An Exploration of How the Content and Advertising in "Seventeen" Magazine Influences the Lives of Teenage Girls: A Pietermaritzburg Classroom Case Study.

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Abstract

This study explores the role that *Seventeen* magazine plays in the lives of its readers. More specifically, it investigates how the content and advertising in *Seventeen* influences the behaviour and identity development of Black, South African, teenage girls.

This research focuses on three primary areas of study:

- The role of the reader in message interpretation

- The media's role in identity development and behaviour

- The socio-cultural influence of readers' backgrounds on message interpretation and acceptance

The research methodology of this study is primarily of a qualitative nature, using different methods of qualitative research to gather information. The data collected as part of the ethnographic research was linked to existing theoretical research regarding Reception Theories – including the 'Hypodermic Needle' model; 'Uses and Gratifications'; and the 'Active Audience'.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

"A few home truths first: Teenage girls are fickle. They're discerning. They're vocal. They're trying to build an identity for themselves. They love boys." (Dixon, N. 2009, p.23).

The purpose of this case study is to explore the content of *Seventeen* to develop an understanding of why teenage girls choose to read this magazine and what effect this content has on adolescent girls who read the magazine. More specifically, the study aims to determine how this content contributes to the development of their identities. Through this study of *Seventeen* Magazine I plan to explore how the advertising and feature articles affect these specific teenagers with regard to their patterns of behaviour and, more specifically, their identity development. I also plan to ascertain why teenagers choose to read this magazine and how they believe it contributes to their lives.

When one considers teenage publications, *Seventeen* stands out as one of the more popular reads among teenagers, with a reported circulation of 35,157 for the months of April-June 2008 for the South African edition (Dixon, N, 2009, p.23).
An international brand, with many countries publishing their own local issues, *Seventeen* has become synonymous with anything 'teen', with content that includes articles about boys, fashion, and celebrities. "Founded in 1944, Seventeen remains one of the most popular and respected magazines for its demographic, i.e., young females between 14 and 20," (Armet, 2008, p.2). For the purposes of this dissertation I will be focussing on the South African issue of *Seventeen*. This publication can best be described as a lifestyle, fashion and entertainment magazine, presenting articles on

popular trends and celebrities, feature articles, advertisements and promotions that are thought to be relevant to the teenage market. Additional content relates to everyday teen issues, including relationships, career guidance, family problems and peer pressure. Such a magazine may be viewed as an example of 'popular culture', a form of media text that the "masses consume" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.10). From this definition the teenage market can be seen as a 'mass' that 'consumes' this mass marketed text for enjoyment purposes. However, this dissertation does not only concern itself with whether or not the masses simply enjoy the text, but also with how the text influences the mass's behaviour, and how the readers' interpretation and reception of the text influences the development of who they are. "Handelman (2001) describes teens as needing a magazine more than anyone because adolescents seek out magazines for answers and guidance during the confusing teen years," (Handelman 2001, in Gorman, 2005). The objective of this study is to determine what type of information teenage girls are receiving from the publication as well whether or not the information is used by these readers in the formation of their identities.

Another reason for specifically considering *Seventeen* as part of this study is because as a teenager, I myself was a regular reader of the magazine. Having enjoyed the publication as a teen and finding that I was able to relate to it, I was interested in exploring whether other readers respond to the content of the magazine in the same way, particularly if they are from differing social contexts to my own. I have chosen magazines as the medium for study because I believe they offer a greater option for interaction between the reader and the media text. Magazines, such as *Seventeen*, also allow some teenagers to share their own knowledge and experiences of the world. Menger (2003) describes how "magazines are taking care of girls, by giving them

vital dialogue that some parents and educators are not. Girls are looking for answers from advice columns to horoscopes. As a result, girls are becoming more independent, experiencing and making these decisions on their own" (Menger, 2003, p.39) and this is made possible through their interaction with the content. What I aim to draw on throughout my research includes a study of the type of content in this magazine, such as integrated marketing, advertisements, feature articles and 'true-life' stories. Further study will include how this magazine interpellates the reader; what messages the readers interpret from the text; and finally, how these texts influence the readers in terms of their identities and the development of those identities, as well as the behaviour of the readers and whether this has any direct link to the messages that they are receiving. Echoing the studies of Hermes's (1995) research into women's magazines, the research conducted will predominantly focus on audience interaction with the texts and less so on content analysis. According to this perspective: "… texts acquire meaning only in the interaction between readers and texts and that analysis of the text on its own is never enough to reconstruct meaning," (Hermes, 1995, p.11). As such, I believe that the texts in *Seventeen* need to be purchased and read for the messages of these texts to have an impact. I plan to explore how the teenage girls, as readers, interpret this form of media text, how it influences their beliefs about their appearance and behaviour, and whether or not this is affected by factors such as cultural and economic background, and peer opinion. Further consideration will also be given to the magazine's advertisements and feature articles. For example, many of the articles in *Seventeen* include true stories of the everyday South African teenager as opposed to that of only celebrities. What I feel needs consideration is whether or not the readers of these articles are in fact able to identify with these girls who are presented as being 'just like them'.

The primary questions that this study aims to answer are:

- What are some of the messages that are presented to teenage girls through *Seventeen*?

- Why do teenage girls read *Seventeen*?

- How do the readers negotiate their way around their interpretations of these messages?

- What effects do these messages have on the reader, with regard to their behavioural patterns, in relation to Reception theories?

- What influence do such messages have with regard to identity development in teenage girls (in both their individual identity as well as their social identity)?

The location of this research will be Russell Girls' High School in Pietermaritzburg, a school that is set within the context of the new, multi-racial, democratic South Africa. The audience, or readers, are made up of adolescent girls in high school who are predominantly from a Black South African background. This factor, I believe, will add an interesting dynamic to the research. This is because many of these girls are living in a world inundated with western trends but they come from a traditional African background. I will be able to explore how other cultural elements influence the way the girls interpret the text and to what extent they are able to identify with the text considering this cultural identity. Put another way, the beliefs and values that these girls bring from their home backgrounds could exert a great influence on how they interpret popular media texts. It is at this point where I will develop links with

theories of identity and identity development and how these texts influence the identities of the readers.

As has been mentioned, the research I will be conducting aims to develop ideas of how the media affects adolescent girls. The reason for my choice of audience has to do with my present work. I am an educator at Russell High School, where I teach Life Orientation and English. Life Orientation as a subject includes the exploration of the media's effects on teenagers and how they perceive themselves in relation to other women presented in media texts. This aligns itself with issues regarding self-esteem and development. It also serves the purpose of incorporating young people into society and creating an awareness of the factors that shape their behaviour. Therefore, it is extremely relevant where this project is concerned. Due to the fact that I have a good working relationship with these learners, I am certain that I will be able to obtain honest views from a variety of teenage girls who vary in age and grade - specifically between grades 8 and 12; ages 13 to 19. By encouraging class discussion about articles, as well as smaller group discussions about the magazine, I believe I will be able to establish an accurate understanding of the relationship between the magazine and reader identity development, and behaviour.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

In this chapter I will address the relevant literature that forms the contextual basis and theoretical foundation of this study. The central purpose of this investigation is to explore media consumption amongst teenagers and how this contributes to their identity development. The research aims to develop ideas of how this particular form of media (the teenage magazine) affects the behaviour of adolescent girls, as well as how it influences their identities. Questions raised in this study serve to address the issue of audience authority, or rather what degree of power the audience has in interpretation of texts; "Any study of popular culture must start from the premise that human beings are complex and multifaceted participants in their social worlds, not soft putty that can be moulded by state bodies to fit the shape of a docile, compliant subject," (Herbst, in Van Eeden et al, 2005, p.13). Our identities are shaped by a number of influences. To interpret and understand the way in which the media attempts to interpellate different audiences requires one to examine how each type of audience can be described or categorised, and what, specifically, influences the formation of identity. We are then able to explore how the readers are influenced by the magazine and what effect the content has on their behaviour.

2.1.1 Identity and Culture

Identity: "…this term refers to the sense of belonging, security, recognition, and importance someone can feel by being a member of a group that is bound together by common values and lifestyles," (Lull, 2000, p.286).

The first idea to be discussed is how the inherent culture of the audience contributes to their identity. What do we mean here by 'Culture'? "The word now suggests the fact that societies in different places, and at different times, are organised differently. Societies have different social, political, and religious systems which they perform in different ways," (Holloway, G. et al. 1999, p.172). However, Holloway and Kane (1999) also offer another view of culture - that despite cultures being viewed as different, they do also have some similarities, and that all cultures are influenced by other cultures. In this day and age, it is argued that cultural boundaries are breaking down. In today's modern times, countries - which are technologically advanced - are easily able to spread their influence and products to other societies throughout the globe (Holloway et al, 1999, p.172). What is being described here is the concept of globalisation. Globalisation means that trends, lifestyles and beliefs are communicated throughout the globe, rapidly spreading and in many cases being adopted by audiences worldwide in addition to their existing cultural behaviour.

In referring to culture here I am talking about a connection between individuals and small groups with larger communities as a result of the values, experiences, and the various forms of expression that they may share (Lull, 2000, p.132). A person's culture is defined by one's background, caregivers, spiritual belief, language and so on, and is shaped by their interaction with the people around them. A person's culture can also be defined as being a major contributing factor to a person's identity. "The very label "culture" has symbolic power. People fear the loss of their culture. To invoke the term is to recognize, and give coherence and integrity, to a "way of life". This is what is generally meant by *cultural identity*," (Lull, 2000, p.134). The conflict in our social worlds comes when these cultural identities are threatened, usually by

the predominance of other cultures that are transmitted through mass communication: "Mass and micro communications media today easily reach across national and cultural borders, a technological development that directly influences international political relations as it intensifies debates about cultural sovereignty," (Lull, 2000, p.224). This global spread of thoughts and values about the world is also known as 'Cultural Imperialism' - a term offered by Herbert Schiller (1992) - describing the process of Western cultural intrusion as a result of globalisation (Schiller, in O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.263). Boyd-Barrett (1977) explain how it is "the United States and other (mostly western) countries that produce most of the media flowing through the international market while often importing little in return," (Rogers, in Cocren, 2006, p.482). As a result, we have reached a point where individuals are no longer able to view the world strictly through "the eyes of his or her own culture," (Holloway and Kane, 1999, p.177) and this can be attributed to the fact that different popular cultural practices are easily 'distributed' throughout the world where they are adopted by other cultural groups.

One of the criticisms of globalisation includes the fact that youth cultures encourage younger people to engage with and embrace a variety of musical and other styles, however, this leads to their interests and preferences becoming increasingly "eclectic and fragmented" (Klopper, in Van Eeden and Du Preez, 2005, p.175). This results in the abandonment of the readers' unique, specific cultures as they adopt a variety of different ideologies of other cultures and implement them in their everyday lives. Even language is seen to be under threat: as the increase in communication between regions of the world develops, English taking the position of a "world language" (During, 2005, p.92). In South Africa, as elsewhere, this is to the detriment of other

indigenous languages, which may be forgotten as a result of the increased practice of the English language. For someone to neglect their inherited 'mother-tongue' would mean their giving up a significant part of their identity, and by selecting the global language individuals from such indigenous groups prove to be more susceptible to global influence.

2.1.2 Influences on Identity Development

I have already mentioned that our caregivers, spiritual teaching, language and even race play an influential part in determining our identity. Our caregivers, much like our cultures, teach us how to behave in response to the world; religion teaches us the difference between what is morally right and wrong; language teaches communication; and race determines our historical identity. The media can also be seen as a strong influence on identity. Woodward (1997) emphasises how the media, as well as images and language, can be seen as contributing factors to our identities (Woodward, in O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.209); she discusses how representation within these forms helps individuals to become more self-aware. In relation to this point, Mengen (2003) describes how girls' teenage magazines, for example, act as "guide books" that readers use to experiment with their identity, "answering questions that girls need along the way as they are trying to rediscover or reinvent themselves," (Mengen, 2003, p.39). Previous theories surrounding Cultural Studies finds "external social forces" as determining how our identities are constructed, and that our identities are structured based on the influences of the people in our lives and the attitudes they have towards us (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.209). It is from the media that we also learn how to exist socially within the world;

where a great deal of our information comes from; and thereby how we are able to form our own opinions about the world around us. The media, therefore, is seen to communicate various world ideologies and is seen as an important means of reinforcing those ideologies (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.192). By 'ideology' we are referring to "a body of knowledge, and a set of texts and practices that are natural", common views that we have about the world and how it works (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.191).

Essentially one finds that media can have one of two effects on its audiences. Charles Horton Cooley suggests how new media in particular, is causing a double result because of its speed and ability to reach large numbers of readers: "On one hand, the media will encourage individuality by offering ideas that are congenial to a person's self-interest. On the other hand, the new media break down limits to the spread of ideas and customs, leading to a universal assimilation and sameness," (Cooley, in McDonald, 2004: 184). New media technologies are able to contribute to the spread of ideologies globally with far more speed and efficacy than ever before. However, the development of such a 'sameness' in identity would, once again, be at the expense of the reader's individuality. Nevertheless, cultures are ever-changing entities that constantly change as a result of the influence of other cultures (Holloway, G. et al, 1999: 172). Such influences are directed through the media, which includes magazines such as *Seventeen.* "If we asserted that all individuals in a culture see things in a certain way, we would be generalising. Most societies have considerable variations within them and we need to bear this in mind," (Holloway and Kane, 1999, p.177). We find readers behaving in ways that are adopted from a variety of cultures as opposed to only one.

