

Remodeling: A Proposed Study of Altered Images in Fashion Stories and Ads of Seventeen Magazine to Match National Statistics

Prof. Mary Celeste Kearney

Eliza Rhea Barry

5/10/2013

“The mass media creates and promotes a standard of beauty that leads many adolescent and adult females to experience significant body dissatisfaction.”

-Spettigue and Henderson

Introduction:

Since the original publication of *Seventeen* magazine in 1944, teen girl magazines have been a key component of marketing products to girls. The attitude of the business industry in the 1940s was that teenage girls did not represent an important consumer segment until Estelle Ellis, the promotion director at *Seventeen*, published a series of surveys of teens along with a narrative of what the typical teenage girl, embodied by her character Teena, was like (Massoni 33). After the surveys, a direct-mail campaign that positioned *Seventeen* as Teena’s “mother-substitute” drew a few brave advertisers to sponsor the magazine, eventually leading to an entirely new segment of publications (Massoni 34). With the explosion of magazines for teen girls in the 1990s, circulations of established magazines like *Seventeen* grew and new magazines geared towards girls emerged, such as *YM*, *Jump*, *Twist* and *Teen Vogue*. At the same time, ad expenditures rose and other mediums (notably television and the internet) began to increase content for teen girls.

With this increase came concerns about what the media was telling teen girls. As adolescence solidified its reputation as a tumultuous and vulnerable life stage, adults from parents to public health professionals began questioning whether magazines were a positive influence on teen girl’s lives. Most notably, concerns about girls and body image came to the forefront, blaming repeated exposure to images of increasingly thin models and celebrities as the culprit for more girls reporting to have a negative body

image or engage in restrictive dieting. Other groups were concerned about the lack of representation of girls and women of color in these magazines, citing the strengthening of the American cultural standard of “white beauty.” This research project examines the current state of girl’s relationships with their bodies and *Seventeen* magazine, how the two are linked, and what has been done by the magazines and others to address the aforementioned concerns in order to suggest ways to test new methods of magazine production to better serve the modern teenage girl. This project will be the basis for a primary research study with 50 girls in focus groups who will be provided an abbreviated copy of the May 2013 issue of *Seventeen* magazine and a version created using the insights gained here, as well as a current statistical analysis of what a more current “Teena” may look like. The aim is to learn if girls find *Seventeen* magazine to be valuable, realistic, a positive or negative influence on their body image and something they would consider purchasing if it were altered.

Magazines and Teen Girls:

One of the earliest examinations of teen girl’s relationships with magazines is Angela McRobbie’s 1982 study of *Jackie* magazine, a weekly British magazine for girls published from 1964 to 1993 (67-116). McRobbie proposed that the homogenized teen girl experience depicted in *Jackie* restricted teen girls development and shaped the magazine’s readers to believe that, among other things, monolithic cultural beauty standards for women were worthy to strive for and only attainable through consumption of the products recommended and advertised therein. In a later work in 1994, McRobbie

revised her premise to include the notion that teen girls consume the magazine but negotiate its ideals and create their own meaning (Norton 296).

This shift represented a change in the way teen girls were perceived: they were critically consuming media rather than, like *Teena* of the 1940s, absorbing advertising messages carte blanche. This position seemed to be upheld by the arrival of teen-made magazines riddled with feminist discourse, such as *Teen Voices* and *Reluctant Hero*, that advocated backlash against the unrealistic and consumerist standpoints of mainstream magazines like *Seventeen*. Both the editors and teen contributors criticized *Seventeen* as “repetitive,” “exploitative,” and “contradictory” in interviews published in *The Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* (Norton 296-298).

