

TRUE BEAUTY: A FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS ON INTERPRETING MESSAGES
OF OUTWARD APPEARANCE IN PRINT TEEN MAGAZINES

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to every girl who, like myself, picked up a copy of *Seventeen* at age 9 and learned how to do their makeup from the pages of the magazine. This study is also dedicated to my parents, who, without their confidence, support and encouragement, I would have never finished this study; to my sister Dani Velarde, who allowed me access to use her friend group to complete this study; to Sarah Rosselet and Abbie Wenthe, who were also crazy enough to tackle something as challenging as a thesis right along with me and were my support system through every step of the process; to Erika Trombley and Abby Kass, who listened to me say “When will I ever be done with this?” approximately 500 times and who provided me with the emotional support to complete this study during its final months; and to Diet Dr. Pepper, the *Hamilton* soundtrack and the coffee shops of Bushwick, Brooklyn, without which, I would have never gotten this far.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how teenagers interpret, utilize and make sense of messages of beauty and outward appearance in print teen magazines in a focus group setting. This analysis is completed through the lens of social construction of reality, which helps explain how teenagers take the editorial messages of beauty in print teen magazines and negotiate those messages among their peers and society to create their idea of beauty. The research indicates that teenagers use beauty content in print teen magazines as a way to shape, define and construct their conceptual idea of beauty. At the same time, they reject teen magazines' usefulness as a guide for practical beauty tips, such as make-up advice. The findings illustrate that teenagers desire realistic, attainable and relatable portrayals of beauty that help validate their confidence and personal idea of beauty. Yet, they will not adopt or change any beauty practices if the practices make them feel uncomfortable. Overall, this study provides an understanding of how teenagers discuss concepts of beauty among their peers and how they shape their personal idea of beauty from the messages they read in print teen magazines.

Introduction

As girls enter adolescence, they are faced with images, ideals and messages about what true beauty is from their friends, family, peers and especially mass media (Heilman, 1998). Print teen magazines are one of the few forms of mass media aimed specifically for an audience of female teenagers; therefore, they act as a guidebook for how girls should act, look and be perceived as a proper teenager by her peers (Finders, 1996; Ward & Harrison, 2005).

Overwhelmingly, *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*, the two most popular teen magazines by readership and circulation, devote more than half of their content to outward appearance, specifically fashion and beauty, according to their respective media kits (*Seventeen*, 2015; *Teen Vogue*, 2015). Because editors of teen magazines choose to set an agenda of how teenage girls should appear to the outside world, teenagers base their appearance on what they read and see in magazines by changing their habits and adapting to the feminine beauty ideal presented in the editorial pages of teen magazines (Duke & Kreschel, 1998; Kaplan & Cole, 2003; McRobbie, 2012).

However, there appears to be a difference between how ideals of beauty are displayed and written about in teen magazines and how many girls actually believe they are beautiful. This is evident in the research conducted by Dove's Real Campaign for Beauty, which determined that three-quarters of girls feel "tremendous pressure to be beautiful" and a mere four percent of girls globally would label themselves as beautiful (Dove, 2013). Often, teen magazines depict abnormally thin models, so they are portraying an unrealistic and mostly unattainable beauty ideal for teenage girls to strive

for (Heilman, 1998). Additionally, because beauty is an abstract idea, it is socially constructed among peers, so teenagers look to “outside authorities” such as “real boys” their age to determine what they accept as beauty and adapt their looks to fit those ideals (Duke & Kreschel, 1998, p. 57; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Finally, when teenagers are faced with editorial content about how to improve their bodies, they engage in unhealthy dieting habits and experience psychological distress and low self-esteem (Utter, Neumark-Sztainer, Wall & Story, 2003; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Harrison & Hefner, 2006).

This study explores how the readers of print teen magazines interpret messages of beauty and outward appearance presented in the editorial content through focus groups with teenage girls. The social construction of reality explains how teenagers create an idea of beauty from the pages of teen magazines and how they discuss the editorial beauty content with their peers.

The following literature review examines the prevalent themes and findings in existing research done on teen magazines, which include looking at teen magazines as a socialization tool that aids girls into womanhood, discovering how teen magazines create problems with how girls view their bodies and informing teenagers about sexuality. It will also expand on the theoretical framework for the proposed research by looking back at the origins of the social construction of reality and exploring how the theory has been applied by researchers who have studied teen magazines.

Review of the Literature

This literature review will first examine the relevant literature associated with the social construction of reality and how it can inform the proposed research on teen magazines. After the theoretical framework has been set up, the researcher will review three main areas of research on teen magazines that do not use the aforementioned theory but do help the researcher understand what has previously been discovered and how those discoveries have shaped the understanding of teen magazines and their audiences as a whole. This will provide a well-rounded and informed background for the researcher and help guide the researcher in the proposed research.

Social Construction of Reality

The social construction of reality was first developed by Berger and Luckmann in 1966 as a way to describe how humans interpret abstract ideas among their social groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). People are constantly interacting in social settings, so people's actions and habits will adapt to those around them in order to assimilate in the social group they are in. These new actions and habits then become reciprocal among the majority of the members of the social group, and over time, the new roles and ideas of the social group become accepted as truth and are engrained into society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Because true beauty is an abstract concept that is decided by society and varies among cultures, teenagers must look to their social system to negotiate what beauty is. The visual nature of magazines allows them to present many representations of what the perfect, beautiful teenager is and therefore acts as a socialization tool as girls read teen

magazines for advice, information and guidance in their adolescence (Finders, 1996). Therefore, the female teenage readers of these magazines read the content, look at the images of models and discuss with their peers to negotiate a socially constructed idea of beauty and therefore manipulate their roles among their social setting to match that idea of beauty.

Studies done on teen magazines have used the social construction of reality to explain how girls determine what the feminine ideal is as they move towards womanhood. Duke and Kreschel's study about how girls understand femininity from messages in teen magazines revealed that readers of the most popular teen magazines at the time negotiated standards of femininity by paying attention to advice from third-party authorities in the editorial content, such as quotes from boys their age about what they want in a girl (Duke & Kreschel, 1998). Because femininity is an abstract concept (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), teenage girls are looking to members of their social group to decide what socially acceptable femininity is. In this case, teenage girls are adhering to boys' preferences of a girl's femininity because these girls wish to impress and obtain the approval of these boys (Duke & Kreschel, 1998). This shows how teenagers construct a reality of the perfect feminine girl by interacting among their peers and changing their roles, habits and appearance to match the socially accepted feminine ideal.

Finders' 1996 landmark study is another prime example of how interpreting messages in teen magazines is achieved through the social construction of reality. The study examines how girls read teen magazines to construct a sense of self and define their emerging social roles as they enter junior high school. Through interviews with female teenagers who were in their first year of junior high school, the researcher found that the

girls would read teen magazines together as part of social events, such as sleepovers, and would discuss how the models in the magazines were the epitome of beauty.

Additionally, the girls interviewed said that teenagers who went to their junior high school who subscribed and regularly read teen magazines were looked at as superior among their peers (Finders, 1996). By debating among their friends the messages of beauty in teen magazines, these girls are actively engaging in the social construction of beauty. Also, print teen magazines are seen as a crucial puzzle piece in the negotiation of beauty among teenagers because girls who are known to read the magazines are automatically seen by their peers as more well-adjusted and closer to the ideal teenage girl. This study is using the social construction of reality to explain that by not being a reader of teen magazines, teenage girls would be incapable of negotiating feminine ideals of beauty and would not be able to communicate to their peers that they are successfully adhering to beauty standards (Finders, 1996).

Editors' Role in Shaping Content in Teen Magazine Research

The social construction of reality provides the theoretical framework for how female teenagers use the messages in teen magazines to determine ideals of beauty. However, it is important to review the large amount of literature that shows how editors of teen magazines can influence how teenagers see and think of themselves through cover lines, dominant images and the kind of content they cover. The media kit of *Seventeen* reveals that 61 percent of editorial content is devoted to fashion and beauty, and *Teen Vogue's* media kit shows 74 percent of editorial content devoted to fashion and beauty. This means that stories and pictures regarding outward appearance appear the most in the pages of teen magazines (*Seventeen*, 2015; *Teen Vogue*, 2015). It can be deduced that

editors of teen magazines are placing the most importance on outward appearance because of the abundance of content devoted to it in the editorial pages.

Research on teen magazines has supported this deduction and shed light on how specifically editors of teen magazines are influencing how teenage girls should look. In a revealing study that examines reader letters from the embarrassing story section in teen magazines, the research found that more than half of the articles analyzed dealt with embarrassment from not meeting a social expectation, such as tripping in front of a boy or having food in your teeth after lunch; thus, the editors, who were picking these letters for publication, were “promoting an agenda of social control” (Pattee, 2004, p. 14). This finding was beneficial because it explored how one specific area of content in a teen magazine can work as a socialization tool and influence how teenagers behave, how they view themselves and other teens, and what they perceive as normal teenage behavior. By devoting the majority of the content in that section to moments when teenage girls deviated from society’s expectations, these editors are communicating to their readers that the most important topic teenagers must focus on is to be accepted by their peers, and teenage girls must closely monitor how they act in social settings to achieve this (Pattee, 2004).

The most relevant to the proposed research regarding beauty messages in print teen magazines is the study Labre and Walsh-Childers (2003) conducted about how websites of teen magazines depict messages about beauty. The researchers started out without any guiding theoretical framework and conducted a textual analysis on all content from websites of top teen magazines at the time, such as *CosmoGIRL!* and *Teen People*. However, after coding the articles and finding themes such as “beauty is a

requirement” and the websites “can help you find the right products” to achieve beauty (p. 379), the researchers discovered that the editors of the magazines were urging their readers to pay attention to their beauty (Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003). This study provides a helpful guide to the proposed study’s main area of interest, but due to the fact that most of the magazines examined are now shuttered, it is extremely necessary to conduct research on current popular magazines and see if anything has changed or if any new findings become apparent. Also, because print teen magazines are used to help construct the reality of beauty among teenagers’ peers (Finders, 1996), this research builds upon what Labre and Walsh-Childers (2003) have discovered and incorporate how the social construction of reality plays into how messages of beauty in print magazines are interpreted by teenage girls.

Understanding the social construction of reality can be beneficial when analyzing research about editors’ messages in teen magazines, and this becomes relevant in Keller’s 2011 study that looks at how editors are depicting messages of feminism. After interviewing four teen magazine editors, Keller discovered that though the editors are attempting to insert a feminist tone into their magazines by hinting that their readers are in charge of their self-worth, they ignore how messages of feminism interact among society and do not present their readers with the necessary tools to help them become equal to men (Keller, 2011). By failing to paint their editorial coverage in a feminist tone, the editors studied in this research are playing into the social construction of reality; they disregard that feminism is a socially constructed concept, and they do not pay attention to the societal meanings of feminism. Through these editors’ failures, it is evident how

important it is to understand how concepts are socially constructed before any editorial message is formed.

The remaining literature on teen magazines mostly falls in three main groups of findings: messages of femininity can influence teenagers' self worth as they socialize into women, teen magazines focus a large amount of content on the body, and teen magazines effectively inform and educate its readers on sexual health.

Socialization, Femininity and Adulthood in Teen Magazines

Most of the research done on teen magazines looks at how the content of the magazines plays into the socialization of young female adults. Researchers have taken many different approaches to how socialization is achieved through the reading of teen magazines, such as how girls of different races are influenced by teen magazines and how feminism plays into how editors of magazines choose their content. But no matter the context in which the researchers conduct their study, this area of research tells us that teen magazines act as a socialization tool to take girls from adolescence to a feminine adult.

Previous literature uses the social construction of reality to explain messages of femininity (Finders, 1996; Duke & Kreschel, 1998), but Heilman (1998) and Kaplan and Cole (2003) are two landmark studies that use a more grounded theory approach to their exploration of messages on femininity in teen magazines. Heilman's 1998 study examines many social influences on how girls create an identity through adolescence, but her section on how mass media can have an influence on the socialization of girls as they transition towards adulthood is relevant and helps inform the topic of proposed research. She conducted a content analysis on advertisements from major teen magazines and

found that the majority of the ads featured unrealistically slender models and depicted a feminine ideal that was extremely difficult for teenagers to strive for (Heilman, 1998). Although the focus of the study is not entirely on mass media, this study informs the researcher's understanding of how advertisements place messages about beauty in a social context of teens wanting to achieve a perfect self-identity (Heilman, 1998). Similarly, Kaplan and Cole (2003) used teen magazines as a context to examine how teenagers view their own femininity as they are socializing through adolescence. By conducting focus groups of teenagers of varying races, the researchers discovered that teenagers, regardless of their race, would associate their self worth with how much they could match messages of "emphasized femininity" (Kaplan & Cole, 2003, p. 141). Both studies reveal that femininity is portrayed in teen magazines in a way that is unattainable for teenagers as they move through adolescence, which causes teenagers to interpret these messages by feeling inadequate and experiencing a diminished sense of worth. Because of the practical psychological and sociological consequences as teenagers move toward adulthood and into the workforce, teen magazines must look at how they are presenting what an ideal feminine teenager looks like and how she should act. Due to the importance of this, the proposed research will also tap into how interpretations of beauty in teen magazines can impact self worth.

