

# Selling Ideals: Sexualization in Teen Girl Magazines, 2007- 2017

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**Abstract**

Magazines are made to sell more than just a product; they sell lifestyles and ideals. Teen girl magazines target adolescents starting as young as twelve years old, but is the content in its pages appropriate and identifiable for that demographic? This study investigated how levels of perceived sexualization changed between 2007, 2012, and 2017, in *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* magazines. A decrease in perceived sexualization was expected across the ten-year period of time. This window of time reflects the last ten years of publication for both magazines. Research was conducted by creating and utilizing a grading system for non-explicit sexualized imagery to analyze ninety-six images, which were selected in a random sample created from six magazines, three published by *Teen Vogue*, and three published by *Seventeen*. The analysis conducted focused on prevalent elements such as Clothing and Skin Exposure, Pose, Touch, and Facial Expression to determine increased or decreased levels of perceived sexualization. Results revealed that the overall level of perceived sexualization decreased across both magazine brands within the period studied. The findings suggested that while these levels declined, more consideration is needed when curating publications for an adolescent target demographic.

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## Introduction

Behind every lustrous page in a magazine lies a clandestine agenda: a perfectly curated space designed to function as a vehicle for persuasion. Everything inside a magazine is an advertisement. The celebrities that adorn the cover, the companies that pay to place their products, the stories that fill the pages, and the endorsements created are all advertisements. Even content made to educate or inform, such as editorials, advice columns, and featured spreads are meticulously placed based on ulterior motives. Elements from color, image placement, and text are constructed to draw the audience's attention. Every single aspect of the medium is trying to sell the audience a story, product, or belief.

This is a concerning notion when it comes to adolescent or “teen girl” magazines. While adults may be able to discern where honesty ends and the sales begin, adolescents' brains cannot always see that more than just the products are being sold. Teen magazines have a young target demographic, typically aged between twelve and twenty-five, depending on the magazine. With little to no legal regulations on the content authorized, the magazine companies are free to curate whatever kind of content they believe will attract advertisers and readers. Furthermore, many forms of media sexualize and objectify the women and girls present in it and their lifestyles. If magazines promoted sexualized images and sold a sexualized lifestyle, would adolescents even know?

This study hypothesizes that teen magazines will demonstrate a quantitative decrease in perceived sexualization over a ten-year period of time, possible due to a culturally conservative shift and more recent concerns regarding sexual objectification and self-esteem. The research question is as follows: How has the level of perceived sexualization changed between 2007 and 2017 in *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* magazines?

This research was conducted using a media analysis of ninety-six randomly selected images across six magazine issues, three published by *Teen Vogue*, and three published by *Seventeen*. The content will be categorized into four segments and analyzed with a manual grading system, allowing for unbiased scores, which can be critically compared. This study tracks how imagery in magazines targeted at young girls has fluctuated between conservative or provocative styles over a period of ten years.

## Literature Review

### *Young People, Advertising and Sexually Explicit Media Content*

For decades, the youth have been surrounded by media that over-sexualizes girls and women, impacting their self-image. “From Bratz dolls to hip-hop videos and pop music, parochial representations of women create expectations of how one ought to behave within their racialized and class-specific contexts and identities” (Baker et al. 1). This age group is easily susceptible to content that encourages self-objectification.

Children are often viewed as one of the most vulnerable groups of people in society. Research supports that many adults view children with intense innocence and feel they need to be protected from the loss of childhood innocence. Affrica Taylor explores this concern in her paper, “Troubling Childhood Innocence: Reframing the debate over the media sexualization of children.” Taylor traverses “the concern . . . that childhood innocence and therefore authentic childhood is being threatened by the premature sexualisation of children by media and advertising industries” (Taylor 49). The loss of childhood innocence is an even greater concern today, as children are being exposed to sexual content sooner and with increasing regularity due to target marketing done by advertisers.

There has long been debate amongst scholars over young people’s ability to recognize content from advertisements. Iulia Grad researched the ethical concerns of this debate in her journal article, “Ethical Considerations on Advertising to Children.” Children are viewed as the main classification of people that need to be protected, yet the responsibility of their care within new and traditional media is not consistently agreed upon by society. Some believe that modern children have a greater ability to discern what is or what is not an advertisement. Sonia Livingstone and Ellen J. Helsper explore the claims of improved resistance of persuasion based

on media literacy and found “that the evidence on children’s responses to advertising does not support the widely held belief that younger children are more influenced by advertising” and instead concluded that “different processes of persuasion operate at different ages, precisely because literacy levels vary by age . . . [and] children of all ages could be, more or less equivalently, affected by advertising but that the effects of advertising are dependent on advertising literacy” (Livingstone and Helsper 576). While different elements affect what entices certain age groups, it was concluded that all age groups could be persuaded by advertisers, despite their level of media literacy.

With no age group being truly immune to direct advertisements, this view is supported when you observe the entire magazine as an advertisement. This includes looking at all content such as native advertisements, sponsored content, and editorials as a sales tactic. Many people view brand advertisements as separate from the editorial content, but Gloria Steinem breaks down why editorials are not excluded as advertisements in her article “Sex, Lies & Advertising.” Steinem argues that “it isn’t just a little content that’s devoted to attracting ads, it’s almost all of [the magazine] . . .” (Steinem 170). If the majority of adults do not comprehend that the entire magazine is an advertisement, children will not understand that theory either.