2.1.3 The Teenage Identity

If we consider the large variety of audiences or target markets, we understand that similarities in identity can help us to group these audiences into different categories or groups. We could argue that our audience of teenage girls displays a variety of different audience traits and characteristics that would help us to recognise them as being part of a very distinctive group. For example, if we were to define this audience according to the approach of the 'Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles' system that has been suggested by Nick Lacey (2002, p.183), these readers could be classified as 'Strivers' – these being audience members who are "unsure of themselves, and have a low income. They are striving for approval from others" (Lacey, 2002, p.183). We could consider *Seventeen* as a resource used by teens for the purpose of gaining approval from peers. It is possible that the magazine would be used as a source of information – a guide – from which these girls will collect information to help mould their lifestyles to that which will be recognised and approved of by others of their age. "Content analyses of *Seventeen* and *Sassy* [another teen magazine] have found most of the stories in these two magazines contain very traditional socialisation messages, including that girls depend on someone else to solve one's personal problems (Peirce, 1993), girls are obsessed with guys, girls are heterosexual, and girls are always appearance-conscious shoppers," (Wray and Steele 2002, in Strasburger and Wilson, 2002, p.169). This theory gives us further insight into what the possible identity make-up of these girls may be as we are able to better understand what it is they are wanting as an audience or target group.

A similar category to that of 'Strivers' to classify these teenage girls would be "Trendies" – a term put forward by Selby and Cowdery (In Lacey, 2002, p.183) – which describes particular "young audiences" as those who "crave admiration from their peers." In many cases it is understood that teenagers are under a great deal of pressure to conform and fit in with their peers. Youngsters will choose to use magazines as a guide to help them structure their identities to match those of their peers. Another example is the way that girls will use the images that they see in magazines "to construct their definitions of femininity by comparing the images to themselves, others and the ideals of their peers," (Gornam, 2005). Therefore what we can determine from these ideas is that there is the potential for readers to use the content of these types of texts to develop their identities. Wayne (1994) appears to share this view, saying that "… there has been a tendency to conceive the popular as a realm of cultural self-making where the people reconstruct their identities and their sense of place in the world at will. Thus questions of power and ideology are suppressed at will by methods that celebrate audience creativity and/or dissolve the text as an object with any effectivity," (Wayne 1994, in Burton, 2005, p.89). This reinforces the idea of an audience who uses the media, and who plays a part in constructing their own identities.

Media institutions would want to know the type of identity that may define their audience because, by learning more about the audience, it provides better insight into what the audience is wanting and therefore how they will be able to persuade or encourage the reader to go out and 'get it'. They are able to 'interpellate' the reader – a term coined by Althusser (1977). Althusser described the manner in which the text is able to "call" or "hail" the readers (placing them in a position where they are

addressed directly) in a way that encourages identification with what is in the text

(Althusser 1977, in O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.203). By attracting the reader

in this manner, media texts are able to sustain the interest of the reader long enough to

encourage either acceptance of the message of that particular text or perhaps the

action of purchasing whatever product is being advertised.

2.1.4 Changing identity

While identity may be used to examine or determine what 'type' of person is being

targeted, it is important to understand that in many cases identity is not a fixed state

and that identity can evolve. This change is dependent on a number of influences, for

example: age and environment. It has also been proposed that the media can be one of

these influences. More specifically, the content of *Seventeen*, as a publication widely

read by teenagers, can encourage changes within the developing identities of young

girls. In today's modern age identity is able to become "mobile, multiple, personal

and self-reflexive", but most importantly, identity is subject to innovation and is able

to change (Kellner, 1995, p.231). This supports the notion that a person's identity

does not remain constant and may change and develop as a result of the influential

modern world, or the influential power of the world's media.

Individuals may find that there are certain identity characteristics – such as culture –

which have a greater significance to them, and which may form part of their core

identity. In some cases, this identity may contribute to a more oppositional meaning

depending on the message of the text. However, in this thesis, it is argued that the

media influences the changing identities of those individuals who interact with it and

that the boundaries of possible new identities are continually developing (Kellner, 1995, p.231). At the same time there are many facets of their identity that may be altered. For example: the idea of appearance. While the physical appearance of a teenager may be genetically inherited, teenagers may select ideas from magazines in an effort to change their appearance should they not be happy with it, and adopt a particular hairstyle, select certain make-up or wear particular clothes. Likewise teens may see their favourite celebrity in the pages of a magazine presenting a certain style, and so they adopt this image. If we examine the various messages that are distributed to teenage girls through the many forms of popular culture – such as teen magazines – it can be determined that issues regarding identity and body image are presented in such a way that links a teenage girl's identity closely to her physical appearance (Mazzarella and Pecora, 1999, p.2). Adverts, for example, play on this relationship between identity and appearance, and much like other forms of popular culture, they use beauty as a means of engaging readers and selling products (Herbst in Van Eeden and Du Preez, 2005, p.20). Physical appearance is a part of one's identity that in many ways is constantly changing. Teenage girls feel that they have to change their image to keep up with what is fashionable at any particular time. If teenagers are not able to do this they may face social exclusion and are viewed as being 'different'. In order to remain a part of 'the group', teens take their cue from teenage magazines as an aid to help them maintain an 'acceptable' appearance. Therefore, teenagers will turn to *Seventeen* and read the content, relating it to their own lifestyles and adapt or change, toward what is represented by the publication. In this capacity, the magazine could be perceived as a positive medium in teenagers' lives, as it helps them to 'fit in', thereby helping to develop esteem and confidence within these girls usually by encouraging the action to behave a certain way or even to purchase certain products. Herbst (2005)

argues that advertisements in such magazines do just that: they "operate by linking formless desire to specific forms (commodities), and the key to this linkage is identification". The reader will identify with an object in the advert and will feel fulfilled and complete because the desire of the reader – whatever it may be – is "tapped" through the presentation of the product that the advert offers (Herbst 2005, in Van Eeden and Du Preez, 2005, p.15). In fact, "teens are particularly vulnerable to the powerful cultural influence of advertising" because – during this period of their lives – they are still forming their identities (Gorman, 2005).

There are theorists who maintain that in our modern world, the globalisation of culture has thrown the notion of identity into somewhat of a 'crisis'. The crisis referred to here involves the deterioration of once-strong national identities to make way for the emergence of new identities (Friedman, 1994, p.86). The same might be argued for cultural identities. Where previously we were able to identify clearly defined cultures, many of the lines between cultures are becoming blurred, resulting in people – or in this instance, teens – recognising and adopting a number of behavioural patterns from a variety of cultures; "… there is a tendency for local self-reproductive systems to disintegrate and to become integrated into the larger colonial and international systems," (Friedman, 1994, p.90). The belief is: the more dominant the cultural system is, the greater the likelihood that smaller cultural groups will follow it. Friedman explains that "ultimately there is a strong tendency to assimilation, to the increasing identification of individuals of aboriginal populations with the model of the center, with a modernism that appears associated with success and which is successful," (Friedman, 1994, p.90). Depending on the type of behaviour and cultural practices *Seventeen* subscribes to, the encouragement of teenage girls to

abandon their original cultural traditions to follow ones that are presented as better, or more popular, may cause them to cast aside these values and alter their identities. The question is: is this a positive or negative reaction (from the readers) to this form of media? *Seventeen* and *YM* (another teen magazine) are accused of providing conflicting messages for young girls - namely, these publications encourage girls to be beautiful and sexually attractive to members of the opposite sex, but also that these teenage girls must be cautious and take responsibility where sexual behaviour is concerned (Mazzarella in Mazzarella and Pecora, 1999, p.97). Though this argument applies specifically to the conflicting messages of the magazines, the same type of contradiction may be found between the messages within the magazine and the teachings and ways of the reader's culture. In fact, many times the ideologies presented by the media are seen to be at conflict with ideologies that the reader may have received by other social media, such as church or family (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.216).

2.1.5 Harmful changes as a result of the media

There have been numerous criticisms of the media's role in the negative influence on change in teenagers, with the common belief that images of slender, attractive celebrities lead to teenagers developing a negative self-image, or even low body-image, where they feel they are unable to live up to the standards that various publications present. There are also insinuations that eating disorders and teens going 'under the knife' are a result of the unrealistic images of women, that are presented through many popular media forms. In a recent study it was found that "girls who wanted to look like media figures on television, in the movies, or in magazines were

twice as likely to be very concerned about their weight, become constant dieters, and

engage in purging behavior," (Field, Carmargo, et al., 1999; Field, Cheung, et al.,

1999; Field, et al., 2001, in Strasburger and Wilson, 2002, p.262-263). Teenage girls

who were previously more comfortable with who they were and who had a strong

self-esteem may become more concerned about fitting in with their peers and being

accepted, and about issues of body-image (Mazzarella and Pecora. 1999, p.2).

However, there is debate about the media's representation and showing of certain

types of behaviour – drinking, partying and sexual experimentation as normal – that is

called into question as motivation for teens to take part in the same risky behaviour. In

these cases, the media is seen to be responsible for the negative changes in identity

and the reader's subsequent behaviour. Mary Pipher, in this regard, maintains that

teenage girls, "are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualised and media-saturated

culture," (Pipher, in Mazzarella et al, 1994:2).

2.2.1 Identity and Reception Theory

Questions are constantly asked about the ways in which the media is able to influence

behaviour and acceptance of the messages that audiences receive. The media has also

been severely criticized for influencing audience members in a negative way. To

determine whether or not the media does have such effects on its audience – or more

specifically, whether *Seventeen* has any particular effect on it readers – we turn to

Reception Theory. We make use of the concept of Reception theory as an umbrella

term describing approaches relating to how readers receive messages and how they

are able to interpret messages as a result of negotiation with the text (Pitout in Fourie.

2001, p. 244). As part of this study I will be looking at a number of approaches

relating to media effects including Stuart Hall's 'encoding/decoding' approach to message interpretation. However, in order to understand the value of these approaches to media effects, it would be of value to examine some of the ideas that motivate them. When considering effects research "two main factors in the process of communication were considered: the content of the media, and the behaviour of audiences," (Lull, 2000, p.98). Therefore, in studying the influence of *Seventeen* on its readers, we need to consider whether the subsequent change in behaviour is linked in any way to the text that they are engaging with.

2.2.2 Traditional Effects Approach

The common notions of the Effects Tradition maintains that the media has the distinct ability to affect the audience, such as influencing individual audience members' thoughts to the extent that they act out the ideas that they have been exposed to. The term is used scientifically, in a way, suggesting that the media induce a precise response in the audience – "we watch something and it makes us do something" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.31). It is assumed to be almost an immediate response, for example seeing an advertisement and heading out to buy the product. This approach is further divided into two strands: short term effects theories and long-term effects theories. Short-term effects is most commonly recognised as the 'Hypodermic Needle' model. This comparison assumes that the media acts like a syringe, injecting meaning from texts into the audience (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p.271). In this instance, the "power is assumed to lie with the 'message'" (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p.271). Accompanying this idea is the focus on the negative impact of the media and its ability to encourage undesirable forms of behaviour in

audience members, such as dangerous or violent behaviour (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.156). Branston and Stafford (2006) describe how the media produces activity in audience members, but in a bad way, "such as … mindless shopping in response to advertisements," (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p.271). The theory sets audience members up as passive receptors of the messages that the media transmits. "McQuail argues that the early history of effects theory … was dominated by the belief that the media could be immensely powerful," (McQuail, in Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.157). The media is seen to have the power, as described in McQuail's argument with the audience, and readers simply accepting the messages that they receive, believing what the media says. As has already been mentioned, in the past such ideas have been strongly linked to antisocial behaviour by individuals; their behaviour attributed to the messages they receive through the media. For example, the aggressive behaviour of individuals has often been linked to the watching of violent films – the simple hypothesis is that violence within the media is responsible for the encouragement of violence within the audience members who are subjected to that particular media text (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2002, p.33). In keeping with the concept that audiences are easily influenced and affected, the Effects Tradition argues that groups such as teenagers and children are even more vulnerable to the exposure of the media (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.156). If this were true it would then be clearly argued that the readership of *Seventeen* might be quite easily influenced by the messages that the magazine presents. Though simple, Effects Theory does make strong sense with regard to the power of the media, and it may be quite naïve to think that the media has no effect on the readers receiving a flood of information. "It would be fatuous to argue that the media have absolutely no impact on their audiences…"(Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.157). Media theorist Althusser argues that ideologies, or messages, are

transmitted through what he terms "Ideological State Apparatuses" – institutions that socialise the readers into simply accepting dominant ideologies. There is no surprise that one of the key institutions that he identifies as transmitting such ideologies is the media (O'Shaughnessy et al, 2002, p.215).

The Effects Approach – in advertising - is all about persuasion. "The mnemonic AIDA sums up one well-known model of persuasion: awareness; interest; desire; action," (Lacey, 2002, p.188). In the same way The Effects Approach expects a response from a reader, the AIDA mnemonic explains how the media persuades consumers to purchase goods through a number of steps. Firstly, the audience is attracted to the product creating awareness of the product, after which the media text uses various, creative techniques to sustain the interest of the consumer. By creating interest in the product, the consumer supposedly desires the product, and this will encourage action to purchase the product (Lacey, 2002, p.188).

2.2.3 Criticism of Traditional Effects Theory

There has, however, been some criticism of the Effects Tradition. More modern research opposes the view that audiences are passive receivers of messages. Instead, there are those who claim that the audience is more active in their participation with the material presented to them by the media; that the simple 'Hypodermic Model', whereby a message is simply 'injected' into a reader who has no choice but to accept it, does not allow for the active nature of the audience, nor does it take into consideration their free will. The argument "… that repressive ideas and ideologies could be injected straight into the masses and that direct and even responses could be

expected from all 'mass' members as they act upon those ideas" (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.157) began to be abandoned for more modern ideas and theories that valued the interaction and power of the audience. Such research has begun to include different factors and variables in measuring the kinds of effects that the audience is subjected to, such as various social and psychological characteristics as well as certain social and environmental factors which may influence the interpellation of audience members (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.158). There are also other arguments against the simplistic effects theory: the fact that the theory is criticised for highlighting the power of the media in its ability to "persuade" the audience, and does not take into consideration other media effects, as well as the fact that this theory ignores many other factors that do influence the way that the audience negotiates the messages of the media (Taylor & Willis, 1999:160).

The various arguments against the 'Hypodermic Model' gave rise to another short-term effects approach called the 'Two-Step-Flow' model. This model valued the consumer's background and suggested that: "people expose themselves selectively to media content with which they prefer, understand, and so on," (Fourie, 2007, p. 235). It was also determined that media could not cause sufficient behavioural change on its own, but in conjunction with other factors could do so (Klapper, in Fourie, 2007, p.235). What we begin to see here is a shift from the notion of a passive audience to a more active group of consumers – a set of consumers who choose what content they wish to engage with depending on what they wish to use the content for. This change in perspective "formed the basis of the uses and gratifications theory," (Fourie, 2007, p.236).

