

CREATING THE CONSUMER GIRL:
A Study of Consumerism in *Seventeen* Magazine

Bachelor's thesis

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
KIELTEN LAITOS

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Kriittisen diskurssianalyysin perusajatuksen mukaan kieli ei vain heijasta todellisuutta vaan myös rakentaa sitä. Kielenkäytöllä voidaan siis katsoa olevan valtaa ihmisten uskomusten, arvojen ja tietämyksen määrittelyssä. Samanlaista valtaa on myös medially, jota feministinen mediatutkimus tutkii stereotyyppisiä ja normalisoivia sukupuolikäsityksiä rakentavana 'sukupuoliteknologiana'. Usein median vallankäyttö tapahtuu juuri kielenkäytön kautta. Kun tietyt puhettavat eli diskurssit toistuvat mediassa tarpeeksi usein, muokkaavat ne myös yleisiä mielipiteitä. Hyvä esimerkki sukupuoliteknologiana toimivasta mediasta ovat naistenlehdet, jotka rakentavat rajattua ja usein kulutuskeskeistä kuvaa naisena olemisesta. Enenevässä määrin tämä koskee myös niin kutsuttuja teinilehtiä, joiden lukijakunta koostuu teinitytöistä ja nuorista naisista.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus on tarkastella kriittisen diskurssianalyysin avulla niitä kielellisiä keinoja ja vakiintuneita puhetapoja, joilla teinityttölukijasta rakennetaan ensisijaisesti kuluttajasubjektia teinitytöille suunnatuissa naistenlehdissä. Tutkimukseni aineistoksi valitsin amerikkalaisen *Seventeenin*, joka on yksi vanhimmista, eniten luetuista ja laajimmalle levinneistä teinitytöille suunnatuista naistenlehdistä. Pysin osoittamaan, että nykypäivän *Seventeenin* muotiin ja kauneuteen liittyvät artikkelit rakentavat teinitytöistä muoti- ja kauneustuotteiden kuluttajia positioimalla heidät ensisijaisesti kuluttajatoimijoiksi. Tyttöjen aktiivinen rakentaminen kuluttajasubjekteiksi on siis naistenlehtien nykypäivää, eikä vain 1940-luvulla teinityttöjen kulutusmarkkinoiden luomisen yhteydessä ilmennyt erityispiirre.

Analyysini tulokset osoittavat, että *Seventeen* positioi lukijansa ennen kaikkea kuluttajiksi ja rakentaa aktiivisesti kuvaa kuluttajatyöstä ihanteellisena teinityttönä. Teinitytöistä luodaan kuluttajia pyrkimällä vaikuttamaan heidän uskomuksiinsa, arvoihinsa ja käsityksiinsä siitä, mitä tyttönä oleminen tarkoittaa ja edellyttää. Positioinnin keinoina käytetään ennen kaikkea itsensä kehittämisen sekä hauskuuden diskursseja. Lehti luo lukijoilleen kuvaa tyttöydestä ensisijaisesti jatkuvana parempaan pyrkimisen prosessina, jossa ainoa keino määrittelemättömän ideaalin saavuttamiseksi on jatkuva muoti- ja kauneustuotteiden kuluttaminen sekä *Seventeenin* neuvojen noudattaminen. Samalla jatkuva itsekontrollin vaatimus yritetään naamioda hauskuuden diskurssiin, jolloin kuluttaminen näyttyy teinityttöjen elämään itsestään selvästi kuuluvana tekijänä, jota ei suositella kyseenalaistamaan.

Kandidaatintutkielmani tarkastelee naistenlehtien kulutusideologiaa laadullisen tutkimuksen periaattein yhden *Seventeenin* numeron muoti- ja kauneusartikkelien pohjalta. Rajallisen aineiston vuoksi tutkimuksen tuloksia on syytä pitää ennen kaikkea suuntaa antavina. Laajemmin yleistettäviä tutkimustuloksia saataisiin tutkimalla useampia naistenlehtiä useammasta eri näkökulmasta. Myös kvantitatiivinen tutkimus voisi tuoda aiheeseen uutta tietoa.

Asiasanat: consumerism, critical discourse analysis, feminist media studies, teen magazines

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language use not only reflects reality but also constructs it. Thus, language can be seen as a powerful tool with which, for instance, the media can construct understandings of reality by transmitting certain ideologies and attitudes. These are best revealed by investigating the way language is used in the media. A good example of a powerful media are women's magazines and so-called teen magazines, which regularly reach a vast number of women and teenage girls. Instead of objectively reflecting female culture, the magazines function according to powerful ideologies such as consumerism, which in many cases determine the content of the magazines. By closely researching the language through which the readers of such magazines are directed towards accepting certain attitudes, or in other words positioned, the ideologies of such magazines can be made more explicit and thus also easier to question.

The ideology of consumerism is indisputably one of the most common ideologies that appear in teen and women's magazines and affect their editorial content. However, the effects of the consumer ideology on the reader positioning of such magazines are not extensively studied. While most studies on teen and women's magazines have examined how the magazines represent gender and maintain stereotypical depictions of women, less attention has been paid to the reader positions and the manner in which the readers are implicitly directed to accept certain ideological beliefs and values as self-evident truths. This is particularly the case with the ideology of consumerism, which encourages the readers to consume endless amounts of fashion and beauty products. It seems that by establishing a pro-consumerist reader position, the magazines aim at affecting their readers' beliefs, values and knowledge concerning consumerism and making them more consumer-oriented. Consequently, it can be argued that teen and women's magazines create consumer girls and consumer women.

The purpose of the present thesis is to extend the research of women's magazines by giving insight into reader positioning in the leading teen magazine of the USA, *Seventeen*, and the manner in which the magazine directs its teenage readers to support the ideology of consumerism. There seems to be a research gap to fill, since so far there has been little discussion about how the ideology of consumerism affects the content of the contemporary *Seventeen* Magazine. The research to date has focused on the connection of *Seventeen* and consumerism in the 1940s, when *Seventeen* contributed greatly to the creation of the teen girl

consumer market (Massoni 2006). In the present thesis I intend to show that the connection to consumerism is still strong in the contemporary articles of *Seventeen* Magazine and that the creation of the teen girl consumer market did not end after the 1940s but is rather ongoing.

This thesis has been divided into four sections. The first section introduces the theoretical background of this research, briefly outlining the main concerns of the method critical discourse analysis and the relevant aspects of previous research conducted on women's magazines. In the second section I state the research questions and introduce the data and method in greater detail. The third section consists of the analysis of fashion and beauty articles from the contemporary *Seventeen* Magazine. In the fourth section of the thesis I discuss the findings and implications of the analysis and suggest topics for further research.

