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Adolescent Sexuality and Gender Discourses in Seventeen, Cosmo Girl, and Teen: A Frame Analysis of Online Teen Magazines

Krystal Ann Zaragoza

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**ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY AND GENDER DISCOURSES IN
SEVENTEEN, COSMO GIRL, AND TEEN:
A FRAME ANALYSIS OF ONLINE TEEN MAGAZINES**

by

KRYSTAL A. ZARAGOZA

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BACHELOR OF ARTS IN JOURNALISM**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of online teen magazines in the production of gender ideologies by analyzing the representation of teenage sexuality from a critical perspective. Informed by theories of representation, citationality, and ideology, I used Pan & Kosicki's frame analysis to analyze three online teen magazines including *Cosmo Girl*, *Seventeen*, and *Teen*, focusing on 251 articles centered on adolescent sexuality. Each article was coded for the thematic, rhetorical, syntactic, and script structures, and categorized based on salient elements.

After the articles were analyzed, the three online teen magazines constructed a discourse on sexuality through a common dominant frame: sexuality as a function of a romantic relationship between a boy and girl. This heteronormative ideology also

revealed an imbalanced portrayal of gender roles concerning sexual health, leaving much to be desired for helpful information regarding prevention and protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases as a sexually active adolescent. In addition, males were perceived as aggressors in romantic relationships, reinforcing a subordinate position for females.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Teenagers did not exist in the social imaginary of the United States until the beginning of the twentieth century. This is not to say that people miraculously went from 12 years old to 20, but that it wasn't until the early 1900s that adolescence was defined as a distinct phase in the cognitive and emotional development of individuals. It was later, in the 1940s, that the word "teenagers" was coined and its use became widespread (Massoni, 2006). This was at the time when marketers and advertisers began to realize that teenagers could be a "direct consumer category" and began developing products to target this new audience (Massoni, 2006, p. 32). One of those products was the teen magazine.

Seventeen magazine made its debut in 1944. The magazine was the first magazine produced specially for teenagers in the United States and one of the first for teens in the world. *Seventeen* was the number one teen magazine in the country from 1944 to the mid 1990s, when the teen magazine industry exploded with numerous new titles focusing on anything from teen fashion and beauty to teen celebrities. The magazine began as a promotion of teenage style – something that, at the time, was new and unknown – for the creation of a new market segment of consumers. Since the 1940s, teen magazines have come to set an agenda beyond just the latest fashions and to be delivered via multiple channels, from traditional print to online media.

Cosmo Girl. Even after the invention of television and the Internet, and despite the enduring popularity of the film and music recording industries, teen magazines have remained competitive with these other forms of popular media by using new marketing

techniques and converging technologies. For instance, a recent news release from Habbo.com reports that *Seventeen* is the most popular magazine among female teens who use their interactive Web site (Mills, 2009).

Teen magazines are, therefore, important sources in the study of adolescent audiences and their mediated communications. Their significance lies in the fact that, as research has shown, teen magazines are not only popular but also trusted sources of information among teenagers. Their role as a “trusted” source and gatekeepers of information for adolescents make them a relevant site to explore. For my interest in studying the role of media in the socialization of teenagers into particular gender roles and societal norms, teen magazines are primary sources of data. The research for this thesis focuses on the most popular online teen magazines to analyze the representation of adolescent sexuality and explore how *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *Cosmo Girl* play an ideological role in the reproduction of gender ideologies. Informed by cultural and critical theories and through the method of frame analysis, this research aims to unravel hegemonic ideas regarding gender and sexuality constructed for adolescent girls who consume these magazines.

A central argument advanced in this study is that the teen magazines examined construct a discourse on sexuality marked by a fragmented and seemingly contradictory set of frames that combine to reinforce traditional gender performance. It is a discourse on sexuality that privileges the notion that girls are emotional beings who actively seek information but use it for the primary purpose of finding and maintaining heteronormative romantic relations in which they follow male prerogatives and respond to naturalized male behaviors. At the same time, magazine representations reinforce the

expectation that girls will exhibit more maturity than boys and are responsible for making the correct moral decisions in regards to reputation and sexuality. Thus, as suggested by the evidence to be presented in Chapter 4, underlying the seemingly contradictory frames and themes is a representation of sexuality as a dimension of life linked primarily to: individualist affective behaviors associated with female emotional dependency on romantic relations; an assumption that moral reasoning rests on individual girls who ought to satisfy boys' desires and yet be responsible for the status and health of sexual and romantic relations; and a view of gender in terms of traditional roles and male dominance. Furthermore, it may be argued that the particular use of story formats and sequencing of information in the stories analyzed is indicative of another tension in discourse: it reflects an editorial choice that, on the surface, seems to offer girls the chance to initiate discussion and seek information about sexuality on their own terms but that, upon closer reading, ends up privileging the voices of columnists, expert sources, and even teen boys as sources of knowledge and authority over teen girls.

The Influence of Magazines in Teen Life

Research has shown that 8 out of 10 teens in the United States read magazines, according to the Teenmark survey (Mediamark, 2004, p. 10). In the same survey, teens reported that among the top 10 items they had last purchased with their own money, magazines were number 9. Furthermore, Currie (1999) found that teens are enthusiastic responders to magazines and, as readers, less critical than adults. As one of their most trusted sources of information, it is no surprise then that teens often turn to teen magazines and other forms of mass media for information about sensitive topics like sex.

According to Brown (2002), the word “sex” is the most popular term searched by teens on the Internet, and teen magazines have increased sexual content in recent years.

On the topic of sexuality, teen magazines have traditionally advised girls through advice columns, answered questions that girls may feel they could never ask their mother or father, and provided a sense of normality through the publication of stories from regular teens just like them.

In fact, research studies have found that teens age 13 to 15 get information about sex from their parents, friends, schools, and mass media – in that order – while teens age 16 to 17 get information about sex from friends, parents and mass media (Brown, 2002). Although parents and friends rank higher than mass media on the list, the ranking does not mean that they are any more or less influential. These days, mass media are ubiquitous, especially with the invention and popularity of the Internet, iPhones, Blackberrys, and MP3 players. Nowadays, mass media don’t chase teens; teens chase media with every click of their cell phones, download of a podcast or surf of the mobile Web. In addition, friends (first or second on the list), often times get their information from such media (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009), which makes media an important influence on teenager socialization and identity construction.

Teen girls often use teen magazines to answer questions about how to act in romantic and sexual encounters and as a source of information on kissing, flirting, and other sexual practices. In this case, media provide perhaps the least embarrassing way to get information about sex and romance. (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004, p. 11)

In addition, teen magazines are one of the only forms of mass media that regularly addresses the issue of safe sex, such as using contraception, birth control and teen pregnancy, and the consequences of sexual intercourse (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009).

However, previous research has also shown that although teen magazines offer an opportunity to discuss sex in a responsible way that no other mass medium offers (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009), coverage tends to reproduce traditional gender roles (Carpenter, 2001; Jackson, 2005a; Jackson, 2005b; Kehily, 1999). Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) found that sex, as portrayed in teen magazines, was a man's domain and teen girls' role was to cater to the male desires. And Brown, L'Engle, Pardun, Guo, and Kenneavy (2009) have argued that exposure to content in the mass media, such as television and magazines, was found to accelerate sexual activity in white middle-class adolescents.

In effect, teen magazines have become a regular site for teen girls to seek information about sex, dating, and relationships. Thumbing through the pages or visiting the Web site of *Seventeen*, *Cosmo Girl*, or *Teen* provides examples of the questions that teens have about sex and relationships. "How can you tell when you've had an orgasm?" asks Carly, 17, from Belleville, IL on *Seventeen.com* ("What does an orgasm feel like?," 2008, para. 1). On *Cosmo Girl.com*'s homepage, the main box shows five featured stories, the first of which reads: "How naughty have you been?" Pictured next to a large bold, pink headline with sans-serif letters is a photo of a teen girl with a coy look on her face while she stares at a male partner's lips and holds her finger up to his mouth, as if to say "shhh." The link, once clicked, will take readers to a page where they can play the

game “Never have I ever” (popular among teens and college students as a drinking game) or take a quiz titled “What’s your kissing IQ?” or “Do you drive guys crazy?” These are just a few examples of how magazines cover the topics that appeal to teenagers who are curious about their bodies and sexuality.

Significance of the Study

This thesis examines the role of online teen magazines in the production of gender ideologies by analyzing the representation of teenage sexuality from a critical perspective. In contrast to previous research that has analyzed particular dimensions of adolescent sexuality represented in magazines, for example health or feminist perspectives, this research will examine the broader discourse of adolescent sexuality to explore ideological effects of teen magazine coverage. The methodological procedures will be frame analysis. The theoretical framework informing this thesis combines theories of media representation, citationality, and the ideological effects of media.

To date, much of the media research on teen sexuality focuses on advertising, television, movies, and music. Studies have pointed out how, for example, teen sexuality is portrayed as an act without consequences or in very unrealistic manners as in the 2007 movie “Juno” or the cable-television show “The Secret Life of an American Teenager,” both of which have highly unrealistic portrayals of teen pregnancy. In the area of magazines, research on teen sexuality has emphasized health effects of information or how gender ideologies are supported by print magazines.

While there has been significant research done regarding print magazines, there are very few studies on online teen magazines. This despite the fact that online teen magazines have become important subjects of research because a Web site has fewer

restrictions than a single 100-page issue of a magazine, of which 50 to 70 pages are advertisements. Online, there are advertisements, but there is more space for additional articles, archives, and interactivity.

Magazine Web sites are of particular interest because of the popularity of the Internet and the amount of information teens seek on it. Like all print forms of mass media, glossy teen magazines have become a dying breed, with the collapse of two teen magazines in 2008 and many more just before. But as print versions have been discontinued, the Web sites are flourishing. According to D'innocenzio (2006), magazine editors are quickly realizing that teens are using the Internet more and purchasing magazines less, leading editors and staff to begin looking for more creative ways to keep teen readers interested. In 2005, *Elle Girl* and *Teen People* suspended publication to focus on Web sites; while *Elle Girl's* Web site remains active, *Teen People's* site has been redirected to *People* magazine. Although the Internet has been cited as one of the key sources in the demise of the magazine industry overall, D'innocenzio (2006) stated that teen magazines need to adapt to an audience more integrated with the Internet.

A poll by *Advertising Age* (Thompson, B., 2006) confirmed that teens are still interested in teen magazines, but more and more are moving to the Internet for information. Even teens are beginning to feel the pinch of the economic recession and are cutting back spending (Zmuda, 2009), so free Internet access to teen magazines that can cost between \$3 and \$4 a published issue is an incentive to read. According to Zmuda (2009), 92 percent of female teens, age 13-21, who participated in a survey by Euro RSCG Discovery, said they were concerned about the economy. Unemployment rates are also affecting the 16- to 19-year-old workforce; a bright spot is the spending on beauty

products, which has increased 12 percent year over year. Thus, the Internet has provided a place for teen magazines to target teen consumers even when print versions are dying. Moreover, multimedia deals to continue marketing these magazines is another way that publishers are keeping them alive. For example, *Seventeen* has partnered, in the past, with Music Television (MTV), Disney, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and Habbo.com.

This study contributes to this literature by focusing on online media to examine the representation and ideological effects of one specific discourse, and, using frame analysis, advance a more in-depth understanding of the information that teen magazines are presenting to adolescents about their own sexuality. The goals of this research acquire significance in view that teen magazines have been shown to affect the lives of teens and have also been seen as a trusted source of information on topics such as adolescent sexuality. Such influence acquires relevance when we consider the need to educate teens about sexuality in the context of pressing social problems. For instance, it is a fact that the United States has one of the highest teen birth rates among the developed nations. Teen magazines may hold a part of the puzzle that could help us better understand the ways in which teens learn about safe sex, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and more. Thus, textual analysis of teen magazines, like the present investigation, may suggest ideas for the further development of educational programs to decrease teen pregnancy rates and help those inflicted with sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, examining magazine representations of adolescent sexuality can uncover the ideological spectrum within which teens come to understand social dimensions of sexuality and construct a sense of identity. Lastly, studying online teen magazines' coverage of

adolescent sexuality is important because teen magazines are often the form of media that provides direct, honest information about sex to an audience of 19 million readers that is constantly seeking answers to the unknown. In this sense, understanding the quality and scope of such coverage can illuminate the ways in which media produce the frames that make “the world intelligible” (Pietila, 2004, p. 240) to younger people.

The information presented in this thesis is organized as follows: in Chapter 2, I discuss the key theoretical concepts and empirical research studies that inform the conceptualization and justify the design of this study; in Chapter 3, I explicate the methodological procedures implemented to conduct the textual analysis; in Chapter 4, I present the results of the frame analysis of magazine content; and in the Conclusion, I provide summary answers to my research questions and discuss limitations of the study and its insights for further study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this section, I present the central theoretical concepts informing this investigation and offer a review of literature relevant to the topic under study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by theories of representation, citationality, and ideology. In this section, I will address how representation, through discursive strategies such as citationality, creates particular positions within an ideological field. Through these interrelated concepts, I frame my critique of teen magazine content and its relevance in the construction of gender ideologies among young women. As it will be discussed in this section, representation, citationality, and ideology are all key concepts in the elucidation of the construction of ideologies in online teen magazines. Each of these concepts will inform the study and help explain how content can uphold or subvert traditional ideas regarding teen adolescent sexuality.

Representation. According to Hall (2006), there are two alternative approaches to representation: (1) as a reflection or re-presentation of an objective reality or as (2) “the way in which meaning is given to things depicted” through images and texts (2006). The first meaning confines representation to the reflection of a pre-existing reality. The second meaning, the one that Hall advocates, posits that reality and its meanings are constructed, for there will always be a gap between the multiple meanings that audiences assign to texts and their depicted meaning. Hall (1997) called this theory of representation the constitutive or constructionist view of representation and stressed that meaning can only be given through language. In other words:

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the 'real' world objects, people, or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events. (Hall, 1997, p. 17)

Further explanation and elaboration of this definition is offered by Vukceвич (2002).

She described Hall's concept of representation as referring to "the medium or channel through which meaning production happens." Citing Hall's book *Representation:*

Cultural representations and signifying practices, she stated:

... meanings are produced by human beings, participants in a culture, who have the power to make things mean or signify something. Clearly, for Hall, representation involves understanding how language and systems of knowledge production work together to produce and circulate meanings. Representation becomes the process or channel or medium through which these meanings are both created and reified. (Vukceвич, 2002)

For instance Gledhill (1997) has drawn on Hall's theory to discuss the representation of women in mass media:

In opposition to this mimetic approach, the constructionist view of representation outlined by Stuart Hall implies that even the terms 'man' and 'woman' – whether word or image – are in fact cultural signifiers which construct rather than reflect gender definitions, meanings, and identities. (1997, p. 346)

In another study of representation, Ryan (2007) conducted an analysis of two pregnant celebrities and their representation in a time of "bump watching" in mass media. Bumps

are pregnant women's abdomens which, in recent years, have become an obsession in mainstream media coverage. Ryan examined the identities of celebrities Angelina Jolie and Katie Holmes to determine what was being represented, both reflected and constructed. She noted: "This analysis assumes that the magazine representation of pregnant celebrities works within a larger system of meaning, both drawing upon and informing the ways in which we conceptualize women, pregnancy, and celebrity" (p. 4). Through her analysis, she finds that the representations of women through pregnancy are contradictory but remain a common trend among mainstream media texts regarding women.

In this study, I draw on Stuart Hall's definition of representation, with an application to media representation to refer to the ways meanings are produced through language, images, and journalistic professional conventions in the process of mass communication by writers and institutions who are in positions of power to produce meanings for the public.

Citationality. The concept of citationality offers a perspective on one of the ways in which processes of representation can fix meanings in particular ways. It holds that no ideologies, such as gender, are created or constructed from someone's imagination or decision to be different. Instead, ideas are reused or cited from some previous understanding, and it is in that citation that reused ideas gain power and can become norms. For the purposes of this research, citationality will be discussed as relevant in the construction of gender normativity and other ideologies, as well.

Butler (1993) explained this concept through the analogy of the law and then later compares the law to gender:

As one who efficaciously speaks in the name of the law, the judge does not originate the law or its authority; rather, he “cites” the law, consults and reinvokes the law, and, in that reinvocation, reconstitutes the law. The judge is thus installed in the midst of a signifying chain, receiving and reciting the law and, in the reciting, echoing forth the authority of the law. (p. 107)

Butler discussed citationality as a part of performativity and, specifically, the performativity of gender.

... There are at least two conceptual knots: first, the body is marked by sex, but the body is marked prior to that mark, for it is the first mark that prepares the body for the second one and, second, the body is only signifiable, only occurs as that which can be signified within language, by being marked in this second sense. (Butler, 1993, 98)

According to Butler, gender is not created anew, but referenced through languages. She discusses Derrida and uses his idea that “it appears that it is by virtue of *the power of the subject or its will* that a phenomenon is named into being. In other words, the norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is ‘cited’ as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels” (p. 13).

Butler stated that gender is a citation that creates a hegemonic norm and a privileged interpretation because of its cultural authority. “In other words, it is precisely through the infinite deferral of authority to an irrecoverable past that authority itself is constituted” (p. 108). Hollywood (2002) discussed physical performativity and, using citationality and signification, the way that not only language – as Butler discusses in “Gender Troubles” – but also physical actions can be gender performance.

