‘I am luckily not the only one’

Analyzing the readers’ interpretations of texting advice in women’s magazines

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Abstract

The aim of this master thesis is to contribute to a more profound knowledge of women's magazine reading by giving insights into the readerships’ interpretations of magazine texts. Three different dimensions of interpretation were thereby identified: the relation to the audiences’ own situations in life, the audiences’ reflections on their prior experiences, and the emerging emotions in the interpretation process. Audience and reception theory, as well as feminist media theory, form the theoretical framework of my research. As audience reception concerns the dynamic interaction between text and the audiences’ reception of it, I decided to concentrate on both text analysis and qualitative interviews. With my qualitative, methodological approach – comprising an analysis of three articles concerning texting advice and interviews with six regular readers, I was able to explore nuances and depths of the phenomenon. I identified four interpretative repertoires which the women used for making meaning of the texts: pleasure, rejection, self-reflection, and practical relevance. Pleasure and rejection were found to be the women’s predominant emotions in the interpretation process. Moreover, my research illustrates that women are interpreting the texting advice in a practical as well as in a self-reflexive way. Their own circumstances and prior experiences are thereby variables, which influence the reception. My work strengthens the perspective of readers as being empowered to understand, evaluate, and critique the media content they consume. This is an important finding influencing society at large. As my research outlines, critical readings were found to be superior to possible ideological influences of women’s magazines. Future research should focus on a further in-depth analysis of individual influencing variables in relation to the audiences’ interpretations as I was only able to evaluate some in my study.

Key words – Women’s magazines / feminist media theory / reception study / decoding / texting advice / audience study
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1 Introduction

Media is becoming increasingly global as well as increasingly important in society – which can be determined as the two main reasons for resurgent feminist debates about ideological influences of media texts right now. The discussion around stereotypical representations, the legitimization of unequal relations, and the depiction of a restricted femininity are covered within the framework of regarding media texts as vehicles for the spread of dominant ideologies. Based on that, it is high time to reconsider if the audiences are passively affected or empowered to understand, assess, and critique the media content they consume. There is a demand for a better understanding of how the audiences feel about the representations and how they actually interpret it.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a more profound knowledge of women's magazine reading by giving insights into the readers’ interpretations of the magazine texts. Thereby, I will focus on texting advice articles as a practical example to study. Empirically, a qualitative study on women's magazine reading in Germany is conducted, because the topic is insufficiently studied in the specific geographical context. Methodologically, I will use a qualitative research approach with a combination of a textual analysis and in-depth interviews with readers in order to pay attention to their close interrelation. Theoretically, I draw upon established frameworks of audience and reception study, cultural studies and in addition, feminist media theory.

The main research question is: ‘How is texting advice in women’s magazines interpreted by their readers?’ By asking how the study focuses on the nuances and depths of the interpretation process. A qualitative approach is, therefore, conducted and doing research with some selected magazine readers is prioritized over a quantitative approach. Their interpretations should, however, not be regarded as representative. In this work, the reception will be analyzed and discussed in relation to the audiences’ own situations in life, prior experiences and the triggered emotions. In doing so, primarily attention is paid to their practice of evaluating and valuing texts differently according to their own context: social orientations, prior experiences, and the personal circumstances. Due to the complexity of the research question, I will further narrow it down according to these outlined dimensions of interpretation along this work.
My thesis provides definitions of the key terms and concepts relevant to my research in the following chapter. In chapter 3, I will contextualize my research problem and illustrate its problem area by introducing the concept of the ‘circuit of culture’. A theoretical framework around audience and reception theory, as well as feminist media theory, will guide my work and is illustrated afterward. In chapter 5, an overview of the existing literature in my research field will be provided and my own work positioned within it. A discussion of the German women's magazines context with structural developments and characteristics will be outlined in chapter 6. Subsequently, a correlation of the research question with this framework and, accordingly, an operationalization is covered. In chapter 8, I will outline and reflect upon the methodology of the qualitative approach with a text analysis and qualitative interviews. In the final chapter, I will summarize and discuss the main analytical findings in relation to the theoretical background that I provided and in relation to the main research question of my study: ‘How is texting advice in women’s magazines interpreted by their readers?’

2 Key Terms and Concepts
As outlined in the introduction, my research examines how the content of women’s magazines is perceived by the audiences by using the recipients’ interpretations of texting advice as an example. The terms ‘women’s magazines’, ‘texting advice’, and ‘interpretation’ are, therefore, of key importance to my work and need to be defined accordingly.

Women’s magazines
To define the term ‘women’s magazines’, I chose to provide a multi-step explanation. At first, magazines can be defined as:

‘Printed and bound publications offering in-depth coverage of stories often of a timeless nature. Their content may provide opinion and interpretation as well as advocacy. They are geared to a well-defined, specialized audience, and they are published regularly, with a consistent format’ (Johnson, Prijatel, 2007, p. 14).

Women’s magazines then are magazines which address female audiences. According to Ytre-Arne (2011), women’s magazines can be described as general interest magazines that take the idea of womanhood as the starting point, background and framework for everything else (p. 49). Based on that, I want to make a distinction between two types of
magazines. Müller (2010a) uses the terms ‘entertaining’ and ‘consultative’ to distinguish these two different types of women’s magazines – and only the latter type is matching with Ytre-Arne’s as well as my own definition of it. Entertaining women’s magazines cover topics with ‘sensation character’ like stories about royals and celebrities, but also puzzles and humor. Consultative ones, however, have fashion and beauty, lifestyle, psychology, and culture as main themes. Travel, food, health, interior, work, relationships, and society are also represented in these magazines, which are more expensive, of higher quality, and addressing – in comparison to the entertaining ones – younger audiences. Both typologies can be located within the general understanding of women’s magazines because they address female audiences. For my work, however, I will concentrate on consultative women’s magazines.

**Texting advice**

These women’s magazines cover texting advice as an increasingly important topic in recent years. Whereby texting – as a shortcut of text messaging – can be understood as short type-written messages sent via mobile telephones (Pettigrew, 2009, p. 697). This type of mediated communication has become a very popular communication tool with its relational dimension as a key characteristic. As Pettigrew (2009) outlines, 61 percent of texting is used to commence, advance, maintain or otherwise influence interpersonal relationships (p. 698). Because of this, advice around texting has become a central topic, which is frequently discussed in women’s magazines, especially covering expected and appropriate behavior as well as patriarchal and social norms. This specific type of advice is located within the framework of relationship advice; focusing on both initiating as well as maintaining relationships.

**Interpretation**

‘Interpretation refers to the way in which people make sense of their lives and the events, actors, processes, and texts that they encounter. This sense making is contextually resourced and often context dependent’ (Livingstone, Das, 2013, p. 1). In my work, interpretation is used in the context of audience reception, which then focuses on interpretative processes of the readers in relation to the text. As a synonym, I use the term ‘meaning-making’.
3 Context

In this section, I want to conceptualize my research problem. To get an understanding of the problem area, I will briefly outline the process each cultural text needs to pass and highlight the importance of the reception as a neglected part of media and cultural studies.

Circuit of culture

As a fundament for my study, I want to highlight the five major elements of a cultural process which each cultural text has to pass in order to be adequately studied. To me, it provides an essential framework for my reception study of women’s magazines – which can be categorized as a cultural text – because it locates my study in a larger context.

The elements are ‘representation’, ‘identity’, ‘production’, ‘consumption’, and ‘regulation’, and taken together, they constitute the so-called ‘circuit of culture’ (du Gay et al., 2013, p. xxx). One of the most important debates in cultural and media studies since the early 1980s is concerned with the relationship between these different aspects of a cultural process. As du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay and Negus (2013) outline, an analysis of a cultural text has to pass each moment of the circuit. This understanding was originally highlighted by Richard Johnson in his work What is cultural studies anyway? in 1986, but also recognized by researchers such as those outlined above (du Gay et al., 2013) and by Hall (1997). Though slightly different terms were used, they all acknowledged the connection between and inseparability of the elements of the ‘circuit of culture’. As Hall (1997) outlines, even though the elements can be regarded as relatively autonomous moments for media, their dependence, interaction, and surface are of main importance. Johnson (1986) designed a model in order to visualize the circular connection between the main elements. In doing so, he also highlights the need to not analyze the elements independently from each other, but rather to regard each of them as an element of a whole process and to pay attention to their mutual influences and interfaces. The author describes the elements as ‘production’, ‘text’, ‘readings’, and ‘lived cultures’.
Apart from the dependencies, the model—outlined in figure 1—functions as an argument that all elements are of equal importance; no element can be left out when analyzing a cultural text holistically. Johnson’s reason for stressing this was primarily that the production and reception of cultural texts were two neglected perspectives at the time of his publication in 1986. What he describes with the term ‘structuralist foreshortening’ is a limited analysis of cultural texts because the focus has mainly been on the text itself (Johnson, 1986, p. 63). A subordination of the aspects ‘production’ and ‘readings’ can be seen as a result, which an increasing number of researchers recognized and addressed afterward—as I will point out in my literature review. Livingstone (2015) highlights that audiences in particular are vital to completing the ‘circuit of culture’. She points to the need of further research with and on them, even if the studies in this field increased in recent years (p. 442). In the following, I will focus on audience research with a more specific focus on reception study to further narrow down the theoretical framework of my study, as I have identified it to be not sufficiently studied and moreover a central debate in the field: ‘The study of media audiences has long been hotly contested regarding their
supposed power to construct shared meanings, to mitigate or moderate media influences, or to complete or resist the circuit of culture’ (Livingstone, 2015, p. 439).

4 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Audience Research
Already in 1980, Hall observed ‘a new and exciting phase in so-called audience research’ (1980a, p. 131). Audience research can be described as one of the most exciting, interdisciplinary works in the field of media and communications because

‘researchers from the diverse approaches of uses and gratifications, social cognition, critical communications, popular culture, feminist communications, literary theory and cultural studies simultaneously converged on a common set of arguments about the possibility of active, interpretative audiences and the importance of researching these empirically’ (Livingstone, 2007, p. 11).

To me, it is an important research field as it challenges the dominant perspective that there are passively affected audiences. Instead, it pays attention to the audiences’ abilities of multiple meaning-making according to their own agendas.

4.2 Hall: Encoding and Decoding
Hall’s text Encoding/Decoding, published in 1980, can be declared as one of the most foundational works in the field. He designed an encoding/decoding model which challenged the traditional approaches to communication. It led to a shift from perceiving meaning as inherent in the text and received passively by the audiences to an understanding of meaning, which is depended on social and political orientations of the different audiences who decode it according to their circumstances. Hall argued that although encoders prefer certain readings over others – they can make restrictions on possible meanings by using normatively or ideologically preferable readings that are more accessible or easier to interpret for the audiences – they cannot determine texts’ meanings for readers (Livingstone, 2007, p. 8). Messages are always polysemic, which means that they do not have only one but multiple meanings depending on the audiences which are required to read them (Steiner, 2016, p. 105). Decoding occurs in the context of the preferred ways of encoding and furthermore in the context of different social circumstances of the audiences. Hall proposed four different codes: the dominant, the
oppositional, the negotiated, and the professional code (1980b). ‘When the viewer takes the connoted meaning full and straight and decodes the message in terms of the reference-code in which it has been coded, it operates inside the dominant code’ (Hall, 1980b, p. 136). In contrast, an oppositional code applies when the audiences understand but reject the intended meaning based on their different social and political backgrounds and suggest an oppositional interpretation (Hall, 1980b, p. 138). The third coding category, negotiated code, mixes these oppositional and adaptive elements and ‘acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations, while, at a more restricted, situational level, it makes its own ground-rules, it operates with ‘exceptions’ to the rule’ (Hall, 1980b, p. 137). The professional code reproduces ‘the dominant definitions precisely by bracketing the hegemonic quality and operating with professional coding’ (Hall, 1980b, p. 136). These codes are then intertwined with specific cultural codes. Later on in this thesis, the codes are being investigated in an analysis of the audiences’ decoding of women’s magazine texts.