2. LANGUAGE, GIRLS AND CONSUMERISM

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical background on which my research will be based. First, I will introduce critical discourse analysis and its main concerns in the study of language. I will discuss ideologies of texts and the ways readers can be directed towards the intended reading of texts through reader positions. In this section, I will also briefly introduce the academic field of feminist media studies upon which my research will also be based. Second, I will examine consumerism in teen and women's magazines and discuss how it is supported by the discourse of 'fun' and the demands for constant improvement of the female body. In the end, I will briefly discuss the *Seventeen* brand in relation to consumerism and the previous research conducted on the magazine.

2.1 Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a sociolinguistic theory that examines the relationship between language and power. This is done by critically investigating the established discourses, or in other words "social constructions of reality", in relation to the socio-cultural context in which they occur (Fairclough 1995: 18). As is stated by Fairclough (1995: 54) and Gill (2007: 58-59), the critical nature of CDA stems from the acknowledgement that language use does not only objectively reflect the reality, but also constructs it. In CDA, language is seen as sets of options. These options are made not only among various linguistic forms, but also between meanings. It is up to the producer of the text which sorts of representations the text makes, how the text positions the reader and what identities the text reflects (Fairclough

1995: 18). CDA examines these options and tries to discover why certain choices are made over other possibilities, what sort of thinking the chosen representations support and what options are altogether left out. Fairclough (1995: 54) states that CDA is needed to make the interconnected relation between language and power and their effects on meanings more transparent to the audiences of texts. Talbot (1992: 174) further states that higher awareness of the functions of language and power may help to 'empower' people and make them recognize how, for example, their own subjectivity and social identities are constructed through language.

Despite its focus on language, CDA is not solely a linguistic theory. Wodak (2001: 1-2) points out that CDA takes an interdisciplinary stance towards linguistic research, meaning that language is never examined in isolation. The socio-cultural context and the possible ideologies of the text are also taken into account, for they are seen to contribute to the construction of meanings. Although the most prominent attribute of CDA is its concern with language and power, Wodak (2001: 10-11) states that language is not seen as powerful on its own right. On the contrary, the power of language stems from the language use of powerful people, who aim at maintaining the dominant power relations. Hence CDA is often used to analyse the language use of powerful parties and the way it creates and maintains the inequalities of the social world (Wodak 2001: 10).

2.1.1 Ideologies of texts

The power of texts is strongly connected to the transmission of ideologies. Fairclough (1995: 14) defines ideologies as meanings that support and maintain unequal power relations and function often on the implicit level of the text. This implicitness is one of the aspects that makes ideologies so powerful: they often go unnoticed by the reader, and thus, they also go unquestioned. Wodak (2001: 3) states that in this way ideologies naturalize power relations. The existence of ideology itself is obscured in the text but its meaning is offered as a natural and stable reflection of the world which the reader is not encouraged to question.

Fairclough (1995: 14-15) states that when investigating whether a text is working ideologically, it is important to ask what are the social origins, motivations and effects of the representation in question. It is important, for instance, to take into account the values of the producer of the text, since they are very likely to affect the representations and meanings

offered by the text. Wodak (2001: 10) further states that by revealing the hidden ideologies of the text, critical discourse analysts aim at 'demystifying' discourses and making readers more aware of the ways ideologies are used to create false images of their needs and interests. This is often the case, for instance, in the ideologies supported by women's magazines.

2.1.2 Reader position

Each text has been written with an ideal interpretation in mind. Mills (1995: 67-69) states that through both explicit and implicit textual means the reader can be directed to interpret the text in the intended manner. This is done by offering the reader a certain position or a role that supports the intended reading and rejects other possible ways of understanding the text. Talbot (1992: 175) points out that the producers of texts cannot know who their readers are in reality and thus the position offered for the reader may not necessarily have anything to do with readers' real social identities, but is rather a reflection of the producers' intentions. However, when certain reader positions are used repeatedly in media texts, they may eventually affect readers' knowledge, beliefs and values as well as the way readers perceive themselves as subjects (Fairclough 1995: 123). Consequently, Fairclough (1995: 17) argues that examining the way social identities are constructed in media texts is important. Although reader positions are not as widely studied as for instance media representations, they are still an essential part of the social impact of the media and thus an important aspect for media analysis.

In regard to teen magazines, Talbot (1992: 175, 179-180) states that the reader position is constructed by creating complementary social identities for the magazine and its readers. Commonly the position of a teen magazine entails a position of both an advisor and entertainer, while the reader is positioned as a person who benefits from the advice of the articles. Moreover, Talbot (1992: 175) describes reader positioning of teen magazines as 'synthetic personalisation', the function of which is to treat readers seemingly as actual individuals. Since the reader position is merely a construction of the text's producers, it is not self-evident that the readers accept it. On the contrary, the readers may also choose to question the offered role and instead position themselves differently than the magazine has intended. Talbot (1992: 176) states, however, that contesting the reader position is rather hard for persons belonging to the target group of readers. This is due to the special relationship constructed between the magazine and the intended readership. The magazines pose

themselves as readers' best friends who allegedly 'speak the same language' and are aware of the needs and desires of the readers (Talbot 1992: 179-180). This impression is created by providing recurring presuppositions that direct the reader's interpretation of the text and encourage the reader to agree with the ideological content of the magazine. Thus, the offered reader position may appear as a natural part of being a teen girl that is not questionable. As a consequence, the reader position of teen magazines is a powerful tool for affecting the knowledge, beliefs and values of teenage girls.

2.1.3 Feminist media studies

Critical discourse analysis can be used as a method for instance in the field of feminist media studies. Feminist media studies is a versatile academic field that examines how the media produces and reproduces understandings of gender (Gill 2007: 7-8). In the same way as language is seen to function in the theory of CDA, feminist media studies considers the media not only to reflect reality but also to construct it (Gill 2007: 12). In Teresa de Lauretis's (1987: 2-3) terms, the media is seen as a 'technology of gender' that defines how gender or rather femininity and masculinity are understood in a wider social context. These understandings affect people also on an individual level by causing them first to accept and then to conform to the views of gender offered by the media (de Lauretis 1987: 13).

Gill (2007: 7) states that feminist media studies is openly political research. Similarly to other feminist studies, the prior goal of feminist media studies is to change the world and increase equality. To achieve this goal, feminist media studies aims at revealing unequal power relations that function behind stereotypical media representations of gender. Since critical discourse analysis suits well for the purposes of revealing ideologies and implicit power relations, it is often used as a method in feminist media studies.

2.2 Women's magazines and consumerism

Women's magazines are widely researched in contemporary media studies. Part of the researchers' interest probably stems from the contradictory nature of such magazines: on the one hand they seem to empower women, but on the other they provide their readers with strict orders and instructions about how to perform femininity. Furthermore, Gill (2007: 181) states that women's magazines not only reflect female culture, but also support the consumerist ideology that tries to sell women all sorts of products ranging from cosmetics to fashionable

clothes. This is affirmed by Griffin (2004: 35) who further states that advertisers have traditionally regarded women as ideal consumers. The ideology of consumerism dominates not only the advertisements of women's magazines, but also their editorial content (Wolf 1991: 81-85). Magazines are filled with advertisements and editorial articles that support the advertisements and suggest to the readers that the only way to be properly feminine is to consume more (Gill 2007, Kilbourne 1999, Wolf 1991). Harris (2004: 163-165) further states that readers are made to believe that consumerism is the best way to achieve power, individualism, citizenship and happiness.

