Levy, 2006, p. 79). This means that the sooner advertisers *target* potential consumers, the sooner individuals are likely to *become* consumers – consumers of products *and* consumers of ideology. However, in order for those in dominant positions (like those in control of the market place and mass media) to persuade the mass population, a shared ideology must be established. Establishing and maintaining power (or hegemony) requires not only political or economic domination of one group over another, according to Gramsci, but it also requires "cultural, moral and ideological' leadership over [...] subordinate groups" which necessitates the development and maintenance of a collective "common sense" that combines various (sometimes competing) social values, ideals and goals into a shared world view (Forgacs, 1988, p. 423). Applied to this research, then, advertising may be considered a shared ideological guide that reinforces particular common sense ideas and ideals. More specifically, when focusing on female audiences, the development of a model of ideal femininity may be used by advertisers to attempt to prime individual and collective preferences, attitudes and behaviours gradually over time with the ultimate goal of guiding these female audiences to similar preferences, attitudes and behaviours in the future.

Accordingly, to determine if a model of ideal femininity is established through advertising in girls' and women's magazines, I conducted a content analysis of 210 advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. Both visual and textual elements were assessed using a detailed coding system adapted from previous research methodologies by Aronovsky and Furnham (2008), Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008), Dixon et al. (2008), Karan and Khoo (2007), and Thomas and Treiber (2000).

Since the three magazines selected for this research target three different (yet overlapping) female audiences, it was not unexpected that there were minor variations in the most frequently advertised product categories and, as discussed, a rather significant anomaly in the data: the frequency of literature advertisements in *Girls' Life* which did not continue with nearly the same regularity in *Seventeen* or *Cosmopolitan*. These variations in advertising, however, are necessary in order for each magazine to appeal to its given demographic. As discussed, these variations allow advertisers to relate to the interests and preferences of different age groups as they experience different life stages.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that there is a model of ideal femininity communicated through advertising in popular girls' and women's magazines. Moreover, these findings suggest that this model is constructed through 1) establishing common ideals which are consistently shared across all three demographically-defined magazines, and 2) through gradually introducing new gender ideals and preferences which correspond to (and emphasise) shifts in the real-world interests and experiences of girls and women. Ultimately two dominant themes in the portrayal of women were identified: women were either presented as independent and self-confident individuals or as passive, sexually desirable objects. Additionally, a tendency to incorporate faux feminism into advertisements which were superficially empowering was identified as a trend which increased in frequency between *Girls' Life* and *Cosmopolitan*. These patterns – both the dominant roles in which women were most frequently portrayed and the use of faux feminism to broaden product appeal – correspond to trends identified in the literature review. Specifically, the literature review establishes a history of advertisers incorporating traditional gender ideals and expectations into mediated representations of women but also shows that, in more contemporary texts, these ideals are often made more palatable through the superficial use of feminist rhetoric.

Therefore, I argue that not only is a model of ideal femininity developed through advertising in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines, and that this model is used as a guide to direct girls and women towards specific ideal preferences, attitudes and behaviours, but I also argue that this model of ideal femininity continues to emphasise traditional cultural values and gender ideals which are not necessarily reflective of the various real world roles and responsibilities women assume in today's society. Modern women are well-educated, hard-working, contributing members of society, yet these aspects of everyday life appear to have been glossed over in the advertisements in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* in favour of generic portrayals of independence (re: independence that is not always explicitly connected to intelligence, skill or ability) and sex appeal (emphasizing appearance over substance). From the gender rebellion feminist perspective with which I have approached this research, then, I propose not that advertising necessarily needs to completely change how women are portrayed, but that advertisers should move beyond traditional notions of gender to consider the range of female experiences. By incorporating more diverse representations of women into their texts, advertisers could develop a new a model of ideal femininity that would acknowledge a range of roles women play in the real world which would ultimately make their texts more inclusive, broadening their appeal and possibly having even more influence over the female audience.

### VIII.1 LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This research focused exclusively on the representations of girls and women in print advertisements in popular general interest magazines. However, there are numerous magazine genres which could be considered for future analysis. These magazines could be incorporated into a single study to assess gender representations and the model of ideal femininity using a broader sample frame which would allow better generalization of findings. These magazines could also be assessed individually to assess and compare how a model of ideal femininity is constructed through advertisements found in specific genres of magazines (ex. the model of ideal femininity as portrayed in advertisements in feminist magazines such as *Lip*, *Bust* and *Bitch*, as portrayed in fashion magazines including *Teen Vogue*, *Elle*, and *InStyle*, or as portrayed in health and fitness magazines such as *Sports Illustrated Kids*, *Self*, and *Women's Health*). Alternatively, this research could be replicated using general interest boys' and men's magazines to determine if there is a model of ideal masculinity communicated through advertisements in these magazines.