4.3 Reception Study
Based on the framework provided by Hall, I want to focus on the theory of audience reception. According to Livingstone’s (2007) understanding, the term audience reception focuses on interpretative processes of the readers in relation to the text, as stated earlier in the definition section. Reception study contextualizes the readers who are actively interpreting media texts within the outlined, wider circuit of culture. This understanding is based on the fundamental assumption, outlined by Fiske (1987), that the meaning of a message is not fixed or pre-given but must be interpreted by its recipients. Recipients, audiences, communities – the interpreting subject is thereby described in plural because of the heterogeneity of people and their belonging to different interpretative communities which in turn leads to multiple readings of media texts (Schrøder, 1994, p. 338). This perspective has developed in recent years – from treating audiences as a homogenous mass to recognizing their heterogeneity, as Fiske illustrated firstly in 1987. According to Livingstone, heterogeneity is also determined by social knowledge and prior experiences. She contributed important findings of the reception perspective to the field of audience studies as she examined the procedure of a reception process: comprehension, implication, and association, as well as response, can be categorized as the three main elements of a reception process (Livingstone, 2007).
Firstly, comprehension refers to the process of decoding the denotative level of a textual meaning and understanding the information conveyed within the text. This can, in contrast to an interpretation, be judged correct or incorrect. Secondly, through processes of implication and association, the connotative level of textual meaning is decoded. Thirdly, the audiences’ responses to decoded meanings – as outlined earlier – depend on their own personal and contextual circumstances (Livingstone, 2007, p. 3). The understanding of audience reception as a variable process is one factor I want to stress primarily. Among audience reception theorists, a focus on open, evaluative, and interpretative processes can be determined. According to Livingstone (2007), the experience and knowledge of the reader play a central role in decoding the text. Her study is centered upon television programs, but the important questions she poses can be adapted to examine women’s magazines as well: by asking *What do programs ‘expect’ of their viewers? And what do audiences ‘bring’ to making sense of television?,* she pays attention to the distinction between implied and actual readers. Reception study needs to evaluate whether audiences possess and use the knowledge invited from them by the text and which resources the audiences use when interpreting it (p. 5).

Relating the reception process to other processes within the circuit of culture is of main importance. Ang (1990) expresses concern that reception studies isolate one moment in the cultural process as being of ultimate significance and ignore the wider sociocultural conditions of audience practices. An isolated analysis of the process should not be undertaken, as highlighted in the context of the circuit of culture. In addition, a combination of different analyses is useful, which I will adapt for my study by using a combination of a text analysis and a reception study in the form of qualitative interviews with regular readers. The aim is to focus on their interrelation within the circuit of culture.

### 4.4 Feminist media theory

Women’s magazines have been analyzed from many different perspectives – feminism is the most discussed and outstanding one of them all. Feminism can be defined as ‘an emancipatory, transformational movement aimed at undoing domination and oppression’ (Steiner, 2014, p. 359). Based on that, ‘feminist media theory applies philosophies, concepts, and logics articulating feminist principles and concepts to media processes such as hiring, production, and distribution; to patterns of representation in news and entertainment across platforms; and to reception’ (Steiner, 2014, p. 359). Important to
mention is that it addresses power due to the media’s reach and possibility to spread dominant ideologies and influence people.

Feminist media theory is concerned with a wide range of different topics like underrepresentations of women in leading positions of media organizations, negative and limited stereotypical depictions of women in media or sexual objectification of women in media. Over time, the topics and analytical frameworks have changed in accordance with social and cultural changes. My literature review will give a more detailed overview on that, while this part is constructed to provide a general theoretical fundament focusing on the essential characteristics of the theory.

The first study around feminist media theory can be dated back to the 1960s when Betty Friedan published *The feminine mystique* (1963). In her critical reflection on popular women’s magazines, she claimed the ideological importance of women’s magazines because they were found to present stereotypical images of women, and these images were assumed to affect the readers. Ideological messages which legitimize and naturalize unequal relations, or the construction of restricted femininity around fashion, beauty and ‘how to get a man’ were covered in the reflections (Gill, 2009, p. 248). Over time, however, a more sophisticated view of key concepts in feminist media theory such as resistance, pleasure, and empowerment, was added to the discussion. According to Steiner (2007), post-feminists claimed that women are empowered – in terms of individual choices about sex, marriage, family life, work, and lifestyles – and also as audiences (p. 370). This development occurs in accordance with general developments in cultural studies, which I outlined above highlighting the movement from text analysis towards audience and reception study. This perspective is applicable to feminist media theory, as Radway outlined in 1984: instead of analyzing media text – assumed to be read as increasing gender inequality – there is a need to understand and research how the media texts are actually read and interpreted by their female audiences. Thereby, particularly Hall’s emphasis on how audiences can produce oppositional or negotiated meanings is important in relation to the reception of feminist content (1980b).

Overall, feminist media theory emphasizes ideology and pleasure, patriarchal gender norms, and potential feminist resistance (Ytre-Arne, 2011, p. 27) and is characterized by its dualism, as summarized by Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron (1991),
specifically focusing on women’s magazines: ‘Why, when their contents fill us with outrage, do we nevertheless enjoy reading them?’ (p. 1). In stating this, the authors point to the simultaneous attraction and rejection towards women’s magazines. In my thesis, women’s magazine articles are analyzed against the background of encouraging the spread of dominant ideologies and gender norms. Moreover, interviews with the readers cover the perspectives of pleasure, resistance, and the women’s empowerment to use the content for their own agendas.

5 Literature Review

In this chapter, I want to position my study in relation to earlier research in the field of women’s magazines by highlighting them. My discussion is focused on studies which I regard as being the most influential ones, and I will outline these selected ones in detail in the following sections instead of trying to represent a complete review of the field. I decided on four sub-categories as a framework for this literature review: the methodological perspective, the specific advice perspective, the feminist perspective and the German contribution to the field. I will refer to and deepen the main theoretical concepts influencing my work by synthesizing the existing literature around it.

5.1 Methodological perspective: from text to readers

As outlined above, text analysis has been the dominant method for analyzing women’s magazines in the past, especially until the 1990s. These studies aimed to identify the effects of women’s magazines on the readership by analyzing their content. What does the medium do with the reader – not what does the reader do with the medium – has been the major research topic at that time. Originally, this perspective derives from the Frankfurt School – especially from the critical theorists Adorno and Horkheimer who tended to view the audiences as passive, subordinated, and as objects of manipulation. Women’s magazines, on the other hand, were characterized as a tool to manipulate women and spread a dominant ideology and role models (Müller, 2010a, p. 13). Cultural studies scholars, inspired by the Frankfurt School, analyzed women’s magazine texts in order to unveil ideological messages (Ballaster et al., 1991).

The first early studies on audiences were provided by Winship (1987) and Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron (1991), who paid attention to the readers’ experiences in consuming women’s magazines. Ballaster et al. responded to the historical tendency to
make claims about readers and reading effects without doing audience research, by delivering one chapter with a combination of a text analysis and a focus group study. The interviews showed that the women were aware of particular discourses, codes, and conventions of women’s magazines. A critical awareness of the interviewees when reading magazines was demonstrated, the researchers, however, limited the readers’ abilities to reshape and deconstruct the presented content in their analysis (Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 131). The other example is Winship’s study, which puts emphasis on the reception of women’s magazines in relation to ideology. Methodologically, her study is a text analysis as well; she analyzed a range of magazines from different genres and periods. However, Winship outlined the pleasure of magazine reading for the readership – a perspective that has not been highlighted earlier (Ytre-Arne, 2011, p. 19). One of the most important contributions to the readership perspective was provided by Hermes (1995). In her study, she aimed to make the pleasure of women’s magazine reading comprehensible by identifying that women’s magazines become meaningful for readers through their integration into everyday life (Hermes, 1995, p. 176). The author has undertaken eighty interviews because she argued that text analysis alone is insufficient for understanding women’s magazines.

As a second step, she used a repertoire analysis as a coding method to outline the ways in which her interviewees utilized and understood women’s magazines. In doing so, Hermes identified several repertoires, classified in two main categories, which readers used when talking about women’s magazines: the descriptive repertoires – with the easily put down repertoire and the repertoire of relaxation as sub-categories – and the interpretative repertoires – such as the repertoire of connected knowing and the repertoire of practical knowledge. Ytre-Arne aimed to identify ways in which readers interpret magazines in her publication Positioning the self (2011) where she also took a closer look into the relation of interpretation and identity. However, she did not use repertoires as an explanation of how women’s magazines become meaningful to their readers. Instead she has formulated discourses interviewees drew upon while talking about women’s magazine reading (p. 248). To her, discourses are frames of references or systems of meaning-making. She used, for example, the information discourse (which is the practical value of information that is relevant to the interviewees everyday experience), fantasy discourse (capturing magazines as a way of daydreaming and escaping the dull everyday life) or realism discourse (magazines should be relevant and realistic to readers’ everyday lives) (Ytre-Arne, 2012, p. 249). As the two examples
outline, there were different methodological approaches in previous research on how to make sense of the readership’s perspective. With regard to the focus of my study, the repertoire of practical knowledge and the repertoire of emotional learning, which Hermes highlights, are of main importance because texting advice could encourage both practical implementations and emotional reflections. Women’s magazines offer material that may help to imagine a sense of control in life, since it can help the readers feel more prepared for difficult decisions, practical situations, and emotional crisis. The women get the feeling that those situations are manageable – may it be having a disabled child, cooking a menu for the whole family or texting at an early stage of a relationship (Hermes, 1995, p. 144). The magazines provide advice and material for comparisons, which can be regarded as opportunities for emotional learning – an essential finding in earlier research in relation to my research focusing on texting advice (Hermes, 1995, p. 149).

5.2 Research on advice in women’s magazines

Apart from the most outstanding, outlined research on women’s magazines, I want to summarize earlier research in the specific field of advice-giving in women’s magazines. Gupta, Zimmerman, and Fruhauf (2008) focused on a text analysis of 100 advice articles about intimate couple relationships – published in Cosmopolitan magazine – in their work. What they pointed to is that ‘many of the ads, pictures, and articles deliver information and messages to the female consumer about relationships and appropriate and desirable female behavior’ (p. 249). Their analysis of the advice showed that some messages can be categorized as being helpful, but the evaluation criterion for helpfulness has been a consistency with marriage and family literature on healthy couple relationships – they did, however, not verify the helpfulness by the readers themselves. Furthermore, they pointed to a presumption of heterosexuality, a superficial perception of couple intimacy and showed that the majority of the advice portrayed stereotypical gender messages (p. 257). Two other studies highlight gendered advice which reflects upon unequal gender relations as well. Both studies proved that women are depicted as being the ones who are in charge of doing the emotional labor (Lulu, Alkaff, 2017, Gill, 2009). Lulu and Alkaff have undertaken research on sex and relationship advice columns in a different cultural context – namely on one Malaysian and two Middle Eastern magazines. Within their research, they regarded the main messages promoted by the three magazines and the authors’ aim was to identify whether these messages reflect or challenge dominant norms and values of society. With their text analysis, they revealed a strong connection
between the dominant values of the society and the advice texts. Moreover, it was found to be the women’s responsibility to take care of sex and relationship issues – a finding that Gill (2009) pointed out in her research as well. She identified the three dominant themes in relationship and sex advice articles of the UK edition of Glamour in her discourse analytical study. Firstly, the perfect partner and relationship are presented as ‘goals’ that need planning; secondly, women need to have knowledge on how to please, reassure, and understand men, and thirdly, women are encouraged to transform their bodies, sexual practices, and psychic lives in order to appear sexually confident. These studies point to different relevant aspects for my study: the relationship between men and women in the sense of role models and gender equality; the influence of current societal values and norms as well as the expected responsibilities of women. Overall, this review of research on advice-giving in women’s magazines shows that the tendency of moving from text analysis to audience and reception study has not been sufficiently implemented in prior studies. Because of this, I aim to do so with the methodological focus of my thesis where an audience and reception study constitutes the main element and is supplemented by a text analysis.