The reason why the consumerist attitudes of advertisers have such power over women's magazines' content is naturally money. Gill (2007: 181) states that the money paid by advertisers covers most of the profit women's magazines make. Thus, women's magazines have to make sure that advertisers wish to advertise products in their magazine also in the future. To ensure this, publishers of women's magazines aim at both creating an advertise-friendly atmosphere in the magazine and forming a strong and friendly bond with the readers of that magazine, which they then can sell to the advertisers (Gill 2007: 182). Hence, it seems that to ensure their financial success, women's magazines aim at convincing their readers that in order to be a woman in a proper, socially accepted way, one has to be a consumer.

The consumerist ideology is particularly visible in so-called teen magazines, that is, women's magazines targeted at teenage girls. A general belief is that the younger the woman is, the better a consumer she is going to be. As Kilbourne (1999: 28) puts it: "If you hook them early, they are yours for life". In this research I intend to show that this attitude is clearly visible also in *Seventeen Magazine*.

2.3.1 Girl Power and the discourse of 'fun'

In contemporary research on women's magazines, some attention has been paid to the Girl Power discourse and its disruptive effects on the content of teen magazines (Harris et al. 2004). In short, the term 'Girl Power' is used to refer to the discourse that addresses girls both as active and powerful subjects, and implies that this activeness and power is achieved mainly through consumption (Harris 2004: 167, Griffin 2004: 35-36). Thus, while empowering girls and encouraging them to believe in themselves, the Girl Power discourse supports a consumerist view of girlhood and suppresses other ways of being a girl. Taft (2004: 75)

points out that if the power of a girl is considered to be equivalent to her power of buying, many girls are rendered powerless. In that light it seems that Girl Power does not belong to all girls, but only to those individuals who have enough money to buy that power. Taft (2004: 73) further points out that in addition to the emphasis on consumerism, the Girl Power discourse also emphasizes the individual responsibility of girls. By stating that a girl can be anything that she wants to be, the Girl Power discourse also states that if the girl fails in being, for example, thin, beautiful and in every way successful, she has only herself to blame. Thus, girls are encouraged to hold only themselves responsible for their own success or failure and discouraged to see the actual injustices and inequalities of the world that may contribute to that particular success or failure.

The harmful nature of Girl Power discourse is disguised both into the pro-girl attitude and the discourse of 'fun'. Gill (2007: 199) states that this greatly resembles the 'can-do' philosophy of magazines targeted at adult women, such as *Cosmopolitan*. Gill (2007: 187) argues that through the discourse of Girl Power, readers of teen magazines are made to believe that in order to be active and powerful girls, they must act out their girlhood by buying certain products, by paying constant attention to their looks and by claiming that all this is fun. In this project, teen magazines are presented as being girls' best friends, who give all the tips and hints the girls need in order to perform femininity and girlhood in a proper manner. Gill (2007: 199) describes this pattern with the term 'omnipresent imperative': the readers of teen magazines are constantly told who they must be and how they must act. This, Gill states, has to do "more with improvement than entertainment" (2007: 199). In spite of the most explicit discourse of fun, the central message within teen magazines seems indeed to be that of improvement and constant re-creation of the self. Essentially, the Girl Power discourse of teen magazines does not support the view that girls are powerful as they are, but claims that they can achieve power by altering themselves to fit the image of the ideal girl represented in teen magazines; that is, a consumer girl.

2.3.2 Demand for constant control

The way girlhood is represented in teen magazines determines the position which the readers of those magazines are offered and how their subjectivity is constructed. Griffin (2004: 42) argues that while supporting consumerist aspects of girlhood, teen magazines also encourage their readers to identify themselves primarily as consumers. Griffin also criticises the habit of

teen magazines to picture girls as “impossible subjects” who can never be happy with themselves. According to Griffin (2004: 42), the subjectivity of girls is made contradictory by stating that girls are or have either “too little or too much”, meaning that girls must always aspire to controlling and improving themselves by making themselves either thinner, fitter, more beautiful or better dressed, no matter how thin, fit, beautiful or well dressed they are to begin with. The content of teen magazines is thus dominated by a discourse of constant improvement.

Magazines teach girls never to be too happy with themselves, for if they were, they would not be as good consumers as they are when they believe that happiness lies in buying certain products, that is, in buying a proper girlhood (Griffin 2004: 42, Kilbourne 1999: 29, Wolf 1991: 84). According to teen magazines, being a girl thus means constant control and improvement of oneself, which can only be achieved by being a consumer. This is also how the readers of such magazines are encouraged to view themselves. On the other hand, the role of teen magazines seems to be to function as an invaluable advisor for girls in the project of consuming. This status of an advisor is often justified both by a big-sisterly tone used by teen magazines and the seemingly friendly relationship established between the readers and the producers of those magazines (Talbot 1992: 175, 194).

2.3.3 Consumerism and the brand of *Seventeen* Magazine

The interconnection between *Seventeen* and consumerism dates back to the 1940s when *Seventeen* was founded, being one of the first magazines targeted particularly at teenage girls (Massoni 2006: 31). Like other women’s magazines, *Seventeen* makes the majority of its profits from advertisers who advertise in the magazine. Thus, to get the new magazine established in the 1940s, the publishers of *Seventeen* had to first convince the advertisers that it was profitable to advertise to their readers, that is, to teenage girls. While describing how the status of *Seventeen* was established, Massoni (2006: 31-34) reveals that the publishers decided to create a concept which perceived teenage girls as perfect consumers. In spite of being purely imaginary, the concept was wholly accepted by advertisers. According to Massoni (2006: 35-41), *Seventeen* claimed teen girls to be perfect consumers since they were young and thus not already “branded” by other advertisers, influential in their circle of friends but also easily influenced by *Seventeen* and willing to spend the money they allegedly had. Most importantly, *Seventeen* depicted teen girls as girls who want to attract boys and who

therefore need to be beautiful (Massoni 2006: 39-40). This is where the advertisers step in, for in order to be beautiful, *Seventeen* implied that the teen girls must be consumers of beauty products and clothes that follow the latest trends.

This early portrayal of a teen girl can be seen to function also as the basis for the more recent depiction of the ideal teen girl consumer. My hypothesis is that the recent position of a teen girl created by *Seventeen* follows the same patterns as the imaginary concept of a teen girl constructed in the 1940s. The content of the magazine still seems to imply that the teen girl is a person who needs to be branded by advertisers and who furthermore needs to perform her girlhood in a very specific manner; that is, by consuming beauty products advertised in *Seventeen* Magazine. Thus, the ideology of consumerism that affected the construction of the *Seventeen* brand in the 1940s has not vanished from the recent issues of the magazine. On the contrary, consumerism has remained as a strong ideological motivator in the positioning of teenage girls.

