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Wanna Know a Secret?

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▼ Abstract

In a study to examine adolescent perceptions of popular teen magazines, two focus groups of adolescent women met four or five times as groups and individually to discuss the health messages in the images and texts they chose from popular teen magazines. They noted that many of the messages in teen magazines are couched in terms of secrets. Interpretive inquiry created an understanding of certain facets of secrets and secrecy as they pertain to popular teen magazines and the adolescent women who read them. Secrets revealed themselves through their links with other secrets in the lifeworld. This interpretive work is an example of substantively driven research where the power of the topic takes the lead guiding the development of knowledge surrounding secrets.

THE DISCOVERY of my daughter secreted in her room, under her bed covers, reading her popular teen magazine alarmed me because of the messages she seemed to be absorbing. There was also the instance of the two girls, both participants in the research study, sharing magazine secrets in the back of my car. Then during the research focus group meetings, the room seemed to bristle with secrets. The evidence was on the tape. The hushed, hissing tones sounded like a barely audible prayer, a *secre*. The hissing was driving me crazy. What right did these people have to whisper to each other during my research interviews ... in secret? At least, that's how I saw it. Come on! Pay attention!: I wanted to know what they were saying, yet I *just* couldn't quite make out their words. *I was left out*.

During one of the focus group meetings, an adolescent woman spoke about the secrets in teen magazines. Her voice sounded hesitant, possibly puzzled by what seemed like an abundance of secrets in popular teen magazines. "These are sun secrets now. Before it was sex secrets. Sun secrets." Sure enough secrets seemed to be everywhere. Some of the titles chosen for the research study by the adolescent women included "Quiz: Can You Keep a Secret" (*Seventeen*, May, 1997),

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"Sex Secrets" (*YM*, February, 1997), "Romance Success Secrets from Guy-Magnet Girls" (*Teen*, July, 1997), "Hot Hair Now! 100 Best Style Secrets" (*YM*, March, 1997), "Sun Secrets" (*Seventeen*, May, 1997), "Sneaky ways to win his heart" (*YM*, April, 1997), and "Your secret scent signals" (*Teen*, January, 1997). Not only were secrets contained in these titles, the article entitled "Sex Secrets" had sealed perforated pages.

Interpretive inquiry about popular teen magazines and adolescent women's perceptions of health messages in the magazines involved two groups who chose images and texts from *YM*, *Teen*, and *Seventeen* for discussion. One group consisted of five adolescent women ages 12-15 and the other group consisted of seven adolescents ages 15-18 years. Who met four to five times for group discussion and twice individually. Hermes, the messenger of hermeneutic consideration ¹ brought messages of secrets and rituals of secrecy using the adolescent experiences, whispers, voices, and magazine topics. I became a participant in the midst of an opening for interpretive conversations created by the arrival of secrets. The power of secrets in this substantively driven research study led to conversations about a phenomenological event, culture, the ancestry of secrets, and their linkages to health, adolescent women, and nurses. The interpretation of the phenomenon of secrets is creatively and artistically ¹ presented as a multivocal conversation that remains open to further dialogue. Importantly, interpretive inquiry is about "creating meaning, not simply reporting on it." ¹ The relationship of secrets with the lifeworld is investigated but this presentation as knowledge development is partial. ²

I am bringing my understanding of the threads of interpretive inquiry to bear in this writing about secrets. I wrote this article in a voice that required cultivation and practice by writing and rewriting. ³ I am writing for you, to draw you into relationship with secrets, so that you are a part of the conversation about them. This bringing together of scattered relationships about secrets, adolescent women, health, initiation, and teen magazines is what Gadamer ⁴ calls the fusion of horizons.