2.2.4 Uses and Gratifications

As mentioned, the issue, or question, of audience use and motivation leads us to the next approach regarding Reception Theory, which is commonly known as the Uses and Gratifications Approach. This approach moves away from the idea of the passive audience, which was examined earlier, towards an empowered audience. The approach has been described as "a reversal of the Hypodermic Model" with the position of power being passed to the audience who "determine what part the media play in their lives" (Williams, 2003, p.166). The Uses and Gratifications model suggests that the audience uses various forms of the media in order to gratify certain needs that they may have. It is not entirely concerned with the effects of the media on the public, but rather what the readers do with the media (Kitzinger, in Downing, 2004, p.170). The "theory assumes that individuals consciously consume media texts for their own ends, purposefully reworking textual meaning in order to integrate the text into their daily life," (Ott, B.L. & Mack, R.L, 2010, p.223). For example, readers of *Seventeen* may turn to the magazine and use it to gratify a need for information, advice or simply for entertainment. Once they have attained the information they are looking for, they will leave the publication until such time that they need to use the product again. In this theory Katz (1959) argues that when thinking about effects, the reasons for audiences selecting certain aspects of the media need to be considered (Katz, in Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.161). In other words, Katz considers why audiences select some forms of media and for what purpose. The core implication of this model is that as consumers interact with the media – for example adverts, videos or newspapers – they are gratifying needs that exist in their lives (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.161). The audiences have more control according to this approach, as they are

able to actively select what they wish to engage with and use it for their own benefit. Theorists have identified many uses of the media by audience members, some of the primary reasons being for "informational-educational" reasons, or else as a means of fantasy escapism (Weiss, in Severin and Tankard, 1992, p.272). Other needs to be gratified include diversion from real life, and to compare ones own lifestyle and relationships with the characters in the media (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p.276), as well as for the maintenance of identity (Burton, 2005, p.89). In simpler terms, readers may 'use' a media text to gratify either a need for knowledge or for entertainment. The audience selects parts of the text and uses them to work through their "interests and concerns" (Burton, 2005, p.89).

Another implication is that social factors may be responsible for "media-related needs" (Katz et al, in Nightingale and Ross, 2003, p.44). For teenage readers, those social factors may include an attempt to 'fit in', improve self-esteem and appearance and learn more about the changes they may be facing in their lives. Dembo (1972) suggests that, "social situation gives rise to certain values, the affirmation and reinforcement of which is facilitated by the consumption of congruent media materials" (Katz et al in Nightingale and Ross, 2003, p.44). Therefore, media texts are selected on the basis of social values and ideologies of the society around us.

2.2.5 Limitations of Uses and Gratifications

Although the Uses and Gratifications model seems far more developed than the Hypodermic Model of The Effects Tradition, it is not without limitation. "The model has been criticized for not taking the content of media texts into account," (Taylor and

Willis, 1999, p.162); neither does it take into consideration the relationship between the reader and their context of reception. Media texts have often been said to offer a 'preferred' reading when presenting certain messages to the audience. Taylor and Willis (1999) question whether gratification for readers depend solely on the acceptance of this preferred meaning or whether their resistance might also produce satisfaction of their needs; "The lack of attention to media content has meant that the issue of how far media messages themselves might produce certain forms of audience activity has been neglected," (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.162). There is also the view that media possibly creates the 'need' for media use in the first place (Severin, 1992, p. 275). They manipulate the readers by researching what the target market wants and then respond to that need.

The model has also been criticized for not taking into consideration the socio-historical context of the audience. Audience members have their own backgrounds and this could be seen to influence message interpretation. However, if one preferred reading is presented this does not necessarily reflect all readers' interpretations. It suggests that different audience members see many meanings within media texts, but also that it is the individual personal and psychological differences that determine the meanings that the audience interprets in those messages (Taylor & Willis, 1999, p.168). Pitout (2001) argues that the engagement between texts and readers involves a "fill in the gaps" process. Interpretation requires readers to make use of their personal experiences and frames of reference – "an inescapable part of our social and cultural life-world" – to fill in the blanks, or decide the intended message (Pitout, in Fourie. 2001, p.245).

2.2.6 Long Term Effects Theory

The second strand of effects models form what are known as Long-Term Effects Theories, so named for the assumption that the media does not have an immediate effect on consumers or readers, but rather that they are affected over a long period of time (Fourie, 2007, p. 237). Specific Long-Term Effects models that would be of most value to a study such as this would include: Accumulation Theory, Modelling Theory, as well as Social Expectation Theory. Like 'Uses and Gratifications', these additional models introduce the idea of a more active media user, and that there are a number of factors that contribute to engagement with media texts. "McLeod et al. (1991) cite several factors, including gratifications, selectivity, attention and information-processing strategies, which they argue are now taken into account when measuring effects," (McLeod et al (2001) In: Taylor &Willis, 1999, p.166).

Fourie (2007) best describes some of the Long-Term Effects Models that are recognised for their contribution to Reception Theory:

Accumulation Theory relies on the belief that should the various media present a common message or focus consistently on a particular issues, it can – over time – have an effect on a person's behaviour (Fourie, 2007, p. 238). For teen readers, this could mean that should the magazines they read offer the same messages on how they should dress and behave, it may result in their acting on these messages.

Modelling Theory argues that "media users can adopt the media's depictions of people's behaviour," (Fourie, 2007, p.240). A media user will view a media text,

consider the type of behaviour presented to them and, later, will alter their own behaviour mirroring what they have seen. Acting in the same manner as presented in the media text usually results in some sort of reward for the individual and they will therefore continue to behave in that manner (Fourie, 2007, p.241). Should teenagers act upon the messages and receive positive feedback from peers, or should they feel more accepted by their peers as a result of the behaviour, there is a greater likelihood for their continuing to act in that specific manner.

Thirdly, I will discuss the Social Expectation Theory as part of Long-Term Effects. This model assumes that "various kinds of content provided by the mass media often portray social activities and group life" and that exposure to this content over an extended period of time results in the "learning of behaviour patterns that are expected by others when acting within such a group," (Fourie, 2007, p.241-242). For teenage girls, this could mean identifying common behavioural patterns expected of them and this in turn could help them identify what types of behaviour is expected of them when socialising with a group of their peers.

All three of these models offer interesting approaches in determining why teenage girls would change their behaviour as a result of exposure to media content. However, as mentioned earlier, they describe a change in behaviour over a long period of time and therefore cannot be effectively applied to this particular study as it deals with immediate effects as a result of exposure to *Seventeen's* content. In order to effectively examine whether these models are able to explain the media's role in identity development and behavioural change would require extensive research over a significant period of time with the same group of readers, to determine whether there

is any long-term change within the readers. Instead, this study will focus more on the theme of an active audience which engages with the text and immediately decides whether to accept or reject the messages offered to them.

2.2.7 Active Audience

The primary approach regarding Reception Theory that will be considered in this study is Hall's Active Audience Approach. This approach suggests the ability and power of the audience to actively negotiate the meanings of messages presented to them by the media. It is Stuart Hall's (1980) model of 'encoding' and 'decoding', which best sums up the core of this theory. Hall sets out to account for the communication process from the encoding in the context of industrial production, through to the consumption of texts - where they are decoded by the audience (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.171). Hall's major claim in this respect was that the message that is 'encoded' into a text was not the same message that is interpreted, or 'decoded' by the reader (Proctor, 2004, p.57). A media institution will encode a text with a particular meaning and the reader of that text will decode that message through active negotiation, based on their particular interpretation of the message, as well as their background, values, beliefs etc. By decoding the message, the audience is not passively receiving the information but actively playing a role in the production of its meaning. "The activity referred to is both about the intellectual work of the audience and about kinds of physical reaction around the text" (Burton, 2005, p.88). He stresses that there is "one dominant meaning" to be found in a media text, but that the understanding of the messages by the audience is open to various interpretations

(Williams, 2003, pp.195 –196). The acceptance of the message is also entirely up to the reader.

According to Hall's model there are "three possible encoding positions": where the text has a dominant reading that is accepted by readers; a negotiated reading where readers are able to negotiate their acceptance of messages; and finally an oppositional reading where the reader rejects the message entirely (Pitout, in Fourie, 2001, pp.253– 254). If the message is rejected it means that the reader has refused to accept the meaning of the text – "if no meaning is taken, there can be no consumption" (Hall in Nightingale and Ross, 2003, p.52). The position that is most focussed on as part of this research is that of the 'negotiated reading', as it links most strongly to the active audience dynamic. The notion of a negotiated reading suggests a high level of interaction between the reader and the text. Hall's ideas regarding this 'interaction' suggest an interest, not in the way that readers simply discover meaning, but rather how they themselves create or "generate" meaning from the text (Proctor, 2004, p. 59). The audience members work at "…decoding media texts rather than being 'affected' in a passive way (Branston and Stafford, 2006, p.277). It also considers how audiences from one culture negotiate and accept or reject the ideologies or messages of another culture.

Despite previous arguments of the active use of the media by audiences, media texts were seen to present only one particular message. New theories "allowed audiences the opportunity to recognise ideology at work and to accept or reject its meanings," (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.170.) These theories allow audiences to actually approach various texts, decode the messages for themselves (interpret the meaning) and then

decide whether or not they agree with the message's meaning that is presented. "Audience members are not seen as passive recipients of textual meanings; they were, instead, active deciphers who might produce a range of different interpretations in their consumption of the media," (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.171). The audience is able to make their own choices in making sense of the text, and in so doing become "producers of meaning" (Burton, 2005, p.88).

A previous media approach known as 'Cultural Effects Theory' undertakes studying the social context of the reader before moving on to understanding the media (Williams, 2003, p.179). Hall adopts this approach as part of his model, focusing on "the 'ideological effects' of the media" and how dominant ideologies are successfully promoted through the media (Williams, 2003, p. 195). Hall argues that the meaning of a media message is never "fixed" nor does the sender of the message determine the meaning; and that the reader does not passively just "receive" the message (Proctor, 2004, p. 59) because they "bring their interpretive frameworks to bear on the message" (Moores, 1993, p.17). In addition, it has been argued that the backgrounds of the readers have a significant impact on how they interpret texts, and whether or not they are able to ultimately accept them. "Hall promoted a *social* theory of subjectivity and meaning construction" where he believed clusters of meaning should be identified and that these common interpretations should be linked to the social context and positioning of the reader (Kitzinger, in Downing, 2004, p.170). As part of this theory there is an "emphasis on the production, negotiation, and reception of ideological messages between classes" (Ott, B.L. & Mack, R.L, 2010, p.224).

Critics like Brunsdon and Morley (1978) insist that the "context of consumption, the socio-economic circumstances of the 'active' reader, their education, class position and occupation as well as their cultural competencies, needed to be assessed in relation to the meanings they gleaned form texts," (Brunsdon and Morley in Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.171). However, this approach is not without criticism. Critics of reception theory have argued that despite readers being afforded the opportunity to contest dominant readings, it does not automatically mean that such decoding will occur (McCullagh, 2002, pp.163-164). Issues of the acceptance of dominant readings will be discussed further on. Nevertheless, various approaches, which value the 'active audience', continue to highlight the choice of readers when it comes to meaning interpretation. Following the trend where different variables are considered, this particular study will also take into consideration the different sociological backgrounds of these teenage readers. Race and culture are both examined as influences in the way that these readers interpret and negotiate the readings from *Seventeen*. Where media use is concerned, researchers consider the "social and cultural context" of the reader, the reasons for media use, as well as social factors that may produce group identities amongst the readers (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.159) as this could determine the possible success of message transmission.

Althusser (1971) suggests that within the cultural apparatus there is an "Absolute Subject" with which all individuals should be able to identify. However, it is clear that many South Africans would not be able to identify with such a model because of their backgrounds, which include conditions of poverty, community marginalization and even body shapes that may differ from those of other societies (Herbst, in Van Eeden and Du Preez. 2005, p.34). This, again, justifies the notion that readers in a South

African context may find it difficult to identify with the messages and ideologies of other societies. Linking this to the study, we will explore whether *Seventeen* reflects the ideologies of what one may consider a 'South African' culture, and whether the readers are able to identify with those ideologies. What will be discussed is how the cultural backgrounds of the teenagers in this study affect the way they are able to identify with the content of *Seventeen*, what they interpret from the messages and ultimately whether or not they choose to use those messages as a way to further develop their changing identities. In fact, "feminist research on popular culture reveals both that the most mainstream texts are highly gendered and that there are possibilities and spaces for oppositional and negotiated readings of these texts – that girls can interpret against the grain altogether or find parts within the text that they will rework to validate their experiences," (Valdevia & Bettivia, 1999, p.160-161). Therefore, the female readers may do the opposite of what the text expects or use the content in other ways that suit them.

2.2.8 Multiple Meanings from Media Messages

Should the reader not identify the intended message in the text, there is the possibility that they may interpret the message differently. The idea of multiple meanings decoded by readers of media texts creates a text that is polysemic - they are open to various meanings. However, Hall does stress that texts cannot simply mean anything that the reader wishes. Polysemy is linked to the sociological background of the readers, so the context in which they consume these texts will affect the meanings they give them (Hall, in Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.171). It is ultimately a combination of the reader's interpretation - as well the readers themselves - and the

context in which they engage with the text. Often, as Hall points out, certain societies will have "Preferred Readings": readings naturally identified and accepted by groups based on their society's cultural ideologies - "dominant meanings and readings will … reflect the dominant cultural order at an institutional, political and ideological level" (Proctor, 2004, p.68).