3. DATA AND METHOD

In this chapter I will discuss in more detail the data and method chosen for this research. First, I will state my research question and its subquestions. Second, I will introduce *Seventeen* Magazine and describe the reasons why I chose this particular magazine and specific sections within it as the data of this study. Third, I will describe how critical discourse analysis is used as a method of the analysis.

3.1 Research questions

In the present research I am going to analyse the way contemporary articles of *Seventeen* Magazine support the ideology of consumerism and try to convince the readers that being a girl entails being a consumer. The primary research question is, thus, the following:

- 1) Does *Seventeen* Magazine support the consumerism of teen girls and if so, how is this done?

The subquestions, through which I try to find an answer to the primary research question, are the following:

- 1) How is the reader of *Seventeen* Magazine positioned in fashion and beauty articles? Does that entail the position of a consumer, and if so, how is the consumerism justified?
- 2) What implicit means are used to reaffirm the support for consumerism?

By answering these questions I aim at revealing that the contemporary *Seventeen* Magazine supports the ideology of consumerism by both explicitly and implicitly supposing that their readers are and also should be girls who enjoy consuming fashion and beauty products. In order to achieve this goal, I use critical discourse analysis to analyse the text of the fashion and beauty articles in one issue of *Seventeen* Magazine.

3.2 Data

In the analysis of teen magazines and consumerism, I have decided to use *Seventeen* Magazine as my data for three main reasons. First, *Seventeen* is an American teen magazine with a special status. It was one of the first teen magazines, being established as early as in 1944, and even today it remains as one of the most read teen magazines in the USA, with the largest rates in both subscription and circulation (Massoni 2004: 51). Second, *Seventeen* is widely read not only in the USA but also in other countries due to various international editions. In countries that lack an edition of their own, the U.S. version of *Seventeen* is quite frequently sold. This is the case also in Finland. Being globally circulated and reaching a vast amount of teenage girls each month, *Seventeen* is in a powerful position in regard to messages it chooses to transmit. Third, there seems to be a research gap to fill in the analysis of *Seventeen* Magazine and consumerism. Although *Seventeen* has for decades been one of the leading teen magazines, it has not aroused the interest of many researchers (Massoni 2006: 32). According to Massoni (2006: 32), most of the research conducted on *Seventeen* is about the magazine's history and the formation of the brand, the main concern being how *Seventeen* contributed to the construction of the teen girl consumer market in the 1940s. What have not been widely studied, however, are the effects of the consumer ideology on the content of the contemporary *Seventeen* Magazine and its reader positions. This research gap I intend to fill.

Since the length of this thesis is restricted, I have decided to concentrate in my analysis only on the fashion and beauty related articles in one issue of *Seventeen* Magazine (November 2009). This will make a total of 15 articles (see Appendix). These articles are primarily combinations of fashion and beauty advice and indirect advertisements, or rather, suggestions

to buy certain types of products. Being half articles and half advertisements, I assume that these texts are the best target for analysing consumerism in *Seventeen Magazine*. The text of the articles consists mainly of the title, subtitle and various captions that are attached to pictures of different fashion and beauty products. Due to the limited length of this thesis, the analysis will include only the textual properties of the articles and exclude the visual ones. Also direct advertisements are excluded from the analysis.

3.3 Method

As the method of this research I use critical discourse analysis, which makes this thesis qualitative research. In the analysis I search for recurring discourses and implicit textual means such as word choices and verb forms which can be seen to follow the consumer ideology and through which, as a consequence, the reader is positioned and consumerism is justified. Following Talbot's (1992: 176) ideas about positioning the reader, I aim at discovering how the reader of *Seventeen Magazine* is addressed and what type of social identity is bestowed upon her. I will also compare the reader position to the position of the magazine in order to see whether they follow the roles of an advisor and a receiver of advice, which traditionally appear in women's magazines. I will first concentrate on the overall discourses of the articles and examine how they function in the construction of the consumerist girl reader. Then, by closely reading and scrutinizing the text and by paying attention to word choices and imperative verb forms, I try to reveal in greater detail the implicit means by which the text aims at affecting the readers' beliefs concerning consumerism and themselves as consumers. In addition, I aim at making public the presuppositions that are depicted as obvious or self-evident in the text. The purpose of the careful analysis is to show that the girlhood which the contemporary *Seventeen* actively produces is similar to the concept of a teen girl created in the 1940s and indeed suggests that an ideal girl is a consumer girl.

Using CDA as a method has various advantages, the most important being the ability to investigate texts on a very detailed level and thus also to get hold of their ideological properties. Thus CDA is a valid instrument when examining the ideology of consumerism in *Seventeen Magazine*. However, due to the detailed analysis the amount of data has to be relatively small in a thesis with a limited length, such as this one. Consequently, the results of the analysis can be regarded primarily as a starting point for further research. A wider

research is needed until the results can be generalised to apply to the *Seventeen* Magazine as a whole or to the entire field of teen magazines.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Reader position

In the first section of the analysis I will examine the reader position of *Seventeen* Magazine and its connections to consumerism. I will first discuss how the consistently used direct address of the reader contributes to the creation of the consumerist reader position. Next, I will examine the categorization of girls that appears in *Seventeen*'s articles and discuss it in relation to consumerism. Then I will examine the teen girl ideal set up by *Seventeen* and show that according to the magazine, the ideal girl is indeed a consumer girl. In the end I will discuss the justifications for consumerism offered by *Seventeen*.

4.1.1 Emphasizing 'you'

Throughout the fashion and beauty articles, *Seventeen* addresses its readers directly with the pronoun 'you', which is an important factor when establishing the reader position or in other words the role with which the reader is expected to identify. The established position follows the traditions of teen magazines in two ways. First, the direct address frequently occurs in imperative or instructive phrases in which *Seventeen* Magazine appears as an advisor and the reader as a person who needs the magazine's advice, as is the case for instance in phrases "Flaunt your best assets with these amazing steals!" and "These three go-to pieces flatter any figure. Here's how to make them work on *yours*." In this perspective, the reader position of *Seventeen* Magazine is similar to the reader positions of other teen magazines, since the magazines habitually position themselves as informers and their readers as people who need to be informed (Talbot 1992:194). Furthermore, this makes the reader position entail the position of a consumer since the matters on which the teen magazines inform their readers are generally consumer-related as the examples above illustrate. Second, the direct address can be perceived as a form of 'synthetic personalisation' described by Talbot (1992: 175), since it creates an illusion of individualism and a discourse of uniqueness that is used to support consumerism. In articles that offer fashion and beauty advice, the direct address implies that obeying the advice is beneficial for each individual reader. This impression is created by constantly writing about "your lean legs", "your best body", "your shoulders and chest" and "your best colors". Eventually, the constant use of discourse of uniqueness may encourage the

readers to identify with the magazine's reader position and obey the consuming instructions provided by the articles.