Secrets addressed me ⁴ and challenged me to listen to their hidden tales of significance. It was a peculiar address, one that startled me with its familiarity while, at the same time, it left me struggling for meaning. Secrets are another one of those things in our lives, another taken-for-granted feature, sitting outside the margins of human understanding: its significance seldom questioned and seldom called to account. Odd as it may seem, as adolescent women flip through teen magazines, they're actually flipping through pages crammed with secrets and somehow, they never seem to tire of them. But discourse about the everyday nature of secrets is unattended to. We are, however, reminded of that everyday landscape as a place of return. No matter how deeply we absorb ourselves in abstractions, we can never *quite* lose sight of the everyday. My daughter's interest in teen magazines returned me to the demands of the everyday. Abram ⁵ reminds us how we are confronted by a worldly existence despite our seeming inattentiveness.

Even the most detached scientist must begin and end his or her study in this indeterminate field of experience, where shifts of climate or mood may alter his experiment or her interpretation of "the data": the scientist, too, must take time off from his measurements and analysis ... to interact straightforwardly with a familiar world that is never explicitly thematized and defined. ⁵ (p³³)

Consequently, I didn't seek an abstract orientation from which I could make prosaic pronouncements about secrets. Secrets are this and secrets are that. "In all recognition of the world and orientation in the world, the element of understanding is to be worked out" ⁶ (p¹⁷⁹) interpretively. The cultivation and working out of the understanding about secrets developed through the *power* of the topic and by allowing it to develop in conversation. ⁷

Wanting to become familiar with the topic, I began at the university library searching for secrets under subject and title headings. The library search yielded books on wars, espionage, spies, traitors, government, and military intelligence—nothing that I expected. Consequently, I had an emergent sense that understanding secrets would not be easy. Secrets appeared as they often do—hidden. What are secrets about then? Such ordinariness should be easy enough to discern. What do they smell like, look like, taste like; how do they reveal themselves; what do they speak of; whom do they speak to; and what do secrets have to do with health?

I proceeded by talking with people at bookstores and with colleagues and friends, searching for relevant texts, and seeking incidents of secrets. The dialogic character to understanding secrets showed in the conversations that took place. ⁴ An example of an initial conversation that helped the topic take shape is presented as follows.

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DECEMBER 27, 1997

At a bookstore putting a deposit down on a book, I mentioned to the owner's wife that I was looking for books about secrets. Even though she couldn't locate any, she did relay a story about a gift she bought for her son's girlfriend. Her son wanted to know what it was, but she refused to tell him. She revealed thoughtfully at his mystified feeling saying, "It *is* really bothering him *but* it's a secret." She seemed to relish her secret, satisfied with leaving her son in the dark.

I realized through such conversations that the peculiarities about secrets are generated in our lives as humans. When I talked to nurses about the difficulty I had understanding the nature of secrets, one of them informed me that secrets necessitate a relationship, "You don't tell secrets to anyone you don't trust." Another said, "Secrets bond people together because they share something." Then, the way secrets are shared was revealed. "When I knew I was pregnant, I kept it a secret." We nodded understandingly. "I had something special, something that was just mine." Then came the punch line. "I could *only* keep it for a day." We laughed. A secret, possessed by humans, possesses us, and seems to have energy of its own, a desire for release, a drive, a push. "It is the very nature of secrets that they get told." ^{8(p1)}

I found myself in the lifeworld that was complicated by a multiplicity of meanings, all to do with secrets. It's strange that without a human world, secrets don't seem to have a place. Secrets live in the midst of the world, in us in contradictory and irresolvable ways, and *are* about this very world. The tentative nature of secrets brings us to an "intermediate, ambiguous, and metaphorical" ^{9(p1)} topography. It is in these "in between" places, the ambiguous, metaphorical places, where secrets reside. It requires sensitive attentiveness to ambiguous features in our lives to discern them.

A phenomenological incident arose that served to deepen the understanding of secrets. The event that caught my attention was a public one, one that I traced to see if it would translate into some thing about secrets.