Studies based on feminist theory can also reveal the pitfalls teen magazines make when trying to socialize adolescents into feminine young adults. In Peirce's 1990 content analysis of fiction articles in *Seventeen*, she found that the majority of the socialization messages in the stories were traditional and did not present feminist viewpoints. Additionally, she explained that the roles girls had in the stories perpetuated the

stereotype that women rely on men (Peirce, 1990). As discussed earlier, Keller (2011) found comparable results with her study that revealed how editors are ignoring how messages of feminism play into how society as a whole depicts feminism and are therefore not successful in telling teen girls how to bridge the inequality gap. Instead of just viewing teen magazines through a feminist lens, both Peirce and Keller actively apply the ideals of feminism in their analyses to discover if feminism is helping these young girls socialize into young adults. They both find that for the most part, teen magazines are failing in their attempts to challenge gender norms and are not giving their readers the correct tools to socialize into independent adults. Therefore, these studies are valuable in bringing into focus the advancements teen magazines must make in order to move away from messages that push an idealized, feminine sense of self and instead move toward content that celebrates teenage girls' advancement toward adulthood, regardless of how feminine or womanly they are along the way.

Massoni's study about how *Seventeen* led young girls toward career choices provides another perspective on how certain content areas of teen magazines can play into the socialization of young girls as they head toward adulthood. By looking at four issues of *Seventeen* and examining stories about future career choices, the study found that "controlling images" (Massoni, 2004, p. 47) presented in *Seventeen* sent messages to its readers that men are the dominant and most powerful gender in the workplace and that entertainment and fashion modeling are the most feasible and desirable option for young girls' future careers (Massoni, 2004). This establishes the idea that images can have an impact on how teenagers view themselves in the future. Furthermore, this study adheres to the theory of the social construction of reality because teenagers do not have the ability

to foresee exactly what they will be or look like in the future, so they turn to the images and content in teen magazines to perceive what they believe is a realistic career choice for themselves (Massoni, 2004). Although the study did not view its findings through the lens of agenda setting, it can be argued that *Seventeen* is setting an agenda toward maintaining beauty as they socialize into adulthood because the magazine is promoting careers based on outward appearances as the most realistic career option for teenagers. This study about career choices adds to the overall understanding of how magazines can set an agenda for teenagers to follow and how these teenagers construct a reality about the prescribed agenda, and the researcher would like to extend this understanding and apply the agenda-setting and social construction of reality theories to the portrayals of beauty in teen magazines.

Additionally, researchers have used race and culture as a context to examine how teenagers interpret messages about femininity in teen magazines. Duke's study on how African-American girls interpret the "feminine ideal" (Duke, 2000, p. 367) in teen magazines in comparison to Caucasian girls is extremely insightful and illuminates how a teenager's race can play into how she understands the messages teen magazines are sending (Duke, 2000). Through interviews with white and African-American teenage girls ages 12-18, Duke discovered that most African-American girls in the study did not care about achieving the beauty standards created by teen magazines because they believed the beauty information was aimed toward white teens, while the white girls interviewed didn't recognize any bias presented in the magazines (Duke, 2000).

Lastly, Maynard and Taylor's study analyzing how teenage girls are portrayed as "girlish" (p. 39) in advertisements in both the Japanese and U.S. versions of *Seventeen*

provides an international perspective to the mostly domestic understanding of how teen magazines define femininity (Maynard and Taylor, 1999). Through a comparative content analysis, it was found that advertisements in the Japanese version of *Seventeen* contained more prominent messages of femininity, such as demure clothing, heavy makeup and coy poses, than the U.S. version of *Seventeen* (Maynard and Taylor, 1999). Even though femininity is a socially constructed idea, this study brings to light the understanding that teen magazines have the power to influence how their readers view their femininity, even in different cultural contexts.

Regardless of whether editors of teen magazines realize the long-term socialization effects of the messages about femininity present in the content, the existing literature has revealed that the readers of teen magazines internalize those messages about femininity and apply them as they negotiate their understanding of womanhood as they grow older. Overall, it is clear that teen magazines help teenage girls socialize out of adolescence and into the next stage of their life, and overwhelmingly, these teen magazines are communicating to their readers that that next stage must be as feminine as possible. Beauty and outward appearance are major contributors to how women communicate their femininity, but very few studies have currently been done on beauty content specifically as it appears in teen magazines. Therefore, the research, which will focus on the fashion and beauty section of teen magazines and the importance readers place on the messages in those sections, will add more in-depth knowledge to the area of research that looks at how messages in teen magazines play into the feminine ideal as their readers move toward adulthood. By understanding how teenagers' view of femininity is shaped by these magazines, editors will be better able to understand the true

impact their content has on their readers, thus potentially shaping future content. Because it has been found teen magazines create unattainable levels of beauty (Heilman, 1998), this research will go a step further to how teenage girls interact with their peers and negotiate self-worth based on images in print teen magazines.

Teen Magazines and Body-Related Content

Due to the visual nature of print teen magazines, the content tends to focus on how the body looks. Therefore, a group of studies on teen magazines has looked at how the physical body is portrayed on the pages of the magazines and what kind of potential problems or effects this might lead to for readers.

Body-related content in teen magazines has been found to have an influence on the self-worth of teen readers. Ballentine and Ogle (2005) displayed how teen magazines can both positively and negatively impact body image at the same time. Through a textual analysis of over 200 articles in *Seventeen* that dealt with “issues of body surface, shape, size or weight as well as body regimens” (p. 287), the researchers identified two themes: half of the content portrayed unrealistic body ideals, and the other half encouraged readers to ignore society’s expectation to have a perfect body and provided tips on how to focus on health rather than appearance (Ballentine & Ogle, 2005). This interesting dynamic between the two messages regarding the body show that editors of teen magazines have a heightened responsibility in influencing how girls view their bodies and should be careful in presenting conflicting messages to their readers to avoid potential body-image issues. The proposed research would build upon this conflicting discovery by using the lens of beauty to see if the messages about beauty have negative,

positive, neutral or any combination of the three influences on the self worth and body images of readers of teen magazines.

Other studies have uncovered strictly negative relationships between body-related content in teen magazines and self worth. Health research that looks at teen magazines has led to a deeper, scientifically based understanding of how the magazines portray the body. Chow (2004) took a health-oriented lens to her research and conducted focus groups to determine how adolescents understand health from messages about the body in teen magazines. The focus group participants revealed that they look to the content of teen magazines to determine an image of physical perfection, and in order for them to feel healthy, they must change their bodies to match that idealized body image (Chow, 2004). Another health-oriented study found negative associations with body-related content in teen magazines through a survey of teens (Utter et al., 2003). By asking questions about content that relates to dieting and weight loss, the researchers discovered that readers of teen magazines would often participate in unhealthy eating habits and feel negative about their bodies after reading those articles (Utter et al., 2003). In both Chow (2004) and Utter et al. (2003), it is revealed that teen magazines can have physiological and psychological effects on how teenagers view their bodies that could lead to damaging habits as these teenagers head towards adulthood. As mentioned above, the proposed research will look at beauty content instead of body-related content, but because both beauty- and body-related content deal with outward appearance, the proposed research would build upon the existing research and see if these negative consequences still exist even without a health-oriented lens of research.

However, a handful of studies have stressed that there is no correlation between body-related content and negative body image. Ogle and Thornburg (2003) is a prime example of this and examined how the teenage body is portrayed in the online teen magazine *Girl Zone*. Through a theme analysis of articles, the researchers uncovered an encouraging, positive, proactive tone associated with content about the body, which helped teenage girls “adopt a socially responsible approach to the body” (Ogle & Thornburg, 2003, p. 143). This article uses an online magazine that is not well-known or widely used today, so *Girl Zone* could be an outlier when considering forms of U.S. teen magazines. Similarly, a study that asked eight adolescent girls to reflect, discuss and categorize images from teen magazines also found positive and dynamic results regarding body portrayals (Oliver, 2001). The girls used images from teen magazines to facilitate discussion not only about the body, but also topics such as racism, teen pregnancy, consumerism and gender stereotyping (Oliver, 2001). Even though the topics discussed aren’t positive in nature, the fact that teenagers are using images of the body to have thought-provoking discussions about topics that can have serious effects on them at their age is a positive effect of body portrayals in teen magazines. Mostly negative associations with body image have been identified in research about teen magazines, but the proposed research would have the opportunity to discover if there is some truth in this positive and helpful consequence of body-related content by seeing if beauty content could potentially empower girls to be in charge of outward appearance and embrace their beauty. This is worth exploring through the eyes of actual readers of teen magazines, which is a goal that the researcher hopes to explore.

Overall, the existing research has found both positive and negative connotations associated with body-related content in teen magazines. However, the negative connotations tend to lead to more lasting and damaging effects for readers of teen magazines, which is the most concerning finding in this area of research. Viewed with the lens of the social construction of reality, this group of findings shows that body ideals are constructed through the messages of teen magazines and among their peers, which is very similar to how messages of beauty are socially constructed for readers of teen magazines.

Sexuality in Teen Magazines

Research in the health-related sphere was previously discussed in relation to the body, but there is another collection of health-related literature on teen magazines regarding how they inform teenagers about sexual health and sexuality. In addition to health-related articles, literature existed that takes a sociological and cultural approach on examining teen magazines and how they portray sex and sexuality. Related to the social construction of reality, this group of findings stresses that teen magazines are constructing teenagers' reality regarding sex and sexuality.

Starting four decades ago, the majority of public schools shifted sexual education classes to abstinence-only education (Wegmann, 2013), so researchers have investigated how effectively teen magazines can educate teenagers about safe-sex practices in the absence of proper sex education in schools. In Carpenter's analysis about how teenage girls' sexuality is portrayed in editorial content in *Seventeen*, it was uncovered that scripts on sexuality in the magazine empower the readers to see themselves as "sexual agents," (p. 162) thus leading them to practice safe sex and to defy gender norms by taking control of their sexuality (Carpenter, 1998). Similarly, Wegmann (2013) sought to examine the

validity of statements about sexual messages in *Seventeen* and found the majority of the sexual messages were accurate, thus providing teenage girls with a reliable source of information about sex. These studies are helpful because they look at teen magazines as a source of education rather than just editorial content. Teen magazines clearly have the power to act as an authority on health, so it can be implied that they have the authority to inform teenagers in all aspects of their lives, including beauty.

Additionally, there is a body of literature about teen magazines that compares how sex and sexuality is portrayed in American teen magazines to how it is portrayed in international magazines. Joshi, Peter and Valkenburg (2014) conducted a series of cross-cultural studies comparing U.S. and Dutch teen girl magazines. In one study, the researchers looked at how hookup culture is portrayed in both cultures' teen magazines and found that hookup culture was mentioned more frequently in U.S. magazines due to the amount of stories about "casual sex and lack of love," (p. 291) while Dutch magazines present hookup culture less visibly because of their concentration on "committed sex and love-related articles" (Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2014, p. 291). In a similar study conducted the same year, the researchers compared content about virginity loss and pregnancy in U.S. and Dutch teen magazines and uncovered that pregnancy was given a negative tone in U.S. and Dutch teen magazines, but virginity loss was looked at more positively in Dutch teen magazines than U.S. teen magazines (Joshi et al., 2014). This pair of studies shed some light on how popular topics in teen magazines are portrayed in international versions of magazines. Also, these two studies were some of the most recent regarding teen magazines, which is evident in the analysis of hookup culture, a term that has grown in popularity in recent years (Joshi et al., 2014). They

analyze the content with a modern lens, paying attention to how teens today read and consume magazines, which is helpful when any new research on teen magazines is conducted.

Lastly, sex and sexuality in teen magazines has also been explored in an entirely international context. Jackson (2005) conducted a study to discover how messages about sexual desire are handled and constructed in an Australian teen magazine's advice section. In the study, the data revealed that readers would often express their wishes to engage in sexual desires, but the magazine would in turn suppress or discourage the sexual desires (Jackson, 2005). Even though this study deals with sexuality, its findings indicate another form of social control that the teen magazines apply to their readers. Instead of just being informative, the magazine is actively pushing their agenda of control of sexual desires onto their readers.

To conclude, sex and sexuality is a main topic of research regarding teen magazines, and one role of teen magazines is to inform its readers about sex. Teen magazines in other countries also include topics on sexuality, and they sometimes cause their readers to exhibit self-control regarding sexual desires. Even though none of the existing research about sexuality in teen magazines uses social construction of reality as a theoretical framework, the findings clearly show a connection between the messages about sex and how the readers of teen magazines socially construct their idea of sexuality from them. In conjunction with all of the previously mentioned research, this area of research exhibits another context besides beauty where teen magazines are an influential and important factor in teenagers' social construction of reality.