The discourse of uniqueness is further affirmed by using the pronoun 'you' as a reference to girls with all sorts of appearances and not only to a certain type of teenage girls. The same pronoun may refer to girls of any possible body shape, skin colour or age, even within the same article. By providing a seemingly wide-ranging reader position, *Seventeen* ensures that as large an amount of girls as possible would be able to identify with the reader position. Admittedly, in this perspective it seems that the reader position of *Seventeen* is ambiguous and even unlimited. However, on the level of personal beliefs and interests the reader position seems to be more restricted. This becomes evident when considering *Seventeen*'s use of the pronoun 'you' primarily as a reference to girls who share a passion for consuming fashion and beauty products. In its articles, *Seventeen* strongly presupposes that the reader is someone who is interested in the latest trends, bargains and possibilities to transform her body, hair or face with correct fashion or beauty products. With phrases such as "You're ready to experiment with new looks", "You need cool pieces that make you look longer and leaner" and "You can have the strong, touchably soft hair you've always wanted", *Seventeen* implies that it knows what the reader is ready to do, what she needs to have, how she should look and what she has always wanted. Typically all of these aspects are related to consumption of fashion and beauty products.

Consequently, the reader position of *Seventeen* seems to be rather contradictory in nature. On the one hand, it includes a variety of teen girls with wide-ranging body types, skin colours and age. On the other hand, it excludes the girls that are not interested in consuming fashion and beauty products. Thus it could be argued that while trying to reach as large a number of teen girls as possible, *Seventeen* also tries to regularize the consumerist reader position. This is done by implying that a proper teen girl is or at least should be interested mainly in consuming fashion and beauty products. While stating that "Everyone wants to look fun and chic (but not too young or too sophisticated!)", *Seventeen* presupposes the reader to agree with the statement, which is posed as obvious and self-evident. Moreover, *Seventeen* implies that looking "fun and chic" is the obvious outcome of obeying the elaborate consumption advice provided by the magazine. This supports the conclusion of Harris (2004: 167) and Griffin (2004: 35-36), according to which teen magazines tend to imply that the only proper way to be a girl is to be a consumer girl. Being continuous, this may affect the way the

readers of *Seventeen* see their own girlhood and the possible ways of acting it out. If the only offered possibility to be a girl is to be a consumer girl, it may eventually contribute to the beliefs and values that teen girls attach to consumerism and make the girls more consumer-oriented than they would otherwise be. This claim is supported by the views of Fairclough (1995: 123) who states that continuous reader positions have a tendency to affect readers' beliefs, values and knowledge. It seems thus reasonable to argue that without *Seventeen's* consumerist reader position, the teen girls reading the magazine would probably not be as consumer-oriented as the articles at present imply.

4.1.2 Categorizing girls

Another relevant issue when considering the consumerist reader position of *Seventeen* Magazine is related to the categorization of the readers. The term 'categorization' illustrates *Seventeen's* manner of dividing the readers into different categories according to their body types, skin colour and age. This is done in a seemingly friendly manner, as if trying to convince the readers that *Seventeen* takes their uniqueness into account and gives specified advice that are meant just for them. The readers are thus, once again, treated seemingly as individuals, which may encourage them to identify with the offered categories and the underlying reader position. However, behind the alleged discourse of uniqueness functions the same ideology of consumerism that dominates the construction of the entire reader position and locates all the readers primarily to the category of consumer girls.

The consumerist nature of the categorization of girls becomes evident when looking at the examples of female 'types' provided by the text. In regard to body types, *Seventeen* divides girls into six categories that are cone, petite, hourglass, tall, apple and pear or alternatively into three less detailed categories that contain only the groups of petite, hourglass and tall. Occasionally *Seventeen* categorizes girls also according to their "best assets" that most often are bust, waist and legs. Regarding skin colour, the offered categories are fair, bronze, deep, olive, beige and golden. The categories for age are 15, 17, 19 and 21 years. For each of these categories *Seventeen* continuously offers specified fashion and beauty products, the need of which is justified by the unique attributes of the groups. Cone girls, for instance, are reported to need "a streamlined look that fits your full bust and highlights your lean legs!" Petite girls, on the other hand, allegedly need "short shorts and strong colors" with which they can "make a big statement" and supposedly compensate for their small size.

In makeup articles, *Seventeen* provides rather direct orders about the appropriate makeup shades and products girls with different skin colours should prefer. For instance, fair skinned girls are ordered to wear “bold lipstick to make their light complexions glow” and to “balance bright lips with soft neutral eyes” whereas deep skinned girls are told to go for a more dramatic eye makeup and to “make the whites of your eyes pop by lining your inner rims with a soft black eyeliner”. Regarding age groups, *Seventeen* writes about the personality traits which girls of different ages ought to emphasize (“15: fresh and playful”, “17: bold and trendy”, “19: fun and flirty” and “21: cool and confident”) and gives then concrete examples of how the desirable outcome can be achieved via clothing and makeup styles. The 19-year-olds, for example, are offered the following piece of advice: “You can’t help feeling fierce and sexy at this point in your life, so own it – in a hot dress and a trendy boyfriend blazer, worn with a statement-making orangey-red lipstick.” The seemingly individual advice provided to each girl category are thus always consumer-related, supporting the view of teen girls primarily as consumers of fashion and beauty products. From this perspective, *Seventeen* no longer seems to treat its readers as unique individuals but as a homogenous group of consumer girls. This further supports the findings of Harris (2004: 167) and Griffin (2004: 35-36) about the teen magazines’ intention to position teen girls primarily as consumer girls.

4.1.3 Setting up the ideal

Given the slightly contradictory nature of the reader position, it is rather complicated to draw conclusions concerning the teen girl ideal *Seventeen* supports. On the one hand, *Seventeen* seems to be concerned about the disruptive effects of the conventional beauty ideal and willing to empower girls who do not fit to these strict beauty norms. This is the case in particular with the article “My Body Peace breakthrough”, which belongs to the article series of “The Body Peace Project” that *Seventeen* Magazine launched in November 2007 to “help girls stop obsessing about their shape”. In this article, the message of the magazine resembles greatly the empowering Girl Power discourse described by Harris (2004: 167) and Griffin (2004: 35-36), as can be perceived from the phrases “I love my curves”, “People see my bright smile, not the flaws” and “It’s about having confidence!”.

On the other hand, on a more implicit level, the conventional beauty ideal of the western world seems not to be entirely forgotten. Implicitly the fashion and beauty articles of

Seventeen still imply that less weight is better than more weight, more height is better than less height and lighter skin is better than darker skin. This becomes evident in the way girls with more weight, or as *Seventeen* puts it: girls with “curves”, are taught to hide their curves with certain type of clothing, how short girls are told to use high heeled platform shoes to make themselves look “super-hot” and how girls with skin of any other shade than fair or beige are told to use makeup that brightens their skin and “cancel[s] out the greenish cast” or “orangey” shade their skin would allegedly otherwise have. As the examples quite clearly demonstrate, *Seventeen* not only suggests that there really is an implicit beauty ideal but also that this ideal can be achieved through consumption of fashion and beauty products.