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PUBLIC SECRETS

Silently at work in another place, suspense at the White House arose. Aha, I thought. This is it! This incident can tell me about secrets. I rushed out to purchase my copy of *Time* magazine. Suddenly secrets started to look *really* interesting. The news story confirmed my idea that secrets are tenuously possessed and possessed with a life of their own. In the unreleased state, we decide who is

to know and how much we reveal. Do we leave certain features out, like names to increase speculation? If we release the secret, does it do harm? Does it do justice? Who wants to know and who will be at risk once revealed? Do secrets hint at loyalty, obligation, trust, and ethics? Do secrets place facades on people? "Is secrecy corrupting when it permits the unchecked exercise of power?" 10^(p xv) Is there a gender specific imposition? Does the teller of secrets make a conscious decision about secrets or is it a culturally learned behavior? It's like my daughter telling me that she knows things about her friends that she will not divulge.

Secrets tell us about places. 11 Should we have been invading the privacy of a nation's leader, in his home, to hear about his so called secrets? We didn't even hesitate to ponder. We waited eagerly to hear the next revelation to place judgment on the man, Clinton. It's possible my daughter, behind her closed bedroom door, showed a peculiar eagerness to learn about magazine secrets. The White House incident demonstrated how secrets are potentially harmful and suggestible. The drama resulted in negative attention, more like titillation, yet it still qualifies as attention. Given this, teen magazine secrets might be just as dramatic, negative, titillating, harmful, and suggestible.

The revelation of Clinton's secrets stunned the world. "But should we have been stunned?" Haven't we heard this kind of tale before? Sometimes as nurses, we hear the most stunning secrets from patients. And I was equally stunned by the ordinary event of my daughter reading her teen magazine. Furthermore, the revelations were not his: by protecting his secrets, Clinton might have continued his life out of public scrutiny. His secrets layered upon each other: just how many secrets could he hide? Consider how it's not unusual that "everything in the West [European culture] is secret unless there is a conscious decision to the contrary." 12^(p280) Reason produced the right to secrecy: man became more hidden than apparent. 12 Is this some kind of omen for our children? Will they become hidden as they grow up?

The White House secrets leaked out (secreted) from the mouths of the women. Specific human practices, almost like rituals, surround secrets. But we know almost instinctively that the secret will be revealed. It's just a matter of time and timing.

Secrets cannot be characterized either by the contents of the concealed messages or by the consequences and outcomes that follow their exposure. Rather, they are understood by the way information actually gets withheld, restricted, intentionally altered, and exposed. The practice of secrecy involves a do-not-talk-about-it proscription that is contradicted by the fact that secrecy is constituted by the very procedures by which secrets get communicated. This I called the *paradox of secrecy*. 8^(p21)

At first, the women, who claimed to know the secrets, had the balance of power. But the balance of power was contained in the secret rather than in the woman: perhaps the balance of power remains with the teen magazines' claims to secrets. A secret was shared with another who betrayed the teller's confidence by illicitly recording her confessions. 13 "Betrayal is necessarily linked with that of 'the secret'" 14^(p262) but more or less the risk of betrayal grants secrets worth. However, this risk does not diminish the fact that "secrets are always deposits lodged by others" 15^(p202): risk of betrayal doesn't seem to lessen the sharing of secrets. Moreover, the unacknowledged possibility is that teen magazine secrets might be messages of betrayal.

Clinton's delicate situation shows how humans are passionately attracted to secrets. It's the same thing as the adolescent women whispering secrets during the research meetings. "Once we are told a secret about someone, then this secret may throw everything else we have ever known about this person into doubt." 11^(p72) We are caught up in interpretations and reinterpretations 8 of reality.

Given the nature of magazine secrets, are adolescent women caught in somewhat similar interpretations and reinterpretations of themselves? We don't know how Clinton's secret would play itself out. What would become of it? Was it his or ours? Yet we wanted to claim the secret and its interpretations.

