

UNAPOLOGETICALLY ELLE:
HOW PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN *ELLE* CONTRIBUTES TO THE MAGAZINE'S
THIRD-WAVE FEMINIST IDENTITY

By Elizabeth Castle

Professor Jennifer Rowe, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Women's magazines have traditionally used a combination of audience, advertising, and editorial to create an individual identity that distinguishes their publications from other women's magazines. That identity, or brand, is supposed to represent the magazine's values and its mission. Yet, despite the differences among women's publications, previous literature has shown them to promote unrealistic portrayals of women, both in terms of their achievements and their physical appearance. This study looked at how *Elle* magazine used one of its brand components, its editorial voice, to frame women's personal experiences in terms of third-wave feminist themes. It looked at how language in editor's letters, personal essays, and profiles used themes of independence, assertiveness, personal choice, and diversity as well as acknowledgement of the existence of a patriarchal society to create the feminist ideology of an *Elle* woman. The researcher discovered that magazine's editorial content depicted feminist values in degrees of third-wave feminism and postfeminism: editor's letters presented an ideal for women's lives, profiles tested and sometimes failed to achieve that ideal, and essays criticized the patriarchal society that obstructs those achievements.