The same concept of children misinterpreting advertisements is brought up in “The Impact of Marketing Influencers on Children’s Buying Behaviour”: “considering the limited advertising literacy skills because of underdeveloped cognitive skills for distinguishing organic and intended content of children under age 12, they represent one of the most vulnerable target groups for influential and persuasive advertising content” (Naumovska 23). Companies are directly targeting children in their marketing to make a profit, and, in turn, affect how these adolescents present themselves both in their daily lives and online.

### *Sexualized Imagery and Self-Esteem*

While the objectification of women is present across almost all forms of media, Laura Vandenberg and Steven Eggermont argue the practice of objectification is different in fashion magazines in their article “Understanding Sexual Objectification: A Comprehensive Approach Toward Media Exposure and Girls’ Internalization of Beauty Ideals, Self-Objectification, and Body Surveillance.” They observe that “fashion magazines objectify females in a different way than television does. Magazines ‘teach’ readers how to modify their appearance according to the current ideals” (Vandenberg and Eggermont 874). Advertisers are using the concept of sexualization and objectification to sell their products as a lifestyle.

Adolescents build their self-image based on current trends and fads. Beatriz Feijoo and Charo Sádaba investigate this in their research, “When Mobile Advertising Is Interesting: Interaction of Minors with Ads and Influencers’ Sponsored Content on Social Media.” They explain that “this study seeks to shed light on how minors relate to the advertising content to which they are exposed on social networks and focuses on conventional ads and those inserted in influencers’ public statements” (Feijoo and Sádaba 16). Minors have been proven to actively relate to and internalize what they see. Adolescents are easily swayed by and are vulnerable to non-explicit advertisements.

One of the two magazine companies, *Seventeen*, is examined through a feminist theoretical lens in “A Feminist Content Analysis of *Seventeen* Magazine.” Brittany Marie Trimble analyzes twelve *Seventeen* magazines published around 2011 to see if the company has changed the oversexualized media they published in previous years. She identified seventy-four anti-feminist articles or imagery that objectified women. Of these articles, sixty-four focused on the importance of one’s appearance. Her findings show the magazine company overstates the

importance of appearance and Western beauty standards— “fair-skinned, youthful, thin, toned, able-bodied and physically “good looking” woman” (Mckay et al. 1)—to adolescent girls and promotes the importance of young girls improving themselves to fit these standards.

*Teen Vogue*, the second magazine company analyzed in this study, has been previously scrutinized for its portrayal of women. In “A Qualitative Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Women in *Teen Vogue*”, Valerie Hawley analyzed 159 advertisements from the 2008 issues and found, “[the] study’s findings resembled and reinforced past studies and reported that advertising images often portrayed women as subordinate, dependent, vulnerable, sexual and accepting of violence” (Hawley 3). Women in media targeted at adolescents are objectified, creating unrealistic and inappropriate standards for young people to attempt to obtain.

Every day people do not inherently share views on what is and is not appropriate. This topic is explored in the article “Too Sexualized to be Taken Seriously? Perceptions of a Girl in Childlike vs. Sexualizing Clothing.” To identify college students' opinions on the appropriateness of outfits based on preconceived notions, they were shown an image and asked to what degree do they agree to these statements, ““She appears to be a tomboy,” . . . “Her clothing is appropriate for her age,” and . . . “Her clothing is ‘sexualized’—has characteristics associated with sexiness”” (Graff et. al. 768). This all ties into how females view themselves and their bodies. Body dysmorphia is the “exaggerated preoccupation about a slight or imaginary defect in physical appearance not generally observable by others” (Senín-Calderón et al. 832). It is most common in young women and impacts them both socially and mentally.

### ***Sexually Explicit Content and Media Regulation***

There are almost no national regulations that restrict what can be put into print magazines targeted at adolescents. Currently, there is the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act

(COPPA) that aims to protect children under the age of thirteen online, but there was never an equivalent act that focused on print media. One of the only national restrictions regarding print media is based on sending obscene content via postal services. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), “. . . United States Code, prohibits any individual from knowingly transferring or attempting to transfer obscene matter using the U.S. mail or any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce to a minor under sixteen years of age” (U.S. Department of Justice). Teen magazines were most commonly distributed via mail and had to follow the legal requirement to be allowed to ship their products. The DOJ states

harmful materials for minors include any communication consisting of nudity, sex or excretion that (i) appeals to the prurient interest of minors, (ii) is patently offensive to prevailing standards in the adult community with respect to what is suitable material for minors, (iii) and lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value for minors.  
(U.S. Department of Justice)

Magazine companies also work to appeal to other advertisers, meaning the curation of advertisements and editorials in each magazine built the environment advertisers were looking for.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) enforces rules and laws that regulate dishonesty in advertisements. “Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act ("FTC Act") prohibits both unfair and deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce” (Starek). The FTC has put these safeguards in place to assist all consumers, but they are especially salient when it comes to advertisements targeted at children, as they are very susceptible to taking advertisements seriously, without deeper scrutiny.

