The Ideological Construction of the Female Body: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Messages to the Readers of Seventeen

by

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Abstract

Research studies have consistently reported a correlation between exposure to appearance media and body dissatisfaction among young (and adult) women. The mainstream literature on body dissatisfaction attributes body dissatisfaction to an uncritical consumption of media by young (and adult) women. The feminist literature on body dissatisfaction suggests that media messages are one aspect of the social subordination of women and that body dissatisfaction originates in unrealistic social expectations about the female body. This thesis examines how *Seventeen* textually constructs the female body. Through acts of linguistic and discursive signification, the female body is homogenized and differences—in terms of race, ability, and social class, for example—are erased. Moving across a range of genres in *Seventeen*, the discourses of heterosexuality, hedonism, paternalism, vulnerability, and altruism work together to universalize a singular perspective on the female body. Ultimately, *Seventeen* constructs the female body as a barrier to the aspirations of the subject occupying it. The female body is constructed as a body that cannot gain attention without being constantly changed and made to look different. Based on the analysis, this thesis recommends that educational interventions go beyond media literacy and focus on media production: Eliminating body dissatisfaction necessarily involves the production of an alternative female body. Future research needs to examine the semiotic resources and media production support that can be offered to young women in order to help them respond to the mainstream construction of the female body with their own alternative constructions.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................. iii

List of Figures......................................................................................................................................... vi

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................. vii

Chapter 1: Research context, issues, questions .................................................................................... 1
  Signification and the Female Body ........................................................................................................ 5
  Conceptual Framework: Mediational means, Ideologies, and “Common Sense” ...................... 9
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................................. 20
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................ 21

Chapter 2: A literature review of constructions and deconstructions of the female body ........ 23
  Discursive Construction of the Female Body ...................................................................................... 24
  Readership and Internalization ............................................................................................................ 26
  Obscuring Contradictions .................................................................................................................. 33
  The Female Body as Performative ...................................................................................................... 34
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................ 36

Chapter 3: Methodology: A snapshot of the hegemonic “common sense” of the female body ........ 38
  Researcher’s Positionality ................................................................................................................... 38
  Critical Discourse Analysis ................................................................................................................. 44
  Media, Ideology and “Common Sense” ............................................................................................... 48
  Analytical Tools ................................................................................................................................ 50
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................ 57

Chapter 4: Homogenization of the female body across race and ability, and the erasure of social class ................................................................................................................................. 59
Race as a Tool of Homogenization ................................................................. 59
Ability as a Tool of Homogenization ............................................................. 86
The Erasure of Class .................................................................................... 89
Summary ..................................................................................................... 102

Chapter 5: Processes of difference construction .............................................. 104
The Horoscopes Section: Astrological Differences ........................................ 104
Other Differences in Seventeen ..................................................................... 123
Summary ..................................................................................................... 133

Chapter 6: Naturalization of body dissatisfaction ............................................. 136
Naturalization of the Female Body’s Need For Change ................................... 136
Body Dissatisfaction .................................................................................... 152
Summary ..................................................................................................... 166

Chapter 7: Conclusions and implications ....................................................... 168
Summary and Synthesis ................................................................................ 168
Recommendations ........................................................................................ 174
Limitations and Extensions ......................................................................... 187
Summary ..................................................................................................... 189

References ................................................................................................... 191
Appendix A: Discourses and themes ............................................................... 195
Appendix B: Discourse of heterosexuality ...................................................... 199
Appendix C: Discourse of hedonism ............................................................... 203
Appendix D: Discourse of paternalism ............................................................ 204
Appendix E: Discourse of vulnerability .......................................................... 205
Appendix F: Discourse of altruism ................................................................. 208
Appendix G: Discourse of collaboration .......................................................... 210
Appendix H: Discourse of femininity ................................................................. 211
Appendix I: Discourse of individualism .................................................................. 213
Appendix J: Discourse of pathology ........................................................................ 214
Appendix K: Discourse of feminism ....................................................................... 216
List of Figures

Figure 1. Mediational means, ideologies and “common sense.” .........................................................20
Figure 2. Extended conceptual framework. ..........................................................................................47
Figure 3. Stages and practices of female bodies. ..................................................................................70
Figure 4. Exposure to “pro-ana” sites. ...............................................................................................77
Figure 5. Product storyline. ................................................................................................................79
Figure 6. Protection from HIV storyline. ...........................................................................................91
Figure 7. Stages of getting new look.................................................................................................101
Figure 8. Romantic storyline. ..........................................................................................................124
Figure 9. Play storyline. ....................................................................................................................131
Figure 10. Storyline of losing weight...............................................................................................144
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“Know that I always want you to feel your awesomeest,” stated the Editor in Chief of Seventeen magazine when addressing the readers (February, 2009, p. 14). Suggestions about what to wear and what to eat along with strategies about how to seduce young men, how to save money, and how to feel confident are among the constitutive parts of the issues of Seventeen. The main purpose of the magazine, as the statement of the Editor in Chief exemplified, is to provide support to the readers, to the addressed readers. The magazine mainly addresses heterosexual young women: the section “love life” exclusively discusses heterosexual relationships. Besides excluding gay young women, many of the assumptions made in the magazine’s articles lead to the exclusion of other categories of young women, among these categories are: young women with special needs (readers are assumed to be able to work out), married young women (all the tips in the Love Life section are about how to get a boyfriend or have a better relation with a boyfriend), and young women who are mothers (readers are assumed not to have children).

The readers addressed by Seventeen are supposed to feel their “awesomeest,” yet they may not. Seventeen belongs to a set of appearance-related media whose readers and consumers are reported to be dissatisfied with their bodies. Correlational and experimental studies have repeatedly reported an effect of appearance media on women’s satisfaction with their bodies; the effect is almost always negative. For example, Grabe et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 77 studies that tested the strength of the association between the two variables. Their analysis
confirmed the presence of a correlation and provided further evidence for the presence of causation: exposure to appearance media increased body dissatisfaction.

Body dissatisfaction, along with other feelings of inadequacy, is essential for the construction of young women as a group of consumers of beauty products: “consumptive behavior is often predicated on creating a feeling of inadequacy in the buyer” (Massoni, 2006, p. 40). Since it was established in the 1940s, Seventeen has used its readers’ vulnerability and feelings of inadequacy to attract advertisers. The vulnerability of young women in the 1940s was constructed through their “need” for a young man. A young woman was constructed as unable to attract or keep a young man without buying the beauty products advertised by Seventeen. This vulnerability in relation to young men constructs young women as perpetual consumers: “[The young woman] goes to Seventeen for direction, the advertiser influences her to buy, she influences others to buy—and then a boy makes her feel inadequate, which sends her running back to Seventeen” (Massoni, 2006, p. 40).

The assumption of young women’s dependency on young men was widely contested after the rise of the feminist movement, the increase in the awareness of gender inequality, and the incorporation of feminist ideas in popular common sense (McRobbie, 1991). However, the female body was still constructed by teen magazines as inadequate and the consumption of beauty products remained an essential need for young women. While constructed as no longer dependent on a young man, a young woman was still constructed as dependent on beauty products. She engaged in the practices of “fixing” her body, not in order to attract a young man, but rather, in order to reach the psychic experience of “feeling like a woman” (McRobbie, 1991). She was not doing this to attract someone; she was doing it for herself: “[K]eep in mind who
you’re doing it for. Don’t do it to impress a guy or your friends— do it for you!” (Seventeen, Editorial, October, 2008, p. 12).

As part of constructing her as a consumer, teen magazines and women’s magazines construct the young woman’s body as inadequate. The female body is constructed as a body that needs to be fixed perpetually and being a female is constructed as being engaged in fixing one’s body. Exposure to these constructions, as Grabe et al. (2008) found, leads to body dissatisfaction among the readers.

Based on their findings, Grabe et al. (2008) offered many suggestions for a solution to body dissatisfaction, including suggestions that were not necessarily supported by the results of their analysis. For example, they called for the implementation of media literacy programs noting that “media literacy can be used to teach girls and women to become more active, critical consumers of appearance-related media to prevent the development of body dissatisfaction and disturbed eating behaviors” (p. 471). Inherent in this suggestion is the assumption that women become dissatisfied with their bodies because they are uncritical consumers of the media. Women are assumed to internalize the messages of the media passively and, therefore, they must be “educated.”

Interestingly, “educating” young women to become critical consumers of the media seems to be one of the objectives of Seventeen magazine. In an article entitled, “What really goes into celeb pics,” the self-esteem expert in Seventeen states the following:

In pictures, famous people look perfect. It’s a bummer to compare ourselves with those images and realize all the ways we’ll never look like that. But it’s important to know that nearly every person on a billboard, a CD, or a book cover has likely been retouched. Flyaway hair, zits, and even tummy rolls can be erased from an image in seconds. (Seventeen, Body Peace, September, 2009, p. 136)
In this passage, the expert’s suggestions are based on the same assumption that Grabe et al. (2008) used in their reasoning: The reason behind young women’s body dissatisfaction is their uncritical consumption of the images in the media. But this assumption is far from being unquestionable. In fact, Grabe et al. (2008) themselves revealed the weakness of their assumption: “despite the critical awareness that media literacy training stands to offer, several studies have found limited evidence of the effectiveness of media literacy” (p. 471). Even after being “taught” how to be critical, exposure to appearance media still increases women’s body dissatisfaction.

According to Bordo (2003), the recognition that the images in the media are not real is not likely to have any effect on young women’s relationship with their bodies:

Breast enhancement is one of the most common surgical procedures for teenagers. These girls are not superficial creatures who won’t be satisfied unless they look like goddesses. More and more, girls who get implants feel that they need them in order to look normal in a culture in which ‘normal’ is being radically redefined. (p. xvi)

Young women are not “superficial creatures” who need to be educated. Their body dissatisfaction is not necessarily rooted in their uncritical consumption of media images. Rather, and as Bordo (2003) suggested, young women might be dissatisfied because they grow up in a world where the female body is already constructed, and constantly reproduced, as unsatisfactory and unfit. While young women’s dissatisfaction may be one outcome of their construction as consumers by women’s magazines, it may also be an outcome of their construction as “females” in the larger social context where they live.

In order to examine this process of construction, the construction of the category “female body,” this thesis analyzed texts in Seventeen. These texts signify the “female body” through categories such as beauty, health and femininity. Through acts of signification, these texts shape
the way female bodies are constructed and the way they are read. This first chapter consists of three parts. The first part discusses how signification can reconstruct the signified. In the second part, the conceptual framework that grounds this research is articulated. The chapter ends by articulating the research questions that this thesis aims to address.

Signification and the Female Body

The linguistic categories used to signify an object construct that object. By choosing a particular expression to refer to an object, we communicate our perspective on the object and on the situation to which the object belongs (Wertsch, 1985). When an adult, while addressing a child, points to a piece of puzzle and refers to it as “the wheels of the truck,” the adult is helping the child reconstruct her reality. The child is transforming her reality from a reality where pieces of a puzzle are independent objects to a reality where pieces of a puzzle represent different parts of the same truck, or different parts of any object that should be put together. As Wertsch (1985) argued, it is through referring that adults communicate their perspectives to children, supporting the children’s construction of more culturally appropriate versions of reality. Referring to an object constructs it, and through constructing objects, referring constructs reality.

The category “object” is itself a referential expression, a construction. When we refer to “objects” we do not refer to reality, we refer to a constructed reality. The category “object” constructs reality as a dichotomous system, where entities are either subjects or objects, “doers” or “done to,” animate or inanimate. However, this construction of reality is not the “true” reality, and like any other construction, it can be challenged.

Many have written about the reverse: about objects as “doers” and subjects as “done to,” objects as animate and subjects as inanimate. For example, the “mathematician Gauss was ‘seized’ by mathematics. The poet Robert Frost insisted that ‘a poem finds its own way’ […]"
And we know that well-tended engines purr, polished instruments gleam, and fine glassware glistens” (Noddings, 1992, p. 20). An “object” is not an “object” by virtue of its “nature,” rather, it becomes an “object” through reference. Referring to an object reconstructs the object because in the very act of labeling the referent as “object” it has already become a construction.

The female body is one of the infinite categories that we refer to, describe, signify. Every time a female body is signified, the category used in the act of signification, is inscribed on it. Race, class, age, weight are all signifiers that, once inscribed on the body, transform its properties and recreate it anew. Like the category “object,” the category “female body” is itself a construction.

An example of how a signifier transforms the property of the female body is the signifier “black.” In general, a body, whether it is a female or a male body, is constructed as a “private” property of the subject occupying it. Any act of aggression on this “private” property is signified with the categories of “harassment” and “rape.” However, when the signifier “black” is inscribed on a female body, the signified female body is reconstructed and, as Bordo (2003) claimed, it is stripped of its “privacy,” becoming a commodity that anyone can own:

By virtue of her race, she is instinctual animal, undeserving of privacy and undemanding of respect. She does not tease and then resist (as in the stereotype of the European temptress); she merely goes “into heat.” […] But the legacy of slavery has added an additional element […] her body is not only treated as an animal body but is property, to be “taken” and used at will. (Bordo, 2003, p.11)

“Black” not only signifies bodies with a dark skin color, it can also signify bodies of any skin color, and the same applies for “white.” Bettie (2000) reported that, in a high school attended mainly by young women who were Mexican Americans or white, some students who were Mexican Americans were described as “acting white.” By virtue of their ethnic belongingness they were signified as “brown,” by virtue of their choices and performances in
school they were signified as “white.” And by virtue of the contradiction between the two categories (“white” and “brown”), they were signified as “unauthentic” bodies, constructed as false bodies.

Female bodies are signified and constructed by others, but they can exercise agency in their signification through negotiation. In order to negotiate, they have to play by the rules of signification. For example, in order to avoid being signified as “unauthentic,” some middle class overachieving young women who were Mexican Americans performed a working class identity and succeeded in “earning” their race (Bettie, 2000). Young women signified as “overweight” also attempt to resignify their bodies; they do so through dieting.

A female body, however, does not always succeed in resignifying itself and earning the signifier it seeks to earn. Dieting is not enough to resignify the body signified as “overweight,” losing weight is what actually leads to resignification. In a column addressed to young women who were trying to “get fit” and encountering difficulty, the self-esteem expert in Seventeen magazine wrote:

[R]emind yourself to stop focusing on the results and to just focus on how you feel. So instead of worrying about the numbers on the scale, for example, think about how energized you feel after a workout. (Seventeen, Body Peace, February, 2009, p. 61, italicized words appear in red in the original text)

The self-esteem expert encouraged young women to deal with their “failures” by ignoring the results, rather than by questioning what counts as a result. The body of a young woman signified as “unfit” will never be resignified unless she reaches a “result,” and what counts as a “result” is weight loss, only weight loss. “Feeling energized” can be a consolation for those who fail to reach results, but it cannot be considered a “result.” While the practices of working out and
dieting can lead to positive feelings, the practices themselves are no guarantee that the body will be resignified.

It is not the practice that leads to the resignification of the body, what matters is the “result” and the category “result” is constructed by context and is imposed on the subject. What counts is not the practice of the subject, it is the interpretation of that practice. Bettie (2000) noted that working class young women, in order to differentiate themselves from middle class young women in their high school and in order to perceive themselves and be perceived as more mature and independent, performed a femininity that was opposite to the one performed by the middle class young women. They wore heavy makeup and tight clothes, and told sexual jokes. The intention was to signify themselves as mature, strong, and responsible. But they were instead signified as “oversexed,” constructed as morally inferior. Their practice was not interpreted as a display of belongingness to a struggling working class; their practice was interpreted as an attempt to increase their sexual desirability, a display of belongingness to a gender constructed as a source of temptation for the opposite gender.

Signifiers that are involved in the construction of the female body impose ontological boundaries beyond which subjects signified as “female body” cease to be signified as “real”: A “real” female body cannot be both overweight and happy, a real female body cannot be both “black” and overachiever, a real female body cannot be or feel like a man. Female bodies are constructed and reconstructed within the boundaries of the “real,” a “real” imposed by the properties of the signifiers used in signifying the female body and its practices: properties that are products of power relations. In order to examine how power relations shape the signification and construction of female bodies, the concepts of mediational means, ideology, and “common sense” are introduced next.
Conceptual Framework: Mediational Means, Ideologies, and “Common Sense”

The concept of mediational means is used to explain how the categories and concepts that mediate our encounter with external reality, shape the way we construct our mental reality and the categories of this mental reality, the “female body” being one of them. The concept of ideology is used to explain how some worldviews, or ideologies, organize our use of mediational means in a way that naturalizes these worldviews. When their use is shaped by ideology, mediational means construct accounts of reality that tend to legitimate ideology and to transform it from a view of the world, to the natural, real representation of the world. The concept of “common sense” is used to explain how different, contradictory ideologies function together in the organization of mediational means and how this organization leads to the construction of accounts of reality that naturalize multiple, contradictory, often mutually exclusive ideologies.

Mediational Means

“It seems, the body that we experience and conceptualize is always mediated by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature,” noted Bordo (2003, p. 35). However, in addition to female bodies being always mediated by constructs, our encounter with every category is necessarily mediated by constructs and concepts.

Our perception is never immediate, we never see the “real” world, we always see a mediated world, a world mediated through the categories available to us and this is what differentiates humans from the rest of animals. Unlike other animals, “I do not merely see something round and black with two hands; I see a clock and I can distinguish one hand from the other” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). Not all humans, as Vygotsky noted, have the category “clock” among the categories that mediate their perceptions of the world. For example, some brain injured patients, when shown a clock, could not see the clock, they could only see a black circle
with two hands. But their encounter with reality was no less mediated than the encounter of those who could see a clock. Their encounter with the world was mediated by the categories of color, they saw a “black” circle, and black is a category, a construction.

A patient of Oliver Sacks saw the world without colors. In addition, he could not remember colors or think of colors, all colors including black, white and grey:

[H]is world was not really like black-and-white television or film— it would have been much easier to live with had it been so. [...] Subsequently, he said neither “grey” nor “leaden” could begin to convey what his world was actually like. It was not “grey” that he experienced, he said, but perceptual qualities for which ordinary experience, ordinary language, had no equivalent. (Sacks, 1995, p. 11)

Vygotsky saw a “clock” constituted by a “black” circle, his patients only saw a “black” circle. Sacks’ patient could recognize a “clock” and a circle, but to describe the circle that he saw, he needed a different category than the category of colors. He needed a category that does not exist in language. The set of linguistic categories and semiotic means available to us excluded what Sacks’ patient saw from the realm of the signifiable.

The same semiotic world that constructs the images that Sacks’ patient saw as unsignifiable, constructs many female bodies as unauthentic, unintelligible, illusionary and false. As mentioned above, Bettie (2000), in an ethnography conducted in a high school attended mainly by young women who were Mexican American and young women who were white, described how young women who were Mexican American and who were in the preparatory classes were constructed as “acting white” and hence as “unauthentic.” Another example of how the semiotic environment constructs bodies as illusionary is the female body signified as “overweight.” In this semiotic environment, the female body that is both signified as “overweight” and “healthy” is a contradiction. “Overweight” and “healthy” are defined as mutually exclusive:
My body to you is a time bomb, ticking towards disease, deterioration, death. […] My body is not diseased, it is not pathological, it is not out of control […] there are pleasures and joys I know of my flesh that fall outside your pathologising, objectifying gaze. (Murray, 2003, as cited in Gard & Wright, 2005, p. 166)

As long as the speaker’s body is signified as “overweight,” she will not be signified as “healthy.” The joy that she knows of her flesh is excluded from the realm of the signifiable and the real. Only when she ceases to be signified as “overweight” can she speak of pleasure and remain within the boundaries of the “real” and the signifiable.

The signifiers that we use to construct our reality impose on us the boundaries of what can be signified as reality. The same signifiers that enable us to construct reality, disable us to construct an alternative reality, a reality outside of the constructed reality. This enabling and disabling is a property of all types of signs.

Vygotsky (1978) differentiated between a tool, which is used in the process of natural adaptation to act on the environment, and a sign, which is used to construct mental reality. Signs are psychological tools; they shape our mental construction of reality like tools shape our adaptation to reality:

[B]y being included in the process of behavior, the psychological tool alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions. It does this by determining the structure of a new instrumental act, just as a technical tool alters the process of natural adaptation by determining the form of labor operations. (Vygotsky, 1981, as cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 32-33)

Mediational means are sign systems or systems of psychological tools. They support and facilitate the mental construction of reality, as well as shape humans’ mental functioning. They provide the foundation for human mental activity, and an account of human mental functioning that does not address mediational means is definitely incomplete, potentially distorted: “[T]he relationship between action and mediational means is so fundamental that it is more appropriate,
when referring to the agent involved, to speak of ‘individual(s)-acting-with-mediational-means’ than to speak simply of ‘individuals’” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 12).

An account of human action based on the notion of mediational means questions the relevance of the traditional definition of the concept “agent.” When we use the term “agent” to describe the person involved in an action, we assume that the action is characterized by an agency on the part of that person. The person is assumed to be in full control. However, the concept of mediational means suggests that natural and psychological tools support and constrain the individual’s agency. Individuals exercise their agency through the tools available to them, but their agency is also constrained by the very tools that support it. When commenting on the power of institutions in shaping the individual’s action, Fairclough (1995) highlighted the difference between “agent” and “subject”: “The term subject […] has the double sense of agent (‘the subjects of history’) and affected (‘the Queen’s subjects’); this captures the concept of the subject as qualified to act through being constrained —‘subjected’ to an institutional frame” (p. 39). While Fairclough’s remark addresses the power of institutions in shaping action, the same reasoning can be applied to the power of mediational means in shaping actions. We become subjects through the use of mediational means and are subjected by mediational means.

Examining mediational means requires an examination of how they are used by subjects and imposed on subjects. In Vygotsky’s view, “it is meaningless to assert that individuals ‘have’ a sign [or a mediational means], or have mastered it, without addressing the ways in which they do or do not use it to mediate their own actions or those of others” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 29). Language, the number system, visual animations are all systems of signs, psychological tools that mediate humans’ mental actions. However, these different systems are used for different purposes and to mediate different types of mental actions.
In the mental construction of reality, the selection of the mediational means to use shapes the type of reality that is being constructed. Switching mediational means transforms the mediated reality that we experience. An observation made by Zeno, known as “Zeno’s paradox,” is an illustration of how switching mediational means transforms reality. The phenomenon of “movement,” when constructed primarily through language, has nothing problematic or paradoxical about it; entities move from point A to point B, nothing problematic, nothing paradoxical. But when Zeno reasoned about this same phenomenon with the mediation of the number system, using the categories of fractions and the relation of mathematical division, he found that “movement” is impossible:

Suppose Homer wants to catch a stationary bus. Before he can get there, he must get halfway there. Before he can get halfway there, he must get a quarter of the way there. Before traveling a fourth, he must travel one-eighth; before an eighth, one-sixteenth; and so on. This description requires one to complete an infinite number of tasks, which Zeno maintains is an impossibility. (Wikipedia.org)

In a reality primarily mediated by the number system, “movement” is impossible. And if “movement” happens, then it is either an illusion or a miracle.

Zeno’s paradox highlights how different mediational means construct different realities. Gender is one of the mediational means that shape the construction of reality and of the category of the “female body” that is constitutive of reality. In its mainstream version, gender is a mediational means traditionally constituted of two categories “men” and “women,” and a relation between them, which is a relation of dichotomy and mutual exclusion. The use of gender as a dichotomous system has consequences on the construction of the boundaries beyond which subjects cease to be “real” or “normal.” Two populations that are often excluded from the realm of the “normal” and the “appropriate” because of the traditional use of gender as a mediational means are the populations of subjects signified as “feminine men” and subjects signified as
“masculine women.” Their stigmatization is due to the dichotomous property of gender: a man cannot act like a woman; a woman cannot act like a man.

Mediation means function to promote certain worldviews, certain versions of reality while shadowing other versions. Fowler (1985) argued that the vocabulary of a language — the set of mediational categories that constitute language — can be conceptualized as a “kind of lexical map of the preoccupations of a culture” (p. 65). Through mediational categories a worldview is kept alive in the collective consciousness of a community: “Possessing the terms crystallizes the relevant concepts for their users; using them in discourse keeps the ideas current in the community’s consciousness […] In this way ideology is reproduced” (p. 65). The use of mediational means is shaped by and functions to reproduce worldviews. But not all worldviews shape and are reproduced by our use of mediational means; those that do are called ideologies.

**Ideologies**

Any assumption about the world is a worldview, but not all assumptions about the world shape and structure the mental reality of the masses and their use of mediational means. Ideologies are worldviews that are taken for granted and naturalized. They structure our use of mediational means in the activity of constructing reality. They also structure the activity of social interaction, the negotiation of reality with other subjects. Fairclough (2001) defined ideologies as “assumptions which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically, and of which people are generally not consciously aware” (p. 2). Ideologies structure the use of linguistic and non-linguistic mediational means according to rules “hidden” from subjects and by doing so they impose and perpetuate and naturalize certain versions of reality while silencing others.
A worldview becomes an ideology through its ability to shape the organization of social and mental life. The same worldview can be an ideology in one society and just a worldview in another. It can be an ideology in one historical era and just a worldview in another, based on its repercussions on the consciousness of the masses.

Ideologies shape our use of mediational means in the construction of reality. Ideologies also have the potential to create new mediational means out of older ones. An example of how an ideology creates a new mediational means is the “couch potato” ideology. The “couch potato” ideology is the worldview that associates fast food consumption, laziness and entertainment technology with being overweight. The functioning of this ideology is illustrated in the following paragraph:

The fat cats of the junk food industry will be feeling just a little fatter this morning. A report published by Sport England confirms what many of us have suspected for years. Our tuberous schools really are turning the nation’s children into couch potatoes. In the five years since the previous survey, the proportion of six- to eight-year-olds spending two hours or more per week taking part in PE declined from 32% to 11%.

(Crace, 2000, as cited by Gard & Wright, 2005, p. 27)

Gard and Wright (2005) questioned why Crace (2000) immediately related the decline of physical activity with “the fat cats of the junk food industry.” They argued that this is an effect of the couch potato ideology. According to them, the couch potato image is an ideology because it became “difficult to think about children, food and physical activity without reference to it” (p. 27).

The “couch potato” ideology created a specialized mediational means designed to shape the construction of bodies signified as “overweight” and “obese.” This mediational means is constituted of two clusters of categories and a relation between them. The two clusters are: On the one hand, “entertainment technology,” “overeating,” “lack of physical activity,” “laziness”
and, on the other hand, “overweight” and “obese.” The relation between these two clusters is one of causation: being lazy and overeating causes one to be overweight or obese. These mediational means not only structure our construction of the categories “overweight” and “obese,” they also structure the way we address people signified as “overweight” and “obese” or people who want to avoid being signified as such. Ultimately, the couch potato ideology is naturalized and taken for granted. Subjects whose reasoning is shaped by this ideology speak with confidence and authority, because, to them, the couch potato image is not a view of reality rather, it is the image of the one “true” reality.

Ideologies shape our use of mediational means, but our use of mediational means can challenge the very ideologies that shape them as well. The texts produced by mediational means, constructed through mediational means, can both reiterate an ideology and simultaneously challenge that same ideology. This effect of texts is due to their heterogeneity, a property investigated in the works of Bakhtin (1981). The heterogeneity of texts points to the possibility for a creative use of mediational means, especially language. Mediational means are always used in new and creative ways. Beginners who are beginning their apprenticeship in the use of mediational means may use them differently than the experts. Vygotsky (1978) argued that the process of internalizing the use of a mediational means is not a passive process of imitation; rather it is a process of recreation where “[a]n operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally” (pp. 56-57, emphasis added).

Another reason why mediational means can challenge the ideologies that they are supposed to reiterate is the multiplicity of ideologies that shape our mental functioning. Our mental functioning is shaped by different contradictory ideologies. The “couch potato ideology” itself is constituted by two contradictory ideologies, as Gard and Wright (2005) noticed. On the
one hand, the “couch potato” ideology constructs the individual as the victim of technology and as helpless against it (technophobia). On the other hand, by constructing subjects signified as “overweight” as “lazy” and as responsible for their condition, the “couch potato” ideology constructs individuals as the masters of their destinies and as able to control their lives (individualism). Are we helpless or in control? This is one of the questions asked by Gard and Wright (2005) in response to the contradictions of the “couch potato” ideology.

In order to complete this conceptual framework, a concept is needed that explains how contradictory ideologies, together, shape the use of mediational means. Also, a concept is needed to explain how subjects whose mental functioning is shaped by contradictory worldviews, still participate in the construction of accounts of reality that naturalize and legitimize these worldviews.

Common Sense

According to Gramsci (1971), consciousness is contradictory because our encounter with reality is mediated by “common sense” and contradiction is an essential characteristic of “common sense.” “Common sense” is the set of incoherent beliefs uncritically absorbed by the masses. These beliefs tend to form, together, a conception of the world full of contradictions (Gramsci, 1971). When the masses develop an incoherent conception of the world, the personality becomes “strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 324).

The beliefs that form common sense are constructed by different, contradictory and sometimes mutually exclusive ideologies. For an ideology to be part of “common sense,” it does
not need to be coherent with the ideologies that already form “common sense.” Every ideology that proves to be historically effective in a social context will be part of the common sense that structures the social and mental functioning of that context—the way mediational means are used in social interaction and mental functioning:

Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of ‘common sense’: This is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life. (Gramsci, 1949, as cited in Gramsci, 1971, editor’s notes, p. 326)

Ideologies become constitutive of “common sense” not through their internal properties or the extent of their rationality, rather, it is their “historical effectiveness” that allows them to join the group of ideologies that shape the subject’s mental functioning.

When the ideology of a social group becomes part of “common sense,” this social group acquires power, because the social interaction and mental functioning of the masses are perpetuating the beliefs of this group and constructing the group’s worldview as the “natural.” According to Fairclough (2001), a group achieves domination not only through coercion, but also through its ability to project its ideology as “common sense.” A group’s worldview is not an ideology until it becomes part of “common sense.” Before penetrating “common sense,” a worldview cannot be signified as an ideology because it has no effect and no power on the construction of reality. Gramsci (1971) called such worldviews “arbitrary” ideologies and differentiated them from “historical” ideologies:

To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is ‘psychological’; they ‘organize’ human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual ‘movements’, polemics and so on. (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377)
In this text, “arbitrary” ideologies are signified as worldviews. Only “historical” ideologies, the ideologies that organize the mental and material functioning of the masses, are signified as ideologies.

“Common sense” is a site of struggle between social groups who are attempting to gain domination. When more than one social group succeeds in making its ideology historically efficient and in imposing it on “common sense,” a negotiation is needed. The beliefs that form one “common sense,” but are rooted in contradictory ideologies, need to be perceived as coherent. Furthermore, “common sense” needs to be perceived not as the authorship of dominant groups, but as a conception of the world that reflects the natural order of things, a naturalized conception of the world that emerges to support a better encounter with the natural reality. Gramsci’s concept of hegemony refers to the process through which different dominant groups, in their attempt to develop a ruling alliance, articulate a “common sense” that simultaneously promotes their interest and is perceived as promoting the interest of all society (Carlson, 1995). This “common sense” is referred to as hegemonic “common sense.”

The relations between the concepts of mediational means, ideologies and “common sense” are illustrated in Figure 1. Mediational means reiterate or challenge ideologies as they are taken up, used and transformed in different contexts. Ideologies shape the use and properties of mediational means, dialectically, and they saturate or challenge hegemonic “common sense.” “Common sense” consolidates and homogenizes ideologies, normalizing their contradictions and naturalizing them.
Research Questions

The main research question that guided this study is the following: How do the texts in *Seventeen* magazine ideologically construct the female body? In order to answer this question, I investigated the following three sub-questions:

- How do hegemonic ideologies shape the texts in *Seventeen*?
• How are counter hegemonic elements, like feminism and social equity, incorporated in the texts of Seventeen?

• How are the contradictions between hegemonic and counter hegemonic ideologies, normalized, and how is the “common sense” about the female body constructed as coherent and natural?

I addressed these questions by examining the way mediational means are used by Seventeen in the construction of the female body. Through studying the properties of the mediational means that are used and the way these mediational means are used together, I analyzed how hegemonic and counter hegemonic ideologies shape the construction of the female body.

Summary

Our encounter with reality is mediated by signs and mediational means. The functioning of mediational means is not arbitrary; it happens in a context where some worldviews are naturalized into ideologies. These hegemonic ideologies shape the way mediational means are used in the construction of reality. The “female body,” like all categories, is constructed through the use of mediational means and its construction is shaped by the hegemonic ideologies that are characteristic of our context. The ideologies that construct the “female body” together form the “common sense” of the female body, which is a set of incoherent beliefs about the female body that further naturalize hegemonic ideologies and hide their contradictions.

In Chapter 2, a literature review extends the discussion of the concepts that surface in my research questions. In Chapter 3, the methodology and procedure used for conducting this research are presented. As the author of a critical discourse analysis, my role as researcher must be made explicit and this discussion completes Chapter 3. An analysis of the data is articulated in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Each chapter addresses a different ideological process through which the
female body is constructed. Finally, Chapter 6 articulates the conclusions, recommendations and limitations of this study.
Chapter 2
A literature review of constructions and deconstructions of the female body

The female body is constructed at the intersection of multiple hegemonic and counter hegemonic ideologies, ideologies that together constitute an incoherent, contradictory “common sense.” This chapter provides a literature review of the female body as a construct of ideologies and discourses. The concept of discourse is defined here as a way of using the mediational means of language. This way of using language is often characteristic of an institution or a social group (Fairclough, 1995). The concept of discursive practice is defined as the practice of producing, consuming or distributing a text (Fairclough, 1995). Discursive practices use mediational means for the purpose of producing or interpreting texts. These texts function to (re)produce a “common sense” of the female body.

The literature review given here is not exhaustive. It focuses on discursive practices that are shaped by the ideology of gendered mind/body dualism. The influence of discursive practices, ideologies and “common sense” on the readers of magazines is addressed through the concept of internalization. Internalization is the process through which readers take up, engage with, and transform mediational means.

This chapter consists of five sections. The first section articulates how different discursive practices construct the female body differently. In the second section, the internalization of the discursive practices that construct the female body is discussed. The third section introduces the ideology of gendered mind/body dualism and analyzes the discursive practices shaped by this ideology and how these discursive practices construct a female body that naturalizes hegemonic “common sense.” Naturalizing ideologies is not the only function of
discursive practices. Discursive practices also have a role in the erasure and hiding of contradictions between different hegemonic ideologies. The fourth section of this chapter discusses the “good choices discourse,” an example of how a discourse can “span the ideological divide” (Kelly, 2000) between different, opposing ideologies. While this thesis conceptualizes the female body as an ideological construct, the female body has also been investigated as a performative construct. This chapter ends with a discussion of the difference between the two conceptualizations.