5.3 Feminist perspective: from concern to respect

The introduction into feminist media theory pictured the development and essential scholars is the field of feminist studies on women’s magazines, therefore this section focuses on the view of the readerships from a feminist perspective. This is essential due to the reception study framework of my study and its focus on the readerships. Two poles can be identified in earlier studies: research focusing on concerns about the readerships which are affected by the ideological stance of women’s magazines and studies showing respect for them as they find meaning and pleasure in reading women’s magazines. According to Hermes (1995), almost all of the studies on women’s magazines show preoccupation rather than respect for those who read them (p. 1). The fundament for the perspective can be dated back to the outlined work by Friedan in 1963 about the ideological impact of women’s magazines. Hermes, however, claimed that it is more productive to accept and respect the readers’ choice of reading women’s magazines rather than criticizing them from a researcher’s distant position (p. 2). In her research, she has taken a positive and respectful feminist point of view, which includes understanding and accepting the readers’ preferences and positioning them in the center of the study. Based on this classification, Winship (1987) and Ballaster et al. (1991) – two early reception
studies mentioned above – also recognized the readers in doing research with and on them. Winship focused on the pleasure of women’s magazine reading by analyzing the role of it in everyday life and society. Ballaster et al., on the other hand, emphasized the harmful qualities of women’s magazines in their work and have, therefore, taken a concerned feminist standpoint. In contrast, Hermes’ position can be located at the oppositional pole of respectful treatment of the readerships – showing an ‘appreciation that readers are producers of meaning rather than the cultural dupes of media institutions’ (Hermes, 1995, p. 5). This perspective was supported by other feminist scholars. Frazer (1987) disagreed on the ideological effects of women’s magazines and van Zoonen outlined that women’s magazines have unjustifiably been regarded as particularly ‘problematic’ by feminist critics, raising unprecedented concern with the female audiences (1991, p. 44).

Overall, there are two existing poles in the feminist perspective on analyzing women’s magazines. Firstly, regarding women’s magazines as vehicles for pleasure or, secondly, regarding them as purveyors of oppressive ideology (Gill, 2007, p. 347). Because of the interrelation of changes in feminism and media, a tendency towards a respectful appreciation of the readers can be determined in relation to the overall shift towards a recognition of audiences in media studies (Steiner, 2014, p. 370). It is treated appreciative that women find pleasure in reading women’s magazines and are empowered to understand, assess, and critique the media content they consume.

5.4 Research on German women’s magazines

Due to the fact that I am focusing on the reception of German women’s magazines in my study, it is essential to outline earlier relevant research in that geographical context. I want to highlight Müller’s works Das Besondere im Alltäglichen (2010), Frauenzeitschriften aus der Sicht ihrer Leserinnen (2010a), and Hannah Wilhelm’s Was die neuen Frauen wollen (2004). The three studies provide examples for reception studies on German women’s magazines. Wilhelm (2004) contributed insights into how readers use magazines in their everyday lives. Her study of the German edition of the magazine Glamour outlined which needs that are being satisfied when reading the magazine. Müller (2010a) did nineteen qualitative interviews with the readers of the German Brigitte and paid primarily attention to the societal context as an influential factor on reception (p. 13). Moreover, she outlined that the reception shapes and is shaped by everyday life.
experience (Müller, 2010, p. 176). Doing research on the practical relevance and the translation of texts into the everyday life, led to interesting findings in relation to my topic. Advice from the departments of psychology, cooking, and health were found to be justified by the readers according to their own experiences and personal knowledge (Müller, 2010, p. 183). The women in Müller’s study illustrated that they talk about advice given in the psychology-department, for example with friends or with their romantic partner in order to give them an understanding of topics which are relevant to them (p. 182).

Nevertheless, none of the earlier studies provided knowledge about how readers interpret the magazine texts in relation to what is being offered and is intended to be represented. In an international comparison, Ytre-Arne (2011) did partly so on the Norwegian market, Ballaster et al. (1991) on British women’s magazines, and Hermes (1995) on Dutch. Ytre-Arne is the most comparable one to my study in terms of method and context because she combined qualitative interviews with readers of women’s magazines with a text analysis of magazine texts in order to identify the connection and overall relevance of women’s magazines for them. Her perspective drew upon Hermes’s (1995) respectful recognition of the readers as she has highlighted the readers’ abilities for critical reading which, in her opinion, is superior to possible ideological influences (Ytre-Arne, 2011, p. 97).

My study will add a new level to the audience research on the German women’s magazine-field by providing knowledge on how readers interpret selected magazine texts – this I will achieve by using the example of texting advice articles. Based on that, it is essential to give insights into the German women’s magazine market and its readerships which I will do in the following section.

6 German women’s magazine market

The German magazine market

As a current study by Zeitschriftenverlegerverband VDZ outlines, 94 percent of all Germans are frequently reading magazines (VDZa), the circulation of consumer magazines in Germany is stable (ag.ma) and the number of new magazines increases further (Handelsblatt, 2017). The statements show that the current status quo of the German magazine market is overall very positive. To characterize the market, a general classification is needed which includes a distinction between the two major parts:
professional magazines and consumer magazines, whereby the latter is of main importance for this work (VDZa). By looking at the two key determinants ‘number of titles’ and ‘circulation’, I want to provide an understanding of the market – sales and publisher concentration, however, two additional determinants to describe the market are neglected because they are more focused on the publisher perspective than on the readership perspective. The numbers published by VDZ are the chosen ones for my thesis.

At first, VDZ highlights the constantly increasing number of consumer magazines. The proportion between discontinuation and new releases clearly leads to an increasing number of magazines. In 2017, 90 new magazines were launched and 37 closed which leads to a number of 1.607 consumer magazines on the German market in 2018.

The continuous increase, illustrated in figure 2, shows that publishers are steadily expanding their title portfolio according to readers’ specializing and changing needs. The market is characterized by diversification and specialization, leading to fragmentations of the market but at the same time prohibiting regressive developments. Because, while the number of magazines increases, the circulation has decreased (Handelsblatt, 2017). This development occurs in spite of increasing prices for magazines: an average price per magazine of 1.90 euro in 2011 increased by 8 percent to 2.05 euro in 2015 (VDZ).
The German women’s magazine market

Women’s magazines can be categorized as being part of the introduced magazine type consumer magazines and will be regarded in-depth in this section. As Vogel states in Der Tagesspiegel, women’s magazines are one of the few still growing markets within consumer magazines (Tagesspiegel, 2016). One reason for that is their successful adaption to the fragmented market with its niche audiences. One the one hand, publishers of popular and well-established magazines use steady innovations to enlarge their portfolio with additional publications around relevant, specialized topics like travel, wedding, or fitness. Additional examples are pocket-sized magazines and celebrity titles, which are launched to a greater extent in recent years. Moreover, publishers develop a broad spectrum of new magazines to enter the market and address women of each possible age group, relationship status, profession, and lifestyle. This results in a growing number of magazines in total. Early studies already pointed to an increase of 60 percent from 1990 until 2005 (Media Impact, 2007) and the number raised again from 72 magazines in 2005 to 117 magazines in 2018 (about 62 percent, IVWb). The total number of 117 magazines can be divided into three different segments which constitute the German women’s magazine market: weekly, biweekly, and monthly magazines. In the first quarter of 2018, 34 titles were published weekly, five biweekly and 78 monthly (IVWb). As outlined, the weekly magazines – introduced as ‘entertaining magazines’ – are of secondary relevance for this work and therefore neglected in this section.

The leading monthly women’s magazine ranked by circulation in Germany in the first quarter of 2018 is Glamour with 288.568 copies sold per issue, followed by InStyle with 264.378. In the segment of the biweekly magazines, Brigitte is the leader with 398.279 copies sold, followed by Freundin with 237.867 copies sold (IVW). Three out of these four listed magazines function as a case study – because they cover texting advice articles in the required format for my thesis – and will be outlined in more detail because each magazine offers its readerships a particular way of making sense of the world (Ballaster et al., 1991, p. 29). Every magazine has a different thematic focus, addresses different audiences when it comes to age, profession, income, and lifestyle and a more detailed examination is, therefore, appropriate. It is thereby crucial to mention that Freundin is an established, local German magazine, whereas both InStyle and Glamour are international magazine brands. Their local editions are adapted to the German market, while specifications of the international InStyle and Glamour brand need to be considered which
can have an impact on the magazines’ visual appearance and textual bias. The readers’ awareness of this different contexts could influence their interpretations in terms of reliability and identification which needs to be regarded further in the analysis.

**Freundin** is positioned as being close to the life of modern women by illustrating what makes life better and easier: fashion, beauty, good food, and a cozy home. The magazine inspires, supports, entertains, and never forgets that women are not perfect and do not want to be, but it is rather about enjoying life. The magazine was launched in 1948 and is published biweekly since then. The magazine has a copy price of 3.00 euro and reaches out to 1.97 million readers (BCN Freundin).

**InStyle** offers its readers an overview of the latest trends and gives impulses and advice for their own fashion and beauty style as well as presenting fashion and lifestyle of celebrities. The monthly magazine was launched in 1999, has a copy price of 4.00 euro, and reaches out to 1.3 million readers (BCN InStyle, IVWa).

**Glamour** is characterized by its fashion and beauty focus: the latest trends, hairstyles as well as news about stars and tips around love and lifestyle are covered in the magazine. The goal of the monthly magazine is to entertain – *Glamour* reaches 1.38 million readers, costs 2.20 euro a copy and entered the market in 2001 (Conde Nast).
The German women’s magazine readerships

To provide a general background about the readerships, it is essential to highlight that 78 percent of all women in Germany aged between 20 and 60 read women’s magazines (Media Impact, 2007). However, Müller points to a typical phenomenon in relation to the readerships of women’s magazines which is called ‘social desirability’ and describes the uncomfortable feeling of admitting things which are negatively connoted. According to her, in Germany, reading women’s magazines is more stigmatized than in other countries. When asking German women if they read women’s magazines, most of them negate, which is important to mention because reading women’s magazines then becomes a negative connoted activity.

‘The readers are conscious about the reputation of women’s magazines as irrelevant, unreliable and not serious and the readership, therefore, does not like to admit that they read it. Women’s magazines are like a porn: almost everyone uses them but somehow nobody wants to talk about it’ (Müller in Becker, Zobl, 2015).

While this finding influences my overall research project, it does not limit market research bureaus in providing reliable data. ‘ma 2018 Pressemedien’ is my chosen source which did research on about 36,000 people and provides essential information about women’s magazines’ readerships. Out of this, I extracted the most relevant demographic background information for my work (Axel Springer, 2018).