### ***Sexualization Coding Systems for Magazine Imagery***

While multiple coding systems have been created by various researchers to identify differing objectification elements in imagery, the research conducted in this paper was built upon Erin Hatton and Mary Trautner's system in "Equal Opportunity Objectification? The Sexualization of Men and Women on the Cover of Rolling Stone." In their study, more explicit sexualization is explored. The system used was a twenty-three-point scale where the total points equate to the level of sexualization in each photo. Notable categories these two researchers created were Clothing and Nudity, Pose, and Touch. This system, combined with other previous research, was used to create a less explicit coding system that measures how the level of perceived sexualization changed, and presumably decreased between 2007 and 2017 in *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* magazines.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted as a media content analysis that used thematic analysis—“a method for identifying and analyzing patterns of meaning in a data set” (Joffe 1)—with a deductive reasoning approach. To effectively do this, I examined how magazines have changed the imagery used to advertise to their young readers over a ten-year period. To achieve this, I systematically compared the differences in imagery in three *Seventeen* and three *Teen Vogue* magazines, with one issue from each brand released in the years 2007, 2012, and 2017.

## ***Approach***

Four categories were created to encompass the vast majority of imagery present in the magazines: Cosmetics, Health and Hygiene, Style, and Iconotext. An unbiased image grading system was created based on existing research and systems that compare exact aspects and posing of the magazine's pages. The results were calculated to determine overall trends over the ten-year period as well as individual magazine trends. This study tracks how advertising targeted at young girls has fluctuated between conservative or provocative styles over a period of ten years.

Three *Seventeen* and three *Teen Vogue* magazines, with one issue from each released in the years 2007, 2012, and 2017, were chosen. These particular magazines were selected due to the availability of past publications and years of circulation. *Teen Vogue* ended its monthly print publications in 2017, then switched to less frequent volumes. Shortly after they ceased print magazines and switched to online publications. Similarly, *Seventeen* decreased print publication by the end of 2018, ceasing monthly publications. The magazines being reviewed were spring/summer editions.

### ***Procedure***

The images were selected using a multi-step sampling process. First, all images were checked for eligibility. Any image smaller than one quarter of a page, as well as finger or hand shots, were not entered into consideration, as smaller images were difficult to identify elements on print editions. Cover pages were excluded due to busy text, typically unrelated to the image present. Furthermore, images without a human model were removed from eligibility because the data would be skewed, as the majority of the elements being graded had to do with human aspects.

Next, images in each magazine were separated into four categories: Cosmetics, Health and Hygiene, Style, and Iconotext. These categories contained subcategories of items that were included in the images. The Cosmetics category contained items such as perfume, nail polish, makeup, and hair dye. The subcategories under Health and Hygiene consisted of hair removers, contact lens solution, hair care products, medicine, acne treatment, and skincare. Subcategories under Style include fashion, clothing, watches, and hairstyles. The Iconotext category refers to visual images with embedded text or attached articles, which assist in storytelling or evoking emotion for the reader.

All eligible images were sorted into one of the four categories and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet under its respective category. If a page contained more than one eligible image, each photograph was assigned a number after the page number, for example: 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, etc. If any magazines contained duplicate imagery, it only counted towards the final sample once. If the sample included more than one model, one was selected through random assignment, using a random number generator. Any other model present was only used for the touch element. This is due to the system only allowing one person to be graded at a time,

as there is a maximum number of points an image can hit, and currently not a way to account for any additional people.

The next step was conducted using the spreadsheet software of Microsoft Excel. To ensure an unbiased selection, a simple random sampling technique was used to select four images from each category, from each magazine. The sorting algorithm (SORTBY) was used to minimize selection bias and enhance the internal validity of the study. It allowed all qualifying page numbers to be added to a chart. Paired with the randomizer command (RANDARRAY), random samples were created based on the numbers provided in the sorting algorithm's chart. An example of the Excel formula used was: =TAKE(SORTBY(B4:B23, RANDARRAY(ROWS(B4:B23))),4).

Random sample magazine images were looked at with a systematic method of grading adapted from a variety of sources. Majority of the research was derived from Erin Hatton and Mary Nell Troutner's study "Equal Opportunity Objectification? The Sexualization of Men and Women on the Cover of *Rolling Stone*" which focused on explicit objectification coded in print images. Their method was not completely applicable to grading teen magazines as explicit sexualization such as nudity, sex acts, and sexual role play, were analyzed. The system they created was then adapted and combined with research from numerous articles, to create a verified twenty-one-point system used to determine implicit or inappropriate levels of sexualization in magazines with an adolescent target demographic. This new system created an unbiased method to anthropogenically identify and detect sexual intent in imagery based on looks, position, and intentions. Additional research was required to justify the scoring system that was used.

Based on body positions provided by a compilation of researchers, each basic element of the system was scored with a numeric grade on a scale ranging from zero to twenty-one. The groupings for grading were Clothing/Skin Exposure, Touch, Pose/Posture/Gesture, Mouth, Breast/Chest/Buttocks as Focal Points, Head versus Body Shot, Head Position, and Environmental Context. Additional research was conducted to ensure accuracy of the categories or prove necessary changes. Differing from Hatton and Troutner's study, prompts were added about any text present and if it changed the context or meaning of the image and if the text added negative connotations.