Literature Summary and Research Questions

The literature presents a strong argument that true beauty is socially constructed and can be shaped through beauty messages presented in teen magazines, which could potentially lead to negative consequences on a teenage girl's self worth. Because teen girls use magazines as a socialization tool to create their ideal of true beauty, they are especially tuned into the beauty messages that editors of magazines present. Therefore, the research on how teenagers interpret messages of beauty in teen magazines is extremely relevant because of the lack of research that identifies how the social construction of reality plays into how teenagers interpret messages of beauty from print teen magazines.

The research questions the proposed study will look to explore are as follows:

- RQ1: What are the reading habits of teenage girls in regards to teen magazines, and what ways do teenagers discuss the editorial content they read and see in teen magazines with their peers?
- RQ2: How do the readers of teen magazines use content about outward appearance as a tool to create their own idea of beauty?
- RQ3: How do teenage girls perceive beauty content in teen magazines as an influence on their feelings about themselves?

Methodology

The focus group method is the most useful, appropriate and desirable approach to explore how readers of print teen magazines create beauty standards from messages of outward appearance in the editorial content of the magazines. This method is appropriate to the study of the social construction of reality because people are brought together to discuss a topic or issue with one another, which “emphasizes the social aspects of the research context” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 83) and helps us understand “how meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 85). Because the primary research goal in the proposed study is to understand how teenage girls create meaning from messages of beauty in teen magazines, focus groups are highly appropriate due to how they “generate discussion, and so reveal both the meanings that people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate their meanings” (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 96). Additionally, the way focus groups are organized also presents advantages to exploring the research questions because focus groups give a measure of control to the researcher and moderator by allowing them to ask predetermined discussion questions while also giving them the freedom to follow up on a participant’s response or comment (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Finally, similar studies on teen magazines have also used focus groups as their research method (Chow, 2004; Kaplan & Cole, 2003; Oliver, 2001). Although content and textual analyses are often used as methods in inquiries regarding teen magazines (Ballentine & Ogle, 2005; Heilman, 1998; Labre & Walsh-Childers, 2003; Ogle & Thornburg, 2003; Pattee, 2004), this study is focused on how teenagers interpret messages of beauty rather than the actual

messages of beauty themselves, which is why focus groups are the most appropriate and advantageous qualitative research method available.

Inspiration for the study's methodology came from Hinnant and Hendrickson's 2014 study that examined how readers of celebrity magazines determine normalcy of health from the behaviors and actions of celebrities. Although this study does not directly relate to the topic of this study, the researchers were able to gain an understanding of how readers of a magazine digest and interpret messages in the editorial content of a magazine, which is what the researcher aimed to achieve in this study. Hinnant and Hendrickson (2014) used focus groups as their methodology, and the following details about how the researcher conducted the focus groups were roughly modeled after their study.

In this study, the researcher conducted four focus groups of 6 to 10 participants each. According to Lunt and Livingstone (1996), that number of participants is the ideal range to ensure quality of research, and a similar study regarding readers of teen magazines successfully used four focus groups to explore their research question about how race influences how teenagers interpret messages about femininity in teen magazines (Kaplan & Cole, 2003). Participants were females aged 14 to 18 who read or have read teen magazines in the past. The participants all were active readers of *Seventeen* or *Teen Vogue* (or both) or had read the magazines in the past. These two magazines were picked because they are the most popular teen magazines aimed toward females by readership and circulation numbers and have median ages of readers as 16.5 and 15.9, respectively (*Seventeen*, 2015; *Teen Vogue*, 2015). Picking a range of participants whose ages match or fall a little above or below the median ages of the magazines ensured that varying

interpretations of beauty messages will be captured as these girls move through adolescence.

In each focus group, a minimum of six participants contributed to the discussion. In total, 26 teenage girls participated in the focus group. This size of sample represents the appropriate amount of participants and focus groups needed to get a thorough, significant and usable amount of data as demonstrated in previous studies using similar methodology (Kaplan & Cole, 2003; Hinnant & Hendrickson, 2014) The researcher did not continue recruiting and holding focus groups after four were conducted because oversaturation of the data would have occurred after that point as participants were echoing similar themes in their responses.

Participants were picked on a volunteer basis through recruitment in Frisco Independent School District in Frisco, Texas, where the researcher went to high school and currently has a family member attending the school district as well. The researcher worked closely with teachers and administrators at the school to make sure that the research was done with approval and provided no intense interference in the daily lives of the students. The researcher also recruited teenagers on a volunteer basis that were friends of the researcher's sister. The parent or guardian of every participant signed a parent consent form so that the teenagers' parents or guardians were well-informed of their daughter's participation in the focus group and were granting another layer of permission and access to the minors. Additionally, each participant signed an assent letter to show they fully understood their involvement in the study.

For the students recruited through Wakeland High School, the researcher reached out to students through administrator-approved email. The emails were sent through their

teachers' email addresses to the students' school email addresses. For the students recruited through a personal network of the researcher's friends, the researcher either recruited them and their parents in person using a script that explained the intent of the study or emailed them the information.

For each focus group, the researcher selected participants who mostly knew one another, participated in similar activities or attended the same high school because selecting girls who often interact with each other will help reveal how messages of beauty are interpreted in social interactions, as recommended by Lunt and Livingstone (1996). Participants were given free pizza and were entered for a chance to win one \$25 gift card to Starbucks as incentives to partake in the focus groups. With permission of the administrators from Frisco Independent School District, two focus groups were physically conducted in classrooms at Wakeland High School during late May and early June 2016. For the two focus groups conducted with participants that knew the researcher's sister, they were held at a neutral location close to the participants' houses as to be convenient for the participants' parents or guardians.

In the room where the focus groups were held, the students sat in a circle of desks facing each other in order to encourage conversation and make it easier for all the participants to see who was talking. The participants were asked general questions about their daily lives as well as their overall reading habits of magazines in order to gain a full understanding of how and why these teenagers read, consume and interpret messages of beauty in teen magazines (see appendix for questions).

To aid discussion after the general questions were asked, the participants read five articles from issues of *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* placed in front of them. Copies of these

articles can be found in the appendix. As mentioned earlier, *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* are the two most popular teen magazines by readership and circulation numbers (*Seventeen*, 2015; *Teen Vogue*, 2015), so they were selected as artifacts to examine during the focus groups due to the prevalence they have in the participants' lives. All of the articles were in issues of the magazines released from February to May 2016. The articles were found in the front-of-book beauty section in the magazines and contained some sort of editorial message about beauty or outward appearance. More articles were chosen from *Seventeen* than *Teen Vogue* simply because *Seventeen* has a larger circulation than *Teen Vogue* as of September 2016 and therefore would have a larger reach of teenage girls. The topics covered in the articles ranged from practical beauty tips, such as how to do your make-up to play up your eye color, to more conceptual and abstract ideas of beauty, such as whether it is acceptable to not shave your body hair as a woman. The group of articles represented a thorough and accurate range of typical topics of beauty articles found in the two top teen magazines in the country. The researcher gave the participants five to 10 minutes to read the article depending on the length of the story. The participants were not allowed to discuss what they thought about the article until the researcher began to ask questions.

The researcher acted as the moderator in the focus group because the researcher could not find someone who was approved by IRB and could adequately relate to the participants. Although it would have been ideal to use a moderator in the focus group so the researcher could write notes, the researcher was able to conduct the focus groups with ease and follow the appropriate protocol.

The researcher asked questions to the participants to foster discussion about beauty messages. The researcher ensured that the questions were not leading (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996) or suggested that tuning into beauty messages is important, normal or expected of teenagers. The series of questions was asked about each article looked at (see appendix for questions). The researcher provided five articles for the participants to read. Because focus groups foster conversation among participants, the researcher also asked questions that clarified or expanded upon a response of a participant in the focus group.

The focus groups were audio- and videotaped and then transcribed verbatim in order to thoughtfully analyze the discussions among the participants, as done in Hinnant and Hendrickson (2014). The researcher employed the techniques specified by the constant comparative method and coded the transcripts for common themes and subjects (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As part of the method, the researcher recoded twice more as new concepts were identified through the analyzing. The most pertinent and revealing categories or themes were determined once recoding was finished (Glaser, 1965), and the following themes can be found below in the results section.

Results

The focus groups were successful in getting the participants to feel comfortable discussing their opinions on the beauty messages presented to them in the print magazine articles. More importantly, the focus groups provided an opportunity to uncover how these teenagers discuss ideas of beauty represented in the pages of print teen magazines among their peers. Although opinions varied among participants within each focus group and across the different focus groups, the evidence suggests that the study supports what researchers have uncovered in past research, which is that teenage girls interpret beauty messages in teen magazines as a way to shape their own idea of beauty. However, because no previous study has looked at this research topic through the theoretical lens of the social construction of reality, the data also uncovered that teenagers discuss beauty messages in teen magazines among their peers and negotiate their idea of beauty with their peers and society's idea of beauty as a whole, which answers the first research question about how teenagers discuss with their peers the beauty content they read in print teen magazines.

Most importantly, the data collected revealed that teenagers interpret and discuss among their peers editorial messages of beauty and outward appearances in two very different ways. On one hand, teenagers reject print teen magazines as useful, practical tools in shaping their idea of surface-level beauty, such as make-up and outward appearance, which answers the second research question about how teen readers use beauty content as a tool to create their own idea of beauty. On the other hand, teenagers embrace and celebrate the editorial content that demonstrates the conceptual idea of inner

beauty because it makes them feel confident and secure with their personal idea of beauty, which answers the third research question about how teen readers perceive beauty content as an influence on their feelings about themselves. Teenagers construct this idea of inner beauty by discussing the content among their peers to accept varying ideas of beauty presented in the editorial content of teen magazines, which also connects back to the first research question that most closely communicates the social construction of reality. This conclusion was reached after multiple themes emerged from the coding of the transcriptions of the focus group, which will be discussed in detail in the section.

Teen Readers and the Desire for Realistic Ideas of Beauty

Participants in every focus group voiced that they wished beauty content in print teen magazines presented realistic ideas of what beauty is both on a conceptual and practical level. Essentially, for a teenager to adopt and determine a beauty message as useful and true, the beauty content must somehow be applicable in their lives, which therefore makes the beauty content realistic to them.

The teenage participants very strongly rejected tips and advice that they deemed over-the-top or extreme. Any content about make-up that featured vibrant, strong and bold colors was deemed as unrealistic by the participants, and any comment made rejecting the advice would be met with nodding heads and outcries of agreement from the other participants in the group. When a participant in Focus Group #1 was discussing the *Seventeen* article titled “Play Up Your Eye Color,” she shared this opinion with the focus group:

I don't have time to do that in the morning. It's really cute, but a lot of their stuff is really avant garde. And you're in high school ... Everybody is really judgmental. I know that they're saying 'be different' and all that, but it's not reality. No one is going to put (on) pink eye shadow.

This opinion was shared with a participant in Focus Group #4, who felt that the use of navy eyeliner wasn't something she would ever do in "real life," and the presence of that make-up idea in the article made her wonder, "Is this what I really should be doing to my eyes?" This sentiment about makeup that couldn't be applied to real life wasn't just limited to the *Seventeen* article. When discussing the Middle Eastern-inspired makeup in the *Teen Vogue* article "Beyond the Veil," a participant in Focus Group #3 said:

It says 'Everyday Muslim women,' but I've never seen an everyday Muslim woman wear that much blue eyeliner or pink eye shadow. And like I think it's glamified when it should be more toned down.

Many participants compared the make-up advice in the articles to something they would wear during football games as cheerleaders or drill team and would never wear the make-up to class during an average day.

In fact, the participants' main concern in determining how realistic make-up advice was in the articles they read was if they would realistically apply the make-up before school started. Across all focus groups, many of the participants don't even wear make-up to school. A participant in Focus Group #2 said she will "always choose sleep over make-up." In Focus Group #3, one of the more vocal participants strongly rejected the make-up advice in *Seventeen's* "Play Up Your Eye Color" story by saying:

It's making it seem like wearing makeup every day to school is something that is encouraged rather than optional. It's like (this is what) you should use on your school day. It makes it seem like it's weird if you don't wear makeup on a school day. Yeah, and if you don't wear makeup, these pages are pretty useless in the magazine.

Echoing this sentiment, many of the participants characterized the majority of the make-up advice presented in the articles as "useless," "impractical" or "limiting."

Because the suggested make-up in the “Play Up Your Eye Color” article was divided into what to use if you have brown eyes, green eyes or blue eyes, many participants said that made them feel those colors and products were the only acceptable products they could use if they had that eye color. A participant in Focus Group #2 said that she thinks the content is “limiting” because she has blue eyes but doesn’t feel like she always has to wear gold eye shadow.

The focus group participants discussed among each other that they believed much of the unrealistic representations of beauty were due to the fact that they applied to a younger age group who don’t know how to use makeup at all. A participant in Focus Group #2 said that if she were 11 or 12, she would pay much more attention to the “Play Up Your Eye Color” article. In the first focus group, the participants discussed that someone who is 14 or 15 and doesn’t really know how to do makeup would find this useful, but that the make-up advice presented isn’t actually what teenagers use in reality.