However, the main limitation of this research is that it does not include a reception study. For future research, through surveys or focus groups, responses from girls and women could be assessed to understand how the actual target audiences of these magazines perceive the representations of girls and women in advertising in *Girls' Life*, *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan*, adding another dimension to the study.

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## **APPENDIX A: Coding Used to Categorize Advertisements**

Accessories – jewellery, purses

Alcohol

Apparel

Awareness – bringing attention to social issues, medical research, environmental concerns, as well as providing access to advice/assistance resources

Beauty – various cosmetics, including fragrances and nail polishes

Charity/Volunteer – opportunities to get involved with various organizations

Contest

Diet – weight loss programs, weight loss supplements

Education

Entertainment – music, television, movies, videogames

Finance – credit cards, insurance

Food & Beverage – non-diet, non-alcoholic, includes gum, candy

Footwear

Hair Care – products, dyes, styling tools, accessories

Health – over-the-counter and prescription medications for general physical and mental wellbeing (cold and flu, asthma, depression)

Home – non-food groceries, including garbage bags, cat litter, laundry detergent

Hygiene – soaps, body washes, feminine hygiene products

Literature

Other – advertisements which do not easily fit into a category (for example, model searches)

Promotional – subscriptions

Recreation – organized social activities (for example, Girl Scouts)

Room Décor – home accessories including candles, bedding, wall art

Sexual Health – over-the-counter and prescription medications for sex-related wellbeing (birth control, emergency contraceptives, HPV treatments)

Skin Care – moisturizers, acne treatments, anti-aging products

Technology – cell phones, laptops, accessories

Transportation

## APPENDIX B: Coding Representations of Women in Advertisements

Analysis of each advertisement focused on the primary character. As Behm-Morawitz and Mastro explain, the primary character refers to the model who is the focus of the advertisements, the one who tells the story (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008, p. 134).

### **Physical Characteristics**

The physical characteristics are traits which may be used to describe the general appearance of the primary model. By considering features such as age, race, and style of dress, patterns may be found that suggest consistencies (or inconsistencies) in the overall general appearance of girls and women in advertisements.

#### **Age**

Tween: under 14 years old

Teen: 14-18

Young adult: 19-34

Middle-aged: 35-50

Elderly: over 60

*Adapted from Aronovsky and Furnham (2008), Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2008), Dixon et al. (2008)*

#### **Race**

Lighter-skinned: porcelain, ivory, pink or peachy complexions

Darker-skinned: beige, olive caramel or chocolate complexions

#### **Hair Colour**

Black

Brown

Red

Blonde

Other (pink, blue, green, etc.)

#### **Hair Style**

Short: to jaw line

Updo

Medium: shoulder length

Straight

Long: past shoulders

Wavy

Curly

#### **Eye Colour**

Brown

Green

Blue

Hazel

*Adapted from Dixon et al. (2008)*

## **Body Type**

Curvy: hourglass shape – large bust and hips (may be slim or heavy)

*Possible sub-categories of curvy body types:*

- Curvy
- Curvy/Thin
- Curvy/Athletic
- Curvy/Petite
- Curvy/Thin/Petite
- Curvy/Thin/Tall

Thin: slim torso and limbs

*Possible sub-categories of thin body types:*

- Thin
- Thin/Petite
- Thin/Tall
- Thin/Curvy
- Thin/Curvy/Petite
- Thin/ Curvy/Tall
- Thin/Curvy/Athletic
- Thin/Athletic
- Thin/Athletic/Petite
- Thin/Athletic/Tall

Petite: small frame, short

Tall: long legs

Athletic: broad shoulders, muscular arms and legs

*Possible sub-categories of athletic body types:*

- Athletic
- Athletic/Petite
- Athletic/Tall
- Athletic/Curvy
- Athletic/Petite/Thin
- Athletic/Petite/Curvy
- Athletic/Tall/Thin
- Athletic/Tall/Curvy

Other/Unknown: body either does not fit into other categories or is not visible enough to classify

## **Style of Dress**

Demure: casual everyday-wear; not necessarily conservative, but does not expose a lot of skin

Suggestive: tight, revealing clothing that emphasizes legs, chest

Partially Clad: more body exposed than covered

Nude: both explicit and implicit, ex. body cover by only a towel/blanket, body in silhouette

*Adapted from Karan and Khoo (2007)*

## **Social Context**

The general appearance of the individual and the environment in which they are presented serve as indicators of the subject's position in society. For example, Thomas and Treiber (2000) determined whether a subject was meant to represent the affluent population, the trendy population,

or the everyday population by analyzing the subject's style, including clothing, jewellery, footwear and hair. Similarly, they used the specific locale and activities presented in advertisements to determine what specific lifestyles were being promoted.