Table 1 System of groupings, point values, and simple descriptions created for grading images

<b>Clothing and Skin Exposure</b>	<b>Points</b>
Normal clothing	0
Shirt low neckline, arms out	1
Somewhat revealing	2
Skintight/revealing	3
Swimsuits/lingerie	4

<b>Touch</b>	<b>Points</b>
None	0
Casual touching	1
Provocative touch	2

<b>Pose, Posture and Gesture</b>	<b>Points</b>
Standing straight/firm/normal activity	0
Suggestive, leaning, arms overhead or sitting	1
Lying down or legs wide open	2

<b>Head Position</b>	<b>Points</b>
(F) Straight or upward, (M) Straight	0
(F) Tilted down, (M) Tilted up	1

<b>Facial Expression</b>	<b>Points</b>
Looking away	0
Eyes straight & looking at viewer	1

<b>Mouth</b>	<b>Points</b>
Closed, smiling, talking, singing, yelling	0
Parted slightly, not smiling, puckered	1
Wide open, explicitly suggestive, finger in mouth	2

<b>Breast/Chest/Buttocks as focal point, spotlight body parts</b>	<b>Points</b>
Not visible/not focal point	0
Somewhat emphasized	1
Major focus	2

<b>Head versus Body Shot</b>	<b>Points</b>
Head shot	0
Full body	1
Headless shot	2
Headless extremity shot	3

<b>Environmental Context</b>	<b>Points</b>
Neutral (i.e., clean backdrop, classroom, office, sidewalk)	0
Scenic	1
Suggestive props (i.e., soft furnishings, food items)	2

<b>Does the text change the meaning of the photo?</b>	<b>Points</b>
No	0
Yes	1

<b>If so, does the text add negative Connotations?</b>	<b>Points</b>
No	0
Yes	1

### ***Coding Criteria Rationale***

Grading the sampled images began with evaluating Clothing and Skin Exposure which scored between zero and four points. They ranged from unrevealing clothing, then shirts with

low necklines or uncovered arms, transitioning to skintight revealing, and ending in swimsuits and lingerie scoring the highest (Hatton and Trautner 261).

The Touch category ranged from zero to two points based on the amount of contact. This began with no touching, casual touch, “a model clasping his hands together or resting her arm on someone else’s shoulder . . .” to provocative touch, example being “[a model] lifting her shirt and resting her hand on her bare stomach just under her breast . . .” (Hatton and Trautner 263). Provocative touch scored the highest in this category.

The Pose category looked at posture and gestures. The scores ranged from zero to two points based on intention. Straight body images receive zero points. Suggestive poses such as leaning, sitting or arms overhead garnered one point. Poses such as lying down or sitting spread legged are given two points. The poses were compiled and ranked by expanding upon the analysis of body posture and sexualization by Goffman (Hatton and Trautner 261).

Head Position for females was ranked between zero and one point. When it comes to the position of the head, “both social and physical dominance judgments increase largely monotonically, and linearly as the head tilts further up. Both femininity and attractiveness, on the other hand, decrease as the head tilts further up and show very similar quadratic and linear trends” (Marshall et al. 5). Since the head tilt down is found to be more attractive and connected to femininity, it ranks as one comparatively to a neutral or up tilt. Since this standard varies for masculinity, with a straight head position scoring zero points and the upwards tilt for men garnering one point. This is distinguished by the labels of (F) for female or (M) for male (see table 1).

The Facial Expression category examines the eyes and the direction they are looking toward. According to Darren Burke and Danielle Sulikowski, “faces are perceived as more

attractive when viewed front-on (eyes straight ahead, looking at the viewer) than if viewed at a three-quarter perspective (eyes straight ahead, so not looking at the viewer) . . .” (Burke and Sulikowski 575). Due to this research, direct gazes received one point while averted gazes received zero points.

The Mouth category was derived entirely from Hatton and Trautner’s findings and was described as follows:

The lowest score (0 points) was for mouths that did not suggest any kind of sexual activity, including closed lips, broad toothy smiles, and active singing, talking, or yelling. One point was given to mouths that were somewhat suggestive of sex; this included images in which the model’s lips were parted slightly but not smiling. Images that scored a “2” featured models whose mouths were explicitly suggestive of sexual activity: This included models whose mouths were wide open but passive (not actively singing or yelling but, perhaps, posed for penetration), whose tongue was showing, or who had something (such as a finger) in his or her mouth. (Hatton and Trautner 263)

The Breast/Chest/Buttocks category was edited from Hatton and Troutner's model to exclude genitals, as these would not be found in any of the teen magazines images analyzed. This question was instead shifted to center more on the focal point of the image. An image would score a zero if none of the previously mentioned body parts were the focus of attention. It would score one point if any of the three elements were the focus, but still mostly covered by clothing or visible yet not the main focal point. Three points would be issued if any of these elements were the explicit focus.

The Head versus Body Shot category differs as it has been adapted to be graded between zero and three points. This is due to the understanding that “Sexual objectification occurs whenever a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (Fredrickson and Roberts 175). Women’s heads have notably been cut off from their bodies in magazines to show focus on their bodies or specific limbs instead (Fredrickson and Roberts 176). In accordance with this research, all head shots—images that did not include below the hips—scored zero points. One point was allotted for full body images. If the head was not present, two points were given. If the image only included a specific body part excluding the head, three points were allotted.

The Environmental Context category was added to convey the differences when backgrounds and props may affect the scene. Treat, Hinkel, Smith, and Viken found “contextual information in the body and in the social environment typically is encoded along with emotion in faces” (Treat et al. 2). Neutral backgrounds such as backdrops and sidewalks do not score any points. Scenic backgrounds score one point and include bedrooms, bathrooms, and parties. Suggestive props such as soft furnishings score two points. This feature assesses the intent behind the items added to the images and background scenery.