The question that this study attempts to answer is how the cultural background and beliefs of South African teenage girls affects the way that they negotiate the meanings of *Seventeen*, and whether they accept the messages or whether they find them to be too much of a contradiction of culture and therefore reject them, or else interpret them in a different way entirely. Interpretation of texts results from negotiation of the reader's social position, or context, and the text itself (Pitout, in Fourie. 2001, p.254). It is also suggested that polysemy within texts can be effective. Advertising, for example, can use multiple connotations within the text, and it is argued "the higher the number of connotations a brand generates, the greater its psychological force" (Danesi, 2006, p.37). As a result of multiple connotations in a text, the greater the number of readers there are that will be able to respond to it. The examination of connotation within texts is more likely to be found under theories of semiotic analysis, which will not be studied for the purposes of this project. However, I do feel that an exploration of what messages and other connotations teenage girls are receiving, and interpreting, in reading *Seventeen* is applicable to this study.

The Active Audience approach can also be compared with a more recent theory of Perse (2001), who is more concerned with the types of effects that the media have on audiences. She describes a model, which she names 'Conditional Effects': "These are

effects which are contingent on the predispositions, personal attributes and belief systems of individual audience members and allow the audience's agency to decide which aspects of a given media text they are willing to accept," (Perse, in Nightingale and Ross, 2003, p.77). This model highlights how the reader's personal background, beliefs and culture affect the interpretation and acceptance of the messages that are presented through various media texts. As with the teenage readers of *Seventeen*, readers of different media texts are able to decide for themselves which messages they agree with. For the readers of *Seventeen*, this type of negotiation of the text could also influence which messages they may use to alter their own behaviour or thought pattern. If an article in the publication were to offer a particular piece of advice, for instance, the readers will choose to follow that advice and act upon it in their own lives or not. If not, they may turn to another source where they may find a message that they are able to accept more easily, and one that may be more relevant to their personal ideology and culture.

What we must recognise is the increasing ability of the audience to take part in meaning construction. "Media cultures have made us more selective and capable consumers of a constantly expanding range of products for work and leisure, and we only belittle ourselves when we overlook this, and inadvertently promote outmoded models of the individual as an ever-manipulated puppet," (Herbst, in Van Eeden and Du Preez, 2005: p.13). People are no longer seen to be under the media's control, interpellated by the media to accept dominant ideologies without question; they have the skills to interpret media messages and to reject them should they so choose (Williams, 2003, p.206).

Chapter 3
Research Methodology

In this chapter I will be discussing the various research methods used as part of this investigation. The type of research that has been adopted for this investigation has primarily been qualitative, with an initial, small measure of content analysis. The research includes ethnographic research in an attempt to explore the opinions of readers as well as how they make use of *Seventeen*. The study offers an in depth consideration of the readers' perceptions and beliefs in relation to the magazine. Since ethnographic research involves the process of observation and interviewing of a group of readers (Deacon et al, 1999, p.252), I have used different research methods in an effort to elicit as much information as possible from the sample groups. The chapter provides a brief description of these research methods as well as the reasons behind the choice of research methodology.

Research for the investigation was conducted at Russell High School in Pietermaritzburg. The headmistress gave permission for the research to be conducted within the school. Ethical clearance for the girls who answered the questionnaires was given by their parents in the form of consent forms. As the non-directive interviews were held within the classroom environment and formed the basis of the Life Orientation lesson, formal consent was not arranged. However, the learners were notified that opinions and responses would be recorded for use in this study. Those that wished to participate were free to do so whilst those that did not wish to participate were under no obligation to do so. These learners were also assured that their names would not be used and that their comments would be confidential. The third group of learners who took part in the focus group were given consent forms to

sign, which outlined the conditions of their participation. Copies of the consent forms can be found in the appendix.

As most of the research has taken place within a classroom environment, I am confident that it has drawn out significant data to put toward this research issue. Being 'embedded' within the classroom environment also provided the opportunity, for me as a researcher, to observe clearly and naturally and interview the learners. By conducting the research in an environment familiar to the learners I feel that their responses – as data - have been more forthcoming and genuine, hence producing reliable evidence to answer key research questions.

3.1.1 Literary Research

Before any qualitative research was conducted, it was important first to investigate and explore existing theoretical literature on the topics of identity (identity formation; identification with the text), culture (cultural impact on identification) and media effects on the readers (change in behaviour; encouragement of certain types of behaviour, and consumption). A variety of theories were found in sources including e-journals, journals, as well as media reference books. Theories from these different texts were compared and linked together by topic, and later used in the ethnographic research conducted. The ethnographic research could then be examined against the existing theoretical information. Since the study considers reader identity development and audience behaviour, specific focus was placed on literature that dealt with effects research, as well as the audience and identity.

Though this study does not focus on content analysis, a brief examination of the magazine was conducted to obtain a fair overview of what content and issues are covered in the publication and how these articles relate to the readers, both as potential consumers and as citizens. This analysis allowed for the structuring of questions in the various means of data collection used.

3.2 Data Collection

This section provides an overview of, and discusses, the methods used in obtaining the qualitative data for the study. The initial step in the qualitative research was to first to decide upon my research groups. The selection of the groups of readers to take part in the research project was done through convenience sampling, and took place within the classroom environment. The reason for such a group being described as 'convenient' is because the group was chosen based on, as Deacon (1999, p.45) would describe, opportunity. The sample chosen was a group of learners from Russell High School: 'convenient' as this is my place of employment. Though criticized as a 'weak' form of sample selection (Deacon et al, 1999, p.54), I feel that the sample is effective because it clearly represents the particular research audience – Black, South African teenage girls from middle to lower income group households, who read teenage magazines written in English. In some of the cases, there was a single White or Coloured learner who made up part of the interview groups. This inclusion to the group, I feel, adds an interesting dynamic offering a different view to what the Black readers had to say, and in some cases offering an interesting comparison between how the two groups interpret the magazine content.

Another way to describe the choice of sample would be to say that the choice was based on "Target and Accessible population" (Bornman, in Fourie, 2009, p.435). The sample is the 'target' or section of society that the research is focussing on, and the group is 'accessible' to the researcher (Bornman, in Fourie, 2009, p.435). Three different types of groups were used in the data collection process. A group of 10 learners volunteered to complete the questionnaires. This was done in an informal manner, in which the girls individually filled in their responses to the answers. The non-directive interviews (interviews in which questions are not formally structured or aimed one person in particular) were conducted with the co-operation of all the students of two classes, one of Grade 9s and one of Grade 11s. The interviews formed part of Life Orientation lessons, and the articles were used as a teaching tool as well as for the use of the research. Finally, the focus group was conducted with another, small group of learners – also volunteers – differing in age and grade. However, I must stress that despite the groups differing in age and grade, the majority of the learners that made up these groups were the same in race, and contextual background.

3.2.1 Questionnaires

The initial means of data collection was through the distribution of self-completed questionnaires (questionnaires completed without the help or influence of the researcher), which were completed by individual learners of a group, ranging between the ages of 12 and 19. These questionnaires formed one of the more structured means of audience research, in that they were made up of specific questions to be answered in writing with no verbal discussion. Questionnaire surveys are often used to "map" groups of readers by providing sample feedback that can be used to represent the

views of the greater audience (Kitzinger in Downing, 2004, pp.172-173). Therefore, the group of readers that I have chosen for this research will act as a representative sample of the greater group of readers who are similar in reading context, identity and culture.

Questions in the initial survey include those regarding: the reasons for choosing to read *Seventeen*; expectations of the content of the magazine; preferences in certain content; as well as the reader's perceptions of the typical *Seventeen* reader. The reasons for such questioning were intended to develop ideas that link to the 'Uses and Gratifications' theory (why they read the magazine), as well as issues of identification (whether they relate to the magazine's content), and to determine whether or not the readers' potential identification with the publication may encourage consumption of the magazine. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

3.2.2 Non-Directive Interviewing in a Free Format

This form of qualitative research was conducted in the form of a general discussion as part of two specific Life Orientation Lessons, of two different grades – as was mentioned earlier. The questions were semi-structured around three selected articles from back-issues of *Seventeen*. Though most of the questions were structured around the content of these articles, questions pertaining to the magazine as a whole were also introduced in the discussions. Additional questions pertaining to the rest of the magazine's content were introduced based on the direction of the discussion. The articles discussed include: "The High Life" (Gasa, 2004, p.78-81), discussing the problem of drug abuse amongst teens in South Africa; "The Colour of Love" (Brooks,

2005, p.58), a discussion about inter-racial relationships; and thirdly, "Life vs. Death" (Bergh & Le Grange, 2005, p.48), a debate regarding the ethics of the death penalty. Not only did these topics relate to the content of the Life Orientation lessons, but they were also selected based on the fact that they were believed to be topical issues in contemporary South Africa. They also related to issues of identity and belief, encouraging readers to consider their own values and beliefs and compare them to the messages presented through the articles. Questions asked included whether or not such articles are appropriate for such a magazine, and whether they (the pupils) learned from them, and what they learned. These questions were asked to determine whether or not readers believed that such content did relate to them and whether or not such articles had any impact on their thinking regarding the society they live in and how they should behave. These ideas could then be further linked to the 'Active Audience' Theory and whether or not the audience chooses to use the messages of the text to shape their own behaviour.

The lessons had to be well structured in order to engage the learners in the most effective way. Learners were encouraged to read and consider the texts and then to share their opinions about them. The facilitator of such an interview has the opportunity of asking further questions "for clarification or further explanation" from participants with regard to their answers (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995, p.107). Therefore, as the discussion progressed I was able to establish the direction of conversation and ask questions that were relevant to the research. Deacon describes how this type of interviewing involves the interviewee dictating the direction of the discussion, building on thoughts and ideas that are developed in the process (Deacon et al. 1999, p.65). The responses of the learners were recorded and transcribed for

reference purposes at the stage of Data Analysis. These responses were filed with the rest of the data collected.

3.2.3 Focus Group

My research methodology also included a focus group as a follow-up to the questionnaires, as a means to obtain more in depth information from the readers. It was a structured focus group, to explore readers' opinions and perceptions in greater detail. Focus Groups are usually made up of groups of 6 to 12 participants, and these members are chosen because of a common characteristic "that relates to the topic of the investigation" (Pitout, in Fourie, 2009, p.498). My focus group was made up of a small group of girls, all of whom were familiar with *Seventeen* and who volunteered to take part in this research. During a 1 ½ hour session, I sat down with the teens and asked a variety of prepared questions with regard to the magazine. I also allowed the girls to page through past issues of *Seventeen* and to offer their comments on the subject matter. By talking to a smaller group, researchers are able to focus on particular (and more specific) questions and can probe to obtain more detailed responses (Kitzinger, in Downing, 2004, p.173). Kitzinger argues the merits of such group discussions, saying that they can be effectively used to explore the different readings from groups of readers of diverse contexts or backgrounds, including "ethnic identities", cultures and classes, and can be effectively used in research regarding the influences of the media (Kitzinger in Downing, 2004, p.173). In addition, the use of focus groups is helpful "where little is known about our topic of research", for example, in "determining media audience members' attitudes, perceptions, frames of reference, and media usage … patterns" (Pitout, In Fourie, 2009, p.498). Considering

this particular research topic, my choice to use a focus group is an appropriate method of obtaining the relevant information for the study.

The focus group was electronically recorded with the permission of the participants and questions were designed, not to 'lead' the responses of the interviewees, but to guide the discussion to concentrate on the research issues (Deacon et al, 1999, p.65) of the use and effects of the content of *Seventeen*. This discussion was later transcribed, verbatim, and the data filed away after analysis. Open discussion around the magazine and its content was encouraged, regarding the group's opinions as to the effect of the magazine on readers, as well as why they believe teenage girls read the magazine and whether or not they are able to relate to and identify with its content. As facilitator of the group discussion, I was able to encourage dialogue amongst the participants by asking questions, as well as by asking for clarification on their answers.

By holding this discussion I expected to receive information about the readers' relationship with the magazine, how they are able to identify with it and how it influences their lives, as well as how the magazine may change their attitude and behaviour. This information could, again, be linked to existing research regarding to audience interpellation, media effects, as well as theories regarding identity and cultural influence with regard to media consumption.

3.3 Introduction to Data Analysis

Once the research of the study was completed, the next step was to collate the information obtained to organise it before subjecting it to any kind of analysis. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, my data was obtained through the use of self-completion questionnaires, non-directive interviewing in a free format, as well as a more structured focus group.

Once the 10 questionnaires were completed and returned, I was able to go through them one by one, typing the individual responses of the participants, thereby making it easier to collate, analyse and compare the various responses. The completed questionnaires were filed away with other research materials from the study. The data obtained through the questionnaires assisted in generating an overview of the characteristics that appeal to the readers of *Seventeen*.

A similar approach was taken with the non-directive interviews. These interviews occurred in the classroom environment as part of the learners' Life Orientation lesson. The session served a dual purpose, not only educating the pupils but also obtaining data as part of the research. The learners read the articles and were asked to share their opinions on the content and the articles' messages. As the interviews were being conducted, various questions were asked and the responses of the participants were written down verbatim. Later, the responses from the different groups were collated together, again making it easier to analyse and compare the different responses. The data used to validate this study has been derived from the notes taken during the interview. The purpose of the free-format interviews was to encourage discussion of

the content to determine any manner of identification between the readers and the content.

After studying the responses from the questionnaire and the free-format interview, I designed a set of questions to help guide a focus group. These questions, based on the existing data, were more specific, designed to engage the respondents and thereby gain a better understanding of reader identification with *Seventeen*, as well as the impact of cultural ideology on the ability to relate to the messages in the publication. The focus group, which had been digitally recorded, was transcribed as a verbatim, typed version of the focus group content for analysis. The tape recording was stored away for reference purposes and the transcription filed away with the responses from the other research methods. As the group was smaller, I expected to go into more detail about the readers' opinions of the magazine. Also, because the group was smaller I was able to probe specific responses to get more detailed, and therefore more accurate, information for my research data.

In order to organise the information received by means of the above research methods, I decided to identify particular themes relating directly to the research questions I had been attempting to answer. These themes include: *identity; culture*; and *behaviour*. Using different coloured highlighting pens, I went through the information ascribing a different colour to highlight key words pertaining specifically to each of the themes. Such a process is best described as 'open coding', where notes are read and "units of meaning are identified" (Henning, Van Rensburg, Smit, 2004, p.104). Once identified, the data was analysed, compared and discussed as part of the

findings for the research topic. The information contributed to my discussion linking

the theoretical research and the research questions.