The idea of “perfection” as being unrealistic also came up across focus groups. When the participants in Focus Group #3 were reading the “Play Up Your Eye Color” article, one of the girls whispered to her neighbor: “Teenagers in magazines always have perfect teeth or braces. There’s never anything normal.” When discussing the *Teen Vogue* article “Hair? Don’t Care,” someone in the first three focus group brought out the line “trying to be pretty made me feel ugly” that was bolded in the article. In Focus Group #3, one of the participants said that line stuck out to her because:

“It shows the pressure of society affects the self esteem of young girls, just in everyday life. If you just focus on your looks, then you’re not going to feel up to par.”

In Focus Group #2, one of the girls responded to the “trying to be pretty made me feel ugly” line by sharing: “Sometimes when I’m getting ready and putting on my makeup, I’m like ‘this isn’t really necessary’ so I don’t want to wear it sometimes.”

The last article they read was a *Seventeen* article entitled “How to Survive an All-Night Study Sesh,” and there was also an overwhelming rejection of the beauty advice and tips in that article as “useless.” The article presented beauty products that will help you remember facts during studying, but as a participant in Focus Group #3 said “I’m just not going to apply red nail polish at 2 a.m. while I’m freaking out (about an exam).” The article also shared beauty products that would help you look more awake after studying, but as a participant in Focus Group #4 said: “If I stayed up studying for a test, I don’t really care what I look like. I’m dead. I’m taking a test.” A participant in Focus Group #1 shared this sentiment, asking her peers, “it’s about studying for finals. Should we really be worrying about what we look like?” and all of the other participants shook their head violently to say “no.”

Essentially, in discussion of all of the articles read, except for one, the participants rejected the beauty advice because they couldn’t realistically see themselves using the advice as a tool to create their own idea of beauty or couldn’t realistically achieve the level of supposed perfection presented in the beauty pages of *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*.

Teen Magazine Articles and the “Celebrity Effect”

Across all four focus groups, the single most effective way to get teenagers to discuss beauty articles among their friends, apply the tips to their lives and feel a personal connection to the content is to incorporate celebrities into the editorial beauty content. Whether teenagers are looking for practical makeup advice or reading articles about

someone's personal journey toward feeling beautiful, the inclusion of a celebrity draws the teenage readers in and makes them more likely to apply the practical, such as make-up tips, and conceptual, such as body satisfaction or overall prettiness, beauty content to their lives and discuss it with their friends.

When asked general questions about why they read teen magazines, a participant in every focus group except Focus Group #3 responded by saying they read them exclusively for the celebrity content. One of the participants in Focus Group #2 shared this anecdote about how celebrities make her remember beauty content more easily:

I remember when we were little there was this one magazine with Selena Gomez and what her favorite beauty products were. And there was this one mascara, I forget what it is called, but every time I see it in the store, I think, 'Oh, Selena Gomez wears that.'

One of the articles the participants read and answered questions about was from the March 2016 *Seventeen* issue entitled "The Pressure to Be Perfect." The article was a Q&A with *Pretty Little Liars* star Lucy Hale, and she talked about her insecurities about her looks. There was also a sidebar featuring her favorite products.

Overall, the majority of participants approved of this article and felt that they connected and identified with the article more because it included first-hand accounts from a well-known celebrity. A participant in Focus Group #1 said that she sees her on TV and enjoys her as an actor, so she felt like she could not only "relate to it but (also) liked that it came from her." In Focus Group #2, there was a general consensus that this was a well-written article, and at one point, three girls were talking to each other about it and nodding in agreement. "It's uplifting," one participant said, while the other two

responded with comments like, “It shows even celebrities are insecure about things” and “It’s like you can relate to her.”

The participants also felt that the inclusion of a celebrity in this article made it more convincing. A participant in Focus Group #4 said she wouldn’t have read this article if it was a “normal” person and finds it more convincing and interesting because “it’s good to know that celebrities go through the same thing.” When comparing this article to other articles the participants had read in their free time about girls dealing with beauty insecurities, a participant in Focus Group #3 said:

This one might be more convincing because Lucy Hale is somebody who people know who she is rather than like the other girls. They were just normal everyday girls. No one knew who they were. This one might be more persuasive.

These sentiments carried over in the discussion about the *Teen Vogue* article entitled “Beyond the Veil.” The article features insights that makeup artist Sir John had while traveling to the Middle East. It is revealed in the body of the article that he is Beyoncé’s make-up artist. A participant in Focus Group #4 said she “perked up” when she read that he was Beyoncé’s make up artist, and three girls in Focus Group #1 had a small exchange with each other about how if they included a picture of him doing Beyoncé’s makeup that they would “definitely read that” and that it “might actually be more interesting.” Finally, one participant in Focus Group #2 demonstrated the impact of celebrity influence in beauty article during their discussion of the article entitled “Hair? Don’t Care.” She said that if a girl who always shaved “saw well-known celebrities (not shaving), maybe they’ll think ‘oh, I don’t have to shave.’”

However, a few dissenters in the focus groups viewed the inclusion of celebrities in beauty articles with distrust and would question the authenticity of the advice. Much of

the distrust came from the fact that Lucy Hale, who is a Mark brand ambassador, was recommending some Mark brand makeup products. A participant in Focus Group #3 mused aloud that “maybe she was paid to say that” and viewed the content as “not truly her honest opinion.” Also, a participant in Focus Group #4 believed that because Lucy Hale is famous, she doesn’t “think she goes through the same problems in the same way” as real girls.

Another participant in Focus Group #4 was able to articulate the internal dilemma she faces when she sees beauty content in magazines that feature celebrities. She said:

I feel so hypocritical about it because if it’s a celebrity, obviously you want to read it more, but I also don’t believe it as much as if it’s a normal person. I wouldn’t read it really if it were a normal person. It’s kind of hard. I see both sides why they are good and bad.

Although some participants did communicate why they can sometimes question the authenticity of beauty advice that comes from celebrities, all of the participants communicated to each other in the focus groups that they would be more likely to read and connect with beauty content if a celebrity was included, in spite of the fact that they felt a bit of distrust about the content.

Teen Magazine Articles and the Idea of Embracing Personal Beauty

Whether interpreting messages of beauty in articles demonstrating makeup advice or articles discussing beauty as a conceptual idea, teen readers take the messages and relate them to their own personal idea of beauty. Therefore, teen girls will only apply tips or ideas of beauty if that information makes them feel comfortable and doesn’t make them question their current beauty practices.

This idea was most pertinent when the focus groups were discussing the *Teen Vogue* article “Hair? Don’t Care.” The article shares a woman’s point of view on why she

doesn't shave, and the participants were able to socially construct this alternative idea of beauty by relating it to their own personal experiences with beauty and shaving. A

participant in Focus Group #1 shares how she relates shaving to her own idea of beauty:

I liked that there was a perspective on it because I definitely feel that way, and people have their own opinion about it and how they feel. But, I think, me personally shaving makes me feel better about myself. That's fine, and if someone else feels like they shouldn't have to and that makes them feel better, then that should really be the only point.

This mentality, which the participants would often describe as "you do you," was present throughout the discussion of this article. Essentially, when interpreting messages of beauty, the participants evaluate if the message would make them or a peer feel comfortable with themselves, and if it does, then it can be shaped into her social construction of beauty. For example, many of the participants pointed out the line in "Hair? Don't Care" that reads "Your body. Your hair. Your rules." Even though it relates to shaving in the article, some participants took that idea and applied to other ways they express beauty. A participant in Focus Group #2 was an example of this:

"I like the last sentence "your body. Your hair. Your rules." I kind of go off of that. I buy my makeup, I wear it, I do it because I want to be creative I guess. People tell me, 'you wear a lot of makeup.' Or my mom will say 'you don't need all of that.' And I'm like 'I know' I just like it though. So I like that statement."

This statement shows the complexity of the social construction of beauty. Even though the participant's peers are saying she doesn't need to wear makeup, she personally likes the creative outlet. Because she sees in this *Teen Vogue* article that it's okay to do what you want to your body, it shows that teen magazines can have a powerful impact on a teenager's personal validation of beauty. A participant in Focus Group #4 expressed the exact same idea in that group's discussion of the article, saying that "girls are attacked because they wear a lot of makeup, but it's not because they don't like themselves. It's

just because it's like a hobby almost." In Focus Group #3, a participant wanted more articles like "Hair? Don't Care" because it shows that women shouldn't care "what society want us to do" and that beauty is "more for yourself than anyone else."

Because these teenagers take these messages and use them as a validation for what they personally view as beautiful, they don't want to make any sort of drastic change to themselves based on what they read in the beauty section of teen magazines. Someone in every single focus group pointed out a blurb in the *Seventeen* article "Play Up Your Eye Color" that talks about how to change your eye color by wearing colored contact lenses. Overwhelmingly, these participants expressed severe dislike of this idea because they do not want to change how they look to achieve beauty. In Focus Group #1, a participant said during the group's discussion of contacts that it "really annoyed" her because she believes you should "love yourself" instead of wanting to change yourself. In Focus group #3, a participant said it made the article lose credibility and focus because the point of the article is to make the eye color you actually have look better. Finally, a participant in Focus Group #4 summarized the general feeling of all of the participants towards this idea when she said:

It's not a problem to change your eye color, but that's basically saying that if you don't like how you are, you can just change it into whatever you want. You should just try to be happy with what you look like.

Finally, related to this finding that teenagers wish to seek validation and acceptance of their personal idea of beauty in print teen magazines is their desire to see girls who look more like them in the editorial beauty content of print teen magazines. In Focus Group #1, a participant said she wished coverage of diverse people was more "honest," and another participant responded to her by saying diversity should not be

included in beauty coverage as a way to just “(check) the box and (do) it just to be diverse.” In Focus Group #3, another participant showed that diversity can mean something different for each person when she pointed out that the “Play Up Your Eye Color” story was diverse because they had a redhead, a blonde and a brunette. Finally, in Focus Group #2, a participant said she stopped reading teen magazines when she was younger because she didn’t see models that looked like her, and all of the participants shook their head in agreement.

Teen Readers and the Social Construction of Unconventional Ideas of Beauty

When faced with beauty topics that don’t fit the westernized version of beauty, teen readers will negotiate among each other how they feel about these topics in relation to their society’s idea of beauty. These negotiations among peers mostly occur when discussing feminist ideas of beauty in relation to the article “Hair? Don’t Care” and beauty norms from other cultures in relation to the article “Beyond the Veil.”

In every focus group, at least one participant would begin reading the article “Hair? Don’t Care” and see the pictures of girls with body hair and respond with saying “gross!” or looking at her neighbor in disgust. One participant in Focus Group #1 felt so strongly about the pictures that she said: “That’s just too much. I can’t even look at them. I am so seriously grossed out by that.”

However, some participants responded positively and with approval of the “Hair? Don’t Care” article. A participant in Focus Group #3 liked that because the writer had “a different point of view, (and) it’s encouraging others to have a different point of view.” In Focus Group #4, even though one participant wouldn’t just stop shaving, she found that it

was “interesting if you needed reassurance about that thing, but if you didn’t, it’s kind of like ‘hey, it’s here’ sort of thing.”

That participant in Focus Group #4 wasn’t alone in her opinion. Even if these teenage girls couldn’t see themselves embracing the unconventional beauty idea of not shaving your body hair, they sought to understand and accept this alternative idea of beauty and respect those who do engage in this beauty practice. A participant in Focus Group #3 said that even though she supported the sentiment in this article, she didn’t think it will lead her to have the idea of “screw shaving” and that she won’t “throw out (her) razor.” Later on in the conversation during the same focus group, another participant echoed this idea by acknowledging that the article says “to just take pride in who you are,” but she is “not going to stop shaving.”

Even though participants said that this wouldn’t change their daily beauty practices, they did feel positively about the article as a whole and look at it as a great example of embracing a different idea of beauty. In Focus Group #1, a participant said that she thinks society “needs to be more accepting instead of ‘This is one look of beauty. This is what it should be.’” In Focus Group #2, a participant said she viewed this article positively and would be most beneficial for “younger girls who might have not seen something like this.”

One of the most interesting and theoretically significant results from discussions of both the “Hair? Don’t Care” and “Beyond the Veil” articles is that the participants would debate among each other how to view these unconventional ideas of beauty and would sometimes end up changing how a participant felt about the beauty idea.

The most lively and interesting discussions occurred in Focus Group #1. During the discussion about “Hair? Don’t Care” one of the participants voiced her opinion that they should have mentioned that that girls shave for personal hygiene reasons. The other participants in the focus group were quick to chime in with differing opinions. The discussion is as follows:

- I think they should have mentioned personal hygiene. Because like we do shave for a reason.
- But then guys don’t.
- Exactly! Guys can be clean and they have hair. So what’s the reason?
- I guess that’s why society is the reason.
- Yeah, it is society. I’m just saying that I feel like they should just mention personal hygiene. Because just because we’re saying you don’t have to shave your legs all the time doesn’t mean you don’t need to have some deodorant.
- But just because someone doesn’t shave doesn’t mean that they aren’t clean. That’s just kind of saying like “Oh, you’re dirty because you don’t shave.”

