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The promotion of thin beauty ideals in Western culture have been linked to the rise in eating disorders in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The current study attempts to examine shifts towards thin beauty ideals within the popular teen magazine Seventeen by analyzing the body size of cover models, and the frequency of diet, exercise, and body-related articles during the period 1955-2014. A body analysis of the cover models revealed a significant trend toward a thinner body shape. Diet, exercise, and body-related articles all increased from 1955-2014; however, only body-related articles were found to increase significantly. These findings suggest that overall trends toward thinness are continuing within our culture, holding broader social implications for the presence of eating disorders.

SHIFTS IN THE PROMOTION OF THIN BEAUTY IDEALS AND RACIAL  
MINORITIES IN SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE FROM 1955 UNTIL 2014

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the 20th century, a new trend in broadcast and print media appeared, where female figures gradually became thinner. Scholars have implied that this trend originated in the fashion industry (Lamb, Jackson, Cassiday, & Priest 1993; Gordon, 1988). During the mid-sixties, “Twiggy” became a sensational figure in the fashion industry, and her body type became a new ideal (Lamb et al., 1993). This new body type was characterized by figures that were “stick thin,” with very little body fat (Lamb et al., 1993). As Twiggy steadily gained popularity, the “larger” body types that had once been idolized in the past seemed to lose their appeal (Lamb et al., 1993). Subsequently, thin beauty standards were promoted since the mid-sixties in Western countries, and have been increasingly promoted in countries where Western media has been introduced (Stice, Shupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Thussu, 2007; Shroff & Thompson, 2003).

Scholars point to social conditions that gave rise to a thin beauty ideal. First, it is our cultural tendency to view many of the women in media (who embody thin beauty ideals) as cultural icons. Women in media are often esteemed as the idyllic representations of beauty, and in turn, women may wish to emulate them (Jhally, Kilbourne, & Rabinovitz, 2010; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Second, an increasing trend towards thinness can be linked to a long history of restraints on the female body

itself (Bordo, 1993). Women have experienced far more societal restrictions than men, and women throughout history have often experienced such restrictions through the control of their own bodies (Bordo, 1993). These social conditions, along with the promotion of thin beauty ideals within the media, have served to create many issues for women within our society.

Although thin beauty ideals may seem nonthreatening on the surface, these beauty ideals can have negative implications for women who try and fail to attain this beauty standard (Groez, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). Harmful consequences that can be linked to thin beauty ideals include: body dissatisfaction, body comparison, negative affect, anxiety, thin-ideal internalization, low self-esteem, and eating disorders (Groez et al., 2002; Thompson & Stice, 2001; Rodin, Siberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1985; Brown & Dittmar, 2005). As Western media continues to permeate our culture, we can likely guarantee that most every woman within our society has been exposed to thin beauty ideals in one way or another. This is problematic because research indicates that thin beauty ideals within the media may negatively affect a larger pool of women than once realized (Brown & Dittmar, 2005). Exposure to exclusively thin models has been shown to elicit body-focused anxiety, regardless of whether or not a woman devotes her full attention to thin media images or not (Brown & Dittmar, 2005). That is, women who glance at thin media images only briefly have been shown to have the same body concerns after exposure as women who give such images their full attention (Brown & Dittmar, 2005). This could help explain why so many women report that they are dissatisfied with their bodies (Brown & Dittmar, 2005), and why eating disorders are



more common among women in Western societies (Pike & Rodin, 1991). Each harmful consequence that thin beauty ideals present is deserving of consideration. In many respects, the problems associated with thin imagery can be linked to each other (Brown & Dittmar, 2005; Lin & Kulik, 2002; Tiggeann, 2002; Menell, Murcott, & Otterloo, 1992). However, eating disorders are by far the most harmful to women in terms of severity. Eating disorders can cause many health-related problems for women, and have one of the highest mortality rates of all psychological disorders (Smink, Hoeken, & Hoek, 2012). As such, the connection between thin beauty ideals and eating disorders deserves considerable attention.

Many scholars have linked the promotion of thin beauty ideals to the recent rise in eating disorders, which began in the 1960's (Shroff & Thompson, 2003; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992; Vaughn & Fouts, 2003; Becker, Burwell, Gillman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002; Eddy, Hennessey, & Thompson-Brenner, 2007; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Stice et al., 1994). Indeed, a close investigation of this issue reveals that there is strong link between the two occurrences. It is no coincidence that eating disorders become prevalent in the latter half of the 20th century, the exact same time thin beauty ideals begin to be promoted (Wiseman et al., 1992; Lamb et al., 1988). In fact, research in regards to the increased incidence of this disorder has focused primarily on media contribution (Wiseman et al., 1992; Vaughn & Fouts, 2003). The present study will build on these ideas by analyzing the content of Seventeen Magazine.

Seventeen is the longest running teen magazine in the U.S., and possess the largest teen reader base according to the Alliance FOR Audited Media (Alliance for

Audited Media, 2012). This long publication history allowed me to collect data across a specific time period, and also increased the likelihood of accessing the information I needed. Several researchers have analyzed the content of Seventeen Magazine; however, the majority of studies have not focused specifically on messages regarding the body (Massoni, 2004; Peirce, 1990; Schlenker, Caron, & Halteman, 1998; Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2010; Durham, 2007). In my literature search, I found only one study that had analyzed the content of Seventeen in regards to the topic of the body. In their qualitative analysis from 1992 until 2003, Ballentine & Ogle (2005) find that Seventeen Magazine presents divergent messages about the body, both problematizing the body while simultaneously offering methods to “fix” body-related issues. Although some messages hinted towards a rejection of dominant beauty ideals, they found that the overwhelming majority of messages offered ways in which one could control the body through “body projects and consumption” (Ballentine & Ogle, 2005). Such solutions to body problems focused on hygiene routines as well as methods of “body molding” which often referenced a singular ideal – slimness (Ballentine & Ogle, 2005). This study offers a fairly recent review of bodily discussion within Seventeen Magazine over a short period of time. And although thin imagery was not included in their analysis, their results indicate that bodily discussion in this magazine is somewhat geared towards thin beauty ideals.

My primary purpose of the present study is to examine how both discourse about and depictions of the female body in this magazine have changed in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on into the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. My research question specifically

asked, “How have the depictions of and discourse about the female body in Seventeen Magazine evolved over time?” I hypothesize that there will be an increase in thin body depictions over time, as well as an increase in diet and exercise articles. I looked at issues from this magazine from 1955 up until the most recent publication year, 2014. Each issue was analyzed per year, every five years, resulting in a total of 156 issues.

The following chapter will address the link between eating disorders and thin media imagery, as well as focus on certain gendered aspects that make women particularly vulnerable to eating disorders, and other negative problems. Furthermore, a review of the literature will help clarify why research on adolescent magazines are important.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Eating disorders have long been recognized as psychological problems, and an overwhelming body of evidence suggests that the prevalence of eating disorders has increased in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mennell et al., 1992; Derenne & Beresin, 2006; Striegel-Moore, Siberstein, & Rodin, 1986; Pyle, Halvorson, Neuman, & Mitchell, 1986; Sherwood & Neumark-Sztainer, 2001). One of the most widely researched and discussed topics in regards to this increase has been Western culture's promotion of thin body ideals (Shroff & Thompson, 2003; Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992; Vaughn & Fouts, 2003; Becker, Burwell, Gillman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002; Eddy, Hennessey, & Thompson-Brenner, 2007; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997). Several studies have pointed to Western media's emphasis on thinness as one of the leading causes for the increase in eating disorders, and many studies have found correlations between media exposure and the development of eating disorders (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992; Vaughn & Fouts, 2003; Becker, Burwell, Gillman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002; Eddy, Hennessey, & Thompson-Brenner, 2007; Shroff & Thompson, 2003; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997). In addition to Western media influence on eating disorders, there are other factors that have led to this increase. Researchers have noted that the increased pressures women experience in modern societies also have contributed to the spread of eating disorders. Women struggling to balance work and

family life have expressed that their stress and unhappiness have led to their eating disorders (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). Similarly, feminist scholars have looked to psychological disorders of the past in order to better understand the eating pathology of today. In her widely recognized book, *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo (1993) explains that eating disorders are in part women's rejection of traditional gender roles along with the longstanding emphasis placed on the female body. Each of these factors are important in regards to the etiology of eating disorders.

### *Sociology of the Body*

Norbert Elias (1982) argues that changes in attitudes towards the body began as a result of a civilizing process. Concerns for bodily behavior began to grow in the 16th century, and by the 17th century concern had grown rapidly, trickling down from the upper classes (Elias, 1982). Previous behavior such as running naked in the streets, blowing one's nose by hand, and relieving one's self in public began to be perceived as unacceptable. Beginning in the 17th century many books on etiquette were published, which taught people how they could properly behave in the public sphere (Davetian, 2009). Suddenly, people began self-monitoring their behavior when they were in the presence of other individuals, and especially in the presence of strangers (Davetian, 2009). This new civilizing process inspired the concept of self-awareness for all individuals, including men, women, and children (Davetain, 2009). However, regulation of the body does not happen evenly across groups. Disciplinary practices continue to vary according to one's gender (Bartkly, 1998).

Bartkly (1998) argues that there are significant gender differences between men and women in terms of their bodily movement, gestures, and posture. Bartkly (1998) claims that women experience far more restriction in their manner of movement than men. In contrast to men, women take up less space in the public sphere, often making themselves as small as possible in the presence of others (Bartkly, 1998). Men, on the other hand, are more likely to take up space, by sprawling out and stretching their bodies. Women also are more likely than men to monitor what they eat, check their self-appearance, and undergo a variety of painful and expensive procedures (Bartkly, 1998). At more dire levels, the female body has been more vulnerable than men to cultural manipulations of the body. One such manipulation is the corset. The corset of the Victorian era often caused the wearer to become physically incapacitated, and in some instances, could cause significant harm to the body (Bordo, 1993).