The assertion that girls critically consume media was quickly overwhelmed, however, by the increasing moral panic over new statistical studies (both short term and long term) that suggested girl’s body images were decreasing in adolescence and were at their lowest in recent memory. One research study in 2001 published by *Health Education Research* found that body image issues affected children “as young as 6” and that “about 40% of the girls perceived themselves as ‘too fat’, yet up to 80% were currently trying to lose weight. These findings suggest that reasons other than perceiving themselves as overweight may prompt weight-losing behaviors in adolescent girls” (O’Dea and Caputi 521). Another, commissioned by the Girls Scouts of America, found that 59% of girls were dissatisfied with their bodies and that 66% wanted to lose weight (Martin 99). A 2004 study commissioned by Dove found that 81% of 10-year-old girls were “afraid of getting fat” and only 2% of women and girls in the study self-described as beautiful (Martin 100). Further, a 1999 study had already linked adolescent

girl's magazine habits and body image. Of the 500 girls surveyed, 70% said magazine images "influenced their idea of the ideal body shape" (Field, Cheung, Wolf, Herzog, Gortmaker, & Colditz). These grim findings led to an outpouring in the media of advice for parents to combat poor body image in their daughters with titles like "Raising a Girl With Positive Body Image" (PBS, 2003) and "Girls and Body Image Tips" (CommonSense Media, 2013) among many others. Once common "tip" in these articles is to limit girl's exposure to media, especially fashion magazines.

Push For Realism

The swell of this moral panic has led to various reactions in the magazine industry. Notably, in 2012, 14-year-old blogger Julia Bluhm started a petition on Change.org to compel *Seventeen* magazine to publish one photo spread each month with no digital alteration of model's appearances (specifically making them look thinner). Bluhm's petition reached 84,168 signatures in six days, prompting Bluhm to request a meeting with *Seventeen* editor-in-chief Ann Shocket, prompting *Seventeen* to publish a "Body Peace Treaty" on its website and a "Body Peace" spread in each subsequent issue (Haughney). The pledge was originally 8 points, but has expanded to 23 because of input from girls on *Seventeen's* website. Readers of the pledge can sign in online stating that they "vow to..." "support my friends, who just like me, have their own body issues," "never blame my body for the bad day I'm having," and "remember that even the girl who I'd swap bodies with in a minute has something about her looks that she hates" ("Sign the Body Peace Treaty!"). *Seventeen* also casts "real girl" models (see appendix A for guidelines) for its monthly Body Peace spread and other shoots calling

for girls of “all sizes” “between the ages of 14 and 21” regardless of modeling experience or portfolio (“Open Call: Be a Real Girl Model!”).

Ironically, however, the Body Peace pledge also includes the point “what you see isn't always what you get on TV and in ads — it takes a lot of airbrushing, dieting, money, and work to look like that” (“Sign the Body Peace Treaty!”). And, despite its recent efforts to cast more “real girls” in photo shoots, little has been done to address the aesthetics of the advertising in the magazine. *Seventeen* claims not to use Photoshop or other production techniques to make girls appear thinner or have a different skin tone (Haughney), but many of the ads on pages facing these “natural” spreads do.

So what exactly is the state of *Seventeen* magazine’s depiction of girls? When Estelle Ellis wrote about Teena in the 1940’s, she was “16 years old, 5 feet 4 inches tall, 118 pounds, attends public high school, expects to go to college—and then marry and stay home... her family is middle class” (Massoni 33). Today, *Seventeen* claims in their media kit their readership includes “females from ages 12 to 25” and measures an average median age of 21.95 across four data reports (TwelvePlus, Doublebase, GfKMRI Fall 2012 and TeenMark) but an average age of 16.5 in the 12-19 demographic (“Seventeen Media Kit”). It sells 20 million copies annually and about 21% of readers are African American, 16% are other/multiracial and 16% are Hispanic (“Seventeen Media Kit”). Most readers are employed. Combined with recent statistics from the CDC, the average weight for girls 12-19 is 136 lbs. and the average height is 63.58 inches (“Anthropometric Reference Data for Children and Adults: United States, 2007–2010”). It would seem that Teena today is older, heavier, more affluent, and more likely to be a

minority than she was in the past. Is *Seventeen* considering the modern teen girl in the makeup of its magazine images? Is there a difference in the way teen girls are depicted in the fashion stories designed and created by *Seventeen* editors and the advertisements designed and created by corporations?

