

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Picture Perfect: Teen Pushes Mag to Change Ways

What Happened:

Julia Bluhm didn't like what she was seeing. The pictures of girls and women she saw in *Seventeen* magazine, one of the most popular periodicals for teens, didn't look like anyone she'd see at school or ballet camp. Many looked flat-out fake.

Editing and altering photographs in major magazines is a given these days—but Julia didn't think it should be that way. On April 19, she slapped a petition on Change.org asking *Seventeen* to print an unaltered photo—just one—in each issue.

Less than three months and more than 84,000 signatures later, *Seventeen* offered an answer to Julia and her many supporters July 3: A “Body Peace Treaty” that says the magazine will “never change girls’ body or face shapes” and will only work with “real girls and models who are healthy.”

The magazine is also opening up part of its editorial process, inviting readers to compare untouched photos (published on *Seventeen*'s blog) with what makes it in the magazine.

Experts hailed *Seventeen*'s statement as a step in the right direction. Many of them have been critical of fashion magazines in the past for working with super-skinny, sometimes super-young models and digitally altering photos. These sorts of techniques give readers a warped sense of what beauty is. When even top models can't look like the pictures in these magazines without the help of Photoshop or starvation diets, what hope do ordinary girls and women have?

Seventeen's statement wasn't an admission of guilt: Editor Ann Shoket insists the magazine never substantially edits photos to change how the models look. “While we work hard behind the scenes to make sure we're being authentic, your notes made me realize that it was time for us to be more public about our commitment,” she wrote in an editor's letter.

No matter. Julia was thrilled with the magazine's response. “It's even more than what we asked,” she told *The New York Times*. “The important thing is they agreed to do what we asked them to do. However they want to say it in their magazine is OK.”

Talk About It:

Girls, do the pictures of models you see in magazines and billboards impact how you think you should look? Can you see how they might make some girls feel insecure? Guys, do you think those same pictures affect what you look for in a girl or how a girl should look?

Is it important for you that the pictures you see reflect reality? Is it cheating to Photoshop photos? When is it OK to edit a photo? When is it not?

Through her petition, Julia helped change how a major, national magazine does business. She helped show how regular teens can make a difference. When you look around your city, state or the world, do you see things you'd like to change? Can you think of ways to help affect that change? Is there anything your church or youth group could do to make a positive impact in your community or in your country?

What the Bible Says:

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of our inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful” (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the wave, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:14).