Of course, then, there is the question about health. What does health have to do with this incident? Nurses know from their intimate work with people that secrets are delicately and complexly interwoven into people's lives. A woman, experiencing a stillbirth, tearfully and painfully confessed to me (not in secret) that the intensity of her grief came from not only losing her baby but also her husband to another woman-her best friend. But I would have not understood this had she not interrupted my understanding about grief with what could have been a secret.

The White House incident-all these incidents-make human existence more variegated and complex as we look at the health issues in each situation. The article in *Time* magazine in early 1998 informed us that Monica had fled, Clinton was flopped onto his bed, and Hillary was cleaning up the mess. ¹³ The downside of the White House revelations was suspicion towards the women, maligning the women (rather than the secret) as if the women were incapable of speaking truth. They were flipped into the margins with their words, trivial. Everything the women revealed was likely a maligning fabrication. "Prove it." Again, women's voices were not heard-silenced. The women appear messy, dirty, and contaminated in contrast to the man. Unjust as it may seem, "the secrets of women ... have traditionally been seen by men as potentially either threatening or alluring." ¹⁶(p40)

What about us? That public incident also affected us personally. As parents, teachers, and nurses, we were left with answering our children's questions. "Mommy, what is semen on the dress?" "What is a blow job?" Health questions? Yes. *Secrets*. This tale returned us to the messy particulars of answering children's questions. Magazine secrets can leave us in a similar sort of predicament and mess, asking and answering equally difficult questions.

Sex secrets, messy secrets, dark secrets, juicy, delicious secrets. We are intimately familiar with them. We are enchanted by them. Teen magazine secrets lead our children-my daughter-into something mysteriously compelling. The White House situation shows us that their tenuous existence depends on shadows, concealment, careful revelation, and people who want to know. Of course, "secrets have a way of getting out, and it takes strength not to betray them, and this is secretiveness." ¹⁵ Secrets signal the impending arrival of something, something worthwhile knowing. They are peculiar kinds of messages, but they are more than that. They bear witness about us, as receivers of secrets, and how we are drawn to them-and to secrecy itself, whether we want to or not. We live in a tradition enamored by secrets and desirous of possessing them.

Secrets grant power to those who hold them: ¹² a dynamic balancing of power (unnoticed by me) took place during the research meetings where the adolescent women gained and I lost. Faced with me as an adult, a nurse, a researcher, and a mother, perhaps the adolescent women negotiated their power using secrets, whispered annoyingly, during the research meetings. I was a part of the secrecy but outside that "sphere to which access is denied, except for those who belong to the sphere of intimacy." ¹¹(p70) The very thing about secrets that I am interpreting is the nature of secret as *it* was revealed in the research.

To enrich the interweavings secrets have with health, adolescents, and nurses, understanding secrets will be further extended through interpretive conversations about scent and bodily transformation in teen magazines. I will start with an adolescent woman talking about curiosity underlying the human attraction to secrets.

Curiosity

Cindy *It has to do with curiosity too, you know, you want to know what these secrets are.*

The adolescent woman reiterated an understanding about my own curious desire to know secrets. What do magazine secrets tell our children? The episodes of secrets, phenomenologically derived from incidents in ordinary daily life, speak to us of power and vulnerability; rituals, transgressions and confessions; curiosity, discovery, betrayal, and torture; places, borders between, margins, interiors, and exteriors; human relationships, silence and voice; the occult and the sacred; initiation and the initiated; privilege, elusiveness, promises, mysteries, tensions between revealing and concealing-tantalizing and paradoxical ways in which we experience secrets in our lives. In response to secrets, we eagerly and curiously (sometimes in veiled eagerness and curiosity) seek them.

Each person's curiosity differs. One secret might entice me whereas another might not interest me at all: the lure is as significant as the content. A secret entices a person to enter its mysteriousness and hiddenness. This "ness" ¹⁷ of mysteriousness and hiddenness, this etymological quality of concrete presence, is like the expression "Your Highness." "Your Highness," leads us to believe that the attachment of this expression to certain people entitles them to elevated human positions. Despite the promise of concrete presence, secrets are by their very nature hidden and mysterious, resisting our tendencies to know, creating peculiar feelings of mystery and attraction. ¹⁰ Their presence in teen magazines seems explainable in this regard.