Discursive Construction of the Female Body

The female body is signified through discursive practices and different discursive practices construct the female body differently. In order to illustrate the repercussions of discursive practices on the construction of the female body, this section examines how the “anorexic” female body is transformed from one discourse to another.

A female body categorized as anorexic is an example of a category where multiple discourses compete for its construction (Bordo, 2003). First, the “anorexic” female body is constructed by the discursive practices of the “anorexic” subject herself. Second, it is constructed by the discourse of pathology. Third, it is constructed through a discourse that interprets it as a form of rebellion and fourth, it is constructed through a discourse that interprets it as a form of conformity.

In the discourse of the subject signified as “anorexic,” the production of the category “anorexic body” is shaped by the ideological construction of the female body as a vulnerable, inferior body. This construction leads to unease among women with their bodies and with their gender (Bordo, 2003). Subjects who develop anorexia are often subjects who have been raped (Bordo, 2003). Rape is likely to make women even less comfortable with their bodies. The
subject attempts, through the practice of anorexia, to overcome the vulnerability of the female body, and she interprets her body through this lens. To her, any mark of gender/sex on her bodies is a mark of vulnerability. The anorexic subject produces and interprets her body in a discourse centered on the concept of vulnerability.

In the hegemonic discourse of pathology, the anorexic body is constructed through the concept of pathology. Subjects that practice anorexia are understood as subjects who are causing their own death. However, this discourse does not understand that the concept of death has no place in the discourse of the “anorexic” subject: “[T]hose trying to ‘cure’ [the “anorexic” woman], as Orbach points out, very rarely understand that the psychic values she is fighting for are often more important to the woman than life itself” (Bordo, 2003, p. 180). The discourse of pathology does not interpret the “anorexic” female body as a body that highlights the naturalized vulnerability of the female body. Neither does it interpret the “anorexic” body as a body that reveals how overcoming vulnerability seems to be only possible through erasing the mark of the gender. Rather, the discourse of pathology constructs the “anorexic” female body through pathological concepts; it problematizes the body and has no say on the ideological elements that shape the production of this body.

Some discourses in the feminist literature have read the anorexic body differently. Part of the feminist literature reconstructs the “anorexic” female body through the concept of rebellion. It notes how the subjects signified as “anorexics,” by going to the extreme in conforming to the thin ideal image, expose the oppressive property of this ideal: “Through embodied rather than deliberate demonstration she [the subject signified as “anorexic”] exposes and indicts those ideals, precisely by pursuing them to the point at which their destructive potential is revealed for all to see” (Bordo, 2003, p. 176). Another feminist discourse focuses on the material effects of
anorexia on the subject practicing it. This discourse reads the subject’s practices through its material effect on the subject’s body. The claim is that what the “anorexic” body does is construct a material reality that perpetuates the gendered dualism instead of challenging it, by shrinking the space occupied by women (Bordo, 2003). This feminist discourse reads the anorexic body through reading the material and health conditions of the subject signified as “anorexic.”

Discursive practices construct the female body by shaping the production of texts that signify the female body and by shaping the interpretation of these texts by subjects. Text interpretation is part of the process of internalization.

**Readership and Internalization**

The female body as constructed in a text shapes the way subjects who are exposed to the text develop their own constructions of the female body. Exposure to text is a type of interpsychological engagement: the reader interacts with the author through the mediational means used in the text. Even though the authors of the text are not present with the subject who is reading the text, their voice is present. Understanding a text is an interpsychological process that involves dialogue: “Any true understanding is dialogic in nature. Understanding is to utterance as one line of a dialogue is to the next” (Voloshinov, 1973, as cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 54). Once a subject attempts to understand a text, he or she enters in a dialogue. A change in interpsychological functioning necessarily involves a change in intrapsychological functioning. Joining a dialogue after a moment of silence necessarily involves a change in the intrapsychological functioning of the interlocutors where “once the [interlocutor] accepts the invitation […] to engage in dialogue, he leaves behind whatever his preoccupation might have
been the moment ‘silence was transformed into speech’” (Rommetveit, 1979, as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 160).

Internalization is the change in intrapsychological functioning of subjects that is due to their interpsychological engagement. According to Vygotsky’s general genetic law of cultural development, “all higher mental functions appear first on the interpsychological plane and then on the intrapsychological plane” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 158). Through negotiation and transformation of the way mediational means are used in an interpsychological process, subjects internalize these mediational means: they develop their own ways of using mediational means which leads to a qualitative shift in their mental functioning. The transition between interpsychological functioning and intrapsychological functioning is a dialectical process and each change in the interpsychological plane “is reflected in a change in intrapsychological functioning” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 159).

The interpsychological act of reading a text, and entering in dialogue with the voices of the text’s authors, is reflected in changes in the intrapsychological functioning of the subject. These changes are due to the requirements imposed by the interpsychological plane on the subject. According to Wertsch (1985), the subjects functioning together in an interpsychological plane need to share some of the assumptions about the significance of the objects, subjects and events that form their situation. When subjects share assumptions about the situation in which they function, they are said to be in a state of intersubjectivity. For intersubjectivity to occur, there needs to be a shared assumption about the context, and often the interpsychological plane imposes these assumptions on the subject. Rommetveit (1979) described how what is being said in the interpsychological plane imposes assumptions on the subject:

[A]s I am watching a large and derelict building, [I may be told]: “There was not enough profit from production.” What I am not told at all—but
yet am forced to assume in order to make sense of what I hear—is that the building in front of me is a factory or a business building of some sort. (as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 161)

The attempt to understand a statement “forced” Rommetveit to construct the building that he is watching as a factory. However, if Rommetveit had ignored the statement or did not trust it, his intrapsychological functioning may not have been affected in the same way. For a person to impose his or her assumptions on another person, a certain amount of trust needs to exist between the two subjects.

The transition from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning depends on an element of trust between the subjects. A subject exposed to the cover of Seventeen and reading on that cover the statement, “Get perfect Abs,” might engage in different types of intrapsychological functioning based on her trust of the magazine. When trust exists, reading the statement, “Get perfect Abs,” may “force” the subject to assume that her abs are not perfect and that she can “get” perfect abs by following the guidelines of the magazine. In contrast, when the subject exposed to the cover does not trust the magazine, the subject might engage in an intrapsychological functioning of anger, criticism, or parody.

The texts that signify and construct the “female body” shape the way subjects develop their own intrapsychological constructions of the “female body,” the way they internalize the texts. The effect of text exposure on the intrapsychological functioning of the subject depends on the subject’s trust in the text. One way through which women’s magazines attempt to gain the trust of their audience is by the adoption of a conversational tone which “indexes a familiar interactional context, in which people who share mutual trust exchange information” (Osterman & Keller-Cohen, 1998, p. 533).
However, even when readers “trust” the magazine, the “female body” as constructed in a teen magazine is often transformed through its internalization. For example, in her analysis of romance comics in a teen magazine published during the 70’s, McRobbie (1991) noted how romance constructs subjects signified as “female bodies” as passive, always waiting for a coincidence to meet the boy of their dreams. However, McRobbie (1991) also pointed to the work of Radway (1987) that emphasized the fact that “the act of reading can carry quite separate meanings from the texts themselves” (p. 139). For example, reading romance in the classroom to challenge the authority of the teacher is a qualitatively different process than reading romance alone in the bedroom. Young women transform the discursive practices they are exposed to by appropriating these practices in their interactions. For example, based on interviews with 48 young women, Currie (1999) found that readers of Seventeen, YM, and Sassy read advice columns because of their usefulness in school culture. To the participants, advice columns were tools for a better adaptation to the school culture, not accounts that provide the truth about the female body.

Teen magazines are often read in a fragmentary way and the texts of these magazines are often read in conjunction with other texts from other media forms (McRobbie, 1991). Reading teen magazines is a secondary activity relative to watching TV and other more sophisticated media; it is only relied upon “when other, more attractive possibilities, are momentarily unavailable” (McRobbie, 1991, p. 143).

The messages of teen magazines are therefore not internalized in isolation from the messages of other media forms. A study of the internalization of the magazines’ messages needs to take into account the other media that form the context in which young women are immersed.
This is not a study of how the texts of *Seventeen* are internalized by young women. It is a study of how the texts of *Seventeen* construct the female body. It is a study of the hegemonic “common sense” of the female body in *Seventeen*, not a study of how this hegemonic “common sense” is internalized.

**Ideological Constructions of the Female Body**

As mentioned earlier, the construction of the female body is shaped by an ideology that assumes a gendered notion of mind/body dualism. This ideology constructs the mind and the body as dichotomous and associates the mind with men and the body with women. It also constructs the mind as a superior, divine entity and the body as a tertiary, inferior entity: “That which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God; that which is body is the albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization” (Bordo, 2003, p. 5). By associating the body with both women and inferiority, any construction that is shaped by gendered dualism is bound to be sexist:

For if, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, the body is the negative term, and if woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death. (Bordo, 2003, p. 5)

A female body constructed through gendered mind/body dualism is a morally inferior, irrational, mindless body. Among the discursive practices through which this ideology constructs the female body are the two discourses of “woman as mistress” proposed by Bordo (2003) and the discourse of “sex-as-power” studied by Machin and Thornborrow (2006).

The “woman as mistress” discourse is a discourse that constructs female bodies as a source of temptation and moral downfall. The mere presence of a female body in a room is constructed as a temptation: “[E]ven when women are silent (or verbalizing exactly the
opposite), their bodies are seen as ‘speaking’ a language of provocation” (Bordo, 2003, p. 6). Female bodies do not become sources of temptation through any additional practices or dramatizations, rather, by being their sex/gender and “earning” the signifier “female/woman” they become a source of temptation. The same mode of being that constructs them as women constructs them as mistresses. This discourse leads to shocking interpretations of reality: “This construction is so powerful that rapists and child abusers have been believed when they claimed that five-year-old female children ‘led them on’ ” (Bordo, 2003, p.6). The female body, since the age of five, is constructed through the “woman as mistress” discourse as the temptress that “leads on” her rapist and that “asks for it.” The “it” here can be replaced by rape, oppression, imprisonment or any other form of subordination.

The “woman as mistress” discourse constructs the female body through acts of interpretation. However, not all practices of female bodies can be interpreted through the “woman as mistress” discourse. Female bodies can engage in practices that do not fit in the “woman as mistress” discourse. For gendered dualism to be naturalized, there should be discourses that produce female bodies whose performances can be interpreted as acts of temptation.

The “sex-as-power” discourse is a discourse through which female bodies are produced. It shapes the practices of subjects signified as “female bodies.” This discourse constructs an association between the performance of temptation and the psychic experience of power. Temptation, while being constructed as morally inferior in the “woman as mistress” discourse, is constructed as power in the “sex-as-power” discourse. In a critical discourse analysis of a selection of texts from women’s magazines, Machin and Thornborrow (2006) noted how the texts in these magazines constructed sex as an index of power. The practices of sexual temptation
and seduction were constructed as practices through which subjects could resignify themselves as powerful and experience power. It was not through labor and political activism that subjects could become powerful and feel powerful, rather, it was through wearing lingerie and stripping:

“The contrast between this, and, for example, the activities of middle-class women […] at the beginning of the twentieth century when they fought for the rights of factory workers and the rights of poor women, is striking” (Machin & Thornborrow, 2006, pp. 183-184).

The “sex as power” discourse constructs power in a way that contradicts the existing power relations in the social structure. It associates power with performances like temptation, sending “nasty” emails, and physically defending oneself (Machin & Thornborrow, 2006). However, and as Machin and Thornborrow (2006) argued, the practices of temptation might lead to rape, the practice of “cc[ing] nasty hate emails” might lead to career problems, and the practice of physically defending oneself might be risky. Playing the role of the “bad chick” may not actually increase the subject’s power. And even though the “sex as power” discourse constructs these associations in a playful context, the playful context actually makes these discursive practices more efficient in their functioning.

In order to construct the role of the mistress as a source of power, without having to address how this construction contradicts the social structure, the “sex as power” discourse sets its narratives within fictional spaces and playful contexts. The texts rely on fictional, illusionary characters who are both seductive and powerful, who perform temptation and develop strength. Among these characters are Charlies’ Angels: “pull a Charlies’ Angels on the scoundrel” states the article “9 ways to be a bad chick.” In this article from Cosmopolitan magazine, being a bad chick is “having it all” because “bad chicks have-it-all” (Machin & Thornborrow, 2006, pp. 178-180).
The “sex as power” discourse positions subjects as powerful through play (Machin & Thornborrow, 2006). Subjects do not become powerful through increasing their ability to control what happens in the social structure, rather, subjects experience power through playing the role of fictional characters. The “sex as power” discourse constructs fictional spaces where performing the mistress role is associated with power. In order to experience power, women produce their bodies through the discursive practices that constitute the “sex as power” discourse. These practices are interpreted through the “woman as mistress” discourse as morally inferior practices. Together, the “sex as power” discourse and the “woman as mistress” discourse construct a female body that naturalizes gendered dualism.

Obscuring Contradictions

Hegemonic “common sense” of the female body is constructed by different, multiple and contradictory ideologies. Often the naturalization of one ideology might denaturalize and deconstruct another ideology. “Common sense” is also constructed by a set of discursive practices that serve different hegemonic functions. Some of these discourses function to naturalize ideologies and denaturalize others, while other discourses function to obscure the contradictions between the different hegemonic ideologies.

The discursive practices that construct the bodies signified as “teen mothers” provide an example of how the contradictions between different hegemonic ideologies are normalized. According to Kelly (2000), the stories told about teen mothers are shaped by the “good choices discourse” that “spans the ideological divide” between liberals and conservatives. At a time when conservative ideology had greater power in shaping the construction of texts that signify teen mothers, teen mothers were signified as “sluts.” However, with the rise in power of liberal ideology, teen mothers became signified differently: “A young woman who finds herself
pregnant […] is no longer labeled as ‘slut’; rather, her failure to use contraception wisely and well, if at all, constitutes a bad choice” (Kelly, 2000, p. 48). Kelly (2000) claimed that this different signification of teen mothers does not eliminate their stigma, rather it reframes it.

The new discourse used in the signification of teen mothers, the “good choices discourse,” still reiterates a conservative emphasis on self-control and moral strength. But the “good choices discourse” also reiterates another ideology: the liberal ideology with its emphasis on rationality. The two opposite ideologies are perpetuated through the same story: teen mothers made bad choices. This was possible because, as Kelly (2000) explained, what the two ideologies mean by “bad choice” is different. While disagreeing over what constitutes a “bad choice,” they agree that teen mothers are subjects who made bad choices.

Discourses succeed in spanning the ideological divide by constructing texts that can be manipulated in different ways to naturalize different ideologies. Discourses also succeed in spanning the ideological divide by constructing texts that foreground the common elements between different ideologies. In the case of teen mothers, the construction of a text that perpetuates both conservative and liberal ideologies was facilitated by a common element between these two ideologies, individualism. Individualism is an ideology that constructs the subject’s situation as the outcome of the subject’s decisions and intentional practices: “Both conservatives and liberals framed the problems facing teen parents as individual rather than structural ones” (Kelly, 2000, p. 49).

The Female Body as Performative

Conceptualizing the female body as an ideological construct carries ideological implications: By studying how signification ideologically constructs the female body, this study naturalizes the dichotomy of essentialism/constructivism. The study assumes that there is a
natural female body that exists outside signification and that is (re)constructed through
signification. However, some feminists like Judith Butler argue that, by embracing the
essentialism/constructivism dichotomy, research functions to further naturalize some realities
and keep alternative realities away from the realm of the “real.” She claims that feminist politics
should work to challenge this dichotomy (Hekman, 1995).

Butler’s rejection of the essentialism/constructivism dichotomy follows from her
rejection of “the metaphysics of substance.” In the metaphysics of substance, substances are
assumed to have an objective existence independent of discourse and social practice. Female
bodies, like other substances, are assumed to exist independently of language and culture. Butler
(1990), following from Nietzsche’s critique of the metaphysics of substance, argues that feminist
research should challenge the notion of a “prehistorical” female body that exists independently
of signification. She argues that this notion is itself a product of acts of signification, it serves to
legitimate acts of signification. Thus, the notion that there is a male and a female prior to
signification serves to legitimate the gender binary of man and woman: Because there is a male
and a female, there is a man and a woman, the binary gender is therefore legitimized. Nietzsche
(1969) argues that “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a
fiction added to the deed — the deed is everything” (as cited in Butler, 1990, p. 34). Following
from Nietzsche, Butler (1990) argues that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of
gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its
results” (p. 34). Therefore, the female body is a category produced by the performances that
define gender.

Butler’s conceptualization of the female body as performative was challenged by Bordo
(2003). Bordo (2003) argues that a rejection of the essentialism/constructivism dichotomy and
the conceptualizing of the body as performative intersects with the discourse on cosmetic surgery. Both the discourse of cosmetic surgery and what Bordo (2003) calls the postmodern discourse on the body conceptualize the body as a “malleable entity” that escapes the limitations of materiality and that promote “fantasies of limitless achievements” (pp. 215-240).

Despite the epistemological contradictions between the two conceptualizations — body as ideological construct and body as performative — both conceptualizations are found to be empowering from an ideological perspective. An ideological evaluation of a concept does not evaluate its truth, rather, it evaluates its ideological functioning, the extent to which it reproduces or challenges domination, the extent to which it empowers subjects who are marginalized and unprivileged by the status quo. Conceptualizing the female body as performative, by challenging the dichotomization of gender, functions to empower subjects who are stigmatized because of their nonconformity to strict and dichotomous traditional gender rules.

Both conceptualizations can contribute to an alternative, empowering and emancipatory construction of the female body. Opponents of both conceptualizations can work together on this emancipatory project. At present, however, a full discussion of the epistemological and methodological contradictions that ground these two conceptualizations is outside the scope of this study. This study, therefore, focuses on the female body as material.

Summary

The female body is constructed through discursive practices. Different discourses produce the female body differently. The construction of the “anorexic” female body illustrates the profound influence of discourse on signification. Discursive practices that construct the female body are shaped by ideologies, like the gendered dualism. The ideologies that shape the construction of the female body can be contradictory, but their contradictions are masked by
discourses that span the ideological divide. The texts of *Seventeen*—their production, circulation, and interpretation—are discursive practices. Exposure to these discursive practices is not a passive process. Readers of *Seventeen* transform the discursive practices to which they are exposed. While this study conceptualizes the female body as a product of ideology, other works on the female body conceptualized it as a product of performativity.
Chapter 3

Methodology: A snapshot of the hegemonic “common sense” of the female body

This thesis examined the “common sense” of the female body in North America through a critical discourse analysis of five issues of Seventeen. The selected issues represent every other issue from a pool of eleven issues that span one year. This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, my researcher’s positionality is articulated to make explicit my commitments. In the second section, I introduce the methodology of critical discourse analysis, and explain how it was applied in this study. In the third section, I discuss an assumption that shaped the production of this research: the assumption that the texts in Seventeen are shaped by “common sense” and, therefore, that a critical discourse analysis of Seventeen may reveal how hegemonic ideologies shape the construction of the female body. In the fourth section, I discuss the tools used to conduct the research.

Researcher’s Positionality

My analysis is an analysis of the “common sense” of the female body. My objective is to reveal the fractures of this “common sense” and reveal how these fractures are obscured. My objective is to expose the way in which hegemonic “common sense” operates through Seventeen magazine and how ideologies signify the female body. I am aware that my analysis might contribute to the consolidation and naturalization of the same ideologies that I am trying to deconstruct and denaturalize.

One of the ideologies that form the “common sense” of the female body assumes a gendered mind/body dualism (Bordo, 2003). In this ideology, subjects signified as “men” are constructed as rational and active subjects who are actively engaged in the construction of the
world, while subjects signified as “women” are constructed as irrational bodies that lack a mind and are positioned as objects. If this thesis is to deconstruct and denaturalize the traditional gendered assumption of mind/body dualism, then it must challenge the construction of women as irrational and as objectified subjects. However, because I am a subject signified as a “man” and I am criticizing the practices and performances that a women’s magazine is encouraging its readers to follow—practices and performances that are traditionally associated with women—my text could serve as an efficient tool in the reproduction of this dualism. For example, this text might construct me as a “rational” man criticizing the “irrational” practices traditionally associated with women. Or, a “rational” man coming to the aid of women who cannot speak or act for themselves. Or, this text might construct me as a “mind” criticizing a “body,” a “subject” criticizing an “object.”

My text is likely to be incorporated by the same hegemonic “common sense” that I attempt to expose, deconstruct and denaturalize. But it is not only my text that is likely to be incorporated, all texts are likely to be incorporated. Hegemony works by incorporation (Fairclough, 1995). Both a text and the discursive practice that shapes this text are targets of incorporation. Even when a discursive practice is the product of a non-hegemonic agenda, it might be co-opted and become a hegemonic tool serving a hegemonic agenda. According to Foucault (1981), discourses can “circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy” (as cited in Fairclough, 1995, p. 81). A discourse can be empowering and emancipatory in one context and become oppressive and hegemonic in another context. It is not the content of the discourse, rather, it is the place occupied by this discourse in the societal order of discourse that determines its functioning.
The discourse against the objectification of women provides an example of how a discourse shaped by a non-hegemonic agenda is incorporated into the perpetuation of the hegemonic “common sense” of the female body. A purpose of the critique of the objectification of women is to liberate women from the “prison” of the body and to support them in becoming more active in the construction of social reality. However, the discourse against objectification does not deconstruct the subject/object dichotomy, rather it reframes it and rearticulates it by constructing an opposition “between a culturally constrained mind that is ‘doped’ by beauty ideals and the strong or independent ‘true’ mind that is unaffected by cultural ideologies” (Saukko, 2003, p. 140). And this “doped mind/strong mind” dichotomy leads to the further oppression of many subjects signified as “women.”

For example, one of the groups that is stigmatized by the discourse against objectification is the group of subjects signified as “sex workers.” For a sex worker, the objectification of her body may be a tool for survival. She may need to spend hours in front of the mirror in order to attract a customer. She may need to go through cosmetic operations in order to erase the damage that a customer has caused her. Applying the discourse against objectification in the situation of sex workers further constructs them as morally inferior. The objectification of their bodies is used by hegemonic “common sense” as a further “evidence” of their promiscuity.

This research, this text, is open to incorporation irrespective of the gender of its author. Hegemony works by incorporation. An author willing to challenge hegemony has to be willing to protect his or her text from incorporation, in whatever way is possible. By text, I mean any instance of the use of language, whether it is a paper, an argument that is part of a conversation, or speech. It is my obligation to protect my text from incorporation, to argue with or against the usages of my text and the subtexts that form it, and to further learn about the contexts where my
text could be used to empower and the contexts where my text could be used to oppress. This obligation is part of what Gramsci (1971) calls the “mode of being of the new intellectual.” According to him:

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, “permanent persuader” and not just a simple orator. (p. 10)

Intellectuals are not simply producers of eloquent, elegant texts. Intellectuals are not simply orators that impose their knowledge on their audiences. Rather, intellectuals are authors who negotiate their texts and the interpretations of their texts. They actively participate in practical life and keep exploring new contexts. They do not write texts that work for all contexts, rather, they learn from different contexts about the boundaries beyond which their texts can no longer function as tools of empowerment and become, instead, tools of hegemony and domination.

According to Gramsci (1971), every human being is an intellectual, every human being participates in the circulation, reproduction and transformation of a conception of the world, a conception of the world with an ideological functioning, a conception of the world that naturalizes or denaturalizes domination. As a human being, and therefore —since every human being is an intellectual— as an intellectual, I am committed to participate in the production and circulation of a conception of the world that disrupts the naturalization of domination and that exposes its historicity.

An aspect of domination that I am dedicated to disrupt is the hierarchy between “those who work with their hands” and “those who were given the privilege of thinking” (Ranciere, 1981, p. 8). In *Nights of Labor*, Ranciere (1981) talks about a group of factory workers in 19th century France who decided to become what they were not allowed or supposed to become:
intellectuals. Their working conditions were not conductive to reflection, they were expected to efficiently produce material products, not ideas. But they decided to “conquer” the world of ideas during the night, after work. In the capitalistic world, thinking is a privilege, and economic exploitation deprives large sections of societies from this privilege. Economic exploitation deprives the workers from their right to participate in the articulation of their culture’s collective discourse and their culture’s “common sense.” Workers are pushed to be transformed into machines of production.

For a long time, I held the belief that thought was a privilege of the bourgeois. And for the economically exploited to conquer the world of ideas, for the economically exploited to be both a worker and an intellectual, sacrifices need to be made and nights need to be infinitely extended. Living like a worker and functioning as an intellectual seemed impossible, an unfair impossibility. But my readings in feminist theory allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the subordination of those deprived from the privilege of thinking to those given the privilege of thought.

I found that, like economic exploitation intellectually subordinates the economically unprivileged classes to the bourgeois, patriarchy, naturalized through gendered dualism, exclusively gives the privilege of thought to one gendered mode of being: the male body. For other gendered modes of being to conquer the world of ideas, to negotiate a culture’s collective discourse, they had to be different, extraordinary and special. Gendered dualism intellectually subordinates the female body and other gendered modes of being to the male body. These gendered modes of being are sometimes constructed as a distraction of the male body’s intellectual activity, sometimes as the objects of that intellectual activity (Bordo, 2003), never as partners in that intellectual activity, unless extraordinary, unless special.
A conception of the world produced exclusively by the bourgeoisie inevitably naturalizes and legitimates economic exploitation. A conception of the world exclusively produced by one gendered mode of being inevitably naturalizes its intellectual superiority. The production of an emancipatory conception of the world that exposes the historicity of subordination necessitates the participation of subordinated economic classes and subordinated gendered modes of being.

In this study, I, a male body, attempt to participate in the disruption of a hegemonic conception of the world that intellectually subordinates a gendered mode of being, the female body. This hegemonic conception of the world mediates gender interaction and, by projecting rationality on one gendered mode of being and irrationality on others, it hinders the possibility of emancipatory dialogue across genders. A purpose of this text is not to come up with an alternative conception of the world—an alternative conception needs to be collectively produced—but to join other texts in their efforts to promote better conditions for emancipatory dialogue across genders.

Bordo (2003) noted that male bodies who research female bodies have a tendency to speak like “prince charmings.” It is crucial to emphasize that the “prince charming” subject position is one that I do not seek to occupy. My rejection of the “prince charming” metaphor is grounded in both my rejection of patriarchy and of colonialism. I remember in 2003, as a high school student, when one of the declared objectives of the war on Afghanistan was to liberate Afghani women from the Burga and from the Afghani male “beasts,” I was expecting the western prince charming to come to the rescue of Afghani women, and I was deceived. I later read about Afghanistan during the 80’s, when Afghani women were active giving literacy classes to peasants across the country. The western prince charming was not aware of them, he was only aware of the “soviet threat” back then. For this reason, the western prince charming militarily
and financially sponsored the fundamentalist groups who ended the “soviet threat” and started institutionalizing and systematizing the oppression of Afghani women and other Afghani subordinate groups.

I do not claim to be a rescuer. I do not claim to be offering truth about the female body or about female body dissatisfaction. I claim only to be participating in an effort toward promoting an emancipatory dialogue across subordinated groups.

My interest in the construction of the female body and the psychic experience of body dissatisfaction is an ideological interest. My objective is to understand how the ideological construction of the female body contributes to the intellectual subordination of gendered modes of being other than the male body. I conceptualize the female body and the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction as constructs of hegemony and domination and I seek to expose the hegemonic character of these constructs. For this purpose, I chose to follow the methodology of critical discourse analysis in my analysis of data.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

In this research, the texts of *Seventeen* were examined through critical discourse analysis (CDA), a theoretical and methodological framework developed as a resource for the struggle against domination “in its linguistic [and semiotic] forms” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 1). In order to be able to use CDA as a methodology, the concepts of discourse and discursive practice need to be further discussed and some new concepts need to be added to the conceptual framework, including local order of discourse and societal order of discourse.

**Discourse and Discursive Practices**

The concept of discourse conceptualizes language as a social practice. The concept of discursive practice is defined as the practice of producing, consuming or distributing a text
(Fairclough, 1995). When language is conceptualized as a social practice, discursive practices are constructed as social practices, practices that reproduce, challenge, and/or transform the social structure. A critical discourse analysis focuses on a key aspect of the social structure: the asymmetrical power relations that constitute it, in other words, the relations of domination. CDA attempts to reveal how discursive practices reproduce, challenge, and/or transform relations of domination (Fairclough, 1995).

In order to study discursive practices as social practices, a concept is needed that connects texts to social structures. CDA does this through the concept of ideology. Ideology, as defined in chapter 1, is a worldview that shapes the use of mediational means and, dialectically, the construction of realities. However, individuals are usually unaware that their mental functioning and social interactions are shaped by ideologies. Ideologies are perceived by individuals not as worldviews that promote the interest of a hegemonic group, but rather, as worldviews that reflect the natural order of things: “[Ideologies] may become to a greater or lesser extent ‘naturalized,’ and hence be seen to be commonsensical and based in the nature of things or people, rather than in the interests of classes or other groupings” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 35). The naturalization of a hegemonic ideology establishes the relations of domination by constructing them not as outcomes of history but as properties of the natural order of things.

Ideologies are naturalized through texts. Discursive practices that construct texts where hegemonic ideologies are naturalized are discursive practices that participate in the reproduction of the asymmetrical power relations that constitute the social structure. By being tools in the naturalization of domination, discursive practices participate in the process of hegemony where domination is maintained not through coercion, but through consent. Through participation in the process of hegemony, discursive practices become social practices.
Hegemony is not constituted by the domination of one single ideological group, rather, the hegemonic bloc is composed of multiple contradictory ideologies. A single discursive practice is not likely to naturalize all of the hegemonic ideologies that form hegemonic “common sense.” Hegemonic “common sense” is naturalized through a set of discursive practices that, collectively, naturalize the hegemonic ideologies and hide their contradictions. A set of discursive practices is referred to by Fairclough (1995) as an “order of discourse.”

An “order of discourse” is a set of discursive practices and relationships between these practices that function to naturalize hegemonic ideologies. The concept was developed by Foucault and incorporated by Fairclough (1995) who differentiated between “local” order of discourse and “societal” order of discourse. A “local” order of discourse is an order of discourse that is local to an institution and through which the ideological functioning of that institution is negotiated. A “societal” order of discourse is an order of discourse that reproduces and negotiates the hegemonic “common sense” that works across institutions to shape the social structure. This study does not address the “societal” order of discourse through which the female body is constructed. Instead, the analysis is limited to a single institution, mass media, and a single example of media, Seventeen magazine.

The discursive practices of Seventeen magazine, which can be understood as the ways through which mediational means are used in this magazine, are social practices. They are social practices because they form a local order of discourse that naturalizes hegemonic “common sense.” Seventeen’s local order of discourse naturalizes hegemonic “common sense” by naturalizing the hegemonic ideologies that form it and by incorporating counter hegemonic ideologies that, under some conditions, still serve the interests of hegemonic groups.
Based on the articulated conceptual framework and the theoretical contributions and methodology of CDA, Figure 2 is a representation of how the methodological concepts elaborated in this section—discourse, discursive practices and orders of discourse—are related to the theoretical concepts that form the conceptual framework for this thesis: mediational means, ideology and “common sense.”

Figure 2. Extended conceptual framework.
Media, Ideology and “Common Sense”

Fairclough (1995) explained that the functioning of the media in modern societies is shaped by two myths or ideologies. The first myth is that media transparently reflects reality. The second myth is that there is one single objective reality. These two myths construct any media institution—a television network, an Internet website or a magazine—as a mediator. Media is constructed as a mediator that is used by the subject to access a single objective reality. *Seventeen* magazine, like other magazines, is constructed as a mediational means that is neutral. It enables the reader to see the world as it is; it is constructed as a transparent mediational means.

A mediator is expected to be transparent and to report the true and objective reality without reconstructing it. A mediator is also pressured to appear committed to its audience and concerned about its audience. It has to appear committed without being perceived as reconstructing reality and one solution for this dual requirement is “for the mediator to purport to speak on behalf of the audience” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 62). By claiming to speak on behalf of the audience the mediator constructs itself not just as a neutral source reporting reality, but as a committed source reporting a transparent reality and analyzing it from the perspective of the audience.

However, the texts of *Seventeen* cannot speak with the perspective of the audience. These texts are constructed within a “societal order of discourse” where different institutions—like the advertisement industry, the school and the family—shape and constrain the magazine’s discursive practices. *Seventeen* magazine has to meet the requirements of hegemonic institutions if it wants to appear to be a transparent, neutral and committed mediator. Fairclough (1995)
referred to the requirements of hegemonic groups or institutions as “principalship.” Fairclough’s argument, which was developed in the context of analyzing the news media, can be applied to the analysis of any media form that claims to be a mediator. According to him, by claiming to speak with the “common sense” of the readers, while, at the same time, being shaped by the regulations from the powerful groups in society, the news media masks “principalship.” Masking “principalship” has important ideological consequences: “In so far as principalship is mystified, the news media can be regarded as covertly transmitting the voices of social power-holders […] [and] putting across the voices of the powerful as if they were the voices of ‘common sense’ ” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 63). By virtue of naturalizing the voices of the powerful, and claiming to speak with a neutral and committed voice, magazines like Seventeen function ideologically as perpetuators of hegemonic “common sense.”

The texts of Seventeen function ideologically. However, this does not mean that they are wrong or distorted: “In claiming that a discursive event works ideologically, one is not in the first instance claiming that it is false […] One is claiming that it contributes to the reproduction of relations of power” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 18). In this text, I am not claiming that Seventeen magazine acts as an active agent willing to construct false texts in order to perpetuate the hegemonic “common sense.” Instead, following Fairclough, I argue that Seventeen magazine is an institution that, in order to conform to its role as a committed and transparent mediator, has to construct itself as speaking with the voice of young women. It also has to function within the social structure of hegemony and to conform to the requirements of institutions that control or influence the lives of young women and respond to the economic resources of the magazine.
Analytical Tools

The analysis of my data draws upon the following concepts: lexicon, collocations, storylines, and coherence assumptions. I use these concepts as access points for my analysis.