As figure 3 outlines, more than 50 percent of the women, who are reading women’s magazines, are working, which influences their motivation in magazine reading, their preferred content as well as their spending capacity.
The age structure and net income are two essential indicators for a broad scope of women which is reached by the magazines. As the figures 4 and 5 outline, the age and net income are almost equally distributed, which again shows that ‘a magazine for each woman’ exists. (Axel Springer, 2018)

At the same time, it points to the need of a specific readership analysis of the three chosen magazines – which mirror the width of the German women’s magazines’ readers – to get a coherent readership profile. As a first classification criterion, the age structure highlights the different readerships of each magazine, outlined in figure 6.
Figure 6: age structure of women’s magazine readers

_Freundin_ is the magazine with the highest conformity to the overall women’s magazines’ readership. The age group of 40 to 49 year-old women, which is their declared main target group, is above average and the age group of 70 plus is below average. In comparison, both _Glamour_ and _InStyle_ address the age group of 50 to 70 plus below average, while focusing especially on a younger readership. For _Glamour_, 91 percent of the readers are between 14 and 49 with an average age of 30 (Conde Nast); for _InStyle_, it is 86 percent and an average age of 32 (BCN InStyle). This needs to be regarded in contrast to _Freundin_ that has an average readership age of 48 (BCN Freundin) because it has a major influence on the magazines’ orientations and also determines their content. While _Freundin_ addresses women who have a career, family, home, and a constant circle of friends, _Glamour_ is more centered upon women who start a career, want to increase their performance in the job and spend money on fashion, beauty, and shopping in general. The
settled woman versus the one who is seeking for orientation could be a classification. Another fact accompanying the finding is that 84 percent of Freundin’s readership are housekeepers; in contrast, for Glamour, it is only 59 percent and for InStyle 62 percent. Moreover, it is outstanding that Glamour addresses above average people who are still in education. This categorization of the three magazines provides an important fundament for the following analysis of the texting advice because the readership profiles influence the content as well as the supposed interpretations significantly.

**Limitations**

With a focus on this geographical context, attention is paid to a specific cultural phenomenon. This, however, implies a normative readership, which is thus racialized because women who are not part of the addressed privileged, white, Western society are excluded – as my text analysis will highlight later on.

7 Research focus

7.1 Research questions

As a part of the introduction, I have stated my overall research question: ‘How is texting advice in women’s magazines interpreted by their readers?’ In this section, I want to operationalize the question, which means identifying explicit attributes that allow for a distinctive evaluation of my research question. A connection of the research question to the outlined theoretical framework determines the operationalization and shows that several dimensions are influencing the decoding process. As I have outlined, Livingstone (2007) mentions prior experiences, Hermes (1995) pays attention to the emotions that come to play, and Müller (2010a) identifies the everyday life circumstances to be affecting the reception. Based on that, my research is concerned with the following dimensions of interpretation, which I formulated as specific research questions:

1. How is texting advice in women’s magazines interpreted in relation to the audiences’ own situations in life?
2. How is texting advice in women’s magazines interpreted in relation to the audiences’ reflections on their prior experiences?
3. Which emotions can be determined by the audiences’ interpretation of the texting advice in women’s magazines?
7.2 Research paradigm

Providing a context for my research does not only mean to highlight the influencing theories and the existing literature as a frame; it is also necessary to introduce my research paradigm. According to Collins (2010), ‘a paradigm can be thought of as a lens through which we view the world’ (p. 38). For my work, interpretivism is the applied one because of its aim ‘to understand the social world as it is (the status quo) from the perspective of individual experiences’ (Rossman, Rallis, 2003, p. 46). I ground my research on the understanding that individuals actively produce meaning to the world. Within this work, I value their personal, subjective observations and individual experiences and interpretations by doing qualitative interviews with the readers, who are positioned in the center of my research.

8 Methodology

In this section, I want to outline the methodological decisions I made on the basis of the research question which I seek to explore. Based on the argument that the main issue of audience reception concerns the dynamic interaction between text and reception, my decision is to concentrate on both text analysis and qualitative interviews and focus on their interrelation (Livingstone, 2007, p. 12). With this qualitative approach, I aim to provide a holistic and comprehensible analysis of the interpretation of women’s magazines by their readers. Already in 1986, Johnson pointed to the need to develop a text-based study which connects to the readership-perspective – however, it is still underrepresented in academic research (p. 74).

A qualitative analysis

In earlier studies on women’s magazines, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used – varying in their focus on particular aspects of the complex topic. For example, quantitative research aimed to identify recurring phenomena in women’s magazines with studies of a great number of articles or different magazines. To my specific research focus, however, a qualitative methodology can be seen as the more appropriate approach. Understanding the readers’ subjective experiences and interpretations is in the center of my attention and qualitative methods aim to explore and interpret the nuances, ambivalences, and depths of this. The social, personal, and cultural context and everyday-life practices are of importance as well and can be examined with a qualitative approach.
(Ytre-Arne, 2011, p. 57). However, the results gained through qualitative research are not as generalizable as the ones of quantitative research because of the small number of participants. The limited representativeness is important to mention, but it does not mean that no relevant and transferable concepts, theories or hypotheses can be developed. On the contrary, with the qualitative approach I will present in detail in the following, I aim to identify concepts which are of relevance to other empirical research.

8.1 Text analysis

For my research, a qualitative text analysis was designed as a preliminary benchmarking analysis before undertaking qualitative interviews with the readers. I then used the analyzed texts in these interviews in the form of a copy test. Therefore, the formal reading of the texts was required to be as open and multi-layered as possible to identify preferred positions and frameworks as well as alternative readings (Johnson, 1986). Furthermore, as Hermes (1995) stressed, it was essential that the text analysis is not applied as a researcher’s superior reading. Ytre-Arne (2011) followed this by designing a reader-guided analysis to completely understand how the magazine texts appear to the readership (p. 70). To me, it seemed to be important to do an analysis before the interviews in order to identify possible readings that I can refer to in the interview, which then contained the interviewees reading and interpretation of the selected and analyzed texts.

Selecting texts

In selecting the sample for my textual analysis, several factors came into play. At first, the articles’ topic needed to be texting advice. Furthermore, due to the fact that the selection of the texts occurred in an interplay – and also at the same time – with the selection of the informants, the target group of the magazines, in which the articles were published, needed to match the age group of my interviewees. In addition, I aimed to choose articles which not only differ in their target group but also in the type of advice they provided, in the language, and format to be able to identify as many influencing factors as possible. Overall, the three chosen ones can be classified as being representative for the wide range of texting advice articles in women’s magazines – they can be found attached in the appendix I-III, while I provide a summarizing list of them below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th><em>InStyle</em> (published in Germany)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of magazine’s main target group</td>
<td>20 – 29 (see figure 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of publication</td>
<td>10 August 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of article</td>
<td>Flirt-texting-etiquette: Get him answering your messages – immediately! <em>(German: Flirt-Texting-Knigge: So antwortet er dir auf deine Nachrichten – und zwar sofort!)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status of targeted women</td>
<td>Women in every stage of dating or a relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Advice | 1. Use simple formulations  
2. Ask questions to get him answering  
3. Timing: text in the morning (weekdays) or Saturday/Sunday afternoon  
4. Answer directly  
5. The timespan for him answering can be five to six hours |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Glamour (published in Germany)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of magazine’s main target group</td>
<td>20 – 29 (see figure 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of publication</td>
<td>29 January 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of article</td>
<td>Against the impulse: do simply not text (German: Wider den Impuls: Einfach mal nicht schreiben)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship status of targeted women</td>
<td>Women in an early stage of a relationship and singles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Advice            | 1. Do not text when drunk!  
                          2. Do not text when angry!  
                          3. Do not text many messages in a row! |
Data collection

As McKee (2003) outlines, a textual analysis on a text is making an educated – because of the researcher’s background knowledge on the topic – guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text (p. 1). In order to identify why the three texts encourage audiences to interpret them in certain ways, I choose to analyze the following criteria: language and punctuation, choice of words, and selection of images (Bainbridge, 2011, p. 227). The context as an essential criterion for a text analysis has already been analyzed during the selection process: the type of media product in which the text is located and the country of origin. I aim to pay primarily attention to the ‘exnomination’, which describes the phenomenon that dominant ideas become so obvious that they seem to be common sense because of the central finding in women’s magazine research that the media texts encourage the spreading of dominant ideologies (Bainbridge, 2011, p. 230). My text analysis is designed to identify ways in which media texts support or subvert aspects like unequal relations between men and women or the legitimization of a stereotypical, female role model. Having this said, it is important to keep in mind that media texts are polysemic – as already outlined – which means that they are open to many interpretations (Bainbridge, 2011, p. 228).

8.2 Qualitative interviews

The main component of my study is the reception analysis of these selected texts and in addition to this, I aim to identify the relevance and effects of women’s magazines and texting advice in specific. Interviews are a commonly used method in reception research
because they can be used to understand underlying reasons and motivations for people’s attitudes, preferences, and behavior and are, therefore, appropriate for my study (Collins, 2010, p. 134). A semi-structured interview-design is selected because it allows for comparison between the interviewees’ answers on the one hand and on the other hand provides scope for the individual participants to express themselves in detail (Collins, 2010, p. 134).

**Selecting informants**

Initially, I wanted to focus on regular readers of women’s magazines who are single or in an early stage of a relationship – I defined ‘early stage’ as the first year of a relationship. Regular readers, to me, are people who actively and frequently choose to read magazines. In order to match the defined main target group of the magazines, the age was limited from 20 to 49 years, with a focus on the age group 20 to 29 because both *Glamour* and *InStyle* have their target group focus there. In total, the number of five interviews was defined, with the opportunity to enlarge the number in case the need for further in-depth knowledge would arise. As Gray (2002) outlined, it is about the richness of the research material rather than the actual number of informants or interviews (p. 101). I aimed to find my participants through a fitness studio in Hamburg (*Kaifu Lodge*) because I expected women’s magazine readers to be members there. The reason for that was the magazines’ target group descriptions which were found to be similar to the women the fitness studio addressed on their homepage. I created a posting on their *Facebook*-page, but just got two responses which resulted in one interview with one of the respondents. Another method to recruit participants were postings on the selected magazines’ *Facebook*-pages. However, I experienced that this anonymous addressing was not productive and focused on a more personal way to recruit readers of women’s magazines in the end. I started sending messages to friends and asked whether they do have friends or colleagues who read women’s magazines and are dating or in an early stage of a relationship. Using this method, I recruited two women and two additional ones were recruited through personal connections. After the five interviews, I decided to include one more perspective of a woman in a later stage of a relationship, which then constituted the sixth interview. I identified that interviewees in a later stage of a relationship were able to adapt advice to their current circumstances and reflect on their prior texting experiences as well. For my research, I classified it to be an enriching perspective. With this sample, I was able to provide relevant, nuanced, and meaningful answers to my research question.
### Data collection

The interviews took place in public locations, such as different quiet cafés, in Hamburg between 23rd to 27th April 2018. Each interview lasted for approximately 40 minutes and was recorded with my mobile phone. Before starting the interviews, I used a pilot interview to test the interview guideline that I had designed, and which I included as a translated version in appendix IV. The guideline for my semi-structured interviews was divided into four main sections: the reading of women’s magazine, the relevance of women’s magazines, specific questions around the selected texting advice articles, and  

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1 The pseudonyms used in this table are also used systematically throughout this work.
2 The selected magazines in my study are colored red in the table.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Women’s magazine reading</th>
<th>Magazines, read regularly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lena</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Sales manager</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Twice a month</td>
<td><em>Glamour, InStyle</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td><em>Glamour, Grazia, Joy, InTouch</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cath-</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Primary school teacher</td>
<td>Early stage of a relationship (January 2018)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2-3 times a month</td>
<td>Varying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>High school degree</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Later stage of a relationship (January 2015)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Twice a month</td>
<td>Varying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Brand manager</td>
<td>Early stage of a relationship (March 2018)</td>
<td>Daughter, 21 years old</td>
<td>At least twice a month</td>
<td><em>Shape, Women’s Health, Glamour, Freundin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>High school degree</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Later stage of a relationship (June 2014)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>At least twice a month</td>
<td><em>Barbara, Brigitte</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7: list of interviewees*
general questions on texting advice in women’s magazines. To structure the sections and questions, I used general and easy answerable questions in the beginning and moved to more complex and personal topics along the development of the interview.