One of the reasons women's bodies undergo more discipline than men is due to our culture's (Western Culture) emphasis on the female body (Bartkly, 1998). Bordo (1993) similarly argues that women throughout history have been subject to cultural manipulations of the body because women are often associated with the body. The women's sphere itself has been associated with the body in family life, mythology, science, philosophy, and religious ideology (Bordo, 1993). The focus on the female body is particularly apparent in Western media, where female bodies experience far more objectification than men (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

### *Eating Disorders and Adolescents*

Although women and young girls both experience the system of objectification, adolescents are placed at particular risk because they endure this objectification whilst undergoing developmental changes (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This can help explain why eating disorders are most likely to develop during adolescence (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Over 90% of anorexics are women (Bordo, 1985), and the majority of cases begin in adolescence (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Researchers have argued that the correlation between adolescence and eating disturbances can be linked to the differences in development between males and females, along with the differences in representation of men and women in the media (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

In a study exploring why women are more prone to develop bulimia, researchers find that adolescence is a major risk factor for the development of the disorder (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1986). Striegel-Moore et al. (1986) also find that young girls experience far greater body dissatisfaction, along with lower self-esteem, when compared to adolescent boys (Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). They explain these realities developmentally. Although boys and girls have relatively the same rate of body fat as children, the body fat of girls is almost double that of boys once they hit puberty (Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). They argue that maturation brings boys closer to the ideal look in Western countries while bringing girls further away. As boys reach maturation they are expected to become the tall, muscular figures that are depicted in the media. However, girls reaching maturation develop more fat, which contrasts the thin prepubescent bodies that female media representatives often have (Striegel-Moore et al.,

1986). Brownell (1999) argues that inequity in gender presentation in the media, combined with developmental changes helps explain why adolescent girls have lower self-esteem, more body dissatisfaction, and why they are more susceptible to eating disorders. These arguments, however, somewhat overlook the media effects on men. One study has implied that the media also could have a negative influence on males (Pope et al., 2000).

As previously mentioned, male figures in the media are often muscular, and this reality has led some researchers to believe that these media representations may influence male body image. In their study of body image perception among college-age males from Austria, France, and the U.S., Pope et al. (2000) found that men generally desire to be heavier and more muscular than they actually are. When asked to choose the body type that they would like to have, men in all three countries were more likely to choose a body type that was roughly 28lbs more muscular than their current body. And when asked to select the body type that would be most preferred by women, they also selected a body type that was around 30lbs more muscular than their own body. Pope et al. (2000) demonstrated in a pilot study that women did not prefer the larger, more muscular male body type. Instead, they preferred an average male body, without any additional muscle. Although this study did not directly study the link between media influence and male body image, Pope et al. (2000) suggest that their findings may have some implications for media effects on men.

Body ideals represented in the media are heteronormative, positing gender representations into two distinct categories, male and female (Fredrickson & Roberts,



1997). The ideal male is often represented as tall and muscular, while the ideal female is often represented as thin and child-like. But beyond these distinctions are obvious inequities in how overweight men and women are represented. Male television characters are two to five times more likely to be overweight than female television characters (Levine & Smolak, 1996). In relation to this, an analysis of prime-time comedies found that 12% of female characters were currently dieting, and many made disapproving comments about their bodies (Tiggeman, 2002). Both of these examples suggest that the media sets specific standards that glorify female thinness. Indeed a number of studies have found Western media to be correlated with the increased incidence of eating disorders (Wiseman et al., 1992; Garner et al., 1980; Sypeck et al., 2004) .

Although studies have indicated that many different races and cultures are susceptible to eating disorders, African American women have been found to be much less susceptible to eating disorder development than other racial groups (Jefferson & Stake, 2009). In a study of American adolescent girls, African Americans reported less body dissatisfaction, fewer weight concerns, higher self-images, and even perceived themselves to be thinner when compared to Caucasian girls (Celio, Zabinski, & Wilfey, 2002). This has led researchers to examine why this might be the case (Greenberg & Laporte, 1996; Jefferson & Stake, 2009).

African American culture is generally more accepting of larger body shapes. Greenberg & Laporte (1996) found in their experiment that white males were more likely than African American males to prefer thinner female figures. This finding suggests that African American males would be more accepting of fuller figures, and if African

American women are aware of this acceptance, they would likely feel less pressure to conform to thin beauty ideals. The lack of representation of African American women in the media has also been suggested to limit negative media effects on body image.

Drawing from social comparison theory, Jefferson & Stake (2009) have proposed that African American women report less body dissatisfaction because they are represented less in the media. On the basis of this theory, African American women would be more likely to make comparisons between themselves and other women whom they perceive to be of African American descent than between themselves and white women.

Furthermore, they note that previous studies have found a wider range of diversity among the body shape of African American represented in the media. This, they suggest, leads to fewer upward comparisons. In their study of self-attitudes among college women, they found that African American women were significantly less likely to compare themselves to media figures or to internalize media beauty ideals in comparison to their European American counterparts (Jefferson & Stake, 2009). These findings have important implications for eating disorders because they suggest that acceptance of beauty ideals within our culture may play a critical factor in determining a person's susceptibility.

### *Eating Disorders and Media*

Eating disorders are culturally specific in nature but were once thought to be exclusive to Western nations; however, documented survey studies and case reports have shown that eating disorders exist across geographic and socioeconomic groups (Katzman, Herman, Hoeken, & Hoek, 2004). Globalization can help explain these trends.

Interestingly, eating disorders in non-Western nations are associated with Western

influence. Western media flows have a strong global presence and are continuing to grow (Thussu, 2007). U.S. media leads the world in news and current affairs, youth programming, children's television, film, and internet (Thussu, 2007). The world's top three magazines are American: Readers Digest, Cosmopolitan, and National Geographic (Thussu, 2007). Likewise, Time and Newsweek are the top two international magazines (Thussu, 2007). Since Western countries like the U.S. dominate the global media market, their exposure has much influence across the globe. And as one might expect, Western media exposure influences other cultures in much the same way that it influences culture in the West. In particular, Western media exposure changes perceptions about the ideal female body shape. Studies of eating pathology have indicated that there is a relationship between media exposure and disordered eating behavior and cognition. That is, Western media exposure can lead women to internalize thin beauty ideals creating body dissatisfaction, the desire to lose weight, and increased diet and exercise patterns (Stice, Shupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994). Indeed, as Western media flows across the globe, female populations report higher levels of body dissatisfaction (Shroff & Thompson, 2003). Next, I discuss the history of thin beauty ideals in Western media, the correlation between media exposure and the development of eating disorders, and the rise of eating disorders in areas where Western media has been introduced.

### *Representations of Idealized Bodies in Print Media*

With each passing decade there has been a significant change in the idealized body shape of women in Western media, with the ideal female body shape growing thinner and thinner (Morris & Cooper, 1988). It is difficult to determine exactly when this

shift in beauty ideals began; however, there is evidence suggesting that thin beauty ideals date back to the late 1950's (Garner et al., 1980).

Looking back across the 20th century, one can acquire a better understanding of when thin beauty ideals began. It can be argued that thin beauty ideals began during the period of the "flapper." During the 1920's the ideal female figure was boyish, and women often tried to flatten their chests (Lamb et al., 1993). However, shortly afterward, a plumper figure was again popularized. In the 1930's cultural icons such as Jean Harlow and Mae West were the ideals for feminine beauty (Lamb et al., 1993). The 1940's was virtually identical, and feminine beauty was again exemplified through the larger figures of Lana Turner and Jayne Russell (Lamb et al., 1993). However, in the 1950's two different beauty ideals were presented in terms of female body size. One of the beauty ideals represented in the 1950's were the fuller figures of Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield, which were no different from the previous two decades, but the thinner female figures of Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn also shared the limelight during this time. The following decade (1960s) seemed to take hold of the latter beauty ideal, and by the mid 1960's we see the stick thin figure of Twiggy turn into a sensation (Lamb et al., 1993).

Most scholars note that thin beauty ideals began during the 1950's, which neglects the 1920's period of the flapper. There are likely many reasons for this. To begin with, the flapper period only lasted roughly a decade, and did not seem to really take root since the following two decades reverted to the promotion of fuller figure women. What we see after the introduction of the Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly is a continuation of

thin beauty ideals. This difference can partially be explained by the differences between the thin beauty representations of the flapper period and the thin beauty representations of the 1950's. Ultimately, the 1920's flapper was a progressive, who on the surface, wanted to present herself as a liberated woman (Hawkins & Nakayama, 1992). This presentation of self was a rebuff against political conservatism that had marginalized the labor of women in the U.S. Therefore, this form of self-presentation had little to do with beauty ideals. In contrast, the images of Hepburn and Kelly do represent beauty ideals. This is because they are cultural icons, who are esteemed for their idyllic beauty. This difference could explain why media outlets took hold of this ideal in the 1960's instead of the 1930's and 1920's. One facet of media in particular that has demonstrated increased emphasis on thinness is print media, or magazines. Several studies provide evidence of this.

Research spanning from the 1950's up until the late 1990's suggest that female figures in print media have grown thinner over time (Garner et al., 1980; Wiseman et al., 1992; Sypeck et al., 2004). The landmark study done by Garner et al. (1980) has well documented this increasing trend as far back as the 1950's. In order to examine and quantify shifts in cultural standards for the ideal female form, Garner et al. (1980) collected and analyzed model measurements from 240 monthly playmates over 20 years and found that the female models had gradually grown thinner, and more tubular over time. Their examination of Miss America Pageant contestants also showed similar trends in regard to female body weight. Garner et al. (1980) collected data from the Miss America Pageant contestants from 1959 to 1978, and found that the average weight of

contestants declined by .28 pounds each year (Garner et al., 1980). For pageant winners, weight declined each year by .37 pounds within this same time period (Garner et al., 1980). These results indicate that the ideal body shape for women in our culture changed during this 20 year time period.

In an attempt to update the study done by Garner et al. (1980), Wiseman et al. (1992) also collected data on the Miss America Pageant and Playboy magazine from 1978 until 1988. They reported that 69% of the Playboy centerfolds and 60% of the Miss America contestants in their study were 15% or below normal weight, meeting at least one of the criteria anorexia (Wiseman et al., 1992). Second, they analyzed six women's magazines from 1959 until 1988 to see if there had been an increase in diet and exercise articles. They found that there had been a significant increase over this time period; however, they found that the level of diet articles leveled off in 1981, and were surpassed by the number of exercise articles. Finally, a study examining the overall body size of cover models from America's most popular magazines from the years 1959 to 1999 found that the body size of fashion models decreased from the 1980's to the 1990's. They also found that there was a dramatic increase in full body portrayals from the 1960's to the 1990's (Sypeck et al., 2004). These examples highlight the gradual yet definite evolution of thin female body ideals in America.