Here 'ritual' is interchangeable with 'reiterative,' suggesting that the term serves only to highlight the repetitive nature of those practices and citations through which the sexed body is formed. This is important for Butler because it is this temporality of citationality that allows for the slippage of norms and their instantiation; resistance occurs in the space and time interval demanded by repetition. (p. 97)

Citationality, especially performativity and citationality, has been used in many texts discussing gender roles and the subversive drag, which Butler herself uses as an example in her book. Harris (2006), in a critique of Butler's analysis of drag, examined the ahistoricity of Butler's discussion of subversive cross dressing and how she overlooked the historical aspect and audience interpretation of performance. He claims that Butler has overlooked important aspects such as historical context and the literal spectator, making her claim that cross-dressing is a subversive act against traditional gender roles incorrect in his analysis. "For Butler, apparently dissonant forms of gender performance have the potential to transgress and subvert sexual norms by revealing all gender to be a copy without an original" (p. 67)—a reference to citationality. He elaborates his argument through an analysis of three French poems discussing cross-dressing, which Harris uses to hold that of the meaning of cross-dressing is different for author and audience and that the identities of the cross-dressed are not determined merely by gender.

While critics like Harris disagree with Butler, there are many others who use Butler's work in their analysis and expand upon Butler's ideas. Salih (2007) said all linguistic signs are citational and because citationality can be restraining to the norms and

hegemonic traditions, identifying the citationalities can be important in changing those norms. According to Salih, “clearly, there are ‘good’ (subversive) citations and ‘bad’ (forced) citations, and the task will be to distinguish between them—which is not always easy as we shall see” (2007, p. 65). The author discussed the ways in which some citations may reinforce heterosexual hegemony, while others are subversive to those norms. In conclusion, the author states that subversive citationality can be dangerous because the audience can interpret an author’s words differently and sometimes, as discussed before, they will interpret what the author meant to be subversive as forced citations (Salih, 2007, p. 66).

Along these lines, Weiss (2005) analyzed the first season of the hit television show “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” and concluded that while many critics of the show have claimed it is stereotypical of the gay community, he found that the show demonstrates and requires the use of the subversive term queer. In terms of identity, Weiss discusses butler’s “I” or self, and argues that the queer “I” is a form of identity or self that is unclear, ambiguous and constantly being constructed through language. Weiss used a theoretical framework that included performativity and citationality. Citationality, in his research, was used with performativity as one of the elements of identity construction. Citing Kulick (2003, p. 122), Weiss (2005) used this idea of citationality:

No language can be considered an essentially intentional phenomenon . . .

Performatives work not because they depend on the intentions of the speaker but because they embody conventional forms of language that are already in existence before the speaker utters them. (p. 79)

Lastly, Hawkins (2002) used citationality to study children's drawings for signs of self-expression and identity. He concluded:

The sketchbooks, in other words, provide a focused example of processes that are more usually obscured by the imaginary and final vocabulary of self-expression which refuses to see children's drawing from any other perspective than that of the imposed exile and isolation of self defined as a pre-existing interiority. (p. 218)

In other words, children's drawings can be analyzed using concepts of citationality because children often cite sources of self and identity.

Citationality, as seen through this discussion of the concept, is strongly linked to representation, identity, and ideology. Citationality is a key concept for the understanding of the signifying process, which is key to representation and serves to create certain positions of identity that can produce and reproduce ideologies. This thesis draws on these interrelated concepts to explore ways in which online teen magazines cite certain existing ideas about sex to reinscribe or subvert particular gender ideologies.

Ideology. Mass media have been deeply imbedded in the study of ideology given its ritualistic role that transcends the diffusion of messages in space to engage the maintenance of society in time: through representation of shared beliefs (Carey, 1988). Particularly with the growing popularity of new technologies to spread media messages, mass media are constantly perpetuating and challenging stereotypes, traditional gender roles, ideologies, and hegemonic relations. In general, ideology has been defined as "the frameworks for thinking and calculation about the world—the 'ideas' which people use to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they ought to

do” (Hall, 1985, p.99). Beyond this basic definition of ideology, the term has been extensively written about and debated.

The Marxist definition, one of the first attempts to theorize this concept, stresses that ideologies are socially determined, not individualistic, and entail “the category of illusions and false consciousness by which the ruling class maintains its dominance over the working class” (Fiske, 1990, p. 165). For Marx, the issue of class was very important because he considered that power inequality stemmed from the class system created by the capitalist order. From this perspective, media are part of the dominant culture and function in service of the ruling classes, and of the ideology that supports their class interests. For example, from this view, one may argue that today most media outlets that deliver current event information, or news, are owned by media conglomerates that own multiple news outlets. By having such a monopoly on the news sources through which most everyday people receive their news, these groups can perpetuate the ideologies of those with power. For Marx, discussing ideology was important for it provided the subordinate group with knowledge that dominant ideologies existed and that they were in place to oppress the subordinate and maintain a status quo that might not be in the subordinate’s best interest.

Later, Althusser’s work on semiotics and language led to new definitions of ideology. Althusser drew on the Marxist theory of ideology but rejected the idea that it was so closely tied to class only. He “developed a more sophisticated theory of ideology that freed it from such a close cause-and-effect relationship with the economic base of society, and redefined it as an ongoing and all-pervasive set of practices in which all classes participate” (Fiske, 1990, p. 174). By developing this new perspective, the

definition became more complicated and ambiguous. Ideologies, in his view, were based on multiple systems of representation (class and other dimensions) and meaning making. Through shared meanings, ideologies are historically determined but open to transformation.

Williams (1977) also drew on Marxist definitions but argued that while processes of signification give meaning to ideas and theories that could determine a system of beliefs for particular classes; the class system is not the only determinant. Along these lines, van Dijk (1998) stated that ideology is:

. . . the interface between social structure and social cognition or the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group. This means that ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, good or bad, right or wrong, for them, and to act accordingly” (p. 8).

The concept of ideology is often linked to theories of hegemony, which refers to the processes through which ruling groups use a combination of coercion and cultivation of popular consent to certain ideas and practices (or ideologies) in order to maintain their position of power in society. In this theory, Gramsci emphasized instability and resistance as part to the dynamics of hegemony, since dominant sectors are constantly fighting to maintain a dominance that is never stable, and one group never wins over the other completely (Fiske, 1990). According to Williams (1977) hegemony is:

...always a process... it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.

However, these dominant hegemonic ideologies are hard to overcome by subordinate groups because of tradition, institutions, and social formations. (p. 112)

Ideology is indeed a highly contested term with multiple definitions. But it has been an important construct for the study of the implications and effects of media representation. For instance, the study of ideology is linked to the study of the development of the industrial mass society (Hall, 1988). Mass media have been blamed both for hindering the mass society and for taking part in its development by exposing the masses to “the commercialized influence of elites, via the media” (Hall, 1988, p. 57). As Chandler (2009) noted: “For Hall et al. the mass media do tend to reproduce interpretations which serve the interests of the ruling class, but they are also ‘a field of ideological struggle.’ The media signification system is seen as relatively autonomous.” Yet, other Marxist theorists have focused on how the media are ideological agencies that play a central role in maintaining class domination (Curran, Gurevitch, & Woollacott, 1988, p. 13).

In addition, in mass media research ideologies are studied as relevant for the production and reproduction of social relations of power and ideas that represent them. For example, Peak and Shah (2003) examined the representation of Asians as the “model minority” in advertisements. The researchers found the reiteration of the stereotypical Asian model minority, which assigns Asians the position of subordinate, quiet, smart, and willingness to participate in dominant white ideology/culture. These researchers argued that these advertisements were all filtered through the eyes of Anglo dominant culture and are, therefore, all products of a dominant racial ideology produced to perpetuate

racial hierarchization. They claim that although this stereotype seems harmless, and maybe, at first glance, even flattering for the Asian community, it fosters antagonism among minority groups and sometimes can cause personal identification problems among individuals in this group.

A second example of ideological analysis of the role of the media is offered by Signorelli (2004), who found—through a content analysis of prime-time network television programs between 1993 and 2002—that women between 50 and 64 were more often classified as “elderly” opposed to “middle age,” fulfilling the dominant show business ideology that women should strive to look younger. She argued that as “the images of older people tend to be based on longstanding stereotypes, the schemas that people, particularly children, may develop about aging may not reflect their own reality” (p. 280). In terms of ideological effects, she maintains that “for those who do not regularly interact with minorities (based on ethnicity, age, sex, etc.), television tells its audience about these groups and how they may be similar and/or different from other people” (p. 297).

The study of the ideological effects of media can also provide insight into the way that ideologies, including political ideology, produce and reproduce social relations of power. For instance, news outlets are one of the oldest forms of mass media, with purported values of objectivity that makes them impartial sources of truth about public affairs. And yet, everything from the people they quote to topic selection involves constructing an ideology. Further, because many news organizations are now corporate owned by only a few companies, media texts often represent a corporate viewpoint through news casts and publications. Looking at news media through a critical

perspective would lead to associate media content with the interests of large corporate owners (Fairclough, 1995).

From a different angle, researchers have discussed how media representations works to perpetuate certain gender ideologies. For instance, magazines are often studied as definite producers and reproducers of a dominant idea that says females should be very thin and attractive to the opposite sex. This idea is part of a broader, traditional gender ideology that has become a normative, dominant ideology. Dieting, exercising (while most forms are healthy, some magazines perpetuate unhealthy ideals about exercise and what can be achieved through it), and fashion are rolled together to form a dominant ideology. The critique of these representations and their impact become more salient as public awareness of problems, such as eating disorders and unstable mental health, grows. As images of skinny models are used to signify success, happiness, beauty, and wealth, concern has grown about the unhealthy effects on teen girls and women as well. These are ideas that have been found in previous research and will be further examined in online teen magazines in this paper.

In this research, Hall's theories of representation and ideology will guide the analysis and interpretation of texts. Hall has stated that "ideology is not a product of consciousness but consciousness is a product of ideological discourses" (Pietila, 2004, p. 239). He adds that ideologies are not concrete and are constantly changing and being redefined:

"Ideology also sets limits to the degree to which a society-in-dominance can easily, smoothly and functionally reproduce itself. The notion that the ideologies are always-already inscribed does not allow us to think adequately about the shifts

of accentuation in language and ideology, which is a constant, unending process”
(Hall, 1985, 113).

In order to study the links between language, ideology, and mass media, textual analysis is a relevant methodology that will be employed in this investigation. As Fairclough (1995) stated: “One very important achievement of this work is establishing that analysis of texts is a significant art of sociocultural analysis of media, by linking properties of texts to ideologies, power relations and cultural values” (p. 24).

Literature Review

The very definition of adolescence implies the development or transition from childhood to adulthood. Research has indicated that children and adults view mass media and the world in completely different ways, with children of different age groups having different cognitive abilities and viewing mass media differently from each other (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). Teen, on the other hand, are said to see the world like adults but make decisions like children (Kundanis, 2003). And when it comes to sexuality, teens also have particular ways of understanding and seeking information.

Research on how information about sex in the mass media affects teens is abundant. In “The Real Truth About Teens & Sex,” former *Seventeen* Editor-in-Chief Sabrina Weill (2005) wrote that many times teens will get information about sex from media if parents don’t answer their teens’ questions. In her advice to parents she stated:

Keep in mind that teens often fill in the blanks incorrectly when they’re given unclear or incomplete information. If you don’t make sure your teen knows the mechanics of how she can get pregnant (or how he can get a girl pregnant), all the

teen has to go on is what her friends tell her, or what she reads on the Internet.

(Weill, 2005, 133)

Obviously, teen magazines have some power in teen lives; the question for researchers is how much power these magazines actually have and how do they influence teens. Teen magazines have been studied from feminist, health, mass media, and communication approaches, using both text analysis and audience studies. These studies have shown that teen magazines do affect the perceptions of teens and their actions. This review will discuss some important findings from research on teen magazines in the fields of media communication, gender and health.

Teen magazines. Although magazines are not as ubiquitous as television, in general, they are highly popular among the teen demographic. According to the Teenmark survey, teens report yearly discretionary incomes from \$1,200 to \$4,500 for their own spending and also reported that among the top ten objects they had last purchased with their own money, magazines were number nine (Mediamark, 2004, p. 4). Most recently, 8 out of 10 teens, or 19.3 million, read magazines, according to the Mediamark Research Inc. Teenmark survey (2004, p. 10). This survey seems to focus on persuading corporations to advertise in teen magazines, stating, “skepticism is a common reaction to media messaging, but magazine advertising has been and continues to be the advertising medium that Teens — like other market segments — trust the most” (Mediamark, 2004, p.10)

Among magazines, *Seventeen* has consistently been one of the top three teen magazines since it was first published in 1944 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004, p. 1). Although it was forced to reposition itself in the 1990s media market to target an older

audience (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004), it has held onto the teen audience longer than some counterparts, such as *YM*—which published its last issue in 2004—and *Elle Girl*—which only lasted four years. But the magazine is definitely not alone in the market. In the 1990s, a growing teen market led to a teen magazine boom, with debuting publications like *Teen People*, *Cosmo Girl*, and *Teen Vogue*. *Cosmo Girl* published its last issue in December 2008.

Magazine content and teen perceptions of beauty and self image. Content analyses have shown that magazine coverage conveys traditional gender roles and construct a contradictory message to teens: that they should be happy with who they are while, at the same time, worry about how they will attract the opposite sex and find ways to look like ultra-thin models and celebrities featured in the magazines. And in effect, some audience studies have shown that teens who read magazines are more likely to want to look like celebrities (Hofshire & Greenberg, 2002), be dissatisfied with their bodies (Field, Cheung, Wolf, Herzog, Gortmaker, & Colditz, 1999), and be concerned about beauty and fashion (Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003). Furthermore, research on girls has suggested that the desire to look like airbrushed models and celebrities often comes with decisions to follow unhealthy diets, body dissatisfaction, and the desire to seek unattainable body types.

Studies have further concluded that dissatisfaction with body shape and weight has begun to affect girls at very young ages and led some to unhealthy behaviors in order to get ideal bodies. “Achieving beauty has become a continuous and all-encompassing project for adolescent girls—a goal the media portray as not only possible but necessary for the achievement of self-satisfaction, popularity, and success” (Labre & Walsh-

Childers, 2003, p. 379). Girls are becoming dissatisfied with their bodies at younger ages, and when they get older are taking steps to look more like the models by dieting and exercising (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009).

Typically, teen magazine content constructs two goals for girls: to be more beautiful and to find a boyfriend, the latter a goal that is, ultimately, achieved by gaining beauty. The girls who read these magazines learn that with physical beauty comes popularity, sex appeal, fashion, and boys. But being beautiful, however, is a little trickier than simply buying the magazine and following easy instructions. Labre and Walsh-Childers (2003) found, through a qualitative analysis of three popular teen magazine Web sites, that teens were being sold beauty metaphorically and also literally by emphasizing the use of beauty products. “Not only do the Web sites promote the centrality of female beauty in our society, but the unstated premise is ‘You are not OK as you are’... Girls’ body parts are presented as problems that must be fixed” (Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003, p. 390).

On the other hand, Chow (2004) conducted focus groups with two groups of teen girls and discussed the material presented in teen magazines. The teens discussed the perception of women being thin as ridiculous, but, Chow noted, with an envious tone. Chow suggested that, while the idea is seen as ridiculous, there is a standard set that being or working to be this thin is normal and should be worked for at all costs (2004, p. 135). In addition, teens discussed the sections of the magazines written from male-perspectives as sources of authority on what all males desired and considered that these desires should be taken as guidelines for conduct. Overall, Chow found that “readers set

the same magazine standard for themselves but their bodies were perceived as defective and in need of constant repair” (2004, p. 136).

As part of a longitudinal study, Duke (2000) conducted three focus groups (one with ten white teen girls, and the other two with eight black girls in each group) in order to find how black and white teen girls read teen magazines and whether their readings showed any differences. In the study, all of the girls (white and black) admitted that the content of teen magazines affects their white female peers’ perceptions of fashion, beauty and self image. However, none of the girls admitted that she was personally affected. Researchers asked the girls questions about teen magazines (each girl was given enough money to purchase the teen magazine of their choice, such as *Seventeen*, *YM* and *Teen*) such as “How do you read this magazine?” to more specific questions about what the magazines say about teen girls. The white girls responded to the questions with answers that focused more on physical attributes of beauty and dissatisfaction with their own bodies, while the black girls discussed character or personality attributes that made someone attractive and stated their satisfaction with their physical looks. As Shelly, one of the black participants, said:

I don’t have the mindset like I got to be perfect. Because how the Black environment is, there isn’t one specific way a Black girl has to be, so you fit in everywhere. . . In the White environment, they have a more specific way of how you are supposed to look and dress. (Duke, 2000, p. 379)

Basically, the black participants, stated that they were not affected by the images and perceptions in the magazine because the culture wasn’t their own, making the information and images less desirable.

The results of studies like these tend to reinforce the tenets of social learning theory, which states that people learn through observation and imitation (Miller, 2002, p. 252). Strasburger, Wilson, and Jordan (2009) have stated that through social learning theory children tend to accept actions from attractive people or people who look similar to themselves. In other words, a 12-year-old girl would be more inclined to buy a product that is demonstrated in an advertisement by an apparently similar looking 12-year-old girl. This theory may help us understand how the desire to look like celebrities makes teens more inclined to imitate behavioral models and accept the messages conveyed by those celebrities, while black girls who do not see celebrities or models who look similar to them--as the African-American participants in Duke's study showed--are, therefore, less inclined to be influenced.