At the end of that exchange, the participant ended up agreeing with her peers by nodding in agreement when they talked about personal hygiene and shaving not having to be linked. She summed up her new opinion by responding, “I mean I could say it’s gross, but I can look back at it and be like, oh well. If someone wants to, they can do whatever they want.”

This same participant in Focus Group #1, who will be labeled as P1 in the following exchange, had her view on beauty challenged by her peers again during the discussion of “Beyond the Veil.” The article features a sidebar entitled “Under Wraps” and depicts how to style your own hijab, a headscarf that is typically worn by Muslim women. She initially thought the trend was fun and wanted to apply the beauty idea to her life, but her idea changed as she talked with her peers. The discussion is as follows:

- P1: I think (name omitted) would look really cool in one. I don’t know. I like trying different things.

- I saw this video and this girl was saying “It’s kind of disrespectful if you wear one and you aren’t of that culture.”
- P1: Really? It is?
- If you do it for fashion, it’s kind of like mocking them.
- P1: I don’t see it as mockery. I just see it as you’re finding the beautiful part of that culture.
- They might not think that though.
- It’s weird if someone is making money off of it.
- It also represents something beyond modesty. It’s part of their religion and what they stand for.
- It’s like, you can either wear it and do all of that, or you can’t wear it at all.
- So yeah, I thought the same thing as you, but then if you really think about it, it’s disrespectful.
- P1: I was about to disrespect a lot of people by wearing a hijab.

The first focus group wasn’t the only group that constructed ideas of unconventional beauty among each other. In Focus Group #4, one of the participants said she wasn’t a feminist, so she couldn’t relate to the “Hair? Don’t Care” article. That comment led to an interesting discussion about what feminism really means and its relation to beauty. The participants in this focus group were younger than the participants in other focus groups, so their ideas of feminism were beginning to take form. One participant in the fourth focus group said that “feminism” is a “very confusing word” and she doesn’t “really know a definition for it.” Another participant in the same focus group said that because it has “such a negative connotation ... you’ll see it and won’t, like, relate to it.” Both participants, however, shook their heads in agreement when another participant said it was important that the article used the word “feminism” because “it shined a light on that word” and “gave it more meaning to (her).”

Teen Readers and Credibility of Beauty Articles

A big concern for the focus group participants was how credible the beauty articles were. Overwhelmingly, they demonstrated that teen readers wouldn’t take beauty content seriously unless their peers are actually writing and producing the beauty content,

and they wish that actual teens had more control over the editorial decisions of the beauty content in teen magazines.

In the first focus group, the participants compared the beauty content of print teen magazines to YouTube makeup tutorials and said that they find YouTube makeup tutorials more credible because if Youtubers “start recommending bad things, people are going to start posting all these bad comments, so they’re held to their credibility because it’s their career.” The same participant said that when she reads teen magazines, she feels that she sees the “same eye shadow looks since, like, the 2012 August issue.”

In the second focus group, one participant did not trust how adults control the beauty content of these magazines. She communicated this idea when she said:

This is, like, a bunch of grown ups and magazine editors are like ‘oh, let’s just put this all together. They’ll listen to it because it’s in our magazine.’ But I think if they had actual people our age or maybe a little bit older giving advice, I think it would be more trustworthy. I guess because I doubt any of the magazine editors actually wear this stuff.

Focus Group #3 felt very strong negative feelings toward any content that they felt contained childish or silly language, thus causing them to not take some of the beauty content seriously and not pay attention to that content. One of the blurbs in the *Seventeen* article “Play Up Your Eye Color” contains the phrase “bae (before anyone else) won’t be able to stop staring,” and everyone starting laughing when someone brought it up. They said that they only use that word “ironically” or as a “joke” One participant from that focus group said, “It’s like they’re trying to sound like teenagers.”

Even when the articles seemed to be trying to relate to readers by using a more age-appropriate writer, Focus Group #3 misinterpreted the attempt. The *Teen Vogue* article “Hair? Don’t Care” was written by a writer from *Rookie*, a website containing

content for teen girls. However, only one of the participants actually knew what *Rookie* was, so almost all of the participants in Focus Group #3 thought the article was saying that the writer was an amateur. Therefore, it caused them to not take her as seriously as they wished they had while reading it.

Both Focus Group #3 and Focus Group #4 felt negatively about the phrase “totally slay that exam” and use of emojis in the *Seventeen* article “How to Survive an All-Night Study Sesh.” A participant in Focus Group #4 said that this disapproval of these small editorial decisions actually made her reject the beauty article in its entirety. She offered a way to fix this problem with *Seventeen*’s beauty content:

If this were written by a 20-something-year-old, then they would know how to use it. But if it’s a 40-year-old trying to relate to teenagers, they’re not going to be as successful with it, and it’s just going to be cheesy.

Essentially, participants in every focus group attributed disapproval of both practical and conceptual beauty ideas in teen magazines to how adult editors and writers were telling teenagers how to look, act and feel in regards to their beauty.

Teen Magazine Articles and Lack of Step-by-Step Instructions

One of the main reasons the participants in the focus group rejected the practical makeup tips and did not find them useful was because they lacked step-by-step instructions on how to apply the makeup or execute the tip. The readers pointed out that teen print articles will contain information about what to use or buy to feel beautiful, but they will almost never explain how to use those products as a tool for beauty.

Speaking in general terms, many of the participants shared that they originally started reading teen magazines because they were seeking advice on how to do their makeup or what to wear. A participant in Focus Group #1 said girls especially need

magazines like *Seventeen* if they don't talk to their moms for advice, but she feels like *Seventeen*'s idea on advice has "shifted off." She felt that instead of including content on "crazy makeup," the magazine should focus on how-to guides like how to take care of your skin or how to care for your hair to keep it healthy. When asked what kind of teen magazine they would create if they had the opportunity, participants in both Focus Group #1 and Focus Group #2 said they could focus on tutorials on how to apply makeup, but both followed their statements by saying YouTube serves the teen market effectively with makeup tutorials because, as a participant in Focus Group #1 said, "you see these (Youtubers) not only show you which products (to use) but how to apply it." Essentially, these teen readers have filled the gap teen print magazines have created by turning to YouTube make-up tutorials, which lay out step-by-step how to achieve a certain look.

The participants critiqued teen magazines' lack of tutorials mostly during the discussions about the *Seventeen* article "Play Up Your Eye Color." In Focus Group #4, one participant felt that the whole article's purpose was just to sell their readers products instead of how to actually use them, and a fellow participant echoed this sentiment by saying "don't just tell me what to use, but tell me how to use it." In Focus Group #1, a participant felt that if a girl who is trying to learn how to do her makeup bought one of the expensive products featured in the article, "she's going to get home, and she's not going to know what to do with it," and her friend in the focus group chimed in by adding, "And they don't even tell you, like, what brush to use. Like what, are you supposed to do it with your fingers or something?" In Focus Group #2, one participant told a story about how an eye shadow palette she owns does a better job of giving step-by-step makeup tips

than this article because it tells you exactly where to put each shade and is more “instructional.”

The participants in Focus Group #3 brought up that the “Play Up Your Eye Color” article felt incomplete and useless to them because it only featured eye shadow and eyeliner products and didn’t give step-by-step instructions on how to complete the rest of your makeup look, such as how to do your eyebrows, how to treat your eyelashes or what lipstick to use. As one participant from that focus group said, “If the person who had brown eyes wore purple lipstick, it wouldn’t look that good with the blue eye shadow.”

The focus groups also brought up their desire for more tutorials during their discussion about the *Seventeen* article “How to Survive an All-Night Study Sesh.” In the first focus group, the participants felt that the makeup tips and tutorials featured didn’t fit the topic of studying. As one participant said, “if it’s a study session topic, why don’t we actually talk about how to study? Not how to look good doing it.” Participants in focus group #3 and #4 echoed this idea, and they said that they find YouTube videos on how to study much more helpful than the instructions they found in the *Seventeen* article.

The Reading Habits and Purchasing Tendencies of Teen Magazine Readers

Important to this study is how teenagers’ reading habits and purchasing tendencies of print teen magazines play into how they interpret messages of beauty in print teen magazines. This results section gives the study’s answer to the first part of the first research question, which sought out to examine the reading habits of teenage girls in regard to teen magazines. Overall, the participants in the focus group were more regular

readers of teen magazines when they were younger, usually around middle school age, and were more likely to be influenced by beauty messages at those ages.

A participant in Focus Group 1 started reading magazines because all of her friends did and she wanted to fit in. Many participants, such as one in Focus Group #3, would read teen magazines regularly because their mom bought subscriptions for them and read them to get advice on fashion and beauty. When reading the *Seventeen* article “Play Up Your Eye Color,” someone in every focus group expressed that they would be more likely to use those tips if they were younger and didn’t know how to do their makeup. Even if they used to use teen magazines as a tool to shape their beauty when they were younger, they tend to skip over or ignore makeup tips at their current age simply because they feel they already know how to apply their makeup.

A general consensus among the participants is that they feel the editorial content and mission of both *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* is geared toward a younger audience than their ages, which is 14 to 18 years old. However, one participant in Focus Group #1 pointed out that even though many of the articles have a younger tone to them, teen magazines, especially *Seventeen*, will try to entice older readers by including articles about going to college or getting a summer job. She says instead of bringing their age group into reading the magazines, it confuses them, puts them off to any content that could be useful. She even offers her opinion on how teen magazines could be more useful to teenagers:

I don’t know why they don’t just pick one specific target audience and focus on their needs instead of trying to get this huge group of girls to do it. They could have like every single 14-year-old girl walking around with *Seventeen* magazine. And yeah they’re going to grow out of it, but there’s always going to be a new 14-year-old girl.

Instead of reading teen magazines on a regular basis like they used to when they were younger, the participants said they tend to read teen magazines occasionally, such as the doctor's office or when traveling. As a participant in Focus Group #3 said, "I don't really read teen magazines. I don't know, I mean, if it's there I'll flip through it, but I'm not actively going for them." As they get older, they said they turn to magazines like *Vogue*, *Glamour* or *Cosmopolitan* for beauty content because, as a participant in the first focus group said, they "apply more to their life than the teen magazines did."

One of the major themes throughout the discussions in the focus group was the expensive makeup featured in the editorial beauty content. Even though they might not be paying for the makeup themselves, teens pay a lot of attention to the price of beauty products and reject any beauty content they (or their parents) simply cannot afford. Although there are many reasons, as discussed earlier, why teen readers reject makeup advice in print teen magazines, a surefire way to turn them off from the content is featuring a product that is unrealistically expensive for a teenager. As a participant in Focus Group #1 said, "I think the prices on these make-up products stand out to me the most because I would say it's 13-year-olds who read these magazines. I don't think their parents would buy \$30 gold eye shadow in here when you can literally get \$5 ones at the drugstore." In Focus Group #2, a participant echoed this idea by saying that teenagers will beg their mother for new makeup, and the suggestions that are included in the beauty section aren't anything that their mothers would realistically buy. Therefore, they would rather look up "drugstore dupes" instead of the high-end beauty products, so this drives the teenagers away from the print teen magazine and towards the Internet and specifically YouTube, where there are beauty product options ranging many different budgets.

It is also important to the study to indicate how the participants go about reading beauty content. Across focus groups, the participants shared that they pay more attention to images than the words. Therefore, when interpreting messages of beauty, teenagers are more susceptible to what they see rather than what they read. They also pointed out that headlines help determine whether they will read a beauty article, and anything cheesy or flashy will turn them off.

Finally, through analysis of all four focus groups, it is clear that the participants prefer, connect with and approve of the beauty content in *Teen Vogue* more than the beauty content in *Seventeen*. At the end of the third focus group, three participants came to the realization together that *Teen Vogue* was their preferred teen magazine when it comes to messages of beauty because of its maturity. The following excerpt from the transcription shows the quotes from that conversation in the order they were said:

- I feel like (*Teen Vogue* is) trying more to help girls empower themselves and become women whereas *Seventeen* is like “read this when you’re a teenager and grow out of it.” I can totally see a 20-something girl reading *Teen Vogue* whereas *Seventeen* you’re like ‘I’m way too old for that.’ They definitely don’t use as much teen slang as they do in *Seventeen*.
- Teen Vogue* is like you are a young adult. You are a woman.
- Like, it’s more refined.
- Also, I think it speaks to the fact that there’s *Vogue* and *Teen Vogue*. I feel like it’s more of an adult magazine. They make it like you grow into it. You grow up with it.

This exchange among the participants shows how they value the magazine’s conceptual portrayal of beauty more than the practical beauty advice. Therefore, teen magazines still remain an authoritative medium to discuss conceptual ideas of beauty, showing teen magazines’ remaining importance in teenagers’ social construction of their personal beauty reality. The following section outlines the significance of the results of the study and its findings.