One part of the interview was a section – specific questions about texting advice articles – where selected texting advice articles were handed out to the interviewees for a copy test. I wanted the participants to get the real physical experience of the women’s magazines and therefore used a real magazine cover as an opener and tried to prey the reading environment as good as possible. It was important to include the visual environment of the text such as pictures and advertisement to reproduce it appropriately. I experienced it to be a beneficial tool because it was possible for the interviewees to refer to the articles and in that way, their reading experience was present in the moment of the interviews. Moreover, I used card sorting as a method to identify what the readers gain from reading women’s magazines – something I assumed to be too hard to be recapitulated without the cards. The options – inspired by Ytre-Arne’s study (2011) – were printed on different cards and can be found in appendix V in both German and English.

**Data analysis**

As a first step after finishing each interview I transcribed them and secondly, I moved on to collectively analyze the transcripts. To me, transcribing was a helpful approach to engage with the great amount of information (Gray, 2003, p. 149). The approximately 60 pages of transcripts are in German and the key components of them needed to be translated into English at first to be able to quote informants. There are two different coding approaches, which I evaluated for my work: thematic coding and portrait analysis. A thematic coding can capture and systematically categorize relevant patterns and tendencies of the research topic, but at the same time, it entails a fragmentation of individual voices, as critically questioned by Gray (2003, p. 153). With portraits, the creation of typologies can be achieved, which is a suitable approach to outline the audiences’ interpretations, however, it was not possible within the scope of my work to analyze both dimensions. For my chosen thematic coding, I drew upon a methodology used by Hermes (1995), where she coded transcripts according to ‘interpretative repertoires’ (p. 27). In doing so, I attempted to extract and interpret passages where the

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3 The transcripts are available on request.
interviewees discussed the texting advice in relation to their present situations in life, as well as to their prior experiences. Moreover, I aimed to capture the women’s emotions arising while reading and interpreting the texting advice. In the following analysis, I have defined four interpretative repertoires based on that.

8.3 Ethics
Doing this research on and with people required an extensive consideration of ethical issues. The well-being and rights of my interviewees were essential and, therefore, I valued the ethical guidelines based on Layder (2013, pp. 16-20). First to mention is the ‘informed consent’: by providing information about the research purpose and process, I ensured that my research subjects were fully informed about the interview and the use of the data, which they delivered. The information was given twice: at first, when I asked them to participate, I described the project and the input they would contribute with. Directly before I started interviewing them, I provided more detailed information again, which also included the possible interview’s consequences like benefits from the participation as well as risks, where I named for example self-reflection. All participants did the interviews voluntarily and were able to not answer the questions if they did not want to – a possibility I outlined as part of my introduction as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, I asked them for permission to record the interview. Second to mention is ‘protecting participants’ interests’: no research should be distressing or embarrassing for the participants, instead they should feel secure at any time. I have been aware that my questions encourage the participants to reflect upon their own texting behavior and their prior as well as their current experiences, and that this could possibly lead to a recognition of negative aspects. Based on that, I aimed to avoid potentially distressing questions in my interview design. Last to mention is ‘confidentiality and anonymity’: to protect the privacy of the participants, I ensured that the personal information cannot be traced back to a specific person. I used pseudonyms within my work to make sure that private data identifying the subjects will not exist. Moreover, I informed them about who will have access to the interview, where it will be published, and offered them to have access to the transcripts and analyses of the interviews. Both the transcripts and the recordings were archived on a hard-drive – where only I as a researcher do have access to – taking two sets of measure to preserve anonymity. Firstly, the files were named with the pseudonyms and by re-listening to the recordings, I made sure that they did not contain personally identifiable data. Secondly,
the research subjects’ permissions to possibly share the data with all involved ones in the thesis project – like supervisor and examiners – was asked for and provided by them. Sharing the data with other researchers would require another permission of my interviewees. With this ethical guideline, I was able to ensure the well-being of my research subjects, which was of high priority for me throughout the research process.

8.4 Reflections and limitations
As an evaluation, I find it necessary to reconsider if the chosen methods were suitable to understand the readers’ interpretations of texting advice in women’s magazines. A correspondence of the overall research question and the chosen research methods is thereby the most important validation criterion. Kvale (2007) talks about validity, referring to whether methods investigate what was said to be investigated, and about reliability, which is concerned with the trustworthiness and consistency of research findings (p. 122). With the data I provided, other researchers will be able to reproduce what I have done in this work and I argue that similar results can be achieved by doing so. For validity, a combination of text analysis and interviews has allowed me to analyze how the readers decode the meaning that is inherent in the text. In my study design, I echo Hermes, stating that ‘the validity of popular culture research might well benefit from a methodological strategy in which the audience study remains central but feeds and directs textual analysis’ (1995, p. 80). At the same time, Morse et al. (2002) suggest the overall significance of completed research as a more important criterion in relation to the contested concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research.

An overall significance of my research is based on my methodological focus enriching the field of reception studies. The main methodological choice I made was to use qualitative interviews as the key element of my research. I supplemented it with a benchmarking text analysis, which enabled me to use the analyzed texts as a central element in the interviews. To me, it was a suitable way of approaching the complex field of interpretations. Earlier research pointed to difficulties of asking people to explain their experiences and interpretations due to the fact that these are dimensions that are difficult to put into words because of their subconscious nature (Ytre-Arne, 2011, p. 76). My solution was, therefore, to use creative methods that can be seen as a central benefit: the alternative research design – with the card sorting and the magazine reading experience in the form of a copy test as part of the interviews – offered the participants additional resources and time to reflect and express themselves and their interpretations. Having the
articles available encouraged the women to talk about and refer to them during the interviews. These methods were supplementing my typical interview format, not replacing it because the questions were needed to be able to make sense of the holistic phenomenon. The personal interview situation was another advantage as it provided a more direct access to the interviewees’ emotions and immediate interpretations.

Within the interview situation, however, I experienced three main limitations: the semi-structured, qualitative format led to some questions that were not asked in every interview which resulted in incomparable data to a certain extent. Moreover, I experienced myself posing directive questions, explaining questions in more detailed to some interviewees than others, and pushing them to go deeper into stated arguments. Lastly, I had to translate from German to English when quoting informants. This is not ideal, because it is difficult to preserve all the nuances of the oral language in accurate translations of the transcripts (Ytre-Arne, 2011). However, these reflections did not influence the overall significance of my research – which is of central importance. A central limitation in regard to my interview sample was the interviewees’ homogenous background. The women represented a specific normative position due to the fact that they are all white, privileged, living in a Western, urban location, and heterosexual.

In conclusion, I can say that my research could have benefitted from a more diverse sample as more interpretation influencing variables could have been identified. It would, however, not necessarily have benefitted from a larger sample size – what I would have expected in advance – because after five interviews I experienced that my material had reached a point of saturation. The last interview, I conducted in a second stage, strengthened the impression because it provided more nuances, but no new insights into the topic. However, for the findings to be transferable to other subjects and situations, the sample is too small, however, this form of generalization was not aimed for when conducting the research.

9 Findings and Analysis

This analysis section consists of two parts based on my attempt to not isolate one moment of the cultural process – the reception process – but, instead, to relate it to other elements within the process, as recommended by Ang (1990). Firstly, I will outline the textual features of the three selected texting advice articles in order to understand the readers’
interpretations of it. Secondly, I will present the repertoires that the women drew upon in interpreting the women’s magazine texts, which I identified based on the approach implemented by Hermes (1995). According to Gill (2009), repertoires can be understood ‘as being a unit of analysis that allows scholars to go beyond individual or discrete expressions to begin to identify patterns across and between texts and to connect these to wider contexts and social formations’ (p. 351). Four repertoires which structured the discussion of texting advice in women’s magazines can be highlighted: ‘practical relevance’, ‘self-reflection’, ‘rejection’, and ‘pleasure’. The interviewees used these categories when making meaning of the texting advice they read; thereby, they used dominant, oppositional, and negotiated codes, as introduced by Hall (1980b, p. 136). Overall, I recognized both homogeneity and heterogeneity among the women when analyzing their way of interpreting the given texts. Due to the outlined polysemy, text can have multiple meanings depending on the illustrated context of the audiences, which I can verify with various nuances in my qualitative research.

9.1 Textual features

*Articles’ overall orientations*

Analyzing the selection of images of the three articles – outlined in figure 8 – already gives an impression of each article’s orientation. It is essential to outline that all images underline an addressing of a normative and thus racialized readership that is white, attractive, and able to afford a smartphone because this is what is being represented. *Glamour* uses an image of a texting man and by stating ‘object of your desire’, the article positions the man as being an object the woman needs to get, which can be regarded as the illustrated main goal. This finding adds nuances to what Gill (2009) highlights: that a relationship to a man is presented as an essential goal for the readership. *InStyle* shows a texting woman and the article is more focused on her behavior – overall, however, the texting behavior is presented as being oriented towards getting the man (answering) which is, for example, highlighted by writing ‘him’ in capitals in the article. *Freundin*’s focus is more neutral, as the image of a smartphone and coffee in the hands of a woman underlines. However, the woman is primarily addressed by stating ‘The five rules, women need to consider.’
The relation between man and woman

This category is closely connected to the overall orientation: *Glamour* depicts the man as an object, the woman needs to ‘get’ which points to an unequal relationship, in which the power is attributed to him. While *InStyle* uses another approach and states ‘With the rules, the woman can turn into the powerful one’, it seems to be centered upon the women. This is, however, based on the assumption that the man does currently hold the power. By downgrading men as ‘simple-minded’ and stating that ‘the male brain does not get complicated sentences’, *InStyle* thereby aims to relativize this dominant code (Hall, 1980b, p. 136). ‘Texting wrongly will scare him off’ is stated in *Freundin* and shows that the woman is characterized as the one who is making mistakes and who is responsible for possible failures in the texting relationship between her and the man.

Addressed woman and tone of addressing

This sub-category completes the overall depiction because the text in *Glamour* gives the impression that the reader is understood by outlining that everyone has experienced the same situation. No texting rules but prohibitions are given and rhetorical questions such as ‘You want to have something to talk about, right?’ create the impression that the addressed woman can actively choose to use the advice, but she is not forced to do so. When talking about the woman’s feelings, words like ‘maudlin’ are chosen which can be categorized as being rather cute than strong. The depicted woman is not strong and self-
confident because getting him answering her text messages is presented as the ultimate goal for this sensible and fragile woman that is addressed by the text. This is an interesting finding in relation to the magazine’s target group, where above-average readers are under the age of 20 and hence still in education (see figure 6). InStyle uses a contrary method by stating rules for texting, using many exclamation marks, strong expressions such as ‘get him answer immediately’ or ‘extremely important’ and exaggerations such as ‘It is possible that he will not answer within three seconds. This is no reason to go crazy!’ The text positions the addressed woman in the center of attention by using the direct appeal ‘You can be the texting-expert!’ The addressing is more demanding, appealing to strong women, and in addition more personal in comparison to the two other articles, which use the formal German addressing ‘Sie’ leading to a more distant relationship. Furthermore, the advice in InStyle could be given by a friend because it is rather on the same level than from an instructing position. What is outstanding in the article in Freundin is the choice of words that gives a clear idea of the target group: words like ‘SMS’, ‘prince charming’, ‘cheeky’ or ‘mode slipping in the basement’ can be categorized as old-fashioned and outdated, therefore appealing for an older target group. Trivializations like ‘Spielchen’ instead of ‘Spiel’ (game) strengthen this impression. As I have outlined in the magazine characterization section, Glamour and InStyle are addressing the woman, who is seeking for orientation while it is the settled woman in Freundin – a finding, this analysis of the specific texting advice articles underlines.