Magazine content on teen sexuality and gender roles. Another area of research interest has been teen sexuality. A content analysis of sex related information in 16 teen's and women's magazines—including *Seventeen*, *Teen*, *Sassy*, and *YM*—found that while there was a slight increase of sexual health-related information found in teen magazines between the 1986-1989 (50.1 percent) and 1993-1996 (53.3 percent), the increase in sexual content not related to health increased by 80 percent during the same periods (Walsh-Childers, Gotthoffer, & Lepre, 2002). The health related sex content in teen magazines during the 1993-1996 period was 43.2 percent. Overall, teen magazines were more likely to mention the use of protective contraceptives and protection against STDs. In terms of sexual content not related to health issues, teen magazines tend to place much more emphasis on sex, setting sex up as an expectation for teens.

Carpenter (2001) conducted a qualitative and quantitative study of coverage of sexuality in issues of *Seventeen* magazine selected from over three decades of publication. Carpenter found that over time the magazine had expanded its sexual information to include topics like oral sex, homosexuality, masturbation, and female desires. However, the magazine still portrayed traditional gender roles favorably, thus, countering the effects of the somewhat progressive sexual content. Similarly, Jackson (2005a, 2005b) conducted qualitative text analysis of advice columns in teen magazines in Australia and New Zealand and found similar results to Carpenter, in that they created a sense of giving teens better knowledge about sexuality than traditionally found in teen magazines, but still maintained emphasis on many traditional gender roles and female stereotypes.

These studies point to the role of teen magazines in the perpetuation of traditional gender ideologies. From this angle, Record (2002) has studied the political economy of teen magazines and the ideologies constructed for women. Looking at the political economy of *Seventeen* magazine as a postwar publication, Record discussed the politics of the United States and the ideologies recreated for women, including teen girls, who were to return to the life of domesticity after working during the war. She argued that in order to make this more accepting for females, mainstream media composed messages celebrating domesticity. For example *Seventeen* encouraged man-finding and actions that would lead to what publications wanted to portray as dream roles in life as wives and mothers. This emphasis on domesticity, and a dominant gender ideology, proved profitable. The magazine has lasted to the present, and has been the leading teen magazine since its inception over 60 years ago.

Likewise, Schlenker, Caron, and Halteman (1998) conducted a content analysis of *Seventeen* magazine over six decades. The purpose of the study was to determine progress in the portrayal of gender roles over time, and to see what effect(s) feminist movements may have had on magazines and if any such changes were sustained. Overall, research found changes in the decades in which feminist activism was more active and publicly visible, that is in 1945, 1975 and 1995. The women's movement that affected the 1975 issues was shown to have lasting changes in the magazine. Yet, improvements seen in the magazine through the inclusion of more information about girls becoming independent, career related content, and coverage of world or political issues did not change or undermine its primary emphasis on beauty. In addition, the study found that the message that physical beauty was to be attained at all costs was still prevalent; and that "the largest percentage of pages [in all issues] was devoted to articles about appearance" (Schlenker, Caron, & Halteman, 1998, p. 147). In another study, Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) reviewed five teen magazines for information on sex, presented in advice columns and other related articles. The researchers found that the "sexual community belongs to men, and women survive by containing themselves and by adapting and subjugating themselves to male desires" (Garner, et al., 1998, p. 73). Along these lines, a Kaiser Family Foundation study on gender stereotypes in the media found there was twice as much content in teen magazines about dating than there was about school or careers (Signorelli, 1997, p. 28).

Effects of teen magazine reading on health behaviors of adolescent girls.

Research has also shown the influence and effects of magazine content on health behaviors. For instance, teen dissatisfaction with body image often found in these studies

has been correlated with unhealthy decisions and lifestyles among teens. Field, Cheung, Wolf, Herzog, Gortmaker, and Colditz (1999) surveyed 548 students in 5th through 12th grades to examine weight issues, including perceptions of ideal body, weight-loss techniques, exercise, and more. The researchers found a strong correlation between reading teen magazines and the discontentment with body shape and weight (1999, p. 1). While only 29 percent of the girls reported being overweight, 59 percent reported being unhappy with their bodies and 66 percent said they wanted to lose weight (Field, et al., 1999, p. 3).

The frequency of reading fashion magazines was positively and independently associated with dieting and exercising to lose weight. Moreover, the more frequently girls read fashion magazines, the more likely they were to report that they had dieted or initiated an exercise program to lose weight because of a magazine article. (Field, et al., 1999, p. 5)

Another study found that teens were more likely to purge or use laxatives to control their weight when they had the desire to look like a celebrity seen on television or in magazines (Field, Camargo, et al., 1999).

In addition, Utter, Neumark-Sztainer, Wall and Story (2003) used a survey to find the relationship between magazine reading and psychosocial behavior—such as binge eating and body dissatisfaction—among 4,746 middle and high school students. Researchers found that teen girls who read magazine articles concerning dieting and weight loss were more likely to engage in weight control behaviors. They also found that girls often cited wanting to lose weight based on ideal bodies found in mass media and photos of models.

A survey by the activist organization Media Awareness Network warned against the unrealistic messages of teen magazines and how they can cause serious effects on teens: “In 2003, *Teen* magazine reported that 35 percent of girls 6 to 12 years old have been on at least one diet, and that 50 to 70 percent of normal weight girls believe they are overweight” (Media Awareness Network, 2008). One positive aspect is a study that showed an increase in exercise by teens who desired to look like a celebrity (Taveras, et al., 2004). This is positive because during adolescents, teens typically exercise less, and by aspiring to look like a favorite celebrity teens are exercising more.

In sum, there is no doubt that each of these studies has further advanced the understanding of the impact of teen magazines on teenage girls. However, each of these studies has a very specific area of research—audience ideas of beauty created through magazines, how those ideas of beauty cause specific reactions like bingeing and the development of eating disorders, or how teen magazine topics are framed around different feminist movements. My study will use this knowledge to guide my research of online teen magazines’ construction of teen sexuality.

Chapter 3

Method

This analysis of teen magazine coverage of adolescent sexuality aims to elucidate how these media represent teen sexuality and construct discourses that teach teens about sex and inscribe certain gender ideologies among young readers. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do online teen magazines represent adolescent sexuality?
2. What journalistic conventions are used to construct a discourse on teen sexuality?
3. What are the ideological effects of the adolescent sexuality discourse in teen magazines?

In this study, representations of adolescent sexuality will be operationalized as linguistic content referring to feelings and behaviors associated with sexual attraction, intimacy, intercourse and its consequences, as presented through diverse topics (for instance, flirting, sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted diseases, abstinence, pregnancy, birth control, etc), and journalistic genres (news, features, advice columns, interactive games, etc.).

The term discourse refers here to ways in which regularity among thematic choices, types of statements, images and concepts gives meaning to experience from particular points of view and thus contribute to the construction of identities, social relations and systems of knowledge (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002; Fairclough, 1995). Of particular interest for this research is the notion that discourse operates through different domains, that is, the various areas of knowledge production and social life through which

we learn about sexuality. For instance, sexuality may be represented through the domains of the medical, erotic, romantic, moralist, religious, feminist, or scientific discourses. Domains of discourse are discursive fragments that may be complementary or contradictory and combine to delineate competing visions and understandings of sexuality.

The ideological effects of media representation have been defined by Hall (1977) as the way media producers employ existing narrative conventions to assign meaning to new events within pre-established cultural maps of meanings. As a result of this process of signification, recurrent meanings come to be perceived as common sense and natural.

Methodological procedures

In order to analyze teen magazine content, this research employs the model created by Pan & Kosicki (1993) for frame analysis of news content. Originally developed by the authors to analyze news, or factual accounts of timely events, the model is applicable to teen magazines because they are a form of print media with many of the same characteristics of news. In addition, Pan & Kosicki's frame analysis is a strategy that allows the researcher to make connections between the text, politics of representation, and discourses on social relations.

In this approach, frames are defined as main organizing patterns that suggest salient meanings and a central theme or idea. Frames are constituted through four structures that are open to analysis: thematic, rhetorical, syntactic, and script. The overarching idea behind thematic analysis is that media texts have a "multilayer hierarchy with a theme being the central core connecting various subthemes as the major nodes that, in turn, are connected to supporting elements" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 61). For

example, the theme of rituals of romance is a cluster of meaning that includes subthemes like kissing, flirting, dating, and breaking up. Rhetorical structure refers to the stylistic choices made by the writers, such as word choice, metaphors, euphemisms, or exemplars. Examples of rhetorical choices include the differential use of the terms “guys” to refer to boys or the particular use of the word “girls.” The rhetorical structure will be used to analyze how the language contributes to construction of the discourse on teen sexuality and gender relations. In this study, thematic and rhetorical analyses will help address Research Question 1 and will facilitate the identification of domains of discourse, as defined above.

The syntactic structure is the way in which the semantic elements within a media text (i.e., headlines and sub-headlines, lead paragraph, quotes from sources, episodes, background, and closing) are organized according to conventional journalistic practices to stress a particular point and lend credibility to the writers. For example, writers may use the conventional inverted pyramid format as the syntactic structure. The inverted pyramid refers to a sequential organization of facts and ideas in descending order of importance (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 59). Although not many of the texts from these teen magazine Web sites are expected to follow this traditional news structure, they will likely have a particular pattern of presenting information to stress the importance of some points. In this respect, the data was coded to identify authors of the stories, persons who answered the reader’s questions, and persons quoted in an article, and the ordering of information in the stories.

Script structures refer to the conventional news genres or formats that, overtime, create a set of expectations in the audience, establish a tone in the coverage, and assign

particular positions to the producers of text and the readers. Example of scripts include the hard news report, the advice column or the political column, the editorial, the letter to the editor, the news quiz, or the human interest feature. The analysis will also focus on how genres of media set a particular tone in the discourse, such as a playful, authoritative, or impersonal. Further, it will examine the particular positions assigned to the writer of the text and the readers. The analyses of syntactic and script structures will help address Research Question 2.

Data collection. Informed by this qualitative method, texts from three teen magazine Web sites were collected over a seven-day period during the week of August 10, 2009. I selected *Seventeen.com*, *TeenMag.com*, and *Cosmo Girl.com* as texts because they are among the top ten magazines in the country according to *magazines.com* (2009). *Seventeen* has been one of the top, if not the number one, magazines in the country since its inception in 1944, and it is the magazine that really began the teen magazine format in the United States.

I visited all three Web sites and collected data pertaining to teen sexuality. I selected content that referred to facts, opinions, feelings and behaviors associated with sexual attraction, intimacy, and intercourse and its consequences, as presented through diverse topics (for instance, flirting, sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted diseases, abstinence, pregnancy, birth control, etc), and through different story formats (news, features, advice columns, interactive games, etc.). Text and photos were gathered, however, only the text was analyzed using frame analysis. The units of analysis were the individual stories formatted as advice columns, feature articles, Q&A sections, news, and

interactive games of varying lengths. Note that in the discussion of findings, I will refer to these units of analysis as “articles” despite their diverse formats.

Over the course of seven days, from August 10 to August 16, 2009, I collected 101 items from *Seventeen.com*, 71 articles from *Teen.com*, and 79 from *Cosmo Girl.com*. These articles were identified first by following links on the home page of each Web site, and then following links from the secondary pages further into other embedded pages. What follows is a description of the home pages of each of the magazines examined.

Seventeen. The first magazine analyzed was *Seventeen*, one of the, if not the, top teen magazines in the country throughout its entire history. Owned by Hearst Corporation *Seventeen* was not the first online teen magazine. It followed in the footsteps of other younger magazines in December 2008, when it launched *Seventeen.com* with support from MTV, a cable television that, at this time, has a target audience in teenagers. Its website is much like the other two magazines. At the very top, is an advertisement that is narrow and spans the entire width of the page; this advertisement is usually for products that appeal to teens, such as Clean & Clear acne products or the chance to win a \$500 shopping spree. Just under the banner advertisement is a line of horizontal links that spans the same width as the advertisement, with key links to customer service sites, like subscription information, some of the magazines links, newsletters and other interactive elements, and a “Sign In” link for interactive pages on the site.

Below are the magazine’s flag and a search bar. Just below, another set of links with different, more prominent, links to the different sections of the web magazine. These sections are Fashion, Hair+Skin+Makeup, Health+Sex+Fitness, Dating, College+Career, Fun Stuff, and Magazine. The most popular or prominent stories are featured in a large

grey box, which also has the “Sign In” boxes for teens who are members of the website. In this large grey box, the featured articles and topics flash between three to four topics and one link that encourages teens to subscribe to the traditional version of the magazine, which still exists. In addition to the featured stories and topics, there are featured stories and topics provided next to this grey box from each section. Underneath the grey box is a box with “The Latest” featured topics, and to the right of this is a box with featured video of the day. The first image displayed is typically of celebrity women or models and many of the featured links and stories focus on physical beauty and items and materials that can enhance that, like fashion, makeup and exercise or dieting. The second most prominent topic featured on the homepage is about the opposite sex, or boys: how to get them, how to keep them, what they want, and what they like. Lastly, the homepage features stories about self improvement or self-fulfillment, such as college advice and interactive quizzes. The page is cluttered and is about half magazine content and half advertisements. Using the featured links that were about sex and relationships as well as the search menu, I collected 101 articles.

Teen. *Teen* magazine, also owned by Hearst Corporation, was one of the teen magazine genre’s top contenders along with *Seventeen* through the mid 1990s. Set up very similarly to *Seventeen*, *Teen* has a bubblier, younger appeal. This can be seen when comparing their fonts. *Seventeen* uses a serif font but in playful girlish colors, appealing to the teenage girl who wants to be older. According to the Hearst Corporation website and media kit for *Seventeen* magazine, the average age of their readers is 16.4. Because *Seventeen* is the only Hearst teen magazine still in print, there aren’t online media kits for *Teen*, or *Cosmo Girl*. However, based on the font for the *Teen* flag, which is multi-

colored and in a bubbly sans-serif font, the audience is slightly younger. At the top of the page is the *Teen* flag, in this flag (from left to right) is the website address (teenmag.com) and links to Celeb Stuff, Video, Advice, Fun, Seen in *Teen*, Quizzes and Win!. The left diagonal bar (from top to bottom) is a set of advertisements for other sections of *Teen* and other teen magazines published by Hearst.

The main box displays the featured stories of the magazine, like “Prom Pretty 2009” and “12 Days of ‘Twilight.’” Below are featured articles from four of the main sections, almost like teasers about topics like, “I really like my friend’s boyfriend and I think he likes me! Is it OK for me to pursue?” and “Wonder what prom was like for some of today’s hottest stars? They told us and we’re sharing!” Below these boxes, is a box advertisement similar to the teasers and a bottom banner advertisement both usually for *Seventeen* magazine and/or retail stores or beauty products. On the right, there are two small boxes with featured quizzes, advertisements, and polls. Using the Advice and Quizzes sections, and the search tool, I collected 71 articles from teenmag.com.

Cosmo Girl. A newcomer, the magazine started in 1999 by Atoosa Rubenstein, former editor-in-chief of *Seventeen* magazine. The magazine, the first teen magazine to go digital in November 2007, is slightly different because of its structure and content. While *Seventeen* and *Teen* use the more traditional structure for teen magazines, with the majority of content being advice columns, *Cosmo Girl*’s content contained more featured articles and quizzes, inspiring more interactivity. It featured a smaller advertisement at the top of the page that, when scrolled over with a cursor, would open to be a larger banner advertisement allowing *Cosmo Girl*’s flag to appear larger along with feature

giveaways from their own site (weekly prizes from the site's sponsors). On the left there is an advertisement and above it a small box with "Editor's Picks."

In the center there is a main box, as in *Teen* and *Seventeen*, but this one is a scrolling box with featured articles. The photos are a bit racier, often showing intimate looking contact between teen boys and girls. Examples of featured topics are: "Just how naughty are you?" and "Beauty obsessed." Below this box are more featured topics in separate boxes. Quiz and video boxes are just below the main featured box, and six smaller boxes refer to features like "What's Hot," with information about beauty, fashion, entertainment, guys, life advice, and fun. These tabs are also featured at the top of the page, just below the flag and search bar, in addition to horoscopes, fun & games, free stuff and connect. On the right, is an advertisement, a link to *Cosmo Girl's* blog, "The Daily Kiss," and additional advertisements surrounding a link to videos of celebrity interviews and photo shoots. At the bottom of the page, there are box advertisements and a banner advertisement for *Seventeen* and other *Cosmo Girl* features. Using the life advice, guys, and fun&games categories, as well as the search tool, I collected 79 articles about sex and relationships from *Cosmo Girl*.

Coding and analysis. Using Pan and Kosicki's four dimensions of news discourse to analyze each unit of analysis, I developed a five-step coding process. I started my analysis with the identification of themes or key ideas stressed on each article. While identifying themes, I also identified scripts, or the format for each article. These scripts were first based on each article's similarity in terms of structure and my knowledge of magazine and news conventions. After I determined the most common scripts, I identified the syntactic structures for each script. The syntactic structures were

broken down based on their syntactical elements, such as headlines, subheadings, leads, body, closing, sources used, and authors. These syntactical structures were also determined based on my knowledge of news and magazine writing styles. and the similarities in the syntax of the articles examined. Lastly, I read through each article again, looking for interesting and meaningful rhetorical dimensions such as word choice, adjectives, and tone in coverage. In a final step, I analyzed the saliency, frequency, and relationship among themes to establish how they suggested primary and secondary framing patterns, and how rhetorical, syntactic, and script structures related to one another to support the frames. In the next section, I present the results of this analysis through a description of a primary and three secondary frames found in coverage. The primary frame was determined based on saliency and frequency; secondary frames were propositions that appear less frequently and complemented or contradicted the primary frame. Once the findings were determined, I compared each magazine's content to assess significant similarities and differences.