Discussion

This study sought out to determine how teenagers interpret messages of beauty in print teen magazines by examining how teenagers discuss with their peers the editorial content they read and see in teen magazines, how teenagers use content about outward appearance as a tool to create their own idea of beauty, and how teenagers perceive beauty content in teen magazines as an influence on their feelings about themselves. Because the majority of teenage girls feel pressure from their peers and media to feel beautiful (Dove, 2013), this research's purpose was to see how the beauty content in print teen magazines could influence, either positively or negatively, how teenagers define beauty for themselves. Because teen magazines act as a guide to how teenagers should act and feel about themselves (Finders, 1996) and can lead teenagers to change their habits based on what they read (Duke & Kreschel, 1998; Kaplan & Cole, 2003), this research holds significant importance because of the disconnect between articles in print teen magazines that show what beauty is and the small number of teenagers who actually consider themselves beautiful (Dove, 2013).

In the researcher's quest to answer the second research question, this study found that teenagers interpret editorial messages of beauty and outward appearance in print teen magazines by evaluating how useful, relatable and realistic the messages were and will either accept or reject the advice as a tool based on if they can personally see themselves executing the beauty advice and be accepted by their peers. As an answer to the third research question about the conceptual interpretation of beauty, the study also showed that the participants were much more accepting of articles that encouraged readers to

embrace their own personal idea of beauty and didn't push their readers to change who they are or adopt new beauty practices to become beautiful. Essentially, the participants responded the most positively to content that made them feel validated in how they feel about themselves and how they shape their own personal idea of beauty. Previous research has found that teen magazines are used as a socialization tool as teenage girls enter into a feminine adulthood, (Heilman, 1998; Kaplan and Cole, 2003; Peirce, 1990; Keller, 2011; Massoni, 2004), and this research expands on this finding by showing that the messages of beauty in print teen magazines can have the ability to act as a socialization tool to let teenagers feel comfortable in their own skin, but alternatively, if the beauty content urges readers to change themselves to socialize into an adult, it could make the teenagers feel uncomfortable and not confident in their beauty.

When it came to practical beauty advice, such as makeup tips, the participants overwhelmingly rejected those messages as too childish or not applicable to them and did not want to use the messages as a tool to create their own idea of beauty. So, to answer the second research question, teen readers overwhelmingly do not use messages of beauty in print magazines as a practical tool to shape their own beauty. In fact, the participants expressed that they would rather turn to the Internet for makeup advice as they viewed it as more relatable and useful. However, when celebrities are introduced into beauty content, the participants were much more likely to be drawn into the beauty content or regard the content as useful or engaging, whether the content be about beauty on a practical or conceptual level.

When analyzed together, the four focus groups were able to communicate a shared and cohesive consensus about editorial beauty content, and they often came to

several agreements about the beauty content they accepted as encouraging or rejected as useless within and among focus groups. In relation to the first research question about how peers discuss the beauty content among each other to shape their idea of beauty, the participants overwhelmingly constructed new ideas on the topic of beauty after discussing content among each other. When discussing articles that contained messages about beauty that were abnormal or didn't subscribe to society's views, the participants would often discuss among themselves how to view this abnormal beauty practice and whether to accept it. This showed that teenagers can use messages of beauty in print teen magazines as a jumping-off point in their social construction of beauty. The following section shows the theoretical implications of this study as a whole.

Theoretical Implications

The social construction of reality played into this study because the participants discussed among each other how the editorial messages of beauty fit into the society they live in, and they used the messages they read in the articles to help shape among themselves what the very abstract concept of inner beauty is. Even though it seems like inner personal beauty might be removed from the idea of social construction of reality, the participants clearly showed their desire to see validation in the pages of print teen magazines and wouldn't consider partaking in a beauty practice unless they felt comfortable among their peers. Therefore, the process of creating a personal idea of beauty comes from negotiating that idea in the society that the teenager exists in. Being able to confirm that personal idea of inner beauty within the beauty content of teen magazines helps to validate their views and feel comfortable in their own skin. As Berger and Luckman (1966) explained, people will adapt their actions, habits and thoughts to fit

into their group, so it is clear that the social construction of reality is most evident when print teen magazines discuss unconventional ideas of beauty. Because beauty is abstract and has no one definition, teenagers must turn to their peers to negotiate if this unconventional idea of beauty they see in magazines is acceptable. Therefore, this research reinforces previous studies (Duke & Kreschel, 1998; Finders, 1996; Heilman, 1998; Kaplan & Cole, 2003) that found print teen magazines play a socialization role in the lives of teenagers and help construct their habits, views and identities as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.

This research also adds to the existing scholarship about how print teen magazines are actors in teenagers' social construction of reality. By focusing on beauty specifically, these participants were able to discuss how the editorial content in the print teen magazines influences how they view themselves and what practices they use to achieve beauty. Even though previous research has been based on the social construction of reality, no known study has used editorial beauty content in print teen magazines specifically as a framework; therefore, this study could be used a blueprint if scholars want to focus on more specific areas of beauty, such as how beauty is portrayed across cultures.

This study took a very wide approach to beauty and analyzed both practical and conceptual takes on beauty because no other study has previous tackled this topic. So going forward, researchers can take the findings from this study and expand upon them using the social construction of reality, potentially finding even more useful and significant results in regards to how teenagers shape their understanding of beauty from the pages of print teen magazines.

Practical Implications

Throughout this study, the participants were able to intelligently and thoughtfully determine whether the beauty content was useful and relevant for themselves and were very quick to make those decisions and judge the editors who made “childish” editorial decisions. Therefore, this study shows that on a boarder level, editors of print teen magazines seem to have lost touch with their audience about how to communicate messages of beauty on a mature, practical and useful level. For example, these findings have shown that print teen magazines have lost their authority as a useful and reliable place for teenagers to go to learn how to do their makeup or seek practical tips on how to achieve beauty due to the plethora of updated and easily accessible information that can be found on the Internet.

However, print teen magazines still serve as influential platforms to share messages and stories about conceptual levels of beauty and ways to achieve inner, personal beauty without the use of makeup. Because it has been found in previous research that print teen magazines can sometimes portray beauty ideals that are unattainable and negatively affect a teenager’s self-worth (Heliman, 1998; Kaplan & Cole), print teen magazines’ continued influence in shaping conceptual levels of beauty is highly important, and editors have a heightened responsibility to communicate to their readers conceptual ideas of beauty in a way that they connect with and feel comfortable with. The participants shared a group consciousness that they approved of, enjoyed and embraced stories that they could relate to, especially stories about how a teenager became comfortable with their definition of beauty. Therefore, print teen magazines still remain

relevant because they can help teenagers create a construction of beauty that they feel comfortable portraying to their peers.

As mentioned earlier, this research found that celebrities have a big impact on the messages of beauty that the participants viewed as important, so because print teen magazines still hold importance for teens when determining their conceptual idea of personal beauty, editors of print teen magazines should use this finding as encouragement to use celebrities in thoughtful ways. For example, instead of using celebrities' advice on what makeup to use, editors could utilize celebrities' opinions and personal stories about how they came to view themselves as beautiful to allow the messages of beauty in print teen magazines to have a positive impact on teenagers' self-worth and their determination of inner beauty.

Lastly, participants within and among focus groups overwhelmingly criticized the beauty content as having language that mimics the stereotypical way teenagers speak. Instead of relating with the language, the participants found it insulting and did not connect with that content. Therefore, if editors of print teen magazines want to make meaningful connections to their readers in beauty content, they must avoid language that makes them sound like what a stereotypical teenager sounds like. This research shows that teenagers don't need to be talked to in a certain way for messages to be relatable and are more interested in the overall theme of the content and if it relates to them.

Limitations

The study used the focus group method as a way to shed light onto the intricacies and nuances of the subject while also attempting to build a framework that could be replicated by future researchers hoping to dive deeper into the topic. However, the focus

group method did present some limitations, such as a lack of being able to apply the findings to other populations due to how focus groups are naturally non-generalizable and relate to one specific group. Also, because the researcher was not able to find an appropriate moderator and had to moderate the focus groups herself, there was a limitation on how well the researcher could interpret the focus group in the moment. However, because the researcher reviewed the audio- and videotapes several times and coded the transcriptions with intense consideration, the researcher was able to compensate for that limitation and deeply analyze the focus group after their completion.

Finally, the last limitation that the focus group methodology poses is that the researcher could have asked a question that would frame the participants' answers in a way that would confirm the researcher's preconceived idea on the phenomena. However, to minimize this possibility, the researcher began each focus group with open-ended, general questions about teen magazines and then turned the focus groups' attention to beauty content. The questions never suggested any preconceived notion or expectation about how to interpret the editorial beauty content found in print teen magazines.

Directions for Future Research

Because the participants mentioned repeatedly that they often turn to the Internet for makeup advice, an interesting avenue for future research is to see how teenagers use the Internet, specifically videos from YouTube, as a tool to create their idea of beauty. For example, because the participants said that they trust "beauty gurus" on YouTube with make-up tutorials more than what they read in print teen magazines, a researcher could reference videos from beauty gurus like Zoella or Michelle Phan when exploring how digital representations of beauty play into a teenagers' personal beauty. Because

there is just such a large number of messages regarding beauty on the Internet that aren't vetted or come from reputable media brands like *Seventeen* or *Teen Vogue*, using YouTube as a reference can focus the study while also tapping into a communication medium that is relatively new.

Expanding on that, an experimental study on teenagers interpret celebrities' level of authenticity in communicating editorial messages would expand on this research and also open up discussion on the extremely powerful influence celebrities have on the social construction of reality that teenagers experience when reading teen magazines.

Another avenue future research can take is seeing how teenagers use social media as a way to shape their social construction of beauty. Many participants shared that if they saw a story or message that agreed with on social media that involved beauty, they would retweet it or share it with their followers. Essentially, these teenagers are using their social media accounts as a representation of what they approve of and believe in, so a content analysis of teenagers' social media posts could be very revealing and insightful into how they construct beauty or other abstract concepts.

This study found that beauty messages can have more influence online through mediums such as social media or YouTube videos; therefore, a study on how teenagers interpret messages about fashion in print teen magazines would be interesting because it would be enlightening to see if fashion would be better displayed in print as opposed to print beauty messages. Because fashion how-to tutorials lend themselves better visually to a print format, teen readers might be more accepting of fashion content than they were of beauty content in print in this study.

Finally, future research should also focus on the editors behind the beauty messages in print teen magazines and how they consider their audience when shaping their editorial beauty content. Researchers could take findings from this study, such as teenagers' desire to be spoken to maturely and their preference for articles about personal inner beauty over practical makeup tips, and use those as a basis for questions for interviewing editors at teen magazines.

In conclusion, messages of beauty in print teen magazines play an important role in how teenage girls shape their understanding of beauty within society because for many teenagers, the messages serve as a catalyst for discussion about beauty among their peers. Participants in this study showed that they value beauty content that validates how they feel about themselves and makes them more confident, thus favoring content about conceptual ideas of beauty over practical tips about makeup and weighing beauty content's usefulness, practicality and relatability against what society deems as beautiful before adopting the magazines' beauty content into their personal understanding of beauty.

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Appendix A

Questions for Focus group

Part I: General Questions

- Why do you read teen magazines?
- How often do you read teen magazines?
- What is your favorite part of teen magazines?
- When did you start reading teen magazines?
- How do you and your friends react to what you see in teen magazines?
- What do you wish to see more of in teen magazines?
- What do you wish to see less of in teen magazines?
- Why would you ever stop reading teen magazines?
- When reading, do you pay more attention to the articles or the pictures? Why?
- Do you ever take advice in the magazines and apply it to your everyday lives? If so, how?
- If you could create your own teen magazine, what would it be about, and what kind of content would you include in it?