### **Social Status**

Affluent: refers to privileged/lavish lifestyles associated with financial prosperity, social and/or professional power, and sophisticated tastes and luxuries; associated with clean, simple ads

Trendy: able to afford new fashions/technologies/experiences, but less conservative than the affluent individual; ads tend to play with colour, pattern, and cropping

Everyday: casual and relaxed style, depicts day-to-day activities of the working/middle classes

*Adapted from Thomas and Treiber (2000)*

### **Environment**

Home: inside the home (bedroom, kitchen, living room), backyard, driveway

Leisure: park, beach, restaurant, sports event/activity

Work Place: job site, office

Other/Unknown

### **Background Characters & Relationships**

Predominantly female

Predominantly male

Children/family

Mixed

None

Friend

Romantic/Sexual Partner

Platonic Male-Female

*Adapted from Aronovsky and Furnham (2008)*

### **Personality & Attitude**

Though the general appearance of a model and the social context in which she is placed inform interpretations of the role the model is portraying, determining the intended demeanour or personality being conveyed requires particular attention to how the subject is oriented in the ad. Simple shifts in the positioning of the body or facial expressions, according to Beebe et al. (2007), may have significant effects on the overall impression.

### **Subject Orientation**

Though in real-world interactions body language may be deceiving, in advertising it is carefully planned to convey a specific meaning. Particular attention should be paid to posture, hand and arm tension, and head position. Advertising also emphasizes facial expressions. When determining what emotion is being conveyed, it is important to remember that the eyes, mouth and brow work in unison. For example, drawing from Beebe et al. (2007):

Body Position

|                                 | <b>Posture</b>                           | <b>Hands</b>                    | <b>Arms</b>                                   | <b>Head</b>              |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Confident</b>                | Squared shoulders, chest out, stomach in | Relaxed, open                   | Resting at sides, in lap, hand on hip         | Often tilted to one side |
| <b>Superior</b>                 | Puffed out chest                         | Gripping object, palms together | Clasped behind back                           | Held high                |
| <b>Apathetic</b>                | Slouched shoulders                       | In pockets, behind head         | Relaxed                                       | Chin tilted upwards      |
| <b>Inferior/Dejected</b>        | Slouched shoulders                       | Clenched                        | Tense                                         | Bowed down               |
| <b>Aggressive/ Oppositional</b> | Straight back, squared shoulders         | Clenched                        | Crossed in front of chest, both hands on hips | Chin tilted upwards      |
| <b>Open/Relaxed</b>             | Relaxed shoulders<br>Slightly slouched   | Relaxed, open                   | Resting at sides, in lap<br>outstretched      | Tilted to one side       |

Facial Expression

| <b>Emotion</b>      | <b>Eyes</b>                                                  | <b>Mouth</b>                                                                     | <b>Brow</b>                                  |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Surprise</b>     | Wide                                                         | Open                                                                             | Raised and wrinkled                          |
| <b>Fear</b>         | Tense skin under eyes                                        | Open                                                                             | Wrinkles in centre of brow                   |
| <b>Disgust</b>      | Lowered upper lid                                            | Raise/curled lip, open mouth                                                     | Lowered brow, wrinkled nose                  |
| <b>Anger</b>        | Tensed lower lid, glare                                      | Pursed lips or open mouth                                                        | Lowered and wrinkled brow                    |
| <b>Happiness</b>    | Wrinkled lower lids                                          | Smiling – Open or closed mouth                                                   | Relaxed                                      |
| <b>Sadness</b>      | Downward gaze                                                | Corners turned down                                                              | Relaxed or wrinkled in centre                |
| <b>Pride</b>        | Direct eye contact<br>Upward gaze                            | Smiling – closed mouth<br>Full/half smile                                        | Relaxed<br>Single raised eyebrow             |
| <b>Devious</b>      | Tense lower lid                                              | Pursed lips or smirk                                                             | Single raised eyebrow                        |
| <b>Bored</b>        | Unfocused gazed                                              | Relaxed mouth                                                                    | Relaxed forehead                             |
| <b>Annoyed</b>      | Lowered upper lid<br>Upward gaze                             | Pursed lips/slightly open                                                        | Raised eyebrows                              |
| <b>Tired</b>        | Lowered upper lid                                            | Relaxed mouth                                                                    | Relaxed forehead                             |
| <b>Flirtatious</b>  | Wrinkled lower lids<br>Direct eye contact<br>Sideways glance | Smiling – open or closed<br>Full/half smile<br>Slight pout, lower lip protruding | Relaxed forehead<br>Slightly raised eyebrows |
| <b>Intimidating</b> | Tense lower lid                                              | Raise/curled lip, open mouth<br>Pursed lips                                      | Lowered and wrinkled brow                    |
| <b>Serious</b>      | Direct eye contact                                           | Pursed/Tense mouth                                                               | Relaxed/slightly furrowed brow               |
| <b>Confused</b>     | Tense lowered lids                                           | Slightly open                                                                    | Slightly furrowed                            |