Chapter Four

Findings

By identifying salient framing patterns in *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *Cosmo Girl*, I was able to analyze the discourse on teenage sexuality in these online teen magazines. In the first section of this chapter, I present the results of the frame analysis by discussing a primary frame and three secondary frames salient in coverage, with emphasis on the themes that support the frames. After presenting primary and secondary frames and their thematic structures, I highlight salient rhetorical features observed in coverage and how they relate to the core propositions of the frames. In the next section, I discuss the script and syntactic structures that also support the frames identified. Throughout the chapter, examples from headlines, leads, body, and other semantic elements of the articles will be given to illustrate major framing structures.

As the discussion below highlights, the primary frame—or main organizing pattern that suggests dominant meanings and macropropositions regarding sexuality—was similar amongst *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *Cosmo Girl*. In all three magazines, sexuality is represented primarily as a function of romance within a heterosexual relationship even though each of these magazines presents different areas of emphasis in coverage. For instance, while *Seventeen* and *Teen* privileged the framing of sexuality as an element of forming a stable and long-term romantic relationship, *Cosmo Girl* also incorporated the framing of sexuality as pleasure and fun in casual relationships. Yet, they all shared the framing of sexuality as part of a romantic heterosexual relationship as the dominant frame.

In the mapping of the discourse on teenage sexuality I found that this primary frame is complemented by three secondary frames that, often overlapping, appeared in *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *Cosmo Girl*. These were secondary frames in all three magazines, however, the idea of personal pleasure was found to be more salient in *Cosmo Girl*. These secondary frames are: sexuality as a reflection of self and personal growth; sexuality as personal pleasure; and sexuality as a biological, health, and reproductive issue. The frames are supported by a set of themes and rhetorical choices that offer seemingly fragmented and contradictory propositions about teen sexuality for girls. Furthermore, the frames are articulated through two primary scripts—the question-and-answer format and the teen story format—and a syntactic structure that combine to assign girl readers a subordinate position power vis-à-vis boys, columnists, and other sources of information that are constructed as voices of knowledge and authority over girls. This chapter provides answers to research questions with evidence from content analyzed, leading to the discussion of question 3 on ideological effects of coverage in the next chapter.

The Primary Frame and Its Thematic Structure

Framing sexuality as a function of boy-girl romantic relationships. The three online teen magazines constructed a discourse on sexuality through a common dominant frame: sexuality as a function of a romantic relationship between a boy and a girl. Within this frame, reference to feelings and actions associated with sexual attraction and behavior (for example flirting, kissing, “making out,” fantasizing, masturbation, intercourse, pregnancy) are constructed within the context of romance (often through reference to rituals like chivalry, dating, proposing, committing to a monogamous

relationship, demonstrating loving feelings through gifts and other gestures of affection and consideration) between a female and a male. Furthermore, these articles about sexuality suggest that sex happens or is acceptable between a boy and a girl who would like to be, if they are not already, in a romantic relationship as boyfriend and girlfriend. More specifically, this frame has three main, interrelated propositions. First, that sexuality is subordinated to rituals of finding, keeping, and succeeding in a romantic relationship. Second, that it is to be expected that boys will be the initiators of sexual behavior but girls will be responsible for making the right decisions about sexuality based on affective and moral considerations. Third, that sexual attraction is acceptable and sexual behavior understandable if they are part of a romantic, monogamous and heterosexual relationship marked by male traditional gender performance and male dominance. This frame was the most frequently constructed across magazines and in all types of articles.

Examples of this frame are abundant. An advice column from *Teen*, titled “I know he’s using me, so why do I still love him?” (n.d.) was centered on Hopelessly Devoted, 15, who was concerned that her on-and-off boyfriend, and her “first,” was only interested in her because she was willing to have sexual intercourse with him. The headline of this article touches on all the propositions of the dominant frame: the boy as the active agent pursuing a sexual relationship, the girl’s compliance although she is interacting sexually only to maintain an emotional and romantic relationship, and the girl as the agent seeking to make moral and affective decisions in the relationship. The advice offered by the columnist further reinforces the message by emphasizing three main points: 1) sex is appropriate if the relationship between a boy and girl is respectful, consensual, long-term,

and loving; 2) girls should consider that boys can be expected to desire only a physical relationship and are willing to pretend to be emotionally involved a means to an end; and 3) it is common to assume that boys often lead the relationship and girls follow.

In *Seventeen*, the article “I’m not ready to have sex” (2006) is an advice column discussing the concern of a 14-year-old who felt she could be pressured into having sex. This teen had received sexual propositions in the past from boys and rejected them because the boys were not her boyfriends. Now that she had boyfriend, she wonders whether she could feel obligated to have sex with him in the near future. The columnist suggests that pressure may be a sign that a boy does not really “like” a girl, and in that case, sexual intercourse is not the right decision. The article also indicates that the decision to have sex would be appropriate if the girl “truly feel(s) connected to him on a deeper level.” The advice giver then states: “Sex is a really intimate experience that should be shared by two people in a very serious, long-term, monogamous relationship.” This advice re-establishes that sex is acceptable if it takes place within a particular type of affective relationship. In addition, the advice suggests that boys will always lead girls in relationships to initiate sexual intercourse, and that it is the girl the one that makes the moral reasoning as to the appropriateness and meanings of sex.

In other articles, these propositions are not as salient on the text’s surface but are present nonetheless. For instance, in a *Seventeen* article, a 16-year-old girl named Ann was seeking advice about disclosing that she has been “faking a pregnancy” (“I faked,” 2007). While the article’s central focus is first on reproduction, the propositions that a misguided decision to pretend to be pregnant is a way to maintain the “attention” of a boyfriend and that a moral decision to be truthful must be made by the girl are at the core

of the advice given to the reader. In *Cosmo Girl*, there is an overarching assumption--just as in other online teen magazines--that readers are heterosexual girls who are interested in stories, articles, quizzes, and discussions regarding sexuality as part of the greater goal of finding or keeping a romantic relationship with a boy. In an article titled "Five hot new kisses"(2006), the anonymous author provides instructions for "letting your crush know just how much he means." The five kisses are: "getting-to-know-him kiss," "endless-moment kiss," "bubble-delicious kiss," "free-spirit kiss," and "take my-breath-away kiss." Through instructions and descriptions of each kiss, the author suggests that kissing, one of the rituals of romance, is performed only between boys and girls. And though the implication that there is personal pleasure for girls while performing these kisses is present, there is also the premise that the girls' pleasure is in function of the boys' pleasure.

Only in *Cosmo Girl* I found two articles about homosexual or ambiguous relationships. The article titled "declaration of love" (n.d.) is a story submitted by an anonymous teen about a very flattering and brave announcement made by her girlfriend. At first, the article seems as though it could have been written by a male; then, this sentence appears: "All of a sudden I heard, 'Candace loves Stephanie!' coming over the loudspeakers in the park!" ("declaration of love," n.d., para. 1). The other article that includes an ambiguous relationship is titled "far and away" (n.d.). It discusses a long-term relationship where a girlfriend moves out of the country. However, the sex of the teen author is never discussed and therefore unknown. In *Teen* and *Seventeen*, it could be assumed the author was a male; however, because of *Cosmo Girl's* edgier take on online teen magazines--an aspect to be discussed in later sections--this is considered to be an

ambiguous relationship. In one article in *Seventeen*, a teen girl asks for advice regarding her bi-sexual boyfriend. However, the advice given stressed the issue of trust and disloyalty in a monogamous relationship rather than the sexual orientation of the boyfriend. These were, however, the only three articles amongst hundreds surveyed that departed from the focus on boy-girl relationship. Besides these two articles, the most salient frame is that of sexuality in the context of a heterosexual romantic relationship where boys lead and girls seek to gain their attention through conventional gender performance. The prevalence of this frame is not a surprise here, considering previous research findings that have suggested that teen magazines teach mainstream ideas about societal expectations regarding romantic relationships, including the assumption that these are heterosexual.

Thematic structures supporting the primary frame. This primary frame is supported by a thematic cluster that features three interrelated themes: traditional gender roles, rituals of romance, and morality. The theme labeled traditional gender roles is the re-iteration of stereotypical and conventional roles that assign dominance to men over women. This is articulated through emphasis on the ideas that boys are strong, leaders, initiators of sexual behavior, and emotionally detached while girls who follow the boys' initiative, are weak and emotionally dependent. Rituals of romance is a theme found in most articles where columnists and editors suggest that relationships develop through the performance of a set of socially acceptable rules of interaction such as flirting, courting, dating, and breaking up a relationship. The assumption here is that without these rituals healthy romantic relationships—with sexuality as a dimension of the relationship—would not be established, maintained or terminated. Morality is a theme that emphasizes the

solution of moral dilemmas regarding issues like having sexual intercourse, dating boys who already are in relationships with other girls, or flirting with boys who are committed to relationships with the girl's sister or girlfriends. Within this theme, sexuality is linked to moral judgment, family values, feelings of self-worth, and personal reputation. Although distinct, these themes often overlap in coverage to give the primary frame its coherence and meaning.

For example, the themes traditional gender roles and rituals of romance are articulated through rhetoric and story formats that emphasize male dominance and stereotypical gender performance. Male dominance is the demonstration of the authority or power that boys have over girls, while stereotypical gender performance refers to the enactment of conventional notions of manhood and womanhood. While manhood is associated with physical strength, emotional detachment, protection of a weak female, and an immature character, womanhood is associated with emotional vulnerability, physical weakness, the need to nurture others, and a more mature character).

These interrelated ideas appear, for instance, in articles that discuss how to “make a boy happy” or how to please him and that prescribe actions that reproduce traditional gender roles. In such articles, males state their preferences in regards to the appearance and behavior of girls and dictate various forms of pleasure they seek, while females are supposed to use the information to attract their attention and please them. As the examples below indicate, although the preferences and behaviors prescribed are not necessarily sexual in nature, they do work to establish male authority and female consent in the construction of boy-girl romantic relations. Perhaps the best example of this thematic structure is seen in articles that ask boys directly for their preference or opinion

concerning girls' behaviors or appearance. This type of feature article is a format that appeared in all magazines. In *Teen*, for example, "10 things guys love about girls..." (n.d.) offers a list of behaviors and traits that boys found particularly "girly" and appealing. One of them is wearing flavored lipstick: "Four out of five guys admit sweet lips make kissing more exciting" ("10 things guys," n.d., para. 7); another is the use of "silly" computer identification names: "Your silly screen name. Kissytinkerbell87? Luvbugjessica? The truth is, some boys think these monikers are charming in a girlie-girl sorta way" ("10 things guys," n.d., para. 21).

Likewise, *Seventeen* features a section that lets girls ask boys what they think about particular topics. In one instance, when boys were asked "What's your biggest turn off?" (n.d.) they gave these answers: "Excessive hair or really muscular," Connor, 15; "Easiness and being ditzy," Nick, 17; and "A girl who doesn't know what she wants in life," Alan, 16. "Guys," as they're referred to, are also asked questions regarding how girls can make them happy, as in articles like "25 Ways to show you love him" (n.d.) in *Teen*, "What's the best thing a girl can wear on a date?" (n.d.) in *Seventeen*, or "Five ways to ruin a date" (n.d.) in *Teen*. Evidently, boys are asked what they like and want so that the girls can accommodate to the expected roles.

Another way in which stereotypical gender roles are reproduced is through the design of the ever popular quiz with multiple choice questions that seek to test knowledge about self, dating, and developing romantic relationships with boys. In one example from *Cosmo Girl*, girls answering the questions posed in a quiz have to choose from three choices that not only describe women through common stereotypes but also ask girls to identify with them. Girls who choose the most demure choices are given results that refer

to them as “rookies” (“What’s your kissing I.Q.?” n.d.) “virgins” (“Test your safe sex smarts” n.d.) and “pixies” (“Are you a tease?” n.d.). In the quiz in *Cosmo Girl* titled, “What’s your kissing I.Q.?” (n.d.) readers are asked, “What are you wearing on your lips right now?” to which their options for response are: “shimmery gloss,” “cinnamon flavored lip plumper,” and “chapstick.” These choices are ways in which three stereotypes of the female character are reinforced through rhetorical structures, with cinnamon suggesting the personality of a girl who cannot control herself and is too interested in sexuality and chapstick suggesting low sex appeal.

The second salient theme supporting the primary frame is rituals of romance, which locates sexuality within the discussion of ritualistic forms of expressing romantic feeling and action, like “crushing” (having interest in someone from afar), courtship, dating, kissing, “making out,” “hooking up,” sexual intercourse, breaking up, and working to keep a relationship together. In general, this theme places these expression of sexual feelings and behaviors within the larger scheme or “game” of finding, securing, maintaining, and ending a romantic relationship. And very often, this discussion reiterates the performance of traditional gender roles.

Within this thematic cluster, kissing and “making out” may be the most often discussed rituals of romance in all magazines, primarily in response to the questions posed by readers about first kisses or about when or how to kiss. For example, in a question-and-answer column in *Teen* titled “First Kiss” (n.d.) the reader states: “My boyfriend and I have been dating for a while and I’m ready to kiss him. I think. The thing is that I’m new at this. How do I keep from feeling dorky?” (para. 1). But kissing is part of a wide and diverse range of actions constructed as rituals of romance. In *Cosmo Girl*, the column

“Ask The Advice Girl” (n.d.) can be used to illustrate this range. The column offers readers answers from an anonymous “Advice Girl” on different aspects of romance. In only one column, the Advice Girl can address questions like these: “I really want to know who my soulmate is. Can you tell me how to find my soulmate?” (para. 2), or “Do you have any advice on how to give hickeys, and how to get rid of them?” (para. 18) or “There is this guy that I really have begun to like. My friend gave me his number, but is it okay to text him out of the blue and see if he remembers me?” (para. 34). Each question refers to a different ritual of romance. And often, the columnist makes recommendations that reiterate traditional gender roles. For instance, the Advice Girl’s answer to the question regarding texting a “crush” did recommend that the girl to send a text message to the boy, but warned her about being too forward and overstepping the boundaries of “dating laws:” “Whatever you do, don’t text him twice in a row. And if he texts you, don’t text back right away – give it a couple of hours so you look cool and casual” (para. 43).

Dating is another ritual of romance that is a recurrent topic of coverage. In all magazines, there is a tendency to frame dating as a game with particular rules to be played in order to win the attention and affection of a boy. This theme also reproduces stereotypical gender performance for it is the girl who has to play, guess, manipulate or accommodate to the boy’s agenda. For example, an advice feature in *Cosmo Girl*, titled “Dater’s Law” (n.d.), addresses the various laws of dating that “your mom...relied on when she was your age” as well as the “modern” rules of dating, according to a *Cosmo Girl* writer. This article, although claiming to be modern because it provides guidelines on when to break the rules, re-establishes many stereotypical gender roles and reinforces

male dominance by constructing dating as a game that gives boys the center stage in the relationship. The excerpt below illustrates how readers learn about the rule, and when to use it or break it in the game of dating:

Never text, call, e-mail, or IM him first.

“Even if you hit it off, let him be the one to text or MySpace you first. That way, you know he’s into you.” –Cari, 22, East Brunswick, NJ

when to use it: This rule sounds old-fashioned, but most of the time, it just works. It’s basic guy nature to want to feel like he worked hard to get you. They like to call first, so let them. If he doesn’t make that effort, then you know he’s not worth yours.

when to break it: if you know the guy’s painfully shy, you may need to gently reach out to him first (or risk waiting forever!). Flirt in person until he hints he’s into you. *Then* text him something causal to open the door to being more than friends. (“Dater’s Law,” n.d., para. 14-17)

Another example is the quiz titled “How much do you know about the opposite sex?” (n.d.) in *Teen*. This feature is a model example of the socialization of teens into the “game” males and females should play in order to communicate properly about romantic and sexual relationships. The first question is structured as follows:

Question 1: He sees you coming his way and he suddenly starts clowning around with his buddies. As you pass by he barely even makes eye contact. You shrug and walk on. Obviously:

- a. he’s letting you know he’s not into you by ignoring you.
- b. he’s a show off who just wants to be the center of attention.

c. he's pretty interested in you, but feels too awkward to do anything about it. (para. 1)

According to this quiz, if a girl can interpret his "stereotypical" male actions correctly, then she understand boys. However if she chooses the wrong answer, option c, she has "no clue." This assumption that males will perform in a certain, predictable way, and that females should react or accommodate accordingly to play the romantic game is a common theme across many articles in these two magazines. Such content helps to reinforce the idea of males as authority and women as pleasers.

In contrast to rituals of romance, the theme labeled morality refers more explicitly to questions about sexual attraction and sexual contact and their aftermath. Morality is a theme constructed through two rhetorical structures: the moral dilemma presented by the teen reader and the "right" decision recommended by the advice giver. This theme was not as prominent in *Cosmo Girl* but was often discussed in *Seventeen* and *Teen*. The dilemmas presented by teens usually involve situations where teens feel the pressure to choose actions that may go against their values or morals. Common dilemmas relate to whether to have sexual intercourse for the first time, how to react to pressure to have sex, whether to cheat on boyfriends and girlfriends, how to deal with conflicting feelings regarding a boyfriend or crush, and how to maintain a good reputation. The "right" decisions offered by columnists are sometimes presented as a series of choices given to girls to evaluate on their own actions based on their values, or as solutions prescribed to the readers by the advice columnists. However, those options are typically offered with a personal recommendation that clearly expresses the moral standing of the advice giver, rather than a offering many options that consider all possible values.