Of the variables thought to influence the prevalence of anorexia and bulimia, media appears to be one of the strongest (Stice et al., 1994). First, the media's portrayal of thin body ideals has coincided with the apparent increase in eating disorders (Wiseman et al., 1992; Hof & Nicolson, 1996). Secondly, the rise in eating disorders correlates with

the increase of weight-loss articles and advertisements in women's magazines (Wiseman et al., 1992). Third, a study found that exposure to fashion magazines correlated with higher levels of eating disorder symptomology (Vaughn & Fouts, 2003). In their study of adolescent girls, Vaughn & Fouts (2003) used questionnaires to assess eating disorder symptomology at two different time periods across a 16-month timespan. Girls who reported an increase in exposure to fashion magazines, as well as a decrease in television viewing, had a significant increase in symptomology (Vaughn & Fouts, 2003). However, girls who decreased their exposure to television and fashion magazines had significantly decreased their symptomology. Clearly, there is a strong relationship between thin ideological messages and the development of eating disorders. Western media has certainly helped to promote these messages, establishing thin beauty standards in the West. But has Western media had a similar effect in other non-Western nations? Research suggests that the answer is yes. The following studies provide evidence of this correlation. Despite the country of origin, the impacts of Western media exposure are strikingly similar. As Western media is introduced across the globe, there also appears to be an increase in eating disorders.

#### *Eating Disorders from a Historical /Gendered Context*

In Susan Bordo's book *Unbearable Weight*, she explains that psychopathology can be historically situated. She argues that certain ills within our culture can help form a pathological condition, and helps explain why modern day eating disorders, and hysteria of the 19th century, both disproportionately affect women. Both psychological disorders highlight historical power relations. Female hysteria is now understood through the

disturbances and ideology related to gender. During the Victorian era, elite women were expected to be obedient and refined, but beyond this, the appetite and desires of women were generally suppressed. This contrasted the indulgence of bourgeois culture and, and inevitably led women to struggle with these contradictions. It was the contemporary woman, struggling to cope, that was susceptible to becoming a hysteric. Similarly, Bordo (1993) argues that another disruption of gender-relations led to the rise of eating disorders in the mid 1960's. Eating disorder arose at a time when patriarchal order was challenged. After World War II, women who had worked in the place of men during the war, were suddenly forced back into their domestic duties. She argues that this post-war period redefined "male" and "female" duties and for this reason, can be compared to the suppression women faced during the Victorian era. In both instances of psychopathology, Bordo argues that women were in protest of traditional gender roles. That is, the psychological manifestations of their disorders came about as a rejection of these roles.

The gendered aspects of women's roles in modern societies also make women susceptible to eating disorders. Rapid economic development in societies has also been linked to the development of eating disorders. Rapid development often can drastically change the way of life within a culture, causing new stressors. In newly developing societies women begin to seek success, and they often have high self-expectations (Katzman et al., 2004). These women however are not always provided with the tools to achieve this success. Likewise, they may face many obstacles that hinder their opportunities for a brighter future. When a woman's aspirations are not realized, eating disorders can become an outlet to achieve success. Indeed, women with anorexia report



that a thin body is equated with greater success and belonging (Katzman et al., 2004). Thus gender forces of modernity can contribute to the development of eating disorders. That is, increased pressures women receive in modernizing societies, such as balancing family and work life, can lead to strain, and this strain in turn can lead to mental health issues such as eating disorders.

The way of life for women living in rural areas tends to be highly patriarchal in rapidly developing societies (Lee & Lee, 2002). Females living in rural environments have been found to have longer stays at home and are expected to be very involved within the home which can lead women to struggle prematurely with expectations for independence (Katzman et al., 2004). Suddenly, a woman may have more economic or sexual pressures. Since a thin body shape is often attributed to success and attractiveness in these developing societies, women can suddenly feel pressured to lower the body weight (Lee & Lee, 2002). Lee (1998) contends that modernity is empowering women while simultaneously disempowering them. A study in Japan illustrates this reality, highlighting women's struggles to balance work and family life (Pike & Borovoy, 2004).

Most women in Japan are encouraged to leave their work in their early thirties to stay at home with their families and then later rejoin the work force in their late forties (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). This common demand prevents women from advancing in the work force. Indeed, many women in the work force are found to be in low-skilled positions (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). The work of child rearing is almost exclusive to women in Japan and has certainly prevented women from advancing in the upper ranks of power (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). Pike and Borovoy provide a case study of an anorexic

Japanese woman who was dissatisfied with certain aspects of her marriage and the family structure. On one hand, she felt that Japan's gendered division of labor was inescapable (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). This reality had led her to pursue the traditional path of motherhood instead of her dreams of pursuing a career (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). This inevitably led to her unhappiness and anorexia became her way of coping with her problems in a private way. Pike & Borovoy (2004) argue that the unchanging social construct within marriage, along with and unequal opportunities in the workforce, have led many young Japanese women to have psychological disorders. In a sense, the traditional social structures within their culture limit them from some of the opportunities that industrialization could have provided them.

Asian modernity differs from Western modernity in that it is characterized by more rapid and uneven economic growth, and well-established patriarchy. (Lee, 1998). As a result, legal and many other institutional structures that should protect women's rights are slower to develop (Pike & Borovoy, 2004). Studies have also shown that societal stressors are linked to the development of eating disorders. For instance, Katzman & Lee (1997) provide a case example of an anorexic Jewish woman who had developed amenorrhea. The woman denied any fear of becoming fat but stated that she couldn't eat. During the course of this woman's therapy it became clear that her food refusal became a means of protesting motherhood while simultaneously concealing her husbands sexual inabilities (Katzman & Lee, 1997). Anorexia had become a means for her to negotiate marital and sexual demands. Thus, disordered eating for some may simply be a way for women to satisfy new world expectations.

It is important to address the gendered aspects of eating disorder development because it would be narrow-minded to state that eating disorders are solely the result of thin media messages. However, much like the developmental aspects of adolescence, gender forces appear to aid alongside thin media messages, making women vulnerable to eating disorders and other negative problems associated with the body. Even so, there is evidence to suggest that thin media messages may play the most important role in making women susceptible to body-related problems. Studies that address the role of acculturation in regards to eating disorders help explain why this disorder is known to be a Western phenomenon.

#### *Cross Cultural Studies of Eating Pathology*

Cross-cultural study of eating pathology is generally limited; however, research findings suggest that eating disorders are a growing problem in developing nations. A well-known study in Fiji has examined the effects of prolonged exposure to Western media. The study examined the eating behaviors and attitudes among adolescent Fijian girls following exposure to Western television (Becker, Burwell, Gilman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002). Becker et al. (2002) used a naturalistic experimental design to observe the effects of television exposure. They found that dieting and self-induced vomiting coincided with the introduction of television in Fiji, indicating that media exposure may be directly linked to the development of eating disorder symptoms. A study on eating pathology in East African women has found Western media to be linked to eating disorders. Eddy et al. (2007) evaluated the presence of eating disorder behaviors and attitudes using a sample of young Tanzanian women. They obtained data through

interviews and self-reporting. They also examined the relationship between eating pathology and Western media exposure by measuring television, film, and internet use (Eddy et al., 2007). Their findings indicate that eating disorder symptoms are associated with media exposure. In other words, those who had the most exposure to these forms of media were more likely to meet the clinical criteria for eating disorders.

A similar study by Shroff & Thompson (2003) collected data from 93 adolescent females from Bombay, India. Using a five-item scale to measure the level of media influence, they were able to determine the internalization of Western media messages. The five-item scale measure had been previously used in U.S. and Australian samples and was shown to have excellent validity (Shroff & Thompson, 2003). They found that internalization had a direct effect on the desire for thinness. Thus, media influence led to the internalization of thin beauty ideals, ultimately leading to body dissatisfaction.

In recent years, economic liberation has prompted Asian governments to deregulate media advertising (Lee, 1998). As a result, images of abnormally thin movie stars and models have been projected in high-income Asian countries as well as low-income countries (Lee, 1998). An examination of three Chinese communities indicates that Western media has had an impact on female body ideals. Lee & Lee (2002) compared Chinese female high school students from Hunan, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong. Students in Hong Kong reported the most body dissatisfaction and fat concerns (Lee & Lee, 2002). Hong Kong students were also slimmer than both Shenzhen and Hunan students. Interestingly, students from Hunan reported the lowest fat concerns. One significant difference between Hunan and the other Chinese cities was media access.

Students in Hunan had limited access to television or fashion magazines. Thus, limited media exposure may help explain why Hunan students were less concerned with their weight. Clearly, the promotion of thin beauty ideals has contributed to the rise in eating disorders. The promotion of thin ideals in the media have painted a picture of an unrealistically thin woman as an ideal body type.

#### *Acculturation and Eating Disorders*

Another important factor to address is the role of acculturation in the development of eating disorders. Several studies have measured this relationship. For instance, the role of acculturation in the development of eating disorders among Cuban American women was examined in a U.S. study (Dulce, Hunter, & Lozzi, 1999). Dulce et al. (1999) used a Cuban Behavioral Identity Questionnaire in which to measure the Cuban ethnic identity of participants. This questionnaire asked participants about how often they participated in Cuban-ethnic behaviors and asked about the participant's familiarity with Cuban expressions and culture (Dulce et al., 1999). Those who showed close identification with Cuban identity had lower EAT-26 scores, and participants who reported the use of Spanish as their primary language had even lower scores (Dulce et al., 1999). Their findings indicate that continued identification and participation within the Cuban culture may deter the development of eating disorders. Whereas, decreased identification with the Cuban community tends to place women at higher risk for developing eating disorders.

A study by Franko & Herrera (1997) turned up similar findings. Franko & Herrera (1997) examined the differences in body image between Guatemalan-American and white college women. Franko & Herrera (1997) found that the more acculturated Guatemalan women expressed greater body dissatisfaction and fear of fatness. Rates of eating disorders also are generally higher in immigrant samples in comparison to samples from their original country of origin (Geller & Thomas, 1999). For instance, Nasser (1986) found that Arab immigrants in London developed eating disorders while attending universities in London. Nasser used two matched samples of female Arab students in both London and Cairo. Six cases met the diagnostic criteria for bulimia nervosa in the London sample; however, there were no cases of anorexia or bulimia in the Cairo sample (Nasser, 1986). A comparison of Greek adolescent girls living in Greece and Germany has similar findings. Fitcher, Weyerer, Sourdi, & Sourdi (1983) gave participants a self-rating questionnaire as well as a general health survey to measure psychological distress. The prevalence rate for anorexia was higher in the sample of girls living in Germany in comparison to the girls living in Greece, which indicates that non-Western immigrants are more susceptible to eating disturbances than women living in their country of origin. Such findings indicate that Western culture norms may help facilitate in the development of eating disorders.