Part II: Questions about the articles specifically

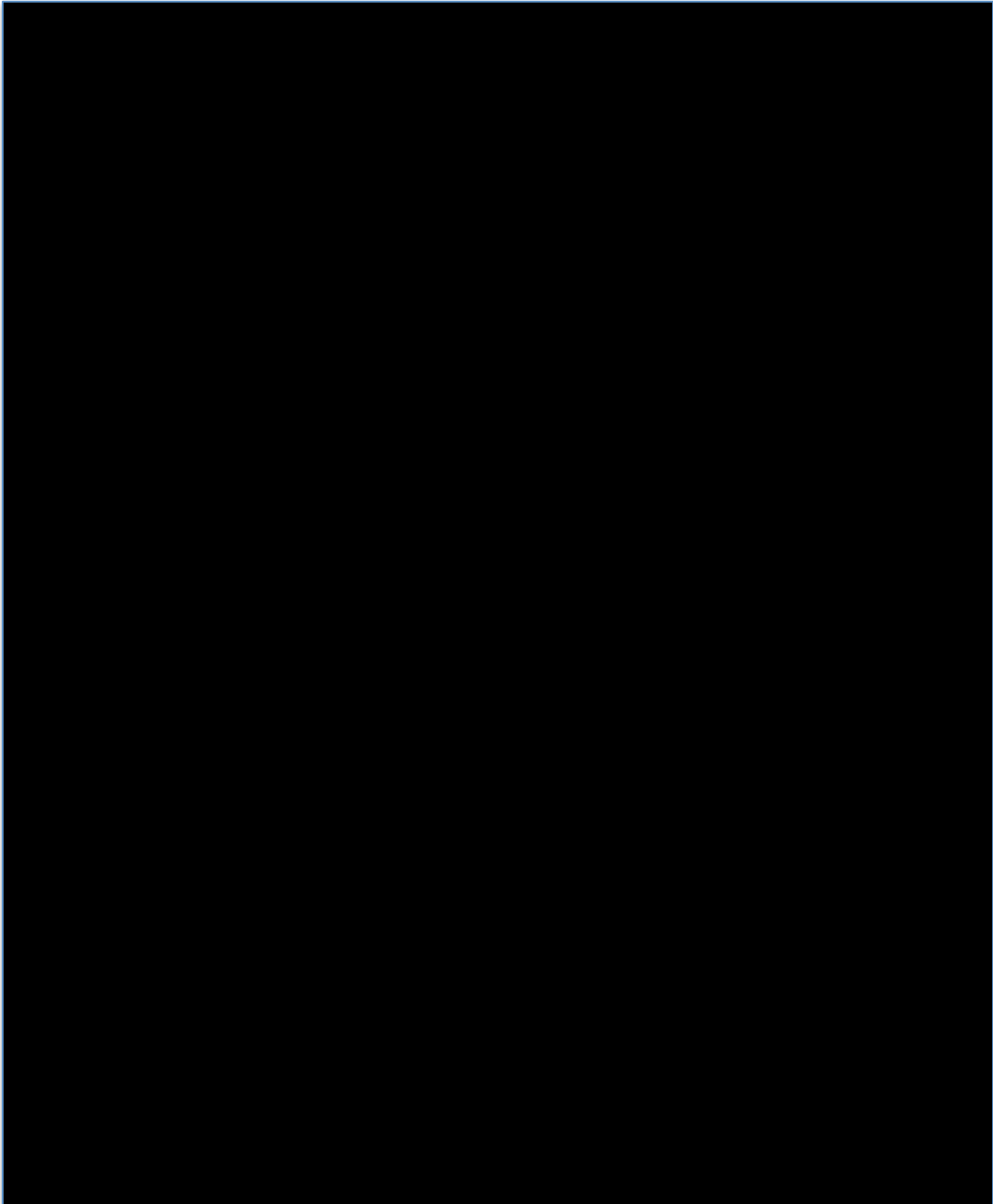
- After reading this story, how do you feel? Why?
- What do you think your friends might say about this story?
- If you suggested that a friend read this article, how would she feel?
- How do the headlines of the story make you feel? Why?
- How do the images associated with the story make you feel? Why?

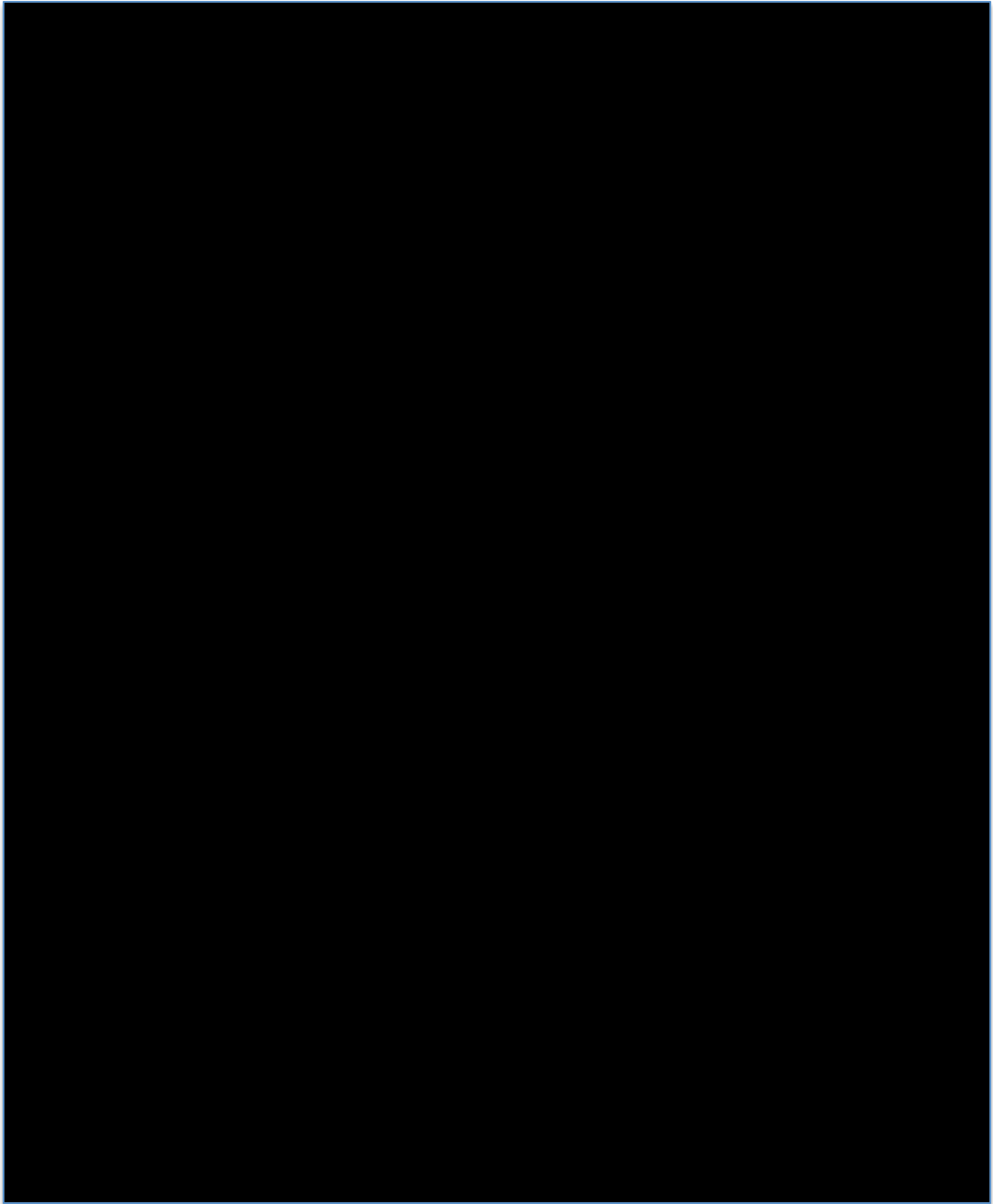
- What part or element of the story sticks out to you the most? Why?
- What part or element of the story is least meaningful? Why?
- If you were going to share this article with a friend, what part of the article would you point out first?
- Do you wish there were more or fewer stories like this in teen magazines? Why?
- What tips or advice stick out to you in the article? Why?

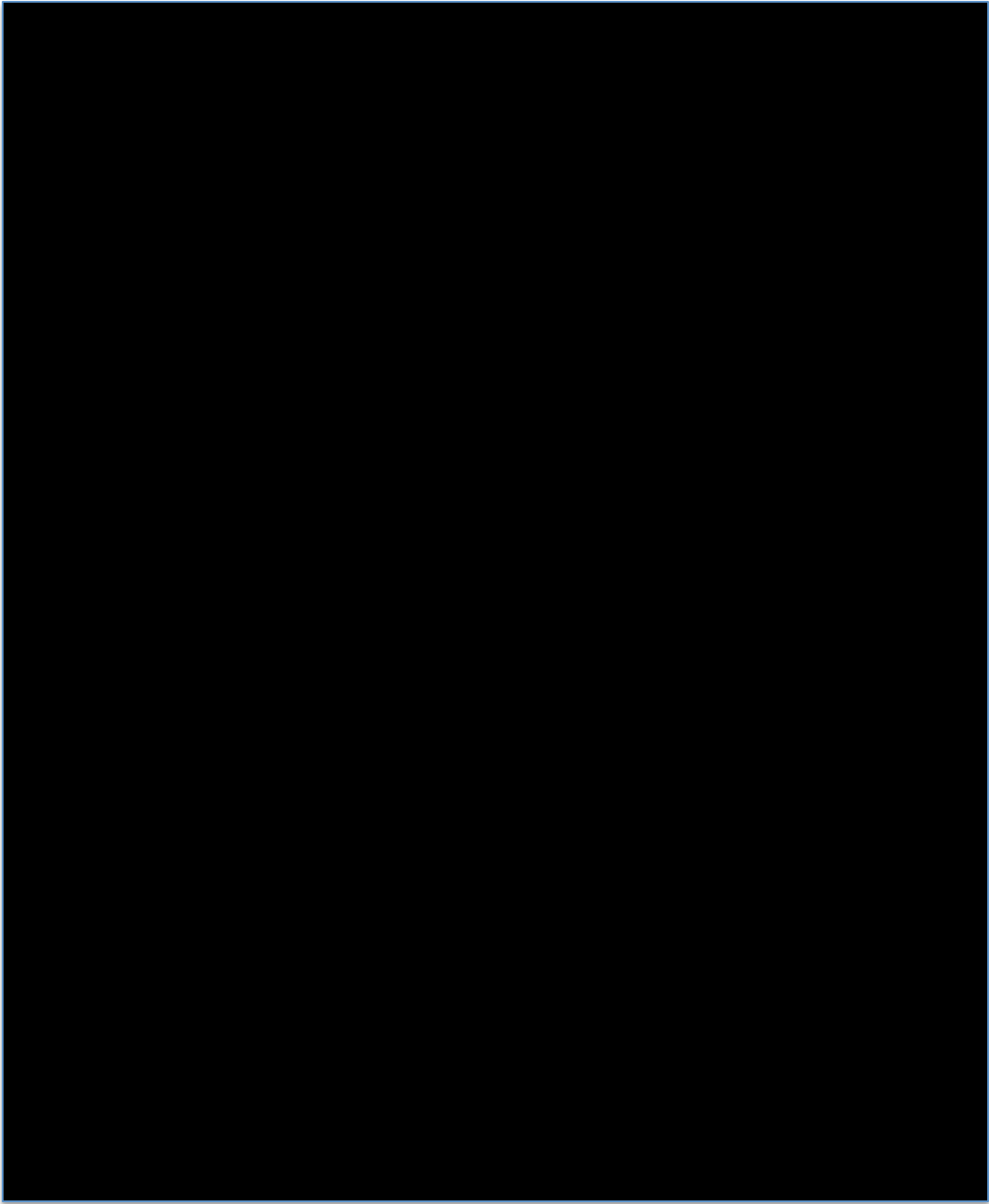
Appendix B

Articles used to facilitate discussion during focus group

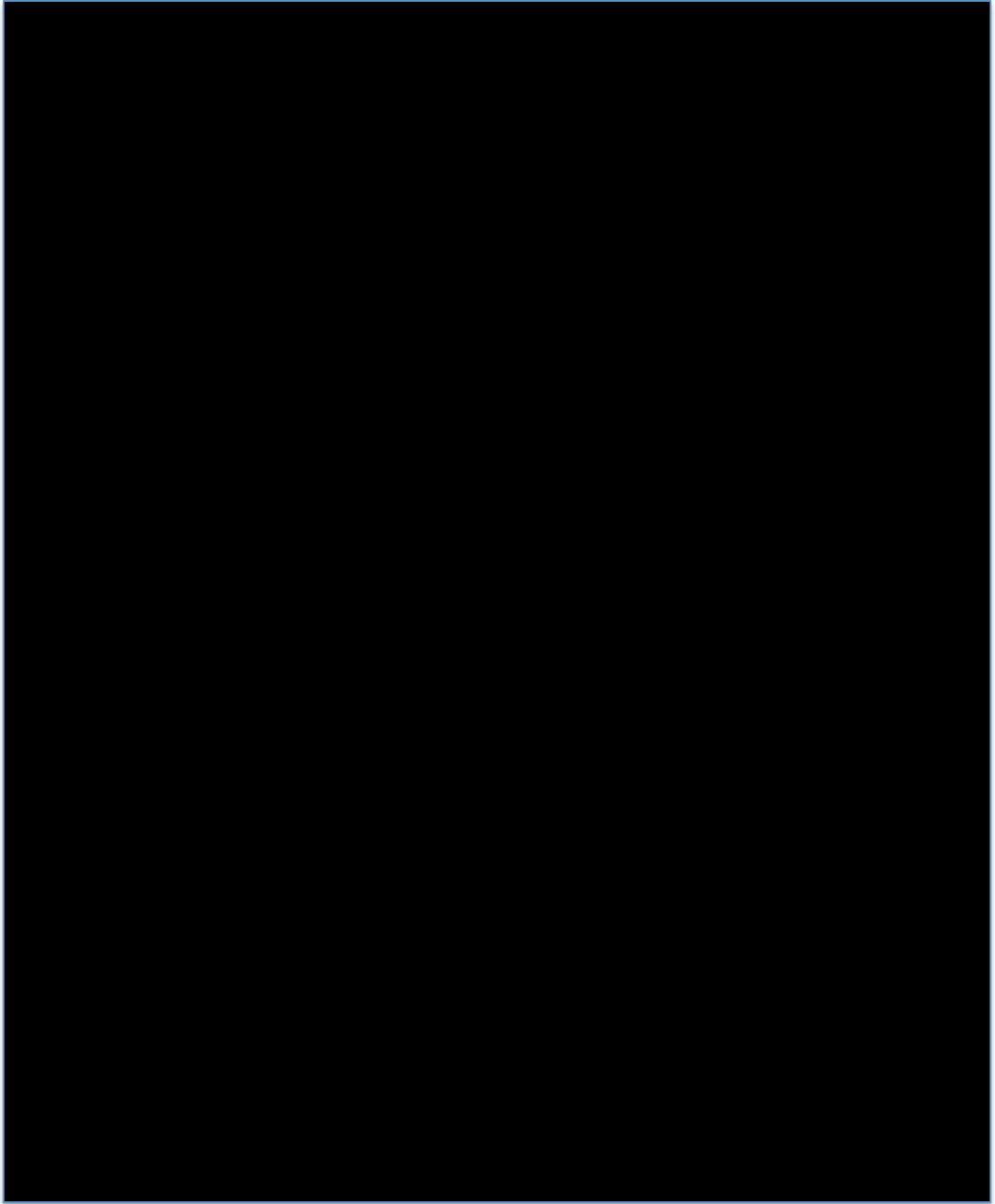
Reference: *Seventeen*'s "Play Up Your Eye Color" article, February 2016 issue, pg. 36, 38 and 40