In *Seventeen*, the article “I’m not ready to have sex” (2006) is an advice column discussing the situation of a 14-year-old who feels she might be pressured into having sex. This teen had received sexual propositions from several boys in the past but rejected them because they were not her boyfriends. Now that she had a boyfriend, the reader felt that she might be obligated to have sex with him in the near future. Although this article differs from the one presented above in that this girl has not yet had sexual intercourse, the advice given is very similar. The columnist suggests that pressure may be a sign that a boy does not really “like” a girl, and in that case, sexual intercourse is not the right decision. The article also indicates that the decision to have sex would be appropriate if the girl “truly feel(s) connected to him on a deeper level.” The advice giver then states: “Sex is a really intimate experience that should be shared by two people in a very serious, long-term, monogamous relationship” (para. 3). This advice re-establishes that sex is acceptable if it takes place within a particular type of affective relationship. In addition, the advice suggests that boys will always lead girls in relationships to initiate sexual intercourse, and that it is the girl the one that makes the moral reasoning as to the appropriateness and meanings of sex.

In another example, an article in *Seventeen*, titled “Should I tell my boyfriend I cheated?” (2005), presents the dilemma of a 17-year-old who promised her boyfriend—who had been cheated on in a previous relationship—that she would not betray him but did have a “make out session” with another boy during a trip out of town. Although the teens were planning to break up regardless of her disloyalty, she wants to remain his friend and wants to know whether she should be truthful and tell him about her indiscretion. Yet the advice given is not a pragmatic answer to the teen’s question, which

was simply, “what should I do?” The columnist’s advice is, instead, a discussion on the emotional maturity teens lack to carry on monogamous relationships and, therefore, cheating is “not the right thing to do” (para. 2). The columnist offers his or her own moral advice without offering an answer or solution to the teen’s problem. This push of personal values by the advice giver demonstrates an unwillingness to explore outside or alternative values. Thus, the traditional ideologies of romantic relationships, such as heteronormativity, are continually represented as the only answers and codes of conduct for teen girls.

Secondary Frames and Their Thematic Structures

In the mapping of the discourse on teenage sexuality, I found that this primary frame is supported by secondary frames that, often overlapping, appeared in *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *Cosmo Girl*. Secondary frames work to support primary frames, just as themes worked to support each frame, by providing salient ideals that contribute to or make up the primary frame of sexuality as a function of boy-girl romantic relationships. Each secondary frame was found to be salient in each magazine. The secondary frames are three key frames that, together, define the parts of a heterosexual romantic relationship. Each secondary frame works to support and in some ways form the primary frame, and helps to explain the elements of a boy-girl romantic relationship. These secondary frames are: sexuality as personal pleasure; sexuality as a reflection of self and personal growth; and sexuality as a biological, health, and reproductive issue.

Sexuality as a reflection of self and personal growth. One of the secondary frames in magazine coverage is the discussion of sexuality in terms of the girls’ emotional growth and reflection of self through decision-making regarding sexuality. The

frame conveys the idea that girls are prepared to make decisions on their own—since the influence or guidance of parents, adults and friends is not given attention in coverage—and that decisions made by girls regarding sexuality will reflect their maturity, morality, and reputation. This frame was found to be more prevalent in *Seventeen* and *Teen* and focuses on the maturity and moral judgment needed to engage in sexual intercourse, and the emotional growth that happens once a teen is in a relationship involving sex. It also works to construct the notion that girls are the ones supposed to act maturely and make moral decisions. The frame often appeared in advice columns and feature articles that featured a strong rhetorical emphasis on making the “right” decision. For example, in an article in *Seventeen* titled “Will I regret having sex?” (2008), Sarah, 17, from Portland, ME, says she would like to lose her virginity to “get sex over with.” She asks if she would regret her first time being with one of her close “guy friends.” After warning the reader about the physical considerations regarding sexual intercourse, the columnist offers the ultimate advice:

When it comes to sex, there are two very important things to remember: one, that you are ultimately the person in charge of your own happiness and your own body; and two, you have a lot of time to wait until you’re totally sure about it. If you decide to put off sex, it’s okay, no matter what anyone else says or does. (“Will I regret having sex? 2008, para. 3).

This secondary frame is supported by three interrelated themes: maturity, morality, and reputation. Maturity is a theme that emphasizes responsibility and logical thinking regarding sexual behavior as indicators of the teen’s positive orientation in the ongoing transformation from adolescence to young adulthood. The second supporting

theme is morality and the decision making of girls when dealing with pressure to engage in sexual intercourse and other sexual activities. This theme emphasizes the dilemmas, options and choices that a teen girl has as opportunities to make the correct decision for themselves and thus demonstrate growth as a person. Lastly, the theme of reputation is usually articulated as a negative or positive evaluation of a teen's decision making on sexuality and as a reflection of self, as judged by others.

One article from *Teen* that illustrates how the themes of morality and maturity are articulated is one titled "I think all he wants from me is sex" (n.d.). In this piece, a 16-year-old from Ohio says she and a boy have expressed interest in each other but she is afraid he may only be interested in having sex, something she is not ready for. The columnist responds that making the "right" decision when dealing with pressure to have sex will help make her a more mature and responsible individual in the future. As stated by the columnist:

There are many emotional issues to think about before you decide to become sexually active. Is the guy someone you trust? If you have sex, are you going to have major regrets? Many girls do--even girls who are convinced they are in a mutually loving relationship can be disappointed once they have sex . . . If he says, 'If you love me, you'll have sex with me,' tell him, 'If you love me, you'll stop pressuring me to do something I'm not ready to do.' (para. 3)

At the end of the column, the writer concludes that making the right decision will help the girl become a more mature person, and advises the girl to share the reasoning with the boy as they both should act responsibly.

None of this is easy-but here's a motto you may want to repeat to yourself when you're feeling unsure: "What I accept, I teach." That means if you only accept the best treatment from a guy, you teach him to treat you well.

That, and nothing less is what you deserve! (para. 5)

Personal decision making regarding sexuality is often tied to some moral dilemma that frames sex as right and wrong. While dilemmas are influenced by outside forces, decisions are seen as the reflection of the values that teens have and as tests of their personal maturity and growth. For example, when teens seek advice regarding their romantic feelings toward their sisters' or best friends' boyfriends, columnists de-emphasize romance to stress the consequences of sex on self-worth and social relations. In these cases, all pressure is placed on the girl, as she is expected to make the right decision. For example, the article titled "I really like my friend's boyfriend and I think he likes me!" (n.d.), discusses what seems like a very easily solved moral dilemma a girl is facing. The advice given by an unnamed columnist, which could be assumed to be an editor of *Teen*, reads:

You have to think about what kind of a friend and person you want to be. Do you want to go behind a friend's back and flirt with her boyfriend? How would you feel if someone did that to you? It's not OK, and it's not harmless fun . . . (para. 3)

Rhetorically, the writers often choose to categorize the options in terms of "right" and "wrong" decisions. In some articles, the judgment of values can be harsh. For example, in the *Teen* article "My crush is dating someone else" (n.d.) a 13-year-old girl asks for advice on how to approach a boy she likes who is already dating another girl. The advice giver is very quick to offer his or her opinion of the situation:

You should get over it! He's dating someone else! How would you feel if he were dating you and some girl made the moves on him? I'm always amazed at how many letters I get from girls with this same "problem." For the record, here's the rule: don't steal another girl's boyfriend. Don't even flirt with another girl's boyfriend. I don't care how perfect he is for you or how skanky and horrible his present girlfriend is. If he becomes single in the future, he's fair game. But until then find your own because this one is taken.

This is how you find out what kind of person you are. (para. 3)

Another salient theme in the framing sexuality as a reflection of self is reputation or how a girl's sexual behavior leads to social judgment on her personality and character. *Cosmo Girl*, for example, presents a particular model of sexual behavior as desirable for teens: wild and instinctual, yet demure and thoughtful. In *Cosmo Girl* teen girls are encouraged to cultivate this particular sense of self, and to grow into the girl that every boy wants. The articles invite girls to be spontaneous, adventurous but warn them to watch out for reputation. Unlike the content in *Teen* and *Seventeen*, in *Cosmo Girl* reputation is discussed in terms of behaving like "good" "bad girls."

For instance, in one article, the magazine's adaptation of the drinking game "Never have I ever..." (n.d.) is the perfect example of this thematic emphasis. This game is typically played as a drinking game among college students, who take turns to say, "Never have I ever..." and then add something they've never done but think others in the group may have. Those in the group

who have done it must drink. *Cosmo Girl* adapted this to a “naughty version.” In the home page of *Cosmo Girl*, one of the feature boxes shows a photo of a girl staring at a boy's lips as if they were about to kiss. The headline reads: “How naughty have you been?” This version is called the romance edition, and while some of the statements can be quite harmless—such as “received a secret admirer letter” or “pretended to be in a sport because of a guy”—others are suggestive of intimacy: “been grounded for having a hickey” and “made out with a girl to impress my crush.”

These themes—morality, maturity, and reputation—run through many of the quizzes and dating advice articles, supporting the proposition that girls can make decisions for themselves, that they have the capacity for mature, responsible, and independent initiative. And even though the advice given is often interlaced with the writers' personal views of right and wrong, rather than stressing than moral judgment the editorial emphasis is placed on providing multiple options and the necessary information to allow readers to make their decisions.

Sexuality as personal pleasure. Another secondary frame in coverage is the framing of teen sexuality as a game employed in boy-girl relationships for personal pleasure. Its main propositions are that sex is spontaneous and fun and that sexuality has one objective: to keep guys guessing through a series of guidelines, almost like a dating game. Here, there is an emphasis on playfulness, obtaining self-satisfaction, and following the rules of a game. In contrast to the primary frame discussed above, this framing pattern makes little or no associations between sex and having serious and stable

emotional attachments, health concerns, or personal growth. The focus is on the individual girl with attention to the relationship in function of personal pleasure. This frame is constructed in articles that focus on topics like kissing for a teen girls' pleasure, being sexually adventurous, and how to give pleasure to a boy. The frame, found amongst all magazines, was found to be emphasized more in *Cosmo Girl*, where it is likely to be the result of the editorial line of its parent magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, whose main emphasis is on sexuality and romance as something game-like and fun.

In *Cosmo Girl*, the article titled "Dater's Law" (n.d.), exemplifies the notion of sexuality as a game with its gendered rules. The piece introduces four laws: "Never let him know you like him," "Don't listen to your friends' opinions," "You can hookup whenever you feel like it," and "Never text, call, e-mail, or IM [Instant Message] him first." Then, it tells girls when to follow the law and when not to:

If he's cute and you feel like kissing him, it's all good. As long as you're not looking to start a relationship, you're sure he's not either, and neither of you is "taken," then go for it. You don't need to be in love to make out.
(para. 12)

In general, this emphasis on playfulness, self-satisfaction, and learning the rules of the game, privileges casual rather than long-term relationships. In *Cosmo Girl* online, the analysis shows that articles about boy-girl romantic relationships are, above all, about how girls can obtain pleasure for themselves or for their partner. In effect, the frame is supported by a core theme: the performance of rituals of romance, primarily kissing and flirting, in the context of casual relationships.

For instance, there are multiple articles about various new styles of kissing, such as the one titled “Five hot new kisses” (2006). Here, readers are encouraged to try a new kiss to “let your crush know just how much he means to you. . . .” (para. 2). In addition, there is a blog that features the “kiss of the day.” And in one article titled “Master the make out” (n.d.), readers get “5 [kissing] tips that will drive him crazy” (para. 1). Even *Teen* and *Seventeen* included articles that touched on this theme of kissing for pleasure. In *Seventeen*, the article “Hookup Secrets” (n.d.) is a list, submitted by teens, of ways to make out with a boy. One of the suggestions is, for example: “Makeout Maven. Suck on his lip toward the end and back up just a little. Then look straight in his eyes and go in for more” (para. 5). In contrast to the theme rituals of romance that supported the primary frame—and where kissing, making out or flirting were presented as expressions leading to forming long-term relations—within this secondary frame kissing or making out serves to support the proposition that sex is a form of casual pleasure, where pleasure is the final aim. Kissing, especially in *Cosmo Girl*, is often offered as something fun to do with a boy, a form of personal pleasure disconnected from concerns about the consequences of intercourse, monogamy, or commitment to a relationship, and moral judgment. However, the overall ideals of the articles always lead to the notion that the immature teen girl will be involved in pointless relationships and the mature ones will choose monogamy.

As with kissing, flirting is another ritual linked to sexual pleasure. Often, girls are encouraged to find a way to flirt that makes it fun and a way to boost self-esteem and self confidence. In *Teen*, the author of the article “What kind of flirt are you? And How can you improve your game?” (n.d.) states: “The four main types of flirting – and flirts. See which one you are, then maximize your efforts by incorporating these tips” (para. 1). The

article describes the four types as “Straightforward Sweetie,” “Playful Pal,” “Coy Cutie,” and “Mysterious Minx.” It then elaborates on the different ways girls can flirt and how they can increase the fun of flirting. An example of the personal pleasure involved in flirting is in the description of the “Playful Pal:” “You flirt by playing around with guys, kind like a buddy – with potential kissing benefits! What makes your flirt style work is that one minute they’re thinking how much fun you are, and the next they’re crushing on you!” (para. 7). In *Cosmo Girl*, “the shy girls guide to flirting” (n.d.) is a list of tips to help shy girls flirt and have fun: “Act it out: Think of talking to the mysterious dreamboy as part of a play. Pretending you’re ‘in character’ might give you the added confidence you need to get that initial convo going. Consider it research!” (para. 4). The emphasis in *Cosmo Girl* is almost always to intertwine fun with sexuality, whether it’s kissing or flirting. Flirting is constructed as a fun activity for girls to do when they’re bored, hanging out with friends, or trying to get the attention of a particular boy.

The treatment of these rituals stresses the acceptability of casual relationships. While a majority of the *Teen* and *Seventeen* articles place sex as acceptable within the context of loving, long-term relationships, there were some articles that focused on casual relationships for the intent of personal pleasure, especially in *Cosmo Girl*. These articles construct the idea of “relationships” as brief encounters, flings, or even “hook ups” between a boy and girl for the purpose of kissing, making out, and other forms of foreplay for fun rather than as a progressive step in a long-term relationship. For example, in *Cosmo Girl*, Fashion Intern, the author of a blog article titled “summer love” (2007) writes:

Summer is the one time of year when it's okay to slip into a dress that's a little shorter, flirt aimlessly with a perfect stranger, and do something completely crazy just because *you* can . . . Whether you're looking for that summer love, or just a fun hookup, who cares if you make a fool of yourself trying to get some attention? What's life if you're not living it to the fullest? (para. 1)

The attitude cultivated in *Cosmo Girl* is that if one guy isn't interested, there are always more, and that girls should be interested in fun more than in finding the one guy with whom they can have a long-term relationship. Unlike *Cosmo Girl*, in *Teen* and *Seventeen* columnists tend to encourage teen girls to be in long-term relationships when it comes to making the decision to have sexual intercourse. However, they also encourage rituals of romance, such as kissing and making out, which are precursors to sexual intercourse. It is not explicitly explained that these rituals can lead to sexual intercourse, leaving teen girls in sexual situations that could end up in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, or traumatic emotional scars. In the *Seventeen* article "My friends think I should break up with my BF!" (2007) the columnist suggests that Cathy, 21 years old, follow her "heart" when deciding if she should stay with her first and only boyfriend, but recommends that she may want to follow her friends' advice to "play the field." For example: "However, this might be a good time in your life to be on your own and date around a little. That way, you'll never wonder what could have been" (para. 1). While the idea of a physical relation is still subordinated to importance of finding a loving, monogamous, long-term relationship with a boyfriend, the ideas of personal pleasure, including flirting and kissing, are occasionally encouraged as part of being a teen.

At first glance, this frame may seem to go against traditional gender roles, in that girls are encouraged to seek out personal pleasure rather than a typically monogamous relationship. This idea would work toward contradicting traditional gender roles if, at the same time, there was not an expectation of eventually maturity at which point the girl would become more interested in monogamous relationships. In addition, the pleasure is almost always geared toward a male partner, whose pleasure may be emphasized more than the girl's.

Sexuality as a biological, health, and reproductive issue. The only frame that offers an alternative to the view of sexuality as linked to emotional and affective dimensions of experience is the framing of sexuality as a physiological, health and reproductive issue. Through coverage of topics related to the physical body, sexually transmitted diseases, protection from unwanted pregnancy, and reproduction, the magazines provide factual, scientific, and medical information rather than advice in pieces where references to romance and pleasure are only incidental. In contrast to the primary frame, the focus of this frame is on the individual girl—and occasionally boy—rather than on girl-boy relationships and thus less attention is placed on reproduction of traditional gender roles. And the word choice is mainly technical and less subject to gender stereotypes. This secondary framing of sexuality was typically featured in longer, in-depth articles and more salient in *Teen* and *Seventeen* than in *Cosmo Girl*. It addresses sexuality and the physical aspects of sex more explicitly than the primary frame. Examples of this framing pattern are provided by the following headlines from *Seventeen*: “What if the condom

came off?” (2007), “Why are there pimples near my vagina?” (2008), and “Does being overweight reduce my chance of getting pregnant?” (2008).