Comparing the three different articles to each other in regard of differences and similarities of the textual features, leads to the conclusion that while particularly the choice of words and the addressing of the readerships can be regarded as varying according to the different target groups, similarities can be seen especially in the articles’ overall orientations and goals. The formulations of the texts aim to position the women in the center of responsibility and activity – it is something, they all share. This can be related to studies by Gill (2009) and Lulu and Alkaff (2017) which highlight that in women’s magazines, women are presented to be in charge of emotional labor and have the responsibility to take care of relationship issues. As my analysis of the specific texting advice articles outlines, the woman is described to be the one who needs to get advice and act according to it in order to be successful in texting with the man. In all three articles, the represented unequal power relation between men and women is outstanding, which I decided to study primarily within my textual analysis. The reason for that is the concerns
that have been raised by several feminist scholars, assuming that women’s magazines increase gender inequalities – for example through such media texts that I have studied.

The next step is to evaluate how the texting advice articles are actually read and interpreted by their female audiences. My following repertoire analysis outlines – by applying what Livingstone (2007, p. 5) stresses – if and how the interviewees use the knowledge invited from them by the text and what knowledge they actually use when interpreting the text.

9.2 The repertoire of pleasure

As formulated in the operationalization of my research question, my aim was to identify the audiences’ emotions when making sense out of the texting advice. Pleasure is thereby found to be an essential category, the interviewees used in their interpretation processes. This perspective contributes further insights to the discussion around women’s magazines as vehicles for pleasure opposed to purveyors of oppressive ideologies (Gill, 2007, p. 347). Moreover, it is important to highlight the need of an existence of women’s magazines due to their attraction and pleasure for its readers – especially as an opposite pole to the rejection repertoire, something I will discuss further later on.

Reading women’s magazines in general is describes as ‘a precious moment for myself’ (Emily) and a ‘moment of pure pleasure’ (Dana). ‘There is a specific attraction with women’s magazines because it is something just for me. It is fun, I enjoy reading women’s magazines a lot’ (Dana). The reasons for this pleasure result thereby from different sources – for Hanna, it is the gossip that is entertaining: ‘The more gossip it is, the more entertaining it is and the more serious, the higher the possibility that it has a practical relevance for me’. Dana, on the other hand, finds pleasure in the practical tips because, to her, they are very inspirational. Especially drawing upon texting advice in women’s magazines, she states that ‘the advice is entertaining, gives new insights, and important tips’ (Dana). Linda feels attracted to the articles both from a serious perspective as well as from a humoristic perspective. As another reader, Emily, puts it; ‘I like the tone of voice in the articles, it is funny, and it makes me smile because I know the same situations and they picture it perfectly right’. By asking the interviewees, what they are using women’s magazines for, four out of six women selected ‘pleasure’ which is one of the most outstanding categories when it comes to accordance among the interviewees. As this
repertoire analysis outlines, women’s magazine reading is found to be associated with pleasure. The degree of pleasure varies thereby among the different departments and specific articles within a magazine. Practical advice – the chosen example for my work – is not the primarily category that entertains the readerships, but my research outlines that the overall reading experience leads to positive emotions. Referring to Gill (2007), it has to be concluded that women’s magazines can be a vehicle for pleasure as my analysis of the readers’ interpretations outlines.

9.3 The repertoire of self-reflection
‘I can relate to the same situations’ is one of the most stated phrases in all the interviews. As Sara explains:

‘While reading the article, I am automatically thinking about how I am doing it. Am I doing it right, am I doing it wrong? Why am I doing it differently? And what you do is, ask yourself: where do I locate myself in this? Have I applied the advice before, do I want to apply the advice?’

The women are interpreting the texting advice self-reflexively: that is one of the main findings which I have experienced in all of the six interviews. The reflections cover both current situations in life as well as prior experiences. After the interviewees had read the articles that I handed out, they evaluated the different tips according to their own behavior and experiences. One example is that Hanna, Catherine, and Dana discussed the advice, given in Freundin: no sarcasm, irony, no misleading formulations; instead use of emoticons. ‘I know that myself, it can lead to major misunderstandings’ (Hanna). Catherine experienced especially the notion of irony:

‘What I found really good was the second advice about ‘Avoid misunderstandings' because I am just starting my relationship and we also have our problems sometimes. Martin texts very ironically or has such a special sense of humor, which is so hard to understand in texting. There have been some difficulties around that already!’

Dana reflects upon her own experience, where the tip around emoticons was applicable: ‘This happens very often that you are writing something, and your partner interprets it completely oppositional. With the misunderstandings it is absolutely true – I experienced it a lot in the beginning, but emoticons are helpful there’. However, she also distances
herself from some other advice while reflecting on her own behavior – for example that the time span for his answer can be five to six hours and that you should not get stressed about it, as outlined in InStyle: ‘I am not constantly checking my mobile phone, if he texts, then it is as it is. I think when you are getting older, you get more relaxed and self-confident’. Other interviewees mention different situations, they are familiar with and where they find the advice particularly helpful. An advice given in Freundin covers ‘Do not write long messages’, which, according to Emily, is important in relation to her perception of men writing shorter messages than women. Lena draws upon Glamour’s advice ‘Do not text many messages in a row!’ which she has not only experienced herself recently but where she is also actively working on right now. ‘I do recognize myself in the advice because it happens to me all the time. When reflecting on my own behavior, I realize that I am doing everything right’ (Lena). During the interviews, I experienced the women’s classification into right, wrong, correct, and appropriate behavior while reflecting upon their own experiences. For example, Sara mentions: ‘Even though I receive the advice, I am not sure whether I implement it 100 percent correct in the situations’. In her interpretation, the intention of the texts is to provide the readerships with tips that lead to success: ‘I want to know how to text in order to be successful with dating in the end’. While the given advice is regarded as a benchmark by her, Dana, for example, perceives it as an orientation for her self-evaluation. Emily makes an argument which can be seen in relation to that because, in her opinion, it works out very well for many women to act according to such texting rules. However, she distances herself from ‘these women’ when examining how she is texting and behaving in the illustrated situations. This corresponds with my finding that the interviewees tend to reject advice and distance themselves from the addressed women, which I will further outline in the next section.

Overall, however, the interpretation of the advice articles consists of an evaluation of the individual behavior in the current life situation. Moreover, the interviewees expressed their own prior experiences and feelings which they recalled when reading the texting advice. This finding needs to be regarded in relation to Müller (2010), who identified that advice is being justified by the readers according to their own experiences (p. 183). As this repertoire analysis outlines, it can be summarized that reading the texting advice articles encourages the women’s self-reflection.
9.4 The repertoire of rejection

As an introduction to this repertoire, I want to link back to a phenomenon discussed by Müller as ‘social desirability’. She points to women’s negotiation of the pleasure in magazine reading because it is a negatively connoted activity in society (Müller in Becker, Zobl, 2015). When interpreting the texting advice, the majority of my interviewees drew upon a repertoire of rejection at some time. ‘This is total nonsense, this advice: to be regarded as desperate if you are responding immediately’ (Dana). ‘I do not feel addressed at all, a very wrong depiction’ (Hanna). ‘Just bullshit’ (Sara). ‘Stupid tip!’ (Lena) ‘Superficial, cliché, according to my personal experiences in the past years also distant from reality’ (Emily). The statements, thereby, concern different advice and magazines. As the quotes outline, rejection was something, I experienced from all interviewees. The audiences’ ability for critical reading was outlined by Ytre-Arne (2011, p. 97) at first; now my analysis provides practical examples to it: the representation of men and women was one of the factors that were decoded with an oppositional code by some women in the interviews (Hall, 1980b, p. 136).

The first example is Catherine’s interpretation of the advice, given in Glamour: *Do not text when drunk!*: ‘The woman is described as the one who is texting stupid messages when she is drunk. But in reality, it can also be the other way around’. In her opinion, the same advice could also be applicable for men, but they are not confronted with such texting rules, according to her. Lena addresses the same advice – also using an oppositional coding – by categorizing it as being out-of-date: ‘Stupid tip! Leaving the bag at home to avoid texting when drunk? Who is doing that nowadays? Total nonsense!’ Hanna interprets the three different advice in Glamour as depicting the woman ‘as a hysterical, communicative being that has to write all the time, put all her emotions into it and cannot control herself when drinking alcohol’. In her meaning-making of the article, she distances herself from the representation of both men and women. According to her, men are generalized and presented as stupid and the ‘simplest thinking beings’. In her understanding, this is ‘degrading’ – an association Emily uses as well. Catherine – who also dislikes the presentation of men as being that simple – reflects that men are more intellectual in reality than represented in the articles. Furthermore, the women are seen to be in the center of responsibility in the texting relationship with men, as Emily describes:

‘The article illustrates that the woman needs to do things ‘right’ and make efforts so that the man wants her. And if she does something wrong, if she writes
something wrong or has not thought enough about her messages, then he does not want her any longer, which is not fair’.

Sara gets a similar impression when reading the articles, especially the advice in *Glamour: Do not text many messages in a row!*: ‘It appears to be that the woman is the problem: that she needs to give him space, that she should not overstrain him, that she should not write thousands of messages’. An accordance of the readers’ interpretations with the benchmarking textual analysis can be determined when it comes to gender inequalities and the depiction of men and women. Referring to the feminist perspective as a theoretical framework, this highlights that the readers are empowered to understand, evaluate, and critique the media content they consume. Within my research, critical readings are found to be superior to possible ideological influences of women’s magazines. Within the process of rejection, a relativization can, however, also be noted, as this example of Sara outlines:

‘The woman is the one who directly goes crazy if she does not receive an answer of the man and the man is not the smartest guy ever – actually it mirrors the reality. Even though I would assume that we⁴ have reached further that than. That is the worst’.

This is one example of the multiple readings of media texts: while some readers interpret the given example as a wrong depiction of men and women in the texting situation, Sara regards it as mirroring the reality. Talking about the advice ‘*Do not answer directly, take time before responding!* (Freundin), she states that ‘everyone recognizes this ‘I don’t want to answer immediately because I want to show him that I am not available all the time’, even though you know that it is bullshit, you use the advice practically’. In saying so, she points to the simultaneous attraction and rejection towards the advice given in the articles.

Part of the rejection can also be an active resistance and a suggestion of alternatives – two methods I identified within the interviews. It concerns the third step of an interpretation process, as outlined by Livingstone (2007, p. 3): the response. ‘Even if they say so, I would write ironically anyway and not retype my messages because then it is not me any

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⁴ By using ‘we’, Sara is referring to the society.
longer’, as stated by Sara, is an example of a distancing in the form of resistance. Giving recommendations for alternative ways of dealing with the texting situation, is the second perspective, as a quote of Dana highlights: ‘You should not text in order to be liked by someone or to entertain, you should just write whatever feels good for you’. The suggestions Lena and Emily add to their rejection of advice is that ‘it depends a lot on the person you are texting with’ (Lena) and that ‘everyone has to decide which behavior is best for him or her individually and every man is different, so you need to listen to your feeling’ (Emily).