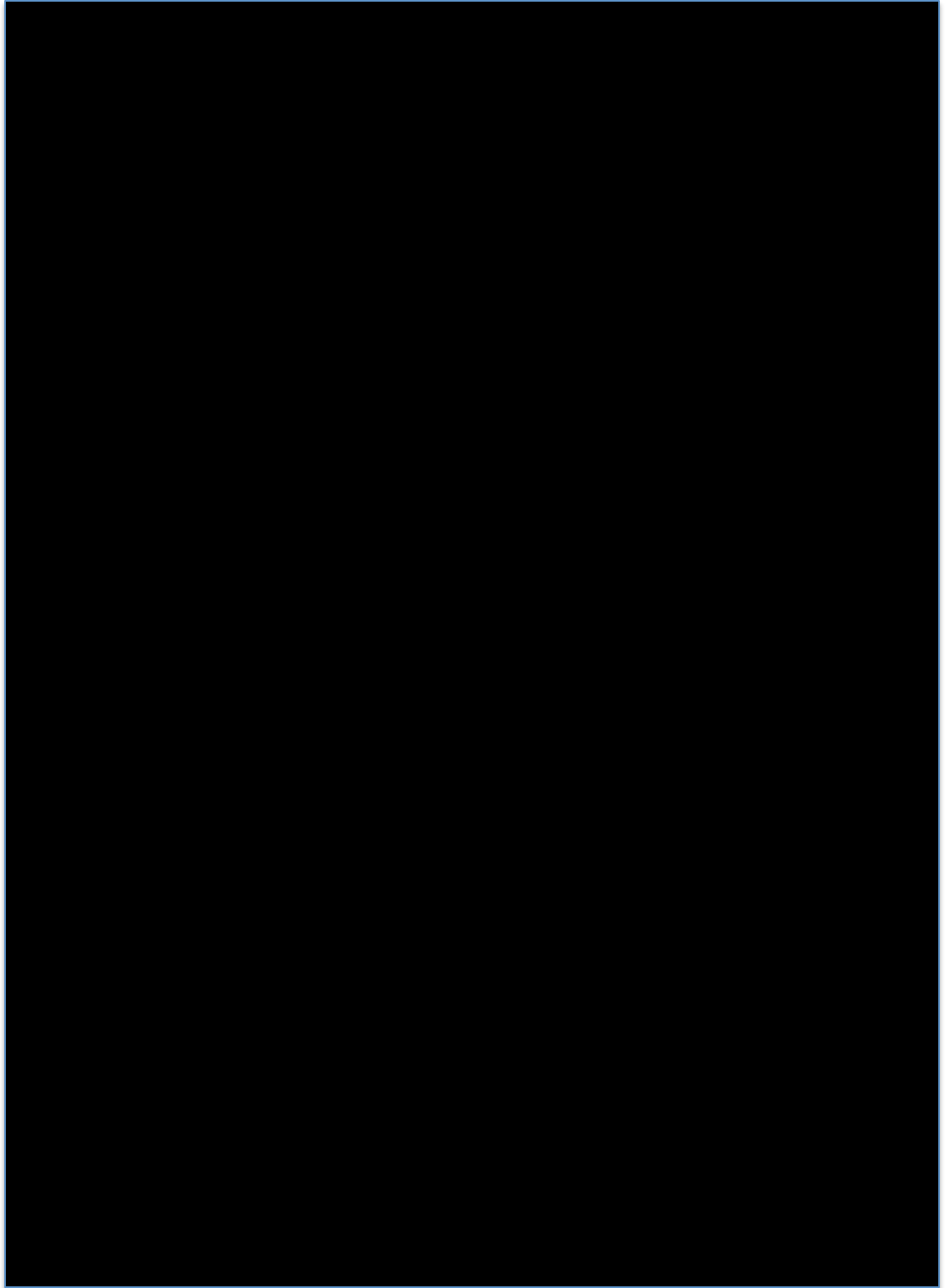




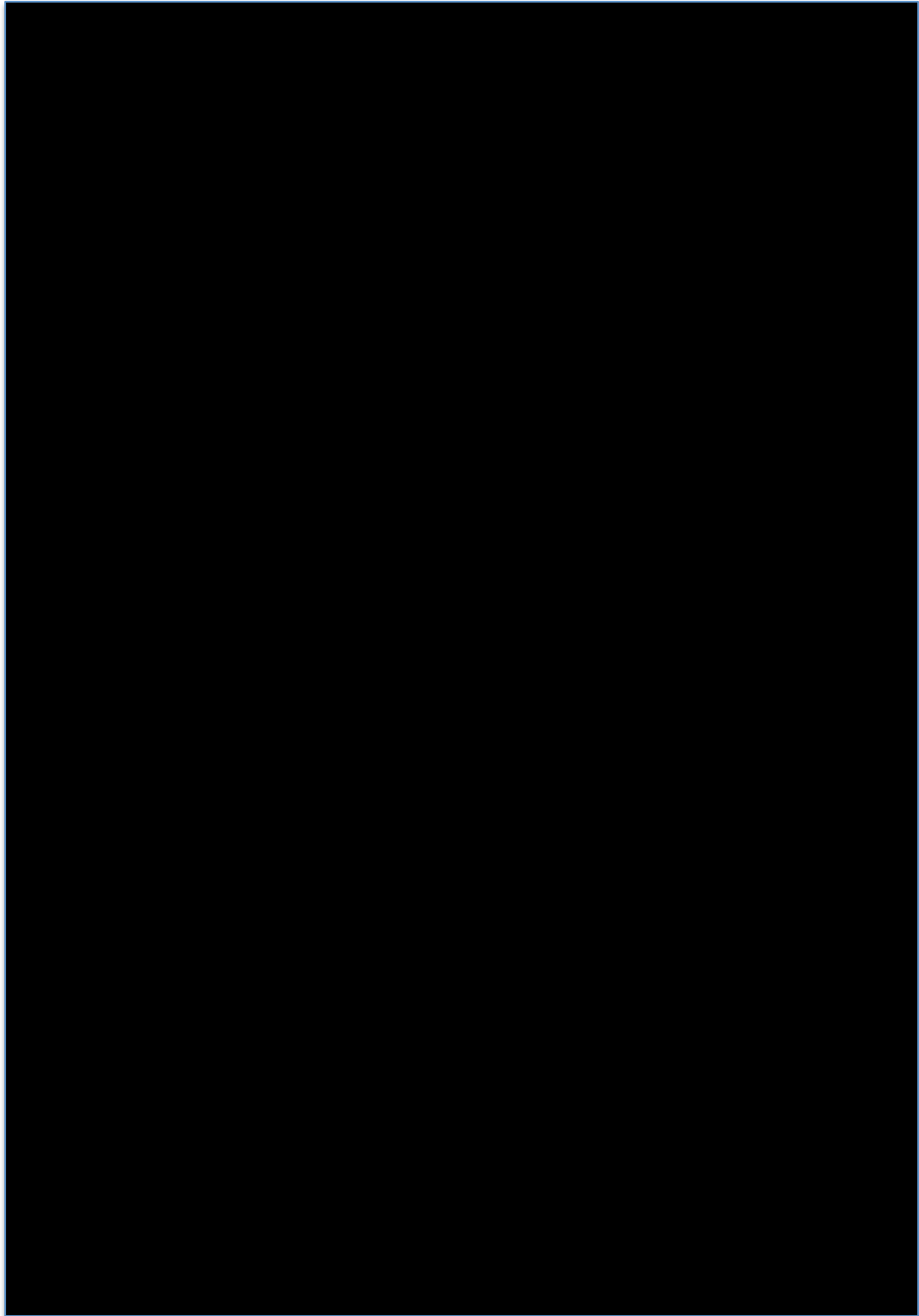
Reference: *Teen Vogue*'s "Hair? Don't Care" article, April 2016 issue, pg. 64

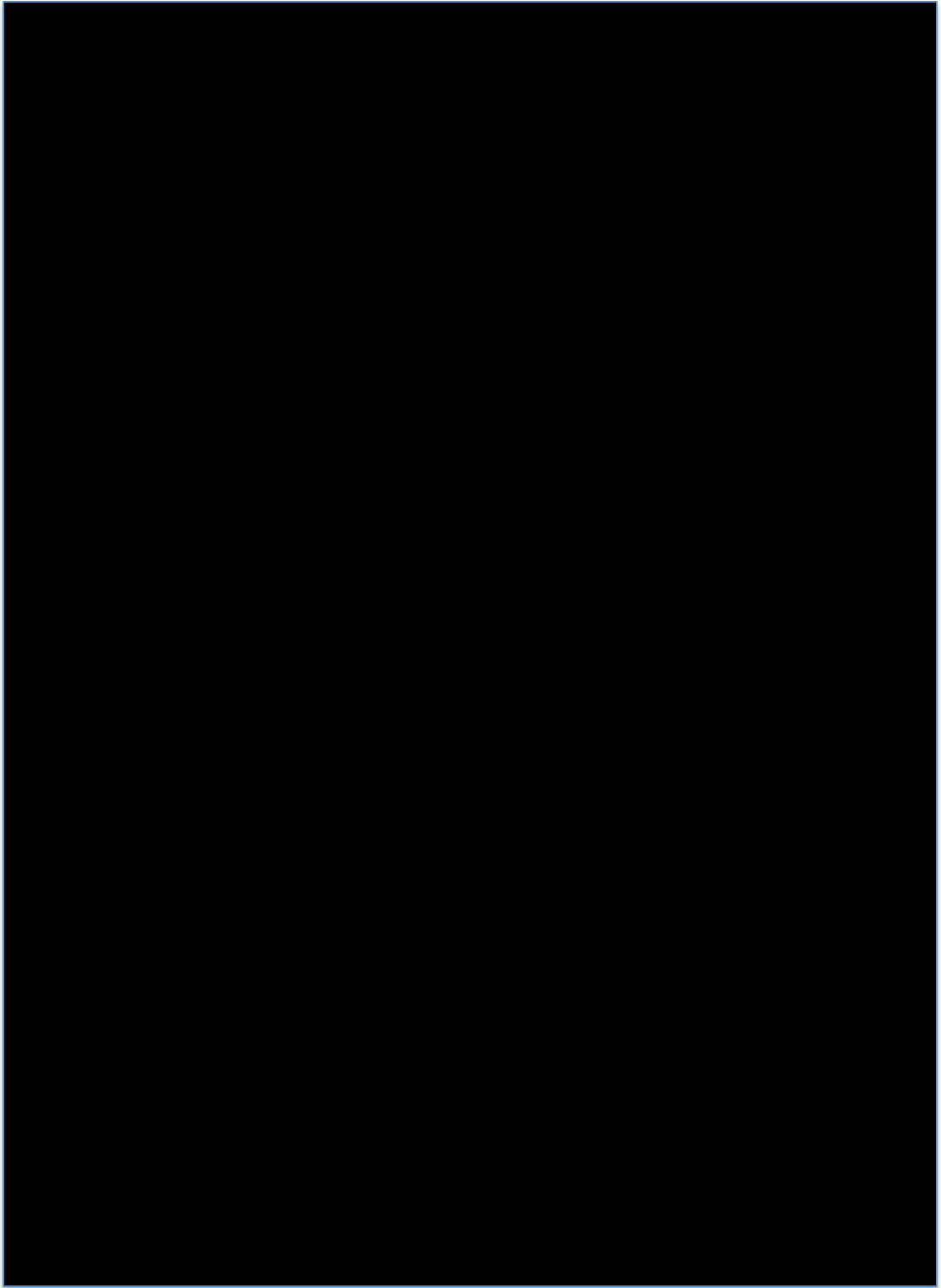


Reference: *Seventeen*'s "The Pressure to Be Perfect" article, March 2016 issue, pg. 62



Reference: *Teen Vogue's* "Beyond the Veil" article, May 2016 article, pgs. 61-62





Reference: Seventeen's "How to Survive An All-Night Study Sesh" article, May 2016 issue, pg. 68