These articles offer biological descriptions of sexual organs and medical explanations of sexual intercourse and health related conditions resulting from it. For example, an article in *Teen* titled “Boobs: A complete owner’s manual” (Motamed, 1999), focused on the female body, in particular on breasts. This article refers to breasts as female “‘secondary’ sex organs” and discusses their development, physical characteristics--such as size and shape--and functions--like sexual pleasure and breast-feeding. Other examples of this framing include articles titled “Jagged little pills” (Aima, n.d.) an article discussing birth control, and “Love yourself” (n.d.) which discusses masturbation. The answers provided to teens questions are typically clinical, addressing physiological and biological elements of the body. For example, in *Seventeen*, the answer offered by a Teens Health source to a question about experiencing pain when having intercourse the first time reads:

It varies. For some girls, there’s no pain whatsoever; for others, sex can be uncomfortable. Some girls feel discomfort when the hymen stretches or tears, which can cause a little bleeding. Sometimes a girl may not be aroused (or she’s feeling nervous or worried) so her vagina isn’t lubricated enough for the guy’s penis to enter comfortably. Lubricated condoms can help. And of course, couples should always use a condom every time they have sex to protect against unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In general, though, pain during sex

does indicate that things aren't going as they should and it's a good topic to talk to your doctor about. ("Virgin Territory," n.d., para. 4)

Only in some instances is sexuality discussed as the cause of emotional or mental health issues. One of these instances is found in the article titled "Going all the way: Sexual intercourse" (n.d.) in *Teen*, where the focus is on being emotionally ready for a physical relationship:

If you're thinking about whether you should have sex with someone, ask yourself these questions: Is this boy worth getting pregnant with? Is he worth getting a sexually transmitted disease? Many girls feel so weird about the fact that they had sex that they break up with their boyfriends. And a boy might say he will only stay with a girl if she has sex with him, but then he breaks up with her after they have sex. Both of these things can leave a girl feeling very sad. (para. 17)

Three themes support this secondary frame: the anatomy of sex, contraception and protection, and curiosity and concern. The first theme, the physical aspect of sex, is seen where emphasis is placed on the discussion of sexual intercourse as a physical act described in technical terms. For example, this same article serves as a step-by-step explanation of sexual intercourse.

Sexual intercourse, commonly known as "sex," occurs when a male and female decide to engage in the emotionally and physically intimate act. After foreplay in which boy people get sexually aroused, the male places his penis inside the female's vagina. A couple usually has sexual intercourse for pleasure and sexual satisfaction. The biological function of

sexual intercourse is to lead to pregnancy. (“Going all the way,” n.d., para.

3)

Notice that although the appeal is not emotional, this explanation still places the “boy” at center stage at the active agent in the sexual relation. The anatomy of sexuality is also emphasized in articles that describe organs typically associated with sexual pleasure. Articles with this theme were about female biology, mostly, but there was also some explanations of male anatomy, as in “Male anatomy: What’s up down there?” (n.d.) in *Teen* magazine.

Besides the anatomy of sex, the theme labeled contraception and protection emphasizes protection from pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and emotional pain as a result of sexual intercourse. Pregnancy was a topic in a few of the articles, mostly concerned with how particular sexual acts could result in pregnancy. Birth control and condoms were discussed more frequently than pregnancy. For instance, “Could I get pregnant?” (n.d.) in *Seventeen* is a discussion of the possibility of pregnancy through oral sex. In *Cosmo Girl*, an article titled “Jagged Little Pills” (Aima, n.d.) discusses the pros and cons of birth control pills, what other options girls have to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitting a disease, how to get and use different types of contraception, and even political views on the pill. Contraception and protection was also discussed in terms of protecting one’s self from known sexually transmitted diseases. For example, the *Cosmo Girl* article, “The Truth About STDs” (n.d.) is a review of common sexually transmitted diseases—such as genital HPV, Chlamydia, and gonorrhea—to discuss each disease from contraction to symptoms and treatments available. It also discusses prevention and protection.

The last theme that supports the framing of sexuality in terms of biological, health and reproductive issue is concern and fear outside the realm of morality. While emphasizing factual information like biological facts or medical explanations, this frame incorporates an emotional dimension of fear or concern regarding sexuality as a cause of physical ailment or unwanted pregnancy. This is the case because many articles are question-and-answer features where teens expose their uncertainty regarding different dimensions of sexuality. For instance, columnists answer questions regarding the possibility of getting pregnant after having sexual intercourse in water, who should bring the condom to the sexual encounter, and myths about the male reproductive system. Each of these topics stems from a point of concern and fear, most often of an unwanted pregnancy and the function of the opposite sex's genitalia. In addition, the discussion of virginity versus sexual activity is common in *Seventeen* and *Teen*, and found in a few *Cosmo Girl* articles. On this topic, abstinence is offered as a solution in most magazines. Abstinence is seen as an option unrelated to any morals, values or religious views but rather as an emotional and medically sound option to dissipate fear and concerns.

Rhetorical Structures Supporting the Framing Patterns

A closer look at rhetorical choices in the framing of teen sexuality reveals language and tone that tend to reinforce the dominant propositions identified in coverage. In this section, I present some of the most salient rhetorical features observed in the coverage to highlight ways in which word choice, sourcing, and tone contribute to the representation of teen sexuality.

The use of the terms “boy” and “girl”: gender stereotyping. A salient feature in teen magazine coverage of sexuality is the peculiar use of the terms “girls” and “boys,”

particularly in articles that focused on sexuality in the context of romantic relations. There were hardly any other words used for teen adolescent females other than the word girls in any type of article. Overall, these magazines refer to boys using a variety of nouns: “males,” “boys,” “men,” “guys,” “crushes,” “boyfriends,” and sometimes “partners,” in ways that may suggest different degrees of maturity or a transition to young adulthood. In contrast, girls are almost always referred to as “girls,” even though they are expected to have a more mature attitude and capacity to make moral decisions.

For example, in an article in *Teen*, “Ten things you should ask yourself before going all the way!” (n.d.) writers refer to males as “guys” and females as “girls:” “A guy who cares about you will be willing to wait. He’ll have more respect for girls who stick up for their beliefs” (para. 37). In *Seventeen*, the same word choice is made for topics of sex:

Some girls feel discomfort when the hymen stretches or tears, which can cause a little bleeding. Sometimes a girl may not be aroused (or she’s feeling nervous or worried) so her vagina isn’t lubricated enough for the guy’s penis to enter comfortably. (“Virgin Territory,” n.d.n.d., para. 4).

Thus, while the advice given to teens suggests that only mature persons are prepared for and could be having sex, the words chosen do not support the idea that female teens are in transition from childhood to adulthood. In fact, the words “young women,” “teens,” or “adolescents” are scarcely used. Further, writers refer to males as “guys,” an informal term that implies boys are more mature than girls. This rhetorical choice is likely to be confusing for female readers, who are otherwise told by advice columnists to postpone intercourse and make their own decision based on their morals, values, and self-respect,

and yet read about individuals having intercourse in terms that suggest that immature people (boys and girls) have sex.

Likewise, words used in association with the terms boys and girls to describe their behaviors lead to the reproduction of gender stereotypes. An article in *Teen* titled, “10 things guys love about girls...” (n.d.), offered “things” such as, “strawberry-scented products [conditioner],” “sweet lips [lip gloss],” “from your mini backpack to your teeny earrings,” “that you’re not afraid to cry,” and “your silly screen name [usernames online].” The adjectives used to describe females construct girls as hyper-sensitive, pink-loving, and dependent on romantic relationships, boys are constructed as the exact opposite. For example in the *Teen* article, “5 Ways to RUIN a Date” (n.d.), girls are given five behaviors and scenarios that they should prevent if they want to find a boyfriend. The article establishes as a fact that girls are emotional beings and boys are not, as in this excerpt:

Unlike most girls, a lot of guys feel awkward and uneasy when it comes to discussing emotional issues. Part of the problem is that they haven’t had as much practice at it as girls have, so they don’t feel like they’re very good at it. (para. 6)

Another example of how language reproduces stereotypical representations of boys is in *Cosmo Girl*’s article “The Guy’s Code of Romance” (Gilderman, 2006), where the writer offers an insight into the way boys communicate and prompts girls to accept this behavior even if it is not what girls ideally expect:

3. He pays attention to what you say

As a guy, I’ll admit that we tune out a lot of stuff girls say. But if we really like a girl, we snap to attention. We listen and care when you talk. We make a mental

note when you tell us what's important to you, what you love and hate, that you like spaghetti with sauce on the side. Then when we want to be romantic, we bring it back up. So when we IM you to say we bought a CD that you said you liked, or we order your spaghetti the right way when you stepped away from the table, it's because we feel connected to you on a deeper level. And what's more romantic than that? (para. 8)

The writer sends the message that it is natural for boys to ignore (“tune out”) the girls’ expressions (“stuff girls say”) and act in seemingly uncaring ways. Thus, that in everyday interactions girls should expect male-female communication to be unfulfilling for females and just plain annoying for males because of gender differences in the approach to communication. Furthermore, that girls should adapt to this behavior, ignore their preferences, and wait for boys to express their feelings in their own way rather than work on establishing a mutually satisfying way to communicate.

The use of exclamation points to increase emotional appeal. Another prominent rhetorical choice observed primarily in content that focused on sex and romance or sex as pleasure is the use and abuse of the exclamation mark as a way to increase the emotion appeal of the articles and columns. This was found across all frames as it was prevalent in all articles, even in those regarding health and anatomy topics. According to the rules of grammar as stated in *The Elements of Style*, the exclamation mark “is to be reserved for use after true exclamations and commands,” (Strunk & White, p. 41). However, in these articles it's as if everyone is screaming about something, as these examples from headlines from *Teen* and *Seventeen* indicate:

“Ten things you should ask yourself before going all the way!” (n.d.)

“How can I approach him without seeming desperate?” (n.d.)

“My friends think I should break up with my boyfriend!” (2007)

“Rumors are being spread about me!” (2008)

Ignoring the grammatical rules of punctuation, editors overuse exclamation marks to add a sense of drama, crisis and extreme excitement to teenage predicaments and expressions. Rather than appealing to reason and reflection in the advice columns and other feature articles, the primary appeal is to emotion when discussing romance and sexuality with a teenage female readership.

Use of colloquialisms and slang to create proximity with readers. Another salient quality of coverage in these teen magazines is the use of colloquialisms and slang to construct a personal and friendly tone in the voice of columnists and editors. This rhetorical choice is salient primarily in content that frames sexuality as a fun, playful, and pleasurable experience. Particularly in *Cosmo Girl*, writers use slang like “making out,” “hooking up,” “smooching,” “puckering up,” “crushes” (to refer to boys), “pecking,” “dismissed as gold diggers,” “that’s hot,” “we totally feel your pain!” “dissed,” “chill girl,” “post-hookup vulnerability,” “Facebook official,” “heck yeah,” “(wink, wink),” “;-)” “I promise,” “sketchy,” “right?!” “totally,” “y’all,” “spank the monkey,” “hot chicks,” and “freak out.”, are employed widely to refer to expressions of physical and sexual attraction or to show empathy or relate-ability with the audience. In the article titled “Five ways to ruin a date” (n.d.) *Teen* editors or writers offer a how-to feature written in a very informal and conversational tone:

Things seem to be going well: He held your hand through the entire movie. He laughed in all the right places over pizza. He’s even taking the super long way

back to your house. All in all the night's been one to remember, but all that could change in an instant if you freak him out. Huh? Why/How would I freak him out?! (para. 1)

In these instances, writers use slang to reproduce the linguistic choices of young people. In another example, *Cosmo Girl*'s article "Five Hot New Kisses" (2006) writers offer a list of kisses and the instructions on how to execute them. When describing the "getting-to-know-him kiss" the writer explains how to perform the kiss in this manner: "Careful!: Biting his tongue or lip could really hurt and make him want to stop kissing, so don't even play like that!" (para. 6). In other *Cosmo Girl* article titled "You Know He's a Bad Kisser When . . ." (n.d.) the nutgraf includes a similar youthful slang: "To any girl who has even been slobbered on, bitten, or given the 'slug tongue,' we totally feel your pain!" (para. 1). This informal tone works to reinforce the frame of sex as playful pleasure.

In addition, the incorporation of text messaging codes and linguistic conventions is also a common feature. For example, *Cosmo Girl* wants to be the teen girls' "bffs" (or best friends forever). And in the article "Sex and Tech: The stats" (n.d.) *Cosmo Girl* editors discuss the very serious and growing issue of "sexting"—using text messaging, email or instant messaging to send nude or partially nude photos—in this manner:

The new booty call. Hey girls, beware guys' newest pickup tactic! 39% of guys who have sent sexy messages to girls have done so because they wanted to date or hook up. (para. 6)

The subheadings in this article use texting code language to reach the teens: "Nothing to LOL (laugh out loud) about," and "TNK B4 PSHNG SND," or think before pushing send.

Thus, in the framing of sex as pleasure, writers opt to language to construct themselves as friendly interlocutors – a big sister or friend who has been where the teen is and is simply lending advice from the position of another teen with slightly more experience to pass on. Even when writers are offering advice to teens, the use of slang and colloquialisms creates a tone of informality and equality between writer and reader. This, in contrast to the tome of adult authority or moral judgment constructed by columnists when dealing with sexuality in the context of romance and health and reproductive issues.

The use of advice as a form of moral persuasion. A common rhetorical pattern is observed in the construction of a discourse that, even when emphasizing the girl’s freedom to make personal decisions independently from adults—as in the framing of sexuality as a reflection of self and personal growth—incorporates the judgment of columnists who advocate for what they see as the “right” decision to make. Although teens are often offered all options available when facing a dilemma, the advice given is typically categorical in terms of what course of action the columnist would prefer the girl to follow.

Some advice columnists are simply judgmental of the teens’ actions and prescribe the correct values and morals to the teens. For example, in the *Teen* article titled “I fooled around with my best friend’s boyfriend” (n.d.) a girl explains that she “fooled around” with her best friend’s boyfriend and needs help to figure out how to tell her friend. The teen states that she is concerned she may ruin the friendship, but does not refer to her moral stance regarding the indiscretion. The columnist offers this advice:

Wow! There are so many things I want to know, not the least of which is –
WHAT WERE YOU THINKING!?! But, since you don't go into details, I'll just
address the matters at hand.

If, as you say, you don't want to lose her, and you know that telling her will make
you lose her, well . . . you do the math. In other words, don't tell her unless your
intention is to hurt her while making yourself feel more righteous. And needless
to say, don't touch her boyfriend again, unless you're trying to build up your
reputation as a slut.

Seriously, that's about as heinous an act as one can pull. (para. 5-6)

It may be argued that within the primary and secondary frames identified, the use
of moral persuasion is a rhetorical strategy that assigns the responsibility of moral
reasoning and responsible decision making primarily to girls who are caught in a
discourse that reproduces their position of emotional dependency in a relationship while
reinforcing the expectation that girls will make the moral decisions and exhibit more
maturity than boys.

Factuality and use of expert sources as an appeal to reason. Although much
less visible than the four rhetorical patterns discussed above, magazine coverage of teen
sexuality incorporates the use of expert knowledge and factual, technical information to
create a tone of factuality and credibility with its readership. This rhetorical structure is
observed primarily in the articles that frame sexuality as a biological, health, and
reproduction issue. For example, a national teen health organization provides many
responses to teen questions regarding the physical and medical aspects of sexuality, while
the more emotional topics related to sexuality and romantic relationships are addressed

by unnamed sources or advice columnists. The responses provided by the national teen health organization, TeensHealth.org, offer direct and factual medical information with little emotional appeal. For instance, in one *Seventeen* article, TeensHealth responds to the question “What’s an orgasm?” (n.d.) in this manner:

An orgasm is an intense, pleasurable physical feeling that can occur during sex or masturbation. Like many feelings, orgasms are difficult to describe. Orgasms vary from person to person, and can be different for the same person different times....A person’s heart beats faster, breathing gets quicker, and muscles in the pelvis contract and then suddenly relax with a wave of feeling that can be pleasurable and, for many people, emotional. (para. 3)

The presence of this secondary frame and its supporting themes makes it clear that teens are hungry for information regarding the biological and medical dimensions of sexuality that are unknown and tempting for them. Most readers are asking questions or looking for answers as re-assurance that there is a solution to the uncertainty of sex in general. In this sense, the magazines construct authoritative voices to position themselves as credible sources. At the same time, while it may be argued that this rhetorical tone adds nuance to the understanding of sexuality, the fact that it is secondary and confined to medical and biological discourse serves to reinforce the dominant framing of sexuality primarily as a function of romance and personal relations.

In sum, one may observe that, overall, the rhetorical choices of writers and editors of these magazines construct discourses that through different rhetorical emphases—factual and scientific information, moral persuasion, or personal, playful conversation—illustrate the dimensions of sexuality privileged in the coverage. As it will be pointed out

in the section below these competing frames with their seemingly fragmented and contradictory thematic and rhetorical emphases contribute to create particular ideological effects.

Script and Syntactic Structures

These primary and secondary frames are not only constructed through their thematic and rhetorical emphases but also by the syntactic structure and scripts privileged in coverage. Script and syntax are relevant because they reveal how journalistic conventions contribute to the process of representation and its ideological effects. Syntactic and script structures are the result of professional conventions that shape the ways in which information is gathered, sequenced, formatted, and thus presented to readers. These conventions also serve to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of coverage as well as to assign a position to readers vis-à-vis writers and sources. Furthermore, syntax and script are structures that suggest particular readings and fix meanings in ways that reproduce certain ideals about gender, romance, and sexuality.

