"Seventeen Magazine Covers -- Messages to Adolescent Females in the Age of Celebrity"  
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Purpose
The purpose of this study was to analyze the visual and textual content presented on the covers of Seventeen magazines published between 1997 and 2007. Seventeen is the most widely read magazine among adolescent females today (SRDS, 2002); research suggests that young readers look to this publication for ideas about who to be and how to look (Duffy & Gotcher, 1998). Covers were chosen for analysis because they represent an index to the information included within the magazine and serve as a representation for the sale of the magazine. Contemporary beauty, fashion, and teen magazines typically feature TV celebrities because the target age groups for these publications are avid television watchers, and thus, often relate to the celebrities on the shows. Insomuch as these celebrities serve as “silent endorsers,” their inclusion on magazine covers may help to sell magazines to these consumers (McCracken, 1993, p. 18). Neil Gabler, a cultural historian, explained that featuring TV celebrities on magazine covers is “a sort of sales pitch for television shows, or a form of cultural marketing” (McCacken, 1993, p. 13). These images and messages are interpreted as specific meanings by the reader. Further, many of elements (e.g., imagery and text) of magazine covers encourage purchase and consumption of magazines, which in turn, expose female readers to advertisements for products and services as well as to editorial content about ways to comply with cultural norms of femininity (McCacken, 1993, p. 14).

Introduction & Background
According to McCracken (1993), magazine covers are designed to sell products and advertising space to marketers. That is, the cover initiates the selling of products featured within the magazine pages through the inclusion of enticing images and text. In other words, “the visual images and headlines on a magazine cover offer a complex semiotic system communicating primary and secondary meanings through language, photographs, images, color and placement” (McCacken, 1993, p. 13). These images and messages are interpreted as specific meanings by the reader. Furthermore, many elements of magazine covers encourage purchase and consumption of magazines, which in turn, expose female readers to advertisements for products and services as well as to editorial content about ways to comply with cultural norms of femininity (McCacken, 1993, p. 14).

Rhetorical Vision 1: Celebrity
Celebrity appeared on 124 of the 132 (93%) Seventeen magazine covers examined for this study. Four themes emerged from the analysis: the notion of celebrity as a “cool” or desirable figure, the notion of celebrity as “realistic” or accessible, the idea that readers should aim to become the in a given celebrity (i.e., that they should look or dress like a celebrity, and the notion that the magazine could provide the reader “access” to the celebrity “real” life or identity. For example, the January 2004 issue of Seventeen illustrates well the construction of a celebrity as a real or accessible person (see Figure 1). This cover includes an image of Liv Tyler alongside the headline, “She’s Real.” Similarly, in 2004 and 2005 issues, the magazine began to feature quotes by celebrity comments on its covers, as if the given celebrity were speaking directly to the reader, thereby fostering the impression of a friendly conversation or a relationship between the celebrity and the would-be reader. Finally, the April 1999 cover features Kirsten Dunst (see Figure 2) and includes text that seemingly offers insight into her personal life. It reads, “Kirsten Dunst on bowling, boys and her parents’ ‘breakup’.” Each of these topics is presumably something that a typical Seventeen reader could relate to; in turn, might provide a platform for identifying with (and developing an affinity for) Kirsten Dunst.

Method
A qualitative theme analysis approach was used to examine 132 covers of Seventeen. The period of 1997 through 2007 was chosen for analysis because, during this time, the practice of featuring fashion models on magazine covers gave way to a new trend in which cover models were replaced by images of celebrities. The categories were developed into a coding guide that was then applied to the data during the process of “open coding.” During the final stages of analysis, the researcher explored the data for broader and more abstract thematic categories.

Results
Analyses revealed three overarching rhetorical visions within the data: celebrity, heterosexual romance, and importance of appearance management.

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Rhetorical Vision 2: Heterosexual Romance
Seventeen magazine covers also included content addressing (heterosexual) romantic relationships, which were presented as including sex and as requiring negotiation and care-taking. This rhetorical vision was observed 150 times and included a variety of subthemes, such as “how to” attract male attention, conduct oneself on a date, and manage various phases of a romantic relationship. For instance, a young female can find advice on “How to be a great date (and get asked out again)” if she

Rhetorical Vision 3: Appearance Management
Appearance management was present nearly every cover, with an average of 3.62 times per issue. Implicit within content addressing appearance management was the notion of a celebrity as realistic and attainable, the notion of sex as a normative component of adolescent romantic relationships, and the notion of fashion and appearance management as matters in need of attention and monitoring/concern. Thus, findings suggest that, for the repeat audience for Seventeen magazine, these rhetorical visions or themes may come to represent a social reality that is invoked to guide thoughts about the self as well as relationships with others.

Conclusions
Although the present research did not include an analysis of reader responses to Seventeen magazine cover content, this is an area ripe for future inquiry. In particular, findings raise concerns about how young adolescent readers may interpret content constructing (a) celebrity as realistic and attainable, (b) sex as a normative component of adolescent romantic relationships, and (c) a narrow range of appearances as desirable or ideal. These topics could form the basis for future inquiry.

References
Standard Rate and Data Service (2002, October). Standard Rate and Data Service consumer magazine advertising source. Des Plaines, IL.

Theoretical Framework
In previous work, researchers have applied iconic and semiotic convergence theory to analyses of teen magazines (e.g., Duffy & Gotcher, 1996). This theory and its method of theme analysis allow researchers to consider how people and groups arrive at a shared “rhetorical visions” (Bormann, 1981), or understandings about the social worlds around them. Rhetorical visions include themes that are constructed to advance a given view about social reality. Implicit here is the assumption that individuals jointly “construct social reality through rhetoric” (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1985, p. 253).