An energetic rush surges through us in the presence of secrets. "Mention secret and we are all ears." ¹¹ ^(p17) We are enticed, open to the truth that secrets possess. Or so it seems. That "a secret may be a lie or wish or dream" ¹⁸ ^(p111) indicates the indeterminateness of its nature. Notice again the "ness." Secrets take tenancy, like squatters, in an elusive haunting territory. Aren't the secrets in teen magazines lies, wishes, and dreams? They might be, but curiosity for these lies, wishes, *and* dreams lures the reader into them.

The word, curiosity, is derived from *cura*, which means to care in Latin. ¹⁷ Curiosity encompasses studiousness, a kind of skillful inquisitiveness, like stickiness, that seems requisite for the adolescent women to learn about secrets. Nurses learn curiously about patients and share their secrets because it is part of nurses' caring, part of the intuitive understanding that secrets somehow pertain to health. It seems that adolescent women are educated (purposefully led) by teen magazines through flipping pages, curiously unearthing the secrets of adolescence that might be considered health secrets. Imagine yourself, 16 years old, like my daughter, staring at the popular teen magazine pages, attracted by the promise of secrets, feeling that strange stirring mix of pleasure, desire, and the forbidden.

Teen magazines speak with what Kant ¹⁵ calls human garrulity, emptying their repositories of secrets. The loquacious voice, similar to a mentoring woman's voice, tells secrets-to my daughter. I suspect, from a feminist perspective, that the voice is that of the male expert. The voice propagates certain kinds of information disguised as a female voice. It's like my colleagues and informants capturing my attention with their secrets.

Even though curiosity motivates the reader, the activity of flipping pages suggests little stickiness. However, the magazine article about scent secrets, which I will talk about next, *did* attract the attention of the adolescent women.

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Sacred ritual: Match it to him

Your Secret Scent Signals: "Get a whiff of this: Scientists say aromas influence attraction even more than any other factor (yup, even looks!). That means smells tell who you like, lust and loooooove." (*Teen*, January 1997, p. 70)

The word, secrets, invites the reader to examine the article just like the world wanting to learn about Clinton's secrets. Yet something was still bothersome about secrets: its explicit use in popular teen magazines was puzzling to me. I sought advice from a modeling agency owner who informed me women are drawn powerfully to secrets. In conversations with colleagues that included a man, the man thoughtfully considered that, "Men do not keep minute details of their lives and privilege them." Moreover, the owner of the modeling agency confirmed this. Because men do not feel the same magnetism of secrets, the word is not used in advertising for them.

The emphasis on women's attraction to secrets and mystery is a "sure thing" to sell them ideas and goods. Secrets appeal to that special status or power people feel, or in other words, the privilege women feel as receivers of secrets, as gifts and as kindnesses. The advertiser's implied message is that the reader is entrusted, sharing a special bond with the reader. "We disclose secrets with care as we develop dialogue with others who can be trusted to share and respect them." 19(p551) "They then become the coins of intimacy, and the currency of its transactions." 14(p259) After all, only an intimate should broach me on the topic of personal odor. However, there is no reciprocal sharing of secrets in teen magazines: the secrets are unidirectionally told to the reader who is supposed to listen. No voices reflect betrayal or challenge the magazine secrets: "this stuff doesn't work." It's inconsequential if the reader's confidence is betrayed: there is always another magazine-with more secrets.

"What's that smell?" The feature strikes at our intimate desires to belong, to be wanted, and to be appealing. Securing a "guy's" love is somehow more important than loving yourself.