Lexicon

The lexicon is the specific language, vocabulary, and/or words used to signify a subject or an object in a text that constructs that which is being signified. Lexical choices made when authoring a text reflect a selective process that both influences and is influenced by ideology. When commenting on the work of Cicourel (1976), Fairclough (1995) noted that the subjects signified as “delinquent” are constructed through the lexicon that the institution of criminology uses to signify them. Lexical terms like “incorrigible,” “defiance” and “lack of responsibility” both describe and construct the subject. An alternative set of lexical terms would construct the subjects signified as “delinquent” differently:

[T]he lexicon itself [….] is one among indefinitely many possible, lexicalizations; one can easily create an ‘anti-language’ (Halliday, 1978, 164-182) equivalent of this part of the lexicon—irrepressible for incorrigible, debunking for defiance, refusal to be sucked in by society for lack of responsibility toward society, and perhaps spirit for delinquency. (Fairclough, 1995, p. 35)

As in the case of subjects signified as “delinquent,” subjects signified as “female bodies” are constructed differently based on the lexicalization used in acts of signification. When the lexicon used to signify the female body is naturalized, the reality constructed by that lexicon becomes naturalized and the female body constructed by that lexicon is positioned as the “natural” and “real” female body.
Collocation

Collocation is the study of the tendency of words or concepts to be used together or to be mutually exclusive; it is also a study of the tendency of concepts to be used in opposition or in a complementary way. An analysis of collocation addresses how one concept, like gender, can transform the meaning of the concepts that occur with it in the same linguistic context. In order to study the realities that they naturalize, concepts should be studied in relation to other concepts. Concepts do not construct realities in isolation from other concepts, rather, concepts collectively co-construct reality. Concepts are grouped into mediational means that are formed by conceptual categories and by relationships between these categories. The meaning of a concept is constructed in terms of its relation to other concepts. For example, as Sondergaard (2002) argued, the meaning of the term “soft” in “soft man” is different than the meaning of “soft” in “soft woman.” The concepts that form the mediational means of gender have a higher status in the construction of reality than other concepts that belong to other mediational means. The mediational means of gender can be said to “infuse”—a concept that I borrow from Vygotsky—the reality that it constructs across the whole text.

Storylines

A storyline can be thought of as a generic template for stories and narratives. Storylines are “a set of sequences of actions and positions saturated with cultural meaning and therefore offering potential interpretations linked to characters and practices” (Sondergaard, 2002, p. 191). Some of the narratives and stories constructed by Seventeen can be conceptualized as realizations of more generic storylines. However, sometimes a storyline can be constructed not through a single text, but across different texts where different parts of the storyline are produced by different discursive practices. Texts can function ideologically through the stories that they
construct. By creating a plot out of the different discursive practices that signify female bodies, stories construct the “female body.”

A storyline that is reiterated through many of the discursive practices of Seventeen is the “improvement-failure-acceptance” storyline. In this storyline, the female body is constructed as initially willing to “become better”: “If you constantly try to be a little bit better, aim higher, and get rid of the old habits that are holding you back, then you are moving toward being the absolute best you can possibly be. Change isn’t scary— it is empowering” (Seventeen, Editorial, March, 2009, p. 20). However, the attempt to be perfect ends in a failure and as a way of coping with the failure, the female body finally accepts itself: “I get the body blues just like the next girl […] Together we’ve created a community, so that as we work toward accepting ourselves (and occasionally experience dark moments anyway), no girl ever has to feel like she’s on her own” (Seventeen, Body Peace, December, 2008, p. 112). This storyline constructs failure as a requirement for acceptance. The female body can only accept itself after constructing itself as a failure.

**Coherence Assumptions**

One way through which ideologies are naturalized is the construction of texts that become coherent only when some specific assumptions are made by the reader. In a critical discourse analysis of a police interview, Fairclough (1995) revealed how, for a text to be coherent, the reader of a text needs to bring ideological assumptions to his or her reading of the text. “[Y]ou went to that house willingly,” stated the police officer when addressing a female who accused a group of men of raping her. Fairclough (1995) argued that the coherence of this text is based on an assumption: The assumption that “if a woman willingly places herself in a situation where sexual intercourse ‘might be expected to occur’ (whatever that means), that is
tantamount to being a willing partner, and rules out rape” (p. 35). This assumption is clearly the product of the “woman as mistress” discourse which is itself a construction of gendered dualism. When the coherence of a text relies on an ideology, the reader is “forced” to function within that ideology and see the world through that ideology in order to make sense of a text.

**Data and Analytic Procedure**

The data for this study was generated from five issues of *Seventeen* that spanned the time period between October 2008 and September 2009.

**The Data**

Before generating data, I familiarized myself with Seventeen by reading and re-reading a year’s worth of issues, or 11 magazines. I read texts from all sections and for every section I identified the genres that were used and the topics that were covered. The magazine sections that were included in the study are noted and described in the following:

- **The Editorial**: A section where the Editor in Chief of *Seventeen* addresses the readers. The Editorial is a letter written in a conversational tone.
- **“What you think!”**: A section that consists of a selection of comments by readers of *Seventeen* on the last magazine issue that they read. The comments are short, one paragraph, and the tone is conversational and confessional. Young women tend to reveal personal anecdotes and connect them with what they read.
- **Beauty**: A section where beauty routines are suggested. The genre of the Beauty section is a hybrid between the procedural genre and the advertisement genre. The section includes step by step procedures for applying beauty products while advertising for these products. Only the first subsection of Beauty was analyzed.
• Love Life: This section was not analyzed in its entirety, only the first subsection of it was included in the analysis. Subsections of Love Life are separated by pages of advertisements. The first subsection consists of love tips, suggestions and, sometimes an interview with a male celebrity.

• Body Peace: A section written in the form of a letter from a self-esteem expert to readers as advice. The stated purpose of the self-esteem expert is to help readers accept their bodies and reach inner peace. The tone is conversational.

• Physical Health: A section that provides explanations of diseases like HIV and breast cancer while offering young women advice on how to protect themselves or deal with disease. The tone of the Physical Health section is more formal than the tone in Body Peace. Medical discourse is often used in producing the texts in this section.

• Seventeen Buzz: A section that addresses controversial issues like racism, HIV and sexual abuse. The tone is similar to mainstream journalism. The genre could be described as newspaper genre where events are covered and analyzed.

• Horoscopes: A section that predicts the near future for readers. The tone is conversational and playful.

The purpose of the study was to examine how the female body is signified through different discourses and in relation to different categories. The sections included in this study address their readers through different genres, for example, while the Beauty section relies in part on the advertisement genre, the Body Peace section is grounded in the use of the self-help genre.

The sections that were excluded from the study are grounded in genres and topics that are found in the included sections.
• The Fashion section, like the Beauty section, is grounded in the advertisement genre and step by step procedures for how to shop and how to dress.

• The Your Life section is grounded in the self-help genre and a conversational, informal tone. The same genres and tones are used in the Body Peace, Editorial and Love Life sections. Your Life also examines controversial issues that a reader might encounter; topics similarly covered in the Seventeen Buzz section.

• The Celebrity Interview uses a conversational tone to discuss the love life and personal life of a celebrity, topics that surface in other sections.

• The Traumarama section provides advice to young women on how to deal with “embarrassing” events that would make them insecure. The section is similar to the Body Peace section, except that the Body Peace section focuses on the insecurity of young women with their bodies.

Analytic Procedure

The analysis proceeded according to the following steps.

1. Analysis of two issues and primary codes: I began by reading through two issues of Seventeen: the issues of October and December 2008. I first took notes of repetitions: terms, narratives, assumptions and ideas that consistently emerged were noted. Codes were generated based on repetitions. Then, I looked for traces of hegemonic ideologies in the texts: ideologies of gendered dualism, heteronormativity, liberalism and conservatism. New codes were generated. Then, I approached the texts with the explicit purpose of coding for race, class and sexuality, and new codes were generated. Finally, some codes were based on a single piece of text that seemed to clearly illustrate an ideological functioning of Seventeen. These codes were then tracked into the subsequent
issues. Some of them were abandoned because they did not surface in any of the subsequently analyzed texts.

2. Secondary codes: After generating primary codes, a preliminary analysis of these primary codes was conducted. Some sets of primary codes were collapsed into a single code. Other primary codes lead to the generation of more complex codes. For example, when a narrative emerged as a primary code, the assumptions that ground this narrative were examined. These assumptions were then tracked in the data and grounded the generation of secondary codes. A codebook was created, and with this codebook in hand, the texts of the remaining three issues of Seventeen were analyzed.

3. Themes: Throughout the analysis of the last three issues, codes were tracked; their occurrence across sections was noted. Relations between codes were examined—relations of complementarities, similarities and mutual exclusivities—and based on these relations, themes emerged.

4. Identifying discourses: Themes with intersecting ideological functioning were grouped together, and the discourses that they seemed to belong to were named.

5. Studying the order of discourse: The ideological functioning of each discourse was tracked in the data. The relation between discourses that seemed to reflect contradictory ideological functioning were analyzed, and the processes through which the contradictions were made invisible or camouflaged were examined.

6. Writing the outcomes: While 13 discourses surfaced from the analysis, only the ideological functioning of eight discourses was addressed given the scope of this study. The choice of the eight discourses was grounded in the weight of the role they played in the homogenization of the female body and the naturalization of body dissatisfaction; the
two major ideological processes that emerged from the analysis. For every discourse there were pieces of data that potentially reflected an opposing ideological functioning. This oppositional data had to be documented and analyzed. My description of the analysis also necessitated that I discuss in detail potential oppositions to the claims from the analysis as well.

**Summary**

Through the use of language and other mediational means, hegemonic ideologies are naturalized. The naturalization of hegemonic ideologies facilitates the reproduction of domination in the social structure. CDA is a study of language that aims to struggle against the reproduction of domination through linguistic and other semiotic means. In this thesis, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of the texts of *Seventeen* and examined how, through its construction of the category of “female body,” *Seventeen* reproduces or challenges hegemony. Hegemony is naturalized through the naturalization of hegemonic ideologies and through the naturalization of the hegemonic order of discourse. Therefore, in my critical discourse analysis I addressed the role of *Seventeen* in the naturalization, and challenging, of both hegemonic ideologies and of hegemonic orders of discourse.

The ideological functioning of *Seventeen* was examined through a study of the lexicon, collocations, storylines, and the assumptions that ground the coherence of the texts in the magazine. A number of discourses were identified and the relation between these discourses were examined. The ideologies that were naturalized by the discourses and by the relations between these discourses were analyzed and interpreted. Because I am a subject signified as “man,” my critical discourse analysis might be incorporated by hegemony. However, every text is open to incorporation irrespectively of the positioning of its author. Hegemony works by
incorporation and, therefore, resisting against hegemony may not only be achieved through writing texts, but may also occur through the protection of texts from incorporation.
Chapter 4

Homogenization of the female body across race and ability, and the erasure of social class

Thirteen discourses grounding the linguistic and semiotic practices of Seventeen were identified through the analysis. The discourses, along with the themes that constitute them, are represented in Appendix A. Seventeen functions ideologically by arranging these discourses into an order of discourse where different topics and categories are addressed and signified through different discourses and combinations of discourses.

In this chapter, I address one of the ideological functions of Seventeen: the homogenization of the female body across race, ability and social class. Homogenization refers to the process of constructing a “natural” female body that is ontologically prior to race, ability and social class. In order to ground the claims that constitute the argument, five of the discourses represented in Appendix A are briefly introduced over the course of the discussion: the discourse of heterosexuality, the discourse of hedonism, the discourse of paternalism, the discourse of vulnerability, and the discourse of altruism.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section illustrates the construction of race as a tool of homogenization. The second section illustrates the homogenization of the female body through the construction of ability. The last section illustrates how Seventeen functions to erase differences of economic classes among female bodies.

Race as a Tool of Homogenization

Homogenization through the construction of race is illustrated by two types of analysis: a detailed analysis of a single passage and a generic analysis of examples across texts and genres.
Analysis of Passage

Amy, 18, and Shelby, 17, have known each other forever: As little kids, they always played together. And even as they got older, the two girls continued to hang out [...] But this Spring, there’s one thing Amy and Shelby won’t be doing together: celebrating their senior prom. They won’t be putting on their dream dresses and doing their makeup together, or giggling as their parents take their pictures. They won’t be partying the night away on the dance floor, or singing along to the radio in the back of a limousine—all because Amy is white and Shelby is black. (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, Black+White proms, May, 2009, p. 137)

This passage is taken from an article that discusses racially segregated proms in an American high school. While the passage is written by Seventeen, its coherence, as argued below, requires participation from the reader, without whom the passage is incomplete and fragmentary. The reader has to assume things that are unsaid in the text in order for the text to be complete. A coherence assumption is an assumption about what is unstated and it is partly through coherence assumptions that this text conducts its ideological work. Besides coherence assumptions, this passage operates ideologically through the storylines that organize its content; a discussion of one of these storylines follows the analysis of the coherence assumption.

Coherence Assumption

This passage does not explain why Amy and Shelby would want to put on a “dream dress,” “do their makeup” and “giggle” as they pose for a picture. The two young women engage in the same types of practices, but the cause of this similarity is not mentioned. It could be because both young women have a common interest, an interest in fashion and makeup that differentiates them from other young women who might be interested in athletics or mathematics. But if this is the case, then this passage is incomplete; it is lacking an element that explains the transition between its sentences. “Amy, 18, and Shelby 17, have a common interest in dresses, makeup and posing for pictures. They have known each other forever [...]” would
have been the necessary beginning for a coherent, self-contained passage. However, even though this passage is not self-contained, it may still be experienced as coherent if the reader completes the absent elements by inference.

The readers only know that Amy and Shelby are both females—a fact mentioned in the same paragraph that contains the quoted passage—and that they belong to different racial groups. Because the reader is not provided with an explanation of the similarity between Amy and Shelby’s practices, the reader has to assume an explanation. In order to experience this text as coherent, the reader has to assume that Amy and Shelby both engage in the practices of dreaming about dresses, putting on makeup and posing for pictures because they are both females. It is because they have the same gender that they both engage in these practices. Being a female is constructed as equivalent to having a disposition for fashion, makeup and posing for pictures.

Fashion, makeup and pictures are constructed as a natural interest for females. And prom night is an opportunity to collectively engage in these practices. Together, young women go through a “makeover:” they try different dresses, apply makeup styles and end the process with a picture. The picture as the last step in the process also emerges in the following statement from the Horoscopes section: “Pluto guides you to try a new style on the 4th. Post a pic of your amazing look on MySpace—your crush will take note!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168). This statement embeds the makeover and the picture in the discourse of heterosexuality and suggests that the practices that female bodies are “naturally” disposed to engage in are heterosexual practices. Therefore, the female body might be “naturally” heterosexual.

Throughout the different sections and issues of Seventeen, the practice of makeover was related to many rewards. One reward of the makeover is attention, being noticed, a reward that
emerges from the discourse of heterosexuality (see Appendix B). However, besides the heterosexual reward, Seventeen associates the practice of makeover with a psychic reward, a construct of the discourse of hedonism (see Appendix C) that focuses on excitement and self-gratification. The presence of a discourse of hedonism is often merged with a feminist, anti-sexist discourse resulting in statements like: “So as you read this issue and find a ton of ways to make yourself over, keep in mind who you’re doing it for. Don’t do it to impress a guy or your friends—do it for you!” (emphasis in original, Seventeen, Editorial, October 2008, p. 12). The contradiction between makeover as a heterosexual practice and makeover as a hedonistic practice requires an extended discussion.

Makeover as heterosexual. Makeover, or changing one’s look, emerged as a theme in all sections. The heterosexual reward of the makeover was framed differently based on the section within which it occurred. In the Beauty section, the reward of changing one’s look was signified through the concepts of “light” and “smoke,” which were used as metaphors for the concept of being noticed and gaining attention.

- In Get ready to sparkle!, the following lexical terms and expressions were used to account for a beauty product’s effect on the female body: “sparkle,” “glisten,” “catch the light,” and “glow” (Seventeen, Beauty, December, 2008, pp. 90-96).

- In Amazing makeunders!, the following lexical terms and expressions were employed to describe the product’s effect: “shine,” “look sunny,” “whites look brighter,” ”give curls a glossy finish,” “add shine,” and “shiny” (Seventeen, Beauty, October, 2008, pp. 61-66).

- In Besties, the looks that were described as “best” were signified through expressions like “everyone notices,” “smoky effect,” “sparkle,” and “glow” (Seventeen, Beauty, July, 2009, pp. 50-58).
• In *New trends to try!*, the effect of the suggested trends was signified through the following lexical terms and expressions: “shiny” and “gets you noticed” (*Seventeen, Beauty*, March, 2009, pp. 57-62).

• In the *American beauty*, “smoky effect,” “glow,” and “gives gloss” were used to account for a product’s effect (*Seventeen, Beauty*, May, 2009, pp. 56-60).

In the Editorial section, being noticed as an explicit reward for changing one’s look emerged in two out of the five issues.

• In the *Seventeen superstars!*, it emerged through the statement of a young woman:
  “When you walk down the street, you want the response to be ‘Wow!’ And I think this dress would do the trick!” (*Seventeen, Editorial*, May, 2009, p. 16).

• In *Celebr summer makeovers!*, it emerged through the words of the Editor in Chief:
  “There isn’t a girl alive who doesn’t fantasize about walking into school and making jaws drop because of how beautiful/fit/hot she’s become” (*emphasis in original, Seventeen, Editorial*, July, 2009, p. 14).

In the Body Peace section, being noticed as an explicit reward emerged in one of the five issues.

• In *The power of a makeover*, *Seventeen*’s self-esteem expert stated that it is important for young women to look their best because “the positive feedback you get can be a powerful reminder that you’re worth the attention” (*Seventeen, Body Peace*, October, 2008, p. 110).

In the Physical Health section, being noticed as a reward also emerged in one issue:

• In *How I lost 100 lbs!*, the reader who shares the story of losing weight ends her narrative by saying: “[T]hat was nothing compared to being at the beach that summer, when a hot
volleyball player asked for my number. For the first time, I felt pretty!” (Seventeen, Physical Health, July, 2009, p. 71).

In the Love Life section, being noticed as a reward emerged in the context of dating:

- In *Have your best date ever!*, the following statement was included: “You want him to open the door and think, Wow!” (Seventeen, Love Life, July, 2009, p. 87).

Finally, in the Horoscopes section, being noticed as a reward for makeover emerged three times, one of the occurrences was already mentioned.

- “You’ll decide to go for a shorter hairstyle. Everybody (including your *new* crush) will flip over your hot look!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).
- “Wear that cute dress you’ve been saving for a special night- hot guys will notice!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152).

The lexicon of “light” used in the Beauty section to describe the effect of a product constructs the female body prior to the product as an invisible body. The female body that sparkles gets its sparkle from the product, it provokes the “Wow!” reaction as a result of using the product. The “Wow” reaction is a fantasy of all girls, as the Editorial and the Love Section suggest through their assumptions about what a female body wants. The Horoscopes section also assumes that the female bodies want to be noticed and assures young women that they will get the reward that they are seeking. The Body Peace section and Physical Health section advance the assumption that feedback from others is important for feeling good about one’s self. The feedback that is constructed as a reward either comes from a generalized Other or from the male body. The feedback from a female body is never constructed as a reward.

The feedback of the male body, besides constituting a reward, is often constructed as objective feedback, rather than a relative opinion. For example, in *Is he lying to you?*, a young
man stated: “I told my girlfriend she was a good kisser, but she was really bad! She used more tongue than I like, so her kisses were too wet” (*Seventeen, Love Life, March, 2009, p. 90*). This statement works ideologically to transform the male’s opinion from a relative opinion to an objective truth. The young man starts by making an absolute statement: His girlfriend is a bad kisser. Then, when explaining his absolute statement he stated that she “uses more tongue than I like,” which is a relative proposition based on the young man’s likes and dislikes. Had the young man said, “My girlfriend is a bad kisser, she uses too much tongue,” the statement would have been logically coherent. But in order for the original statement to be experienced as logically coherent, the reader has to assume that a male’s opinion is an objective statement. And it is through the male’s opinion that the objective female body is defined.

Besides including a statement from a young man who constructs his opinion as an objective description of the female body, *Seventeen* uses the opinion of young men as advice.

- In an interview with a young man who is a celebrity, he is asked: “Can you tell us what kind of kissing technique you like?” (*Seventeen, Love Life, October, 2008, p. 88*).
- In an interview with another male celebrity, he is asked: “What’s the biggest flirting mistake girls make?” (*Seventeen, Love Life, December, 2008, p. 118*).
- In the text *It’s okay if…*, young women are told what is okay for them to do and what is not. The text uses quotes from young men as evidence that it’s okay if “you eat a lot on dates,” or “you accidentally burp” (*Seventeen, Love Life, October, 2008, p. 119*).
- In *Your top 5 guy questions answered*, young women are provided with answers to the questions “we all [all women] want to ask.” The winning question was, “What do guys find most attractive in a girl?” (*Seventeen, Love Life, May, 2009, p. 92*).
The criteria that young men set for attraction are not questioned, rather, they are suggested by Seventeen as tools that can be used by female bodies to get the attention that they are assumed to be seeking. The male’s opinion is an objective truth; the female body becomes real through the gaze of the male body. First, the female body must be noticed by the male’s gaze to enter the realm of the visible. Then, based on the young men’s opinion, the female body becomes real and good or real and bad.

Through the assumption that grounds its coherence, the passage analyzed in this section, whose purpose is to challenge racism, conducts implicit ideological work. The text uses race to further naturalize the discourse of heterosexuality promoted in other sections and issues of Seventeen. Seeking attention to one’s body, a practice that is embedded within the discourse of heterosexuality throughout Seventeen’s texts, is constructed as a property of the female body that is ontologically prior to the category of race. However, the presence of a hedonistic reward to makeover, a reward grounded in the assumption that female bodies go through a makeover in order to feel good—not in order to get attention—seems to contradict the claim that makeover is solely a heterosexual practice.

Makeover as an act of hedonism. As argued above, Seventeen constructs the practice of makeover as a heterosexual practice. By naturalizing this practice, it functions to naturalize heterosexuality. Through heterosexuality it functions to homogenize the female body. But this claim might be challenged by occurrences in Seventeen where makeover is constructed as an act of hedonism, and it is necessary to examine these occurrences in order to legitimize the claim made earlier.

“Focus on feelings, not looks,” stated the Physical Health section in Seventeen when addressing young women who want to successfully lose weight. The statement is based on the
narrative of a young woman, Whitney, who “loved how exercise gave her a mood boost. It kept her going until the physical changes kicked in” (Seventeen, Physical Health, July, 2009, p. 71). Young women are told here to focus on their feelings, on the hedonistic experience of “mood boost,” in order to be able to keep going. Hedonism is therefore used as a tool to keep going towards the desired outcome: physical change. In Whitney’s case, the reward of physical change was when a “hot” volleyball player asked for her phone number.

The hedonistic reward as a tool to keep going also occurred in the Editorial section. When the Editor in Chief asked young women to go through a makeover, not to impress a guy but to feel strong, her statement occurred in the following context:

I’m proud to say that I can do 10 push-ups without breaking a sweat […] I know it doesn’t seem like such a big deal- no one can even see the difference. But I know I’m stronger […] So as you read this issue and find a ton of fun ways to make yourself over, keep in mind who you’re doing it for. Don’t do it to impress a guy or your friends- do it for you! (emphasis in original, Seventeen, October, 2008, Editorial, p. 12)

In this passage, like in the statement from the Physical Health section, a collocation occurs between the failure to change one’s look and the focus on feelings. In the Physical Health section, the “mood boost” keeps the young woman going till the “physical changes kick in.” The mind boost is, therefore, a need only in the absence of physical changes. In the Editorial, the Editor in Chief first admits that her pushups did not make any difference in her look, “no one can see the difference.” Then, she speaks about the psychic reward of her push ups: “I know I’m stronger.” Both examples suggest that the psychic reward is a secondary reward, a way of tricking one’s mind by diverting it from the primary reward.

When the heterosexual reward occurs in a text, it is not always collocated with a hedonistic reward. However, the hedonistic reward is always collocated with either the presence
or the absence of a heterosexual reward: The young woman either gets both rewards, or she gets
the hedonistic reward after failing to get the heterosexual reward. The hedonistic reward never
occurred independently from heterosexual reward. In the previous two examples, the hedonistic
reward is collocated with the absence of a heterosexual reward. In the following two examples,
the hedonistic reward is collocated with the presence of a heterosexual reward:

- “The mini makeover will make you feel extra hot when a new guy enters the picture next
  month!” (*Seventeen*, Horoscopes, July, 2009, p. 136). The hedonistic reward here is
  “feeling extra hot.” The heterosexual reward is the “new guy entering the picture.”

- “When you want to pamper yourself, here’s the stuff that makes you feel as good as you
  look!” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, July, 2009, p. 56). The hedonistic reward here is “feeling
  good.” The heterosexual reward is “looking good,” and potentially gaining attention.

Makeover may lead to a heterosexual reward or not. When the heterosexual reward is acquired, it
might be accompanied by a secondary reward, a hedonistic reward. When the heterosexual
reward is not acquired, the hedonistic reward is used as a trick to divert the mind’s attention from
its failure to get the primary reward.

The focus on inner feelings, besides being part of the discourse of hedonism, occurred as
a tool of protection. As in the hedonistic discourse, the focus on inner feelings functions as a
trick in the act of protection. In *Think HIV is no big deal? Think again*, young women are
advised to talk with their partner in order to convince him to get HIV tested: “Talking to your
partner about STDs and HIV can be awkward. […] If he says [he has not been tested], say
“You’ll feel much better if you get tested—and so will I” (*Seventeen*, Seventeen Buzz,
December, 2008, p. 157). While the purpose of a young woman is to protect herself, she uses a
psychic reward, the reward of “feeling better,” as a trick to convince her partner. She cannot
bluntly ask for her right as a human being to protect her life, because talking about protection is constructed as awkward, embarrassing and unromantic: “It can be scary to think about HIV—you might be so in love and think that the person you care so much about could never give you a disease that could kill you. […] Or you’re too embarrassed to buy condoms because it makes you feel unromantic” (p. 155). Seventeen does not challenge the assumption that sexual protection is embarrassing and unromantic, rather, Seventeen takes the assumption as a given and suggests strategies for young women to deal with the awkwardness. One of these strategies is the use of psychic rewards as a trick.

While it does not challenge the assumed awkwardness of sexual protection, Seventeen also does not challenge the assumed need for a heterosexual reward among female bodies. Rather, Seventeen takes the necessity of a heterosexual reward as a given. And for young women who fail to get the heterosexual reward that they are assumed to want, Seventeen suggests using a psychic reward as a trick.

The heterosexual reward of makeover is a naturalized reward. It is even naturalized by the linguistic practices that seem to contradict it—like the hedonistic reward. The coherence assumption that grounds the passage analyzed in this section constructs the heterosexual reward as common to females from all races. It homogenizes the female body through (hetero)sexuality.

**Storylines**

“As little kids, they always played together. And even as they got older, the two girls continued to hang out […] But this Spring, there’s one thing Amy and Shelby won’t be doing together: […] They won’t be putting on their dream dresses and doing their makeup together…” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, Black+White proms, p. 137). This passage embeds prom night in a storyline that represents the traditional activities of female bodies at different stages of their lives.
(see Figure 3). When they are children, they play together, when they become teenagers, they “hang out.” In their senior year, they go to Prom together.

Figure 3. Stages and practices of female bodies.

The first two stages of the storyline are practices that occur under the supervision of an authority and are constructed through the discourse of paternalism (Appendix D). Children play together either at home or in school, under the supervision of either their parents or their teachers. Teenagers “hang out” outside of their houses and schools, however, their “hanging out” is often regulated by paternal authority.

Racially segregated proms are also constructed as an outcome of the regulation of the paternal authorities of parents and schools, instead of being the outcome of a systemic oppression. This is reflected in the structure of the article. First, it questions, through the voice of the young women, why the school does not intervene and throw a unified prom instead of the two racially segregated proms: “Most students think the solution is simple: The school should get
involved and throw a unified public prom” (*Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz*, May, 2009, p. 138). Second, after addressing the school’s role, the article turns to the parent’s responsibility where it stated that “most students say […] it’s the parents, both black and white, who make having one prom impossible” (*Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, Black+White prom*, p. 138). The article ends with a section where young women express their frustration and suggests how young women can end the segregation in their school. They are encouraged to “team up” and “stand up” against segregated proms because “it would be so much more memorable to finally have just one prom for everyone” (p. 139). The purpose of “standing up” is not for a social change, but a negotiation with their paternal authority in order to get more memories out of the event of prom night. They are not standing up against racism as a social injustice; they are standing up against adults in their environment to claim their right for a shared memory.

In order to further reveal how racism is constructed as an issue with paternal authority, the continuity between the practices used to signify the event when young women are unable to “hang out” and the event of racially segregated proms is highlighted. The inability of young women to “hang out” with their peers occurred twice in the analyzed sections and in both cases it was attributed to a family vacation.

- “[During a family vacation] negotiate with your parents to get an hour a day to yourself. While you’re doing your thing, keep an eye out for guys who are also on a family vacation, then use this line: “Are you held hostage too?”” (*Seventeen, Love Life*, March, p. 87).

- “You’d rather barbecue on the Fourth with friends, but your parents have a big vacation in the works for the first week of July. Don’t feel too bummed! Uranus and your ruler,
Venus, will join forces on the 2nd, opening up the possibility of a sweet summer fling while you’re away” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, July 2009, p. 136).

Though family vacation and racist beliefs are qualitatively different phenomena, both family vacation and racist beliefs are constructed as different instances of the same type of problem, the problem of the female body with its authority. Young women are encouraged to “negotiate” with their parents for a time when they can meet young men on a family vacation, and, in turn, young women are encouraged to negotiate with parents who impose the racially segregated proms: “it’s important to respect your parents and grandparents—but it’s also important to question their opinions on race if they aren’t inclusive. You don’t have to fight with them: but you do have to remember that all people are equal” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, May, 2009, p. 139).

Racially segregated proms, like family vacations, pose a challenge for the female body who is assumed to need/want to engage in heterosexual practices. Racially segregated proms are an injustice not because they construct a race as inferior, but because they deny black female bodies the joy of engaging in heterosexual practices with their white peers and vice versa. The problem of black female bodies is therefore a problem with a paternal authority. Like the problem of female bodies who are forced not to “hang out” or not to barbecue, the problems of black female bodies are not qualitatively different, they are also grounded in their naturalized heterosexuality. Their race is a problem because it is a barrier to fulfilling their naturalized heterosexual need.

The statement on the importance of questioning the parents’ opinion contradicts another statement made in the Body Peace section, where young women are told not to feel insulted when their mom criticizes their body:

The next time your mom tries to “help” (e.g., “I saw a fun Spinning class at the gym you could try”), remind yourself that’s exactly what it is- help. She likely
thinks she’s **inspiring** you to be your best. Or maybe she might even see a little bit of herself in you, and her words are meant to **protect** you from the insults *she* received. (*Seventeen*, Body Peace, March, 2009, p. 80)

While a racist mother who does not allow the unsegregated mixing of subjects from other races should be challenged and negotiated with, the mother who insults her daughter because of her weight should not be challenged. The young woman should remind herself that her mom’s purpose is to help her. Even though the mother’s opinion objectifies the daughter and it stigmatizes subjects who are signified as “overweight,” her opinion should be respected and followed.

An explanation of the contrast between *Seventeen*’s two statements can be reached by analyzing the ideological impact of both a mom who appears to be racist, and a mom who appears to be insulting, on the homogenous female body. While a mom who appears to be racist is a threat to the homogenous female body, strengthening a boundary that exposes female homogeneity as false, the mother who insults her daughter because of body weight is contributing to the perpetuation of body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction, as argued in Chapter 6, is a tool of homogenization.

While the voice of the mother who appears to be racist was excluded, and the reasons for forcing her daughter not to attend a unified prom were not addressed, the voice of the mother who appears to be insulting her daughter because of the daughter’s weight is not only included but also imposed: “the next time [she] ‘helps’ remind yourself that’s exactly what it is—help.” While the first “help” was within quotes, the second one was not quoted which serves to impose the mother’s authority: from her perspective it is help, therefore, it is.

Race was the topic of only one of the analyzed texts: *Black + White Proms*. It did surface in other texts, but not as the main topic. *Black + White Proms* uses race to homogenize the
female body. By claiming to challenge racism, it naturalizes two premises of the homogenous female body that it constructs. The first naturalized premise is the premise that all females, by virtue of being females, want and enjoy “doing their makeup” and posing for pictures. This premise is part of the heterosexual discourse that grounds all of the sections in Seventeen. Another naturalized premise is the premise that the female body is subordinated to authority, either the authority of parents or the authority of institutions, and that “making a difference” necessarily involves negotiation with the paternal authority. Young women who have to attend racially segregated proms are told about changes that happened in other schools and are encouraged to push for similar changes in their schools. However, they are not encouraged to examine how the change that they would produce in their school can contribute to a wider social change. They are also not encouraged to examine parental pressure regarding weight gain and/or weight loss. The next section examines other texts where race surfaced.

Generic Examples

Besides the article Black+White Proms, race emerged as a tool of homogenization in another article from the Seventeen Buzz section, throughout the Beauty section and throughout the “What you think!” section.

Race, Protection and Vulnerability

Homogenization of the need for protection. The article Think HIV is not a big deal? Think again opens with a chart of 24 pictures of young women. In every row there is at least one young woman who could be described as brown or black. “5 of the girls on this page are HIV positive,” was written on the top of the chart. The statement on the bottom was: “1 of them shared her story with Seventeen.” Among the five young women in the chart who turn out to have HIV, two could be described as brown or black. The young woman who shared her story with Seventeen could be
described as black. The young woman does not mention anything related to her race or ethnic background in her story. The person who caused her condition is someone that she met online, through “a teen chat line.”

The “guy met online” is a category that surfaced three times in the texts that were analyzed. Two out of the three times, the “guy met online” was negatively connotated. In one instance he ended up sexually abusing the young woman he met; in the second instance he ended up transmitting HIV to the young woman he met. The third occurrence of the category is found in the “What you think!” section where a reader challenges Seventeen’s advice not to date a guy met online (the advice was contained in an issue that was not part of the issues analyzed for this study): “Sometimes the people you meet online aren’t creepy,” the young woman concluded in her entry (Seventeen, What you think!, March, 2009, p. 22). However, even when a young woman challenges Seventeen’s advice, she does not challenge the naturalized assumption that the “guy met online” is a threat, rather, she describes her situation as an exception through her use of the term “sometimes.” The general “guy met online” is maintained as a potential threat to young women of different races and functions as a homogenizer: because a young woman has a female body, she is threatened and she needs to protect herself.