Chapter 4
Data Analysis

4.1 Data Analysis

As part of the data analysis I have recorded the findings under several different headings based on the initial research questions regarding identification with the magazine, effect of content on behaviour, and cultural influence on identification.

4.1.1 The Perception of *Seventeen*

The readers questioned appear to have a common opinion about what can be found in *Seventeen* as a magazine and what they find most enjoyable and appealing in terms of content. The readers agreed that the target market for the magazine is teenage girls, and usually those who are inclined to be feminine with an interest in fashion. The majority of readers admitted to only reading *Seventeen* every few months – seven out of eleven respondents to be accurate. They find the magazine somewhat expensive. "Most of [the products are] expensive," says one member of the focus group. Expense is also a factor that has an impact on their choosing not to buy items purchased in the magazine as well.

Readers appear to be most attracted to the headlines, and the cover picture of the magazine. Readers expect that the cover picture will be a celebrity, usually female. These celebrities are identified as being aged anywhere from being a teenager to early adulthood. The readers also expect these cover girls to be attractive.

Familiarity with the magazine also brings to the fore expectations of the type of content that readers can find in the magazine. In addition, readers identify certain content as being synonymous with the publication. This includes articles on: celebrity gossip and profiles; entertainment; advice and personal help, as well as relationships. Interestingly, these types of articles were also mentioned as those most enjoyed by the readers, for reasons that will be mentioned later on. The quality of the magazine is recognised as being superior to others, and this has a positive effect on the readers, one reader saying: "It makes you, as a teenager, feel more sophisticated." Readers also find the magazine to be upbeat and "happy" as opposed to others, which they feel are critical and negative in their articles. Other given reasons for reading the magazine include: the interesting articles; the fact that it's "a youth magazine" with articles that deal with "issues relating to teens"; as well as the fact that it's filled with articles about fashion and entertainment. It is a feminine magazine which one respondent describes as bringing "out the girly side of you", and offers advice while teaching about life, fashion and beauty.

Readers were also asked questions about what attracts them specifically to *Seventeen* as a publication. According to the responses the readers provided through the questionnaire, reasons for choosing *Seventeen* over other publications are for many of the same reasons as why it is read to begin with. One reader describes how it caters to all needs – from the "nerdy bookworm to the trendy fashion lover". Another says the advice columns respond in a way that considers the teenage point of view, and another explains how it relates to what interests the teenage readers and the issues they may face in their lives.

Although readers felt that different types of teenagers would read the magazine, they also identified several characteristics that are assumed to be more common in the average reader of *Seventeen,* and would therefore be more likely to respond to the content. For example, of the questionnaires that were filled in, five of the respondents chose 'feminine' to describe the typical *Seventeen* reader, and eight described them as fashionable. However, only two respondents expected the typical reader to be a 'tomboy'. There is therefore a greater expectation of girls who are feminine and fashionable to read the magazine as opposed to 'tomboys' or 'academics'. Likewise, readers feel that girls who are social and outgoing are more likely to read the magazine as opposed to someone who is introverted. The questionnaire respondents felt that Black and White teens were equally likely to read the magazine.

4.1.2 Readers' Identification with *Seventeen*

One of the main questions that I hoped to answer through my research was whether or not the readers were actually able to identify with the content of the magazine. Through examination of their responses, it was clear that there are a number of ways that the readers are able to identify with the content of *Seventeen*. As female readers, they immediately recognise that the content relates to young women. Many of the products that the questionnaire respondents commonly find advertised in the magazine include predominantly feminine products such as hair products, shoes, clothes, facial products and perfumes. Free items that often come with the magazine as a means to promote sales are also very much targeted at young females. Free items that readers remember receiving from the magazine include items such as lip-gloss, face-wash, sanitary products, and diaries.

Secondly, readers identify with the fact that as a magazine, "it involves issues related to teens". The relevant advice articles consider problems "from a teenager's point of view". Readers also relate to the magazine based on their various interests. They describe *Seventeen* as catering to all needs – from the bookworm to the fashion lover. When asked what appeals to them in the magazine, some readers mentioned fashion articles, as they had an interest in fashion, while others said that they were interested in celebrity gossip and entertainment because these interests are part of their intended career path. Readers also find that the magazine's content regarding celebrities, and stories about their lives, is written in such a way that helps the reader to relate to the these 'stars'. According to one focus group respondent, learning more about these celebrities' lives makes them seem 'normal' – just like everybody else – and that makes readers feel better about themselves.

Responses from the questionnaires explain how the readers have many issues that they have to face in their lives. One response from a questionnaire described how the reader enjoys reading articles relating to advice and relationships. She says this because "some of the articles may describe/relate to your issue, so you can get help through reading them." They are able to identify with the articles that are in *Seventeen* because the articles discuss the same types of problems. Another response elicited through the questionnaire mentions that the magazine includes relevant articles with suggestions on how to deal with their problems. "Some of the articles may describe or relate to your issue." In discussion about the article regarding interracial dating, one teen explained how she was able to identify with the stories as she had been in such a relationship, while others said they had witnessed such relationships amongst their

friends. On the other hand, some teens did say that they had not been involved in, nor seen these relationships in their social environments. In this sense they were not able to identify with this particular story. While often teens can identify with some of the stories in the magazine, there are others, who may not relate to those stories if they have not been affected personally in the same way.

4.1.3 Effects on Behaviour and Identity Development

Much of the ethnographic research included questions which sought to determine whether or not the publication had any influence on the behaviour of the readers, as well as whether it influenced the type of identities they create for themselves. Some discussion on the content of the magazine ensued, specifically on the more serious human-interest stories. Regarding the article "The High Life" (Gasa, 2004, p.78-81) – a story warning of the dangers of drug use – readers explained the value in the content saying that they are able to gain knowledge from these stories, which helps them to learn from the mistakes of others; "… by buying the magazine, more teens will learn more lessons." In addition, readers felt that the advice offered in such articles is useful, giving them the knowledge of how to react should they be in such a situation in the future. While looking at another, somewhat shocking, advertisement detailing the effects of drug abuse, readers admitted to feeling "scared" and dissuaded from drug usage. This means the advert could be responsible for deterring or preventing such antisocial behaviour.

What emerges from the responses is the idea that the content of *Seventeen* is most useful as a guide, teaching readers how they should behave in various situations. For

example (according to the readers) an article on inter-racial dating may provide the reader with a positive example of integrated relationships, or may help them to understand how different relationships work. Likewise, when discussing an article on capital punishment, readers mentioned how the article provides a better understanding of such an issue and encourages them to think about the realities of crime and its consequences: "We think more about crime." One reader mentioned how the articles in the magazine help them to focus on aspects of life that they seldom think about; "You look at life through different angles," and "…you learn about the challenges people face." The content in the advice columns, for instance, can help with guidance should they have the same problem. They appreciate that they are not the only ones facing problems and so they feel better about their own lives. Readers found some of the content to be inspirational. It was explained how they enjoy reading the articles where teens similar to them had overcome great problems, because it inspires them to be happy and grateful about their own lives and to have hope in reaching their own dreams. On the other hand, there were some readers who admitted that though they read the articles, they find they have little effect on their own lives; "You're reading but there is no change in your life," such as was described in one respondent's questionnaire.

Change of view or opinion is an interesting development, but what about real change in readers' behaviour or ideologies? According to the readers, the content has an effect by telling them how to dress, as well as what is 'cool' or trendy and what is not. It helps to develop a better taste in readers' fashion sense. It also tells them how to "control their lives". Respondents who took part in the focus group admit to taking content and ideas from the magazine and trying to implement aspects in their own

lives. For example, one reader admitted to liking the features on ways to exercise and tries to do the exercises herself. By reading the articles, one reader says that it helps her to have a more positive outlook on life, as well as encouraging her to be "a better person". Reading the content of *Seventeen* helps the reader choose better friends who have a positive influence in their lives. Readers feel the magazine offers advice, which encourages them to take control of their lives. It also helps to develop a better taste in readers' fashion sense.

Readers also identified a number of somewhat negative influences regarding the magazine's content. One reader explained how the magazine encourages her to "want things", especially things she knows she cannot have. Readers admit that the magazine does create desire within them for certain products; one reader explains how the magazine makes you want things advertised inside. Another reader of the focus group suggests that this will encourage the reader to go out and buy the product, as six of the questionnaire respondents claim to have done. However, other readers say that they might not buy the products because many of the products are expensive and they can't afford to purchase them – as one respondent explains, the magazines makes her want things she knows she can never have. In fact, readers suggest that the entire lifestyle that the magazine promotes is rather expensive. Readers also complain about the 'perfected' look of the girls inside the magazine. Readers feel that by presenting unrealistic, enhanced photographs of women, they are unable to relate to them because they feel they can't measure up. As a result they feel extremely negative and develop a low self-image.

4.1.4 Cultural Influence on Interpretation

Readers were also asked certain questions to determine the influence that the magazine's content has on how they develop their identity. According to readers, they imagine the typical trendy South African teenager to be one who keeps up with the latest fashions, hairstyles, and slang. These teens can most commonly be found leading an outgoing and social lifestyle that includes going to the movies, listening to music and playing with the latest gadgets. They also spend time partying and dating. Despite this, many of the readers felt that they were still unable to relate to the magazine because of its westernised feel, as well as the fact that they believe it to contradict their African culture. As described by one of the readers of the focus group: "It contradicts what I grew up with, so it's really hard to relate to that."

The article on inter-racial relationships for example suggests a positive outlook on integration. However, some readers bring attention to problems of cultural clashes. It may be difficult to accept ideas regarding these types of relationships when two people come from backgrounds involving different customs. In the same way, readers feel their parents would have problems accepting this type of relationship as a result of the difference in cultural backgrounds. When asked whether or not the magazine complements their cultural identity, most of the readers said no. Some of the content, especially that which openly discusses relationships, is not common in the Zulu African culture. According to one reader: "In our culture, dating is bad." Even so the readers agree that there is a strong emphasis on dating in the magazine and this is not really compatible with their culture. Another reader of the free format interview

suggests that although communication about dating is more common, they are still unable to discuss it in African culture.

Parents and members of the community teach these readers about their culture and if they return to their rural homes, a more traditional and more conservative lifestyle is what they are expected to embrace. Yet readers admit that when they are in their urban home environment they adapt to a more modern lifestyle – a more westernised or "American" lifestyle as they describe it. However, though they enjoy reading the magazine, they find very little content in the magazine that is specifically South African. Their perception of the content is that most of the major celebrities and even entertainment reviews (such as those of American blockbuster movies) are American, with a few token South African models or teen 'voices' included to make it more relevant to South African readers. Despite this, these readers still find the western lifestyle more appealing than their African ideologies, which they describe as "boring". The western lifestyle is described as being "more grown up" and "glamourous". There is a likelihood that a group may associate themselves with the lifestyle practices of a culture that they find more appealing than their own. By following the behavioural patterns of the new culture, they also begin to adopt the beliefs and values of that culture. This case sees African teenage readers becoming increasingly attracted to a more "American" lifestyle. Furthermore, most of the readers feel that since they have been born into and raised in a society that adopts these practices and this behaviour, their "Western" identities have been naturally established. Even so, they still feel that they are not Western and find themselves "in the middle" of the two cultures. Though their parents have attempted to remind them of their African heritage, they feel they cannot fully accept this identity because the

media and Western cultures have encouraged them to adapt to more western patterns of behaviour.

The readers feel that the magazine content is written in a format that is much like the open communication that Western society operates with. "When people write in with a problem … [they] are advised in certain situations and you can actually decide for yourself." At home, readers find that parental advice is merely instruction, and there is no room for negotiation. Readers also feel that White readers possibly do not face the same problem, considering that they do not have the same 'traditional' background conflicting with their modern lifestyle. When probed about this, readers also admitted to perceiving the magazine as one that targets girls, mostly with advertised products that are used by White girls, even though – as mentioned earlier – they suggested both race groups would read it. As a result readers of a different race are unlikely to identify with much of the magazine's content because they do not use a number of the products marketed. Says one respondent of the focus group: "…what's the use of me reading [an] ad and I can't even use half the products?"

In addition, interaction in the more western environment has led to neglect of their home language. Readers admit that they seldom speak their home language without inserting English into the conversation. Older family members (and even strangers) often reprimand the teens for their inability to converse fluently in Zulu. Readers of the focus group are targeted and accused of trying to be "White" by conversing more in English than in their mother tongue and are criticized for forgetting their culture. Meanwhile, these teens don't understand their supposed fault, and claim that they don't choose to speak in this manner but that it comes naturally. Ultimately these

readers find themselves wedged between two worlds, unable to fit into either. "South Africans have become Americans. We're now Americans. We're American-African." These Black teens who find themselves in the situation of being traditionally Zulu but acting American (such as by speaking in English) are criticized by peers, who refer to them as "coconuts" – outwardly Black, but behaving in a way that others might consider to be 'White'.

When asked what they thought was a factor contributing to this change in identity, the readers claimed that the media was responsible. "People look at the way [the people in the media dress and think, wow! I want to be like that." Most media, according to readers, is of American origin and generates more profit because society is more attracted to the American way of living. In order to feel more "American", teens will go out and buy products advertised that they feel would help them to fit in more with that lifestyle. Ironically, the readers believe that as much as they appreciate the American way of life, they feel that people from overseas countries are, in turn, fascinated with African culture. One focus group respondent explains: "Strangely, we would prefer something which is westernised, but people overseas are fascinated about our culture." South Africans don't appreciate their own culture, mostly because they're used to it or take it for granted. Instead they're looking for something new. As a member of the focus group explained, her friends are "not into their culture anymore".

Given the negative aspects, pointed out by the readers, they still feel that it is a good publication, which offers something different from other magazines. In many ways it is "relatable, interesting, [and] it's for teenagers." On the other hand, though it

contributes to their modern identities, it doesn't relate to their traditional, cultural backgrounds and values. Furthermore, readers have a strong idea of what they can expect to find in a copy of *Seventeen* and readers, for various reasons, enjoy much of the content. They describe it as a fun, bright, positive magazine that considers relevant teen issues and teaches teens many things while inspiring them and encouraging them to appreciate life.