Barbara *I read that. I didn't understand what the message was.*

Laugh

Nan *Yeah, what's the point.*

Laugh

Terri *I think it's right here. The scent is right on if you're a guy.*

Uh uh

Meg *Match it to your guy?*

The article about scent evoked comments about the meaning of the message. Women are taught that they smell and they must not offend the male nostril with their disgusting smells. 20 A secret underlying the scent secret is that the male is not an equal: the adolescent woman needs to subordinate herself and her potential preferences to the male by addressing his scent preferences. "Match it to your guy."

The normative values (ideology) around an odor conscious Eurocentric society is that "women are more attractive to men when they mask their human scent with the fragrance of flowers." 21^(p150) "It is considered feminine and erotic for a woman to smell like a bouquet of flowers." 21^(p151) There is, however, something left out of this discussion. Talk about pheromones, and the erotic, sensuous biological ways people connect with other humans through our odors, is left out of the talk about scents-kept secret. That the natural scent of armpit secretions from one group of women alters the menstrual cycle of another group of women attests to the secrets possessed by the human body.

Secrets were contained in 16th and 17th century books of secrets; recipes, with "esoteric wisdom, the domain of occult or forbidden knowledge." 20^(p5) Teen magazines seem to be a lineage from those sacred texts telling the reader about magic potions, promising anointment, and pleasure. Putting on scent is a "sacred act of anointment, solemn and joyous in one graceful gesture, a moment akin to the last rites in the feminine ritual of preparing body and soul to meet the unknown." 21^(p52) This anointing the body with the potion of scent is part of a sacred and secret ritual initiation into womanhood, a chosen one.

Nurses are implicated in this concern with smell. That mix of sweat with bacteria, in the production of stale body odor, is regarded by society as disgusting. 21 Do nurses talk about the secrets of offending odors, potions, attractions, culture, and preferences of men? Is it possible for nurses to use the word, secrets, to lure and motivate patients, particularly women, into health? This fuss about scent is not a harmless pleasure. The word conveys the age-old charge against women: "Unclean, unclean." 21^(p152)

One of the adolescent women put it forth plainly that she objected to being called "stinky." She said, "You're calling me stinky or something? Geeze." This comment candidly sums up how adolescent women are lured secretly to read the article: once hooked, they are subtly attacked and insulted-made to feel stinky or lacking in other dimensions. This article like others in the teen magazine imparts misogynist ideologies as secrets and offers prescriptive advice to remedy the adolescent's predicament. What other secrets do adolescent women need to know once they've attracted a "guy" with their scent secrets? Of course, scent secrets are not enough. One advertisement chosen by the adolescent women advises them on how to attract a "guy" with an ideal body type. The secrets for a shapelier body follows this section.

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Secrets for the transgressed body

"Get a Thinner, Firmer, Cuter Body!" The headline screams out at the young readers: to make it absolutely safe it's a "14-day trial" (*Teen*, April, 1997, p. 119). A young thin adolescent woman is depicted in the picture wearing a bikini. She is smiling, modeling the body every adolescent is supposed to desire. The "Body Changer" will teach the young woman how to make her body "firmer, shapelier, more feminine-looking" (*Teen*, April, 1997, p. 119). The advertisement promises that you can:

Lose weight from all over your body, have thinner, shapelier, more beautiful hips and thighs, a thinner, narrower waist, flatter, firmer abs and stomach, thinner, more beautiful legs, a firmer, shapelier behind, and shape, firmness and curves in all the right places. (*Teen*, April, 1997, p. 119)

The seduction using secrets begins. The adolescent woman imaginatively removes her clothing and regards her physical being. In seeming privacy, the adolescent is counseled, sold the story that her body has transgressed norms, and advised to transform it. Such a ghastly revelation demands that the adolescents rush to obtain a cure, the anecdote for their horribly disfigured body. The public

revelation of disfigurement is so horrifying that the adolescent women take on the challenge with humor.

Meg *Do it.*

Laugh

Barbara *Oh, rush. Get cuter fast. For your privacy, this package won't say who it is from or what's inside.*

Oh oh ho ho

Lucky us!