Overall, it appears that the development of eating disorders and other body-related problems are most associated with the promotion of thin beauty ideals in Western media. In Western media there has been a shift towards a thinner female body type. Indeed, women represented in the media have gradually gotten thinner over time (Wiseman et al.,

1992; Garner et al., 1980). As a result, women are more likely to internalize thin beauty standards, resulting in negative consequences such as low-self esteem, body dissatisfaction, and even eating disorders. To a somewhat lesser extent, gendered forces also are linked to the development of eating disorders. Although, research suggests that gender roles may more or less assist thin media ideals in creating body-related problems among women. The current study will build on prior research that has analyzed the content of women's magazines, and since research indicates that adolescents are most susceptible to eating disorder development, a teen magazine has been chosen for my analysis.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORY AND METHODS

For this research I conducted a content analysis of Seventeen Magazine from 1955 through 2014, a period in which thin beauty ideals and bodily discussion have been shown to increase (Garner et al., 1980; Wiseman et al., 1992, Spyeck, 2004). This particular magazine was chosen because there have been fewer content analyses of this kind in regards to youth readership, and also because adolescents are most susceptible to eating disorder development (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Striegel-Moore 1986). Women and adolescents who have been exposed to thin beauty ideals have been consistently shown to have more body-related problems. These problems can be expounded through two theoretical frameworks, objectification theory and social comparison theory.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Much of the literature on female media representations and their relation to eating disorders utilize objectification theory and/or social comparison theory. As such, these two overlapping principles provide a helpful medium in which to better understand the medias impact on eating disorders. Objectification theory offers a framework in which to better understand the consequences of being female in a culture that objectifies the female body (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This theoretical framework places the female body within a sociocultural context, exploring how gender is shaped through



cultural and social contexts (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) suggest that as culture objectifies the female body, women may develop negative subjective experiences that contribute to mental health risks. This objectification is played out in different ways.

To begin with, objectification can occur through social encounters, such as sexually evaluative gazing. This process posits women on the non-reciprocated end of male stares or glances. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) suggest that these gazes are often sexual evaluations that commonly occur in public places. Another form of objectification Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) suggest to occur through visual media. This particular form of objectification occurs when females in media are presented in ways that place central focus on their body parts. Furthermore, research concerning female media portrayals indicates that women in advertisements are often turned into objects such as cars or alcoholic beverages (Jhally, Kilbourne, & Rabinovitz, 2010). The consequence of these forms of objectification is that they often lead women to treat their own bodies as objects to be evaluated by themselves and others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). As a result, females learn to become more concerned with their outward physical appearance than their inner, non-observable attributes. It is no wonder, then, that women begin to compare themselves to others.

According to Festinger (1954), individuals judge themselves in relation to others. In other words, individuals compare themselves to others in order to determine their own rank or status. Women who are preoccupied with their outward appearance then begin to assess their physical beauty by engaging in physical comparisons. Such comparisons

indeed operate through interpersonal encounters, but they also operate through encounters with the media (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997). The media undoubtedly sends messages that a women's worth depends on her beauty, and these messages of beauty are often tied to thin beauty ideals (Garner et al., 1980; Wiseman et al., 1990). The media sets a standard for who we are and who we should be, and feminine ideals within the media have revolved around women who are young, thin, and beautiful (Jhally et al., 2010). Women and young girls, in turn, measure themselves against this standard (Jhally et al., 2010). The problem with this self-judgment is that many women cannot achieve the extremely thin body type that is perpetuated by the media. It is argued that only one in 40,000 women actually meet the height, weight, and shape requirements of a model (Wolf, 1991). This unrealistic body expectation leaves women at odds with their physical body. As women struggle to meet our cultures standard beauty ideals, they then may begin to struggle with shame, and ultimate resentment towards their own body.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argue that eating disorders reflect two strategies for women. The first strategy aims to alleviate the discontent and shame women may feel towards their own bodies. In other words, women seek to become thinner and thinner as a way to cope with the struggle of meeting societal beauty standards. The second strategy, serves as a form of resistance to societal beauty standards. In essence, this second strategy is a form of protest towards the objectification of the female body within our culture. Despite the differing strategies, they suggest that female objectification within our culture has led to negative consequences, one of them being eating disorders.

Scholars have used social comparison theory and objectification theory to help explain media impacts on women, and several studies have also integrated the two theories to increase our understanding of sexual objectification and how it relates to eating disorders (Tiggeman & Polivy, 2010; Tylka & Sabik, 2010). Both of these theories can be applied to this research because they both help to illuminate the processes of how and why the media can influence women to internalize thin beauty ideals. As such, I will draw from these theories to make broader implications for my study findings.

To determine if there have been any shifts in female body presentations and female body discussion over time, trends were investigated through an analysis of cover models and through cover articles of the popular teen Magazine, *Seventeen*. I have chosen a teen magazine because past research on this topic has focused on adult fashion magazines. Since prior research has indicated that adolescents are more susceptible to eating disorders than adult women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Striegel-Moore et al., 1986; Brownell, 1999), it is important to examine those messages to which adolescents may be exposed. *Seventeen Magazine* in particular was chosen due to its popularity, and its history. *Seventeen Magazine* has been in print much longer than most teen magazines and this gave me access to a longer span, the 1950's up until the most recent decade. As previously mentioned, I have chosen this time period because previous studies have suggested that an increase in eating disorders coincided with the promotion of thin ideals in the fashion industry (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992; Vaugn & Fouts, 2003; Becker, Burwell, Gillman, Herzog, & Hamburg, 2002; Eddy, Hennessey, & Thompson-Brenner, 2007; Shroff & Thompson, 2003; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997).

As mentioned previously, women in print media have grown thinner since the 1960's. Thus, looking at this magazine prior to the 1960's will allow me to determine if this magazine aligns with current consensus on when thin beauty ideals became more common in the industry. Furthermore, since less research is available in regards to teen magazines, an analysis of Seventeen will help further our understanding of adolescent exposure. I hypothesize that there will be a significant increase in diet and exercise articles, as well as an increase in thinner cover models over this time period.

#### *Data Collection and Sampling*

Seventeen magazine is published monthly, and has been in publication since 1944. The magazines target audience is young women from age 12 to 19, and is the highest circulated teen magazine within the U.S., reaching over two million readers annually (AAM, 2012). Two years from each decade were systematically selected, at five year intervals between 1955 and 2014. The final sample included 156 issues. The only year that was not systematically selected was the year 2014. I had to analyze this year instead of 2015 because I did not have access to the entire years worth of issues. Only the covers of the issues were analyzed, and these were mostly found through Internet archives such as Pintrest, but a few were bought in bulk on EBay and some were also accessed through library catalogues. The data was coded and entered into the quantitative statistical analysis software SPSS (PASW- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

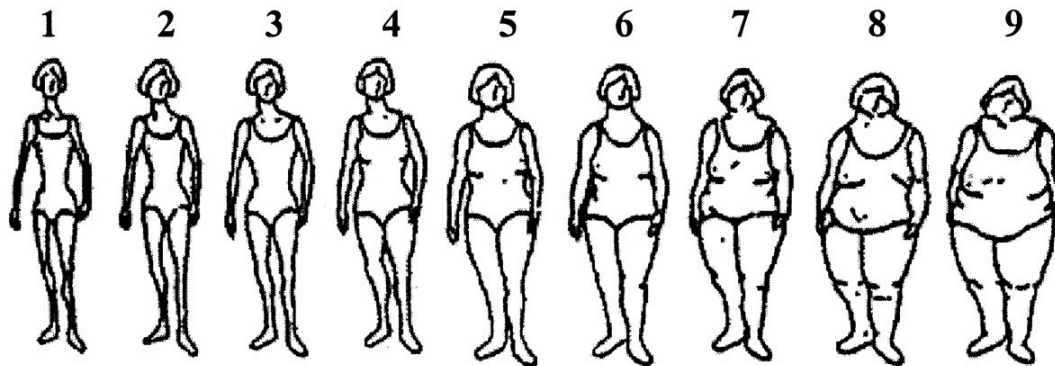


Figure 1. Contour Ratings Scale

*Criteria for Cover Model and Article Analysis*

In order to determine if media depictions of women have shifted towards the promotion of thin beauty ideals, overall body sizes of models were determined through the use of the Contour Ratings Drawing Scale (See figure 1). This scale was developed by Cusumano & Thompson (1995), and has been used in other studies to analyze the body figures of women (Spypeck et al., 2004; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Thompson & Gray, 1995). The use of this scale provided a more reliable method of evaluating a models size rather than mere estimation, and it also allowed for direct comparisons. The Contour Ratings Drawing Scale itself consists of nine detailed female figure drawings, with a rating of 1 representing the thinnest body shape, and a rating of 9 representing the heaviest body shape. For the purposes of this study, this scale was condensed into 5

categories. A rating of 1 represented an emaciated figure (extremely thin/severe bone protrusion), a rating of 3 represented a thin/underweight figure (showing signs of some bone protrusion), a rating of 5 represented a figure with a healthy or moderate body weight (little to no bone protrusion or excess fat), a rating of 7 represented a figure with some excess fat, and a rating of 9 represented a figure that could be classified as overweight. In order to determine which cover models were suitable for analysis, I used criteria that has been designed to determine the suitability of rating the body size of figures (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997).

In order for a figure to be rated, a sufficient amount of the body needed to be visible to gage, shapes also had to be well defined (refraining from rating models with loose clothing). In a few cases, there were multiple models on the cover, and in these instances such images were excluded from analysis. Discussion of the body was determined by the occurrence and frequency of exercise, body, and dieting articles. Each counted equally as evidence of bodily discussion, but was analyzed separately. Topics falling under the category of dieting included: low calorie recipes, and articles on dieting and weight loss. Topics falling under the category of exercise will include: articles on fitness/exercise. Finally, topics falling under the category of the body included any article pertaining to the body. Aside from these categories, the most common topics were celebrity articles, romance and relationship articles, fashion articles, college and career, and beauty articles. Article topics on romance include: relationship advice, relationship quizzes and surveys, romance horoscopes, and real life articles on dating. Topics on fashion included: articles on who wore it better, fashion advice, and gift guides/editors

pics. Topics falling under the category of beauty include: beauty advice, skin/hair/makeup articles, and makeovers. College and Career articles generally included topics on college or career advice. Finally, any topic including information about celebrities fell under the celebrity category. Articles falling under the “other” category include a wide range of topics that seemed to correspond with the era. These topics will be discussed at length in the findings.