## **Role**

After examining an advertisement using the previous criteria, the overall role of the primary model may be assessed. Drawing upon the representations of women as discussed in the literature review, I evaluated the portrayed role according to four main categories: wife and mother, sex object, empowered woman, and competent employee.

Wife/Mother: primarily concerned with the home and family, typically portrayed inside the home, performing domestic activities, emphasis on caring for others, nurturing

Sex Object: is not determined by how much skin is exposed, but rather by how the body/body parts are positioned/manipulated to accentuate sexuality/sexual desire and emphasize vulnerability or dependence on another person (typically male); woman may appear intellectually absent (gazing off into distance) to emphasize decorative qualities of body; product may act as substitute for sexual partner

*Depictions of sexual objectification include:*

Reduced to Body Parts: image focuses on a single physical feature (ex. mouth or legs)

Contained/Restricted: woman's movement is controlled by an external force

Impeded Vision: one or both eyes are covered, hindering her eyesight, preventing her from seeing everything around her, and creating an obstacle to overcome

Glazed or Unfocused Eyes/Eyes Cast Downward: woman is detached from the situation, is unengaged and/or unaware

Touching Body: woman is depicted caressing her body to bring attention to particular physical features, is focused on looking sexually appealing for someone else; there is a lack of strength/control in her actions

Diminished Size: woman is depicted as smaller than another person, less powerful

Empowered Woman: accentuates female control over herself, her environment, and sometimes other people; emphasis is on strength and control (physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual)

*Depictions of empowered women include:*

Physically Strong: emphasizes the physical strength of a woman; often depicted as athletes

Liberated: emphasizes carefree movement, freedom from any external forces; often depicted with open arms and smiling

Assertive/Confident: woman appears in control and self-assured; often depicted in a power stance – legs apart and feet firmly on the ground, shoulders back, hands on hips, head held high

Sex Subject: like sex object, is not determined by how much skin is/is not exposed, but rather by how the body is positioned/manipulated; woman is depicted as a sexual person, but is in control of her sexuality, there are no external pressures for her to behave a certain way

Competent Employee/Student: typically portrayed in a work environment and wearing uniform or professional attire, emphasizes power, intellect, control, and ability; similar to the competent employee is the student who, though portrayed in a school environment, emphasizes similar qualities of power, intellect and ability

## **Subtext**

Though advertisers use deep understanding of culture, social relationships, and audience needs and wants to construct images that convey specific ideological meanings, the textual elements of an advertisement also contain important connotative meanings. These meanings may be interpreted by interpreting the product promise and the product slogan and/or company tagline.

### **Product Promises**

The product promise – its benefits for the consumer – is communicated both through the visuals of an advertisement and through the accompanying text. Thomas and Treiber have identified five categories with which to assess these promises (Thomas and Treiber, 2000: 363).

- 1) Good Times: emphasis on socializing with friends, having fun, being carefree
- 2) Appearance: product will fix some perceived problem; ad emphasizes particular aspect of the face/body to reinforce this message
- 3) Sex-Romance: intimacy shared between two people
- 4) Family-Marriage: emphasizes traditional family roles and activities
- 5) Celebrity Identification: uses recognizable personality to imbue product with associated qualities

I would also add to these categories:

Practical: focus is on the utility of a product

Reveal True Self: emphasis on using the product to express inner self

Customized for You: perception that the product is made to fit the needs and interests of the individual

