



One School Girl's Protest of Seventeen Magazine—Now 75,000 Strong

[Teenager Julia Bluhm was aware of the kinds of pressures put on adolescent girls to look a certain way. So Julia decided to do something about it by starting an online petition asking Seventeen to include unretouched photos in their magazine.]

After school, I swung the car door open, and plopped myself in the passenger seat of my mom's car, trying to stuff my 50-pound backpack down by my feet.

"Get ready, Julia," my mom said. "Your life is about to get pretty crazy."

That's when I learned that I would be leaving for New York City the next morning to be interviewed about a change.org petition I had written only a week or two earlier. I'm a member of the SPARKTeam, a group of 20 girl activists from all over the U.S. and Canada. We are part of the fabulous girl-powered movement called SPARK, and with their help I was able to create a petition asking *Seventeen Magazine* to include some photos that aren't photoshopped. SPARK and our 60+ sister organizations shared the petition all over the Internet, and many of my friends and I shared it all over Facebook. Soon it had reached over 25,000 signatures. That was enough to spark some media interest.

So, my mom and I hopped on a plane the next morning. A plane that would take me from my small town in Maine all the way to New York City, to represent the tens of thousands of girls, mothers, fathers and supporters who signed my petition.

We all know how Photoshopping can make models look unbelievably "perfect" and how it can cause girls to develop an unrealistic idea of beauty. By showing girls how different non-Photoshopped images look, we can teach girls to recognize the airbrushed, touched-up, "perfect-ified" images when they come across them.

Instead of looking at computer-edited pictures of girls, and wishing we looked like them, we should roll our eyes and say "well [sic], you're fake, and I'm not. I don't need a computer to be beautiful. I'm already beautiful." We even made a video with kids at my school during lunch to show how we felt about this issue. My friend Izzy Labbe (another amazing SPARK activist) helped launch the video. She told me that she loves *Seventeen*, but "it's [sic] really ironic to see pages telling you to love your body right next to advertisements that are sending subliminal messages about changing your body."

Once in New York City, I gathered with a number of other SPARKTeam activists, like Emma, from New York City, and even Crystal who took a train up from Baltimore at 4 a.m., and we did a mock photo-shoot [sic] outside of *Seventeen*'s headquarters. We wanted to show *Seventeen* that we're real girls, and we don't need Photoshop to be beautiful.

The photo-shoot [sic] was really great. It was pouring down rain, my toes were kind of numb (not the best day to wear sandals), and my hair was frizzing out like crazy. But I didn't care. We were standing out there in the rain, talking and laughing, and not caring about what anybody thought of us. We were being real girls, and we were enjoying it.

Soon reporters were gathered around us, shoving microphones in our faces. They asked me the same things over and over, and I said the same things over and over. That sort of thing sucks the energy right out of you. Or at least that's what it did to me. This trip to New York City was one of the most exciting three days of my life, but talking to so many reporters was kind of overwhelming. Eventually my lips and tongue started tasting like rubber. I was kind of sick of my own voice. I was really not used to that sort of thing.

The next crazy amazing thing that happened was that we were invited inside to meet *Seventeen*'s Editor-in-Chief, Ann Shoket, and a woman who works in PR at the magazine. The editor is on the Healthy Media Commission Committee, and she's very concerned about the well-being of her readers. I was really excited to meet her, and hoped to have a really positive conversation. That's just what happened.

My mom, Dana Edell, the director of SPARK, and I went to Ann Shoket's office. It was the most attractive office I had ever seen. There were glass walls, pink chairs, a coffee table with a tray piled with mini peanut-butter-and-jelly cupcakes, and *Seventeen Magazine* covers all over the place.

We sat around the table, snacked on cupcakes, and chatted for a while. I told her what I liked about *Seventeen*, but also what I'd like to see change. She talked a lot about how her models were "authentic," girls with great personalities, and natural beauty. She pointed out certain pictures, saying they used Photoshop to change lighting, remove wrinkles in clothing, and stray hairs, but she said nothing about touching up the girls' bodies, skin, blemishes, or faces.

After a nice discussion, she gave me a tour of the *Seventeen* offices. She showed me the room where they keep all of the clothes (it was, like a whole clothing store in there), the makeup room (a whole wall with makeup and hair products...not exaggerating!) and the computers where the magazine was put together.

I guess I was pretty disappointed that *Seventeen* didn't commit to anything right away, but I'm really happy that they were willing to give me an hour of their time to talk. I'm also really happy that I got my picture taken with Ann Shoket, and gave her my email. They'll get in touch with us, and we'll see what happens. It would be really great to work with *Seventeen* in the future on this issue.

So, *Seventeen*, here's what I'd like to say:

Girls love your magazine. I am one of those girls. We'd love it even more if you were the ones to take charge and use less Photoshop on your models. I want to be able to look at a magazine and say "Whoa...she kind of reminds me of me." I want to be able to read your magazine without feeling bad about myself because I'm not eating the healthy foods that are supposed to make me have "a flat tummy," or because I don't have a bikini that makes my butt "pop," or some kind of other trick to supposedly fix or cover up my "imperfections."

I know, a lot of girls like to read about those things, but why do you think that is? It's because the media tells them that they have to have flat abs and a butt that pops to be beautiful. It's because magazines that girls love (like *Seventeen*) feature girls that are perfectly perfect, and we think we have to look like them.

Many other magazines do the same things, and often at more disturbing levels. You also see perfectly perfect, mannequin-looking girls in ads in all magazines alike. Sometimes it's really confusing to remember what's an ad, and what's a part of the actual magazine. This is also true for *Seventeen*.

So, *Seventeen*, I hope you understand what I'm saying—and what over 75,000 other people are saying, too. Photoshop hurts girls. We want to see pictures that look like us, in a magazine that's supposed to be for us. You have already done so much to make the lives of teenage girls more fun. Why not go a step further?