It is also important to note that certain types of information on the covers were omitted from analysis, these items include: magazine promotions, freebies, and sweepstakes. Magazine promotion was generally rare, and included statements such as, “Mini-Mag – A Great New Section!” Freebies, on the other hand, were more common, but only appeared in the latest issues (the year 2000 onward). These freebies often appeared at the very top of the cover page or in the cover corners, in fine print. These include statements such as: Exclusive Coupons! \* Aeropostale \* A/X Armani Exchange \* Guess? Aside from these exceptions, all other data on the covers were analyzed.

Another component of my analysis addressed racial representation in order to see if there had been any changes over time. Covers possessing more than one person were excluded from racial analysis. There also were two covers with a male as the cover model; these were also excluded from the racial analysis. These two exceptions were relatively rare, and left only 17 of the 156 covers unanalyzed. Ideally, more than one rater would be used to assess racial diversity. However, very little racial diversity was observed from 1955 until 2010. The overwhelming majority of the cover models appeared white. Furthermore, the vast majority of minorities appeared from the year 1995

onward, which allowed me to correctly identify many of the cover models during this time period and research their ethnicity. Precisely sixteen of the minorities out of twenty-one were correctly identified. Even so, this kind of analysis of race can be problematic because it is subject to error. I could not possibly look up the ethnicity of every cover model, or be absolutely sure of their ethnicity. As such, racial diversity findings can only be presented as “best guess” estimates.

The data gathered in this study was analyzed quantitatively. With the use of the contour ratings scale, mean body scores were collected from the cover models for each year. A regression was then performed determine if there had been significant changes in the body size of cover models over time. Diet, exercise, and body articles were analyzed similarly. Numerical counts were tallied for each year and regression analyses were preformed. Finally, percentages of racial representations were tallied for each year, but since there were so few racial minorities throughout, no statistical tests were ran.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study are discussed as follows: one limitation was the lack of intercoder reliability. I was the sole person analyzing the images, as well as the article and racial categories. Another limitation of this study were the lack of images suitable for analysis. In some cases, models were presented from the upper torso up. Others simply had head shots. All such images were unable to be rated. Similarly, models who wore loose clothing also were exempt from analysis. In such cases, figures were undefined, making it impossible to accurately assess the model’s body shape. There also were problems with categorizing articles on the body. Some of the article topics listed on



the cover referenced ways to make the body look thinner or better without specifically referencing exercise or dieting. As a result, articles that I categorized as “body articles” may have actually related to dieting or exercise. Another potential limitation is the use of cover pages as a representation of the magazine itself. In other words, the articles and female figures found on the cover page may somewhat misrepresent the frequency of such articles or figures within the magazine. Finally, I must address the fact that the images I analyzed were not directly observable. Since these representational images are not a real subject, my generalizations will be more limited.

### *Conclusion*

This research was designed to understand the evolution of the female body, as well as discourse centering on the female body over time in order to determine if there have been increasing trends towards thin beauty ideals. This research also addresses racial representation to determine if there have been any shifts in minority representation. My specific research questions ask: Have female body representations grown thinner from 1955 until 2014 in the magazine Seventeen? Has there been an increase in diet and exercise articles in Seventeen over time?

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

One of the goals of the current study is to determine if Seventeen magazine has increased its promotion of thin beauty ideals from 1955 until 2014. The second goal was to assess racial diversity among cover models to determine if minority representation had increased significantly. After collecting data from the covers of each issue, regression analyses were used to in order to distinguish these patterns.

I was able to obtain and analyze each of the 156 covers that I intended to examine. The vast majority of these covers presented a female model. However, a few issues did have male cover models. Males appeared on 10 issues, accounting for 6.41% of the issues examined. Of these covers, solo males were presented 20% of the time, couples (1 male/1 female) were presented 30% of the time, and males that were on the cover with multiple people appeared 50% of the time. As mentioned previously, males were excluded from all analyses. A racial analysis similarly showed very little minority representation within the magazine.

#### *Racial Analysis*

A total of 140 covers were included in the racial analysis. Covers that were excluded from this analysis include: covers with multiple people, and covers with males (as discussed in the methods section). Minority groups were rarely represented on the covers throughout the years observed, and some minority groups such as Native

American, Indian, Asian, and various others were never represented on the covers at all. The first non-white cover girls in this analysis appeared in 1980 (see Fig. 3). The 18 minorities presented over the total span of years include: one African American female, one Hispanic female, two white/black females, and 14 females that were of mixed race. When all minority groups are compiled together, they account for only 12.86% of the total percentage of cover models. Despite this fact, minority representation did increase over time (see Fig. 2). A significant positive correlation by year was found for the number of minority representations from the interval 1955-2014 ( $r = .75, p < .05$ ). However, a sizeable increase in racial representation did not appear until 2014. Prior to this year, non-white cover models were presented only 7.86% of the time or less for each year observed, roughly 1 to 2 minorities for every 12 issues. And a regression from the years 1955 until 2010 found no significant positive correlation. Therefore, no true linear relationship was found.

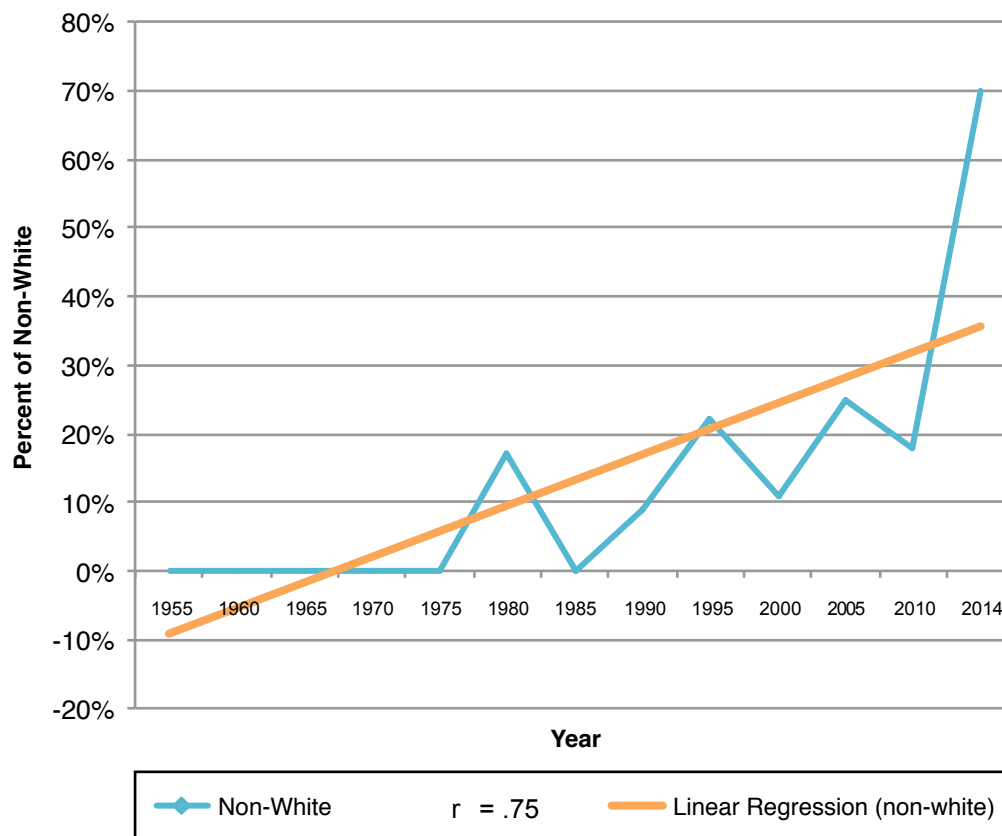


Figure 2. Percentage of Non-White

It is also worth noting that many of the minorities represented in the mixed category may be perceived as white, and this category by far represented the largest percentage of minority groups, 77.78 %. Research has shown that lighter skinned minorities integrate better into American culture (Massey, 2007), and are generally more accepted (Massey, 2007). Therefore, this positive correlation by race could overestimate the increase of diversity over time. This will be examined in length in the discussion section.

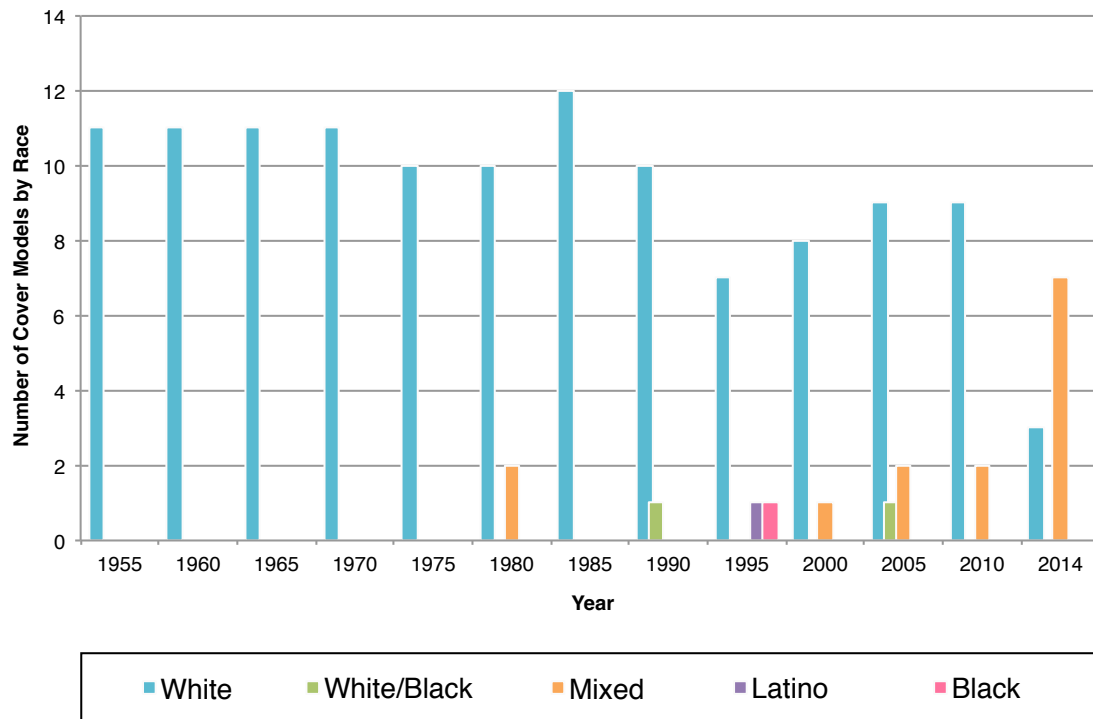


Figure 3. Number of Cover Models by Race

*Analysis of Articles*

One of the goals of this study was to examine the frequency of diet and exercise articles over time. Although I had originally planned on observing only diet and exercise articles as indicators of bodily discussion, during my research I noted that articles regarding the body itself were prevalent in this magazine. These article topics did not include information regarding diet or exercise specifically, but still posed concepts regarding the body and sometimes the alteration of the body. For example, the first body article, which appeared in 1970 states: “Right feeling, wrong body?” This article does not directly refer to exercise or dieting but it indicates that the body is being discussed as a topic. The use of the word wrong, further indicates that this article might discuss ways