The Textual Context category was added specifically for this research. In some cases, the text present changes the context or implications of the image. Two separate questions are prompted: does the text change the meaning of the photo, and if so, does the text add negative connotations? This includes feelings with negative associations such as shame, embarrassment, and guilt. Both are depicted as a yes or no question, with yes equaling one point and no scoring zero points.

For each feature a photo displayed, points were allotted based on the intensity of any elements listed under a grouping. Each image was given a total grade based on the number of points it accrued. Then the image points were combined to get a total grade for said issue. The average grade per issue was also calculated. This data was used to compare the intent of the advertisers and magazine companies and draw conclusions on the perceived intent of the content included in the issues.

## Results

Explored below are the findings of the content analysis conducted on six magazine issues: *Seventeen*, June of 2007; *Seventeen*, May of 2012; *Seventeen*, July/August of 2017; *Teen Vogue*, June/July of 2007 *Teen Vogue*, August of 2012; and *Teen Vogue*, Volume 2 (June) of 2017. This study tracked how advertisements that were targeted at young girls fluctuated between conservative or provocative styles over a period of ten years, and the results indicate the trends discovered. To systematically examine a variety of images, all qualifying images were divided into four categories: Cosmetics, Health and Hygiene, Style, and Iconotext. Sixteen images chosen through random sampling were evaluated using a twenty-one-point coding system. The system created was designed to take visual and contextual elements found in imagery and objectively measure the level of perceived sexualization.

The results presented show a breakdown of the total coded sexualization scores and total points each magazine issue accrued per year separated by each retrospective category (see table 2, table 3, and table 4). Images such as Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 are provided to show how the grading process took place and contain examples of higher scoring and lower scoring images.

Table 2 Total coded sexualization scores for each magazine issue, exhibited alongside the maximum possible score and percentage of the maximum listed by year

<b>Magazine</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Maximum Points</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Rounded Percentage</b>
<i>Seventeen</i>	2007	98	336	29.1%	29%
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2007	95	336	28.2%	28%
<i>Seventeen</i>	2012	97	336	28.9%	29%
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2012	76	336	22.6%	23%
<i>Seventeen</i>	2017	75	336	22.3%	22%
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2017	81	336	24.1%	24%

Table 2 showcases the total coded sexualization scores based on print year for each magazine issue. This is presented alongside the total score, maximum possible score (336), and percentage of each magazine out of the maximum possible score. *Seventeen* (2007) received the highest score at 98 points, or 29%. *Seventeen* (2012) received the second highest score at 97 points, or 29%. *Teen Vogue* (2012) received the second lowest score at 76 points or 23%. *Seventeen* (2017) received the lowest score at 75 points or 22%.

These results stipulate a perceivable difference in the coding of sexualization of the different issues based on year and publisher. This established a base rate, or total score for each magazine, which was used for further category-based analysis.



Figure 1. Highest scoring image (rightmost subject) in *Teen Vogue* 2012 (15 out of 21 points) illustrating multiple indicators such as touch and facial expression (see table 1)

Figure 1 is the *Teen Vogue* image that garnered the greatest number of points at fifteen out of twenty-one points. The following was the justification for the grading based on the created coding system. Only the rightmost subject was graded as the system only allows for one subject to be analyzed. This image received a maximum of four points for Clothing and Skin Exposure as the coded model was in a swimsuit. Continually, the image received the two-point maximum for provocative touch, as the leftmost model's hand is placed below the rightmost model's breast. This is the only element that takes all subjects present into account. For Pose, the image scored the two-point maximum as the model's legs are spread open, sitting on what appears to be a jet ski. No points were awarded as the model's head position was tilted upward. For Facial Expression, the maximum of one point was awarded as the eyes were straight and looking towards the viewer, or camera. For Mouth, one out of two points were awarded as the mouth was parted yet not smiling. For spotlight body parts, one out of two points were awarded as the chest was somewhat emphasized. Since the image showcases a full body, one out of three points were given. Given that there is a jet ski present as a suggestive prop, the maximum of two points were awarded for Environmental Context. Zero points were scored in the Textual Context as the text did not change the meaning of the photo or add a negative connotation to the image. All images were graded in the same manner, using table 1 and the explanatory supplemental research to make the most objective decisions on the allocation of points without personal bias.



Figure 2. Image from the Style category of *Seventeen* (2012) scoring 3 out of 21 points

Figure 2 is an example of a low scoring image from *Seventeen* (2012) magazine. It scored a maximum of two points in the Pose category as the model is lying down. It also scored the one point maximum for Facial Expression as the model's eyes were straight and looking at the viewer and camera. In total, this image garnered three out of twenty-one points and had a more neutral/conservative coding.



Figure 3. Image from the Health and Hygiene category of *Teen Vogue* (2017) scoring 8 out of 21 points

Figure 3 showcases a higher scoring image from *Teen Vogue* (2017) magazine that is not a full body image. This image garners points due to Clothing and Skin Exposure, Touch, Pose/Posture and Gesture, Head Position, Breast/Chest/Buttocks, and Textual Meaning elements. This image accrued eight out of twenty-one points and had a more direct, viewable level of perceived sexualization.