The research participants imagine the scenario when the package arrives in secrecy without any content markings. They know it's a secret that cannot be kept from their families. "They aren't gullible."

Gloria *Your parents saying, Gloria, here, there's something here in a brown box.*

(Mimicking parents and replies)

What is it?

I don't know

What was it? Because when

Nothing

Wrong address

Laugh

Meg *Yeah, exactly, your parents go to the mailbox, like, they're not going to be more curious what's like, inside this mysterious brown box?*

Supposedly, the purchase is delivered in secret to avoid shame, the feeling that can accompany the public revelation of a secret. ¹¹ It's the same as the revelation of private matters in places like the White House. Perhaps, shame prevents some patients from revealing particular secrets to nurses. The advertisement (versed in the secrets of customer acquisition) speaks to the reader in a frenzied tone. The reader is aroused to a "do it now." A completed order form is confession of bodily imperfection and submission to the advertiser. The "Body Changer," whatever it is, remains a secret. The promise of it is enough. Come to think of it, I shouldn't be surprised if a secret package arrives for my daughter.

Lack of confession suggests a preference for disease. ²³ The adolescent woman-the "funny-looking kid"-expresses mathematical disproportion, unfitness, incongruity, inequality in contrast to "an inflexible model of perfection by number and quantifiable form." ²⁴(p215) Like facial physiognomy, the correspondence between appearance and concealed cognitive and spiritual dimensions ²⁴ implicates our own human frailties. In other words, a person is only as good as the person looks. ²⁴

Needless to say, normality includes bodily imperfections ²⁴ but the magazine advertisement claims there is an existent ideal. The adolescent women resist the ideology with these comments.

Nan *If you want your chest bigger, girl, all power to you.*

Eh, *giggle*

Gloria *If you want your butt bigger, eh there you go....*

If you want your butt smaller.

Laugh

Belly, *back, it has everything in here.*

Meg *But anyone who knows anything about anything like OK, nutrition and exercises knows that, no matter what, there's no way you can make your chest bigger.*

The article really leaves the young woman with no choice. It tells the adolescent woman that she can look shamefully like her grandmother. This isn't a secret.

So it's all up to you. This summer, you can either have a lot of fun at the pool in your cute new bikini. Or, you can wear a one-piece swimsuit that's just like your grandma's. It's your choice! (*Teen*, April, 1997, p. 119)

The intermeshing of secrets goes like this: the promises of secrets, to be sent away for in secret, kept secret from the family, received in secret. The following conversation, even though full of humor, self-effacement, and distortion, reminds us poignantly about the adolescent women's concerns. You might think that the adolescents have a weight problem. In fact, they are tall, thin girls, between the ages 13 and 15 years.

Kay *I don't want people looking at me. I don't want people turning their heads every time I walk by cos I'm showing off my navel. It's just not*

Tina *I would if I had some abs.*

Laugh

Me too.

Lisa *You have abs.*

Kay *Well, they're like under 6 inches of flab.*

Laugh

I'd get them sooner or later if I do my crunches.

Laugh

Tina *Then I'll show it off.*

Laugh

Yes

Did we expect our young women to speak and act differently? We personally know of women who are in hot pursuit of secrets for attaining perfect bodies. Their voices breathe madly of fat, unshapely thighs, cellulite, bulging abdomens, wrinkles, and despised weight. Their endless complaints seem to spill out verbosely. Does anyone ever question the mindlessness of this?

This advertisement initiates and reinitiates adolescent women into "health" activities, potentially a lifetime of suspect practices by reinforcing an ideal body type. Have we forgotten something? We tell our children readily about strangers, drugs, and alcohol. But somehow, we've forgotten about the other strangers, media secrets, welcomed into our homes to sell us a whole range of suspect ideas and products.