to alter one's perception of their own body or alter the physical body itself. The next article topic on the body came much later, in the year 2005. After this observed year, reference to the body became more frequent and direct. Articles on the body often held messages concerning body alteration. Article titles on the body from the year 2005 include: "Make over your body"/ "Get your best butt – how to look totally hot in a bikini." / "Get your best body"/ "Clothes that make you look thinner"/ "The best style for your body." Not only did the frequency of this topic soar after this time, but this article topic also specifically began to refer to ways in which the body can be "improved."

Over time, there was an increase in the number of diet, exercise, and body articles, but article topics on the body increased the most (see Fig. 4).

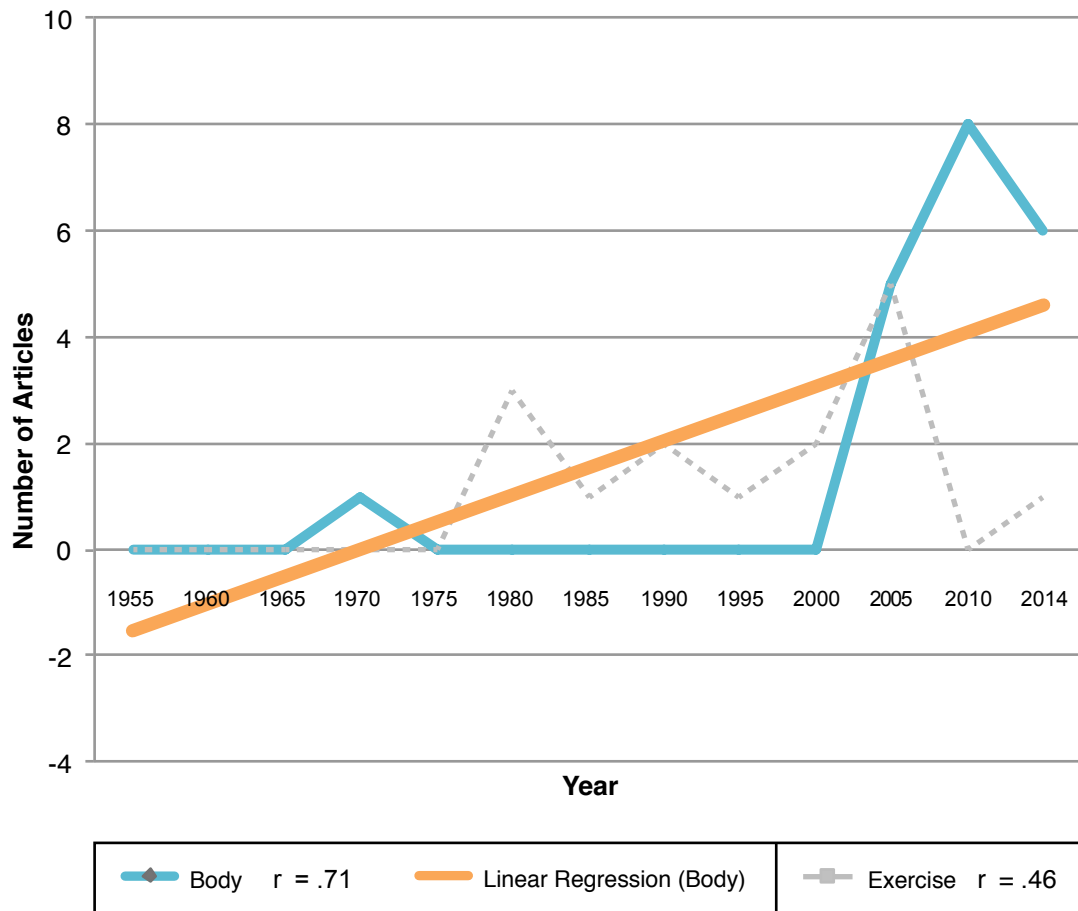


Figure 4. Number of Articles

A significant positive correlation by year was found for the percentage of body articles over time ( $r = .71, p < .05$ ). There were not, however, significant positive correlations found for diet ( $r = .03, p > .05$ ), exercise ( $r = .46, p > .05$ ), or body loving articles ( $r = .28, p > .05$ ). Even when collapsing diet and exercise articles together, the results were not significantly different from 1955 until 2014 ( $r = .38, p > .05$ ).

It is also important to note that there were two articles purporting “body -loving” rhetoric. The first body-loving article appeared in 1995, stating: “Do you hate your body?”

How to stop.” The second article, appearing in the year 2000, stated: “Love your body: Here’s how.” The presence of these articles is somewhat contradictory since diet and exercise articles were present within those same years. However, it is worth mentioning that there were less diet & exercise articles those years in comparison to years prior and after. There also were no body article topics during both the years 1995 and 2000. This suggests that this could have been an attempt to scale back on articles that could be potentially negative during these years. However, shortly afterwards, in 2005, there was a dramatic increase in article topics that refer to the alteration of the body.

The vast majority of the article topics found on the cover pages were related to fashion, beauty, dating/romance, and celebrities (see Fig. 3). However, the articles categorized under “other” accounted for the largest percentage of all the article topics. Many of these articles were found to be random, or common of a certain time period. That is, some article topics in this category were only present during certain decades, and tended to be presented no more than twice per decade. More random topics appeared only once or twice out of all the decades analyzed. A closer look at these articles better clarifies these trends.

During the 1950’s and 1960’s topics placed into the category “other” referred to handwriting, sewing, do it yourself projects, fiction, and alcoholic drinking (framed as a problem). Aside from article topics on drinking, these topics were rarely presented again, or were not presented at all during the following years. During the 1970’s, article topics falling under the category of “other” were centered on environmental issues, alcoholism, religion, drugs, sex education, and self-analysis. Article topics on sex, drugs, and



drinking seemed to continue on, but were infrequently presented throughout the subsequent years. Article topics during the 1980's included topics on divorce, abortion, birth control, AIDS, marriage, battered teens, money management, psychological problems, rape, and suicide. Aside from topics on sex, psychological problems, alcoholic drinking, and divorce, article topics defined as other in the 1990's touched on a wide variety of topics, which include: water sports, how to tan safely, Satanism, the straight edge movement, roller blading, race relations, envy, shopaholics, and a story about why a girl quit being a gymnast. Covers from 21st century continued to present article topics that were present in years past, such as article topics on sex, pregnancy, drugs or alcohol, divorce, and psychological issues. However, several articles during these years touched on topics that were more technology driven, which included articles concerning Youtube, selfies, and cellphones. Menstruation also became a more common topic during this period.

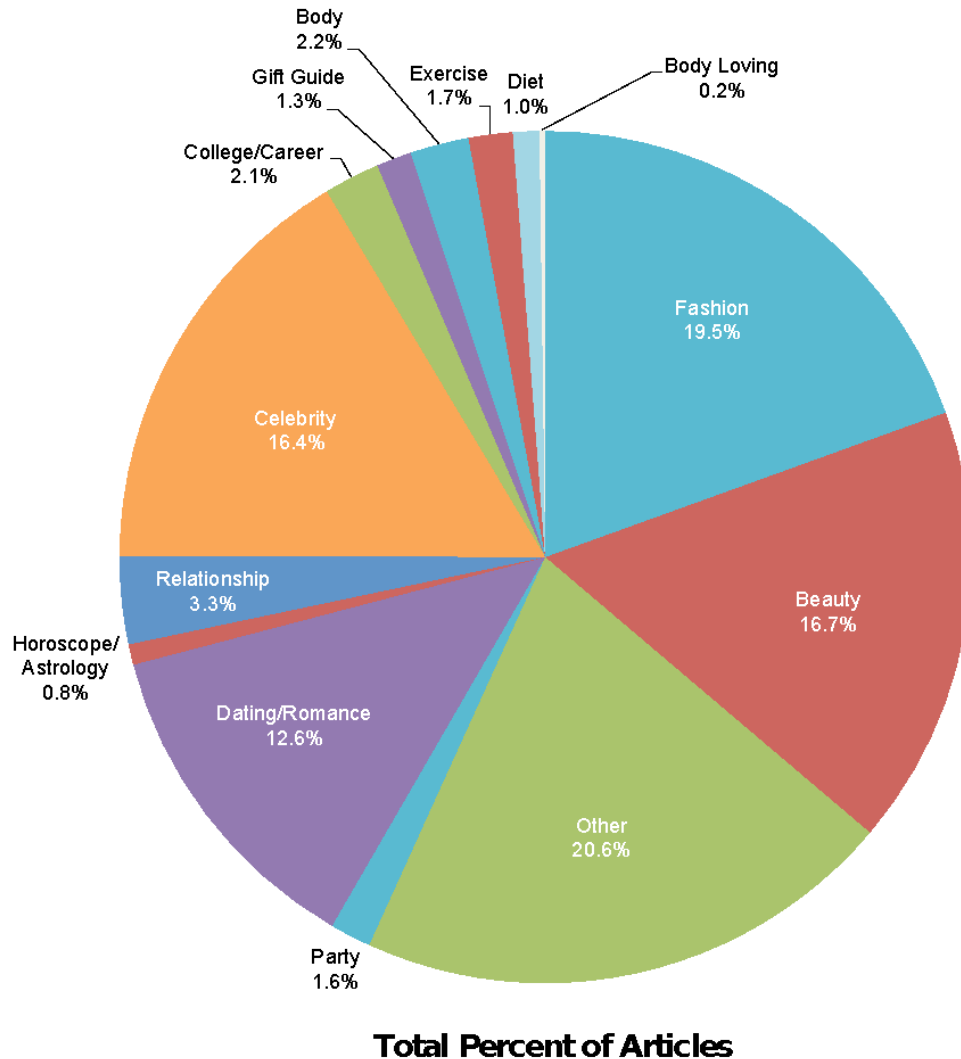


Figure 5. Total Percentage of Articles

Most all of the defined article categories were constant over time, with little to no fluctuation. But one category that did increase dramatically over time (aside from exercise and body articles), were celebrity articles (see Fig. 6). A regression of celebrity articles over time indicated that there was a significant positive correlation by year ( $r = .75, p < .005$ ). Celebrity articles peaked during 1995, followed by a decline, and now

appear to be on the rise since 2010. Inevitably, this finding reveals that this particular magazine has dramatically increased its focus on celebrities, which could have wider implications for Western cultures interest in celebrities in general.