The young woman with HIV attributes her situation to her need for attention: “He was the first guy to really shower me with compliments and make me feel wanted. […] I just didn’t have the self-esteem to insist on what I wanted—to have his attention without having to give up my safety” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, December, 2008, p. 156). As argued in the previous section, the need for attention is a naturalized need for the female body as constructed by Seventeen. However, the need for attention makes the female body vulnerable, as the statement
of the young woman with HIV implies. This leads to the construction of protection as another “natural” need of the female body.

Protection in Seventeen. The theme of protection, one of the themes that constitute the discourse of vulnerability (see Appendix E) in Seventeen, emerged in the Seventeen Buzz section, the Beauty section, and the Physical Health section.

In the Seventeen Buzz section, the theme of protection emerged in four out of the five issues.

- In Think HIV is not a big deal? Think again, young women are given strategies to protect themselves from HIV (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, December, 2008, pp.154-157).
- In The ED diaries, “pro-ana” groups—online groups for young women who are anorexic to share tips—are constructed as an “online […] danger.” The danger was illustrated by the following statement from a young woman: “I looked online for ways to lose weight; what came up were ‘pro-ana’ […] sites. I tried their tips and read the discussions- it became an obsession” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 143). The storyline that organizes this statement is represented in Figure 4.
In this storyline, the young woman developed an “obsession” due to her exposure to “pro-ana” groups. She does not mention anything about her context or the pressure to lose weight that might have been imposed on her. Her statement constructs exposure to “pro-ana” groups as a threat no matter what the context is, constructing young women as incapable of critically reading messages from the media. The suggested protection against “pro-ana” groups is to stop them, not to inquire about the way they are internalized by young women or about what contextual factors would facilitate an inclination among

Figure 4. Exposure to “pro-ana” sites.
young women towards anorexia. *Seventeen* asks young women to “show [their] support by joining [the] ‘stop pro-ana’ group” (*Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries*, March, 2009, p. 143). It is assumed that female bodies engage in anorexic practices because of their uncritical consumption of the media not because of social pressure and traditional gender roles. Therefore, female bodies are assumed to need protection from “pro-ana” groups, not empowerment in negotiating the social pressure to lose weight. Because their internalization of media messages is assumed to be an uncritical one, young women need to be distanced from the threatening texts.

- In *Creepy older dudes (CODs)*, it is argued that even though CODs may “seem harmless,” they represent a danger and young women are given tips on how to avoid them. Young women are constructed as inclined to be victims of CODs through statements like: “It’s okay to admit that attention from an older guy can be flattering” (*Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz*, July, 2009, p. 123). The female body needs to be protected not only from CODs, but also from her inclination towards CODs. The female body is, therefore, constructed as a threat to herself and needs to be protected from her naturalized inclinations. The threatening inclinations of the female body are also illustrated in this statement from the Love Life section: “He’s the guy you’re supposed to avoid […] so why can’t you resist him?!?” (*Seventeen, Love life*, March, 2009, p. 86).

- In *The sex secret*, young women are advised not to go to isolated areas with males that they recently met, “Getting you alone makes you more vulnerable” (*Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz*, October, 2008, p. 160). This statement assumes that any female body, *because it is a female body*, is vulnerable to be abused when left alone with a male body. The statement excludes the possibility that a female body might be able to overpower or
outwit a male body. The female body is assumed to be weak vis-à-vis the male body, therefore it needs protection.

Protection was also a topic in the Beauty section, the following storyline was consistently repeated in four out of the five issues: Getting a product, applying a product, protecting the effect of the product (see Figure 5). While in the Seventeen Buzz section the female body needs to be protected from potential rapists, from HIV or from “CODs,” the Beauty section suggests ways for the female body to protect its look from nature and time. The female body shines through the product, and has to protect the shine from fading.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5. Product storyline.**

- In *New trends to try!,* protection was lexicalized through the following expressions:
  “Keep hair neatly in place,” “Secure with bobby pins,” “keep [the braid] from unraveling,” “To make your color last,” “keep color from chipping,” and “Protect your strands” (March, 2009, pp. 57-62).
• In *Get ready to sparkle!*, protection was lexicalized through the following expressions:
  “keep your gloss in place,” “help the shimmery flecks […] stay there!” (December, 2008, pp. 90-96).

• In *Amazing makeunders!*, protection was lexicalized through the following expressions:
  “prevent your hair from fading,” “prevent creasing,” and “prevent heat damage”
  (October, 2008, pp. 61-66).

• In *American beauty*, protection was lexicalized through the following expressions: “so it stays in place,” “Secure the ends with small barrettes or bobby pins,” “keep everything in place” (July, 2009, pp. 50-58).

The theme of protection also emerged in the Physical Health section in three out of the five issues. The three issues dealt with the topic of the sexual encounter:

• In *The most important talk you’ll ever have*, talking to mom is constructed as necessary for protection from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. A young woman who got pregnant against her will stated: “Things would have been a lot easier if I had let [mom] help me get protection” (*Seventeen*, Physical Health, May, 2009, p. 86).

• In *Read this before your next hookup*, young women are told about four “hidden health risks” that might lead to sexually transmitted diseases (*Seventeen*, Physical Health, December, 2008, p. 113).

• In *Sex, your body, and your heart*, young women are advised to check their head, their heart and their body before engaging in a sexual intercourse. “Checking your body” consists of checking whether the young woman is protected from sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy. By constructing the act of checking the body as an act of checking whether the body is protected, the body is constructed as threatened and as in
need of protection. The body is reduced to a vulnerable morphology, not the site of feelings, emotions, the intellect, and ideas.

Throughout the texts in Seventeen, the need for protection and vulnerability are naturalized as properties of the female body. The use of race in the Seventeen Buzz section conducts the ideological work of constructing the naturalized properties of the female body as universal and as independent of race. The female body is not vulnerable because of its race, it is vulnerable because it is a female body.

Race in the Beauty Section

Race as a visual theme. Race was consistently used in the Beauty section as a tool of homogenization. Race was used in the Beauty section through a different semiotic process than the Seventeen Buzz section: it emerged mainly as a visual, and not linguistic, theme. Four out of the five Beauty sections that were analyzed contained images of celebrities and young women who could be described as brown or black.

- In The besties, in three out of the six pages, there is at least one image of a young woman or female celebrity who could be described as brown or African American (Seventeen, Beauty, July, 2009).
- In Amazing makeunders, in two out of the four pages, there is at least one image of a young woman or female celebrity who could be described as brown or African American (Seventeen, Beauty, October, 2008).
- In New trends to try, in three out of the five pages, there is at least one image of a young woman or female celebrity who could be described as brown or African American” (Seventeen, Beauty, March, 2009).
• In *American Beauty*, in two out of the four pages, there is at least one image of a young woman or female celebrity who could be described as brown or African American (*Seventeen, Beauty, May, 2009*).

• In *Get ready to sparkle!*, there were no images of celebrities or young women who could be described as brown or African American (*Seventeen, Beauty, December, 2008*). However, race was included in this section through a different device: skin tones, a set of five categories where each category represented a skin color. The five skin categories are: “fair skin,” “beige skin,” “golden skin,” “bronze skin,” and “deep skin.” Each of the four pages in this section illustrates a beauty routine, and for each beauty routine, different products are suggested based on the skin category to which a young woman belongs.

While all routines were illustrated by a young woman with a “fair skin,” young women with other types of skins could follow the same routine by using beauty products that fit their skin tone.

One might argue that the exclusion of images of female bodies with brown or black skin from *Get ready to sparkle!* is grounded in the assumption that a female body with dark skin cannot “sparkle,” however, this argument could be countered from within the same section. In fact, the exclusion of images of female bodies with dark skin colors is masked by the fact that all images in this section represent the same young woman: the section contains four images, all of which are images of the same young woman, a young woman who could be described as white. Therefore, one might argue that *Seventeen* did not exclude young women with dark skin, rather, *Seventeen* chose to illustrate the section with a single model, this model happened to have a white “fair” skin.
Dual representations. In one of the five Beauty sections, Seventeen uses dual representations where the same trend is illustrated by two female bodies with different skin colors. Dual representations operate to ground the claim that any female body can get the look of any other female body even if the imitated and the imitator have different skin colors and ethnicities. In New trends to try, three out of the four suggested trends were illustrated by dual representations:

- “Glam Braids” were illustrated by Alicia Keys, a celebrity that could be described as brown or black paired with a young woman could be described as white (March, 2009, p. 60).
- “Orange lips” were illustrated by Taylor Momsen, a celebrity that could be described as white paired with a young woman who could be described as brown or black (March, 2009, p. 61).
- “Turquoise nails” were illustrated by Jennifer Hudson, a celebrity that could be described as black paired with a young woman that could be described as Asian (March, 2009, p. 58).

The premise that dual representations perpetuate is that any female body can look like another female body irrespective of skin color and/or ethnicity.

This premise is challenged in another text from the Beauty section. In The besties, Seventeen presents the “tricks” of four celebrities, and shows how young women can apply these “tricks” to look like the celebrity. Three out of the four celebrities could be described as white and one could be described black. For each one of these celebrities, her suggested “tricks” were applied to a young woman who has the same skin color. A premise underlying this section may be that the “tricks” of a female body that is white can only be used by a female body that is
white; a female body that is not white cannot look like a female body that is white even if the same “tricks” are used. This premise contradicts the premise that underlies dual representations. On the one hand, the Beauty section constructs one homogenous female body that is ontologically prior to race through dual representations. On the other hand, the same section constructs female bodies belonging to different racial groups as qualitatively different.

The Beauty section homogenizes through inclusion, either of image or of a skin color scale. Within the Beauty section there emerged challenges to the homogeneity of the female body: the presence of traces of a Eurocentric discourse where a dark body is assumed not to “sparkle,” and traces of an assumption that differentiates white bodies from black bodies. But these two challenges are balanced in the semiotic practices of the Beauty section. The assumption that female bodies with a dark skin color do not “sparkle” is countered by a textual practice; female bodies that are brown or black are signified as “glowing” in two texts from the Beauty section. The assumption of a differentiation between white and black is counterbalanced by having dual representations spread throughout one text from the Beauty section.

However, even though the differentiation of white bodies and black bodies was counterbalanced in the Beauty section, it was not counterbalanced elsewhere. In the Body Peace section, Love Life section and Seventeen Buzz section, all images of heterosexual couples that were included were images of couples where both subjects belonged to the same racial group. Throughout the analyzed texts, the images of couples were all images of heterosexual couples, and the only instance where the image represented a racially heterogeneous couple was in the “What you think!” section. A young woman sent her comment on the Black + White prom article:

As an African American, “Black & White Proms” really struck me. Prom shouldn’t be about color—it should be about every student having the same
chance to hang out with every member of her class. I had a blast at prom—it would have been so sad if my date and I hadn’t been able to go together because of our races. (Seventeen, “What you think!”, July, 2009, p. 19)

In this passage the young woman’s statement perpetuates the ideological work of the article Black + White prom by constructing racially segregated proms as barriers to heterosexuality. Like the article on racially segregated proms, she constructs the primary need of a young woman from an oppressed group to be a heterosexual need. She reduces the negative effects of racially segregated proms to the denial of young women from enjoying their heterosexuality.

Race in the “What you think!” section. In the “What you think!” section, as in the Beauty section, race was used as a tool of homogenization through inclusion. Some of the included testimonies were accompanied by an image of the young woman who sent them. Out of the 35 illustrated testimonies, five were sent from young women who could be described as brown or black. There were no significant qualitative differences between the content of letters sent from readers who could be described as black and readers who could be described as white. The following two letters illustrate the continuity between letters from young women who could be described as black and letters from young women who could be described as white.

- Letter from a young woman who could be described as black: “I loved that you chose Beyoncé as your Style Star of the Year! She wears what she wants and totally works it all the time. It’s great for us girls to see that. She really expresses herself through her choices, and she transitions so well from one fashionable look to another. She’s such an inspiration!” (Seventeen, “What you think!”, March, 2009, p. 22).

- Letter from a young woman who could be described as white: “Thanks so much for putting Leighton Meester on your March cover! Leighton’s independence and confidence in the guy department was inspiring! […] If Leighton doesn’t need a guy to feel good
about who she is, neither should any of us!” (Seventeen, “What you think!”, May, 2009, p. 24).

The continuity between the two entries is established through the following elements: (1) both entries are praising a celebrity, (2) both young women are inspired by celebrities, (3) both young women use “us” to refer to themselves as “girls” and construct their sex as ontologically prior to their race.

**Ability as a Tool of Homogenization**

Ability was underrepresented in the analyzed texts; it occurred only twice. In both occurrences ability functioned, like race, as a tool of homogenization of the female body. The first occurrence of ability was in the Editorial section where young women with special needs were constructed as receivers of help. The second occurrence of ability intersected with race; a young woman who could be described as black and who claimed to have a disability shared her narrative on how she got HIV.

In the Editorial section, ability emerged in the following passage:

[The Spartan cheerleaders’s] dedication to helping others [is] truly amazing. [They] have done more than 800 hours of community service, raised almost $6,000 for disaster relief, and even created the Spartan Sparkles, a cheer squad for special-needs girls in their community. (Seventeen, Editorial, May, 2009, p. 16)

This passage is grounded in a coherence assumption. It starts by stating that the Spartan cheerleaders have a dedication to helping others. Then, the passage mentions a set of practices in which the Spartan cheerleaders engage: community service, raising money and establishing a cheerleading squad for young women with special needs in their community. In order to experience this text as coherent, the reader has to assume that community service, raising money and establishing the “Spartan Sparkles” are all examples of the Spartan cheerleaders’ dedication to helping others, therefore, they are all acts of help. However, by assuming that establishing a
cheerleading squad for young women with special needs is an act of help, one is constructing an identity for these young women.

Helping a subject involves fulfilling a need of the subject. When a practice is signified as an act of help, is it assumed that the helper fulfilled the need of the helped. When the establishment of a cheerleading squad for young women with special needs is signified as an act of help, the young women with special needs are assumed to need or to want to become cheerleaders and to practice cheerleading. Young women with special needs are assumed to want to be cheerleaders. Their desire is not rooted in their personal preferences, rather, because of their gender, because they are females, they are assumed to want and to enjoy being cheerleaders.

Like race, ability is used as a tool of homogenization of the female body. Through the signification of ability, a female body that is ontologically prior to ability is constructed, a female body that is “naturally” inclined to enjoy cheerleading. Like young women without special needs who experience a makeover and then pose for a picture, young women with special needs are “helped” to go through a makeover and then they are “helped” to pose for a picture, and the picture, along with their story, is published by Seventeen. Like young women without special needs who have a “natural” need to “sparkle,” as argued in the previous section, young women with special needs are also constructed as having a “natural” need to sparkle. In order to fulfill their assumed need, they are called “Spartan Sparkles.”

Wearing cheerleading dresses, posing for pictures, “sparkling” are all heterosexual constructs that are used in the signification of both young women generally and young women with special needs. Heterosexuality is used to homogenize the female body across ability, as well as race. The act of helping young women who are brown or black, as constructed by Seventeen,
consists of helping them attend a unified prom so they get the chance to collectively enjoy their heterosexuality with young women who are white. Similarly, the act of helping young women with special needs, as constructed by Seventeen, consists of helping them enjoy what other young women enjoy—cheerleading for male dominated sports.

The other instance where a young woman with special needs is included is in the article Think HIV is not a big deal? Think again. In this article, a young woman describes how, because of her disability, she was constantly teased: “My whole life, people teased me for my little nose and my ‘crazy eyes’ (I was born with a visual disability)” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, December, 2008, p. 156). The young woman then describes how her disability was an obstacle for her to get attention and how she is grateful because her new boyfriend “accepts her disability.”

Gratefulness to the man who “accepts” a female body naturalizes the vulnerability of the female body. By being grateful for being accepted, a young woman constructs herself as possessing a lack or a shameful element. Being grateful is not limited to young women with special needs, but it is continuous across all categories of young women. The continuity between a passage from a young woman with special needs and a young woman with no identified special needs reveals this commonality.

- The young woman with a disability, when talking about her boyfriend, stated: “Brian accepted my disability and took a true interest in me. We could talk for hours about anything” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, December, 2008, p. 156).
- In the “What you think!” section, a young woman not identified with special needs says: “… so we started talking on the phone for hours every day […] I can be myself around him, and he treats me so well!” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” March, 2009, p. 22).
In both cases, the female body is grateful because it is accepted. This gratefulness for acceptance is grounded in the assumption that the female body is a source of shame for the subject occupying it. The shame may be due to a disability or to another characteristic of the body. Disability intersects to add another shameful element to a female body that is already constructed as “naturally” shameful.

**The Erasure of Class**

One way of reducing differences is by constructing them as differences *within* a homogenous group. Differences of race and ability are reduced by constructing them as differences *within* the homogenous female body. Another way of reducing difference, illustrated in this section, is by making a difference invisible, by erasing it. Differences of economic class between female bodies are erased by *Seventeen*.

**Analysis of Passage**

*Once you protect yourself and your friends, it’s time to help HIV and AIDS in other parts of world* [...] *Seventeen* has made it easy for you to make a difference: We partnered with (PRODUCED) RED to create exclusive goodies-when you buy them, a portion of the sale will go to the Global Fund to purchase medicine that helps people with HIV and AIDS in Africa live longer lives. (Emphasis in original, *Seventeen*, Seventeen Buzz, December, 2008, p. 157)

In this passage, as argued next, young women with low income in North America are made invisible. The erasure of social class is revealed through an analysis of a coherence assumption that grounds this passage and a storyline that organizes its content.

**Coherence Assumption**

This passage describes how *Seventeen* enables young women to help people living with HIV in Africa through the act of purchasing a particular brand of products. The products included in this brand are shoes and laptops. The passage claims that by enabling young women
to help through the act of consumption, *Seventeen* has “made it easy” for them to “make a difference.” Therefore, the act of consumption is assumed to be an act that is easy for young women. Further, this act of consumption is assumed to make a difference. An act of consumption, however, may not be easy for a person who has a low income. Purchasing products necessitates the possession of a certain amount of financial capital, including enough money to cover basic living expenses and necessities and excess money for additional spending. This passage assumes that consumption of these particular products is easy. But in order for the assumption to hold, the reader has to bring another assumption into the reading: the assumption that all young women in North America have enough money to shop and purchase these products. In order to experience the text as coherent, the reader needs to take it as given that all of the young women who read *Seventeen* have enough money to both cover their basic living expenses and have excess money, or that they belong to a middle or upper social class. Further, the reader has to assume that simply donating directly to a particular cause is somehow less appealing.

**Storylines**

The storyline that organizes this passage (see Figure 6) also functions, along with the coherence assumption, to erase young women with low income in North America.
This storyline reflects the organization of the passage’s first sentence: “Once you protect yourself and your friends, it’s time to help HIV and AIDS in other parts of world.” First, the young woman protects her body, then she contributes to the protection of her friend’s bodies. Finally, she helps subjects living with HIV in Africa. In the text from which this passage was taken, the young woman protects her body through medical tests and by convincing her partner to get tested regularly. She protects her friends by joining the “ring of girls” who wear a promise ring and promise to protect themselves from HIV. When a young woman wears the promise ring, she is assumed to help other young women get protection: “[b]ecause if everyone is in it together, it will be an easier promise to keep!” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, Think HIV is not a big deal? Think again, December, 2008, p. 157). Finally, the young woman helps people living with HIV in Africa through the purchase of products.
An analysis of the storyline reveals a discontinuity between its parts. In the first two parts, the foregrounded issue is the need of young women in North America to protect themselves against HIV. In the last stage, the foregrounded issue is the need of people living with HIV in Africa for economic help in order to have access to medicine. By defining protection as the primary need in North America and medicine as the primary need in Africa, the female body living with HIV in North America who does not have access to medical support is excluded. This exclusion exposes the assumption that grounds this storyline: it is assumed that all young women living with HIV in North America have access to the medical support that they need. However, in North America, young women with low income may not have access to good insurance coverage, or a job that offers them insurance. Through the assumption that grounds the transition between parts, this storyline operates to erase the female body with low income in North America.

**Generic Examples**

Throughout the analyzed sections, three different ideological processes emerged through which the female body with low income was erased: the construction of acts of help, the construction of financial difficulty, and the use of the advertisement genre.

**Acts of Help**

The discourse of altruism (see Appendix F) consistently emerged in the analyzed texts. A theme within the discourse of altruism was the act of help. In 16 different instances, the female body was the subject of an act of helping. The 16 instances were sorted as the following.

- Two out of the 16 acts of help were oriented outside of North America; both of these acts were acts of economic help
Out of the 14 acts of help within North America, four acts involved economic help while the other instances involved helping the environment or pathologized female bodies.

In three out of the four instances of economic help in North America, the receiver of economical help is unspecified and, therefore, made invisible. The following two instances illustrate this invisibility:

- “Show off your generous Sagittarius side and donate anything you no longer want” *(Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).*
- “Jupiter helps you *feel* great too by pushing you to donate your old clothes” *(Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168).*

In both of these statements, young women donate things that they do not need. However, it is not stated to whom these things are donated. Young women do not only donate things that they do not need, but also they sell the things they do not need.

In the act of selling, however, the receivers of the young woman’s property are specified:

- “Sell old clothes, shoes, and accessories you don’t want to a consignment or resale store” *(Seventeen, Love Life, March, 2009, p. 87).*
- “Sell your old books, CDs, and video games at used bookstores—or on eBay” *(Seventeen, Beauty, March, 2009, p. 61).*

By omitting the receiver of economic help from the statement that signifies the act of help, the receiver of economic help is made invisible. When a property is donated, the receiver of the donation is omitted; when the same property is sold, the purchaser is included. The female body with low income who is more likely to be a receiver of economic help is, therefore, erased.

The receiver of economic help was specified only once. Even in this instance, however, the receiver was only partially specified: “Each member [of the sorority] won a new [...] outfit,
plus $1,700 was donated to their local women’s shelter by [an organization]” (Seventeen, Editorial, May, 2009, p. 16). This sentence refers to an act of help where one institution donated money to a women’s shelter. However, the purpose of the shelter is not mentioned. The shelter could be a shelter for young women or adult women, it could be a shelter for pathologized women, homeless women, or women who are being domestically abused. When the act of financial donation was directed outside of North America, the purpose of the shelter was specified: “I [...] earned so much money that I was able to donate $70 to a homeless shelter in China. I feel like I’m making a difference!” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” October, 2008, p. 20). While homelessness in China and the inability to get medicine in Africa are explicitly stated, homelessness and economic difficulty in North America are erased.

Financial Difficulty

Seventeen includes a section on finances that was not included in the analysis for this study. However, in other sections, issues related to finances still emerged. In the March 2009 issue, every single page, including the pages that constituted the source of data for this thesis, included one financial tip at the bottom. Also, “money” was a topic of two entries in the “What you think!” section and two entries in the Horoscopes.

The first occurrence of money in the “What you think!” section was in the entry from the young woman who donated money to the homeless shelter in China: “Thank you so much for including the summer jobs tips [Seventeen’s Guide to making major money]! I took your advice and earned so much money that I was able to donate 70$ to a homeless shelter in China!” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” October, 2008, p. 20). In this passage, the purpose of the summer job is not to cover the basic needs of a young woman, rather, the purpose is to “make major
money” so that the young woman can purchase products and engage in activities that are not essential.

In the text Creepy older dudes (CODs), the harassment that young women encounter in the workplace is attributed to the presence of a co-worker who is a “creepy older dude.” When faced with a “creepy” co-worker, young women are encouraged to either tell their parents or their boss. A young woman who reported to Seventeen that she was harassed by her co-worker left her job, then told her mom and her boss. In the end, her boss fired the “creepy” co-worker. The three suggested solutions to harassment in the workplace are all grounded in the assumption that the young woman is involved in a symmetrical power relation with other people in the workplace, that she is working in a job where harassment is not tolerated, and that she can afford to leave her job without another job.

While the young woman who shared her story was able to leave her job after being harassed, other young women cannot do that. They might not have the luxury of leaving a job without another one to go to; the salary that they get from their jobs might be covering their basic needs, need for shelter and need for food. For them, leaving the job is not an option, especially when there is no guarantee that they will find another job immediately. When Seventeen suggests that young women tell their parents, it is assumed that parents have the power to financially save their daughter from her situation. For many young women, however, parents may not be able to cover basic needs if she loses her job. Further, they might not be able to intervene in her workplace and change the way she is treated. Finally, when Seventeen asks young women to tell their boss, a dichotomy between the middle class and working class men is being perpetuated. It is assumed that the working class co-worker is the “creepy older dude” and the boss is the “gentleman.” In fact, when the young woman who has been harassed reflects on her experience,
she says: “I regretted ever becoming friends with someone who was out of high school and living on his own” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, July, 2009, p. 124). Her statement attributes her co-worker’s behaviour to his level of education. However, many cases of rape and sexual assault have proved that there is no correlation between the level of education and the man’s attitude towards women. An example is the case of Russel Williams. Russel Williams graduated from the University of Toronto, he completed his Masters degree in the royal Canadian academy, he was a Colonel in the Canadian Army. In October 2010, he was convicted of the rape and murder of two women and the sexual assault on three other women including a recent mother.

Telling parents or a boss might help some young women who are harassed in the workplace, but definitely not all of them. An act of help that would have been inclusive of young women from different economic classes would have been to tell young women about their legal rights as employees. Introduce them to the policies that are relevant to their work and give them suggestions on how to end their harassment at their job—whether they are harassed by their co-worker or their boss—without loosing their job. As the analysis of the text CODs (Creepy Older Dudes) demonstrates, the discursive construction of the event of sexual assault at work functions to make the female body with low income invisible.

Sexual assault was the topic of another text from Seventeen Buzz, The sex secret too many girls are keeping. The signification of sexual assault in this text also functions to erase the female body with low income. The text starts with the following statement: “For some girls, it happens at a party. For other girls, it’s while watching a movie on the couch in the basement. It can be in the backseat of your car, or on the beach, or even with tons of other people in plain sight” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, October, 2008, p. 159). This statement constructs the differences between young women who are sexually assaulted as differences of geography: for
some it happens in location x, for others it happens in location y. The statement does not acknowledge that some young women, including young women from economically unprivileged classes, are more at risk of sexual assault because of their working conditions, including working in male dominated professions or working late at night or working in unsafe areas, as well as the asymmetrical power relations in which they are involved in their workplace.

Working class young women are erased because the purpose of work for a young woman is assumed to be making excess money. Young women are assumed to have other sources of income as the following two entries from the Horoscope section imply.

- “Thanks to Uranus, your ruling planet, cash will come your way when your parents surprise you with a little spending money for the weekend! Save most of it: Your friends will want to plan an awesome trip soon” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152).
- “Mercury put some extra cash in your holiday cards and you’ll want to spend it on the 11th. But save some —you’ll need it for a big event next month” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168).

Both entries suggest to young women that they will receive unearned money. Further, that they should save the money that they receive. This suggestion constructs financial difficulty as a problem of saving money not a problem of access to money resources.

Financial difficulty is assumed to be a problem that could be solved through saving and organization, as the following statement by a young woman implies: “You were dead-on about everything, especially money. Let’s just say I broke the bank. Now I’m keeping a journal of my spending, like you suggested!” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” October, 2008, p. 18). In the issue that included financial tips, the tips fall in one of these categories:

- Tips for saving money;
• Tips for purchasing, while paying less;
• Tips for making money by offering services to parents and local children;
• Tips on making money by selling things that the young woman has, but no longer needs, and;
• Tips on getting a scholarship.

The tips that go under the first four categories all assume that the female body belongs to a privileged economic class. The first two categories assume that the young woman already possesses money, but does not spend it in the best way. The third and fourth categories assume that the young woman’s parents, other parents in the neighbourhood, and “local children” are able to be financial resources for the young woman. Only the last category, which includes only one tip, is useful to women from different economic classes.

Tips for purchasing products are also included in the Beauty section where young women are told about “best deals.” Besides the best deals, the Beauty section constructs the reader of Seventeen as a consumer and assumes the reader’s ability to purchase and consume. This ideological work is conducted through the advertisement genre in the Beauty section as discussed next.

Advertisement Genre in the Beauty Section

In four of the five issues of Seventeen included in this analysis, the Beauty section mainly consists of procedures of beautification that young women are expected to practice in order to look better. These procedures are shaped by a genre that may be described as a hybrid between a procedural genre and an advertisement genre. The hybrid genre contrasts with the conversational genre that is characteristic of all the other sections.
The following passage from the Beauty section illustrates the hybrid procedural-advertising genre through which procedures of beautification are constructed in *Seventeen*.

step 2

COLOR

Trace inside the centre of the stencil with a glittery liquid eyeliner, filling in the star shape completely. Allow it to dry for five minutes, then peel off the stencil.

step 3

SHIMMER

Make the rest of your skin glisten by swiping a glitter-necked body lotion or powder onto your arms, shoulders, and chest. (*Seventeen, Beauty, Get ready to sparkle*, December, 2008, p. 96)

In this procedure, step two reflects the procedural genre: the focus is on what actions need to be performed and in what temporal order, including “trace inside the center [...] Allow it to dry for five minutes, then peel off the stencil.” Step three reflects the advertisement genre: the focus is on the product’s effect and what the use of the product can allow the female body to do, including “Make the rest of your skin glisten by [using a product].”

In all four Beauty sections that included procedures, the advertisement genre was present and merged with the procedural genre.

- In *New trends to try!*, procedures that were shaped by the advertisement genre contained expressions like: “Keep your hair neatly in place by,” hold your style in place with” (*Seventeen, Beauty, March, 2009, pp. 57-62*).
• In *Amazing makeunders!*, the advertisement genre emerged through the following expressions: “keep the color fresh by,” “give curls a glossy finish by” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, October, 2008, pp. 61-66).

• In *Get ready to sparkle*, the advertisement genre emerged through these expressions: “For an even more dazzling effect [use a product],” “add more sparkle and prevent chips by,” “Make the rest of your skin glisten by” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, December, 2008, pp. 90-96).

• In *American beauty*, the advertisement genre emerged through these expressions: “for a smoky effect,” “Flip your bangs back over to their natural part [by using product],” “Finish with a [product] that adds shine” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, May, 2009, pp. 56-60).

In the Beauty section, procedures are not suggested, they are advertised. The addressed reader is a consumer who is looking for the right product in order to achieve the desired look. In *Seventeen*, the female body “gets” a look, it does not produce its look. Routines of beautification are constructed as acts of consumption, not acts of work and labor on the body.

The construction of makeup routines as acts of consumption is revealed through the following passage from the Horoscopes section: “Start thinking about a stylish new look you want to try, then unveil it on New Year’s Eve” (*Seventeen*, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168). This statement can be represented through the storyline in Figure 7.
In this storyline, the female body transitions immediately from thinking about the new look, which exists already and is something she just needs to “try,” to revealing the new look. All the effort that is required for the female body to change herself is excluded from the storyline. Stylish looks exist, are thought of, and then unveiled. The part through which the look is achieved is excluded from the temporal order of events. Looks are developed in no time, looks are simply purchased. The female body buys them, gets them, but never creates or produces them herself.

In four of the five Beauty sections, the advertisement genre emerged from within routines and procedures of beautification. In the section that did not include procedures of beautification, the advertisement genre emerged more explicitly. In *The besties, Seventeen’s* readers are introduced to a selection of products that were judged by the *Seventeen* expert as “the best for body,” “the best for face,” and “the best for hair.” The products were advertised through the voices of readers and experts.
• An example of the use of expert’s voice to advertise a product is: “This [product] contains 10% benzoyl peroxide so it really works on acne—but it also has added moisturizers to help fight dryness” (Seventeen, Beauty, The besties, July, 2009, p. 54).

• An example for the use of the reader’s voice to advertise a product is: “This system is amazing! Each step does something different to repair my skin” (Seventeen, Beauty, The besties, July, 2009, p. 54).

The example of the young woman’s statement, besides contributing to the advertisement genre that is spread throughout Seventeen’s Beauty section constructing the reader as a consumer, naturalizes the need of the female body to be “repaired.” The construction of the female body as a body that needs to be repaired and redressed is an ideological process that naturalizes body dissatisfaction as a natural outcome of having a female body. The description of this process is articulated in Chapter 6.

**Summary**

Race and ability are examples of how differences between female bodies are reduced to differences within a “natural” homogenous female body. By challenging racism, the young woman who is brown or black is constructed as naturally inclined to enjoy heterosexual practices. By including linguistic and visual representations of young women from different races, the heterosexual and vulnerable female body that wants to sparkle and gain attention is constructed as ontologically prior to race. Like race, ability was used to further naturalize heterosexuality and vulnerability. Another process through which Seventeen functions to construct a “natural” female body that is ontologically prior to differences is the erasure of class. Young women from unprivileged economic classes whose primary needs contrast with the
naturalized needs of the female body are invisible in the linguistic and semiotic practices of *Seventeen*. 
Chapter 5
Processes of difference construction

The previous chapter addressed homogenization through processes of difference reduction: the shift from socially constructed differences in terms of race, ability and class across female bodies to differences within an homogenous female body. This chapter addresses homogenization through processes of difference construction. The chapter is divided into two sections, each one addressing a different process of difference construction. In the first section, astrological differences between female bodies are addressed. The second section discusses differences that are based on the relationship status of young women. In order to ground the claims in this chapter, the following discourses are addressed over the course of the discussion: the discourse of collaboration, the discourse of hedonism, the discourse of heterosexuality, the discourse of vulnerability, the discourse of femininity, and the discourse of feminism (see Appendix A).