In the magazines examined, two salient syntactic structures were identified and will be discussed in this section: the selection of sources (unnamed and named) presented as expert or relevant in coverage of sexuality to convey authority on a given topic and place teen readers in a particular position as interlocutors; and the ordering of information through the use headline, body of text, and closing to suggest particular readings of the content. These syntactic features are embedded within a set of scripts or conventional formats to present information. In the coverage of sexuality in *Seventeen*, *Teen*, and *Cosmo Girl*, five different scripts were identified: Q&As (where a question from a female reader is answered by writers of the magazine, expert sources, and even boys selected by

the editorial staff to provide direct answers to girls' questions), teen stories (stories sent in by teens about their own experiences, often regarding topics solicited by magazine editor), feature topic (topics covered in a standard magazine or news feature format, presenting multiple sides and angles of one larger human interest topic), quiz (multiple-choice format quizzes about teen-related topics with results based on the frequency of similar—A's, B's or C's—chosen), and blogs (articles written as opinion pieces from an author discussing any topic of his or her choosing). Among the 251 articles selected for analysis, 135 were Q&As, 39 were teen stories, 48 were feature topics (32 human-interest, 4 focused on celebrities, 10 how-tos), 16 were blogs, 10 were quizzes, and five did not fit into any particular script. In this section, I discuss Q&As and teen stories as the two predominant scripts and examine their syntactical structures to explain how they contribute to reinforce dominant meanings underlying the framing patterns identified above and assign a particular position to girls.

As indicated above, the more recurrent script in coverage of sexuality is the Q&A, a question-and-answer format that contains teen girls' questions submitted to magazine editors regarding such topics as sex, relationships, friends, and other topics pertinent to teen lives. Of these Q&A articles, about three-fourths focus on the emotional relationships that lead to or involve different kinds of sexual interaction, and one-fourth regards sexuality in terms of physiological and health matters. Questions centered on relationships between boys and girls are answered anonymously by an unnamed member of the editorial staff for the respective magazines. Examples of such questions are:

“I'm a freshman in high school, and I'm really hitting it off with a junior. He's so sweet, but I've heard rumors that upperclassmen are just trying to

get in your pants. What's the deal with dating upperclassmen? ("Will my older boyfriend," 2008, para. 1))

"My friend is dating my ex. I'm sad," (n.d.)

An example of questions concerning the physiology of sexuality is "How painful is sex the first time?" ("Virgin Territory, n.d.).

Most of the articles formatted as Q&A script features a fairly standardized syntactic structure or sequencing of information: (1) a headline adapted from the question asked by a reader; (2) a blurb with the actual question or an excerpt or quote from the reader, with or without direct attribution; (3) a body discussing the situation and a tone of empathy with the reader and/or factual information offered; and (4) a closing statement that may contain different options for action but offers a final word of advice from a columnist who assumes the voice of authority or reason). The following is an example of this Q&A script in an article that focus on sexuality in the context of romantic relationships:

(1) A headline, crafted by the magazine's editors: "Is our relationship moving too slowly?" (2008)

(2) a blurb with excerpt or quote from the person who asked the question (without attribution): "My guy and I have been together for almost a year, and we still haven't even made out. It doesn't bother me, but all of my friends and his say we're moving too slowly, and that most couples would've had sex by now. Are we moving too slowly? -- Maddie, 15, Midlothian, TX."

(3) the body of the story, with a tone of empathy: “It’s inevitable that friends are going to have opinions on your relationship, but the most important thing is that the two of you are comfortable with how things are going”

(4) a closing with various scenarios or options and final advice addressing overall moral or life lesson: “Some people dive right into the physical aspects of a relationship, while others like to build up to that, so there’s absolutely nothing wrong with the pace the two of you have chosen . In fact, it has probably let you get to know each other a lot better . . . It’s essential to be honest with your partner about how you feel things are going . . . the two of you are dating each other, not your friends.”

In *Seventeen*, questions regarding physiology or medical aspects of sexuality displayed a similar syntactical structure, as illustrated by these two examples:

(1) headline: “I bleed after sex!” (n.d.)

(2) quote from the teen’s submission (with direct attribution): “My boyfriend and I have only had sex twice, but when we do, I bleed afterward. Is this normal?”--
Nicole, 17, Nova Scotia, Canada”

(3) body elaborating on the situation with factual information: “Some girls bleed the first time they have sex because the hymen, a very thin piece of skin-like tissue that stretches partly across the opening of the vagina, breaks for tears. Some girls are born without much of a hymen. Other girls’ hymens cover a large portion of the vagina’s opening—it all depends on the girl” . . . If bleeding happens when you’ve already had sex before, it may be from irritation or scratching (like from your partner’s fingernails) or some further tearing of the remnant of the hymen.”

(4) closing with advice: “If the bleeding continues to happen or if you have any other unexpected symptom, see a doctor .”

In articles on this frame of sexuality as a biological, health or reproductive issue, the elaboration of the situation on the body of the story will typically include factual information as well as some sort of warning; in the article discussed above, the warning is that bleeding could be a sign of an STD. This is another example on the same frame:

(1) headline: “Can I get pregnant from oral sex?” (2007)

(2) quotation: “My boyfriend and I have recently started to have oral sex. We have not yet had vaginal sex. Is it possible for me to get pregnant?”--“Anonymous, 16, OH”

(3) body with elaboration: “No, it’s not possible to get pregnant from oral sex alone . . . But if a couple has vaginal sex while hooking up, the girl could get pregnant. And while getting pregnant isn’t a possibility with oral sex, getting a sexually transmitted disease is.”

(4) closing with advice: “To avoid pregnancy and STDs, always remember to use proper protection anytime sexual contact occurs, including oral sex.”

Across frames, the sourcing in these Q&A articles is interesting because while writers or editors respond to the teens’ questions with a voice of authority and moral force, there is no byline to establish the identity and therefore credibility of writers. In most cases, the editorial staff employs the pronoun “I” and occasionally “we” in their responses to readers, as in “We understand how upset you must be over this.” Yet, readers can only assume that “I” or “we” refers to the editors of the magazine. To add to this mystery, pictures and personal information about editorial staff are hardly seen on the

magazine's Web site, with the exception of information on the *Seventeen* Editor-in-Chief, Ann Shoket and, occasionally, the fitness competition editor. Thus, readers are never clearly told who is offering advice nor have access to that information on the site, even when writers make personal judgments about them.

For example, in one answer to a 19-year-old woman who liked a 14-year-old boy, the unnamed writer stated: "I don't want to be harsh, but some people would consider you a predator for wanting to be in a relationship with a boy so young. I will give you the benefit of the doubt" ("Dating an older guy," n.d.) This is clearly a personal judgment by a writer who assumes her (or his) opinion will be respected by offering information in such a manner. In another example, in a piece titled "Why can't I get a guy?" (n.d.) a teen identified as "Karen, 16" claimed that previous advice given by the magazine that has not worked; the magazine writer responded: "You're right that the best advice I or anyone can give a person is to be yourself" (para. 2). And in another article, titled "I'm fooling around with my sister's boyfriend" (n.d.) the anonymous responder displayed a certain level of comfort and power when she or he placed judgment on the teen: "Boy, with sisters like you, who needs enemies? I don't believe that you were kissing and THEN you started to like him...That's really low" (para. 2). In the *Seventeen* article "Guys always break up with me" (2005), the anonymous magazine writer replied with a strong sense of authority over the reader:

I want you to stop dating for a little while. (And not just dating—take a break from guys in general: flirting, hooking up, all of it.) I know this might seem drastic to you, but hear me out. (para. 2)

In articles about sexuality as a biological, health, and reproductive issue published

by *Teen* and *Seventeen*, most answers are provided by sources from Teens Health, an organization that hosts a Web site sponsored by Nemours Foundation. The foundation is a pediatric health system that runs Teens Health to provide accurate medical information to teens via an interactive web site. The articles include a link to TeensHealth.org at the bottom of the page that reads: “from the health experts at TeensHealth.org.” Should teens click on the link, they’ll be directed to the Teens Health website, where more questions are answers and other interactive media are provided regarding common teen questions. This organization provides a higher level of credibility for the magazines and the trust of teens that are likely to associate a “health expert” with the truth. However, the TeensHealth editors rarely disclose names of editors or contributors to the Web site. In some pieces, TeensHealth sources use “I” but no byline is offered.

A particularly meaningful variation within the structure and sourcing of the Q&A script is the “Guys Answer” section. “Guys Answer” is exactly what it suggests: teen readers send questions to the editors, and the editors ask a group of “guys” to provide insight into the desires and curiosities of the teenage male mind. It is a Q&A in which editors ask boys the questions that teen girls presumably want to know about boys, typically regarding the mysterious feelings and actions of boys, as for example: “What’s the best thing a girl can wear on a date?” (n.d.) and “What’s the best yearbook message you’ve ever received?” (n.d.).

The syntactical structure shows a similar pattern with two key variations. First, unlike magazine columnists and editors, boys who provide answers are identified with a

photo, first name, and age. Second, rather than offering direct advice to girls, teen boys who answer questions voice their opinions or perspectives and thus indirectly suggest to girls a desired course of action to attract or conform to the boys' preferences and desires.

This example illustrates this format:

(1) A headline that incorporates a question from a girl or questions from multiple teens grouped together to form one general question: "What romantic thing would you want a girl to do for you?" (n.d.).

(2) a photo with name attribution and age of the boy answering the question: "Josh, 17"

(3) a body with the answers from one or more boys and men, typically age 14 to early 20s: "To go on a date to the beach."

Typically, the answers offered by boys are not nearly as complex as those provided by columnists. However, they are placed in a high position within the page, as the "guys" have their name and photo displayed and the amount of space dedicated to boys' answers on the Web site can be greater.

In *Teen*, the "Guys Answer" section is sometimes structured differently, with lists with multiple answers from multiple boys on one topic. For instance, in "25 Ways to show you love him" (n.d.) girls read a numbered list of common ways teenage males request to be appreciated by teenage females. For instance, "P.K., 18," says: "I love it when a girl makes me feel special." Each numbered item is followed with a short paragraph describing exactly what girls can do to meet the request: "Learn what he digs and give it to him in steady doses! He's into hip-hop? Write him a rap." In the article "Five ways to ruin a date" (n.d.) girls are given a numbered list of things to avoid at all

costs when in a relationship, and in “10 things guys love about girls” (n.d.) the author writes: “4. The way you love tiny things. From your mini backpack to your teeny earrings, he notices all the little touches that make you hugely cute” (para. 8).

Despite these variations in sourcing and order of presentation, the ever present Q&A script places girl readers in a subordinate position to a voice of knowledge and authority, be it in the persona of columnists, editors, health experts, and even boys of their same age group.

The second most salient script is teen stories, a format found in all three magazines. These are stories solicited by editors regarding topics such as kissing, monogamous relationships, dates, breakups, and other exciting and embarrassing events surrounding romance and sexual experimentation. Teen Stories are narratives provided by teens about their own experiences or as pieces of advice to other girls as solicited by the magazine editors. An example of a teen story would be a collection of narratives on different types of dates, for instance: “I love going to the zoo on a first date. It’s not too expensive, and it’s hilarious seeing your guy get all goo-goo over the koalas” (“First dates,” 2008). Another example from *Cosmo Girl* is the article titled “Surf’s Up” (n.d.) where a teen girl wrote about her fantasy-like first kiss with a “crush.” A variation of this syntactical structure is the combination of teen stories with the Q&As script, where a direct question is posed by editorial staff, and teens offer their stories as answers.

But unlike the Q&A features, these stories may or may not contain any form of identification of the teen contributor. In terms of length, stories can be presented as a complete story on a specific topic selected by the editors, or as one or two sentences answering a specific question, sometimes using a very brief example to illustrate. An

example of a complete narrative is presented in the article “Why me” (2007) in *Teen*, where a girl writes a tale of embarrassment and shame:

My best friends were spending the night at my house, and we were picking out thongs. Well they dared me to go to the grocery store and wear a lime-green polka dotted thong and wear a shirt with a big rip in the middle. I thought it’s 2:00 in the morning, and no one’s going to be there (cause there open 24/7). When I went there, guess who was there? My ex-boyfriend, my boyfriend and MY DAD! My dad told me to come here, and then he spanked me. He grounded me for 2 months, and I wanted to kill my friends and plus it was in front of my boyfriend!

(Why me, 2007, para. 2)

An example of a short narrative is from *Seventeen*’s section “Daily Secret,” where teens are allowed to post some telling piece of information that no one knows about them. One anonymous entry among these read: “I lie about my first kiss: I have never had my first kiss, and I tell everyone that I have been making out with guys for like ever!” (I lie about my first kiss, 2007).

The basic syntactic structure for the teen stories script can be illustrated with this article from *Seventeen*. In this particular example, a teen girl offers advice to other girls based on their personal experiences and what has worked with their boyfriends or dates:

(1) a headline that focuses on the theme selected by editors, for example: “Beach Dates” (2008);

(2) blurb that works like a nut graph or summary of key points of the article:

“Looking for a fun summer date? Head to the beach with your guy! Readers share their tips for having the most fun in the sand, surf, and sun!”

(3) attribution (if any): “Sara, 17;”

(4) the body of the teen’s story: “Go to the beach right around the time the sun is going to set and have a picnic with all your favorite foods. Ask your guy to make something he thinks you like, and you should try to do the same! It’s fun!”

Examples from *Cosmo Girl* followed the same syntactic structure as *Teen* and *Seventeen* but may include the staff writer authoring the feature. For example, a piece by Kristen O’Gorman is a set of “nightmarish” narratives from teens regarding the most embarrassing stories from prom night. These stories, likely edited by O’Gorman, appear under in this format:

(1) headline: “Dates from Hell” (O’Gorman, n.d.)

(2) blurb: “Having a date for the big night doesn’t automatically mean that you’re destined for a picture-perfect prom. These cringe-worthy tales will make you glad that you went solo!”

(3) attribution: “By Kristen O’Gorman.”

(4) body: each teen’s story is presented with a headline and in quotation marks, as if it were an exact reproduction of the teen’s words.

As suggested by these examples, an important framing device in teen stories is the selection of topics and crafting of headlines by editorial staff. Headlines are certainly part of the gatekeeping function of editors who select a particular angle and tone for each teen’s story. Furthermore, one can assume that teens stories—with a few examples where

grammatical errors suggest that editors did not alter the story submitted by teens—are significantly edited by staff for correctness, length, and content. These two framing devices are significant ways in which editors retain power over the re-presentation of teen voices and perspectives.

Although much less salient, the feature topics, quizzes and blogs offered alternative ways to present information about sexuality. It is worth noting that these scripts reinforce the effect of Q&As in that they serve to offer advice and guidance to girl readers. The feature topic, much like a news feature article, is written about a specific newsworthy human interest topic. Within this script, “how to” articles were included to provide information that helps to solve some sort of issue or that prescribes what not to do. The “how to” pieces were found most often in *Cosmo Girl* and were mostly about managing relationships—whether on how to keep a kissing style exciting or a boyfriend. The articles are also about what not to do. For example, the topic “How to lose a guy in 10 days” (n.d.) became very popular, after a mainstream movie with a similar title was released in the late 1990s. The first point on the list is:

Public usage of pet names. It’s one thing for you to call us Snoogles or Scrumpy Wumpy when we’re alone. In fact, we kind of like it. But it’s quite another thing to do it in front of our friends . . . (para. 2)

Quizzes, found in all three magazines but most often in *Cosmo Girl*, have a very standard form. These quizzes are about topics ranging from kissing to birth control, clingy boyfriends, or “guy friends.” These quizzes are very predictable and tend to use stereotypical language and references to develop the answers, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Quizzes in *Seventeen* and *Teen* were more focused on serious decisions

regarding sexual intercourse, such as, “Are you emotionally ready to have sex?” (2007), rather than the playful quizzes found in *Cosmo Girl*, such as “Which Twilight guy should you date?” (n.d.)

Finally, the script labeled blogs was only found in *Cosmo Girl* and typically features a personal narrative on topics that range from kisses to crushes and the politics of dating. All but one of the blogs was written by women. This Web site section includes a list of contributors with photos and descriptions of their backgrounds. However, the names listed were not found among the authors of any of the blogs in the data collected. Although blogs have an interactive element that might involve teens, the authorship is questionable. It seems that these authors may be able to better relate to teens, as they are younger women who have had some romantic experiences. But there is no use of sources or, commonly, even last names on the authors. Teens don’t really have a way to find who “Arielle” or “Meredith” is, and the editorial intern or fashion intern offering advice on romance does not seem very credible. However, because character of the “blog” is about personal narrative and opinion, the experience of a young woman could be seen as even more credible than that of other teens or experts. After all, bloggers may be the women that teen girls reading these online magazines look up to.

Summary and Discussion

The primary and secondary frames identified in coverage highlight complementary dimensions of sexuality as linked to: a) heterosexual romance, b) personal growth, c) pleasure, and d) health and reproduction. However, the dominant emphasis was placed on the representation of sexuality as an integral part of romantic relations between boys and girls.

The thematic clusters constructed support the framing patterns by stressing a) sexuality through the performance of rituals of romance within traditional gender roles and male dominance; b) sexuality as involving moral decision making and the reputation of girls; c) the performance of rituals of romance in pleasurable casual relations, and d) the anatomy of sex, contraception and protection against sexually transmitted diseases.

Likewise, salient rhetorical features identified further reinforce these framing patterns through: a) linguistic choices that reproduce stereotypical gender representations of “boys” and “girls” in the description of heterosexual romance and emphasize emotional appeals to girls; b) the use of slang and colloquialisms to construct sexuality as playful, pleasurable fun; c) the use of moral persuasion to appeal to the girls’ moral judgment; and d) the appeal to reason through factuality and expert sources in content about sexual anatomy, health, and reproduction.