In each magazine's categories, results were not consistent as not all categories show the same numeric trend. For example, in *Seventeen* (2017), Iconotext had an image with a single lower score only garnering two points. This score was low compared to the other two images that garnered seven points, and one that had ten points. *Teen Vogue* (2012) also has an image divergent from its category trend as it scored fifteen points. The second highest graded image only contained five points, and the final two images, three points (see Appendix A). While neither magazine had a mathematically supported outlier, it is important to note that not all categories' images trend in the same direction.

Table 3 *Seventeen* magazines' total points per year separated into four categories, exhibited alongside the difference, which indicate increase or decrease

<i>Seventeen</i>	2007	2012	2017	$\Delta$ 2007–2017 (excl. 2012)
Cosmetics	17	22	9	-8
Health and Hygiene	24	23	25	+1
Style	24	33	15	-9
Iconotext	33	19	26	-7
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>-23</b>

Table 4 *Teen Vogue* magazines' total points per year separated into four categories, exhibited alongside the difference, which indicate increase or decrease

<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2007	2012	2017	$\Delta$ 2007–2017 (excl. 2012)
Cosmetics	12	26	20	+8
Health and Hygiene	23	16	27	+4
Style	38	13	17	-21
Iconotext	22	21	17	-5
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>-14</b>

Table 3 and 4 showcase *Seventeen's* and *Teen Vogue's* respective total points found by combining all four images per category in each issue. The maximum number of points each

category could have had per issue was eighty-four points as each image is graded out of twenty-one points. The point difference indicates if the category increased or decreased in coded sexualization over the ten-year period. The point difference is the predominant indicator dictating whether the imagery in each category moved towards more explicit (+) sexualized coding, or more neutral and/or conservative (-) coding, based on the parameters of the study conducted.

Comparing the differences over a ten-year period, both brands decreased in perceived sexualization. *Seventeen* remained stagnant in points between 2007 and 2012, garnering a one-point reduction while there was a notable decrease in points which occurred between 2012 and 2017. The lowest scoring issue of both magazines brands was *Seventeen* (2017), which garnered twenty-two less points than *Seventeen* (2012). *Teen Vogue*'s most notable decrease in points was between 2007 and 2012. Between the two forementioned years, there was a nineteen-point decrease. There was a five-point increase between 2012 and 2017; however, there was an overall fourteen-point decrease when only contrasting 2007 and 2017. Although the reduction in points in *Teen Vogue* was not linear, overall, it declined by fourteen points, resulting in a decrease in perceived sexualization.

When looking at the individual categories displayed, there were fluctuations throughout the aforementioned time period. The Cosmetics category had divergent results which trended upward in the *Teen Vogue* magazines, whilst *Seventeen* showed an overall equivalent decline. Notably, in 2012, both magazines' Cosmetics category acquired a greater quantity of points than in 2007, then decreased after 2012.

The Health and Hygiene category's calculations increased in both magazines, with a minimal reduction in 2012. *Seventeen* was fairly consistent throughout the years, with little

change showcased, scoring 24, 23, and 25, respectively. *Teen Vogue* was more variable, garnering 23, 16, and 27 points, respectively.

Style fluctuated greatly, containing the largest decline in points out of all the categories that were analyzed. *Seventeen*'s Style category had little change between 2007 and 2012 but decreased by eighteen points between 2012 and 2017. *Teen Vogue*'s Style category declined significantly in the first half of the study, decreasing by twenty-five points between 2007 and 2012.

Iconotext decreased overall in sexualization points, with *Teen Vogue* reducing at a more linear rate. *Seventeen* decreased points in a non-linear fashion, garnering the lowest points in 2012, yet increased again by seven points in 2017. When looking at both magazines overall, they indicate a reduction in the points by the end of the study.

While the shifts are notable, they should be viewed relative to the maximum possible points. With a maximum of (336) points across all four categories (eighty-four points each), both magazines stayed well within the lower third of the potential sexualization scale. Comparatively, *Teen Vogue* stayed in the same range throughout the five years with minimal increase in points. Across all magazines, 2007 issues show higher sexualization scores than 2012 and 2017. The decline is most pronounced with *Seventeen* magazine, where average scores drop from 29% to 22%. *Teen Vogue* remains more stable, showing only slight downward shifts. The results indicate a broader editorial movement away from overt sexualization toward more neutral or empowerment-focused imagery.

## Discussion

The study conducted established that the level of perceived sexualization decreased in *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* between 2007 and 2017. For each magazine brand, the 2007 issues garnered the greatest number of points. While *Seventeen* magazine received greater point totals than *Teen Vogue* in 2007 and 2012, it received the lowest quantity of points in 2017 decreasing by over twenty points. *Teen Vogue's* level of perceived sexualization increased after 2012 yet still declined fourteen points from 2007. Based on the data collected, the magazine brands shifted the content present in their issues to exhibit lessened levels of imagery with sexualized connotations.

Despite there being easily identifiable trends based on the total number of points, there is more variety in the trends when looking at the datapoints in each category. The four categories, Clothing and Skin Exposure, Pose, Touch, and Facial Expression, primarily do not exhibit the same trends when examining points scored across both magazines' brands. While some categories share a commonality in decreasing or increasing in points across the ten years analyzed, the exact point distribution trend is only reflected in one of the four categories. Health and Hygiene share the same trend in both *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*, with the points scored decreasing from 2007 to 2012 and ending with the greatest number of points in 2017. For both magazines, the Cosmetics category similarly had its highest points calculated in 2012. The score only decreased to be lower than its 2007 score in *Seventeen*. In *Teen Vogue*, the lowest point value was in 2007.