The Horoscopes Section: Astrological Differences

The Horoscopes section appears in every issue of Seventeen. It categorizes young women in one of twelve astrological categories. I argue, here, that—even though the Horoscopes section constructs twelve distinct categories of young women—the constructed differences naturalize a homogenous female body that is common to all categories. While the reduction of differences naturalizes a homogenous female body that is ontologically prior to race and ability, the construction of astrological differences functions to naturalize a female body that is ontologically prior to astrological categories.
Analysis of Passage

You’re always the first to post weekend photos on MySpace or Facebook. After all, Leos love showing off a little. But be careful: Around the 6th, a jealous girl will try to use them to cause trouble. Change your privacy settings so only your close friends can see your pictures! (*Seventeen*, Horoscopes, October, 2009, p. 166)

This passage discusses a difference between astrological categories, but it also presupposes a commonality between these categories. Young women who belong to the category, “Leos,” are differentiated from other young women and defined as more inclined to show off. However, an analysis of the passage reveals that it also functions to construct a female body that is common to all astrological signs and, therefore, to all young women. The construction of commonality is revealed by addressing the coherence assumption that grounds this passage and analyzing a collocation that this passage perpetuates.

Coherence Assumption: The Naturalization of Posting Pictures

One way through which coherence assumptions are revealed is by introducing slight changes into a passage and then analyzing the changes in meaning that this slight change provokes (Martin, 1990). In order to reveal the coherence assumption that grounds it, I introduce a slight change into the above passage’s first sentence.

- The suggested first sentence is: “You always post weekend photos on MySpace or Facebook. After all, Leos love showing off a little.”

- The original first sentence is: “You’re always *the first* to post weekend photos on MySpace or Facebook. After all, Leos love showing off a little” (emphasis added).

In the suggested sentence, posting weekend photos is constructed as a practice that results from the young woman’s love to show off. Loving to show off leads the young woman to post her weekend pictures on Facebook. However, in the original sentence, the love to show off does not
just lead her to post weekend pictures online; rather, it leads her to be the first to post her pictures. It is not the act of posting pictures per se that reveals whether a young woman loves to show off or not. It is the act of posting before others that reflects the young woman’s love to show off. In order to experience the above passage as coherent, the reader has to bring an assumption into her reading: she has to assume that the act of posting pictures on Facebook is not necessarily an act of showing off. If she does not assume so, the inclusion of “first” in the original first sentence may be experienced as unintelligible.

The assumption is, thus, all young women, whether they like to show off or not, post their pictures. The young woman who likes to show off is the one who posts her pictures first. The inclusion of “first” in the sentence implies the presence of a second and a third. Posting pictures is constructed as a common female characteristic. “Leos” are not alone in posting pictures. “Aries” —defined by Seventeen as “strong” and “impulsive”— post their pictures: “Pluto guides you [addressing “Aries” young women] to try a new style on the 4th. Post a pic of your amazing look on MySpace—your crush will take note!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2009, p. 168). The practice of posting pictures for the gaze of others, both friends and crushes, is therefore constructed as a “natural” female characteristic.

Collocation: Being a Female and Having a Tendency to Harm Other Females

The analyzed passage reconstructs the difference between young women who show off and young women who do not. The reconstructed difference functions to naturalize the practice of posting pictures for the gaze of others. The passage also reproduces a collocation that is widespread in Seventeen: Being a female is collocated with being jealous of, competing against, and in a destructive relation with other female bodies.
Harmful relations between female bodies. The above passage signifies the young woman causing trouble as a “jealous girl.” By signifying her as “jealous,” she is assumed to be intentionally causing trouble: she intentionally uses another young woman’s pictures to intentionally cause harm. However, in another passage where a young woman causes trouble to herself by using her own pictures in a harmful way, the act is constructed as fully unintentional and irrational: “The story ‘My Nude Pics Got Me Kicked Off Cheerleading’ really hit home. A year ago, my friend and I went through something similar, and it turned our lives upside down. […] Now I know you should always think before you click” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” May, 2009, p. 24). In this passage, when she harms herself, the young woman does not intend it, she does it thoughtlessly: she did not think before she clicked. When she is harmed by another young woman, however, the other young woman is assumed to have intended it. The other young woman is assumed to be driven by jealousy.

Young women are constructed as having a “natural” motive to harm one another: jealousy. Even young women who “like to keep peace” have a tendency to harm other young women as the following two statements from the horoscopes section show.

- A guy you’ve been friends with forever has been hinting he wants something more, but you just don’t feel the same way. Libras like to keep peace, and with the help of Mercury on the 14th, you’ll find just the right words to duck his advances (Seventeen, Horoscopes, July, 2009, p. 136).

- You’re usually the flirt of the group, but this time it’s your friends who are getting guys. And when they ditch you for their new BFs, you’ll get super-mad. Mercury’s movement on the 18th will make you want to send a bitchy text (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).
In the first statement, the “Libra” young woman is signified as having a natural disposition to keep peace. However, the second statement reveals how the tendency to keep peace is only materialized in the context of a heterosexual relationship. In relationships with other young women, even young women who like to keep peace are naturally inclined toward practices that are “bitchy.” A young woman’s peacefulness does not hinder her or stop her from engaging in “bitchy” practices against other young women. “Bitchy” practices are rooted in jealousy, a property of young women that is constructed as ontologically prior to the properties rooted in astrological categories.

Young women’s inclination to be in destructive relationships with one another emerged in four out of the five Horoscopes sections.

- In the October issue, jealousy was a theme of one of the twelve entries: “A jealous girl will try to use [your pictures] to cause trouble” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).
- In the May issue, the concepts of “mean girls,” “bitchy” and “gossip” emerged: “Mean girls stir up drama for you and your guy” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).
- In the March issue, the concept of “bitchy” also emerged: “A full moon […] will make your best friend seem completely bitchy” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152).
- In the December/January issue, the concept “nasty” emerged: “Ignore her nasty text or your Cancer temper will explode!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168).

Horoscopes are traditionally known to attempt to predict the future. However, through acts of signification, the Horoscopes section in Seventeen ideologically constructs the future, besides predicting it. It uses the predicted future as raw material for the ideological future that it seeks to construct. Seventeen predicts conflict, and by signifying the female bodies engaged in conflict as
“nasty,” “bitchy” and “jealous” it attributes the conflict to a presupposed destructive and sabotaging tendency in the female body. The act of predicting the future, therefore, becomes an ideological act with the ideological implication of naturalizing destructive encounters between female bodies and attributing them to a naturalized characteristic of the female body: jealousy.

Challenges to claims of harmful relations. One of the discourses that was found to shape the practices of Seventeen is the discourse of collaboration (see Appendix G). The discourse of collaboration appears to challenge the thesis on the construction of the female body as “naturally” hostile towards other female bodies. In order to maintain the claim on the naturalized hostility of female bodies toward one another, the discourse of collaboration needs to be discussed.

One of the constitutive elements of the discourse of collaboration is the “your girls” expression where a young woman finds in her female friends a supportive companion, rather than a competitor. In the Horoscopes section, the expression “your girls” occurred in five instances. In four out of the five instances it was used as a source of support:

- “[w]hen your girls invite you to the beach, go along!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, July, 2009, p. 136).
- “Lucky for you, your girls will be planning a fun road trip for that weekend!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, July, 2009, p. 136).
- “[w]hen you’re invited to a party […] say yes and bring your girls along!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152).
- “Grab your girls and go to a yoga class—it will be the best bonding experience you’ve ever had!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).
In these instances young women bond together, they have fun and share recreational activities. The discourse of collaboration is used here in conjunction with the discourse of hedonism. However, unlike the hedonistic context, in a heterosexual context the discourse of collaboration is replaced with competitiveness.

Within the heterosexual discourse, where young women change their look in order to gain attention, competitiveness between young women dominates. Collaboration, if it occurs, is infused with a sense of competitiveness. For example, in one Beauty section young women from different states share their “local trends,” an act that could be signified as collaboration: “More than 1,000 readers shared their local trends. Now you can steal each other’s secrets to create your own amazing look!” (Seventeen, Beauty, American beauty, May, 2009, p. 56). However, besides its reference to collaboration, the passage perpetuates a sense of competitiveness between young women; it constructs the act of imitating a young woman’s makeup style as an act of “stealing.” The signifier “stealing” constructs the act of sharing between young women as an act that involves someone who steals and someone from whom something is stolen. When there is a stealer and a stolen from there is someone who wins and someone who loses: a competition.

In another issue of Seventeen, the Beauty section metaphorically signifies the competitiveness between young women as a race: “The prettiest looks on the runway can be yours! Learn how to create them before everyone else” (Seventeen, Beauty, New trends to try, March, 2009, p. 57). Young women are racing for the look and the winner is the one who will have the look “before everyone else.” It is not enough for a young woman to get a look; she has to get it “before everyone else.” When she wants to get a look, she also wants others not to get it.

Competitiveness also metaphorically emerged in the Physical Health section. When a young woman shares her narrative about losing weight, Seventeen follows the narrative with a
list of tips. The list’s title is “steal [her] secrets!” The strategies that a young woman uses to change her look are constructed as a secret. Even when the secret is shared, the young woman who reads the secret is still constructed as stealing it. Young women, though they collaborate in their effort to change their looks and gain attention, when they share their strategies and beauty routines, are still stealing from one another. In the act of “stealing,” the one who steals the secret wins. The one from whom secrets were stolen loses.

The discourse of collaboration, besides being collocated with the discourses of hedonism and heterosexuality, also collocates with the discourse of vulnerability. Young women collaborate together to protect one another from a potential threat. This protective collaboration occurred in two of the analyzed texts.

- In the Seventeen Buzz text, *The sex secret too many girls are keeping*, the discourse of collaboration emerged through the following two suggestions: “Always stay around a female friend you trust, and never go off to a secluded area with a guy you just met,” and “before you hang out, set up a code phrase with a friend (like “CGM” for “Come get me”), so you can text her to rescue you” (*Seventeen*, Seventeen Buzz, *The sex secret too many girls are keeping*, October, 2008, p. 160).

- The discourse of collaboration emerged through a metaphorical lexicon in the following suggestion from the Love Life section:

> When a guy acts too clingy or ultra touchy on the dance floor, it’s time to dump him. Use your girls as a quick defense system: grab a friend’s hand and groove her over, so she’s dancing between you and the guy […] Then wave over other friends and have them build a human wall around you in a dance-y way. (*Seventeen*, Love Life, *Get rid of a dud!,* October, 2008, p. 122)

In this passage, young women collaborate with one another to protect themselves from potential physical harassments on the dance floor. The female body is, therefore, protected from
harassment through a human wall built by other female bodies. The wall of female bodies keeps danger away; it separates the young woman from any unwanted encounter with a male body.

The female body is separated from male bodies by a wall of female bodies. This wall protects the female body from unwanted male bodies, but this wall may also separate the female body from the male bodies she desires. The wall that is protective in the above two examples becomes a challenge and an unwanted wall elsewhere. “Mean girls” and “jealous girls,” as argued above, are a threat to the young woman. Even daily interactions with other young women are constructed as a threat: “Drama with your close friends is seriously beginning to affect your love relationship. You’ll bite your tongue when your girls annoy you—but then you’ll end up picking a fight with your guy” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144). A young woman has “her girls” as partners in recreational activities, she needs her girls in order to engage in new, exciting and recreational activities. Her girls protect her from potential rapists, they listen to her when she is facing problems, but the daily interactions with her girls are bound to occasionally have negative effects on her heterosexual life.

In Seventeen, the sabotaging effect of the wall of female bodies in the heterosexual sphere can be overcome through the following two processes: (1) the presence of a male body who can see beyond the wall and (2) the ability of the young woman to “stand out.” The male body that can see beyond the wall and outsmart the wall occurred in the following two entries from the Horoscopes section.

- “Mean girls will stir up drama for you and your guy […] Luckily, your guy is smart enough to know it’s all lies” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).
- “It seems like all the guys are going for a certain kind of girl. Don’t worry, because a shy guy is noticing what makes you so special” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).
Both these entries construct the female body as passive and powerless in overcoming the barrier that other female bodies constitute. In fact, the female body does not overcome the barrier; rather, it is the male body that does all the work of breaking the barrier. The female body, however, is not always completely powerless vis-à-vis the barrier; sometimes she can participate in the process of overcoming the barrier and in bridging the gap that separates her from the male body as the following examples show.

- “But a guy this gorgeous has lots of girls flirting with him. You like playing hard to get, and it will work!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168).
- “Since there were so many other girls at the party, I figured out a playful approach would make me stand out, and it did!” (Seventeen, Love Life, How to flirt wherever you are, March, 2009, p. 87).
- “Even when they all wear black to a formal, their unique personalities shine through!” (Seventeen, Editorial, May, 2009, p. 16).

The goal of a young woman is to “shine through” the collective. The same human wall that protects her from unwanted encounters hides her and, in order to overcome the wall and “stand out,” she has to creatively “play.”

Standing out and “shining through” the collective is a challenge that may sometimes lead to frustration and desperation. When desperation follows from competitiveness, the discourse of collaboration is again activated.

I get the body blues just like the next girl. Last week, I found myself feeling down and so alone [...] Reading your messages, it hit me: Together we’ve created a powerful community, so that as we work toward accepting ourselves (and occasionally experience dark moments anyway), no girl ever has to feel like she’s on her own. (Seventeen, Body Peace, We’re in it together!, December, 2008, p. 112)
As this passage shows, the disappointment that a young woman experiences because of her body is a characteristic of all young women: “we’re in it together.” Therefore, young women can provide support for one another in dealing with the “body blues.” However, this discourse of collaboration is activated only when the female body fails to stand out and be noticed. It is activated between female bodies that fail to stand out and sparkle, by female bodies that are invisible, it is activated in the dark.

Once the female body begins to be noticed, competitiveness is reactivated and this is revealed through a dichotomy that grounds the semiotic practices of Seventeen: the “I get attention”/”you get attention” dichotomy. In this dichotomy the “shining” of other young women leads to a jealousy and “bitterness.” This dichotomy was reported in the following sentences.

- “You’re usually the flirt of the group, but this time it’s your friends who are getting guys. And when they ditch you for their new BF’s, you’ll get super mad” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).
- “Just a look, or a comment (‘Your sister looked so pretty at prom’), can send you over the edge […], instead of resenting your sister (or brother or cousin), try this sneaky way to remind your folks to throw praise at you too” (Seventeen, Body Peace, “Why can’t you be more like…,” March, 2009).

In the entry from the horoscopes, the young woman gets “super mad” when her friends get attention. When her friends get attention, her immediate response is jealousy. Jealousy as an immediate response is also found in the example from the Body Peace section. In this passage, jealousy is constructed as a default reaction of a female body when it witnesses other female bodies (or male bodies) getting attention and praise. Seventeen challenges this dichotomy when it
addresses young women: “instead of resenting your sister, try this sneaky way to ...” However, this advice presupposes that young women’s immediate, natural reaction is resentment.

Competitiveness is activated when another female body stands out. It is also activated once a female body decides to start changing in order to shine and get attention. This is reflected in the narrative from a young woman who was trying to lose weight:

Those first few months were rough. My parents weren’t ready to change their bad eating habits, and sleepovers with friends were the worst. My friends would eat junk and say, “[...] it’s just cookies!” I’m not sure if they were jealous or didn’t get how hard it was, but it broke me down. (Seventeen, Physical Health, “How I lost 100 lbs,” July, 2009, p. 71)

This narrative constructs the journey of losing weight as a struggle against parents who are not prepared and against young women who are jealous, or who do not understand how hard it is. There is no mention of the struggle against hunger, headache, sickness, fatigue and all the other physical phenomena that a person may experience when they are trying to lose weight. While the parents’ negative role is attributed solely to their being unprepared, the young women’s negative role was attributed to the possibility of being jealous.

The acts of collaboration mentioned thus far are acts of collaboration between female bodies that are non-pathologized, “normal” female bodies. However, collaboration also occurred between pathologized and non-pathologized female bodies. In the Seventeen Buzz section, young women who are pathologized share their stories with Seventeen’s readers in order to protect the readers from becoming pathologized bodies:

- “turn the page to see how HIV has changed her life—and why (and how) you should protect yours” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, Think HIV is not a big deal? Think again, December, 2008, p. 155).
• “She shared her recovery diary to help you understand what it’s like” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 141).

Except in the case of anorexia, the relation between normalized and pathologized is a relation of mutual help. However, in the case of anorexia, in addition to the relation of mutual help, there is another type of relation that can be revealed through the following statements.

• “You can’t help staring and whispering with friends when you see a girl who’s painfully skinny. But that kind of gossip can be crushing to girls with eating disorders” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 141).

• “Lately it seems like everyone is obsessed with who does or who doesn’t have an eating disorder. When you’re walking the halls at school, maybe you find yourself gossiping with friends about someone you heard was throwing up after lunch” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 141).

In this instance, the naturalized tendency to harm again emerges. Female bodies are constructed as subjects who “cannot help” whispering and gossiping about other female bodies. They “find themselves” engaging in these harmful practices.

The discourse of collaboration emerged in conjunction with the discourse of hedonism, the heterosexual discourse and the discourse of vulnerability. In the context of hedonism, young women collaborate together to get more hedonistic satisfaction out of their recreational activities. In the heterosexual context, the discourse of collaboration is overshadowed by competitiveness and jealousy. Within the discourse of vulnerability, collaboration emerged through the concept of a protection wall. The female body is protected by a wall of female bodies that keep it away from unwanted encounters. However, this same wall becomes a barrier to the female body that wants to “shine” and the collaborative value of this wall vanishes within the heterosexual discourse.
Jealousy, resentment and gossip are all constructed as “natural” tendencies of the female body in the texts of Seventeen. They are common to all female bodies irrespective of their astrological category. And even though the texts of Seventeen perpetuate a discourse of collaboration, the discourse does not challenge or threaten the naturalized competitiveness and “bitterness” between female bodies.

**Generic Examples**

The analysis of a passage included how the heterosexual discourse and the discourse of vulnerability are perpetuated in the Horoscopes section. Posting pictures for the gaze of others and being threatened by other female bodies are constructed as a property of the “natural” female body that is ontologically prior to its astrological characteristics. In this section, a generic analysis of the Horoscopes section is provided. The analysis reveals how other constructs from the discourse of vulnerability and the discourse of heterosexuality shape the linguistic practices of the Horoscopes section.

**Astrological Interventions**

The horoscopes genre is grounded in the assumption that the movement of stars shapes the lives of individuals; the intervention of stars in an individual’s life can be called an astrological intervention. In Seventeen’s Horoscopes, astrological interventions occur in two different spheres: The inner psychic subjective sphere of the female body and the external sphere of objective events. A study of the way astrological interventions are constructed in these two spheres allows further elaboration of the ideological work conducted through the Horoscopes section.

The astrological interventions reported in the Horoscopes section may be classified into three categories: (1) psychic interventions that lead to a transformation of the psychic state
within the female body, (2) psychic interventions that are continuous with the current psychic state of a female body, and (3) interventions in the external material world. The following list illustrates each type of astrological intervention with an example.

- “You’re not the type to hog the spotlight, but on May 17, Saturn will bring out a whole new attention-seeking side of you” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144). This is an example of the psychic intervention that leads to a psychic transformation.

- “A close friend will need your help big time on May 20, and luckily Neptune will help you offer her some great solutions” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144). This is an example of psychic intervention that is continuous with the current psychic state of the female body. It provides support for the activity in which the female body is already engaged; it does not lead the female body to embrace a new activity or a new thought.

- “On March 11, Venus will add heat to your love life! You’ve been waiting awhile for this, so you’re tempted to rush into a relationship with the first guy who flirts” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152). This is an example of an astrological intervention in the world external to the female body: Venus arranges a meeting between a young woman and a man, it does not intervene in her psychic sphere, it does not lead her to rush or to wait. Whether she decides to wait or rush is a decision that she will take independently of Venus.

Not all entries in the Horoscopes section contained an astrological intervention and some of the astrological interventions could not be classified into one of the categories described above because they could be interpreted differently. These entries were not included in the analysis of astrological interventions.
The five Horoscopes sections that were included in the data for this study consisted of 72 entries, 50 out of these 72 entries could be unambiguously classified into one of the three categories described above. A descriptive quantitative representation of these entries is provided here.

- 35/50 entries consisted of inner psychic interventions, astrological interventions in the psychic sphere.
- 17/35 astrological interventions were inner psychic interventions where the agent is the female body—continuous interventions. In these entries, astrological interventions provide support or direction in a practice in which the female body is already engaged.
- 18/35 inner psychic interventions where the main agent is astrological—transformative interventions. In these entries, astrological interventions move the female body from one state of mind to another qualitatively different, and sometimes oppositional, state of mind.

Psychic interventions where planets, rather than the female body, are in control of the female body’s mental processes strip the female body of its agency and self-control and construct the act of thinking as an act that is shaped by forces external to the female body. Given the high occurrence of these types of astrological interventions, their ideological repercussions need to be discussed.

Naturalization of irrationality. Different types of astrological interventions have different effects on the agency of a female body. When astrological interventions are directed towards the material reality that is external to the female body, the female body’s external reality is changed and might provoke a mental reaction. However, this mental reaction is still controlled by the female body and shaped by the female body’s conscious and unconscious choices. Also, the
astrological interventions that lead to a psychic change that provides support for the activity in which the female body is currently engaged does not strip the female body of its choice and agency. But when the female body is engaged in a certain mental activity, and the astrological intervention leads to a change and transformation of that mental activity, then the female body’s mental life is constructed as the product of outside alien forces.

Astrological interventions that strip the female body of its agency occurred in all of the five Horoscopes sections that were analyzed. For every astrological category, at least one entry consisted of an astrological process that transforms and switches the mental state of the female body. Irrespective of the astrological category to which it belongs, the female body is alienated from its mental life. Planets interfere in the psychic life of the female body and the female body has to deal with these interferences. The female body has to struggle against the unpredictability of her own mental processes. For example, when the female body, because of the movement of a planet, and not because of a change in circumstances or because of a reflection, switches from being stressed to being in state of inner peace, the female body seems to have no agency over its mental state.

One way through which the mental unpredictability of the female body is naturalized is through the construction of conflict in the Horoscopes section. As the following examples highlight, conflict and peace between female bodies are constructed as outcomes of astrological movements:

- In an entry addressed to “Cancer” young women, the following statement is included:
  “When the moon changes signs on the 9th, a friend will pick a fight” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168).
The future of “Taurus” young women is predicted as following: “you’ve been working very hard lately, so you’re feeling stressed and picking fights with friends for no reason. Venus encourages you to knock it off on the 6th” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152).

When addressing “Scorpio” young women, Seventeen states the following: “you’ll argue with a friend […] But before the end of the month, Venus will revamp your outlook on the situation” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).

While these statements address different astrological categories, they presuppose a common female body. They presuppose a female body that fights for no reason. And when fights between female bodies happen for no reason, peace can also happen for no reason. Even when a fight is due to a reason, stress for example, the reason of the fight should not be eliminated in order for the fight to end. The elimination of the fight is not due to a conscious rethinking, rather it is due to an astrological intervention that leads the female body to “knock it off,” to “revamp” its outlook on the situation and to “get over the old issues:” “You haven’t talked to one friend in ages. Saturn gets you over those old issues this month” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168). The young woman does not direct her own mental life. Instead, she is a witness of a mental life, a mental life that is directed by the movement of the stars.

Naturalization of heterosexuality. The movement of planets changes the female body’s mental state from a confrontational state to a peaceful state. The movement of planets also changes the mental inclinations of the female body. A young woman who is shy becomes bold, a young woman who is not romantic becomes romantic, and a young woman who does not seek attention finds herself seeking attention, “surprisingly.”
“Virgos aren’t the most romantic girls in the world, but on the 27th, love planet Venus [encourages] you to ask your guy on a special date. Treat him to dinner at his favorite place. He’ll return the gesture all summer long!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, July, 2009, p. 136).

“You’re not the type to hog the spotlight, but on May 17, Saturn will bring out a whole new attention-seeking side of you” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).

“You’re one of the shiest signs in the zodiac, but this month you’ll surprisingly want all the attention on you” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).

Seventeen’s Horoscopes section presupposes differences between astrological categories. While the Pisces and Taurus categories are assumed to be flirty and romantic, Capricorn, Virgo and Cancer are assumed to be less playful and more serious or reserved. However, even the signs that are not romantic, not flirty and not seeking attention find themselves engaging in these heterosexual practices. Astrological interventions divide young women into two categories: they either engage in the heterosexual practices of seeking attention and acting “romantic” because of a natural disposition, or they engage in such practices because of a supernatural intervention.

While supernatural interventions make the unromantic female body become romantic, the romantic female body never becomes unromantic. Throughout the analyzed Horoscopes entries, there are no examples of a young woman who is usually romantic finding herself suddenly unromantic and no examples of a young woman that seeks attention finds herself hiding from attention. In fact, hiding from attention is constructed in the Body Peace section as an act of not caring about oneself: “When you hide in your clothes, it’s like telling the world, ‘Don’t care about me, because I don’t either.’ But putting in effort to look your best does the reverse” (Seventeen, Body Peace, The power of a makeover, October, 2008, p. 110). Seeking attention is,
therefore, constructed as an act of caring for oneself irrespectively of one’s astrological sign. Even young women with astrological signs that are not predisposed to seeking attention, if they want to take care of themselves, they must seek attention.

The only case that surfaced that exemplified a female body originally enjoying attention moving to a position of not enjoying it is the following: “You love to stand out, but even you will be overwhelmed by all the attention!” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168). In this entry, the astrological intervention does not transform the young woman who enjoys attention to a young woman that does not, rather, it overwhelms the young woman with attention. Therefore, there is no mental switch or mental transformation that is provoked here. The young woman who is naturally disposed to seek attention keeps her natural disposition; she is just overwhelmed by the sheer amount of attention that is beyond the typical amount she receives.

Mental switches only occurred with female bodies that are not naturally disposed to engage in traditional heterosexual practices. Mental switches function ideologically to naturalize irrationality and heterosexuality as properties of the female body that are ontologically prior to differences.

**Other Differences in Seventeen**

Besides astrological differences, Seventeen constructed other types of differences between female bodies. Unlike astrological differences—which shaped a genre that appeared in every issue, the Horoscopes section—other differences were the topics of single texts. In particular, differences between female bodies were the topic of the two analyzed texts that follow.

- *American beauty*, a text from the Beauty section where the geographical differences between female bodies is the topic.
• *Makeover your love life*, a text from the Love Life section where young women are categorized as “single,” “talking to a few guys” and “in a relationship.”

Like astrological differences, the construction of geographical and romantic differences is an ideological process that functions to naturalize the discourses through which the female body is traditionally constructed.

**Single, Flirting and In A Relationship**

In *Makeover your love life*, female bodies are categorized in one of the following three categories: single, flirting or in a relationship. The three categories form different parts of the same storyline, the romantic storyline (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8. Romantic storyline.](image)

**Bridging the Gap Between the Discourse of Heterosexuality and the Discourse of Feminism**

Unlike astrological categories where once a young woman belongs to a category she belongs to it forever—for example, a young woman who is Leo cannot move to the category of Cancer—young women can move, and are expected to move, between the categories of “single,” “talking to a few guys,” and “in a relationship.” In the romantic storyline, a young woman who is
single is defined as a young woman who either wants to have a boyfriend or to “meet new guys.” When she is “talking to a few guys” she either wants a boyfriend or “less guys drama.” When she is in a relationship, she either wants more excitement in life or to become single again so she can “have fun flirting.”

**Perpetuation of the discourse of heterosexuality.** Young women who are in the first category of the storyline, single, are divided into two subcategories: young women who want a boyfriend and young women who “want to meet more guys.” While what they want seems to be different, an analysis of the passages through which *Seventeen* addresses these two subcategories reveals the opposite.

- The young woman who wants a boyfriend is told: “Consider new possibilities. You, lucky girl, get to flirt with anyone you want! So open your eyes to all the guys you haven’t considered before […] When you start imagining new guys ‘in that way,’ you’ll realize that your world is full of relationships just waiting to happen” (*Seventeen*, Love Life, *Make over your love life*, October, 2008, p. 116).

The young woman who is single, whether she wants a boyfriend or more male friends, has to “embrace her flirty side.” She has to flirt. The only difference is a difference of quantity: while one young woman has to flirt with one person, another one has to flirt with many. Flirting is, therefore, constructed as the only practice through which a young woman can exercise her agency in changing her romantic relationship status. Between being single and being in a relationship, flirting is crucial.
The statements, “Embrace your flirty side” and “You, lucky girl, get to flirt with anyone you want,” construct young women as having an inner tendency to flirt. By assuming that a situation where a young woman can flirt with anyone is a “lucky” situation, it is presupposed that young women have a natural disposition to enjoy flirting. The same presupposition underlies Seventeen’s command to young women to “embrace” their “flirty side.” It is presupposed that in every young woman there is a naturalized “flirty” side.

Want and need. The young woman who is single wants to meet a boyfriend or more male friends. However, while Seventeen does not problematize wanting to be with a boyfriend or wanting to have more male friends, it problematizes the need for a boyfriend:

If the idea of a night without guys seems a bit blah, or if you feel like you need to flirt […] you’re putting too much importance on guys. (They’re supposed to be fun!) […] spend time with your girls […][it] will help you remember everything else you have going on. (Seventeen, Love Life, Make over your love life, October, 2008, p. 116)

The text differentiates “want” from “need” and, through this differentiation, it bridges the gap between two contradictory discourses in Seventeen: the discourse of heterosexuality and the discourse of feminism. Young women are constructed as seeking to get the attention of a young man through flirting but, simultaneously, they are constructed as independent from men.

Men are commodities, they bring joy to young women, but they are not a necessity. A young man can bring confidence to a young woman: “we finally did have sex, it was amazing. It made us closer and improved my confidence in myself and my body” (Seventeen, Physical Health, Sex, your body, and your heart, March, 2009, p. 82). But the young woman can be confident without a man: “if Leighton [a celebrity] doesn’t need a guy to feel good about who she is, neither should any of us!” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” May, 2009, p. 24).
The distinction between “want” and “need” might suggest that attention from men is a reward that female bodies enjoy, but that they do not need. Like Leighton, any young woman can reach confidence independently of men. An analysis of the occurrences of the term “confidence” adds more depth to this discussion. “Confidence” occurred eleven times in the analyzed texts, three of the eleven occurrences are from the same text. A representation of the occurrences is provided here. The three occurrences from the same text are reduced to one occurrence because they were found to echo the same message.

- In 4/9 occurrences, the confidence of the female body is collocated with attention from the male body or the generalized Other. Confidence is either the outcome of attention—whether from a male body or a generalized Other (being asked for phone number by a male body, being noticed by others)—or confidence results in attention from a male body: “he’ll like your confidence, flirty girl” (*Seventeen*, Love Life, *Your ultimate party guide*, December, 2008, p. 115).

- In 5/9 occurrences, confidence is the result of self-acceptance, the young woman develops confidence by accepting herself. However, in four out of the five instances, self-acceptance is collocated with body dissatisfaction. Accepting one’s body is collocated with presupposing the failure of one’s body. For example, a female celebrity claimed: “We all have the same fears and insecurities […] the difference with me is that I have learned to face my fear… I think that is part of what helped me build my confidence” (*Seventeen*, Body Peace, “*Ugh, I hate the way I look!*,” May, 2009, p. 84).

In this statement, the female celebrity naturalizes the fear that one’s body can cause. This fear is a reference to the fear of revealing one’s body to the public, a fear that *Seventeen* connects to the fear of “facing the red carpet” on prom night. The female celebrity does not question the
legitimacy of the fear, rather, she acknowledges its presence and its universality, and she perpetuates the presupposition that the female body is a legitimate source of insecurity.

The following statement by a young woman also demonstrates the naturalization of the failure of the body: “Now I love my curves—and people notice. When they say how great I look, I know it’s really because I’m confident” (Seventeen, Body Peace, We’re in it together, December, 2008, p. 112). In the young woman’s statement, confidence results in being noticed. Confidence also presupposes the failure of the body to be noticed: “I know it’s really because I’m confident.” According to her, she is noticed because of her confidence, not because of her body. Her confidence compensates for the failure of her body.

Among the five occurrences where the female body reached confidence independently of the attention from men, four occurrences were occurrences where the female body reached acceptance only after acknowledging the failure of the body. This acceptance is grounded in a process of ignoring and erasing, as the following statement of a young woman demonstrates: “I took an eyeliner pencil and wrote all the things I hated about my body on a mirror—then I used window cleaner and erased them all. It felt so good to wipe that stuff away! […] I’ve started to truly see myself as beautiful” (Seventeen, Body Peace, “Why can’t you be more like…,” March, 2009, p. 80). In this statement, the young woman reached self-acceptance by erasing her negative impressions of her body. She does not question, challenge or negotiate the inferiority and failure of these parts of her body, rather she ignores these parts and erases them from her consciousness. The female body acknowledges its inferiority, ignores it, and then reaches self-acceptance.

Young women do not always succeed in ignoring and erasing the inferiority and imperfection of the female body. Young women are reminded of the failure of their body, no matter how confident they are: “No matter how great you feel about your shape, or how immune
you say you are to insults, when the words come from someone inside your family […] it can eat away at your inner confidence” (Seventeen, Body Peace, “Why can’t you be more like…,” March, 2009, p. 80). The confidence that one gets through self-acceptance is weak and vulnerable; a look or a word can collapse it. Young women can therefore reach confidence independently of men, however, this confidence can collapse instantly. For a sustained confidence, young women need heterosexual attention. The distinction between want and need functions ideologically to mask the naturalization of the need of young women for heterosexual attention. The need for attention emerges as a natural need, not a naturalized need.

Naturalization of Playfulness and the Need to Play

Besides perpetuating the discourse of heterosexuality, the romantic storyline, through the differences that it constructs, perpetuates the discourse of femininity (see Appendix H).

Constructing the female body as playful. The romantic storyline, through its differences, also functions to perpetuate another naturalized characteristic of the female body: playfulness, a construct of the discourse of femininity. The female body moves from being single to being in a relationship only through flirting: either with one person or many. Flirting is constructed as a distraction from reality: it pushes the female body into the shallow sphere of playfulness. Young women who are “talking to a few guys” are divided into two subcategories: The category of the young woman who should take a boy break and the one who wants a boyfriend. The one who should take a break is told: “Taking boys out of the picture for a while will help you remember everything else you have going on” (Seventeen, Love Life, Makeover your love life, October, 2008, p. 116) and the one who wants a boyfriend is told “trade quantity for quality” (p. 116). Flirting is, therefore, constructed as a distracting activity, an interaction where interactions are of “low” quality and where reality is forgotten: an interaction in the sphere of play.
In the flirting category, the young woman is operating in a shallow domain that keeps her away from reality. The young woman who is single is operating within reality, then when she is flirting, she distracts herself from reality and operates in the domain of play and, finally, she goes back to reality when she is in a relationship. However, the reality of being in a relationship poses a challenge. The fun of play needs to be recreated, but within reality this time: “The downside to feeling totally comfortable with your boyfriend is that you have to work to keep things exciting” (Seventeen, Love Life, Makeover your love life, October, 2008, p. 116).