Achieving the ideal is not easy, however. Although *Seventeen* implies that being thinner, taller and lighter skinned is good, it does not position the girls who are thin, tall and light skinned to begin with in the category of the ideal. On the contrary, they are assigned their own problems to battle. *Seventeen* makes sure that as it addresses all kinds of girls more or less equally, it also assigns all these girls problems that prevent them from being perfect. Additionally, when one problem is corrected, there are a dozen more waiting on the next page. The ideal is thus fluctuating and impossible to achieve. In every aspect the girls are either too little or too much, being too thin or too thick, too tall or too small, too pale or too dark. This finding resembles greatly the findings of Griffin (2004: 42), according to which teen magazines often position their readers as ‘impossible subjects’ who require constant improvement and can thus never be happy with themselves or their bodies.

By setting up an ambiguous and ever-changing ideal that renders all girls ‘impossible subjects’, *Seventeen* creates an atmosphere that is favourable to beauty and fashion industries and their advertisers. As pointed out by Gill (2007: 182) and Wolf (1991: 81-85), keeping advertisers happy is a factor that often affects the editorial content of women’s magazines. The best way to do this is to prevent the readers from being happy with themselves and to claim that happiness can be bought by purchasing an endless number of fashion and beauty products, as was argued by Griffin (2004: 42), Kilbourne (1999: 29) and Wolf (1991: 84). This seems to be also the first priority of *Seventeen*. Since the actual ideal of the magazine is indefinite and to large extent impossible to achieve, the factor that matters most is thus not being ideal but aspiring towards it. As a result, the girl that is concerned about her appearance

and determined to improve it by endless consumption of the latest fashion and beauty goods is the closest to becoming ideal.

4.1.4 Justification for consumerism

By encouraging teen girls' quest for their personal yet impossible beauty ideal, *Seventeen* manages to establish the ideology of consumerism as an essential part of every teen girls' life. While recommending that the readers aspire towards the indefinite beauty ideal, *Seventeen* also encourages them to accept three factors that are offered as obvious justifications for ongoing consumption of fashion and beauty products. The two most conspicuous justifications stem from the idea that the reader must improve her body either by hiding the problematic parts of the body or by highlighting those parts that are already good. The third reason stems from the assumption that the reader will become bored unless she frequently updates her style. Consumerism is thus perceived not only as a means to improvement but also as a source for excitement and joy.

The intentions to improve problematic parts and to emphasize the best aspects of the body are indisputably the most prominent justifications for consumerism in *Seventeen*. They are counterparts of one another, stemming from *Seventeen*'s general attitude that while no one is perfect, everyone still has something good in their bodies. According to the underlying message of the magazine, the possible flaws can be corrected by buying correct products and the potential best parts can be made even better with some other products. The trick is, thus, to recognize both the flaws and the assets and to learn how to operate with them. In this process *Seventeen* functions as the ultimate advisor who gives detailed instructions in both categories. The readers are, for instance, advised to "make your legs (not your full bust) the focus of this look" (the problem being a bust that is too full) or to "fill out a smaller chest (but make it look natural!) with gel-filled push-up bra" (the problem being a bust that is not full).

Regardless the nature of the alleged problem, buying clothes that are correctly cut or of an appropriate colour or texture seems to be the key to fix it. The same pattern is also visible in the articles that market makeup and hair products, which becomes evident for instance in the phrases "To cancel out the greenish cast in your skin, dust a lilac shadow with flecks of silver on your lids." and "When you're stuck in hair hell, these tricks will get you out!". In regard to

emphasizing the best parts, on the other hand, the readers are directly told to emphasize their narrow hips in micromini skirts, show off their lean legs in tiny shorts and “flatter [their] curvy bust in tops that reveal a little cleavage”. In regards to makeup, the articles give instructions about highlighting either eyes, cheeks or lips and advise the reader to choose makeup colours that “flatter”, “warm up” or “play up” their own skin colour. On some occasions *Seventeen* also claims that the problematic aspects of one’s body can be corrected by emphasizing those parts of the body that are allegedly better (e.g. “A sheer full top floats over your curves and highlights your bust”, the problem being “your curves” and the best part “your bust”.) By paying attention also to the good sides of teen girls’ bodies, *Seventeen* manages to alleviate the rather strict and domineering tone of the problem-oriented approach and makes consuming appear as something that is essentially fun. Hence the overall tone of the articles remains friendly, which is important for maintaining the friendly relationship between the magazine and its readers (Talbot 1992: 175, 194).

It is worth emphasizing that both the problem-oriented and the emphasis-oriented approaches are always related to consuming certain goods. For instance, when *Seventeen* instructs how to get “your best body ever” or how to “transform your figure”, the instructions never include suggestions for physical exercises. On the contrary, *Seventeen* advises how to “shape up” and “transform your body without working out”, the trick being an allegedly amazing outfit in which “you’ll only look like you spent hours at the gym”. Consequently, it seems that the only function of pointing out body problems is to sell the products that allegedly solve those problems. Since the products are infinite, also the problems are infinite. One can always make up more. This is the case also in the emphasis of the best parts. The general attitude of the emphasis-oriented approach is best conveyed in the subtitle: “Love what you’ve got, then learn how to make it even *more* beautiful!” Even though the explicit message seems to be to love the body as it naturally is, the underlying meaning still presupposes that no one can be perfect without utilising the possibilities provided by the fashion and beauty industry. This attitude further validates the notion that girlhood means constant improvement and re-creation of the self. As observed by Gill (2004: 187-199), this sort of practice resembles more clearly the discourse of improvement than entertainment. The requirements for improvement are, however, disguised into the friendly, big-sisterly tone of the articles and the discourse that claims that improving one’s body is predominantly fun.

The third aspect in the justification for consumerism is related to style updating. Updating one's style is also the aspect that is most clearly related to the discourse of fun, which is often used in teen magazines to disguise the otherwise rather dominant discourse of improvement (Gill 2007: 187, 199). While claiming that by frequent style updating the reader can avoid boredom that otherwise would be inevitable, *Seventeen* also presupposes that style updating creates excitement and is essentially fun. Consumerism is thus seen as entertainment that rescues the readers from getting bored with their appearance, as is revealed for instance in the subtitles "If you're sick of your style, get inspired to make a change" and "Bored with your routine? Try these colourful ideas". It is also evident that by promoting style updating, *Seventeen* aims at strengthening its own position as an advisor, since the readers are straightforwardly encouraged to experiment with the very products *Seventeen* introduces. *Seventeen*, thus, seems to position itself as the reader's best friend, who knows all the tips and hints the reader needs to be aware of. This practice is widely used also in other teen magazines, as is pointed out by Gill (2007:187) and Talbot (1992: 175, 194). By posing consumerism as a source of fun, *Seventeen* discourages the readers from questioning the necessity of consumerism and presents it as if being an indisputable part of every teen girls' life. Additionally, style updating is a powerful justification for consumerism due to its unlimited nature. Providing that the fashion and beauty industry continuously invents more styles, *Seventeen* has always new consuming tips to offer its readers. Style updating is, thus, always a viable reason to consume new products.