Teen magazines commiserate with adolescent women over the "ugly" particularities of their bodies: the surfaces then become hidden, despicable, alterable, disposable. Something has to be done with their miserable bodies. In the advertisement, "Get a Thinner, Firmer, Cuter Body!," the adolescent woman is invited to imagine herself as invalid. On the clip-out coupon, she checks off the parts she wants to change: face, chin, neck, arms, hands, chest-want it bigger, chest-want it smaller, butt-want it bigger, thighs (outer), thighs (inner). How does this differ from the self-surveillance other women subject themselves to?

When particulars have no essential virtue, then my own virtue as a particular depends wholly and only on my subjectivity or on your desire for me, or fear of me: I must be desirable, attractive, a sex-object, or win importance and power. For without these investments in my particular person, coming either from your subjectivity or my own, I too am but a dead thing among dead things, potentially forever lonely. 25^(p88)

Teen magazines represent the adolescent woman, as a model, without soul and "no intimacy." 25^(p88) The adolescent women's consumptive desire (our own consumptive desire) for the things shown in magazines stems from the desire to "have and to hold, wholly dependent on the subject to breathe it into life with personal desire." 25^(p 88)

It has become women's sacred duty to fortify themselves against their inborn

vulnerabilities using the magazine guidelines, categories, and judgements: losing their sense of biological rootedness. We have lost the sense that "beauty is the manifest animal mundi." 25^(p301) Beauty is tied to the appearance of forms: "they are given, sense data, bare facts, Venus Nudata." 26^(p301)

Teen magazine pages contain incantations, spells, and secrets that cast adolescent women for successful initiation and passage through adolescence. We don't usually regard health messages as incantations, spells, alluring promises, secrets, and mysteries. Are secrets not ideologies? The pages of teen magazines offer seductive secrets and represent the undiscovered territory, beyond childhood, to be navigated towards adult womanhood. Secrets buffer against failure, the humiliation of a "failure" as a woman. I, too, am fascinated by the spell of secrets cast upon me by these teen magazines. I have something to learn, maybe something to explain how I am, and what I can do. These teen magazines secrete magic.

This interpretive inquiry is an opening to converse about the kin that popular teen magazine secrets have with the lifeworld and is an opening to other possible dialogue about secrets. Because human knowledge is partial, 2 this interpretation does not encompass all the possible conversations. For example, how nurses recognize and deal with both patient and professional secrets and silencing are significant issues for further development. "The best you can do for them [secrets] is think them, holding them, turning them over, wondering awhile." 18^(p144)

Critics of the American style of mind from de Tocqueville in the early nineteenth century on down have said this is not a land of ideas. We are superb at implementing, at making useful (practical?) inventions.... My idea about ideas in America is that we burn them up too quickly. We get rid of them by immediately putting them into practice. We only know one thing to do with an idea: apply it; convert it into something usable. And it dies right there in the conversation. It loses its generative power. 18^(pp141,142)

Secrets tell us something about our lives and as such encompass our being in the life-world. With interpretive inquiry, the important application for nurses is the possibility that we hold ourselves open to listen to adolescent women and to converse about teen magazines. Such listening is the heart of hermeneutics.

The word theory is related to the Greek *theorós*, which means spectator. 23 In interpretive inquiry, as substantively driven research, the presentation about secrets is the theory. As the reader of this interpretation, it is hoped that you have come to particular view and understandings about secrets through this research writing. Transformation is possible with understanding. "Coming to an understanding in a deep sense is at the same time to modify ourselves in such a way that we will act differently in the world." 27^(p10)

The interpretation of secrets entailed engagement and interpenetration with a multivocal world that invited me to look at a world in flux, as lived in all its tenuousness. 28 Interpretive work is about inter-dependencies, openings, multivocality, 29 temporality, 4 and the voices of children arriving again. 30 There are living relations that secrets have in the world that need reconnection and reaffirmation. My writing about teen magazines does not claim to be definitive, openings are already there for further dialogue about secrets and teen magazines in our lives.

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Key words: adolescent women; body image; feminist research; Gadamer; health messages; interpretive inquiry; popular teen; qualitative research; secrets; substantively driven research

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