The romantic storyline constructs playfulness as a phase that the female body goes through in order to get the heterosexual reward that it seeks. Playfulness is part of the inner flirty side that female bodies need to embrace in order to get attention. The naturalization of playfulness also occurs in the Love Life sections of the four other issues of Seventeen:.

- In Love mistakes you keep making, the three mistakes that female bodies always make are defined as the following: being too “picky,” “getting too serious too soon,” and “always having a boyfriend” (Seventeen, Love Life, Love mistakes you keep making, July, 2009, p. 89). The young woman who is “getting too serious too soon” is the one who immediately engages with her date in “long nightly phone calls.” By immediately engaging in long phone calls, the young woman is skipping the playfulness category of the romantic storyline. And by signifying her decision as a mistake, the playfulness category is constructed as a necessary stage in the romantic development of a relationship.

- In Guy secrets no one ever told you, “secrets” about men from different age groups are given. For all age groups, playfulness is naturalized as a stage in the development of the romantic relationship. For a young man who is fifteen, most of the conversations with a
date consist of flirting through text messages. For young men who are seventeen, young women are encouraged to send “funny picture texts and flirty Facebook messages” (*Seventeen, Love Life, Guy secrets no one ever told you*, May, 2009, p. 91).

- In *Flirting tricks that work anywhere!* and *Your ultimate party guide!* The following storyline occurred (see Figure 9).

![Figure 9. Play storyline.](image)

The storyline occurs in a party where a young woman encounters a young man she desires. Then she uses a “line”; the “line” is usually a flirting statement. If the line “works,” the young man reciprocates and the encounter is moved from the sphere of reality to the sphere of play and flirting. The following example illustrates the storyline: “Try this line […] He’ll be psyched to play along” (*Seventeen, Love life, Your ultimate party guide*, December, 2008, p. 115).

Playfulness and reality are constructed as two discontinuous worlds. In order to seek her heterosexual reward, the young woman has to leave from reality to play. And in order to play, she needs to “psych” a guy so he will “play along.” Young women move from reality to play and
then back to reality. The discontinuity between play and reality allows them to embrace two oppositional modes of being. The two spheres function to perpetuate different discourses through which the female body is constructed.

**Boldness in play/subtleness in reality.** While reality occurs at school and home, play occurs in a party, in an online space and through text messages. The spaces of play are spaces where young women can be flirty, “silly” and bold. Examples of the mode of being of young women in the spheres of play include the following.

- “Send funny picture texts or flirty Facebook messages to keep his mind on you” *(Seventeen, Love Life, Guy secrets no one ever told you, May, 2009, p. 91).*
- “Send him a text that teases him a little […] make a silly bet […] suggest a kiss under mistletoe!” *(Seventeen, Love Life, Your ultimate party guide!, December, 2008, p. 115).*
- “Throw [the party] on May 16, and your crush will definitely show up. Flirt a little and you’ll hard-core make out with him by the end of the night. Before he leaves you’ll make plans to hang out again!” *(Seventeen, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).*

The mode of being of boldness and “hard-core making out” that young women adopt in the play sphere is discontinuous with their mode of being in reality. The contrast between the two modes of being can be revealed through a comparison between the last example in the above list and the following passage from *Have your best date ever:* “Ready for a kiss? Don’t rush out of the car […] move closer to him and keep eye contact. If it’s on his mind too, he’ll lean in!” *(Seventeen, Love Life, July, 2009, p. 87).* When a young woman is in the car after a date, the boldness, silliness and “hard-core” attitude are replaced with subtleness, she just leans in and waits for his reaction. She does not “suggest a kiss” or “hard-core make out.”
The play sphere allows young women to adopt a mode of being that would be stigmatized in reality. They move from reality to play, adopt a bold mode of being in play, gain attention and then bring this attention from play back to reality. She “hard-core” makes out in the play sphere, makes plans to hang out with the young man in the sphere of reality, go on a date and adopt a subtle mode of being during the date. Play is, therefore, an instrumental performance, a strategic retreat from reality in order to play by different rules.

The construction of differences between “single,” “talking to few guys” and “in a relationship” naturalizes the need for play in order to develop a romantic relationship. It also naturalizes a discontinuity between the implicit rules of the playful spheres (party, online chat, texting) and the implicit rules of reality. In Seventeen, young women do not negotiate the rules of reality, rather, they temporarily retreat to play and use “lines that work” in order to get a male body to “play along.”

Geographical Differences

In American beauty, a text from the Love Life section, the geographical differences between young women are foregrounded. “Texas girls,” “Colorado girls,” “Florida girls,” and young women from other states share their “favorite local trends.” In this text, the beauty trend that a young woman adopts is based on her geographical location, not on the characteristics of her personality or the identity that she chooses to perform in her peer culture or in other situations. Through the style of her body, she reflects her environment and signals her belonging. She belongs through her look, not her practice as discussed in Chapter 6.

Summary

Seventeen constructs differences between female bodies. These differences presuppose a common, ontologically prior female body. The Horoscopes section articulates twelve categories
of young women. In its articulation of these twelve categories it naturalizes jealousy and
tendencies for resentment between female bodies. The section also functions ideologically
through its articulation of astrological interventions. The astrological interventions that occur
within the psychic sphere of the female body naturalize irrationality: thinking is constructed not
as the outcome of the young woman’s agency, but as directed by outside forces. The discourse of
heterosexuality is also perpetuated throughout the Horoscopes section.

Another difference that Seventeen articulates is the difference between “single” and “in a
relationship” young women. The articulation of the difference presupposes flirting and
playfulness as a necessary stage for a young woman seeking to move from “single” to “in a
relationship.” The young woman who is flirting and playing is signified as “talking to a few
guys,” she operates in a sphere where the implicit rules allow her to be bold and exercise more
agency in her romantic and sexual life. However, this sphere is constructed as temporary,
instrumental and divorced from reality. Through its construction of the three categories “single,”
“talking to a few guys,” and “in a relationship,” Seventeen naturalizes a discontinuity between
the spheres of play and the sphere of reality. The sphere of play allows the young women more
agency, but it is constructed as a distraction, a necessary distraction in order to gain attention.
The young woman can play in order to get the attention of a male body but once she secures the
attention, she is expected to go back to “reality” and adopt a passive mode of being in her
romantic relationships.

Seventeen foregrounds geographical differences in one of its texts. Geographical
differences, as argued in the next chapter, are among the ideological tools that naturalize the
confinement of young women to their bodies and the orientation of the female body towards
itself. The confinement of the young woman to her body is discussed in the next chapter. The
chapter also addresses the relation between confinement to one’s body, body dissatisfaction and consumerism.
Chapter 6

Naturalization of body dissatisfaction

The previous two chapters discussed how processes of difference reduction and difference construction operate to homogenize the female body. This chapter discusses a naturalized feature of the homogenized female body: body dissatisfaction. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section addresses how the female body is constructed as oriented towards itself and as in need of changing itself and pushing itself. The second section discusses body dissatisfaction as an ideological outcome of the naturalization of the female body’s need for change. Over the course of this chapter, I draw upon four discourses to make my argument: the discourse of individualism, the discourse of feminism, the discourse of pathology, and the discourse of vulnerability (see Appendix A).

Naturalization of the Female Body’s Need For Change

In this section, I address how Seventeen constructs the female body as oriented towards itself, confined within itself, and isolated from processes in the material world. Then, I show how the constant need for change is a naturalized characteristic of the female body and how the female body is constructed as a barrier to the aspirations of the subject occupying it.

The Female Body Oriented Towards Itself

The female body’s orientation towards itself is an ideological product of several intersecting linguistic practices in Seventeen. Among these practices are: 1) the construction of geographical differences among female bodies and, 2) the construction of the relation between the female body and the concept of “change.”
The Construction of Geographical Differences

In *American beauty*, from the Beauty section in *Seventeen*, female bodies are divided into different categories. Each category corresponds to a state in the US where the female body lives: “Texas girls,” “Colorado girls,” “California girls,” and others. All female bodies within a state are assumed to love the same look and their preference is implicitly and playfully attributed to the state’s environment. For example, because in Texas “everything is bigger,” young women from Texas love “cat eyes”: “Everything is bigger in Texas— including perfectly lined eyes” (*Seventeen, Beauty, American Beauty*, May, 2009, p. 56). Also, the preference of young women from Colorado is associated with the Rockies, an aspect of their state’s natural landscape: “A pouf as high as the Rockies means you’ll never have a flat-hair day again!” (*Seventeen, Beauty, American Beauty*, May, 2009, p. 56).

In two out of the six looks that are suggested in *American beauty*, the female body is constructed as reproducing the natural landscape of the state in which it lives: Young women from Colorado love a pouf “as high as the Rockies” and young women from New Jersey love the “soft glitter” that gives their face “a beachy Jersey-shore glow” (*Seventeen, Beauty, American Beauty*, May, 2009, p. 58). In one of the suggested looks, the female body reproduces not a natural landscape, but the state’s reaction or adaptation to its natural landscape: Young women from Florida love “wild waves” because “Floridians know the best way to outsmart the humidity (and frizz!) is to embrace your natural texture” (*Seventeen, Beauty, American Beauty*, May, 2009, p. 56). The ability to outsmart humidity is a characteristic of Floridians and young women from Florida demonstrate this characteristic through their hair and their body.

As well as reproducing their state’s natural landscapes, female bodies reproduce other characteristics of their states. In two out of the six suggested looks in *American beauty*, young
women reproduce, on their body, a characteristic of their State: Young women from California reproduce the “Cali laid back style:” “The ultimate laid-back Cali style starts with the perfect swoop—and it flatters any face shape!” (Seventeen, Beauty, American Beauty, May, 2009, p. 60). Young women from Texas reproduce the proliferation of “big” things in their state through their “big” “cat” eyelashes.

*American beauty* operates ideologically by constructing the female body as a product of its location, not of its history. The look of a young woman’s hair is not the outcome of her work conditions, hobbies, or own intentions. Rather, it is the product of her location: a natural landscape or an adaptation to the natural landscape. It is geography, rather than history, that constructs the female body. Within every state, there is a common preference that is based upon the state’s location and its natural landscape, not upon a collective sense of aesthetics developed through dialogue, joint reflections, or shared experiences over time.

Geographical differences only emerged in the Beauty section. While location of a female body might have implications for health—for example, different natural landscapes might pose different challenges to health—geographical differences between young women never emerged in the Health section. The location of a female body might also have implications on her love life. In some states where gay marriage is legal, being in a same-sex relationship poses fewer challenges than in states where gay marriage is not legalized. A young woman signals her belonging to a state neither through her health or romantic practices, nor through her artistic practices. She reflects her belonging through her body and she participates in her environment through her body; she is confined to her body.
Change and the Female Body

The confinement of a young woman to her body, the orientation of the female body towards itself and away from the outside, is illustrated in the following passage.

Are you ready for a change? After all, it’s the mantra of our new president— he’s inspired the whole country to look ahead with optimism for a better future. There’s real power in that message, and it’s something we should all take to heart on a personal level. [...] We’ve even made a few changes to Seventeen this month too. Check out our new column, Easy Money, [...] just like Obama’s economic plan, we’re here to help you be able to pay for everything you want! [...] So what do you want to change? I want to hear every detail. (Seventeen, Editorial, Power of change!, March, 2009, p. 20)

This passage illustrates two types of changes: changes that are oriented toward the self, and changes that are oriented toward the outside world. Obama and Seventeen are both agents of changes that are directed towards the outside world. Obama, a president, changed the economic policy of the US. Seventeen, an institution, took Obama’s message “on a personal level” and decided to change the magazine’s organization by adding a section on financial issues. Seventeen participated in the practice of “change” by changing a cultural artefact, the magazine. However, the way Seventeen’s readers are asked to take Obama’s message on a personal level differs from the way Seventeen took it on a personal level: female bodies follow Obama’s message by changing themselves, by changing their looks, and not by changing a cultural artefact or a social process.

Change is a constitutive element of the discourse of individualism (see Appendix I). Change was the topic of three of the five Editorials analyzed. Two Editorials spoke of the importance of a “makeover” and one editorial spoke of the “power of change.” In each Editorial, examples of changes are given and most of the examples are changes that are directed towards the body.


In *Happy Halloween!*, the suggested examples of change are Halloween costumes: “October 31 is the ultimate excuse to give yourself a fantasy makeover” (*Seventeen*, Editorial, *Happy Halloween*, October, 2008, p. 12).

The female body, as the above examples demonstrate, is both the agent and product of change. Its energy is used to produce changes both within and on the outside, which naturalizes its orientation towards itself.

Some of the examples given by *Seventeen* consist of inside changes, however, that might later facilitate outside changes. For example, to quit smoking is an inside change that positively impacts the female body’s physical condition and its ability to engage in labour. The same reasoning may apply for working out. Therefore, it cannot be argued that *Seventeen* constructs the female body as oriented towards itself without examining how the inside changes that *Seventeen* suggests are used in the lives of young women. A workout leads to strength; quitting smoking and “ditching junk food” are changes that lead to a healthier body. A stronger healthier female body may produce energy more efficiently, engage in a more productive lifestyle, and be able to contribute to more positive changes in the outside material world. However, the way physical strength and health occur in *Seventeen* is different. In *Seventeen*, health and physical
strength are not facilitators of production and creation, rather, they are facilitators of getting attention and being noticed.

Smoking, besides emerging in the Editorial section, emerged in two other texts.

- In *The besties*, from the Beauty section, smoking was signified as a “skin sin”: “Between smoking and tanning, Lindsay Lohan is the queen of skin sins!” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, *The besties*, July, 2009, p. 54).

- In *Your breasts: Everything you need to know*, from the Health section, smoking emerged as a threat that may lead the female body to develop breast cancer: “A study found that if you start as a teen, you may be 70 percent more likely to develop breast cancer than if you’d never smoked” (*Seventeen*, Physical Health, *Your breasts: Everything you need to know*, October, 2008, p. 112).

Young women are told to stop smoking in order to have skin that looks better and in order to stay within the realm of the “normal” and avoid becoming a pathologized body. The consequences of smoking on the strength of the body and its productivity are not mentioned. To quit smoking is constructed as an adaptive change not because of its positive impacts on the body’s blood circulation, respiration and wellbeing, rather, its adaptive value is in its effect on the look of the skin and on the preservation of the female body’s place within the “normal” and away from pathology.

Like quitting smoking, working out is constructed as a change whose value is in its effect on the body’s look, not on the body’s strength and abilities. Working out occurred three times in the Editorial section and two times in the Health section. Physical strength was reported as an outcome of working out in only one out of the five occurrences. However, the physical strength that the female body developed was used playfully: “C’mon, boys—who’s up for a little arm-
wrestling?!?‖ (Seventeen, Editorial, *Celeb summer makeovers!*, July, 2009, p. 14), wrote Seventeen as a comment on the strength that the female body develops after working out. The strength of the female body, even when it is acknowledged, is pushed into the sphere of play. As argued in Chapter 5, play is used by female bodies to gain attention. Therefore, working out is constructed as an adaptive change because of its effect on the heterosexual desirability of the female body, not on the female body’s ability to master or produce change in the outside material world.

When the term “change” occurred as a verb with the female body as the subject, it was almost always a change directed toward the female body: it was an inside change. However, outside change did occur once throughout the analyzed texts. It occurred in the following passage: “Inventive Uranus helps you to use your sign’s artistic talent to make over your room on October 10. You’ll be shocked at how changing your surroundings can boost your mood too” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166). In this statement the outside change occurs within the domestic sphere (in the bedroom) and its purpose is partially to promote an inner psychic experience, the experience of a mood boost. Therefore, even when change is directed to the outside and not to the inside, its purpose is a psychic purpose, an inner change.

The female body participates in the process of change by changing itself. This is an individual process, isolated from the processes of social change. Its participation in history is ahistorical. It changes itself in order to shine and be noticed by the agents of historical processes. It changes itself in order to reach a psychic experience that it desires, like the experience of feeling strong (Seventeen, Editorial, *Happy Halloween*, October, 2008). It changes itself in order to “psych” a male body and tempt him to move from reality to the sphere of play, as noted in Chapter 5.
The Female Body Should Push Itself

The female body participates in history by being noticed and by gaining the attention of agents of history, therefore, it needs to change its look. The need for change is constructed as a constant need, because the female body is presupposed to be unable to shine by itself without an intervention, a sustained intervention. Two of the ideological processes that naturalize the female body’s need for change and the female body’s unreliability and inferiority are: the erasure of the female body’s effort and the construction of comfort as a negative state.

The Erasure of Effort

In the “What you think!” section, a young woman stated the following:

Thank you so much for printing the article “Girls & Steroids.” I know guys at my school who have taken steroids. I’m now a junior on the varsity soccer team and wanted to get a bit leaner and in better shape for the new season. I was on the verge of asking one of my guy friends who take them for something to help— but after reading the article, I thought twice. I’ve decided to watch what I eat and push myself harder instead. (Seventeen, what you think, October, 2008, p. 18)

In this passage, the young woman stated her purpose: “get a bit leaner.” Reading Seventeen empowered her to give up the idea of taking steroids. Reading Seventeen led her to problematize the act of taking steroids, but it did not lead her to problematize her purpose for getting leaner.

The young woman stated that she was on her school’s soccer team. Being on a soccer team usually requires the individual to attend training sessions and exert physical effort. However, the effort that the young woman puts in her training sessions is unacknowledged by the young woman herself when she says: “I’ve decided to push myself harder.” She assumes that she is not pushing herself hard enough. All the effort to make it to the soccer team is erased. She does not question the goal that she sets. She attributes the failure of “getting a bit leaner” to her
failure to push herself hard enough. She does not question whether it is still possible to get leaner, after all her effort, and at what cost.

The young woman’s narrative is an example of the erasure of effort in *Seventeen*: as long as the young woman does not reach perfection, she considers this a failure, and the failure is her own. She attributes her failure to her body and to the unreliability of her body and through this attribution she erases all of her previous effort.

Another instance of the erasure of effort occurred in the narrative of a young woman who lost weight. The storyline that organized her account of her experience is represented in Figure 10.

![Storyline of losing weight](#)
In this storyline, the first part is a decision. Then, following the decision to lose weight is “little changes” like “30 minutes of walking […], turkey sandwiches instead of burgers for lunch, and fruits instead of chips for snacks” (Seventeen, Physical Health, “How I lost 100 lbs!,” July, 2009, p. 71). The part that follows the little changes is the frustration with parents and friends who were not ready to change their lifestyle in order to help the young woman reach her objective. Following from the frustration with parents and friends is the part where the young woman abandons dieting and practices binging. Finally, the last two parts follow when the young woman overcomes the barrier imposed by her parents and friends and succeeds in losing weight.

Excluded from the above storyline is the part when the young woman exercises effort in order to lose weight. The struggle that is involved in changing her eating habits and living with hunger is excluded. Losing weight is constructed as an effortless process, and this construction perpetuates the stigmatization of young women who are labelled as “overweight.” “Overweight” young women are constructed as young women who do not want to engage in an effortless process because of their laziness. Not only are “overweight” young women constructed as lazy, but also any young woman who fails to change her body and stops pushing herself is constructed as lazy. The very act of pushing oneself in order to change one’s body is constructed as effortless: The female body, even when it pushes itself, it is not really pushing itself, and, therefore, it can and must push itself more.

Since the act of pushing oneself is constructed as effortless for female bodies, the female body should not claim a rest. In fact, even when it takes a well-deserved rest, the female body is constructed as lazy: “I vow to take a lazy days: We push our bodies so hard with school and jobs, so I’m taking a day each month to reward myself by relaxing —and loving it!” (Seventeen, Body Peace, December, 2008, p. 112). In this statement, the self-esteem expert in Seventeen shares a
decision with her readers, she decided to take a “lazy” day every month. She acknowledges her effort and her history of pushing herself, however, when she wants to take a day of rest, she signifies this day as a “lazy” day.

The self-esteem expert does not signify her day of rest as a day of deserved rest or a day for recharging energy. Her statement is grounded in a dichotomy: a female body is either active and pushing itself or taking a rest and “being lazy.” For a female body, taking a rest cannot be a part in an active process. The day of relaxation is not a day when the female body gathers energy in order to be able to produce more in the future. The day of relaxation is a lost day, a “lazy” day. Even when effort is accounted for, it is constructed as an effort that does not require rest, an effort that does not deserve rest, an effort that is effortless.

The erasure of effort occurred in the Editorial section, the What you think! section, the Health section, and the Horoscopes section. The two occurrences from the Health section and the occurrence in the What you think! section have already been introduced. Other occurrences are noted next.

- In the Editorial section, the erasure of effort occurred in the following passage: “If you need more makeover motivation, let me tell you about Whitney [...] One summer, she was so tired of being unhealthy and unhappy that she did something about it. Check out her whole get fit plan on page 70!” (Seventeen, Editorial, Celeb summer makeover!, July, 2009, p. 14). This passage constructs the decision to lose weight as the main element in the narrative of the young woman who lost weight. The story of losing weight is constructed as a story of a decision followed by a plan, not as a story of the challenge to follow the plan and the effort required to follow the plan.
In the Horoscopes section, the erasure of effort is revealed in the following statement: “Start thinking about a stylish new look you want to try, then unveil it on New Year’s Eve” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, December, 2008, p. 168). This statement is organized according to the following storyline: The first part is the decision to change and the second part is “unveiling” the product of change. Changing style requires the female body to buy new products and apply new beauty routines, a process that takes money, time, and effort, but this process is excluded from the storyline. Like the narrative of weight loss that excludes the part when the female body uses effort to lose weight, the narrative of changing styles excludes the part when the female body uses effort in changing its look and style. The female body decides to change styles and then unveils the new style. It does not work on, create, or produce a new style; it just decides which one of any number of existing styles and then unveils.

Because the effort of the female body is erased, the female body is expected to keep pushing itself. This expectation leads to the construction of comfort as a negative state for the female body.

**Comfort as a Negative State**

When the female body is comfortable in a heterosexual relationship, comfort is constructed as a challenge and as a threat to excitement: “The downside to feeling totally comfortable with your boyfriend is that you have to work to keep things exciting” (Seventeen, Love Life, Makeover your love life, October, 2008, p. 116). When a young woman is comfortable with the way things are, comfort is constructed as a barrier that keeps her from reaching “the absolute best [she] possibly can be;”

It can be intimidating to think about changes in our own lives, especially when we’re comfy and cozy with the way things already are […] But here’s my
philosophy: If you constantly try to be a little bit better [...] then you are moving toward being the absolute best you possibly can be. (*Seventeen*, Editorial, *Power of change!*, March, 2009, p. 20)

Whenever a female body is in a state that is not “the absolute best,” it is expected to be undergoing change. Satisfaction “with the way things are” is constructed as a negative state, the only state that the female body should be comfortable with is ongoing change toward perfection.

Perfection as an expectation for the female body, besides occurring in the Editorial section, emerged in the Beauty section in two out of the five issues.

- In *The besties*, perfection emerged through the following statement: “Wonder how these stars look so perfect? [...] Try their tricks out for yourself” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, *The besties*, July, 2009, p. 58). When stars are signified as “perfect,” when perfection is used as the only descriptor for the star’s look, it is presupposed that perfection, and perfection only, is what makes a female body a star. The expectation of perfection—and no less than perfection—from female “stars” is also reflected in the following statement about a female celebrity: “Her skin is absolutely flawless, which is what makes it glow” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, *The besties*, July, 2009, p. 56). In order to shine, the skin of a female body should be “absolutely flawless.” A single, tiny flaw can not be tolerated because flawlessness is the cause of the glow.

- Like a single flaw on skin is a barrier to “glowing” and “shining,” a frizzy spot of hair is also constructed as a barrier: “Smooth [your hair] section by section so you don’t miss any spots that may frizz later” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, *Amazing makeunders*, October, 2008, p. 66). Because her body is expected to be perfect, a young woman should protect every inch of her hair from the possibility of frizz.
Since comfort distracts from the pursuit of perfection, comfort is to be avoided. Every change in the female body should be a “perfect” change, progressive changes are not tolerated. Skin that has fewer flaws or hair that has less frizzies do not count as successful changes. The skin should become “absolutely” flawless and the hair should not have a spot of frizz.

A comparison between expectations for the male body and expectations for the female body further highlights the ideological functioning of the concept of perfection. In the following statement from the Love Life section, Seventeen comments on the progression of the look of a male celebrity: “It took a few bad hair days (okay, years!) for him to turn into the cutie he is now” (Seventeen, Love Life, Juicy questions for Penn Badgley, October, 2008). In this statement, “bad hair days” and “cutie looks” are part of the same storyline. The statement is followed by four horizontally aligned pictures of the male celebrity. The first three pictures are described as: “Rocking the man-bangs,” “All fro’d up,” and “BFF with his hair gel.” The last picture is praised: “Nice goatee.” The praised picture is not contrasted with the other pictures, rather, the praised picture is represented as a different stage in the same process, the same storyline. It is constructed as evolving from the other looks.

In contrast with the male body, the female body’s perfect and imperfect looks are never part of the same storyline; they are always presented as discontinuous and in opposition whenever they occur together.

- In The besties, the bottom of every page has a small subsection with the title The worsties. The background of The worsties subsection is black and it contrasts with the white background in the remaining portion of the page (Seventeen, Beauty, July, 2009, pp. 50-58).
In *Amazing makeunders!*, on the bottom of every page two pictures are included next to one another, one is entitled “oh yes!” and one “oh no!” The “oh yes” picture shows a celebrity looking “perfect.” The “oh no!” picture shows the same celebrity, but with a “bad” look (*Seventeen, Beauty*, October, 2008, pp. 61-66).

For the female body, unlike the male body, perfection is expected to be not the outcome of a process or a sequence of stages. Rather, perfection is expected to be the outcome of every stage, any process. A look is either perfect or “bad,” and when it is “bad” it should be rejected.

The pursuit of an unachievable perfection causes pressure and discomfort. However, when the discomfort with one’s body becomes threatening and unbearable, *Seventeen* suggests that the female body give up the pursuit of a perfect look. For example, when female bodies are preparing for prom, *Seventeen* suggests that they give up their discomfort in order to enjoy the event:

> There’s nothing wrong with wanting to look your best, but when all the preprom prep is making you miserable, it’s time to take a step back […] So when you’re getting ready, focus on one thing you love about your look: a dress that hits your curves perfectly, the way your earrings make your whole face light up. Force yourself to shrug off what you wish could be different. (*Seventeen, Body peace, “Ugh, I hate the way I look!,”* May, 2009, p. 84)

This passage starts with legitimizing the discomfort of young women with their bodies through the statement: “There’s nothing wrong in wanting to look your best.” The passage then provides the readers with a “trick” that they can use in order to compensate for the imperfection of their bodies. This passage constructs the state of imperfection as a normal state without challenging the expectation of perfection from female bodies. It is “normal” for young women not to be perfect, but they still *have* to look perfect. In order
for the imperfect female body to look perfect, she is told to use products that compensate for her imperfection.

While comfort is constructed as a negative state and discomfort with one’s body is naturalized, female bodies are allowed a break from discomfort, and this break is made possible by products. Products may compensate for the imperfections of the body; however, this compensation is a trick. The beautification of the body is a trick as the following two statements from the Editorial demonstrate.

- The winner of Seventeen fashion design context stated: “When you walk down the street, you want the response to be ‘Wow!’ And I think this dress would do the trick!” (Seventeen, Editorial, Seventeen superstars!, May, 2009, p. 16).

- The Editor in Chief of Seventeen stated: “So this issue is full of new fashion and beauty tricks to try now, so you’ll be able to have your back-to-school moment!” (Seventeen, Editorial, Celeb summer makeovers!, July, 2009, p. 14).

The female body is expected to look perfect, but even when it looks perfect, perfection is attributed to trickery. While always pushing their bodies, young women have to always look for products that compensate for their bodies’ imperfections and that allow them to trick the gazes of others.

Seventeen constructs perfection as a normalized expectation for the female body. However, in order to reach perfection, the female body has to be infinitely pushing itself or it has to use the product as a trick to look perfect. By constructing “pushing the body” and “tricks” as the only ways through which the female body can look perfect, Seventeen operates to construct the female body as a barrier to the pursuit of perfection. The female
body is a source of frustration for the subject occupying it and this frustration grounds the phenomenon of body dissatisfaction.

**Body Dissatisfaction**

The construction of perfection is a requirement of and goal for the female body—and as a requirement that can only be met through pushing the body or using the product as a “trick”—operates ideologically to naturalize the experience of body dissatisfaction. Among the ideological processes through which body dissatisfaction is naturalized are: the construction of the body as a barrier, and the differentiation between body dissatisfaction and anorexia—the distancing of body dissatisfaction from the pathological realm.

**Analysis of a Statement**

In the following statement from the Beauty section, a beauty expert explains why she chose a certain product as the “best straightener”: “I’ve used this on Kristen Stewart [a female celebrity]—and if your hair just won’t cooperate and get straight, this will win the battle for you!” (*Seventeen, Beauty, The besties*, July, 2009, p. 52). This statement functions ideologically through its use of metaphorical lexical terms, like “cooperate” and “battle.” These terms function to construct the body as a barrier and naturalize the young woman’s need for a product that supports her struggle against her own body.

**The Body as a Barrier**

When the young woman is constructed as engaged in a “battle” against her body and when the body is constructed as “not cooperating” with her, the mind/body dichotomy is perpetuated. The young woman’s mind and body are constructed as having contradictory needs and aspirations. The mind wants the young woman’s “hair” to be straightened and it assumes that the hair should be straightened and needs to be straightened. The body does not cooperate, and
because of the body’s lack of cooperation, the young woman turns to a product that will help her defeat the body.

In the same text from which the above statement was taken, the following statement occurred: “This [acne system] is amazing! Each step does something different to repair my skin” (Seventeen, Beauty, The besties, July, 2009, p. 54). The product is signified as “repairing” the young woman’s skin, the product is not constructed as adding an effect on the female body’s look, rather, it is constructed as repairing a deficiency in the body. The naturalization of conflict between the young woman and her body contributes to the construction of the female body as a barrier. Another way through which the body is constructed as a barrier is the naturalization of the female body’s need for the product: “This [product] will win the battle for you!” (Seventeen, Beauty, The besties, July, 2009, p. 52).

The Need for the Product

The body’s need for the product is naturalized through a storyline that consistently emerged in the Beauty section. This storyline constructs two categories of products: 1) products that produce the desired effect and 2) products that prepare the body to receive other products.

The storyline organizes beauty procedures as following: In the first part, the female body uses a product that prepares it to receive another product; in the second part, the main product is used to produce the desired effect. Procedures that are shaped by this storyline were found in three out of the five analyzed Beauty sections.

- In New trends to try, young women are asked to use one product to “smooth” the nails before putting the nail polish. While the nail polish’s purpose is to produce a visual effect, the other product’s purpose is to prepare the body to receive the polish (Seventeen, Beauty, March, 2009, p. 58).
• In *Amazing makeunders*, readers are told to first use a product that “de-frizz[es]” the curls before using a product that “give curls a glossy finish.” In order to get the “glossy” effect, the body needs to first be prepared by eliminating frizzes. (*Seventeen*, October, 2008, p. 62).

• In *Get ready to sparkle*, readers who want to put gloss on their lips are told to first use a liner that will “define” the lips and “keep [the] gloss in place.” In order for the gloss to produce the desired effect on the lips, the lips need to be modified by another product, the liner. (*Seventeen*, December, 2008, p. 91).

By constructing a category of products whose purpose is to prepare the body to receive another product, the female body on its own is constructed as a barrier to the process of beautification. The body cannot be beautified before being modified, and the body that wants to be beautified needs the product and cannot be beautified without it.

The naturalization of the need for these two products contrasts with the rejection of the need for men. While *Seventeen* problematizes the situation when a young woman needs a man “if you feel like you need to flirt whenever you go out, you’re putting too much importance on guys” (*Seventeen*, Love Life, October, 2008, p. 116), *Seventeen* does not problematize the need for the product: “Here are the makeup, hair, and skin products you can’t live without” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, July, 2009, p. 50). The female body, as claimed by *Seventeen*, can live without a man but cannot live without these products.

The contradiction between “need for men” and “need for product” reveals the boundary of the discourse of feminism in *Seventeen*. The discourse of feminism is activated in the context of heterosexual encounters between males and females. However, it vanishes in the context of the relation between the female body and beauty products. The female body does not consume
beauty products in order to attract a man; the female body consumes beauty products in order to “repair” itself. Whether it will attract a male body or not, the female body is a barrier for the young woman occupying it as long as it is not an absolutely perfect body. The need for the product is constructed as a “normal” need.

**Generic Examples**

The analysis of a statement from the Beauty section reveals how body dissatisfaction is naturalized by constructing the body as a barrier and the product as a need. Another ideological process through which body dissatisfaction is naturalized is the construction of two discontinuous versions of body dissatisfaction: a normalized version and a pathological version. The pathological version is differentiated from body dissatisfaction and constructed as an abnormality. This differentiation serves to construct the body dissatisfaction that “normal” female bodies experience as a natural psychic experience that is not rooted in any pathological process. The normalized version is signified through lexical terms like “the body blues” and “obsession about looks.” The pathologized version is signified as “anorexia.” The discontinuity between the two versions of body dissatisfaction is the outcome of two related processes: 1) the dichotomization of the female body into either a “normal” or a “pathologized” body, and 2) the differentiation between the practices of normalized female bodies and the practices of “anorexic” female bodies.

**“Normal”/Pathology Dichotomy**

The discourse of pathology was among the discourses that shaped the practices of *Seventeen* (see Appendix J). The discourse of pathology emerged in four of the analyzed sections: Editorial, “What you think!,” Health, and *Seventeen Buzz*. A consistent element of the
discourse of pathology is the discontinuity between the “normal” sphere and the pathologized sphere.