Analysis of the May 2013 issue of *Seventeen*:

The short answer is yes. In order to investigate if *Seventeen* was being representationally accurate, I performed a close, statistical reading of the May 2013 issue. I devised a method for counting the number of depictions of girls and their demographic characteristics (age, race/ethnicity, height, weight) in the issue and analyzed the magazine for consistency with national averages and *Seventeen's* claims about its readership and target demographics. A graphic statistical analysis is included in the Appendix B, along with the details of the methods for data collection.

The main issue with the magazine as a whole is that it is overwhelmingly features thin girls and women who are older than *Seventeen's* target audience of 12-19. Of the girls and women featured in the magazine, 71% white and only 38% are at or under the age of 19. In fashion stories, 65% are white and 41% are 19 and under. This uptick in the number of teen girls featured is consistent with *Seventeen's* attempts to represent more real girls and the racial and ethnic diversity is greater in the fashion stories (17% black, 9% Asian and 9% Hispanic/Latino). However, the overall effect of this is drowned out by the advertisements, which feature 63% white girls and women and only 21% of those depicted are 19 and under. The advertisements also appear to be altered by Photoshop in almost every instance whereas the fashion stories by *Seventeen* do not,

although there is no way of testing this and contacted companies (Procter & Gamble, Neutrogena) declined to comment. The overall effect of displaying thinner, older girls in ads and stories is that girls feel pressured to look both thinner and more mature.

Further Research:

With the knowledge that the May 2013 issue is relatively unproblematic in its depictions of minorities (averages are close to US Census data), I will focus my attention to the apparent weight and ages of the girls and women featured in the altered version for testing, paying particular attention to reducing the ages of models portrayed in ads. Additional research will be required to obtain accurate weight averages for models, celebrities and real girls in ads and fashion stories in the May 2013 issue of *Seventeen*. Only two model profiles listed the model's weight rather than measurements and these two models had conflicting profiles elsewhere on the internet. In order to gain accurate and current data, the model's representation will be called.

Conclusion:

The insights gained in this project have led to the alteration of the artifact that will be used for testing. Ethnic and racial diversity of the magazine will be maintained and the average age of the models featured will be reduced. Women and girls featured in the altered magazine will also be carefully selected to match the national averages for height and weight in the target demographic of ages 12-19. This artifact will then be tested with at least 50 girls in focus groups (selected by convenience sample of local girls in Austin, Texas who self-report to read teen girl fashion magazines and are ages

12-19) in order to determine if they feel a more representative depiction of girls in magazines is desired and commercially viable (i.e. they would still want to read the magazine and buy the products).

Suggestions for Further Research:

Further research may be conducted to determine whether cover models are consistent with the data uncovered in this study. Few studies have been done about the apparent weights of the cover models and there are no available data about the ethnicities and ages of models used on the cover of *Seventeen* recently, though there are data on which cover models are credited with selling the most magazines. Cover representation is a big part of the complicated relationship girls have with their bodies and *Seventeen* and a cursory investigation suggests that the cover images are not as diverse as those contained in the pages of magazine.

With regard to girls of color and their relationship to media depictions of a thin ideal, The longitudinal study by Paxton, Eisenberg and Neumark Sztainder found that being African American was a protective factor for body image in girls but gave no data as to how often these girls are exposed to images of models of color in media. Further research could establish a more firm connection as to why African American girls seem to be less vulnerable to media images and whether this is linked to their lack of representation.

Content of articles also contributes to the feelings of inadequacy girls may experience while reading *Seventeen*, as topics such as romance and dieting consistently appear and occasionally give conflicting advice. Detailed analysis of this

content in context may yield an opportunity to better serve girl readers with advice they want and can use in their daily lives.