Table 5 Shows the percentage of each issue's sixteen images that scored between one and five, scored six to eight and nine to twenty-one from the random sampling

<b>Magazine</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Images Scored 1-5</b>	<b>Percent of 16 Images</b>	<b>Images Scored 6-8</b>	<b>Percent of 16 Images</b>	<b>Images Scored 9-21</b>	<b>Percent of 16 Images</b>
<i>Seventeen</i>	2007	8	50%	4	25%	4	25%
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2007	8	50%	6	37.5%	2	12.5%
<i>Seventeen</i>	2012	8	50%	5	31%	3	19%
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2012	12	75%	3	19%	1	6%
<i>Seventeen</i>	2017	11	69%	4	25%	1	6%
<i>Teen Vogue</i>	2017	10	62.5%	6	37.5%	0	0

Advertisers were utilizing both magazine companies to reach their target audience. Based on observations, images that scored above eight seem unfit for magazines with a younger, adolescent audience. Unexpectedly, images that garnered between six and eight points seemed to navigate a fine line of appropriateness when it comes to perceived sexualization. While not numerically backed, images that scored between the aforementioned point values should have been reevaluated on an individual basis. This range of numbers were constructed based on visual analysis and therefore leaves room for interpretation. This would suggest images that scored below six points were fit for publishing, images that scored between six and eight points began pushing boundaries, and images that scored above an eight were high in perceived sexualization and should not be present in magazines targeted at adolescents. Table 5 divides the images in each magazine into three groups: images that scored under six points, between six and eight points, and above eight points and assigns percentages.

Some images, such as figure 4, which garnered seven points, seem like a reasonable inclusion in a magazine issue, despite garnering a higher number of points. This image scored high as the subject full body (one point) is shown lying down (two points) on soft furnishing (three points) while touching their face (one point). Figure 5 also garnered seven points, yet it

seems its inclusion is not suitable for an adolescent audience. This image garnered its grade due to the subject's sitting down (one point) in somewhat revealing attire (two points) with their full body visible (one point), the somewhat drawn focus to the subject's breasts (one point), hand placement (one point), and the context added from the added text (one point). While both receive the same perceived sexualization score, arguments can be made for and against the image inclusion in their respective magazines (see figure 4 and figure 5). While the system created can effectively differentiate between the different levels perceived as reasonable or not, there is not an exact number where everything above or below should be approved or excluded as human nuance is required.



Figure 4. Image taken from lower half of page from the Iconotext category of *Seventeen* (2017)



Figure 5. Image from the Health and Hygiene category of *Teen Vogue* (2007) scoring 7 out of 21 points

The study conducted supports my original hypothesis that the level of perceived sexualization would decrease over the ten-year period. The results met my expectations, with tables 3 and 4 being easily discernable examples of the decrease in points. These results contextually support existing research that analyzes the contents of magazines.

Magazines have been a previously scrutinized topic when it comes to the content typically present in it. Speno and Aubrey found that young girls are more likely to be adultified—dressed to look like adult women—in teen girl magazines than adult women are subject to “youthification”—dressed to look younger and childlike—in adult magazines. One of the magazines they coded images from was *Teen Vogue*. They found that it might be more difficult to sexualize young girls without adultification and a direct connection between adultification and sexualization (Gerding Speno and Stevens Aubrey 638). When coding images, these researchers found a correlation between sexualization and how subjects under eighteen years of age were presented. Trimble-Clarke conducted a feminist content analysis of *Seventeen* magazines from 2011 and compared it to previous research from the 1990s. She found that “*Seventeen* magazine does in fact promote anti-messaging by placing emphasis on articles focused on anti-feminist ideologies, such as the importance of appearance and Western standards of beauty or advice from boys and heteronormative relationships” (Trimble-Clarke 51). She also found that 64% of 101 images focused on teaching the audience how to look attractive or more appealing, overemphasizing the importance of beauty (Trimble-Clarke 52). While these studies differ in type of analysis from the study conducted, research finds that the type of content placed in adolescent magazines has been a concern for many years.

Despite both *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* ending print publication, the research conducted was relevant to track the progression and regression in content created for adolescents. A research-backed method to analyze images without explicit sexualization was developed and deployed to conduct this study. Much of the imagery present in these magazines was concluded to be fine for the target audience of these magazines, but much of it was not, as well. With ever changing morality about what is or is not appropriate for children, magazines remain a platform

dominated and curated by advertisers, with minimal laws and regulations in place regarding non-explicit sexualization. This thematic analysis based on the random sample provides confirmation that the level of perceived sexualization had decreased between 2007 and 2017 in both *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*.

The study conducted was not without flaws. It is possible that outliers exist despite not being present in my sample of ninety-six images, meaning an image could score all points from one or two high value categories, such as Clothing and Skin Exposure. An example of this concept could be a person in a swimsuit lying on a towel on the beach. This hypothetical image would score six points excluding any other existing elements. Outliers like that would be uncommon as most images in magazines are staged and meticulously planned. Many subjects are models, and models are instructed on how exactly to pose, look, and act in a photoshoot. While this did not occur as related images accrued more points, this demonstrates why some nuance is needed.