In the “What you think!” section, the dichotomy between “normal” and pathologized female bodies is revealed in the discontinuity between the entries from young women who identified as having pathologies and the entries from young women who did not. Entries from young women who identified as cases of pathology occurred six times and in all six times, young women reported about an aspect of their lives or their bodies that is discontinuous from “normal” young women:

- In an entry from a young woman who identified as having bulimia, it is stated: “I had bulimia, and it can be just as dangerous: It can lead to heart problems and damage your esophagus” (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” May, 2009, p. 24).
- In an entry from a young woman who identified as having anorexia, it is stated: “[I] realized I was hurting myself” (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” October 2008, p. 22).
- In an entry from a young woman who identified as having cancer, it is stated: “I have cancer and struggle to live a normal life (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” October 2008, p. 18).
- In an entry from a young woman who identified as having leukemia, it is stated: “I didn’t understand how important it was to donate blood until this past year when I underwent treatment for leukemia. I had to get countless blood transfusions (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” July, 2009, p. 18).
- In an entry from a young woman who identified as a “self-injurer,” it is stated: “I used to cut myself and snap rubber bands on my skin when I was upset” (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” October, 2008, p. 20).
In an entry from a young woman who identified as sexually abused, it was stated: “I was sexually assaulted [...] Feeling ashamed, I kept it secret for two years” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” December, 2008, p. 19).

The mode of being of the female body who is pathologized is revealed through the above entries. A pathologized female body is constructed as a “damaged” body, as a body that is harming itself, and as a body that undergoes routines like blood transfusions and visiting recovery centers.

This mode of being contrasts with the mode of being of “normal” female bodies as defined in the following entry from a young woman: “Taylor [a female celebrity] talked about all the same stuff I think about: boys, love, relationships, and friends. It inspires me to know that you can be a normal girl who checks your MySpace page and updates your Twitter and still achieve that kind of success” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” July, 2009, p. 18). In this entry, the preoccupations of the “normal girl” are romance and friends.

In the “What you think!” section, entries from young women who did not identify as cases of pathology occurred thirty times, the distribution of the topics was the following:

- 8/30 romance;
- 8/30 friends;
- 7/30 beauty, fashion and physical exercise;
- 2/30 money;
- 2/30 sexual protection, and;
- 3/30 other topics.

Romance, beauty, fashion and physical exercise, while they emerged in most of the entries from “normal” young women, did not emerge in any of the entries from young women who identified as cases of pathologies.
The normalized and pathologized female bodies are, therefore, constructed as having discontinuous interests and engaged in discontinuous practices. However, a common topic between entries from young women who identified as cases of pathologies and young women who did not was “friends.” This commonality may challenge the claim regarding the discontinuity between “normal” female bodies and pathologized female bodies. For this reason, this intersection, or what seems to be an intersection, needs to be addressed.

In entries from pathologized young women, the category of “friends” emerged in the following two occurrences.

- “I was sexually assaulted by the most popular guy in school [...] I kept it secret for two years. Then I read this article and told my best friend, who helped me tell my mom. She brought me to a youth advocacy center where they are helping me toward recovery” (Seventeen, “What you think,” December, 2008, p. 19).

- “I used to cut myself and snap rubber bands [...] Luckily a friend of mine introduced me to an organization called To Write Love on Her Arms” (Seventeen, “What you think,” October, 2008, p. 20).

In both statements, the friend of a young woman helps her to recover, to go back to the mode of being of a “normal” female body. Unlike the “normal” young woman who talks to her friend about romance and shares hedonistic activities with her friend, the pathologized young woman is helped by her friend to leave a pathological state: She does not share activities with her friends, she is led by her friends.

While the category of “friends” occurs in both the “normal” and the pathologized spheres, the role of friends in each sphere is qualitatively different and the discontinuity between the two spheres is not challenged. The category of “friends,” when it was collocated with pathology,
emerged only in the entries of young women who identified as having psychological pathologies, not physiological pathologies. For the female body who has cancer, leukemia or HIV, it is medicine, not her friend, that allows her to leave from pathology and return to the normalized sphere: “I have cancer and struggle with living a normal life [...] I was happy to see all the ways people can help promote cancer research because we need to find a cure!” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” October, 2008, p. 18).

Friendship between the “normal” female body and the female body who has a physiological difference is absent in the “What you think!” section. Besides being absent in the “What you think!” section, friendship between “normal” female bodies and female bodies with physiological pathologies is presupposed to be nonexistent in the following statement from the Seventeen Buzz section: “Once you protect yourself and your friends [from HIV], it’s time to help fight HIV and AIDS in other parts of the world” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, Think HIV is not a big deal? Think again!, December, 2008, p. 157). The first clause of this statement “once you protect yourself and your friends” presupposes that all of the reader’s friends do not have HIV—a young woman who has HIV does not need to protect herself from HIV. This presupposition is a coherence assumption: in order to experience the above statement as logically coherent, I have to assume that all of the reader’s friends do not have HIV, hence they all need protection, not cure. Friendship between “normal” young women and young women who have HIV is therefore excluded from the realm of the possible.

The discontinuity between the “normal” sphere and the pathologized sphere is a discontinuity between two different modes of being. The “normal” sphere is where young women talk about romance and develop friendships by sharing “fun” times and hedonistic activities. The pathologized sphere is where young women hurt themselves, “cut themselves,”
and engage in pathologized activities. When friendships occur between the two spheres, they are friendships that serve to move the female body from one sphere to another, not to establish continuity between the two spheres.

The dichotomization of the female body into “normal” and pathologized lays the ground for the differentiation between “normal” body dissatisfaction and “anorexia.” This differentiation constructs body dissatisfaction as a “normal” experience and keeps it away from the realm of the problematized. The practices that a “normal” young woman engages in and the practices that an “anorexic” young woman engages in are constructed as discontinuous and rooted in qualitatively different psychic processes. When normalized, the push toward perfection, increasing effort, and making over the body is unproblematically accepted as a universal experience of young women, while young women with “anorexia” are patients with a disease.

**Discontinuity of Body Dissatisfaction from Anorexia**

In one of the texts from the Seventeen Buzz section, the pathologized category of anorexia is addressed. The text opens up by differentiating the practices that an “anorexic” young woman engages in from the practices that “normal” young women engage in: “[Eating disorders] are not something that you choose, like a diet. They’re a sickness. They’re about covering up pain, insecurity, and sadness. They’re about not being able to control your mind” (*Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The Ed diaries*, March, 2009, p. 141). While this passage speaks of “eating disorders,” the only eating disorder that was mentioned in the text was anorexia. This passage constructs anorexia as discontinuous from dieting. Anorexia, unlike dieting, is about “covering up” pain. However, it is not only the “anorexic” young woman who covers pain and insecurity, “covering” is a practice in which the “normal” female body also engages.
In *Do you talk too much about your guy?*, from the Love Life section, young women are told: “If you find yourself telling everyone how great your boyfriend is, you could be desperate to validate the relationship because, deep down, it’s making you insecure” (*Seventeen*, Love Life, *Do you talk too much about your guy*, May, 2009, p. 94). In this statement young women are constructed as covering their insecurity through talking. They talk about their boyfriend in order to cover their dissatisfaction with the romantic relationship.

In *The besties*, from the Beauty section, a young woman is quoted speaking about a makeup product: “It’s awesome for people who need coverage—but it looks natural” (*Seventeen*, Beauty, *The besties*, July, 2009, p. 50). This statement reveals the twin purpose of the product: to cover the body and make it “natural.” Young women want to cover, and they do not want to be seen as engaging in the practice of covering.

Both “normal” and “anorexic” young women are engaged in the practice of covering. However, while the “covering” that the “anorexic” female body is engaged in is exposed through the discourses of pathology and vulnerability, the covering that the “normal” young woman is engaged in is hidden. And the discontinuity between normalized female bodies and pathologized female bodies is left unchallenged.

*Hiding the practice of “covering” among normalized female bodies.* *Seventeen* operates ideologically to hide the practice of “covering” in which “normal” female bodies are engaged. It constructs the practices that the “normal” female body engages in as different, and even oppositional, to “covering.” The ideological work of differentiating the normalized practices of the female body from the practice of “covering” is clearly illustrated in *Amazing makeunders!*, from the Beauty section. The text opens with the following statement: “There is a fine line
between enhancing your natural beauty and covering it up. We showed three readers (and you!) how to minimize their beauty routines and look even prettier” (*Seventeen, Beauty, Amazing makeunders!*, October, 2008, p. 61). The text contrasts the act of “enhancing” the “natural” beauty of a female body with the act of “covering” it. It is assumed that “minimizing” beauty routines is equivalent with “enhancing” beauty while extended beauty routines are equivalent to “covering” the female body’s beauty. However, a further analysis of the text reveals that both the practices of “enhancing” and “covering” involve changing the body’s look and are grounded in the same assumption about the female body: its need to look different.

For example, one of the suggested minimized beauty routines in *Amazing makeunders!* is the “subtle liner.” The effect of this routine is reported as following: “Subtle liner makes her eyes look bigger and the white looks brighter” (*Seventeen, Beauty, Amazing makeunders!*, October, 2008, p. 64). This statement is grounded in an assumption about the female body: The eyes are not big enough and not white enough. They need to look bigger and whiter. However, the challenge of the female body is to make the eyes look bigger and whiter while still looking “natural.” The challenge is to cover the body with products and to hide the “covering.”

The practice of “covering” is also hidden in the Love Life section. In the Beauty section, it is hidden through the constructs of “minimized beauty routines” and “enhancing the natural beauty.” In the Love Life section, it is hidden through playfulness. For example, in *Have your best date ever!*,* Seventeen* provides young women with a procedure that they should follow on a date. The procedure involves six steps. The first two steps are: “Getting ready” and “At the door:”

- The first stage (“Getting ready”) opens up with the following statement: “You want him to open the door and think, Wow!— but without looking like you’re trying too hard”
(Seventeen, Love Life, Have your best date ever!, July, 2009, p. 87). The statement defines two tasks for the female body: looking attractive and covering the effort that was involved in creating the attractive look. The young woman needs to look “naturally” attractive. The young man should attribute her attractiveness not to her effort or to the products covering her body, but to her “natural” body.

- While the young woman covers her effort in the first stage, she then playfully reveals it in the next stage (“At the door”): “make a joke that acknowledges the weirdness (“Full disclosure: I changed three times!”)—it will diffuse any pressure” (Seventeen, Love Life, Have your best date ever!, July, 2009, p. 87).

As in the Beauty section, the female body in the Love Life section is engaged in the practice of covering, and it is hiding its engagement in this practice. Hiding the engagement of the “normal” female body in the practice of “covering” contributes to the construction of a discontinuity between “normal” female bodies and “anorexic” female bodies and the practice of “covering” becomes a property that is exclusive to the “anorexic” female body and the pathologized sphere.

**Normalized body dissatisfaction and pathologized body dissatisfaction.** The practice of “covering” that is found in the Beauty section is rooted in a naturalized body dissatisfaction. The same naturalized body dissatisfaction that grounds the lexicon of trickery, and that constructs the female body as a barrier grounds the practice of covering. The practice of “covering” that the “anorexic” female body is engaged in is rooted in a qualitatively different form of body dissatisfaction: a pathologized body dissatisfaction.

Seventeen constructs two different versions of body dissatisfaction: a normalized version and a pathologized version. The main difference between the two versions of body dissatisfaction is a difference of control. While the “normal” female body is in control of its body
dissatisfaction, the “anorexic” female body is controlled by its body dissatisfaction. For example, Seventeen’s self-esteem expert tells her readers: “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to look your best, but when [it] is making you miserable, it’s time to take a step back” (Seventeen, Body Peace, “Ugh, I hate the way I look!,” May, 2009, p. 84). The “normal” female body can take a “step back” from body dissatisfaction, but the “anorexic” body cannot: “[Eating disorders] are about not being able to control your mind—and turning to food as something you think you can control” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 141). The “anorexic” female body is constructed as struggling against an inner voice that is controlling it: “My e.d. [eating disorders] voice has been really strong lately. I’ve got like 2 people in my head, I try and block it out, but it still shows its ugly face” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 141). The voice of eating disorders is a constant reality that the “anorexic” female body lives with, a pathologized reality.

While the “anorexic” female body is constantly living with the “eating disorders voice,” the normalized female body is only interrupted by this voice. Body dissatisfaction is only an interruption for the normalized female body, it is a “strange” interruption.

This strange thing happens right before a major event. You forget what your everyday life (and body) is really like, and you begin to daydream about what I call the “future you” [...] The pressure to look good [...] may even have you or your friends thinking about crash dieting, turbo tanning, or changing yourself in some other drastic way. (Seventeen, Body Peace, “Ugh, I hate the way I look,” May, 2009, p. 84)

Unlike the pathologized female body who engages in “crash dieting” and other pathological activities, the “normal” female body is only “tempted” to engage in such activities. In addition, the “normal” female body is able to “take a step back” and defeat the temptation: “I was on the verge of asking one of my guy friends who take [steroids] for something to help—but after
reading the article, I thought twice. I’ve decided to watch what I eat and push myself harder instead” (Seventeen, “What you think!,” October, 2008, p. 18). Both the “normal” and the pathologized female body are pushing themselves. However, the “normal” female body is constructed as in control of the pushing. On the other hand, the pathologized female body is pushed and controlled by its pathology.

The psychic processes that ground the experiences of “anorexia” and normalized body dissatisfaction are constructed by Seventeen as different and discontinuous. Even when the “normal” female body thinks of engaging in activities that the “anorexic” female body engages in, the thought is constructed as a disruption, a temptation. And the “normal” female body overcomes it. Overcoming the “dark” moments of body dissatisfaction is a characteristic that defines female bodies as a homogenous collective: “Together we’ve created a powerful community, so that as we work toward accepting ourselves (and occasionally experience dark moments anyway), no girl ever has to feel like she’s on her own” (Seventeen, Body Peace, “Ugh, I hate the way I look!,” May, 2009, p. 84). Normalized body dissatisfaction is a tool of homogenization, it brings female bodies together. Together “normal” female bodies overcome their dissatisfaction and accept themselves.

This functioning of the collective of “normal” female bodies strongly contrasts with the functioning of collectives of pathologized female bodies. When “normal” female bodies come together, they come together to reach peace with their bodies. When collectives of “anorexic” female bodies come together, they become a social threat: “When I was 14, I looked online for ways to lose weight; what came up were “pro-ana” (pro-anorexia) sites. I tried their tips and read the discussions—it became an obsession” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, The ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 141). The only instance where an “anorexic” female body engages in a positive
collective action happens after two years of starting recovery: “It’s been almost two years since I started recovery. [...] Now I’ve started mentoring girls at school with eating disorders” (Seventeen, Seventeen Buzz, the ED diaries, March, 2009, p. 143). As long as the “anorexic” female body is not undergoing “recovery,” it is a threat to other female bodies. While the normalized body dissatisfaction is an experience through which a sense of community between young women is fostered, the body dissatisfaction of “anorexic” female bodies is constructed as a destructive force.

For “normal” young women, body dissatisfaction brings them together. They come together to collectively share their story, and by sharing their stories they are perceived as helping one another, as engaged in a positive social behaviour. One the other hand, because pathologized young women are constructed as qualitatively different than normalized young women, because they are constructed as a threat to themselves and to others, as bodies controlled by a sickness, they raise suspicion when they come together. When they share stories, they are not perceived as engaged in a prosocial behaviour, rather, they are perceived as engaged in a destructive behaviour.

Seventeen constructs a discontinuity between “normal” and pathologized female bodies. Body dissatisfaction is associated with the “normal” sphere and “anorexia” is associated with the pathologized sphere. By constructing body dissatisfaction and anorexia as discontinuous, the dangers of “normal” body dissatisfaction are overshadowed and the female body struggling against itself becomes a normalized state.

**Summary**

The female body is constructed as oriented toward itself and changing itself. The female body is expected to look perfect; but in order to reach perfection the female body has to push
itself and be in a constant discomfort, because the body itself is a barrier to the change that the young woman wants to achieve. As a result of constructing the body as a barrier, the experience of body dissatisfaction is naturalized and normalized. Another process that leads to the normalization of body dissatisfaction is its differentiation from anorexia and from the pathologized sphere.
Chapter 7

Conclusions and implications

In the previous three chapters, an analysis of the ideological functioning of Seventeen was provided. Based on that analysis, this chapter discusses the implications of the findings. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, a brief summary of the last three chapters is provided followed by a synthesis of the findings in light of the research questions raised in Chapter 1. The second section articulates recommendations based on the findings of this thesis. Finally, the third section addresses the limitations of this thesis and possible extensions.

Summary and Synthesis

This section is divided into two subsections. In the first subsection, a brief summary of the analysis is introduced. Following from the summary, a synthesis of the ideological functioning of Seventeen is articulated based on the findings and the research questions.

Summary

Seventeen functions to construct a universal female body that is ontologically prior to race, ability, class and other constructed differences. Whether it is described as black or white, with special needs or with no special needs, the female body is constructed as having a set of “natural” properties. For example, Chapter 4 introduced two of the universal and “natural” properties of the female body: the need for attention and the need for protection. The need for attention is naturalized and universalized through the signification of race and class. The needs of female bodies who are black and female bodies with special needs are reduced to heterosexual needs: the need to gain attention and to “shine.” The act of helping young women who are
described as black or with special need necessarily involves allowing them and making it easier for them to gain attention: a female body who is black is helped by suggesting beauty products to her that make her “shine” despite her dark color and by allowing her to attend a unified prom night and a female body with special needs is helped by being dressed like a cheerleader.

Female bodies from economically unprivileged social classes challenge the universality of the need for attention as a primary need. For them, the main need is financial capital. But female bodies from economically unprivileged social classes are erased by Seventeen. The female body is constructed as a classless female body; a female body who needs financial capital for the consumption of beauty and fashion products, and not for covering the basic needs of food and shelter. The naturalization of the universality of the need for attention is left unquestioned and unchallenged.

The need for attention results in the naturalization of another need: the need for protection. Female bodies gain attention by applying products on their face and by going through beauty routines, however, a product’s effect needs to be protected from fading. Also, the naturalized need for attention makes female bodies vulnerable to young men who give them attention in order to later exploit them sexually. The need for protection, therefore, becomes another naturalized universal need of the female body.

Chapter 5 examined how, despite the differences between female bodies that are constructed in Seventeen, the universality of the female body is not challenged. Rather, the differences constructed by Seventeen are differences that further naturalize the need for attention and the vulnerability that results from it. Whether they like to show off or not, female bodies have a naturalized tendency to take pictures of their look and post them for the gaze of others. Whether they are peaceful or not, female bodies have a tendency to be in conflict with other
female bodies and to “steal” from other female bodies the secrets for gaining attention. Whether they are shy or bold, female bodies are assumed to have a natural “flirty” side that they are expected to embrace if they want to exercise agency in their romantic life.

Female bodies have a naturalized need to gain attention, but female bodies are constructed as inadequate in this task that they are supposed to desire. Chapter 6 explained how, in the “common sense” produced by Seventeen, there are only two ways to gain attention: constantly changing and pushing the body, or tricking the person gazing at the body. The female body needs to be a changed female body in order to gain attention. The female body is constructed as inadequate and as a barrier to gaining attention and the naturalized inadequacy of the female body lays the ground for the psychic phenomenon of body dissatisfaction.

Body dissatisfaction is constructed as a legitimate experience, an experience that signals the female body’s willingness to pursue perfection. Female bodies are constructed as in control of their body dissatisfaction. They are tempted by their body dissatisfaction to engage in the practices that “anorexic” young women engage in, but they refuse this temptation. Unlike the “anorexic” female bodies who are controlled by their dissatisfaction with their bodies, the “normal” female body is in control of its body dissatisfaction. By being differentiated from anorexia, body dissatisfaction is kept separate from the realm of pathology. Anorexia is constructed as discontinuous from body dissatisfaction and grounded in different psychic phenomena. The construction of a discontinuity between anorexia and body dissatisfaction functions to further normalize and universalize body dissatisfaction.

In summary, body dissatisfaction is a byproduct of the discursive construction of the female body, notably the discourses of heterosexuality and vulnerability. And Seventeen, like
other mainstream institutions, functions to construct a “common sense” body where the inadequacy of the female body is naturalized.

**Ideological Synthesis**

The purpose of this study, as the research questions in Chapter 1 suggested, was to examine the following three subquestions: How do hegemonic ideologies shape the construction of the female body, how are counter hegemonic elements incorporated, and how are the contradictions between hegemonic and counter hegemonic elements masked? The purpose of examining these subquestions is to contribute to the literature on body dissatisfaction among young women. In fact, these subquestions surfaced out of a reflection on the conflict between two qualitatively different conceptualizations of body dissatisfaction: On the one hand, body dissatisfaction is conceptualized as an outcome of media exposure, media being the cause of body dissatisfaction. On the other hand, body dissatisfaction is conceptualized as an outcome of the social construction of the female body. Following from the latter conceptualization of the relationship between body dissatisfaction and the female body, this thesis was grounded on the following question: How is the female body constructed?

**Heteronormativity, Mind/Body Dualism and Individualism**

The construction of the female body is shaped by the hegemonic ideology of heteronormativity. Chapter 4 revealed how the need of the female body is reduced to a heterosexual need and the activities that the female body is constructed as “naturally” inclined towards are heterosexual activities. The naturalized heterosexual need is constructed through the concept of attention, as a need to be noticed. Chapter 5 discussed how even when the need for men is problematized, the need for beauty products that make the body more noticeable is normalized even if just for oneself. The metaphorical construction of being noticed as “shining”
and as being visible reproduces the ideology of gendered mind/body dualism. While females exist as bodies, males represent the mind through which the female body is evaluated and brought to life. The ideology of heteronormativity constructs female bodies as bodies that exist by being noticed, and the ideology of gendered mind/body dualism constructs the male gaze as the noticer, the agent through which the female body becomes visible.

By analyzing the occurrences of the concept of change in Seventeen, Chapter 6 revealed how the individualistic ideology constructs female bodies as isolated subjects constantly changing themselves. Agency is associated with changing oneself, not with engaging in a change that is directed outside of the self. Even in the instances where female bodies work for an outside change, the purpose of their actions is assumed to be an inner change: they challenge the racist rules in their school in order to have a more fun and “more memorable” prom (see Chapter 4) and they change their room in order to feel “less chaotic” (Chapter 5)

Counter Hegemonic Elements in the “Common Sense” on the Female Body

The female body is constructed at the intersection of the ideologies of heteronormativity, gender mind/body dualism and individualism. However, a number of counter hegemonic elements surfaced in the semiotic practices of Seventeen. According to Fairclough (1995), hegemonic “common sense” is constituted of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic elements. What makes the hegemonic “common sense” hegemonic, what makes it function to reproduce domination, is an order of discourse where counter hegemonic elements are incorporated in a way that limits their transformative potentials. The discourse of feminism and the discourse of collectivism are among the counter hegemonic elements that emerged from the analysis. Their position in a hegemonic order of discourse, however, limited their transformative potential.
Discourse of feminism. The discourse of feminism (see Appendix K) in *Seventeen* is limited to the domain of heterosexual encounters. Female bodies’ dependence on male bodies is contested; their dependence on beauty products is not. The contradiction between the discourse of feminism that promotes independence, and the discourse of heterosexuality that promotes the need for the product in order to gain attention, is bridged through the discourse of hedonism. In the discourse of hedonism, female bodies do not seek attention because it is a need, rather, they seek attention because they “want” it (see Chapter 5). They enjoy attention like they enjoy the consumption of any commodity. The ideological effect of this order of discourse—discourse of heterosexuality, discourse of hedonism and discourse of feminism—is the naturalization of the need for attention while masking it as a desire.

In *Seventeen*, the discourse of collaboration is used in conjunction with the discourse of vulnerability. Young women come together to protect one another from a potential rapist, from the “body blues” caused by body dissatisfaction, and from HIV. Young women come together only to struggle against a common enemy. However, and as argued in Chapter 5, when they overcome their body dissatisfaction and when the danger of a potential rapist is gone, young women are again engaged in a competitive discourse.

The discourse of collaboration is also used in conjunction with the discourse of hedonism; young women collaborate in an altruistic act in order to have fun. In *Seventeen*, the reward for altruistic acts is the hedonistic experience of fun and excitement, not the experience of promoting positive social change. For example, in the Horoscope section altruistic or environmental acts surfaced five times. In three out of the five occurrences, the altruistic or environmental act was related to a reward, and the reward was signified as the following:
• “You’ll be surprised by how fun raking leaves with friends can be” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).

• “donate anything you no longer want—you’ll feel rewarded and less chaotic” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, October, 2008, p. 166).

• “you’ll have a blast with your BFFs while you’re at it” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152).

In the two examples where the altruistic or environmental act is collaborative, the reward is a psychic and hedonistic reward. Young women collaborate to have fun and to have a “blast.”

Collaboration between young women is constructed as a momentary and transitional event. They collaborate in order to transition from boredom to fun: “you and your friends have been feeling super-bored lately! Thanks to Mars, you’ll find something new and fun to do [...] you’ll have a blast” (Seventeen, Horoscopes, March, 2009, p. 152). They also collaborate to transition from feeling lonely and isolated to not feeling alone (see Chapter 5). They collaborate to overcome isolation, but once they overcome their isolation, they engage in a mode of being that isolates them again from one another. Temporality limits the potential to use the discourse of collaboration for counter hegemonic means.

**Recommendations**

In this section, I discuss three recommendations based on the findings of my analysis. The first recommendation is concerned with transforming the hegemonic “common sense” on the female body. The second recommendation discusses an alternative conceptualization of beauty products and beauty routines. The third recommendation discusses educational interventions and points out the limitations of programs of media literacy.
The Discourse of Feminism and the Discourse of Collaboration

A hegemonic ideological construct like the female body is not a stable construct; it is constantly reproduced. It is reproduced through interactions that conform to the hegemonic order of discourse. It can be challenged through interactions that disrupt this order of discourse.

Following from Gramsci (1971), Fairclough (1995) notes that hegemony “is never achieved more than partially and temporarily, as an unstable equilibrium,” and this unstable equilibrium is reflected in the hegemonic order of discourse (pp. 76-77). The presence of counter hegemonic elements like the discourse of feminism and the discourse of collaboration reveals the instability of the hegemonic “common sense” on the female body. Therefore, a rearticulation of the hegemonic order of discourse, notably a rearticulation of the place occupied by counter hegemonic elements within that order of discourse, can disrupt the hegemonic “common sense” on the female body.

As McRobbie (1991) argued, the functioning of contemporary media is grounded in a study of their audience. They learn the language of their audience and articulate their messages in the language of the audience. The hegemonic and counter hegemonic elements in Seventeen are also part of the readers’ language. Seventeen functions ideologically through reproducing an order of discourse out of the existing one. Like Seventeen, other institutions and collectives, reproduce the existing order of discourse through their linguistic and semiotic practices. And through linguistic and semiotic practices, the order of discourse can be reproduced differently.

Extending the Use of the Discourse of Feminism

As argued in the previous section, the contradiction between the discourse of feminism and the discourse of heterosexuality is bridged through the discourse of hedonism. However, the use of the discourse of hedonism to bridge the gap between the discourse of feminism and the
discourse of heterosexuality limits the domain of use of the discourse of feminism. For example, in *Seventeen*, the independence and assertiveness that characterize the discourse of feminism is absent from discussions of sexual protection; sexual protection is constructed through the discourse of vulnerability as an embarrassing act. And *Seventeen* offers tips on how to adapt to the “embarrassing” situation of protecting one’s life while seeking sexual pleasure (Chapter 4).

An alternative discourse that can be introduced to bridge the ideological gap between the discourses of feminism and heterosexuality while expanding the use of the discourse of feminism is the discourse of self-love. Caring for oneself involves developing an independent personality. Caring for oneself can also involve developing a romantic relationship and having agency in one’s romantic life—opportunity to use the discourses of heterosexuality, feminism and a gay romantic discourse. Caring for oneself also involves sexual protection: opportunity to use the discourse of feminism in conjunction with the discourse of sexual protection.

When sexual protection becomes constructed through the discourse of self-love, the assertiveness characteristic of the discourse of feminism can be used in the signification of sexual protection. Like one reader assertively declares, “It’s important to read the signs of a controlling partner. No one should endure abuse from one they love” (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” May, 2009, p. 24). Other young women, through a hybridization of the discourses of feminism and the discourse of self-love, may assertively declare that: “It’s important to practice sexual protection. No one should be pressured to engage in a risky behaviour by the one she loves.” Similarly, through a hybridization of the discourse of feminism and the discourse of self-love, young women may assertively declare: “No one should be pressured to constantly change her body in order to be accepted.”
The introduction of the discourse of self-love in the hegemonic order of discourse releases the discourse of feminism from the limitations imposed on it by the discourse of hedonism. The introduction of the discourse of self-love has a transformative effect on the act of self-care. Caring for oneself is no longer reduced to seeking hedonistic satisfaction and excitement. Rather, and as Noddings (1992) argued, caring for oneself could encompass caring for self, caring for others, caring for objects and caring for ideas.

The introduction of the discourse of self-love allows the assertiveness and confidence of the discourse of feminism to be applied in more contexts. However, in a world governed by hegemonic “common sense,” the assertiveness of the individual young woman and her unconditional acceptance of her body might lead her to be isolated. In order for her assertiveness and confidence to be sustained, the young woman needs to be part of a collective that provides her with empowering feedback.

From Collaboration to Collectivism

In Seventeen’s order of discourse, collaboration is a momentary and partial process. It does not lead to the construction of cultural artefact or to collective action. Collaboration is more empowering when it becomes a sustained process that produces supportive feedback for female bodies engaged in the disruption of the hegemonic order of discourse that produces their representations. In order for collaboration to be a sustained process and not a mere transition, the discourse of collaboration needs to be transformed to a discourse of collectivism.

In a discourse of collectivism, acts of social or environmental altruism are not isolated, fragmentary acts whose purpose is a hedonistic reward. Rather, these acts are part of the same process, a process whose purpose is social change. In order for the discourse of collaboration to be promoted to a discourse of collectivism, the concept of change needs to be oriented outside of
the female body. In a discourse of collectivism, inner changes are followed by collaboration for promoting social change.

In *Seventeen*, the female body is isolated from the world. It changes itself to gain attention from the world. Missing from *Seventeen* is the conception that the world is our creation and that the female body, through its modes of being, participates in the creation of the world.

Body dissatisfaction is the phenomenon where a young woman experiences her body as a barrier to her aspirations. The normalized aspiration of a young woman is to be noticed, and the female body is constructed as “naturally” unreliable to gain attention, therefore the female body is a barrier to the young woman’s aspiration. However, gaining attention is no longer a requirement, if the “perfect” look is no longer an expectation. Then, the female body is free to create and produce. The female body becomes a resource for the subject occupying it, a resource through which the subject creates a different, more empowering world.

**Alternative Conceptualization of Beauty Products and Beauty Routines**

The orientation of the female body toward changing itself reproduces the ideology of gendered mind/body dualism. The ideology of gendered mind body/dualism as a subject of inquiry, and how it projects the body’s inferiority on females and the mind’s transcendence on males, can be traced back to the work of Simone de Beauvoir (Bordo, 2003). Based on her deconstruction of gendered mind/body dualism, de Beauvoir suggested that women reject the confinement to the body and become oriented to the development of the mind. However, and as Butler (1990) argued, de Beauvoir’s position might function to reproduce mind/body dualism, which would further naturalize the superiority of mind over body, in part because it does not challenge the existing dualism and, therefore, reifies it.
When female bodies change their look, they are producing a look, a cultural artefact. As written texts are produced through the mediational means of language, and music through the mediational means of musical instruments, female bodies produce a look through their body. And this changed look—like the written text and the composed piece of music—is a semiotic product that participates in the construction of semiotically mediated reality. This semiotic product has the potential to challenge and disrupt the hegemonic semiotically mediated reality. An example of a changed body that functions to disrupt hegemony is drag. According to Butler (1990), drag functions to disrupt the naturalized dichotmization of sex. The body, and the orientation toward changing the body, may be part of a counter hegemonic project.

Beauty products may serve as tools through which a female body that challenges hegemony is produced. Engagement in beauty routines does not necessarily reproduce patriarchy, and it can have empowering and emancipatory effects. However, for beauty products to be tools of empowerment, the conceptualization of their purpose needs to change. Instead of being tools for “fixing” the body and “tricking” the body’s perceiver, beauty products must be conceptualized as tools for exploring, expressing, creating, and disrupting. As they participate in the production of the world through their mind, young women can participate in the production of the world through their bodies.

**Programs of Media Literacy and the Reduction of the Phenomenon of Body Dissatisfaction**

Exposure to *Seventeen* and other appearance media has been correlated with body dissatisfaction; this relation was attributed to an uncritical consumption of media among young women (Grabe et al., 2008). Young women are assumed to internalize the “common sense” of the female body uncritically. In order to be empowered, this research argues that they need to go through programs of media literacy and learn how to be critical consumers of the media. In the
paragraphs below, I offer an alternative recommendation for the empowerment of young women experiencing body dissatisfaction.

**Body Dissatisfaction and the Lack of Semiotic Support**

*Seventeen* belongs to a web of mainstream media. The ideological and discursive functioning of *Seventeen* should be understood as part of an interrelated web of ideological and discursive practices. In her research on youth culture, McRobbie (1991) noted that the reading of teen magazines is a fragmented activity that occurs in conjunction with other activities. Young women read magazines while watching music videos or while waiting for their favorite TV show to start. The semiotic practices of *Seventeen* function together with the semiotic practices from other media forms. *Seventeen* does not and cannot function in isolation. This may be inferred from the following entry from one of *Seventeen*’s readers: “I was sitting at my table cutting out pages from *Seventeen* to make a collage when I saw a tote bag and realized I could make a really cool bag instead!” (*Seventeen*, “What you think!,” March, 2009, p. 23). The pages of *Seventeen* are potentially cut after being read; they are not likely kept as a reference. The messages of *Seventeen*, if not supported by messages from other media forms are potentially forgotten.

The reading of *Seventeen* is often an inattentive reading; it occurs during other activities, when multi-tasking, for example, or the text itself is used for other purposes than reading, like making a collage. If the messages on this page are forgotten, there is no way to retrieve them directly. The reading of *Seventeen*, like the exposure to other media forms, is often not a deep reading. And because the act of reading is likely to be fragmentary, a more refined explanation to the relation between media exposure and body dissatisfaction must be articulated.