In the decoding process, rejection is a phenomenon I experienced on different dimensions: at first, there is found to be a general rejection of committing to read women’s magazines, as outlined by Müller (Müller in Becker, Zobl, 2015). I was not able to support this finding with my research because all the interviewees were selected based on their – at least – occasionally committed reading frequency. The second dimension, I identified in my interviews, was a rejection of the relevance of women’s magazines for the own ideology and identity: the women downplayed the relevance by describing it as, for example, ‘just subconscious, but it is no orientation for me’ (Hanna). The third dimension is especially focused on the specific texting advice that was partly – by some of the interviewees – found to be a stereotypical depiction of role models, where the woman appears to be the problem (Sara). Furthermore, she is regarded to be the one who needs to take care of relationship and dating issues – as my analysis but also Gill’s (2009) and Lulu and Alkaff’s (2017) outline. A critical reading of the texting advice can definitely be highlighted as an essential repertoire, the women drew upon when interpreting the texts.

9.5 The repertoire of practical relevance
An integration of practical advice into the readers’ everyday lives is one of the central functions of women’s magazines – earlier studies by Hermes (1995) and Ytre-Arne (2011) discussed this finding in relation to women’s magazines in general. My research confirms it: while it is music and book recommendations for Emily, Hanna mentions fitness exercises, film tips and recipes, Sarah and Dana list travel and hotel recommendations, which they practically use, and Catherine highlights dating and relationship advice.
Taking this knowledge about an essential importance of practical advice in women’s magazines as a fundament, I want to outline its adaptability to texting advice in specific by introducing the repertoire of practical relevance in the following. The repertoire is the most discussed one in all of the interviews. Lena points to the currently outstanding practical relevance: ‘The topic is of essential relevance, especially with the immense use of *Tinder* and *WhatsApp*’. Not only on this superior level, but especially on a personal level, texting advice is highly relevant, as Hanna outlines: ‘It has a practical relevance because I recognize the problem myself – it is often discussed with friends’. The relevance in thereby not specifically dependent on a relationship status: while Catherine argues that now that she is in an actual relationship, the advice becomes more relevant to her than during the dating period, Lena and Sara – who are both singles – experience a greater practical relevance especially as singles when texting with different men. Even though the three articles target women at different relationship stages (*InStyle*: women in every stage of dating or a relationship, *Glamour*: women in an early stage of a relationship and singles, *Freundin*: women in an early stage of a relationship), the interviewees’ interpretations underline the general relevance and adaptability for different circumstances. As Livingstone (2007) outlines, the audiences’ responses to decoded meanings depend on their own personal and contextual circumstances, which could be verified and will be outlined next (p. 3).

One variable, that I identified to be a distinguishing criterion, was the frequency of practically using the advice: Hanna, being in a later stage of a relationship, describes the frequency of discussing the topic and using the advice as ‘sometimes’ while Sara states: ‘The advice covers everything that happens on a daily basis. What the struggles in life are. Everything is clearly answered so that you know how to behave’. Emily adds another variable which influences the degree of the practical relevance to the discussion, because to her, it is not only dependent on the relationship status but also the individual feelings that are linked to it: ‘It is helpful when you are frustrated or in the moments when you are feeling alone as a single or when someone does not reply to the feelings you are having for him or her’. She interprets the advice as summing up the most important issues one encounters when texting with someone. If you are currently in the situation – as for example Sara – ‘all the things are discussed with your friends on a daily basis because these are the problems, you have: what should I respond? Why is he not responding? Can I respond directly if I am online anyways?’ As Dana generalizes: ‘If I see a connection to something in my life right now, I do keep the advice in mind’.
Another interpretation influencing variable, that I identified, was the age. The women evaluate the texts also according to it: ‘It is helpful advice, but more for a younger target group’ (Dana), ‘I think it influences younger people who are starting to date someone much more, for example, I think that when I was 16 or 18, I was influenced by such advice’ (Emily). Taken together, the interpretations are verified as being related to the own circumstance as well as the situation in life at the present moment. While it is a currently important topic for Sara, who highlights that ‘Texting stresses me a lot when I like someone a lot’, the option of recalling the knowledge one gained from the advice when he or she happens to be in the situation at a later stage was also mentioned by the interviewees. Learning and a following, practical implementation of the tips can, as the interviews show, be part of in the decoding process. This adds a new dimension to Hermes’ finding that women’s magazines offer material for emotional learning (1995, p. 149) because they also offer material for practical learning, as my work outlines. The fundament for it would be a trustworthiness of the advice, which all six women interpreted. As the example ‘Check if you are the only one’ in Glamour outlines, the interviewees interpret it very differently according to their own orientation. The advice is also linked to questions of morality and shows the greatest decoding range of all advice and interviewees. On the one hand, Hanna likes the advice and would practically use it, on the other hand, others, such as Sara and Lena are shocked and interpret it as being bullshit and state that they would not try to implement it.

Another dimension of the practical relevance, I examined, was outlined by Müller as well: taking the articles for initiating a conversation in order to give the partner an understanding of topics that are relevant to the woman (2010, p. 182). The texts thereby function as a tool to ease the addressing of a topic. As Catherine recalls, she talked about an article from a women’s magazine, which covered the importance of differences among couples with her boyfriend and states that ‘I can also imagine talking about these articles for initiating conversations around texting with him’.

Overall, I identified a practical relevance on two levels: at first in the form of knowledge that can be recalled when needed in a texting situation and a direct implementation of the advice. Secondly, relevance can be in the form of giving orientation and inspiration, encouraging to think about the topic (Dana) or calming down (Catherine). As Emily puts it: ‘If there is an article on that topic, other people do have the same problem. Even though it is only one person. It helps to know: I am luckily not the only one’. As the analysis
outlines, the practical relevance of the given texting advice is determined by the readerships’ own connection to and experiences with the topic as well as the current relationship status.

10 Conclusion
This conclusion covers three essential aspects: firstly, I will outline the main findings of my research in relation to the research question. Then I will go on to situate it in the broader context by highlighting my work’s implications for society at large, and finally I will suggest further research.

Main findings
To approach my overall research question ‘How is texting advice in women’s magazines interpreted by their readers?’, I formulated three dimensions of interpretation: the relation to the audiences’ own situations in life, the audiences’ reflections on their prior experiences, and the emerging emotions in the interpretation process. With my research, I was able to analyze them by identifying patterns of interpretation among the different interviews and relating them to the three dimensions. I defined four dominant patterns which were described as ‘the repertoire of pleasure’, ‘the repertoire of rejection’, ‘the repertoire of self-reflection’, and ‘the repertoire of practical relevance’ based on earlier studies (Hermes, 1995).

The repertoire of pleasure describes positive emotions while reading and reflection upon the texting advice and is, therefore, related to emerging emotions. Reading women’s magazine texts was found to be pleasurable for the readership. An important finding in relation to that is the women’s simultaneous attraction and rejection towards the texting advice in women’s magazines – because, apart from the pleasure, rejection has been the identified predominant emotion in making meaning out of the texts in my research. This covered especially the illustrated, unequal gender relations to which the interviewees responded with distancing and active resistance. Furthermore, the woman’s responsibility to take care of dating and relationship issues which resulted in the suggestion of alternatives. As my analysis illustrates, some interviewees draw upon such oppositional and negotiated codes, while others interpret the advice according to the dominant code (Hall, 1980b). It can, therefore, be noted that my research provides an example for Fiske’s (1987) understanding of multiple readings of media texts.
Another outstanding finding, I want to stress is that women are interpreting the texting advice in a practical as well as self-reflexive way. Both dimension, I identified within my research, are interpreted in relation to the readers’ current situations in life and their prior experiences – the two dimensions I sought to analyze. On the one hand, the interviewees use these dimensions in making meaning of the texting advice, on the other hand, they also influence their decoding. I was able to identify that heterogeneous interpretations resulted from the individual reader’s own circumstances by verifying the three variables ‘age’, ‘relationship status’, and ‘prior experiences in texting’. A larger and more diverse sample and an in-depth analysis of more variables in future research could add more nuances to this finding. Overall, my thesis provides a more profound understanding of women’s magazine reading by researching the neglected audience perspective and outlining how the readers actually read and interpret the media texts.

Implications
In this section, I want to highlight my research’s implications for society at large, thereby focusing on the feminist perspective and the German women’s magazine market. Especially in regard of the reconsidered concerns on the ideological influences of women’s magazines in connection with the outlined, growing number of women’s magazines entering the German market, it is important to mention that I found little evidence that ideological messages in women's magazines influence readers directly. Instead, my research pointed clearly to the readers’ critical reflections on women’s magazines content and their abilities for oppositional decoding. An essential finding with broader societal relevance is that women’s magazine readerships are not victimized with dominant, stereotypical depictions but empowered in using the content for their own agendas. As my research outlines, they are empowered to understand, evaluate, and critique the media content they consume. Even though gender inequalities could be verified with the textual analysis, the audiences’ critical reading was found to be superior to possible ideological influences. The representation of men as holding the power and women positioned in the center of responsibility and activity with their ultimate goal of getting the men answering their text messages was decoded with an oppositional code by some of the interviewees. The analysis thereby pointed to the heterogeneous interpretations of the texts according to the readers’ varying circumstances, orientations, and experiences: while some interviewees assessed the depiction as mirroring the reality,
others declared it as a wrong representation. What Hermes (1995) already claimed years ago, is also my summary for this section: showing respect rather than concern for the women’s magazines readership is needed. As my work outlines, there is no reason to be afraid of harmful ideological effects of women’s magazines. Instead, it is high time to value that women find pleasure in women’s magazine reading and profit from the offered material for self-reflection and for practical and emotional learning.

**Further research**

Based on this broader relevance of my thesis’ findings, I would really encourage undertaking further in-depth research in the field. Thereby, I want to draw attention primarily to the multiple decoding depending on the audiences’ context, composed of expected and appropriate behavior, patriarchal and social norms, political orientations, personal circumstances, and prior experiences. With the selection of my informants, I aimed to take this into account by choosing a variety of interviewees who encompassed various dimensions of difference which I could analyze in advance – like age, relationship status, and women’s magazine reading frequency. When analyzing the interviews, I ascertained that other variables like the type of women’s magazine consume – conscious or unconscious – the feminist orientation, the feeling of being addressed, and the relevance of women’s magazines for one’s ideology and identity influence the decoding process as well. Within the limited scope of my work, I was, however, not able to analyze all the individual influencing variables in relation to the audiences’ interpretations. Further research should focus on this in-depth and analyze it, because, as my work outlines, it seems to provide further nuances to the complex field of audiences’ interpretations of media texts. The design of typologies based on a portrait analysis would be my recommendation for an appropriate method.
11 Reference list


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Appendix

Appendix I: article in *InStyle* (published 10 August 2016)

Wir kennen alle diese Situation: Erst haben wir uns stundenlang überlegt, wie wir die Nachricht an ihn am besten formulieren und nachdem wir sie abgeschickt haben, schleichen wir uns nur noch um unser Handy, in der Hoffnung, dass er endlich zurückschreibt. Dabei können aus Sekunden schon mal schnell Stunden werden.

Doch damit ist jetzt Schluss! Mit diesen einfachen Tricks, antworten Männer sofort und du wirst zum Flirt-Texting-Experte.