Chapter 5
Discussion of the Findings

Thus far this thesis has focused on three primary areas of study:

- The media's role in identity development and behaviour

- The role of the reader in message interpretation

- The socio-cultural influence of readers' background on message interpretation and acceptance

Much time was spent examining existing theories, and additional time was used for interviewing readers to determine how they receive the magazine. It came time to examine and analyse this information as data to see if any correlation could be made between the two. As I progress through this chapter I will use these areas to structure the discussion of the findings. The subheadings used throughout the chapter are related to the initial research questions thereby corroborating the information of chapters 2 and 3. Analysis of the data will serve to answer the initial research questions that were outlined in the introductory chapter of this study. The data was collected through the examination of teenage readers' responses to *Seventeen*. As was explained in Chapter 3 (Research Methodology), different methods of qualitative research were adopted to solicit as much information from the teenage interviewees as possible.

5.1 Putting the 'Teen' in *Seventeen* (Attracting the Teenage Market)

As a magazine, *Seventeen* is targeted at a very specific group of readers. One of the primary questions that this study sought to answer was whether or not the magazine played any part in the development of the readers' identities. In order for the magazine to have an effect, there must be some degree of audience interpellation. In order to draw the readers' interest, it is important that the readers are able to identify with the content of the magazine, and before determining the ways in which readers identify with the magazine it is beneficial to attempt to define the typical identity of South African teenagers of today, so that we may better understand how they are able to relate to the content.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Lacey (2002, p.183) offers two descriptions that could possibly describe the teen media market: "Strivers" and "Trendies" (striving for acceptance and attempting to be trendy or 'cool'). From the data obtained in the focus group, as well as the responses of the questionnaires, these specific readers define typical South African teenagers as being outgoing – inclined to spend their time going to movies, partying and (for some) dating. Teenage interests lie in spending time socializing on their cellphones, playing with the latest gadgets and listening to popular music. Teenagers also spend their time keeping up-to-date with the latest trends, whether they are fashions, hairstyles or even commonly used slang terms. In understanding this identity we can understand what content the readers are attracted to and therefore how *Seventeen* interpellates them.

This leads to an examination of how readers are interpellated – or "hailed" (Althusser, 1977) – as consumers by this specific text. If readers are attracted to (or can identify with) the text, there is a greater likelihood of consumption. Principles of Hall's "Cultural Effects Theory" are evident here, and relate to the way the magazine draws in its readers. The social context of the readers needs to first be considered (Williams, 2003, p.195) followed by an examination of the messages presented in the text. Therefore producers of media texts will first seek to define the identity of the readers before presenting the readers with content that will relate to their lives or what appeals to them. According to the data obtained through the distribution of questionnaires, as well as the focus group, readers are attracted to the magazine as a result of an appealing cover picture. They expect to see an attractive-looking celebrity on the cover, usually a female. Since readers highlighted the content offering news on celebrities as something that they enjoy reading, it makes sense that the inclusion of a celebrity on the cover would be an effective way to draw the attention of that target market. The readers are also attracted to the quality of the magazine. The glossy, high-quality pages that the magazine offers to its readers makes them feel "sophisticated". If the readers feel sophisticated, it could mean that the magazine takes them seriously as consumers by offering them a product that is similar in quality to expensive, luxury women's magazines. The idea here is that if the readers feel that they are taken seriously, or valued, they will feel more compelled to purchase the product. At the same time, one must keep in mind that the target market is made up of young consumers, many of whom identify more with a fun and somewhat carefree life. Therefore, the magazine provides content that is mostly upbeat and "happy", as the readers of the focus group describe. Furthermore, by offering content that relates to teens, it encourages further consumption of the messages, as the teens are able to

identify with the content. This description of the teen identity helps to answer the question of how the readers are able to identify with the content and therefore how they are encouraged to read it.

By interviewing the groups of teens, I was able to explore what it was that made the content significant enough to encourage identification. The primary reason teenagers are able to relate to *Seventeen* is that they consider the content of the publication to be extremely feminine in nature – in that it related to girls. This includes articles relating to female issues, advertisements that promote the purchasing of feminine products such as perfumes, clothes and hair products. Free products that may appeal to teenage girls are also continually included with the monthly issue of the publication. Readers have identified a variety of items that they have received with purchase of the magazine. The inclusion of these promotional 'giveaway' items also encourages readers to buy the magazine.

The fact that the content includes issues related to teenagers means that, as teenage readers, they are easily interpellated by the text and are better able to identify with the content of the magazine. They read the magazine because the articles make sense to them in their lives and they are able to make comparisons between the stories in *Seventeen* and their own experiences. Problems often discussed in the magazine are common problems that the teenage female readers will face. As was previously mentioned, this identification only occurs if the reader has in fact had the same or similar experience, or is interested in the particular issue and learning more from what the magazine says about it. For example, readers who have had some type of experience with inter-racial relationships, such as discussed in "The Colour of Love",

relate to the article. On the other hand, readers who admit that they "have not seen these types of relationships" may not be able to find value in the content.

So far, I have discussed the effective way that *Seventeen* as a publication is able to draw in or interpellate its readers. This information is important as it provides a better understanding of the supposed influence the magazine has on the development of reader identity. As the reader is better able to identify with the content of the magazine, it could mean a stronger chance that the magazine will be able to influence the reader. Kellner's (1995) notion of identity, being something that is subject to change and evolution, is relevant here. It is believed that the modern media encourages this change and therefore as a magazine, *Seventeen* could change teen identities mostly by changing their mindsets and ideas about the world around them, in either a positive or negative manner.

5.2 Cause and Effect (Influencing Reader Identity and Behaviour)

This exploration into audience activity intended to answer the question as to whether or not there is any form of change in behaviour, ideas, and values that could be attributed to reading the magazine. In addition, the research sought to examine pre-existing theories regarding audience effects and to determine if the ethnographic research data is able to corroborate these theories.

I initially expected the research findings to suggest that the readers were strongly influenced by the content of *Seventeen*. What I determined was that the magazine affects the readers to a greater degree in developing their existing knowledge of the

society they live in as well as helping the readers to develop their opinions about certain issues relating to teens. This also contributes to the development of identity as will be discussed further on. The readers use the magazine more as a tool to gain knowledge as opposed to a reference on how to behave. Furthermore, the research data shows that a change in the readers' mindset does result in a change in their physical behaviour. If the data shows this, it could suggest that the media has succeeded in affecting the behaviour of the reader. However, I also discovered that although there are some ways that the content does affect the readers, there are also cases where they are unwilling to identify with the magazine and will not accept some of the messages of the text. Should they not accept the messages, it possibly means no effect on their behaviour.

Evidence for the magazine's role in the development of the readers' frame of knowledge is based on the responses from the interviewees that were recorded during the free-format interviews and the focus group, as well as some additional information that I obtained through self-completion questionnaires. Many of the readers who were interviewed claimed that they viewed *Seventeen* as a guide, or tool, that offered information that they could refer to when making their own life decisions – that through reading the magazine teens "will learn more lessons." Mostly the readers stated that when they read about the problems of other teens like themselves, they learn from their mistakes. A response elicited from the research questionnaire described how the reader used the advice articles to learn more about relationships, thereby helping her in her own relationships. One reader described how reading the feature articles has helped her to choose the right friends who have a positive influence on her life. Another reader commented that reading the articles has taught

her that there is "more to life than having boyfriends and partying" and that she has developed a better sense of control over her life as a result of reading the content in *Seventeen*. Other readers also commented on the magazine's affect on their attitude towards life. While one reader explained that reading the articles help her "to have a more positive outlook on life", another described how the articles encourage her to be a better person. Most articles in *Seventeen* describe and explore common teen issues and the readers who absorb the information, through interpellation and identification, use the information – such as when they are facing the same or similar issues in their own lives. "The High Life" is an example of one such article that presents the story of a teen's encounter with drug abuse as well as advice of what to do in the same situation, or what to do if a reader has a friend showing signs of drug use. The data shows evidence of the process of how teens will read this article, consider the information, remember it, and apply it when they wish to abstain from such behaviour themselves. If we relate this type of consumption, and the use of the content of *Seventeen*, to the various theoretical ideas examined in Chapter 2, one will see that this form of media usage correlates with the principles of the 'Active Audience' approach. The Active Audience theory confers agency on the readers, where the readers themselves determine the meaning in the text (Proctor, 2004, p.59). It was mentioned in Chapter 2 how this theory presents "three possible encoding positions" as described by Pitout (Pitout, in Fourie, 2001, p.253-254). These positions include: acceptance of the preferred meanings of the messages as presented by the media; negotiation where the message is considered and the readers only accept what they choose to; and thirdly rejection of the message entirely. Based on the example of "The High Life", it can be determined that the readers take a negotiated position that could lead to acceptance of the message. They read the content, consider its value and

accept the message of the text to apply it when they feel it is necessary, much like what is suggested in the Uses and Gratifications Approach. When an advertisement presenting the consequences of cocaine abuse was examined in the focus group, one reader stated that she felt "scared" upon looking at the image. The reader looked at the image and went on to say that after looking at the image, she was certain that she would not allow herself to become like "that". This could suggest that the reader considers the text, accepts the message – in this case not to use cocaine – and consciously makes the decision not to carry out the same behaviour. In addition to avoiding certain types of behaviour, the content can also be seen to encourage more positive forms of behaviour. An example of this is one reader's choosing to eat healthier as a result of the articles she has read in the magazine, as well as another reader's attempts to try new exercise as demonstrated in the content.

Readers also feel that by reading the articles, the magazine is helping them to develop their opinions about various topical issues, as well as change their mindsets about such issues. Readers in the free-format interviews were presented with articles on two common topical issues – "The Colour of Love" (Brooks, 2005, p.58), an article describing an alternate view of inter-racial relationships; and "Life vs. Death" (Bergh &Le Grange, 2005, p.48), an article debating the merits of capital punishment. By reading these articles readers are able to develop a better understanding of these issues and, to an extent, consider how they themselves feel about these issues. When asked how the article "Life vs. Death" affects the readers, one interviewee stated that she believed the article develops "a better understanding of the issue". Another reader suggested that by reading this article readers are encouraged to consider the issue in

more detail: "We think more about crime." Revisiting "The High Life", one reader found it interesting because "you learn about the challenges people face."

These responses suggest (or support the idea) that the readers are active participants in their media use – much like Taylor and Willis (1999) suggest. The readers actively consider (negotiate) the text and then use it, either to learn something new or develop their own viewpoints about issues in society. The acceptance of the messages in the content could even result in a change in certain beliefs and values of the readers. According to one response recorded on a self-completion questionnaire, the reader said that she enjoyed the human-interest stories the most because: "… they make you realise some aspects of life you've never thought about. You look at life through different angles." This response shows active consideration of the text, and suggests that the content of the magazine can have some effect on the reader's beliefs, which could ultimately influence their current ideology. These ideas will be given more attention further on in this chapter as part of the analysis of cultural influences on identification with media messages.

Despite this, there were some responses from readers, which showed an oppositional reading on their part. A different response obtained through the questionnaires stated that the reader did not enjoy human-interest features because for themselves, there is no change in their life – that they are aware of - after reading the articles. If the readers report no change in their ideas and behaviour it may because they are rejecting the messages presented to them. They consider the content without acceptance of the message and as a result, there "is no consumption" (Taylor and Willis, 2003, p.52). A reader who took part in the focus group expressed a somewhat similar, oppositional

position by stating that, as an individual, she does not frequently follow the trends that she finds in the magazine because she wants to stand out in the crowd by being different. As a result, she chooses to accessorise in 'different' styles from what is fashionable, showing an alternative view of what the magazine considers stylish.

However, other readers responded quite differently to questions about articles on fashion and trends. Readers claimed that based on the content in the magazine, teenagers would desire the products that are advertised. One reader in the free-format interview suggested that the magazine influences readers to like the things advertised within, and because they look good, they want them. A similar response came from another reader in the focus group session. When asked what sorts of effects appealing advertisements have on the reader, the interviewee stated that the reader would go out and buy the product. In addition, of the eleven questionnaire respondents, six claimed to have purchased a product that they had seen advertised in *Seventeen*. The items that readers claimed to have bought after seeing them advertised mostly included clothes, perfumes, DVDs and CDs, and toiletries. One reader explained how the magazine helps her to develop her fashion sense, while another explained how reading the fashion articles of the magazine encourages her to wear more fashionable clothes. Referring back to Gornam (2005), it is explained how teenagers will construct their own feminine identities by often comparing themselves to the images in the media. For the readers of the focus group, this idea can be compared to the way that they compare their own lives with those of celebrities. By reading more about the celebrities' lives, they are able to identify with them and feel better about their own lives because they feel that their issues are the same. Again, what we see is a high level of interaction with the text, whereby readers negotiate the content and choose to

apply the suggestions the magazine offers to their own lives. The readers may not necessarily accept all the suggestions offered to them but one can still argue that the 'Active Audience' theory applies here. Considering this level of audience agency we are reminded of Williams who is certain that readers cannot be simply controlled by media texts, but that readers are capable of interpreting such texts themselves choosing to accept them or not (Williams, 2003, p.206).

Revisiting the point made regarding reader desire for products featured in the magazine, brings us to question the motivation of desire for many of the products, and is a topic that we could spend a great deal of time discussing. Quite briefly, what the research suggested was that, in the cases of some readers, a desire is created which may lead to change in reader behaviour. For other readers however, they may be unable to fulfil this desire, as they do not have the financial means to do so. One response from a questionnaire participant stated: "I want things or tend to want things I know I can never have." When the focus group was asked why they would not buy certain items advertised in the magazine, they said: "Most of it is expensive." Under normal circumstances, if a reader desired a product they would buy it to satisfy that need for the product – a concept linked to the AIDA principle of media advertising. According to this principle, media texts and adverts use different methods to attract readers' attention thereby making them aware of a product, and use additional techniques to sustain the readers' interest. Once they have done this, it is hoped that the readers will desire (or want) the product, resulting in the action to buy it and satisfy that desire (Lacey, 2002, p.188). However, in this case, some readers appear unable to purchase the product, and are ultimately left unsatisfied. As Lacey explains:

"It is no good if the potential client says 'Yeah I love it but can't afford it'," (Lacey, 2002, p.188).