Appendix:

A: Real Girl Model Casting

Posted in: [Events](#)

model casting: *your chance to be in seventeen!*

February 6, 2013 at 10:32:00 AM by [Seventeen Magazine](#) • 52 Comments



Have you always wanted to see yourself in the pages of *Seventeen*? Now is your chance! We're always looking for [real girl models](#) to feature in the mag. This is why we're hosting a huge [model casting event](#) on March 1!

We're looking for girls between the ages of 16 and 22. If you're interested, come to the Joseph Urban Theater in the Hearst Tower (located at 300 W. 57th St.) in New York City. The casting will be held between the hours of 10 a.m. to 1

p.m., and 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Come with very [natural makeup](#) and hair. Most importantly, bring your biggest smile! Be prepared to have your [picture taken](#).

Have you always wanted to be in the pages of *Seventeen*? Are you coming to the casting? Tell us in the comments below!

do you want to be a seventeen real girl model?

We're looking for girls in all sizes!



Seventeen is looking for readers in the NYC area (must be close enough to travel to the city for shoots) to be featured in our pages as Real Girl models! We are looking for all different types of girls so as long as you are 22 or younger. **WE WANT YOU!**

Send us a full length photo of yourself, along with a link to your Facebook page!

First Name:	<input type="text"/>
Last Name:	<input type="text"/>
Email Address:	<input type="text"/>
Phone Number:	<input type="text"/>
City:	<input type="text"/>
State:	<input type="text"/>
Country:	<input type="text"/>
Date of Birth:	<input type="text"/>
Your Comments:	<input type="text"/>

Upload photos (5Mb max): [browse](#)



Enter security code before submitting:

B: Statistical Reading of May 2013 *Seventeen*

Method:

Models were counted when faces or bodies were visible (i.e. a model shown from the back was counted; a shot of a hand in a nail polish ad was not counted). Models shown more than once were counted more than once as long as that appearance was not on the same page (excluding opposite page).

Apparent genders were used to account for maleness and femaleness without verification of true biological sex.