**Die 5 wichtigsten Flirt-Texting-Regeln!**

1. Weniger ist mehr!

Männer sind ziemlich einfach gestrickt. Also überforder ihn nicht mit ellbogengroßen Schachtelhütern, sondern beweise den einfachen Satzbas (Subjekt-Prädikat-Objekt).
2. Fragestunde

Ebenfalls extrem wichtig: Der letzte Teil deiner Nachricht sollte eine Frage beinhalten. Sonst fühlt sich dein Mann der Welt aufgefordert, dir schnell zu antworten. Das männliche Gehirn versteht Sätze wie „Ich würde gerne ein Eis essen!“ nicht als Aufforderung zu einem Date. Schreibst du aber: „Hast du Lust auf ein Eis?“, wird er dir garantiert antworten.

3. Das richtige Timing


4. Keine Spielchen!

Es wird oft behauptet, dass du dir mit deiner Antwort auf seine Nachricht ruhig ein paar Stunden Zeit lassen sollst, denn dadurch wird sein Jagdinstinkt geweckt. Schreibst er dir, wenn du gerade auf dein Handy blickst, dann kannst du ruhig die Gunst der Stunde nutzen und sofort antworten. Denn so steigen die Chancen, dass ihr in eurem angeregten Chat euch auch gleich fürs nächste Date verabredet.

5. Eventuelle Wartezeit

Es kann schon mal passieren, dass er nicht binnen drei Sekunden antwortet. Das ist aber kein Grund, gleich auszusplitten. Vielleicht hat er tatsächlich gerade einfach viel zu tun oder sein Handy schlichtweg auf lautlos gestellt. Eine Wartezeit von fünf, sechs Stunden ist noch vollkommen okay und annehmbar.

MEHR ZUM THEMA

LIEBE

TEILEN  PIN  TWEET  MAIL

TAUSCHE E-MAIL-ADRESSE GEGEN COOLE TRENDS

Ich willigeeizefrei stimme den bereitgestellten Unternehmen zur Nutzung meines Daten zu. Ich bin über die dort genannten Verträge, Gewinnspiele, Newsletter, Werbung, Promotions, gemeinsamen Angelegenheiten, zusammenarbeiten, sprichweisen und für individuelle Informationsangebote und Werbungswerte nutzen. Alle Details hier.
Wider den Impuls: Einfach mal nicht schreiben

Jetzt fragen Sie sich schon seit fünf Minuten, warum das Objekt Ihrer momentanen Begierde so lange zum Antworten trübt. Hat er/er schon das Interesse an Ihnen verloren? Gerade am Anfang einer Beziehung, wenn man sich noch nicht so gut kennt, ist es manchmal schwierig, die eine oder andere Nachricht nicht zu schreiben. Wir verreisen, in welchen Situationen Sie die Finger von WhatsApp lassen sollten.

Wenn Ihnen die Erinnerung an das letzte WhatsApp-Faurok zu immer die Schmerzen im Geist treibt: Empfinden Sie sich, brauchen Sie folgende drei absolute Schreibverboten, und legen Sie endlich das Telefon weg.

1. Schreiben, wenn Sie betrunken sind

Unter Alkoholeinfluss kommen Sie Ihren Emotionen und auch der Drang, dazu zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Da restet Ihnen schnell eine Gefühlshand in der Hand, die eine Beziehung zu einem Mann, den Sie erst seit kurzem kennen, im Klein stören kann. Das legt gar nicht unbedingt daran, dass er Sie nicht gut findet, sondern weil es zu dieser Zeitpunkt einfach noch unsorgfältig und übertrieben ist, manche Dinge zu sagen. Genauso wie mit dem wohltätigen Versand von Herzschreiben können solche Nachrichten gerade mal für Irritationen sorgen.

2. Schreiben, wenn Sie unvermittelt

Wenn es ’n’ nicht macht, was ich schreibe? Ich kann nicht auf dem Walten?“ oder „Ich muss sie wieder an?“ Wenn man verliebt ist, kann man eines solchen Schützen schon mal messen. Damit ist die Nachricht nicht mal verdreht, lässt sich so schnell nicht zurückrufen. Außerdem ist es Ihnen in schriftlicher Form deutlich härter beim anderen unbemerkt oder falsch verstanden werden.

3. Schreiben, wenn Sie ihre Lebenslinie im Netz

Wenn Sie Ihre Lebenslinie im Netz sichtbar machen, kann ein paar Stunden verloren gehen und anschließend in Bue (Doppelgänger, was Sie wirklich möchten wollen. Im Zweifel lässt sich das im romantischen Gespräch sowieso einfacher sagen.

Alpha-Nam oder Kutscher? Dieser Mann passt zu Ihnen?

4. Schreiben, wenn Sie ihm schon eine, zehn oder 20 Nachrichten geschrieben haben


Memo an Umgangsteile: Nur weil Nachricht schnell geteilt ist, heißt das nicht, dass man den andereneden Anruf nidiz nutzen muss. Besonders, wenn er auf die letzte Nummer noch nicht mal reagieren kann. Schließlich wollen Sie sich beim nächsten persönlichen Treffen doch auch noch etwas zu erzählen haben, oder?
Die 5 wichtigsten SMS-Regeln für Verliebte


Kurznachrichten können einer Beziehung erst die rechte Würze verleihen. Und das gilt besonders, wenn es sich noch um eine ganz frische Liebe handelt. Wer weiß, wie man die kurzen Nachrichten richtig einsetzt, kann viel gewinnen. Diese fünf Regeln sollten Sie unbedingt beachten.

1. **Antworten Sie nicht sofort**


2. **Vermeiden Sie Missverständnisse**

Zweideutig darf es in Ihren Nachrichten ruhig werden, umso mehr Lust wird er bekommen, Sie wiederzusehen bzw. Ihnen erneut zu schreiben. *Hüten Sie sich jedoch vor Sarkasmus und Ironie.* Besonders wenn Sie sich noch nicht gut genug kennen, kann dies sonst fälschlicherweise als Ihr...
Ernst angesehen werden und die Stimmung in den Keller rutschen. Vermeiden Sie deshalb missverständliche Formulierungen und helfen Sie sich an geeigneter Stelle mit Emoticons, die klarstellen, wie Sie es wirklich gemeint haben.

Was mache ich, wenn er sich nicht meldet? DAS sagt ein Mann dazu.

3. Schreiben Sie niemals, wenn Sie angetrunken sind
Alkohol macht mutig. Und vielleicht mag es Ihnen wie eine gute Idee vorkommen, Ihrem neuen Schwarm davon zu erzählen, dass Sie ihn gern heiraten und viele Kinder mit ihm wollen. Doch seien Sie versichert: Am nächsten Morgen wird Ihnen diese Idee als das erscheinen, was sie wirklich ist: ganz, ganz schlecht. Haben Sie also einmal ein oder zwei Gläser Wein zu viel getrunken, verstauen Sie das Handy in sicherer Entfernung und schreiben Sie ihm lieber am nächsten Tag, was für einen schönen Abend Sie hatten.

4. Prüfen Sie, ob sie die einzige sind
Es klingt unglaublich frech, aber manche Männer machen das tatsächlich: Sie schreiben mehreren Frauen die gleichen Nachrichten. Haben Sie dies immer im Hinterkopf und prüfen Sie seine Texte darauf, ob sie auf Sie persönlich zugeschnitten sind oder auch eine Massennachricht sein könnten. Kommen Ihnen seine Mitteilungen öfter komisch vor, sprechen Sie ihn offen darauf an.

5. Schreiben Sie keine Romane
Die Kommunikation von Männern und Frauen unterscheidet sich in vielen Dingen. Vor allem jedoch, was die Menge angeht. Hüten Sie sich deshalb davor, ihm per WhatsApp Ihr halbes Leben zu erzählen. Von zu langen Nachrichten werden Männer leicht erschlagen, sodass sie den Flirt mit Ihnen schnell als anstrengend empfinden. Fassen Sie sich deshalb immer kurz. So fällt es Ihnen auch viel leichter, noch einige Geheimnisse zu bewahren, die Sie für ihn noch spannender machen.

Verwandte Artikel
- Was mache ich, wenn er sich nicht meldet?
- Wie verhalten sich Männer, wenn sie auf eine Frau stehen?
- Das wünschen sich Männer beim ersten Date
- Warum Männer mit Schwärmern die besseren Partner sind
Appendix IV: interview guideline

Interview guideline
Name:
Age:
Highest education:
Profession:
Relationship status:
Children:
Living circumstances:
Women’s magazines reading
1. How regularly do you read women’s magazines?
2. Could you please describe the situations and circumstances in which you read magazines?
   - Reading magazines at home – where, when, in what kind of situations?
   - Reading outside the home – where and when? (Travelling, work, hairdresser, visiting friends etc.)
3. How do you read magazines – specifically?
   - Only selected articles, the whole magazine at once, favorite column you always read first, save the magazine until you have plenty of time
4. Which parts do you like to read in women’s magazines and why?
5. Which parts do you dislike reading in women’s magazines and why?

Relevance of women’s magazines
For the next question, I prepared cards with different answer options. Please select the ones that are applicable to you personally and sort them from highest to lowest importance for you afterward.
1. What do you gain from reading women’s magazines?
   - Options:
     Recreation and relaxation
     Time alone
     Inspiration and new impulses
     Insight into relationships between people
     Information about fashion and trends
Information about health and lifestyle
Pleasure
Passing the time
Practical advice and tips
Information about work and economy
Information about societal questions
Information about culture and literature

2. How relevant do you find women's magazines to your everyday life?
   - Why? Different magazines, different examples?
   - Do you use tips and information [e.g. recipes, product recommendations, relationship advice]? Examples?

Texting advice in women’s magazines
I have chosen three articles around texting from different magazines. I would like you to read them and will ask some questions after each of them.

1. *InStyle*
   a. Could you please describe your first impression of the article?
   b. How helpful do you find the advice?
   c. Would you try to implement the advice yourself?
   d. How realistic/unrealistic do you find the advice?
   e. How would you describe the relationship between men and women in this article?
   f. How would you describe the role of the woman in texting with men?
   g. Do you feel addressed by the article? Why, why not?

2. *Glamour*
   a. Could you please describe your first impression of the article?
   b. How helpful do you find the advice?
   c. Would you try to implement the advice yourself?
   d. How realistic/unrealistic do you find the advice?
   e. How would you describe the relationship between men and women in this article?
   f. How would you describe the role of the woman in texting with men?
   g. Do you feel addressed by the article? Why, why not?
3. Freundin
   a. Could you please describe your first impression of the article?
   b. How helpful do you find the advice?
   c. Would you try to implement the advice yourself?
   d. How realistic/unrealistic do you find the advice?
   e. How would you describe the relationship between men and women in this article?
   f. How would you describe the role of the woman in texting with men?
   g. Do you feel addressed by the article? Why, why not?

General questions on texting advice in women’s magazines
1. Would you normally read such articles? Why, why not?
2. Which of the three articles does fit your needs the most & why?
3. Do you recognize yourself when reading this advice – Are you familiar with the topic around texting with men?
4. What would you expect from texting advice in women’s magazines?
5. To what extent do you reflect on your prior experiences while reading this advice?
6. To what extent do you reflect on your own situation in life right now when reading this advice?
7. Can you describe the effect of reading these articles for you personally?
Appendix V: key words printed on cards for card sorting
English translation: recreation and relaxation, time alone, inspiration and new impulses, insight into relationships between people, information about fashion and trends, information about health and lifestyle, pleasure, passing the time, practical advice and tips, information about work and economy, information about societal questions, information about culture and literature.

Erholung und Entspannung

Zeit für mich allein

Inspiration und neue Impulse

Einblick in zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen

Informationen über Mode und Trends

Informationen über Gesundheit und Lebensstil

Unterhaltung

Zeitvertreib

Praktische Ratschläge und Tipps

Informationen über Arbeit und Wirtschaft

Informationen zu gesellschaftlichen Fragen

Informationen über Kultur und Literatur