These frames are articulated through two primary scripts—the Q&A and teen story formats—and a syntactic structure that positions unnamed columnists, expert sources, and teen boys as voices of knowledge, experience, and authority over girls. Even in the relatively few articles that conform to the teen story script—where girls send their own narratives—the gatekeeping function of editors restricts and keeps anonymity among girl contributors.

In the final analysis, girls are caught in a discourse marked by tensions and contradictions. It is a discourse on sexuality that privileges the notion that girls are emotional beings whose primary interest is finding and maintaining heteronormative relations in which they follow male prerogatives and respond to naturalized male gendered behaviors. At the same time, magazine representations reinforce the

expectation that girls will exhibit more maturity than boys and are responsible for making the correct moral decisions in regards to reputation and sexuality. Thus, as suggested by the evidence presented above, underlying the seemingly contradictory and complementary frames and themes is a representation of sexuality as a dimension of life linked primarily to affective behaviors associated with female emotional dependency on romantic relations; an assumption that moral reasoning rests on individual girls who ought to be responsible for the status and health of sexual and romantic relations; and the view of gender in terms of traditional roles and male dominance.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the particular use of Q&As and teen story formats in these magazines is indicative of another tension in discourse. It reflects an editorial choice that, on the surface, offers girls the chance to initiate discussion and seek information about sexuality, while editors assume the role of responding to their audience. Yet, the syntactic and rhetorical structures privileged within these scripts end up reinforcing the editorial voice of authority over teen girl readers.

In effect, the ordering of information and sourcing place girls in a position of ignorance and subordination to sources of knowledge and authority on matters related to sexuality, romance, and pleasure. These sources or voices of reason and authority are most often columnists offering advice. Sometimes, the sources are even teen boys. When boys are used as sources of information, boys' photos and names are disclosed, making them more visible in coverage than girl readers and other contributors. Furthermore, teen boys who answer questions voice their opinions or perspectives and thus indirectly suggest to girls a desired course of action in order to attract, conform to, and meet the boys' preferences and desires. In the realm of sexuality as a biological, health and

reproductive issue, the voice of authority is given to expert sources from the medical field. Only in some teen stories, the script allows girls to become sources of knowledge and advice to other girls (and boys). However, this format is used much less frequently and, even when used, the voices of girls follow the agenda set by editorial staff as the staff ~~who~~ selects the topic, length, and format of narration. In addition, in teen stories the name and identification of the girls contributing their personal narratives is often kept anonymous.

Arguably, the saliency of the Q&A and teen story format projects the image that the magazines are merely responding to reader generated questions about sexuality—in contrast to the feature article where editors are more clearly exercising their agenda setting role or the quiz format where both topic and categorical answers are prescribed to readers—and thus allow editors to avoid potential political conflict from claims that the magazines are encouraging and promoting sexual behaviors among teen readers.

Implications. As stated in the introduction, recent research has shown that a majority of teens is still using magazines for information and entertainment. And with the increasing popularity of the online medium, online teen magazines are likely to become a preferred source of entertainment and information. In addition, previous research on traditionally published teen magazines has shown that the publications often present information about beauty that causes teen girls to act in prescribed ways, leading to dieting, unhealthy body image, and, sometimes, eating disorders. Other research has also shown that teen magazines work to reinforce teen girls as subordinate to males while establishing and re-presenting traditional gender roles as the socially acceptable way of living. Like this previous research, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that

gender is still represented through heteronormativity. Based on a reading of Butler's *Gender Troubles* (1990, Part 1, Chapter V), heteronormativity is the performance of binary gender roles reified through patriarchic social representations. In the articles examined in this study, teen girls are often represented as a subordinate group dominated by boys, columnists, and editors. Through articles written in the most salient script, Q&As, teens are often told how to act via the morals of the editors and columnists written as advice, but laced with hints and judgments about the teens' actions and questions. The ideals of domesticity are likely not as strong as when teen magazines were first created, but the notion of subordinate women supports the same ideology about gender and cites that same heteronormative society that adolescent girls, seeking approval, will use to understand their role in the world.

Thus, the editorial agenda of the teen magazines of today are in many ways no different than that of the first edition of *Seventeen* published almost 70 years ago. However, today, with the dominance of the internet as a source of information, and its format and space being highly adaptable and almost limitless, teen magazines seem to have more of a responsibility to provide teens with socially responsible content, particularly in the case of sexuality. As previous research states, of all mass media, teen magazines have been found to be the most responsible in their presentation of topics regarding sex. The online medium provides an opportunity to take that responsibility to a higher level by dedicating more opportunities for health-related information, offering teen girls a place to find more factual and practical information that will assist them in navigating new-found sexuality and sexual relationships. However, the research findings discussed here show that teen magazine editors choose, instead, to fill that infinite space

with topics that may hurt more than help teen girls, ideologically and physically.

Regarding sexuality, in particular, the information provided only works to reinforce gender ideologies, and the focus on emotional issues as a result of physical sexuality may result in more teens involved in unsafe sexual situations. The promotion of playful sexual actions without an equal amount of discussion regarding sexual intercourse itself and the risks of unsafe sexual intercourse can leave teens hanging, and possibly acting on making out or hooking up with a boy or another teen, but unclear on how to approach the result of that action, likely, sexual intercourse.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Based on the frame analysis of the data collected from the three online teen magazines, I will provide summary answers to my research questions and draw conclusions about the discourse of adolescent sexuality presented in the most popular teen magazines. The analysis and discussion aim to contribute to the body of literature on the ideological effects of teen magazine coverage and, more specifically, on the content created and presented online.

RQ 1. How do online teen magazines represent adolescent sexuality?

Amongst the three magazines, the most consistent representation of adolescent sexuality frames it as an element of a romantic boy-girl relationship. Overall, this heteronormative representation of adolescent sexuality is a dominant frame in all three magazines, which suggests to teen readers that sexuality happens only between a male and female. This discourse reinforces a societal norm through representation of traditional gender roles while discussing sexuality and the relationship between boys and girls. Each of the teen magazines examined overwhelmingly chose to represent the emotional, moral, and relationship aspects of sexuality rather than balancing this information with medical and health information about prevention and protection. Not only is attention to factual information about sexual activities lacking, but the focus on rituals of romance--such as kissing, making out, and hooking up--omits important information that may help teens realize that the result of these rituals can often be sexual intercourse. Lastly, these magazines frame adolescent sexuality as actions that subordinate women to men, who are always seen as the initiators of sexual activity.

This consistency among magazines demonstrates the heteronormative representation of teen sexuality that is being perpetuated through the mass media. While the heterosexual population amongst teens may be a majority, there is a great opportunity for mass media directed at the teen audience to educate and encourage alternative viewpoints on sexuality. However, this opportunity is not yet being taken. Among the 251 articles collected, only one had a clear topic of homosexuality and two others were ambiguous. This very limited discussion on sexuality, which follows only a heteronormative ideology, could perpetuate a feeling of disconnectedness for some teens from their peers. It could, more simply, encourage the perpetual out-casting of some teens willing to express a different view on sexuality. This omission of what might be considered alternative types of sexuality could also be a vast misrepresentation of how teens think and feel. By neglecting the topic, some teens could feel that the publications are outdated and out of touch, and question their credibility.

Moreover, the emphasis on interpersonal, romantic relations privileges an approach to teen sexuality where teen girls and boys are seen as individual actors with the emotional and moral capacity to make personal, private decisions regarding their sexuality. This personalization of sexuality and reduction of sex to individualistic dynamics omits any consideration of sexuality as a dimension of life that is guided and affected by the social relations and institutional contexts in which teens are socialized. In most cases, advice columnists encourage readers to act in an individualistic manner without taking into account the guidance of parents, teachers, older relatives, friends, and religious or civic leaders, among others, in processes of decision making, nor is the

particular cultural and family values that teens may be familiar with a factor to be examined.

Lastly, the medium itself is one of almost exponential possibilities. The internet offers endless possibilities, allowing for an opening of discourses on sexuality that may not be as limited by resources as the print version. While print publications are often limited by advertisers, tangible space, and a multitude of other outside influences, the openness of an online publication, even as an extension of the print magazine, seems to offer the opportunity for a more diverse discussion on adolescent sexuality. Ironically, these magazines have shown to only perpetuate the restrictive and somewhat archaic representations of adolescent sexuality and gender ideologies through, what should be, a more progressive medium.

RQ 2. What journalistic conventions are used to construct the discourse on teen sexuality?

The script and syntactical structures of the magazine stories were mostly similar and, therefore, demonstrated a consistent use of conventional journalistic formats, some specific to magazine writing. The question-and-answer or Q&A script was most common amongst the three magazines, with less saliency in *Cosmo Girl*. The stories were structured in the traditional Q&A format: 1) a headline, formed from a portion of the question asked; 2) the question itself as a quote from the inquirer; 3) attribution of the question; 4) an answer to the question. Although this script may provide teen girls with the opportunity to ask personal questions of their choice, their power ends there. The questions are selectively and strategically chosen by editors, and then edited and

modified by editorial staff before they are answered by an unidentified columnist who is placed in a position of authority.

The second most common script, Teen Stories, was structurally similar in all magazines. It featured: 1) A headline, constructed by editors based on the theme of the teen stories provided; 1a) a sub head that works like a nut graph – a summarization of the theme or key points of the article; 2) attribution, if there is any; and 3) the story in one sentence to three or four paragraphs. Like the Q&A, this script is seemingly a free space for teens to share stories of their own lives. However, the usual journalistic convention for all publications would dictate that these stories are all chosen, edited, and arranged by an editorial staff, removing the power of the teen girls and placing it back in the hands of the publication.

As for syntactical structures used, very few articles in the magazines were attributed. By journalistic standards this is very odd, as journalists as well as columnists use bylines and attribution as signs of credibility. However, these magazines often lack these basic journalistic conventions. When used, bylines rarely carried much credibility, as writers identified by name did not disclose their qualification or expertise on the topics covered. Bylines appeared more often in *Cosmo Girl*, although the authors' identities were not well known or appeared on more than one or two articles each. *Seventeen* and *Teen* offered few articles, mainly feature topics, that included attributed sources such as doctors and counselors. However, the majority of articles were Q&A scripts, and provided answers from the non-profit foundation TeensHealth.org. There were no other bylines in these two magazines.

Lastly, all magazines did consistently attribute teen boys as sources in articles. While discussing date attire, kissing styles, and male pleasure in general, teen males were often quoted, offering opinions and preferences on the particular topics. Many of these articles discussed how to make boys feel good, happy, liked, and entertained. By offering the opinions of teen boys, teen girls were, seemingly, getting coveted information from a mysterious and wanted source.

In sum, by adopting the journalistic conventions of traditional magazines and newspapers, the publishers are building credibility, trust, and authority among readers. To teens, these journalistic conventions have likely already become associated with expectations of truth, credibility, and authority. In combination with the personal tone and colloquial language used in the articles, the script and syntactical structures build trust with teen readers, even with the omission of bylines and source attribution. At the same time, the emphasis on these scripts and the predominance of advice columnists as sources of information reinforce the framing of sexuality primarily as an individual, personal, emotional, and romantic issue. Girl readers, in particular, are thus positioned as dependent on prescribed guides for action offered by boys and columnists and on information that often reproduces stereotypical gender behaviors.

RQ 3. What are the ideological effects of the adolescent sexuality discourse in teen magazines?

According to Hall, ideology, in general, is “the frameworks for thinking and calculation about the world—the ‘ideas’ which people use to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they ought to do,” (Hall, 1985, p.99). Based on the dominant and secondary frames, and supporting themes found in the three

online teen magazines, the discourse on adolescent sexuality represented is that of a mass media working to maintain conventional, heteronormative gender relations. Overall, the most salient, and therefore dominant, frame is that of sexuality as a function of a boy-girl romantic relationship where male dominance and prerogative is asserted. Teen girls are represented as traditional and stereotypical—always seeking a long-term heterosexual relationship in which to please a male. Males are also represented stereotypically as lacking emotional needs and seeking to initiate physical relations, in particular sexual actions. This overarching ideology about boys and girls reinforces not only an ideology of teen adolescent sexuality but also the gender roles of boys and girls. According to Butler,

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who is said to preexist the deed. (Chapter V. Identity, Sex, and the metaphysics of substance – paragraph. 22)

By framing males as an authority, but also as a source of pressure and dominance, this representation of males becomes somewhat overbearing and males can then be seen as dangerous or distrustful.

Another ideological effect of the discourse is construction of female teen identity as a fractured and contradictory identity that juxtaposes girls' independence and maturity

in decision making to an emotional dependence on boys. Although teens are hormonally, emotionally, and physically in transition, magazine content, constructs an image of girls as independent individuals capable of making mature and moral decisions regarding sexuality. At the same time, girls are encouraged to learn about and perform the female behaviors that teen boys claim they prefer and want. While teen girls can read advice on making moral decisions and explanations regarding when one might be ready for sexual intercourse—often stressing ideals of independence and responsible thinking—there are so many more articles that use teen boys’ prerogatives to dictate girl behaviors—as in articles like “25 Ways to Show You Love Him ” (n.d.). This article features a list of quotes from teen boys telling teen girls what to do if they want to have a good relationship with a boy. These representations and ideals may be asking girls, who are clearly unsure about sexuality and their own personalities, to make decisions that they aren’t ready to or mature enough to make.

To further reinforce this gendered pattern of representation, the discourse on sexuality heavily emphasizes emotional appeals to girls rather than rational thinking about how romantic behaviors may lead to sexual activity or other social dimensions of sexuality. This rhetorical structure can add to the confusion often lived by teenagers as they being to understand their sexuality. While magazine content discusses topics like making out, hooking up, and casual relationships as normal, it underplays discussion of how the rituals of romance can lead to sexual intercourse and limits the amount of factual information about sex. Thus, in this sense the coverage fails to play a role in socializing teens to make informed decisions about intercourse and other sexual behaviors.

Based on Hall's definition of ideology, one may argue that this popular form of media is providing a set of frameworks for understanding sexuality and behavioral guidelines for teen girls to follow. On the basis of information provided and, more importantly, subjective advice offered by columnists, magazine coverage suggests a place and identity to girls as they engaged different aspects of sexuality—from kissing to flirting, dating, intercourse and other rituals of romance that involve intimacy. This representation of sexuality through stereotypical heteronormative gender roles reinforces an idea of what all teens are and “ought to” be and restrains thinking on alternative and diverse expressions of sexuality and romance.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

It should be noted that the analysis presented in this thesis is based on a selection of articles that were displayed on the magazines' websites as they would be in a print magazine. Due to the high number of articles identified, interactive pieces as well as visual representations that accompanied each article were not examined. In this regard, the findings discussed in this thesis may not be representative of the interactive formats present on the web sites but excluded from the data set examined for this research. Another limitation is the medium itself and how its evolving character may affect the generalizability of findings. Content production for the Internet is evolving almost constantly. Even during the time when this research was being conducted, the magazine sites were dramatically redesigned. In fact, after data collection for this research had concluded, these online magazines were bundled into one interactive site named *Seventeen.com*. *Teen* and *Cosmo Girl*, are now formatted as blogs found only within the *Seventeen* site and combine social media, blogs, and message boards to draw teen

interaction and contribution. And with each new web-related evolution, media formats and sources may change for the teen audience. Thus, the rapid evolution of online design and its impact on audience activity pose challenges to researchers. Therefore, while the research on online media presented here contributes to a sparse body of literature, evolving production dynamics may limit the scope and generalizability of the findings.

In this sense, a possible direction for future research is to expand the data set to focus on these interactive pages and compare them to traditional content (online and in print) to explore whether interactive formats are conducive to alternative framing patterns or a different positioning of girls as readers, sources, and producers of content. By dissecting the online versions of magazines, researchers could also explore the way audience interaction may be a factor contributing to editorial decisions like topic selection, story formats, and sourcing. Further, using a framework like Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, researchers could examine the dynamics of production and consumption by teen audiences. This could incorporate analysis of audience interactions online as well as focus groups with teens. This approach would add to existing literature on teen use of media by illuminating how technological developments may or may not be affecting how teens use of media, and how the interactive audiences' dual role as both consumers and producers of content—for instance by exchanging ideas and advice via comment sections or blogs—may shape discourses. Other relevant questions to be explored are: Does the interactive approach empowers teens, and if so, how? Does it lead to greater trust and source credibility among teen audiences? Do audiences use interactivity in magazine web sites as an informational or recreational tool?

In addition, this research may provide a starting point for conducting similar research, but comparing the online magazines that originate in the United States to those that originate in other countries, possibly the United Kingdom or another European country with a similar set of adolescent magazines. The discussion of sexuality may prove to be an interesting topic when comparing the countries. This may also open up discussion on the state of teen pregnancies and how the representations of adolescent teen sexuality can or might affect those numbers and others related to teen health, such as sexually transmitted diseases.

There may also be room for a more quantitative approach on this research topic. This study could serve as one part of a more full-set of data that also examines effects theories such as cultivation theory and other mass media and health communication theories. This, in combination with the current research, may help to develop additional educational tactics and strategies for teen health and sexuality.

Lastly, a key area for future research should be media and source credibility among adolescents. Teens have always been a fickle market, making it hard to reach in terms of public service announcements but easy to target for clothing and energy drink companies. Future research should focus on the sources and media outlets that teens find most credible—including the trustworthiness, reputation, and status attributed to each. Research that identifies media and source credibility among teens would be valuable for organizations seeking to educate teens and spread educational and positive messages regarding self and sexuality. This would be particularly useful for federal, state, and non-profit organizations that work relentlessly to reach the teen audience with messages of

public service, in particular, prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases amongst teens.

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