If we consider the major reception theories that were discussed in Chapter 2 and relate them to the results of the ethnographic research, we find that the 'Encoding/Decoding' – or 'Active Audience' – approach correlates more strongly. It would appear that the ideas concerning 'Effects Theory' are not substantially supported in this research. The ethnographic research data suggests too high a level audience agency among readers, as citizens who are developing identities for themselves based on the messages they receive from these texts. Traditional effects research imagines a passive reader who accepts and applies ideas from the media to their own lives without question (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.157). The fact that, as has already been pointed out, some readers reject the messages of the media or only accept certain messages means that these particular readers are not as vulnerable to influence as this theory suggests. In addition, the evidence that the content encourages readers to think about issues and "look at life through different angles", suggests an interaction with the text as opposed to simple acceptance. Taylor and Willis also argued that it would be impossible to claim that the media has no impact on those who engage with it (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.157), and this study does not deny that point. What I do argue is that readers do not accept simply anything presented to them. They are active in deciding which messages they want to accept and in deciding how they want to change their beliefs, opinions and behaviours. These points echo the criticisms of 'Effects Theory' – that it does not consider the free will of readers. It also fails to consider how the social, psychological, or economic background of the readers (Taylor and Willis, 1999) affects whether they accept media messages or not.

Unlike the earlier 'Hypodermic Model', the 'Uses and Gratifications' model offers a stronger argument where the issue of media effects in concerned, emphasizing more active readers when considering media usage. However, it claims that whenever readers make use of a media text, they are acting out of a desire to gratify some sort of 'need'. They engage with media texts based on a need to use the message and once they have 'gratified' the need, then leave the text until such a time that they may need it again, or else they move on. From the research data I obtained, readers offered a range of reasons why they will read *Seventeen*. Readers claimed to read the magazine for enjoyment; because it is interesting; because they learn about life; as well as receive tips on fashion and beauty. Considering that many readers claimed they learn from the magazine, or the magazine encourages them to think, it is understandable why theorists say that media is mostly used by consumers as an "informational-educational" tool (Weiss, in Severin and Tankard, 1992, p.272). Teenagers do focus on trends represented in magazines like *Seventeen*, as it gives them an idea of what is trendy. A reader in the focus group pointed out how teenagers do not want to be the joke amongst their peers, and this means keeping up-to-date with the latest trends. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, a great need for many teenagers is to fit in with their peers. To do so they may choose to follow the advice in *Seventeen* to help them to do so. They 'consume' or use the messages to secure affirmation from others within their own social environment (Katz et al, in Nightingale and Ross, 2003, p.44).

Though this discussion offers a good argument, which serves to affirm the 'Uses and Gratifications' approach, there are several reasons why I believe it cannot be used to justify media usage and effects in this instance. Many of these reasons lie with the

numerous criticisms of the theory itself. Firstly, based on the ethnographic research data none of the respondents claimed to use the magazine exclusively to 'help' them in any way. Furthermore, though they offered reasons for why they enjoyed reading the magazine they in no way suggested that they 'need' to use the magazine to advise them, but that they merely take the content into consideration if they read it. In fact, seven out of eleven respondents claimed to only read the magazine every few months. This is further evidence that readers do not necessarily value *Seventeen* all that highly as a determining guide for their lives. The 'Uses and Gratifications' theory is also criticised for "not taking the content of media texts into account" (Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.162), nor does it consider the context of media usage. The personal experience and knowledge of readers is important in interpretation according to Pitout (2001). The different 'backgrounds' and histories of the readers determine how they interpret media messages.

Severin (1992) was also mentioned in Chapter 2, when he suggested that perhaps the media were responsible for creating the so-called 'need' for media use that has been discussed here. The respondents of the focus group complained strongly about the fact that magazines such as *Seventeen* present unrealistic expectations of how teenagers are supposed to look and dress. Though the respondents also realised that these models and celebrities were not necessarily presented in their natural state, and that they had been "photoshopped", to appear more beautiful, they suggested that readers would still possibly feel negative looking at the images, especially if they feel that they do not look like the models in the magazine. As a result, they may then continue reading these types of magazines to learn how they should dress, thereby gratifying their need to feel better about themselves, and by doing so further develop their

identities - as appearance is considered to be a contributing factor in identity formation.

One of the features of 'Active Audience' is that it takes into consideration the context of the reader when engaging with a media text. Brunsdon and Morley feel a number of factors need to be considered when thinking about media consumption: the "context of consumption"; socio-economic influences; education; class; and cultural competencies (Brunsdon & Morley, in Taylor and Willis, 1999, p.171). These factors, especially those regarding "cultural competencies", will be considered in depth in the next part of this chapter, which considers the influence that the readers' pre-existing cultural ideologies have on the way in which they interpret and accept the messages that are presented to them through *Seventeen* magazine, as well as whether or not the messages from the magazine create any change in this group of readers' existing ideology.

5.3 "American-Africanism" (The influence of Western Ideology on African Identity)

So far I have explained how *Seventeen* is able to engage readers actively in the interpretation of its content's messages. In some cases, the acceptance of these messages is confirmed by a change in the readers' beliefs and in some cases their behaviour. Earlier in the chapter I reported the opinions of the respondents regarding what they considered the typical teenage South African identity to be. Based on these responses, I questioned the readers regarding the different ways they are able to identify with the content of the magazine. The responses that were generated from the

interviews, focus groups and questionnaires showed how the readers were able to identify with the content based on their social interaction in a more urban environment. However, in addition to this information, another issue I set out to investigate was whether or not the unique cultural identity of these readers had any effect in content identification and message acceptance. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, the majority of the readers that took part as respondents in this case study were African, Zulu-speaking teenagers from lower to middle income households. According to readers' explanations, traditional African cultures have their own beliefs and values regarding behaviour, which are taught to the teens by their parents and other members of the community. Like these specific readers, there are many other South African teenagers whose identities have developed, encouraged by the traditional beliefs and behavioural patterns of their culture, while at the same time appearing to embody the modern identity associated with South African teenagers. This being because their family teaches them and instils in them their cultural values, but teenagers are encouraged by their friends and the media to adopt a more Westernised, progressive lifestyle.

However, what we find is that a conflict exists between the two cultures, because of their differing values, leaving some readers unable to identify fully with either set of beliefs. This in turn affects the way the readers receive the messages of the publication because, if they are unable to relate to the content when reading, there is a lesser chance that they will accept the messages presented to them. Evidence from the ethnographic research suggests that there are differences between the content of the magazine and their own traditional values. This could create somewhat of an identity crisis for those readers who feel under pressure to relate to both cultures

simultaneously, as suggested by Friedman (1994, p.90), and that an inability to relate purely to ones national identity could mean the decline of that culture's influence in the reader's life. However, theorists such as Kellner have suggested that one's culture is ever changing, while only certain physical attributes and religious values remain constant. Identities, according to Kellner, are continually developing (Kellner, 1995, p.231). This could mean that identification with differing belief systems may provide the reader with enough information to develop an entirely different and unique identity based on the values that they are already familiar with. To determine whether this type of identity development is in practice among the readers of *Seventeen*, we need to negotiate the responses of the readers based on the questions asked of them regarding cultural identification. By doing so it will provide insight into which culture they feel they are more willing to accept.

When asked what sort of lifestyle or 'culture' was presented by *Seventeen,* members of the focus group responded by saying that it is very "American". Though one reader did not necessarily feel that the magazine targeted the White race, another reader felt that the discourse of the content targeted white teenagers more. More than race however, the readers felt that content was relevant to a more American way of life. They identified most of the celebrities (who appear on the cover and are the subject of many of the features) as being American, and film reviews mostly target Hollywood blockbusters. However, criticism cannot be directed at *Seventeen* for publishing this so-called American content, since this is what appears to be popular amongst readers worldwide.

According to the respondents of the focus group, the modern Americanised way of life is clearly a more popular lifestyle choice. Globalisation means that the trends and practices of the more Western countries are projected more quickly and more easily than ever before. Modes of dress, song and dance are presented to a global market on a mass scale leading to the "crisis" that Friedman identifies. Local identities are threatened by "international systems" as consumers begin to assimilate these international lifestyles, abandoning their own (Friedman, 1994, p.90). Globalisation is driven by technological advances, which make the distribution of information instantaneous. Respondents recognise the popularity of western culture amongst their Zulu South African peers. A respondent of the focus group commented that some of her friends are not "into their culture anymore." They prefer to dress and act in ways associated with American culture. Despite this the respondents acknowledge that many urban teenagers still follow their culture to an extent. However, living in a modern, urban, more westernised society means many teens have ascribed to this way of life. The teens also recognise that the behaviour associated with modern, western practices contradicts their traditional cultural beliefs and practices. Based on the responses from members of the focus groups and free-format interviews, traditional African culture is portrayed as being more conservative, valuing mother-tongue language, and includes a range of rituals or practices not associated with western ideology. For example, readers identify how the topic of relationships is the focus of many of the articles in *Seventeen*. Within the readers' traditional African culture, such a topic of discussion is considered taboo. "Dating is a sensitive topic," says one reader and therefore the discussion of dating - particularly with parents – is a modern and progressive concept compared to Zulu culture. "You can't talk about [relationships] in

African culture," says a member of the free-format interview, making it difficult for readers to openly discuss this topic.

Another instance in which this conflict was made evident was in the free-format interviews. One respondent, when discussing "The Colour of Love", explained the problem with the acceptance of inter-racial dating. She suggested that African families would have a problem if their daughter were to date a member of a different culture or race because of conflict as a result of cultural clashes, therefore the content of the article which condones such relationships may not be received in as positive a manner by these readers' parents. The readers went on to describe how parents value tradition and would not accept such a relationship, and that such a relationship would face problems based on differences in culture and traditional custom.

Regardless of what culture dictates, readers identify articles discussing relationship issues as one of the more popular inclusions in the magazine. In fact, it appears the more popular western practices become, the more traditional values are neglected. It would seem that these teenagers are disassociating themselves from their traditional cultural practices, causing frustration for their elders who value these traditions. Various readers find that inter-racial dating is a sign of progress, showing a positive example of integration. Many teens are raised in urban, modern environments to such an extent that they have limited knowledge of their own culture's traditional practices. One respondent of the focus group describes her first experience of witnessing a traditional cow slaughter. She admits that growing up in westernised society did not prepare her for the experience, and she found it 'scary". She describes how her family criticised her reaction, accusing her of being "White" – so-called for her inability to

identify with African culture. Also discussed was how the elders of these groups remind the teens – especially in these situations – that such practice is part of their culture and heritage and they should not reject it.

Another criticism the elders have of these 21st century teens is that they are neglecting their language. As was discussed in Chapter 2, language forms a major part of a person's identity. In this case the Zulu language forms an important part of the Zulu culture and identity. However, as was discussed in the focus group, these readers are adapting more and more to the use of English to the extent that either they find themselves speaking more English than Zulu, or they converse with one another combining the two. Teenagers will code-switch when conversing with one another, alternating between the two languages as they speak – something, which they describe as natural for them. In some instances, teenagers are able to converse in their 'home language' but, according to their elders, are unable to pronounce the words correctly. By neglecting their language they face criticism from elders who, again, feel that the teens are neglecting their culture. The teens even explain how they encounter criticism from strangers in public who, on hearing them, instruct them to speak Zulu, not English, and who tell them not to forget their culture. The readers themselves feel that they are not to blame, and that the adoption of English as part of their language, is something that has occurred naturally. The dominance of English is clearly illustrated here, echoing During's theories of English as a world language, threatening indigenous languages such as isiZulu (During, 2005, p.92).

For the majority of these teenagers the traditional lifestyle is not what they consider "trendy". According to the respondents, traditional culture does not offer anything

exciting to teenagers. It's something they are already familiar with, whereas "American" culture is exciting, glamourous and new. Regardless of their views of their culture they still recognise their ties to it, and acknowledge that they are unable to entirely adapt to the western lifestyle. Their South African roots and Zulu culture mean that they are unable to completely relate with American ideology, yet they have been brought up in a modern society and are unable to embrace traditional values and practices entirely. This inability to identify with their culture, and the abandonment of traditional customs results in many African teenagers being dubbed "coconuts" – the idea being that they are 'White inside' but 'Black outside'. Caught between these two conflicting social systems, the teens find themselves in a situation which mirrors Klopper's description of "eclectic and fragmented" cultures (Klopper, in Van Eeden and Du Preez, 2005, p.175) where the practices and values of more than one culture are adopted and combined to create an individual belief system – in this case satisfying the South African teens desire to participate in modern, western behaviours while remaining loyal to their traditional heritage.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

This study is not without limitation, and I feel that additional study could develop this research further, particularly since the research group considered, in this exploration has been very specific. The research group selected was made up predominantly of black, Zulu, English speaking teenage girls, from middle to lower income households in urban areas. Further research could be conducted using different groups of teens to see if there is any difference between their identification with the magazine and that of the original research group. For example, teenagers from differing racial groups, or

from different cultural groups, could be considered to determine whether or not they too experience the same conflict that the research group of this study did. Likewise, it was mentioned that these readers are able to identify with the femininity of the magazine, and I feel it could be of interest to explore how this characteristic of being "feminine" is able to help them better socialise and interact with their peers. Another interesting dynamic would be to consider a teenage group from more affluent families. One of the comments from the research was that often readers were not given the choice to act on their desire for a product as a result of cost. It would be interesting to explore whether readers are more likely to act on this desire if they have the means to do so.

Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, this study has examined the immediate effects of the magazines content on readers as they engage with the messages presented to them. It would be of great interest to explore what the long-term effects of the magazine's content would be on readers, in relation to the models discussed in the Literature Review. Thus far, the study has shown how these teenage girls will read the content and then either change their behaviour (or belief) or they will not. It might be of value to research whether or not these changes are permanent by examining the responses of a particular group over a longer period of time.