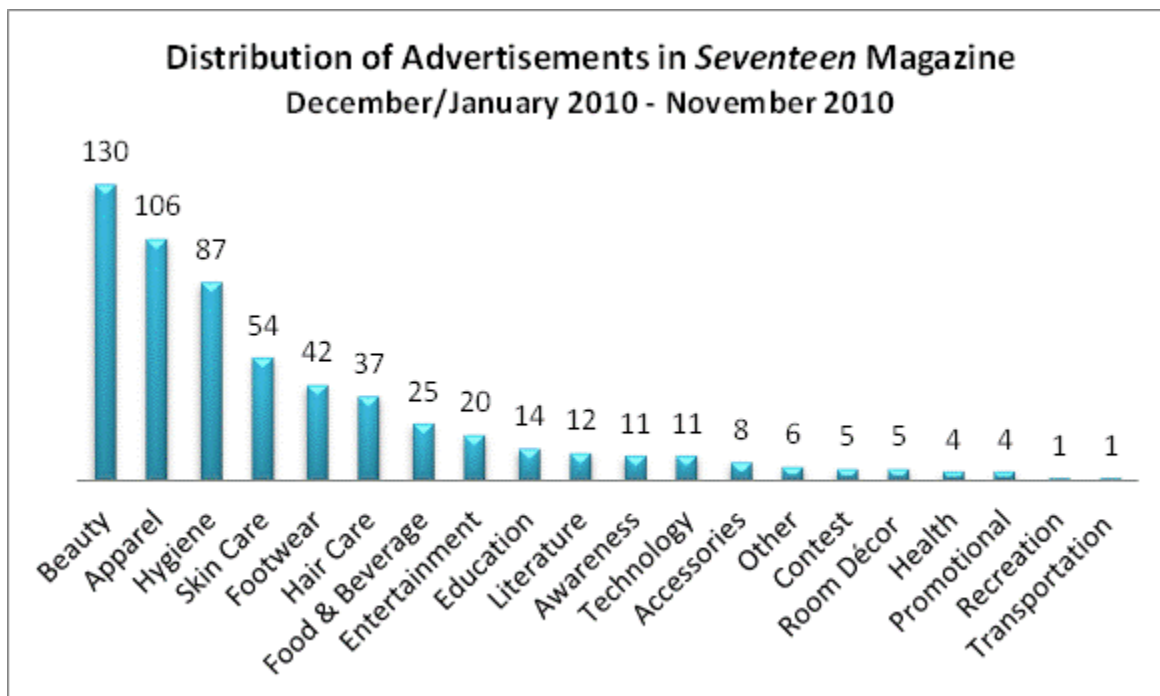
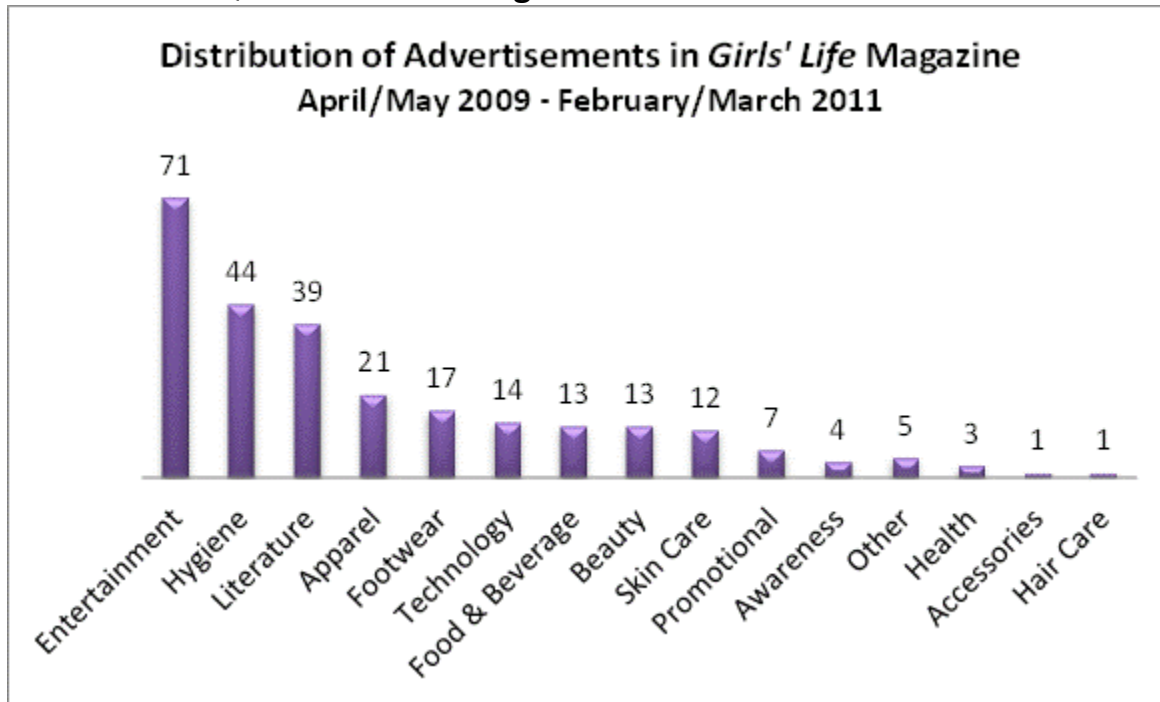
Do-It-Yourself (DIY): emphasizes that how the product is used is dependent on how the individual decides to use it