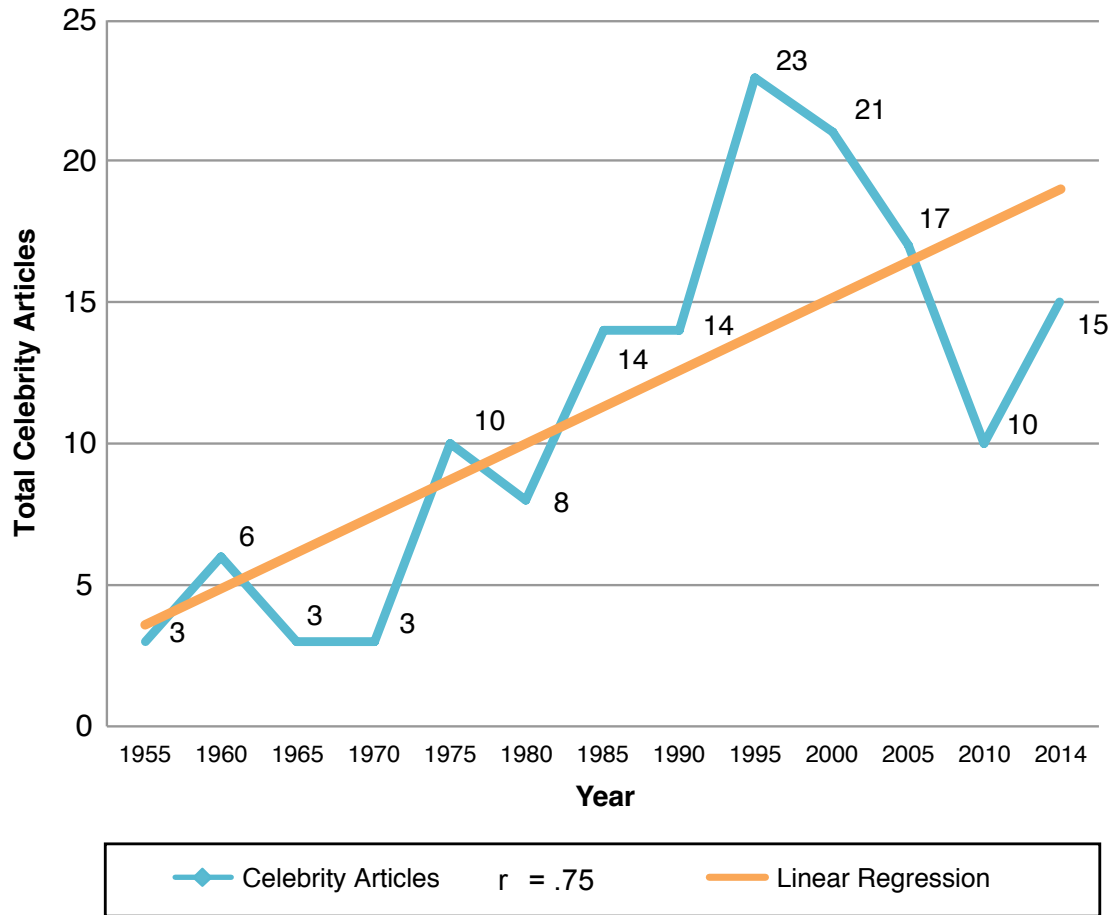


Figure 6. Total Number of Celebrity Articles

*Body Size Analysis*

One component of female body analysis sought to determine if full-body portrayals had increased over time. An increase in full-body representations, could suggest an increased emphasis on the body. Complete head-to-toe full-body portrayals

were found to be extremely rare. Full-body portrayals of covers with one cover model account for 9.62% of all the covers, and full-body portrayals of covers with multiple people account for only 3.85%. Full body portrayals first appeared in the 1960's and extend up until the latest year, 2014. However, the most full-body portrayals occurred during the year 1960, a total of eight out of twelve.

Body size ratings were only analyzed for years in which the majority of cover models were suitable for analysis. This left the following years to be examined: 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1995, 2000, 2010, and 2014. It was not possible to analyze the figures of the cover models for the years 1980, 1985, 1990, or 2005 because the cover models were not suitable for analysis. During these years, headshots of the models were often presented, making them impossible to rate with the contour ratings scale. Only rankings of a three or five were found across all years that were analyzed, with no overweight or extremely emaciated figures presented. Over the years that were examined, a significant positive correlation was found ( $r = .82$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that the body size of cover models did decrease over time.

I did note racial differences in full body portrayals among the cover models that were analyzed. Out of all the racial categories, only white and mixed race cover models were ever ranked below a 5 on the contour rating scale. This could be an indication that certain races are less likely to be presented as thin or underweight within the media. However, since so few racial minorities were presented in this magazine, such implications are very limited.

In summary, minorities were rarely presented on the covers from 1955 until 2014. However, there was a dramatic increase in minority presentation in the year 2014, which was the last year that was analyzed. There were no significant increases in diet and exercise articles over time, but there was a significant increase in article topics of the body, and all of these title topics were geared toward the alteration of the body. There also was a significant increase in thin cover models over time. These findings indicate that there has been a shift towards thin beauty ideals within Seventeen. A significant increase in body articles, as well as a significant increase in thin cover models, clearly suggests that thin beauty ideals have been increasingly promoted. These findings are consistent with prior research on women's magazines, which indicates that adolescents are being exposed to the same types of thin promotional messages.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to identify trends in the depictions of female figures on the cover of Seventeen magazine from 1955-2014. Cover models were found to become thinner over time, and this shift was statistically significant. This finding is consistent with previous research that has analyzed the figures of women in fashion and adult magazines magazines (Sypeck et al., 2004; Wiseman et al., 1992), and is also consistent with previous research that has examined the depictions of the ideal female figures in televised media (Garner et al., 1980).

The other component of the body analysis determined whether or not full-body portrayals increased over time. The vast majority of full-body portrayals in Seventeen occurred during the 1960's, and the least amount of full-body portrayals appear from 1985 until 2014. This finding suggests that there has not been an increase in full-body portrayals over time, contrasting prior research. In a previous study that analyzed the body sizes of models in four different women's magazines, researchers were unable to rate cover models during the 1960's and 70's in three out of the four magazines because the majority of issues did not display full-figure bodies (Sypeck et al., 2004). Since these findings included the analysis of several different women's magazines, this could suggest that full-figure portrayals in teen magazines differ from adult magazines. Or, this could suggest that full-figure portrayals reflect a magazine's aesthetic at a certain period of

time. Regardless, this finding suggests that full-body depictions may not necessarily signify an increased emphasis on the body.

### *Limitations and Concerns*

One particular concern regarding these findings is that while cover models have become thinner over time, the average American woman has not. Fashion models and celebrities who represent beauty ideals within our culture are considerably thinner than the average American woman. Perhaps even more striking, in this study I found that no overweight women were presented throughout all the years that were analyzed. This sends a message that overweight women, and even slightly overweight women, do not represent the feminine ideal. This could potentially have devastating impacts on overweight teens that read this magazine, because they are marginalized the most by these messages.

Drawing from social comparison theory and objectification theory, trends in this magazine would aid in causing body-related problems among women. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) objectification theory suggests that through our culture, women have learned that their bodies are subject to evaluation, and in turn may become more concerned with their physical appearance. As women become concerned with their outward physical self, they then begin to compare themselves to others, and naturally women in media are included in this comparison (Festinger, 1954). This is problematic because this research indicates, along with other studies (Garner et al., 1980; Wiseman et al., 1992, Spyeck et al., 2004), that women in media have become increasingly thinner.

As such, women may begin to compare themselves to an ideal that is difficult and unhealthy to achieve, leading to many body-related problems. The increase in diet, exercise, and body articles found in this study is likely to compound this effect.

Although exercise and diet articles increased across the years that were analyzed, these increases were not statistically significant, which was not consistent with previous research findings (Wiseman et al., 1992). One reason for this could be the addition of the body category. As mentioned previously, I felt that it was important to include this category because some article topics did not directly reference dieting or exercise. Also, I did not read the actual articles, which made it difficult to determine whether or not an article should be coded under dieting or exercise. For example, the article topic, “Get your best butt – how to look totally hot in a bikini” could be an article about exercise but there is no way to be absolutely sure. What is evident about this article topic, is that it will refer to ways to alter the body. Thus, while the method of body alteration is unclear, the message of body alteration is definite. Other article topics referenced ways to make the body look thinner or better specifically without dieting or exercise. For example, the article titled “Clothes That Make You Look Thinner” clearly refers to body alteration, but without the use of diet or exercise. This implies the same ideas regarding body modification mentioned in the previous example. Therefore, I found it absolutely necessary to include this category. Even so, this categorization could have potentially undermined the true percentage of diet and exercise articles over time, as it is very likely that some of the articles I categorized as “body” could actually be geared towards dieting or exercise.