Although both the emphasis-oriented approach and the style updating approach present consumerism predominantly as fun and conceal the harshness of the problem-oriented approach, the most dominating discourse in the justification for consumerism is undoubtedly the discourse of improvement. The notion that everyone has problematic parts in their bodies that require constant correction is presupposed in *Seventeen* so strongly that it does not require any acceptance on the reader's behalf. The idea of a body as a source of infinite problems is thus posed as a self-evident background knowledge with which all the readers are expected to agree. As stated by Mills (1995: 69-70), the meanings of texts that are made to appear as self-evident prevent the reader from observing the ideological motivations that may lie behind these meanings. As a consequence, the reader may end up taking the offered ideas for granted. Through the uncertainties of one's body, *Seventeen* thus not only creates an atmosphere in which consumerism is supported but also contributes to the manner in which the readers learn to see girlhood in a negative light. Arguably, the problem-oriented approach

can make the whole concept of girlhood appear as a process of constant observation and improvement of one's body. This strongly supports Griffin's (2004: 42) argument, according to which the editorial content of teen and women's magazines is often dominated by the demand for constant control and the discourse of improvement, the function of which is primarily to support consumerism by making the women first feel bad about their bodies and then encouraging them to search for remedy within the fashion and beauty industry.

4.2 Implicit means of influence

In the second section of the analysis I will discuss the manner in which *Seventeen* implicitly supports its pro-consumerist attitude in regard to word choices, the continuous use of imperative forms and the reliance upon expert advice. Analysing the implicit means through which *Seventeen* supports consumerism is important due to the concealed nature of such means. The hidden devices through which the magazine aims at confirming its message may easily remain hidden from the reader and thus be very effective in regard to directing the opinions of the reader.

4.2.1 Word choices

Seventeen's use of words and phrases reflects in various ways its pro-consumerist attitude. Moreover, the word choices implicitly persuade the readers to believe what the articles also more explicitly suggest. First, *Seventeen* often uses vague and ambiguous phrases when referring to the effects of products, such as "add a little oomph", "a fresh fall feel", "a super-chic new way", "will make a big statement" and "to make the entire look pop". These sorts of phrases suggest that products will make a huge difference but fail at pointing out what this difference will actually be. Through this sort of language use, products are made to sound invaluable and important, even though they might not have any significant effects in reality. Second, *Seventeen* creates a contrast between natural bodies, skin and hair and those that are improved with various products by referring to the former with negative and the latter with positive phrases, such as "beanpole", "lanky", "hair hell", "pale skin", "flat & limpy [hair]" compared to "your perfect look", "killer legs", "milky skin", "full & bouncy [hair]". This implicit tendency further highlights the attitude of the magazine, according to which beauty and attraction can only be achieved by using correct products. Third, *Seventeen* refers to the products it advertises with phrases that imply that the reader cannot possibly live without them. Clothes and accessories are referred to as "these amazing steals" or "basics for your

shape”, hair products as “these must-haves” or “your tool kit” and makeup products as “your best colors” or “your go-to color[s]”. By describing the products as basics, the best and must-haves, the reader is directed to think that owning them is a matter of primary importance even though any other evidence for such implication is not offered.

In short, the word choices in many cases implicitly support *Seventeen*'s pro-consumerist attitude and direct the reader to follow similar ideas as the magazine also more explicitly offers. Moreover, it seems that the importance and excellence of the advertised products are not necessarily based on reality but rather created by clever use of words. This contributes to the advertise-friendly atmosphere, which guarantees that the readers keep purchasing the advertised products and that the advertisers are willing to advertise in the magazine also in future (Gill 2007:182). Furthermore, the word choices give further support to the notion that *Seventeen* indeed promotes the view that in order to be an appropriate girl, one has to be a consumer girl, which is a common practise also in other teen magazines (Griffin 2004: 42).

4.2.2 The omnipresent imperative

The articles of *Seventeen* contain a vast amount of imperative forms and more subtle hints and instructions that function often in the same way as direct imperatives. Other word choices alike, the use of imperatives and instructions supports consumerism on a fairly implicit level. Thus its impact might stay unnoticed from the reader who has not learned to question *Seventeen*'s role as an advisor.

The connection between consumerism and imperative verb forms is conspicuous. There are a vast amount of cases in which the imperatives order the reader to try a new fashion or beauty product. Common imperative forms include verbs such as use, try, intensify, add, show off, make, go for, pick up, highlight, choose and make sure. All of these are followed by a product and occasionally also the effect the product in question is claimed to have on its users' body, skin or hair. The magazine commands its readers to “use foundation shades that are warm yellow to make you look sun-kissed”, “pick up a semi-permanent lowlightning kit to add some depth and dimension to your strands” and to “highlight just the inner corners with bright yellow to make the entire look pop”. In most cases, however, *Seventeen* seems to consider the imperative form itself to be convincing enough. The reader is told to “try crazy-curly”, “go

too shades lighter”, “cut long bangs”, “make your fragrance the ultimate accessory” and “toughen up a dress with chunky boots and play up your eyes with an easy smudge of black liner” among other things, while the advantage of following these orders is left unstated. In these cases it seems that the reader is expected to make the interpretation that following the orders will have beneficial effects. Although *Seventeen* does not directly state that crazy-curly, blond hair and long bangs are trendy hair styles and thus worth trying or that it is fashionable to use perfumes or try an edgier style, these are the interpretations that the reader is expected to make. Systemically, the expected interpretations include a strong suggestion to consume fashion and beauty products.

A more subtle way to give orders to readers is to refer to the good qualities and effects of different products in the form of mere hints. In beauty and fashion articles *Seventeen* consistently informs its readers about products with which the reader may allegedly improve various features in her body, skin and hair. According to the articles, “a creamy nude gloss blends with your skin to make lips look extra full”, “a creamy highlighter brightens your entire face”, “the cool, icy effect of a silver shadow balances out the gold in your skin”, “[adding lowlights] will add a fresh fall feel to your overall hair color” and “these amazing pieces will -- transform your figure”. Although the phrases do not directly order the reader to try any of these products, the reader easily makes the interpretation that this is what *Seventeen* actually intends to say when emphasizing the beneficial effects of such products. In these cases it seems thus that the underlying imperative meanings are concealed in the form of more implicit hints or instructions, which makes the overall tone of the magazine more friendly while the pro-consumerist message remains more or less intact. It is also worth observing that in various cases imperatives and hints are not easily separated from each other, since they often coexist and appear in same sentences supporting the effect of one another.