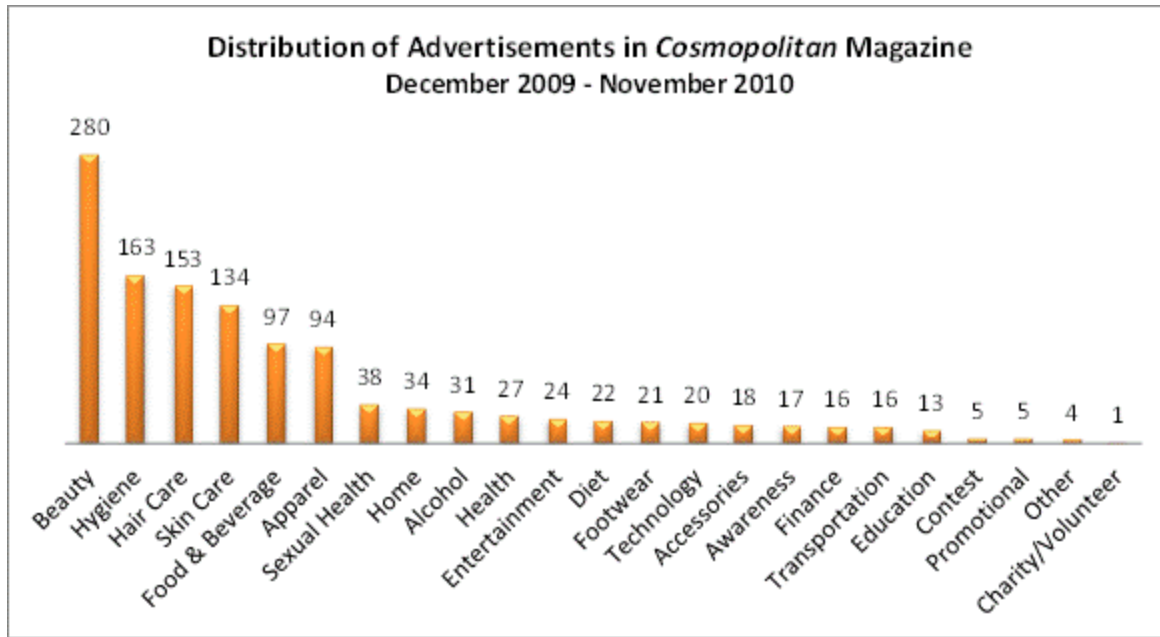
Self-Empowerment/Strength: emphasis is on independence, strength and control (physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual)

\*Reveal True Self and Customized for You may be collectively referred to as promises of Self-Actualization

*Adapted from McGraw-Hill (2002)*

## APPENDIX C: Quantitative Findings





## APPENDIX D: Qualitative Findings

### 1 Physical Characteristics

All figures represent the percentage of total advertisements (excluding advertisements coded as literature)

#### 1.1 Age

|                     | Tween | Teen | Young Adult | Middle-Aged | Elderly |
|---------------------|-------|------|-------------|-------------|---------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 20.6  | 51.5 | 26.5        | 1.5         | 0.0     |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 0.0   | 54.9 | 39.4        | 5.6         | 0.0     |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 0.0   | 4.3  | 75.7        | 20.0        | 0.0     |

#### 1.2 Race

|                     | Lighter Skinned | Darker Skinned |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 77.5            | 22.5           |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 68.4            | 31.6           |
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 73.5            | 26.5           |

#### 1.3 Hair Colour

|                     | Black | Brown | Red  | Blonde | Other |
|---------------------|-------|-------|------|--------|-------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 10.0  | 50.0  | 7.1  | 30.0   | 2.9   |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 17.5  | 42.5  | 15.0 | 25.0   | 0.0   |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 8.5   | 62.0  | 2.8  | 26.8   | 0.0   |