Despite the fact that diet and exercise articles did not significantly increase over time, there was an increase in exercise and diet articles over the years analyzed nonetheless. Additionally, the findings indicate that exercise articles began to surpass diet articles by the 1980's, which is consistent with prior research (Wiseman et al., 1992). And perhaps most importantly, body articles were found to increase significantly over time. Since each article topic (exercise/diet/body) counted equally as evidence of bodily discussion, it can be argued that bodily discussion did increase over time within this particular magazine. Lastly, I found two articles that promoted "body-loving" rhetoric during 1995 and 2000. Since these articles were close together in years, it is likely that this might have been the magazine's way of reverting back from articles on body modification because during those same years, there were less diet and exercise than previous and subsequent years, and no article topics on the body were found at all during those years.

An analysis of all the cover articles revealed an emphasis on articles that refer to one's physical appearance. Beauty and fashion articles accounted for approximately 36.2% of all the total articles. Here, I must reiterate that this is a lifestyle magazine, not a fashion magazine, and yet most of the topics are focused on physical beauty. The next most popular categorized articles included dating/romance and celebrity articles. Much less common, were articles on relationships (with parents or friends) or articles about college and career. And out of all of these total articles, celebrity articles increased the most over time, a shift that was statistically significant. This could suggest that our

culture has become increasingly preoccupied with celebrities, and could indicate that celebrities are more influential than years past.

Finally, articles titled as “other” constituted for the majority of the total articles, and although the number of these articles varied little over time, some of the article topics themselves did. Many of these topics illuminate the types of discussion that were common among young women, or society at the time. During the 1950’s and 1960’s, topics defined as other focused more on gender roles, such as knitting and sewing. This is a reflection of the more domestic duties of women of that time. The 1970’s drew awareness to environmental issues, and referenced religious topics, but after this decade those topics were no longer presented. This likely reflects a loss of momentum or attractiveness in topics that was once popular. During the 1980’s discussion of a wide array of psychological or abusive problems surfaced, more so than any other decade. The topic of divorce also surfaced during this decade and continued on afterward, which reflected trends in marriages within our culture. The 1990’s had the widest array of random topics, and continued some of the article topics that had been mentioned previously. As such, no distinctive topics appeared during that particular decade. Finally, articles in the 21st century began to refer to topics that hinted towards advances made in technology, and also began to refer to topic of menstruation. These two topics reflect some significant changes we’ve made in our current society, one being advances in technology, the other being more open view towards the bodily functions of the female body.

The final component of my analysis assessed the racial diversity in Seventeen Magazine over time. Overall, minority groups were rarely represented on the covers, and did not appear on any of the covers analyzed until 1980. The vast majority of the minorities presented were of mixed race, and only two distinct racial categories were ever presented, African American, and Latino American. Only one African American Female, and one Latino American female were presented during the years that were analyzed. This correlates with prior research suggesting that African Americans are represented far less than white Americans in mainstream media outlets (Schooler et al., 2004). Even direr, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Indian Americans were never presented on any of the covers. This is consistent with previous research that has assessed racial diversity within the media. For example, a study that examined minority portrayals in prime-time television commercials similarly found Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latino Americans to be presented the least among all racial categories (Mastro & Stern, 2003). The numerical representation of race within the media can often be seen as an indication of social relevance (Mastro & Stern, 2003). As such, these given results send a message that minority groups are of less importance. Despite these findings, a significant increase in minority representations was found over time after collapsing all minority groups together. Still, this finding very likely overestimates minority representations because the largest non-white racial category included females of mixed race. Additionally, the year 2014 had the largest increase of minorities, which skewed the results somewhat. A closer look at those categorized under the racial category “mixed” indeed suggests that any apparent improvement in racial diversity may be overestimated.

Female cover models that fell under the mixed racial category by far outnumbered those of other races, and what makes this group particularly unique is that many of them may be perceived as white. Taking a close look at cover models from 2014, reveals that many of the cover models in this category are of mixed European descent. Five out of the seven cover girls categorized under mixed race that year had possessed at least 50% white European ancestry. And indeed, at first glance, I myself perceived these girls to be white. From this perspective, only two cover models from that year are likely to be perceived as non-white, which means that racial diversity has remained stagnant since the 1980's. But when reviewing the literature on social stratification and racial inequality, the findings may suggest that racial diversity has not just remained stagnant, but has reverted to the promotion of only "certain" racial minorities, who are less marginalized within our society.

Literature on social stratification and racial inequality has purported that lighter skinned minorities are less marginalized within our society. For example, Latinos who assume a white racial identity are more likely to earn higher wages and incomes than those who assume a non-white identity. Latinos that are perceived as white are also less likely to experience housing segregation (Massey, 2007). Furthermore, literature indicates that certain minorities, such as Greeks, experienced more opportunities and less racism than other racial groups such as Mexicans – who are often darker skinned (DePalma, 2005). With this in mind, racial representation within this magazine may suggest trends towards the promotion of lighter skinned minorities with Caucasian features; because after the year 2000, all but one cover model were categorized under the

mixed category. Thus, as mixed racial minorities are gaining popularity in this magazine over time, more distinct racial categories are not. This is important because representation within the media is often an indicator of social relevance. As such, trends in this magazine may indicate that mixed racial groups are becoming substitutes for darker racial groups.

One final element of my racial analysis specifically looked at the frequency of African American cover models, and whether or not their figures were average or below average in size. This is because African American women have been shown to be less likely to develop an eating disorder, and also because they report greater body satisfaction. The findings of this study were similar to that of other studies, which found African American women to be presented less frequently, and to show a broader range of body shapes (Jefferson & Stake, 2009). In the black and black/white racial categories, no cover models were rated below a 5 on the contour rating scale. Secondly, African American women were rarely presented at all on the cover pages of this magazine. Drawing from social comparison theory, African American girls would be less likely to internalize thin beauty ideals purported in this magazine than their white counterparts. The only other racial category (Latino) did not present a figure that was suitable for analysis but the other cover models falling under the mixed racial category were found to rank below a 5 on the contour ratings scale. Of the 9 cover models that were suitable for analysis in this group, 5 were given a ranking of 3, placing them in the thin/underweight range. This could help explain why other racial groups are susceptible to eating disorders, while others are not. Certainly, this pattern goes deeper than the surface level of

magazines, as research as suggested that African American culture is more accepting of larger figures. However, their lack of racial representation combined with a lack of thin/underweight African American figures within the media could help to prevent African American women from internalizing thin beauty ideals.

### *Implications for Future Research*

This research suggests that there has been an increasing trend towards thinness within Seventeen Magazine over time, as well an increasing trends toward bodily discussion. These results lend further support to the hypotheses suggested in prior studies (Garner et al., 1980; Wiseman et al., 1990, Sypeck et al., 2004). These findings are concerning because the public has been increasingly exposed to this form of media (Wiseman et al., 1990), both nationally and internationally (Thussu, 2007). Western media is expected to continue to expand across the globe (Thussu, 2007), which means that the messages within these magazines will have the potential to influence more and more women.

Consistent with the increased incidence of eating disorders, the body sizes of cover models began to grow much thinner in 1965. Only one cover model was given a rank of three for the years 1955 and 1960, but in the year 1965, four cover models were given this ranking. This is a sizeable increase, and suggests that these two incidences could be related, as many other studies with similar findings have suggested (Garner et al., 1980; Wiseman et al., 1992). Drawing from objectification theory and social comparison theory, women reading Seventeen during the mid to late 1960s would have

likely began to make unhealthy comparisons between themselves and cover models. Another interesting finding that could add to this effect is the fact that celebrity articles were found to increase significantly over time.

Celebrities are cultural icons that are known for their idyllic qualities, and certainly many people admire them, and seek to emulate them. As such, thin celebrities represented in the media may have an even greater impact on women than cover models who are less well known. Thus, research may want to address the effects that thin celebrity images have on young women in comparison to that of thin models.

Articles topics on the dieting and exercise have increased over time, and topics on the body have increased the most. Since extreme dieting and exercise are two of the diagnostic criteria for Anorexia Nervosa, these messages could certainly have implications for eating disorders. Still, the largest increase in articles over time was article topics on the body. This may have implications for future researchers because most prior research has not included article topics on the body in their analysis. As mentioned previously, some of these articles topics that I categorized under “body” could have fallen under dieting or exercise. Since I was not able to read the articles to determine the article topic with upmost certainty, my findings are somewhat limited. However, I can be sure that at least some of the article topics that fell under this category were not articles on dieting or exercise. Furthermore, each article topic counted equally as bodily discussion, which would have shown a significant increase in such articles regardless. Therefore, researchers who study the medias influence on eating disorders

may want to include article topics on the body in the future, as article topics such as “dresses that make you look thinner” certainly promote thin beauty ideals.

Additionally, this research suggests that there have been shifts in racial diversity over time. Prior to the 1980’s, all cover models were white. Racial trends then remained constant until 2014, where there was a significant increase in racial diversity. What is curious about this finding, however, is that the mixed cover models are by far represented the most out of all the racial categories. And many of these cover models have white European ancestry, making many of them appear white. When taking this into account, racial diversity has not increased very much since the 1980s. Furthermore, these findings may indicate that mixed raced cover models are taking precedence over other racial categories. Since the year 2000, all but one non-white cover models were of mixed race. To my knowledge, no studies have highlighted such trends in the 21st century, but these results could be an indication of shifts in racial representation within the media. Thus, this could potentially have implications for future research in representations of race.

Finally, these research findings could provide further affirmation that the racial representations of African American women within media may inadvertently make them less susceptible to eating disorder development. African American women were not only rarely represented in this magazine, but they also were never presented below the normal weight range. As hypothesized, this would likely prevent African American women from making comparisons between themselves and the cover models, which ultimately would lead to less body dissatisfaction or eating disorder symptomology.



In conclusion, this study documents trends towards a smaller body size, as well as a significant increase in bodily discussion over time. As previously stated, it has been hypothesized that the increased incidence in eating disorders are connected to the promotion of thin beauty ideals within our culture (Sypeck et al., 2004). Therefore, a continued increase in thin beauty ideals may continue to have an impact on the prevalence of eating disorders among women, especially women living within Western culture. Increases in bodily discussion over time, similarly, may contribute to eating disorders among women. This study's documentation of racial diversity may also provide future insights for differences in racial portrayals. If future content analyses in this area reveal similar findings, this could mean that mixed racial categories are taking precedence over other racial categories.

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