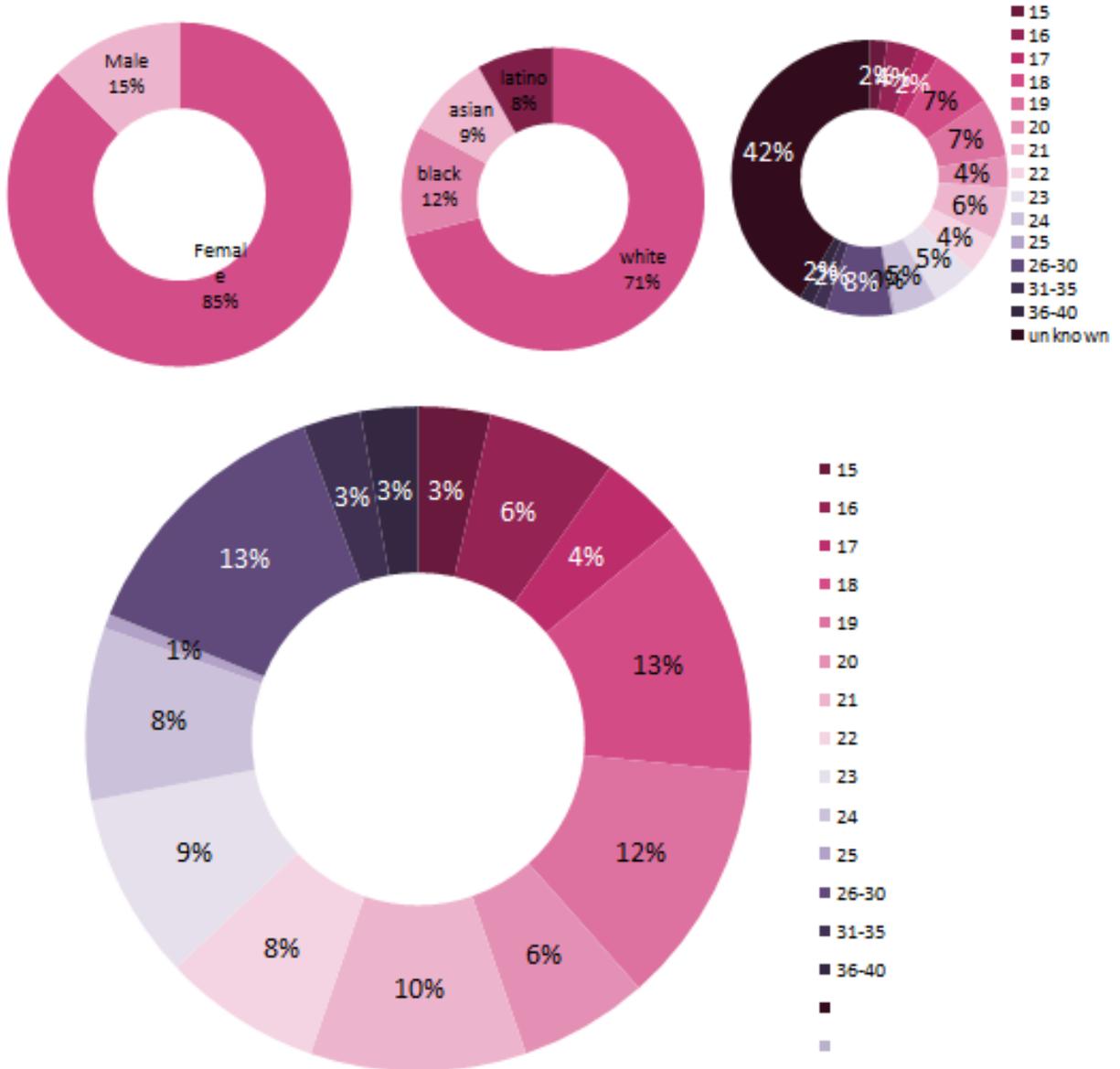
Ages given by *Seventeen* were not investigated. Model profiles on *Models.com* and *Style.com* provided ages and ethnicities for most of the models. All models who did not have a profile or who were not named on the campaign website of their ads or *Seventeen.com* were counted as "unknown" for the age category.

Ethnicities were also collected from model profiles and *Seventeen.com*. Race/ethnicity, where very apparent, was counted without additional verification.

Cover girl, AnnaSophia Robb, was not counted in any instances of her appearance in this issue of *Seventeen*. Cover models cannot be considered representative of *Seventeen's* average editorial choice as there are external factors (timeliness of appearance in a TV show, in this instance) leading to placement.