The biggest challenge with regard to this study is the fact that the research group was made up of a fairly young group of respondents. Though responsive, there was a great challenge in soliciting eloquent responses from the girls in an attempt to answer the research questions. The respondents had strong opinions but they are still developing their language skills and so, many times, extended questioning had to be conducted to

ensure a full understanding of the comments. Nevertheless, I feel that their responses have provided valuable insight where this study is concerned, and has helped to further develop research into Reception Theory.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

This exploration into media effects sought to determine how a particular group of South African teenage girls is influenced by teen publications. The findings have revealed that the readers consider themselves to be a representation of the typical South African teenage identity, in addition to how well they – as these teenagers – are able to identify and relate to the content of *Seventeen*. It has been determined – through this study - that urban, English speaking teenage South Africans are outgoing, spending much of their leisure time at parties or at the movies. There is a strong emphasis on keeping up with the latest trends such as fashions, gadgets and colloquial language or jargon. As readers, the respondents are able to identify with the magazine for its feminine content, its fun and upbeat approach, as well as its content relating to teen issues.

Firstly, the research has made an effort to determine the extent to which the magazine is able to influence and affect the further development of these teenagers' identities, as well the readers' behaviour. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the content in *Seventeen* helps to develop readers' existing knowledge and opinions about issues in society. The readers gain more knowledge about their social environment, as well as a variety of issues that relate to them and impact their lives and relationships. This in turn not only changes readers' mindsets but, according to the research, also dissuades readers from engaging in future activity that may be risky, as well as helps readers to make sensible future decisions (such as those regarding relationships), and even influencing change in dress sense. The change in dress sense is especially spurred by the readers' desire to fit in with their peers. The real-life feature articles allow the readers to make

a comparison between these stories and their own lives and, by doing so, learn from the mistakes of others. The readers also gain advice and guidance as to future behaviour. The content also creates desire for products in the magazine, and therefore the subsequent purchasing and consumption of these 'desirable' items as advertised. By acting as a guide, as described by Mengen (2003), the magazine helps readers to experiment with their identities and reinvent who they are (Mengen, 2003, p.39). From this we are able to determine that the readers' identities are able to change based on the content they engage with in the magazine, and therefore their identities can be described as "mobile" and subject to change as Kellner suggests (Kellner, 1995, p.231).

However, the research revealed instances where these readers are unaffected by the content and messages of the magazine. It was revealed that there were instances where the readers fail to identify with the magazine content and, as a result, fail to accept the messages presented to them. One response from a reader revealed that she is not aware of any change in her life as a result of reading *Seventeen*. It was found that one reader was not influenced to follow the trends and fashion styles, selecting to rather express individuality as opposed to following the crowd. In this way, the different views that readers have about life contribute to whether they choose to accept the messages or not. However, they are nonetheless still active participants in message negotiation and interpretation. Other readers, despite desiring the products, are unable to fulfil this desire because of the cost of the items advertised and so – as mentioned – are left unsatisfied.

The second research question sought to determine the extent to which readers take part in the interpretation of content in the magazine. Based on the responses and the manner of reader interaction with the content of *Seventeen*, it has been determined that the readers are active participants of message interpretation. The readers do not just read and act, but rather select the certain content to act upon. They read the content and determine for themselves whether the advice of such applies to them or not. As a result, the Uses and Gratifications approach as well as that of the Active Audience are the approaches that most accurately represent the manner of audience reception. The Uses and Gratifications approach is represented in the way the readers use the publication for entertainment, to learn about life, and to obtain guidance on fashion and beauty. They are using the content to gratify certain desires – for enjoyment and information. As mentioned in Chapter 2, "individuals … consume media texts for their own ends" or purposes and apply those messages to their own lives (Ott, B.L. & Mack, R.L, 2010, p.223). However, as previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the Uses and Gratifications model is criticized for failing to consider the context of consumption of the readers. In this case study, some of the readers come from a cultural background with beliefs which differ in many ways from the messages of the content presented in *Seventeen*. What I found as part of the research was that while the magazine presents content of a more Western nature, favouring open discussion about issues such as sex and relationships, the Black readers' traditional culture is more conservative assuming discussion of this nature to be taboo. This difference is found to deter this group of readers from accepting the messages of the text. Such a group can be labelled as an "interpretive community", a termed coined by Stanley Fish who explains how particular groups "interpret texts similarly because they share similar social positions and experiences" (Ott, B.L. & Mack, R.L, 2010,

p.231). In this instance, the group of readers may negotiate the text and choose to reject the message of the content based on the fact that it does not agree with their cultural belief.

From this study one could deduce that the Active Audience approach is the one that most accurately reflects the engagement of these readers with the content of the magazine, with its concerns of the "production, negotiation, and reception" of the messages (Ott, B.L. & Mack, R.L, 2010, p.224). This model considers the context of reader interaction, the background of the reader, as well as their pre-existing beliefs. The model emphasizes an active reader who is able to, as was determined by the ethnographic research, select the content they feel is relevant to them and participate in the interpretation of the message. To answer the original research question regarding the readers' role in message interpretation, the data shows that the readers play an active role in message interpretation. They do not accept all of the messages presented to them, and in some cases they reject the messages. However, in other instances the readers use the content of the magazine to develop their worldly knowledge.

The third question that the research sought to answer was how the socio-cultural background of the readers influenced the way they interpreted and accepted certain messages. The study considered the differences between the readers' traditional Zulu beliefs and the messages which they described as having more "Americanised" content. What was found was, although the readers were able to identify – to a degree – with both cultures, they were unable to do so without some conflict between the two. Furthermore, they were unable to entirely relate to either one particular culture as

a result of their ties to both. As a result, a type of 'hybrid' culture emerges where the readers remain loyal to their historical, traditional roots, but also associate with the Western culture, which they in many ways find more appealing. As mentioned earlier, however, the conservative practices of the traditional Zulu culture make it difficult for the readers to completely engage with and accept the messages of a more American media text, such as the articles on dating. The continued attraction to and usage of these media texts also disrupts the ties to these readers' heritage, as they struggle to remember their indigenous language and fail to associate themselves with traditional rites and rituals.

For the most part, the content of *Seventeen* is considered to influence the reader to adopt different modes of dress, behaviour and in some cases, even a different social discourse, focussing more on English than the traditional home language of Zulu. In Chapter 5 I mentioned how Klopper describes new identities as reflecting an "eclectic and fragmented culture" (Klopper, in Van Eeden and Du Preez, 2005, p.175), and this is mirrored by what is happening in the lives of these teens. What I have found is one group of teens that adopt two differing cultures in their lives, combining them to form a new identity of their own. Further research into this development could reveal the emergence of a unique, new South African culture and identity. With the progression of time, future generations may not experience the conflict between two separate cultures, or may readily accept the blended or 'hybrid' culture that emerges. At present, it is the older generation that criticizes the youth for their choice of western cultural practice. Should there no longer be that critical influence in the future, there may be a greater likelihood for a more natural adoption of a combined culture, and the teens may feel more comfortable fitting into this new identity. However, this could be

an entirely idealistic view, and the difference between the two cultures may be too great for there to be a compromise between the two in the effort to form a new identity.

Overall, I do feel that this research into reader identification and engagement has revealed some valuable findings. These findings offer a contribution towards theories regarding reception and effects on readers, as well as cultural identification. It has been revealed that while readers of *Seventeen* are able to identify with and are attracted to most of the content, they do not necessarily accept the messages, often as a result of conflict between their indigenous cultures and the modern western culture.

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Appendices

Questionnaire

*The following questionnaire was distributed to respondents as part of the first phase of ethnographic research.

Why do you read *Seventeen*?
_____
_____

When you look at *Seventeen* what attracts you to read it? (Tick relevant boxes)
- ❑ Cover Picture
- ❑ Headlines/Articles
- ❑ Free Giveaways

How often do you read *Seventeen*?
- ❑ Every Month
- ❑ Every Few Months
- ❑ On Occasion
- ❑ Seldom (once or twice a year)

Why do you choose to read *Seventeen* over other magazines?
_____
_____

Name some other magazines you read regularly:
_____

What types of articles would you expect to read in *Seventeen*?
- ❑ Celebrity Gossip
- ❑ Celebrity Profiles
- ❑ Entertainment (music and movies)
- ❑ Human Interest
- ❑ Articles relating to help
- ❑ Advice column
- ❑ Articles on Relationship
- ❑ Other: if so please name: _____

What types of articles do you enjoy reading most in *Seventeen*?
_____

Why? _____

Have these articles ever influenced (changed/affected) your personal behaviour in any way?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

If yes, how?
_____
_____

Which articles do you not enjoy reading?
_____

Why not?

_____

_____

What age do you thin *Seventeen* is best suited for? Why?

_____

_____

Describe the typical girl you think would read *Seventeen*:
- ❑ Teenager
- ❑ Tomboy
- ❑ Feminine
- ❑ Fashionable
- ❑ Academic
- ❑ Outgoing
- ❑ White
- ❑ Black
- ❑ Introverted

Why have you chosen these characteristics?

_____

_____

What types of products would you expect to find advertised in *Seventeen*?

_____

_____

Do you ever buy the products advertised in *Seventeen*?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

If yes, how often do you buy these products?
- ❑ Regularly
- ❑ Seldom

What types of products have you been motivated to purchase?
- ❑ Clothes
- ❑ Perfume
- ❑ Foods
- ❑ Books
- ❑ DVDs or CDs
- ❑ Toiletries (deodorant, razors, face wash)
- ❑ Other: _____

Have you ever bought the magazine for a free item?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

If yes, what was the free item? _____

Have you ever made use of a 'special offer' that has been advertised in *Seventeen*? (eg. Voucher, coupon, discount)
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

Agenda For
Non-Directive Interviews

*The following questions were asked as part of the Non-Directive Interviewing of the ethnographic research.

Free Format Interview 1
"The High Life"

- Do you think it is important for teenage girls to hear stories such as these?

- ***Do you think that it is a good idea for magazines like 'Seventeen' to print articles such as these for girls to read?***

- What have you learnt from the article?

- Does the content of the article interest you?

- Do you find the advice given on how to approach a friend helpful?

- Why is it important to know the dangers of drugs?

Free Format Interview 2
"The Colour of Love"
"Life vs. Death"

"The Colour of Love"

- How are you able to identify with this story?

- Do you think this article would have a positive or negative effect on the reader?

- What type of effect could it have?

- Do you see potential problems to this somewhat controversial issue?

- Are there any good effects?

- How does such a message affect you on a cultural level?

- Does it agree or disagree with your culture?

- Do you think that 'Seventeen' magazine and other teen magazines compliment your culture? In what way?

- What type of lifestyle do you think 'Seventeen' promotes?

- What does 'Seventeen' promote as being 'trendy' or 'cool'?

- Do you think that articles such as these are important to read? Why?

- Why choose 'Seventeen'?

- What types of articles can be found in 'Seventeen'?

"Life vs. Death"

- Do you find the article interesting?

- Where would you expect to find an article such as this?

- Why do you think the article offers two opposing views?

- How do you think this article affects those who read it?

- Why do you think one would be interested in reading this article?

Agenda for Focus Group

*The following questions were written up to guide the progression of the focus group. These were not the only questions that were asked. As discussion continued, responses from the participants gave rise to additional questions relating to effects and identity.

- What do you expect from an issue of Seventeen? Why?

- What about Seventeen encourages you to read it? What about the magazine grabs your attention?

- Some girls have claimed to read Seventeen for the celebrity gossip. How does this gossip influence your life? Why is it interesting/important to read?

- Why choose Seventeen over other magazines?

- What, if any, factors cause you not to buy it?

Identity

- How would you describe your identity, or that of the average teenage South African?

- In your opinion, what does it mean to be 'trendy'?

- In what ways can you identify with Seventeen?

- What type of lifestyle/culture do you think Seventeen promotes?

- Does this match your cultural background?

- Who encourages you or has taught you about your culture?

- Would your parents approve of the content in Seventeen? Why/Why Not?

- In what ways does the magazine influence your life/the way you live your life?

- What effect does this have on your cultural background?

- Is there a difference between the type of lifestyle you live and the one the magazine promotes? Which type of lifestyle would you prefer to live? Why?

Consent for Participation: 1

Dear Parent

Your daughter has kindly volunteered to assist with research for a Master's degree dissertation by taking part in a discussion group. The research involves opinions and questions of identification with regard to 'Seventeen' Magazine. As parent / guardian of the participant, I request that you read and sign the following consent form allowing your daughter to take part in these discussions, and have your daughter return the form. This dissertation forms part of my Master's degree, which I am studying through the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (PMB Campus). My supervisor who will oversee the research is Ms. Dee Viney, whose details follow below.

Once again, I thank you and your daughter for your co-operation.

Many Thanks
Miss Donna-Jade Shelver
Master Student
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
Tel. Number: 033 042 4631 (Russell High School)

Ms. Dee Viney
Media and Communications Lecturer / Supervisor
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
033 260 5024

___

I……………………….. , parent of (name of daughter / ward) ……………………. do hereby give full consent for my daughter / ward to participate in discussions as part of Miss D.J Shelver's Master's Research. I understand that my daughter will be taking part in discussions in which her opinions will be used as part of the research for this dissertation, and that these discussion sessions may be recorded. I understand and accept that my daughter's identity as part of the research will remain anonymous in the dissertation and that at no time will she be forced to take part should she choose not to.

Furthermore, I am fully aware that any questions asked of my daughter will not cause any duress or embarrassment on her part. I am aware that she will not be placed in any danger nor will she be asked to do anything or answer any question that compromises her values. I acknowledge that her participation in this research group is completely voluntary and that she may withdraw from the research group whenever she chooses.

Parent's Name: _____
Signature: _____
Date: _____

Consent for Participation: 2

Consent for Participation in the Focus Group: 09/12/2009

I_____ hereby acknowledge that the discussion I am taking part in is to be used as part of the research of Miss. D.J. Shelver for her Master's dissertation, and that my participation is of my own will. I fully understand that any information or opinions that I offer will be kept strictly confidential and that my identity not be made known in the completed dissertation. I also understand that my opinions and observations will be voice recorded. I consent to this and furthermore acknowledge that these recordings are for reference purposes only and will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

Name: _____
Sign: _____   Date: _____