Body dissatisfaction as an effect of reading *Seventeen* must be positioned within a web of interconnections between *Seventeen* and other mainstream media forms. *Seventeen* not only
produces a “common sense” of the female body, it also projects that “common sense” on its representation of celebrities who contribute to mainstream media: including television shows and movies, reality shows, the music industry, and celebrities who are celebrities given wealth or family name. These celebrities are constructed as embodiments of that “common sense.” The “common sense” that Seventeen produces shapes the mental life of young women through the mediation of celebrities. The following excerpt from the Body Peace section highlights how celebrities are constructed as embodiments of the “common sense” that Seventeen produces:

When she first hit it big with The Princess Diaries, she looked self-conscious—like she was hiding from the spotlight. But after filming a string of Hollywood hits, Anne [Hathaway] has undergone a style transformation. Today with her sleek bob and body-flattering clothes, she radiates the quiet “I know I’m a star” confidence she’s gained with her success. (emphasis added, Seventeen, Body Peace, The power of a makeover, October, 2008, p. 110)

In this passage, the author constructs Anne Hathaway as a representation of confidence. In the “common sense” produced by Seventeen, confidence is made visible and “radiates” through “body-flattering clothes,” tight clothes. Female bodies who do not wear tight clothes are constructed as “hiding from the spotlight.” According to Seventeen’s self-esteem expert, “hiding” in one’s clothes is equivalent to abandoning the self and not taking care of the self: “When you hide in your clothes, it’s like telling the world, ‘Don’t care about me, because I don’t either’” (Seventeen, Body Peace, The power of a makeover, October, 2008, p. 110). In Seventeen’s common sense, wearing tight and revealing clothes is an embodiment of confidence and an act of caring for oneself. This common sense is condensed in the representation of Anne Hathaway. Representations of Anne Hathaway—in movies, television programs, interviews, reality spots, and tabloids—serve to constantly revive the “common sense” on the pages of Seventeen.
Programs of media literacy are supposed to “teach” young women how to critically examine the messages of appearance media. Young women, after going through programs of media literacy, are supposed to have learned that Anne Hathaway is not the only model of success and confidence for female bodies, and that success and confidence can also be signalled through practices that are different from wearing tight and revealing clothes. However, programs of media literacy do not provide young women with celebrities who model an alternative type of confidence. Like the pages of Seventeen are likely to be cut and used in a collage, the brochures and handouts from the media literacy programs are likely to be lost. And like the messages of Seventeen are likely to be forgotten, the messages from the media literacy programs are likely to be forgotten. But what allows the messages of Seventeen to be revived are the celebrities and TV shows that perpetuate the same common sense that Seventeen perpetuates. The messages of Seventeen are condensed in the semiotic environment of young women. The messages from media literacy programs are not condensed anywhere, and in order to access them, young women have to return to the brochures, handouts, or program materials again. That media literacy programs are often attached to school curricula or after-school programs locates them within the institution of schooling, which may or may not be a consistent or strong enough force to challenge mass media.

According to Barone (2003), challenging dominant narratives or what he calls the “dominant imaginary” necessitates both cultural critique and cultural production. It necessitates revealing the fractures and misrepresentations in the dominant accounts, but it should also involve the cultural production of alternative accounts. In the case of programs of media literacy, young women are provided with and “taught” to examine media and develop cultural critiques, but young women are not exposed to cultural products that can provide them with the semiotic
support through which they can always engage in cultural critiques. They may also not be positioned as capable to produce their own media, although this perspective is changing in particular in relation to youth blogs, zines, and web pages. Of issue here is the necessity for consistently available and valued access to the tools that enable production of alternative media.

Our semiotic and material environment shapes the activity of constructing our mental life and our representations of the world. From our first basic impressions, to our most complex reflections, our thought processes are conducted through the tools that we find in our environment. Representations of celebrities and characters in TV shows are among these tools. Through celebrities and characters in TV shows, the hegemonic “common sense” of the female body is reconstructed in the consciousness of young women, a hegemonic “common sense” that naturalizes, normalizes and legitimizes body dissatisfaction. Even when young women are aware that the “common sense” that their semiotic environment pushes them to reconstruct is a “common sense” that is based on the interests of hegemonic groups, young women may still lack the semiotic tools through which an alternative “common sense” can be condensed; or semiotic tools through which young women can reconstruct the alternative “common sense” that they once constructed.

It is not enough to “teach” young women that the images of celebrities they see are digitally modified and that “confidence” is not only signalled through tight clothes. Rather, empowering young women should involve introducing new role models and new semiotic tools that they can use in the construction of an alternative “common sense” of the female body. They need not only to learn to criticize the media, but they also need to be provided with the cultural semiotic tools to develop, produce, and value alternative media, and condense the messages in this alternative media on categories and narratives.
Our reality is a mediated reality. We construct our representation of reality through the tools that our semiotic environment provides. The richer our semiotic environment is, the more creative the process of constructing reality may become. A young woman constructs her representation of reality and her representation of her body through the semiotic tools available to her. But when her semiotic environment is saturated with a lexicon, storylines, and discourses that construct the body as inadequate and with narratives that construct the female body as vulnerable and in need of protection, body dissatisfaction will be a likely outcome, not because of an uncritical consumption, but because of a poor semiotic environment that does not support the semiotic act of constructing the female body differently. As a result of this semiotic environment, subjects who embody an alternative female body tend to be isolated and stigmatized. For example, Duncan (2004) found that a young woman signified as a “lesbian” in her peer culture is least likely to be also signified as “popular.”

In conclusion, young women do not need to be “taught,” they need to be provided with additional tools. The semiotic tools provided by *Seventeen* and other mainstream forms of media need not to be eliminated. The presence of hegemonic and counter hegemonic elements in the semiotic environment of young women may support their creativity and allow them to come up with their own hybrid representations of the female body. Young women, when semiotically empowered, may use the hegemonic elements creatively in the production of counter hegemonic representations.

**Ideological Functioning of Programs of Media Literacy**

Programs of media literacy may themselves have problematic ideological consequences. They can function to naturalize the irrationality of women through perpetuating the discourse of paternalism. The premise upon which programs of media literacy are grounded is continuous
with the discourse of paternalism used by *Seventeen* in addressing readers and constructing female bodies. Programs of media literacy construct female bodies as irrational and acritical, their exposure to media leads to body dissatisfaction because they do not know how to consume the media. Not knowing or not being pragmatic is a theme associated with the discourse of paternalism used by *Seventeen* to signify the female body.

- In “*Why can’t you be more like...,*” young women are told: “The next time your mom tries to ‘help’ (e.g., ‘I saw a fun Spinning class at the gym you could try’), remind yourself that’s exactly what it is—help” (*Seventeen*, Body Peace, March, 2009, p. 80).

- In one entry from a young woman in the “What you think!” section, she states, “it was immature of [Taylor Swift] to admit to you guys that she writes songs about real relationships—we all know “Forever and Always” is about Joe Jonas, and the lyrics make him look like a bad guy [...] and while revenge can be sweet, it’s not always the best!” (*Seventeen*, July, 2009, p. 18).

- “Mercury’s movement on the 18th will make you want to send a bitchy text, but that would only make things worse!” (italics in original, *Seventeen*, Horoscopes, May, 2009, p. 144).

Young women are assumed to have forgotten that their mother’s purpose is to help. To avoid an angry reaction to the mother’s comment, they have to *remind* themselves that they are being helped. The possibility that young women might be already aware of their mother’s purpose while still objecting to their mother’s comment is excluded. It is also assumed that young women engage in “immature” behaviors because of their lack of awareness of the consequences of their behaviors, hence, they need to be told that “revenge is not always the best” and that their angry behavior “would only make things worse.”
Maybe young women are aware that their anger “will make things worse.” Maybe the problem is not a problem of awareness, but a problem of pressure. Correspondingly, maybe body dissatisfaction is not a problem of awareness, but a problem of a hegemonic “common sense” that young women themselves are pushed to reconstruct because of the limitations of possibilities in their semiotic environments. In their semiotic environment, there is the discourse of paternalism that projects ignorance and irrationality upon them. In their semiotic environment, their bodies are signified as inadequate bodies that should change and can only change by constantly being pushed. The beauty products that they use are constructed as necessary to “fix” their bodies. The celebrities and TV shows that they see model only one type of confidence, the confidence acquired through tight and “body flattering clothes.”

Based on the above discussion, the empowerment of young women necessitates providing them with access to and an understanding of alternative semiotic tools that they can use, along with the hegemonic semiotic tools that are available to them, to construct their own “common sense” on the female body. These semiotic tools can be provided by introducing new discourses to the “common sense” through which the female body is constructed and by changing the order of discourses that grounds this “common sense.”

Besides access to alternative semiotic tools, young women need to see subjects who, through their practices and mode of being, embody an alternative female body while maintaining their desirability and a social status that is not stigmatized. The limitations of interventions that focus on providing tools of creation without addressing the broader social context are illustrated in the work of Gonick (2001). Gonick (2001) found that even when young women were given the tools to create their own magazine, they tended to re-create the constructions that they were exposed to in mainstream media. In order for young women to textually construct alternative
female bodies, they need to see models who embody an alternative female body while being happy, successful, and valued.

**Limitations and Extensions**

This section closes the thesis by stating its limitations and, based on these limitations, suggesting ways through which this work may be extended.

**Limitations**

The data set for this thesis consisted of five issues of *Seventeen*, and each issue included eight sections. Given space limitations, it was only possible to explore in this thesis in detail three of the ideological processes that surfaced: homogenization through difference reduction, homogenization through difference construction, and normalization of body dissatisfaction. However, the data analysis identified 13 discourses, each of which deserve detailed study. For example the ideological functioning of the discourse of paternalism was only superficially touched upon in this thesis, and the discourse of positive psychology was not addressed.

The limitation of this thesis’s data set impacts the legitimacy of its claims. Many of the analyses that occurred here were based on a small set of occurrences. For example, in Chapter 5, one of the analyses addressed the occurrences of the term “confidence”; a term that appeared only nine times throughout the analyzed texts. The analysis’ results were based on only nine occurrences which weakens the possibility generalizing them. However, claims that are based on a small amount of data can serve as hypotheses for future studies.

Another limitation of this study is the type of data. Data was generated from teen magazines and the purpose of this study was to analyze how *Seventeen* constructs a “common sense” about the female body. However, the ideological functioning of the texts of *Seventeen*
depends on how they are internalized by readers. It is through readers that these texts are negotiated, redistributed and appropriated.

**Extensions**

This thesis consisted of a critical discourse analysis of texts and attempted to study the “common sense” of the female body that these texts construct. Based on the study of this “common sense” and on how this “common sense” shapes the semiotic environment of the readers of *Seventeen*, recommendations were articulated. Alternative semiotic tools that may lead to the construction of an alternative “common sense” of the female body were suggested. However, the suggestions provided here are not enough. While the introduction of new types of semiotic tools in the semiotic environment of young women can have an empowering effect, the commitment to empower young women must go beyond changing their semiotic environment.

The assumption that by changing a subject’s environment, whether material or semiotic, we change the subject herself is grounded in a vulgar materialism where subjects are assumed to be without agency, mere products of the environment. The critique of vulgar materialism goes back to Marx, who argued in *Theses on Feuerbach*, that “materialistic doctrine that men are the products of circumstances and education, and that changed men are therefore the products of other circumstances and a changed education, forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated” (as cited in Korač, 1966, p. 2). The semiotic tools through which the semiotic reality of young women is produced are produced by young women themselves. The texts of *Seventeen* are made for young women, but they are remade by young women, and this study does not address how young women internalize, negotiate and remake the texts of *Seventeen*. 
Providing young women with an alternative semiotic raw material is not enough. If a young woman is to be empowered in creating an alternative “common sense,” she should be empowered to create. The young woman creates a representation of her body, and in her act of creation she needs more than semiotic tools. In order to study what else is needed, the process of creation needs to be studied. Studies are needed where young women’s internalization of Seventeen’s messages and of the messages of counter hegemonic cultural artefacts are addressed. The question that needs to be raised is how do young women construct their own hybrid “female bodies” out of hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses? And in their acts of creation, what are their needs? This study attempted to speculate on the semiotic needs of young women, it analyzed messages of a mainstream magazine. An extension of this study would consist of addressing how young women internalize the messages of the media and what factors can promote a creative and transformative internalization instead of a repetitive and reproductive one.

Summary

An ideological synthesis of the discourses that shape the texts in Seventeen suggests the presence of potentials for a transformation in the “common sense” of the female body. By changing the position of the discourses of feminism and collaboration in Seventeen’s order of discourse, the female body can be constructed differently: The assertive and independent attitude that Seventeen encourages young women to display in heterosexual encounters may be extended to transform the young woman’s relation to her body. And the promotion of the discourse of collaboration to a discourse of collectivism changes the act of collaboration between young women from a transitional state to a sustained state. The recommendations articulated in this study are limited by the small amount of data and by the type of the data. The limited amount of
data does not provide strong support for generalization and the type of data, documents, does not allow for a study of what resources are needed by young women in their act of constructing an alternative “common sense” of the female body. This study needs to be extended with a study of how young women internalize the messages of teen magazines and how do they create their own constructions of the female body.
References


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*Magazines cited*

*Seventeen*

October 2008
December 2008
February 2009
March 2009
June 2009
August 2009
Appendix A

Discourses and themes

**Discourse of Heterosexuality**

A discourse that functions to construct the female body as a heterosexual body, engaging in beauty routines and playfulness to gain the attention and gaze of the male body.

**Themes**

- Attention
- Heterosexual relations
- The party
- Female daily passivity and historical passivity

**Discourse of Hedonism**

A discourse grounded in the concept of self gratification and hedonistic satisfaction.

**Themes**

- Hedonistic value of products
- Self gratification
- Excitement

**Discourse of Paternalism**

A discourse that functions to project ignorance and irrationality on young women.

**Themes**

- Reality check
- Irrationality

**Discourse of Vulnerability**

A discourse that functions to construct the need for protection as a “natural” need among female bodies.
Themes

- Protection
- Fear
- Female body in disorder with natural and social world
- Loneliness and competitiveness
- Irrationality of the female body

Discourse of Altruism

A discourse that signifies the acts of help that female bodies engage in.

Themes

- Help and giving
- Environmentalism

Discourse of Collaboration

A discourse that signifies acts of help and support between young women.

Themes

- Group as a source of help
- Homogeneity of the female body across race and ability

Discourse of Femininity

A discourse that functions to construct the female body as playful, gentle and subtle.

Themes

- Feminine consumption of beauty products
- Playfulness
- The homogenous female body

Discourse of Individualism

A discourse that functions to construct the condition of a female body as an outcome of individual processes.
Themes

- Body in disorder with nature and with the social world
- Loneliness and competitiveness
- Differentiation from others

Discourse of Pathology

A discourse that functions to naturalize the normal/pathology dichotomy and to construct pathologized bodies as engaged in a qualitatively different mode of being than normalized bodies.

Themes

- Pathology as discontinuous from “normal”
- Pathologized body as a disruption of normalized events

Discourse of Feminism

A discourse that advocates for self acceptance and assertiveness among female bodies.

Themes

- Assertiveness
- Anti Objectification

Discourse of Positive Psychology

A discourse grounded on the assumption that when an individual changes her perspective, her situation is changed.

Themes

- “All you need is a little”
- Thinking “positively”

Discourse of Critical Thinking

A discourse that differentiates superficial thinking from critical thinking.
Themes

- Rationality
- Reality check

**Discourse of Domesticity**

A discourse that function to confine the female body within its domestic setting.

Themes

- Home
- Feminine consumption of beauty products
Appendix B

Discourse of heterosexuality

Theme 1: Attention

- Being noticed
  - Lexicon: “notice,” “take note,” “see”
  - Lexicon: “sparkle,” “light,” “glow”
  - Collocation: attention to female is attention to her body, both attention to body and attention to words are collocated with attention males
  - Storyline: get product or style → reveal product or style → get attention
  - Storyline: busy → recharging → meeting guy
  - Dichotomy: showing/hiding
  - Assumption: Attention brings joy, it is a need
  - Assumption: Attention is attention to body not to words or movements
  - Assumption: Caring for self is “showing” self to others
  - Collocation: males seeking attention signified as “attention hogs.”
  - Collocation: Attention to the words of the female constructed as unusual

- Light in the product
  - Lexicon: “keep,” “stay there,” “natural”
  - Storyline: use product → sparkle → keep the sparkle
  - Storyline: new style → feeling good → confident when meeting guy
  - Dichotomy: covering the natural/making the natural glow
  - Assumption: The light of the body comes from the product

- Image and appearance
  - Collocation: Advertisement genre used to signify beauty routines
  - Assumption: All girls post images, girls who “like to show off” are not the only girls who post pictures, they are the “first” to do so.
  - Assumption: smoking is not good because of its effect on appearance
  - Collocation: For males, “bad look days” are part of the process of looking good, for females, bad days are hidden and only perfection revealed.
  - Collocation: Dealing with breakup through changing style is praised, dealing with breakup through writing a song is signified as “immature.”

- Hiding/revealing
  - Lexicon: “show side,” “be myself”
  - Storyline: caring guy → no need to hide → “I can be myself”
Collocation: humor to cover embarrassment
Assumption: laughing at self assumed to be a sign of “security” among females

Theme 2: Heterosexual relations

- Give him what he wants
  - Lexicon: “deliver,” “figure out”
  - Storyline: figure out what he wants → deliver

- Male reaction
  - Storyline: male does not notice → seek another male
  - Storyline: male does not make a move back → feel crushed

- Romanticism
  - Collocation: kissing real girlfriend on TV makes it not Romantic (language of romanticism instead of language of privacy).
  - Collocation: Buying condom before meeting with partner is not romantic

Theme 3: Party

- Before the party
  - Lexicon: “stress,” “work hard,” “Busy from,” “your girls”
  - Storyline: busy → stressed → need for break → go to party
  - Storyline: question relationship → go to party → realize you should date around

- In the party
  - Lexicon: “line,” “playful,” “psyched,” “give him excuse,” “hit it off,” “it worked”
  - Lexicon: “crush,” “flirty”
  - Lexicon: “unexpected,”
  - Lexicon: “get kiss”
  - Storyline: boldness → guy psyched → he will “play along”
  - Storyline: subtle flirting → “making out”
  - Dichotomy: reality/play, lie/line

- After the party
  - Lexicon: “really spend time,” “quality,” “one-on-one,” “it works”
Theme 4: Female daily passivity and historical passivity

• Being “stuck”
  
  o Lexicon: “stuck,” “held hostage”
  o Storyline: male lies → female impressed → male gets stuck
  o Storyline: female stuck at home → female daydream of males (female try to figure males out)
  o Collocation: “help hostage” incorporated into a playful discourse
  o Collocation: Conservative Mom signified as “stuck” on the same messages

• Quality of relationships
  
  o Lexicon: “talk for hours,” “spend hours together”
  o Storyline: send flirty text → keep his mind on you
  o Storyline: avoid long messages → keep him waiting for more
  o Collocation: decontextualizing talks, no mention of topics of talk
  o Assumption: male passivity as reward
  o Assumption: strength of relationship constructed through the time spent in proximity of the male body

• Male exclusivity as a gift
  
  o Assumption: exclusivity in relationships is a gift from male to female

• Staying in his mind as reward
  
  o Collocation: getting involved in his work only to stay in his mind

• Waiting
  
  o Lexicon: “wait,” “rush”
  o Collocation: Young women asked “not to worry” about making plans in advance when they want to go out with a young man, just to wait for him to call.
  o Collocation: wait till you have the “sex talk” with partner, wait for “love,” wait till you get tested.
• Storyline: inability to stand out in the crowd → waiting for a male who can see the female’s uniqueness and “what make her special” → male sees uniqueness → female “makes the first move”
• Storyline: waiting for male to call → receive call → go out.
• Storyline: talk about sex with partner → wait → know whether partner is just interested in sex or not
• Assumption: making first move constructed as “not waiting”
• Dichotomy: The girl who cannot wait to have sex/ The girl who waits
• Dichotomy: Female who has cosmetic surgery/ female who waits for later

• Joy of passivity
  • Lexicon: “surprise,” “unexpected”
  • Storyline: male notices → male reacts → female “feels pretty”
  • Storyline: female does not deliver what male needs → female objectively constructed as inefficient
  • Storyline: inability to get complements → remind others of what make you special → get complements
  • Storyline: go on a date → wait for male phone call → enjoy not knowing, enjoy that anything can be possible
  • Assumption: female objectively exists through the “objective” judgment of male
  • Assumption: not knowing as joyful

• Meeting “new hot guy”
  • Context: no definition of “new hot guy”
  • Assumption: meeting a new hot guy or being noticed by a new hot guy as an incident of luck
  • Storyline: meet new hot guy → hold on to him → mean girls try to cause problem → “luckily” the guy is clever and does not believe them
Appendix C

Discourse of hedonism

Theme 1: Hedonistic value of products

- Sensation from product
  - Collocation: feeling of being in the salon as an outcome of putting the product
  - Collocation: feeling spring after putting the product
  - Storyline: put product on palms (or fingers) \(\rightarrow\) feel the product on palms or fingers \(\rightarrow\) apply product on face (or skin or hair)

Theme 2: Self gratification

- “feeling great” as reward
  - Storyline: you look great \(\rightarrow\) help others \(\rightarrow\) you will also feel great
  - Storyline: change style \(\rightarrow\) you will feel great
  - Storyline: make first move \(\rightarrow\) you will feel cool

- Giving to self/giving to others
  - Lexicon: “treat yourself”
  - Collocation: give to others what you no longer need

Theme 3: Excitement

- Not feeling time
  - Storyline: go on a diet \(\rightarrow\) distractions from feeling time \(\rightarrow\) “real” results \(\rightarrow\) go back to time
  - Collocation: Distraction from feeling time collocated with inability to reach “real” results
- Escaping stillness
  - Lexicon: “shake up life,” “add heat to life”
Appendix D
Discourse of paternalism

Theme 1: Reality Check

- *Seventeen* as an agent of reality check
  - Lexicon: “Admit it”
  - Collocation: use of imperative to challenge the perspective of the reader: “No!”
  - Dichotomy: what you see/what others see
  - Assumption: *Seventeen* knows why you do it

Theme 2: Irrationality of the female body

- Uncontrolled development of heterosexual attraction
  - Lexicon: “bad boy,” “impossible to ignore,” “it won’t go”
  - Storyline: clicking with the “wrong” boy → admitting it is the wrong boy → attraction goes out of control

- Emotions as barriers, emotions uncontrolled
  - Lexicon: “emotional drama,” “bitchy,” “nasty”
  - Collocation: females find themselves gossiping
  - Storyline: emotional drama → “nasty behaviour” from a friend → ignore it → things go back to normal
  - Storyline: “nasty behaviour” → repression of reaction → explosion
  - Assumption: Conflicts should be avoided
  - Assumption: Emotions should be distinct from decision making
  - Assumption: Conflicts can end by themselves by ignoring them

- Theory of emotions
  - Dichotomy: emotions stay/ emotions go away
  - Dichotomy: boy stays in mind/ mind cleared up
  - Storyline: boy stays in mind → distraction → “take break” from boys
  - Assumption: In order to be able to reflect and focus, young women need to take a break from boys
Appendix E

Discourse of vulnerability

Theme 1: Protection

- Protection from HIV/STD
  - Lexicon: “heat of moment,”
  - Lexicon: “romantic,” “unromantic”
  - Collocation: sexual protection as a personal responsibility
  - Storyline: «hooking up» → inefficiency in using condom → getting HIV
  - Storyline: preparing what to say, preparing how to use condom → talk with partner → sexual intercourse
  - Storyline: failure to talk to partner → getting HIV
  - Dichotomy: knowledge by looking/knowledge by going beyond looks
  - Assumption: Being female as a risk factor for catching HIV
  - Assumption: “checking body” constructed as checking whether body is protected or not, “checking heart” constructed as checking emotional readiness. Body as the site of vulnerability.

- Protection from loosing product’s effect
  - Lexicon: “keep in place,” “secure”
  - Storyline: using product → securing the product’s effect through other products → protect product’s effect from the possibility of fading

- Protection from “creepy”/unwanted guys
  - Lexicon: “creep,” “dud,” “cod”
  - Lexicon: “your girls”
  - Storyline: invasion → protection
  - Assumption: “dud” is working class

Theme 2: Fear

- “Being on the verge”
  - Lexicon: “smoothing into”
  - Assumption: being too bold is dangerous

- Fear of being noticed
  - Collocation: Collocation of being worried with being noticed
  - Storyline: realization of having eating disorders → fear that others would notice
• Fear of knowing
  o Context: “scary,” “freak out”
  o Storyline: thought I had breast cancer → fear of going to doctor → used Seventeen’s analogy → discovered I do not have breast cancer → thank you Seventeen

• Change as scary
  o Collocation: males respond to change in their lives by asserting independence, females respond to big changes by fear
  o Assumption: unexpected move to a new social category (mother) is negative and scary

• Age
  o Assumption: looking older is looking “uglier”
  o Assumption: looking older is the punishment for smoking
  o Collocation: “Grandma” signified as having vulgar dance moves

• “creepy” categories and spaces
  o Collocation: dud has his mom’s car, reference to working class
  o Collocation: dud has vulgar dance moves “like grandma”
  o Collocation: co-worker in a low paying job constructed as “creepy” when he flirts with younger female body
  o Collocation: The guy you meet online as source of danger
  o Assumptions: “creepy older dud” are “creepy” not because they sexualize the female body but because they sexualize female bodies who are much younger

Theme 3: Body in disorder with the social and the natural

• Pushing self, pushing others
  o Storyline: on the verge of taking pills → wakeup call → decision to push self more → feeling great
  o Assumption: Comfort is negative
  o Assumption: Pushing self is a need
  o Assumption: Humiliation is a reminder
  o Dichotomy: Males insist/ females push

• Nature as danger
  o Lexicon: do not let, prevent
  o Collocation: Sun as danger
Collocation: breasts as cause of worry and discomfort

Theme 4: Loneliness and competitiveness

- Competitiveness
  - Lexicon: “stand out,” “steal”
  - Dichotomy: you are noticed/your friends are noticed

Theme 5: Irrationality of the female body

*See Appendix D.*
Appendix F

Discourse of altruism

Theme 1: Help and giving

- Colonialism
  - Assumption: Special needs assumed they have the same needs as “normal” female bodies.
  - Assumption: Female bodies who are black assumed to have same needs as female bodies who are white
  - Assumption: Female bodies with pathologies assumed to have the need of living longer as a priority (not living better or allowed to live in a way that facilitates their productivity and integrity)

- Helping “normal” bodies
  - Storyline: getting in pathology → help other people stay away from pathology

Theme 2: Environmentalism

- “Saving the planet”
  - Lexicon: “saving the planet,” “making difference”
  - Context: environmentalism and helping pathological bodies as the only types of helping in North America
  - Context: helping in third world countries is helping homeless people.
  - Context: environmentalism hides homelessness in North America

- Environmentalism as fun
  - Storyline: bored → looking for something new to do → grab girls and clean neighbourhood → feel good
Appendix G

Discourse of collaboration

Theme 1: Group as a source of help

- “We are in it together”
  - Lexicon: “we all,” “together,” “community”
  - Storyline: working towards self acceptance → “dark” moments → turn to the collective for support
  - Collocation: Achievement of individual as “motivation” for others in the group
- Hiding in the collective
  - Dichotomy: standing out from crowd to get attention/hiding in the crowd to avoid attention
  - Storyline: pathology → shame → happy to know that “I’m not the only one”
  - Storyline: threat from dud → using girls to build a “human wall” → girls as “defence system”
  - Storyline: overweight → depression → avoiding attention

Theme 2: Homogenity across race and ability

- African Americans
  - Storyline: collective practice of feminine rituals → “tradition” of racial segregation intervenes → feminine rituals carried in isolation
  - Assumption: Racism as a barrier to collectively practice gender
- Special Needs
  - Assumption: Special needs need to practice traditional feminine rituals
  - Assumption: helping special needs is achieved by facilitating their practice of feminine rituals
Appendix H

Discourse of femininity

Theme 1: Feminine consumption of beauty products

- Differentiation from overconsumption
  - Storyline: using less product → look prettier

- Gentleness in using product
  - Lexicon: “gently,” “lightly”

- Effect of product
  - Collocation: use of scientific term to explain content of product
  - Storyline: use product → life changes

- Naturalized consumption
  - Assumption: Going to Starbucks as daily ritual
  - Assumption: The female body needs beauty products
  - Assumption: female and male body presupposed to own iPods

Theme 2: Playfulness

- Playful challenging
  - Storyline: meeting athlete → challenging him in athletic activity → he will be impressed
  - Storyline: tease cute guy in party → give him excuse to “playfully” defend himself
  - Storyline: work out → become strong → playfully challenge males
  - Collocation: strength used in playful discourse

- Sneakiness
  - Lexicon: “sneaky,” “silly,” “playful”

Theme 5: The homogenous female body

- Milestones: sex, the kiss
  - Collocation: preparation for sex as getting ready for how feelings would change after sex
  - Collocation: readiness for kiss decontextualized
- Dichotomy: ready for kiss/ not ready for kiss

- Subtleness “smoothing into” boldness
  - Lexicon: “balance,” “smooth into”
  - Storyline: subtle start → smoothing into boldness → boldness
  - Storyline: subtle start → acceleration into boldness → explosion

- Obsession
  - Lexicon: “obsessed,”
  - Collocation: “you know I’m obsessed with,” identification as member of a group
  - Collocation: celebrating obsession with food, admitting obsession with gossip
  - Collocation: eating as a metaphor for gossiping
  - Collocation: eating as a metaphor for destroying
  - Assumption: eating in front of person as a sign of comfort towards that person

- Erasing class
  - Assumption: being a female body as the only risk factor for being sexually abused
  - Assumption: helping others through consumption is easier for the female body (“Seventeen made it easier for you”)

- Exclusion of Pathology
  - Assumption: in “all you need to know about your breasts,” “you” excludes female bodies who might have breasts cancer, they are asked to go to the doctor, their breasts are a mystery before reading the article and after reading the article
  - Dichotomy: Seventeen provides requested knowledge (vegetarians)/Seventeen refers them to a website or a doctor (young women with bulimia, young woman who might have breast cancer)

- Recapitulating mom’s history
  - Assumption: Mom is the best source of sex advice for you (no matter how the quality of the relationship is)
  - Assumption: Positive effect of the sex talk with Mom is because she is “Mom” not because she is a significant adult who has been sexually active
Appendix I

Discourse of individualism

Theme 1: Identification by differentiation

- Differentiation from promiscuous girls
  - Lexicon: “desperate,” “trying too hard,” “rush”
  - Dichotomy: girl who rushes in relationship/girl who does not rush in a relationship
  - Assumption: revealing skin as a sign of desperation

- Differentiation from non feminine girls
  - Lexicon: “keep it simple,” “halloweenish,” “crunchy”
  - Collocation: non feminine females engage in uninformed, not aesthetic beauty routines

Theme 2: Loneliness and competitiveness

See Appendix E.

Theme 3: Body in disorder with nature and with the social world

See Appendix E.
Appendix J

Discourse of pathology

Theme 1: Pathology as discontinuous from “normal”

- Modes of being of pathology
  - Lexicon: “pain,” “depression,” “unhealthy,” “unhappy.”
  - Collocation: “normal” bodies helped by “normal” bodies and by pathologized bodies, pathologized bodies helped only by “normal” bodies.
  - Collocation: Pathologized bodies help by revealing their stories.
  - Storyline: getting into pathology → help other girls stay safe from pathology.
  - Dichotomy: strong, happy, healthy, wearing jeans/overweight, unhealthy, unhappy, cannot find her size.
  - Dichotomy: gorgeous and poised/depressed and overweight.
  - Dichotomy: pathologized, seeing counsellor/recovered, “not seeing counsellor anymore.”
  - Dichotomy: normal, daily beauty routines/pathology, monthly visits to doctor, monthly blood transfusions.

- Split discourses
  - Lexicon: “body blues,” “strange moments,” “step back.”
  - Lexicon: “anorexic voice,” “binge,” “stolen from,” “struggle to feel normal.”
  - Collocation: pathologized bodies controlled by anorexic voice and low self esteem.
  - Dichotomy: normal life interrupted by moments of pathology/pathological life taken over by pathology.
  - Dichotomy: eating healthy as “excuse” for pathology/eating healthy as a positive practice.
  - Collocation: “normal” female bodies “playfully” stealing, pathologized female bodies “stolen from.”

- Pathological collectivism, collectivism of “normal” girls
  - Dichotomy: destructive pathological collectivism, “pro-Ana” groups/constructive collectivism of “normal” girls.

Theme 2: Pathologized body as a disruption of normalized events

- Anorexic body causing a moment of discomfort in Christmas party
  - Storyline: opening gifts → young woman does not fit in 00 jeans → everyone stares → young woman runs to her room → mom follows her → mom tells her she had an eating disorder.
• Overweight body that is on diet cannot celebrate the obsession with apple pies during holidays
  o Storyline: holiday times → female bodies celebrating “obsession” with apple pies → Overweight body on diet → tension → overweight body gives in → binge
  o Storyline: Holiday times → female bodies celebrating “obsession” with apple pies → tension with overweight body → overweight body pressures to eat “just one” → other girls perceived as “jealous”

• Female body that has been sexually assaulted cannot fit in the playful flirting of the normalized party
Appendix K

Discourse of Feminism

Theme 1: Assertiveness

- Challenging authority
  - Storyline: met someone online → mom against it → challenge mom → mom met him and saw how good he is
  - Storyline: noticed a lump in my breast → doctors said I am too young to have breast cancer → I insisted and asked for a second opinion → they found that I have breast cancer

- Independence from Guys
  - Dichotomy: love self first/love him first
  - Dichotomy: what you want/what he wants

- Confidence and strength
  - Collocation: no one notices but I know I am strong

- Non conformity
  - Lexicon: “personal values,” “changing for them,” “proud,” “unique”
  - Storyline: changing for them → not feeling good → decided to accept myself
  - Dichotomy: what you want/what others want

Theme 2: Anti objectification

- The guy who just wants sex
  - Lexicon: “pressure”
  - Collocation: pressure decontextualized and is not clearly described
  - Storyline: male usually inattentive → female body “unusually” brings a serious topic → if male body is still not attentive then he is just into sex
  - Storyline: male body asks for sex → female body waits → male body leaves female body → male body signified as just interested in sex

- Appreciating personality of guy
  - Lexicon: “list of criteria,” “how he treats you”
  - Storyline: questioning personality of a guy who looks “hot” → going to party → realize it is time to date around
  - Storyline: long list of criteria → no guys interested → making list about how he treats you → attract guys
  - Dichotomy: long list/list about how he treats you
  - Assumption: assumed problem is in length of list not the content of list