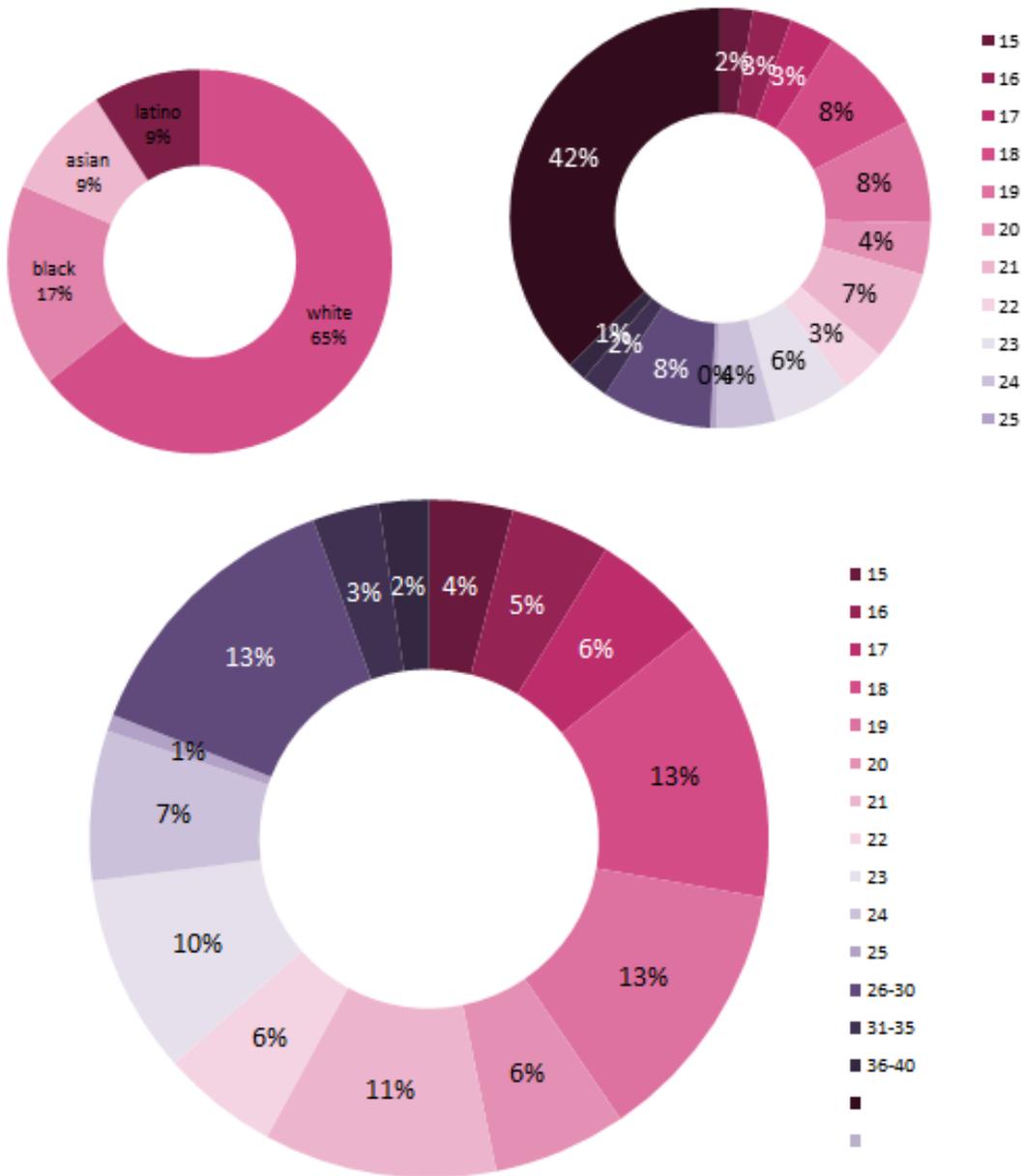
Advertisements were differentiated from stories if they were labeled as advertisements or were clearly not created by *Seventeen* editorial staff. Product recommendations were not counted as advertisements.

Totals for May 2013 Issue (all content, ads and stories)