Continually, the medium is incredibly difficult and expensive to locate. Much of the earlier magazine issues were not digitally archived and had to be purchased through resellers. Looking more comprehensively at issues from the years chosen would incur a large cost. Archivists with specific magazine collections are potentially needed to find complete calendar issues. While the system was effective for coding the images, the exclusionary elements were not comprehensive enough. Not all images that fit the criteria for inclusions were effective for grading. If this study was to be replicated, images that include subjects, but are visually hard to make out due to image quality, the subjects' size, or additional effects such as camera blur should be disqualified from the first step of the sampling. The results from this study are still valid, as only one image in the sample fits these additional exclusionary qualifications, though other

images in the magazine that were not present in this sample had similar difficulties. Future research could analyze a greater sample of images per year and issue to get a more comprehensive total and comparable score for each magazine brand.

## Conclusion

This analysis of *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue* reveals a clear shift in the contents of imagery present between 2007, 2012, and 2017. Findings show a pronounced decrease in perceived sexualization in the elapsed time. This supports the initial hypothesis concluding that the number of images with an implied sexual nature diminished in both publications. While not exclusively linear, both magazines' overall scores declined between 2007 and 2017, showing a concrete decrease in the perceived sexualization of the imagery present.

The individual categories—Cosmetics, Health and Hygiene, Style, and Iconotext—experienced an increased amount of fluctuation compared to the overall magazine scores. Few categories linearly decreased, and instead experienced peaking or plunging numbers in 2012. The scoring was conducted with as little subjectivity as possible, and the criteria listed were frequently referenced.

For any further research conducted, a larger sample should be analyzed. Increasing scrutiny of images accepted into the sample is required to ensure increased proficiency at scoring images. While there may be conceivable obstacles to acquire more issues, more images from other seasons—fall, spring, and winter—would increase the precision of continuing research as only summer issues were scored.

Conducting this research assisted in documenting the evolution of the level of perceived sexualization in imagery presented within magazines to an adolescent audience. Despite the medium's declining relevance in the digital era, this study remains significant as it sets a trackable baseline for the kinds of media created and advertised to adolescents. Discretion is imperative when the rules and environment are created for and shaped by advertisers, and designed to sell to unassuming, youthful audiences.

## Appendix A: Results

Magazine														
Seventeen														
June 2007	Cosmetics			Health and Hygiene			Style			Iconotext				
	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent		
	146	3		87	6		115	8		105	12			
	17	2		57	3		11	3		134	10			
	59	5		64	11		97	3		91	3			
	127	7		140	4		18	10		98	8			
	SUM	17	20%		24	29%		24	29%		33	39%	TTL98	29%
Maximum points per image 21 Maximum points per category 84 Maximum points per magazine 336														
2007 AVG 29% 2012 AVG 26% 2017 AVG 23%														
Magazine														
Teen Vogue														
June/July 2007	Cosmetics			Health and Hygiene			Style			Iconotext				
	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent		
	103	2		107	6		36	6		54	3			
	23	4		47	7		61	14		138	7			
	26	4		99	6		131	5		155	7			
	102	2		87	4		59	13		25	5			
	SUM	12	14%		23	27%		38	45%		22	26%	TTL95	28%
Magazine														
Seventeen														
May 2012	Cosmetics			Health and Hygiene			Style			Iconotext				
	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent		
	72	4		10	11		29	15		110	4			
	7	6		56.1	3		42.2	9		20	5			
	53	7		95	2		4	3		105	3			
	9	5		81	7		128	6		92	7			
	SUM	22	26%		23	27%		33	39%		19	23%	TTL97	29%
Magazine														
Teen Vogue														
August 2012	Cosmetics			Health and Hygiene			Style			Iconotext				
	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent		
	9	15		88	2		6	4		82.2	2			
	69	5		93	3		24	3		70	8			
	91	3		123	8		10	4		16	6			
	165	3		125	3		48.1	2		61.2	5			
	SUM	26	31%		16	19%		13	15%		21	25%	TTL76	23%
Magazine														
Seventeen														
July/August 2017	Cosmetics			Health and Hygiene			Style			Iconotext				
	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent		
	37	4		7	5		20.1	3		82	2			
	12.1	3		59	7		29	4		56	7			
	36	2		77	5		6	5		53	10			
	32.2	1		19	8		22	3		84	7			
	SUM	9	11%		25	30%		15	18%		26	31%	TTL75	22%
Magazine														
Teen Vogue														
Volume 2 (June) 2017	Cosmetics			Health and Hygiene			Style			Iconotext				
	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent	Page	Points	Percent		
	51	9		17	5		114	3		3	4			
	60	5		53	6		15	3		66	5			
	39	5		29	8		118	7		116	6			
	121	2		31	8		108	4		34	2			
	SUM	20	24%		27	32%		17	20%		17	20%	TTL81	24%
2007														
Mean by category	Cosmetics			Health			Style			Iconotext				
		3.625			5.875			7.75			6.875		Average	
Mode by category		2			6			3			3		Most common	
Median by category		3.5			6			7			7		Middle	
2012														
Mean by category		6			4.875			5.75			5		Average	
Mode by category		5			3			3			5		Most common	
Median by category		5			3			4			5		Middle	
2017														
Mean by category		3.625			6.5			4			5.375		Average	
Mode by category		2			5			3			2		Most common	
Median by category		3			6.5			3.5			5.5		Middle	
Total														
Mean by category		4.417			5.75			5.833			5.75		Average	
Mode by category		2			6			3			5		Most common	
Median by category		4			6			4			5.5		Middle	

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