Seventeen's frequent use of authoritative language and imperative verb forms supports Gill's (2007:199) argument, according to which the use of the 'omnipresent imperative' is a common practice in women's magazines. *Seventeen* also seems to extend the impact of imperative forms by using less direct hints and instructions along the direct orders, which softens the overall tone but maintains the support for consumerism. By giving direct and indirect instructions about who the readers must be, how they must act and what products

they should use, *Seventeen* also strengthens the power of the discourse of improvement which seems to a large extent dominate the content of the articles.

4.2.3 Expert advice

A fairly frequently used method through which *Seventeen* implicitly justifies its consuming instructions is related to external experts and their advice. These experts or alleged experts include for instance makeup artists, celebrities and girls who no longer fit to the age limits of *Seventeen*'s target group but who arguably used to read *Seventeen* in their teenage years. The advice provided by these experts is used to complement the advice provided by *Seventeen*. The status of an expert seems to be fairly easy to justify based on occupational expertise (makeup artists), popularity (celebrities) or older age (older girls). Furthermore, *Seventeen* presupposes that the readers recognize these people as experts and respect their opinions about fashion and beauty. As a consequence, there are various examples in which the experts offer beauty and consuming advice to the readers who are then expected to take it even more seriously than the advice that is offered simply by *Seventeen*. This is the case, for instance, in the makeup article that is made to stand out from other makeup articles with the following subtitle: "World-famous makeup artist Scott Barness is known for giving celebs that perfect glow. Here, he creates a radiant look just for *you*." The article that follows is then filled with suggestions to experiment with specific makeup products simply because they are recommended by the expert.

Since the views of the experts are identical with the views of *Seventeen* in regard to fashion, beauty and consumerism, the main function of expert advice seems to be to give further support to the magazine's views. By claiming that the idea of teen girls as consumers of fashion and beauty products who are in constant need of improvement derives originally from a wide range of experts, *Seventeen* makes this claim sound more convincing. This practice further validates both the discourse of improvement and the ideology of consumerism in which the readers of *Seventeen* are directed to believe throughout the fashion and beauty articles.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present research has described the manner in which the contemporary *Seventeen* Magazine encourages consumerist attitudes among its readers through explicit and implicit

means and as a result supports the common practice of teen magazines of positioning teen girls primarily as consumers of fashion and beauty products. Returning to the research question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that *Seventeen* Magazine evidently supports consumerism of teenage girls. This is done by providing a reader position that is primarily a position of a consumer, by offering various justifications for consumerism that are related either to the discourse of improvement or the discourse of fun and by strengthening the power of the consumer ideology by supporting it also with implicit means in addition to the more explicit ones. The present study thus supports previous findings of Gill (2007) and Harris et al (2004) concerning the main discourses functioning in the teen magazines. Furthermore, the results support the findings of Massoni (2006) concerning the connection between *Seventeen* and consumerism and contribute additional evidence that suggests that the connection to consumerism remains strong even in the contemporary magazine.

The findings of this research show that the contemporary *Seventeen* Magazine has not abandoned the connection to consumerism which it successfully utilised in the 1940s to establish the teen girl consumer market and its own position within that field. On the contrary, the results suggest that *Seventeen* deliberately aims at maintaining the concept of teen girls as consumers. It seems, thus, that while *Seventeen* in the 1940s was one of the greatest contributors in the project that made teen girls appear as consumers, the contemporary *Seventeen* is one of the greatest protectors of the same conception. In addition, it could be argued that since teen girls are a renewable group of potential consumers, the new teen girls must continuously be directed towards consumerism in order to maintain the concept of teen girls as consumers. In that sense, the contemporary *Seventeen* can be seen not only as a maintainer but also as a creator of consumer girls in the same manner as the *Seventeen* of the 1940s. Moreover, it could be the case that without the strong contribution of *Seventeen* and other teen magazines alike, teen girls would not regard themselves so strongly as consumers and would instead be more critical towards the consumer culture.

While pointing out the ongoing construction of teen girls as consumers, the results of this study have important implications for developing the media literacy skills of teenage girls. If the ideological motivations of teen magazines were better taken into consideration in the

education of media literacy, the readers of such magazines would learn to read them more critically. As a consequence, the power of teen magazines to define girlhood and position teen girls as consumers would be mitigated. By teaching the readers to question the consumerist values of teen magazines and the discourse of improvement promoted by those magazines, the readers would also better understand that the view of the magazine is by no means the absolute truth. The readers of teen magazines would thus be freer to constitute their own beliefs, values and knowledge concerning both girlhood and consumerism. Furthermore, questioning the necessity of constant consumption would be beneficial in terms of sustainable development, given that the continuously increasing level of consumption will eventually lead in a global crisis and the lack of natural resources.

A few limitations to this research need to be acknowledged, however. First, the analysed sample of articles was relatively small, covering only the fashion and beauty articles of one issue of *Seventeen* Magazine. In order to be able to generalise the results to describe the whole field of teen magazines, a research with a wider selection of magazines and articles is required. Second, it is possible that the support for consumerism is stronger in fashion and beauty articles than in other content of *Seventeen* Magazine. Thus, a study that examines the whole magazine and for example whole volumes of the magazine instead of one separate issue may possibly give different results. Third, while critical discourse analysis gives deep insight to the ideological content of the text, different research methods could also provide valuable information concerning consumerism in *Seventeen* Magazine. Quantitative analysis, for instance, could provide more exact information concerning the frequency of consumerist support.

Since the results of the present thesis are preliminary rather than absolute, more information on consumerism in contemporary teen magazines is required. In addition to the previously mentioned suggestions, further research might explore, for instance, how strongly the leading teen magazines of different countries support consumerism and is the pro-consumerist attitude more characteristic of teen magazines in the USA than for example in Europe or more specifically in Finland. A matter of great importance is also how the teen girls themselves experience the ideology of consumerism in teen magazines and whether they believe that the magazines have an effect on their beliefs, values and knowledge concerning girlhood and

consumption. It would also be interesting to compare the manner and strength in which consumerism is supported in teen girls' and women's magazines to the way it is supported in magazines targeted at boys and men. Presumably there would be a great difference based on gender already within the marketed products, given that teen girls and women are most often encouraged to consume beauty products, whereas boys and men are more likely encouraged to purchase technological devices.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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7. APPENDIX

The list of articles used as a data. *Seventeen Magazine*, November 2009.

1. "Get your best body ever!" (p. 25-32)
2. "17 trends that make your body look hot!" (p. 34-35)
3. "Basics for your shape" (p. 36)
4. "The cutests... boots" (p. 38)
5. "Bargains for your body" (p. 40)
6. "The best colors for your skin tone!" (p. 42-46)
7. "Amazing hair makeovers" (p. 50-51)
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