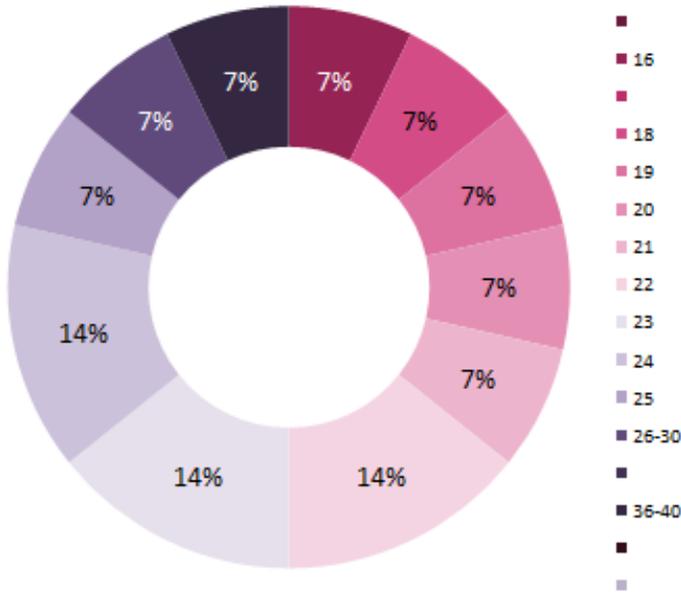
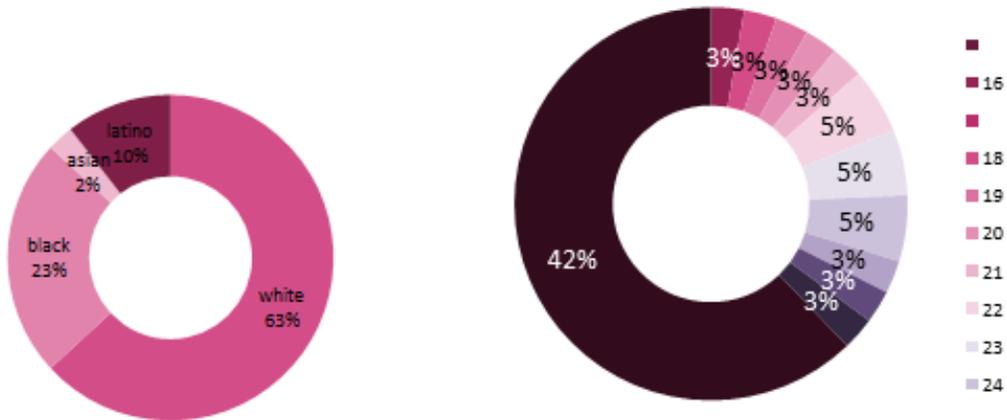
Only 38% are in the 12-19 demographic (if unknowns are excluded)

Fashion stories



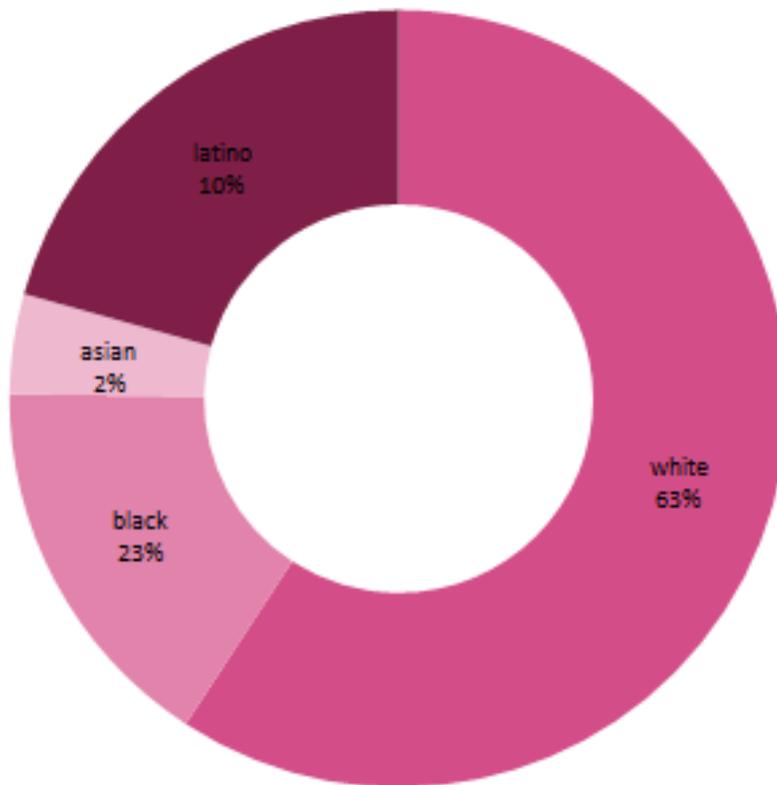
41% are in 12-19 demographic if unknowns are excluded

Advertisements



Only 21% are in the 12-19 demographic

National Average (girls ages 10-19)



Girls age 10-19 make up 6% of the total U.S. population (19,681,000)

Works Cited:

- "Anthropometric Reference Data for Children and Adults: United States, 2007–2010." *Vital and Health Statistics* 11th ser. 252 (2012): 6+. *CDC.gov*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web.
- Chow, Jean, Ph.D., R.N. "Adolescents' Perceptions of Popular Teen Magazines." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 48.2 (2004): 132-39. *NCBI*. Web.
- Clay, Daniel, Vivian L. Vignoles, and Helga Dittmar. "Body Image and Self-Esteem Among Adolescent Girls: Testing the Influence of Sociocultural Factors." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 15.4 (2005): 451-77. *Wiley Online Library*. Web.
- Field, A. E., L. Cheung, A. Wolf, D. Herzog, G. Gortmaker, and C. Colditz. "Exposure to the Mass Media and Weight Concerns Among Girls." *Pediatrics* 103.3 (1999): n. pag. *NCBI*. Web.
- "Girls and Body Image Tips." *CommonSense Media*. Common Sense Media, Inc., 14 Jan. 2013. Web. <<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/advice-for-parents/girls-and-body-image-tips>>.
- Haughney, Christine. "A Magazine Vows to Ease Retouching." *The New York Times* 4 July 2012, Late Edition ed., sec. B: 1. *LexisNexis Academic*. Web.
- Martin, Jeanne B., Ph.D., R.D., F.A.D.A., L.D. "The Development of Ideal Body Image Perceptions in the United States." *Nutrition Today* 45.3 (2010): 98-110. *NursingCenter.com*. Wolters Kluwer Health. Web.
- Massoni, Kelly. "'Teena Goes to Market': Seventeen Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (As) Consumer." *The Journal of American Culture* 29.1 (2006): 31-42. Blackwell Publishing Limited. Web.

McRobbie, Angela. "Jackie Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl.

"*Feminism and Youth Culture*. New York: Routledge, 200. 67-117. Print

Norton, Bonny. "When Is a Teen Magazine Not a Teen Magazine?" *Journal of*

Adolescent and Adult Literacy 45.4 (2001): 296-98. The University of British
Columbia. Web.

O'Dea, Jennifer A., and Peter Caputi. "Association Between Socioeconomic Status,

Weight, Age and Gender, and the Body Image and Weight Control Practices of

6- to 19-year-old Children and Adolescents." *Health Education Research* 16.5
(2001): 521-32. *NCBI*. Web.

"Open Call: Be a Real Girl Model!" *Seventeen*. Hearst Teen Network, n.d. Web.

<http://www.seventeen.com/contribute/fun/share/fashion/seventeen-open-call?click=main_sr>.

Paxton, Susan J., Marla E. Eisenberg, and Dianne Neumark-Sztainer. "Prospective

Predictors of Body Dissatisfaction in Adolescent Girls and Boys: A Five-Year

Longitudinal Study." *Developmental Psychology* 42.5 (2006): 888-99. *EBSCO*
Host. Web.

"Raising a Girl With a Positive Body Image." *PBS*. PBS, 2003. Web.

<<http://www.pbs.org/parents/raisinggirls/bodies/image.html>>.

Seventeen May 2013: 1-134. Print

"Seventeen Media Kit." *Seventeen*. Hearst Magazines, n.d. Web.

<http://www.seventeenmediakit.com/r5/showkiosk.asp?listing_id=4574568>.

"Sign the Body Peace Treaty!" *Seventeen*. Hearst Teen Network, n.d. Web. May 2013.

<<http://www.seventeen.com/health/tips/body-peace-pledge>>.

Spettigue, Wendy, M.D, F.R.C.P.C, and Katherine A. Henderson, Pd.D., C. "Eating Disorders and the Role of the Media." *The Canadian Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Review* 13.1 (2004): 16-19. NCBI. Web.

Stice, Eric, Diane Spangler, and W. Stewart Agras. "Exposure To Media-Portrayed Thin-Ideal Images Adversely Affects Vulnerable Girls: A Longitudinal Experiment." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 20.3 (2001): 270-88. *Guildford Journals*. Guildford Press. Web.