#### 1.4 Hair Style

##### 1.4.1 Hair Style - Length

|                     | Short | Medium | Long |
|---------------------|-------|--------|------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 10.5  | 35.1   | 54.4 |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 13.0  | 38.9   | 48.1 |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 8.8   | 28.1   | 63.2 |

##### 1.4.2 Hair Style – Style/Texture

|                     | Updo | Straight | Wavy | Curly |
|---------------------|------|----------|------|-------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 13.9 | 40.5     | 22.8 | 22.8  |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 26.7 | 36.2     | 22.9 | 14.3  |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 22.2 | 44.4     | 24.4 | 8.9   |

### 1.5 Eye Colour

|                     | Brown | Green | Blue | Hazel |
|---------------------|-------|-------|------|-------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 56.4  | 3.6   | 21.8 | 18.2  |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 57.6  | 1.5   | 27.3 | 13.6  |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 50.9  | 7.5   | 17.0 | 24.5  |

### 1.6 Body Type

|                     | Curvy | Thin | Petite | Athletic | Unknown |
|---------------------|-------|------|--------|----------|---------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 15.9  | 63.8 | 2.9    | 5.8      | 11.6    |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 7.1   | 70.2 | 7.1    | 3.6      | 11.9    |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 9.7   | 58.3 | 0.0    | 1.4      | 30.6    |

#### 1.6.1 Body Type – Curvy Body Types

|                     | Curvy | Curvy/<br>Thin | Curvy/<br>Athletic | Curvy/<br>Petite |
|---------------------|-------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 8.0   | 56.0           | 32.0               | 4.0              |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 0.0   | 33.3           | 66.7               | 0.0              |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 33.3  | 41.7           | 25.0               | 0.0              |

#### 1.6.2 Body Type – Thin Body Types

|                     | Thin | Thin/Tall | Thin/<br>Petite | Thin/<br>Petite/<br>Athletic | Thin/<br>Curvy | Thin/<br>Curvy/Tall | Thin/<br>Curvy/<br>Petite |
|---------------------|------|-----------|-----------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 22.7 | 18.2      | 27.3            | 0.0                          | 31.8           | 0.0                 | 0.0                       |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 20.3 | 39.0      | 22.0            | 0.0                          | 5.1            | 10.2                | 3.4                       |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 40.5 | 14.3      | 14.3            | 2.4                          | 11.9           | 9.5                 | 7.1                       |

#### 1.6.3 Body Type – Athletic Body Types

|                     | Athletic | Athletic/<br>Curvy | Athletic/<br>Thin/<br>Petite |
|---------------------|----------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 33.3     | 66.7               | 0.0                          |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 33.3     | 66.7               | 0.0                          |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 20.0     | 60.0               | 20.0                         |

### 1.7 Style of Dress

|                     | Demure | Suggestive | Partially Clad | Nude |
|---------------------|--------|------------|----------------|------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 83.6   | 7.5        | 9.0            | 0.0  |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 61.3   | 17.3       | 16.0           | 5.3  |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 45.5   | 18.2       | 24.2           | 12.1 |

## 2 Social Context

All figures represent the percentage of total advertisements (including advertisements coded as literature)

### 2.1 Social Status

|                     | Affluent | Trendy | Everyday |
|---------------------|----------|--------|----------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 7.6      | 54.5   | 37.9     |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 13.9     | 50.0   | 36.1     |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 47.2     | 31.9   | 20.8     |

### 2.2 Environment

|                     | Home | Leisure | Work Place | Other/<br>Unknown |
|---------------------|------|---------|------------|-------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 15.2 | 40.9    | 4.5        | 39.4              |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 5.8  | 52.2    | 1.4        | 40.6              |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 4.2  | 30.6    | 0.0        | 65.3              |

### 2.3 Background Characters & Relationships

#### 2.3.1 Background Characters & Relationships – Background Characters

|                     | Predominantly Female | Predominantly Male | Children/<br>Family | Mixed | None |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------|------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 30.9                 | 13.2               | 0.0                 | 16.2  | 39.7 |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 17.4                 | 7.2                | 0.0                 | 5.8   | 69.6 |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 6.9                  | 6.9                | 1.4                 | 1.4   | 83.3 |

#### 2.3.2 Background Characters & Relationships – Relationship with Background Character

|                     | Friend | Romantic/<br>Sexual<br>Partner | Platonic<br>Male-<br>Female |
|---------------------|--------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 89.5   | 5.3                            | 5.3                         |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 66.7   | 20.0                           | 13.3                        |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 0.0    | 100.0                          | 0.0                         |

### 3 Personality & Attitude – Subject Orientation

All figures represent the percentage of total advertisements (excluding advertisements coded as literature)

#### 3.1 Body Position

|                     | Confident | Superior | Apathetic | Inferior/<br>Dejected | Aggressive/<br>Oppositional | Open/<br>Relaxed |
|---------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 22.2      | 4.8      | 0.0       | 4.8                   | 27.0                        | 41.3             |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 35.9      | 7.7      | 2.6       | 10.3                  | 16.7                        | 26.9             |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 27.5      | 8.7      | 2.9       | 11.6                  | 17.4                        | 31.9             |

#### 3.2 Facial Expression

|                     | Surprise | Fear | Disgust | Anger | Happiness | Sadness | Pride | Devious |
|---------------------|----------|------|---------|-------|-----------|---------|-------|---------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 3.3      | 1.1  | 0.0     | 0.0   | 41.8      | 1.1     | 15.4  | 7.7     |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 1.7      | 0.9  | 0.0     | 0.0   | 28.7      | 2.6     | 20.0  | 4.3     |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 1.9      | 0.0  | 0.0     | 0.0   | 24.8      | 0.0     | 21.0  | 1.0     |

|                     | Bored | Annoyed | Tired | Flirtatous | Intimidating | Serious | Confused |
|---------------------|-------|---------|-------|------------|--------------|---------|----------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 0.0   | 3.3     | 2.2   | 4.4        | 13.2         | 6.6     | 0.0      |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 3.5   | 3.5     | 0.0   | 18.3       | 6.1          | 10.4    | 0.0      |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 8.6   | 1.0     | 0.0   | 27.6       | 3.8          | 9.5     | 1.0      |

### 4 Role

All figures represent the percentage of total advertisements (excluding advertisements coded as literature)

#### 4.1 Role – Overall

|                     | Wife/<br>Mother | SexObject | Empowered<br>Woman | Competent<br>Employee/<br>Student |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 0.0             | 12.0      | 88.0               | 0.0                               |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 0.0             | 38.0      | 62.0               | 0.0                               |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 1.4             | 46.5      | 52.1               | 0.0                               |

#### 4.2 Role – Woman as Sex Object

|                     | Reduced to<br>Body Parts | Contained/<br>Restricted | Impeded<br>Vision | Glazed/<br>Unfocused/<br>Eyes Cast<br>Downward | Touching<br>Body | Diminished<br>Size |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 0.0                      | 16.7                     | 0.0               | 0.0                                            | 0.0              | 83.3               |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 7.4                      | 22.2                     | 0.0               | 48.1                                           | 14.8             | 7.4                |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 15.2                     | 21.2                     | 24.2              | 15.2                                           | 24.2             | 0.0                |

### 4.3 Role – Empowered Woman

|                     | Physically Strong | Liberated | Assertive/<br>Confident | SexSubject |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------------|------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 25.0              | 22.7      | 45.5                    | 6.8        |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 20.5              | 18.2      | 40.9                    | 20.5       |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 10.8              | 18.9      | 48.6                    | 21.6       |

#### 4.3.1 Use of Faux Feminism within Representations of Empowered Women

|                     | Empowered Women | Faux Feminism |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 79.1            | 20.9          |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 61.4            | 38.6          |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 18.9            | 81.1          |

## 5 Subtext – Product Promises

All figures represent the percentage of total advertisements (including advertisements coded as literature)

### 5.1 Product Promises

|                     | Good Times | Appearance | Sex-Romance | Family-Marriage | Celebrity Identification | Practical | Reveal True Self | Customized for You | DIY | Self-Empowerment/<br>Strength |
|---------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------|------------------|--------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| <b>Girls' Life</b>  | 32.8       | 7.2        | 2.8         | 0.0             | 15.0                     | 10.0      | 3.9              | 8.9                | 1.1 | 18.3                          |
| <b>Seventeen</b>    | 22.3       | 21.3       | 4.1         | 0.0             | 7.6                      | 16.8      | 3.6              | 3.0                | 0.5 | 20.8                          |
| <b>Cosmopolitan</b> | 11.0       | 23.8       | 7.2         | 0.0             | 12.2                     | 27.1      | 2.8              | 2.2                | 2.2 | 11.6                          |