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Magazine Article Analysis
(sample essay by the instructor)

Twist magazine's "10 Sneaky Ways to Get a Guy by Tonight" provides a guide for teenaged girls to pursue boys through deception and indirect communication. In this essay, I will describe this article and analyze it from a social constructionist perspective.

The cover of the February 2003 issue of *Twist* features the come-on "Get a Guy by Tonight! You're Ready. He's Waiting." The article's emphasis on deception is revealed by the addition of the word "sneaky" in its actual headline. The suggestions vary in their level of deception. One of them involves an outright lie: buying two tickets to the movie and telling "your crush" that your best friend couldn't go because she has the flu. Others involve ploys to get yourself indebted to the boy, such as "accidentally" crashing into him on the dance floor, leaving your notebook in front of his locker for him to find and return, and intentionally losing a bet to him. Others appear more harmless, such asking to do something together, e.g., studying, getting a music lesson, without revealing your romantic intentions. The common theme of the suggestions is that high school girls are not supposed to ask guys out. Girls may initiate activities, but only by pretending that they aren't.

The article doesn't explain why girls are supposed to be sneaky. However, the implication of the article is that, for whatever reason, guys respond to these ploys. The article is found in the magazine's "All About Guys" section, which includes both information from guys ("Your Top 10 Valentine's Day Dates," "Do Guys Really Kiss & Tell"—in which a "panel" of five shirtless young men answer questions), stories from teenaged girls ("Your 8 Worst Crush Disasters Sorted"), advice ("He grabs my butt in public—not matter who is watching!) and a quiz ("Is He Worthy of You?"). In short, the section provides information to teenaged girls about what teenaged boys are like and how to relate to them. From a social constructionist perspective, the section is an example of typification. The articles build a gendered world of meaning about men and women by making characterizations about what they are like and how they should relate to one another.

Reading magazine articles is one way that people internalize—that is, are socialized into—their culture's world of meaning. These articles can also be thought of as cultural resources that young women may choose to draw upon to pursue their purposes.

The advice in "10 Sneaky Ways to Get a Guy by Tonight" supports traditional constructions of gender. By attempting any of the suggestions in the article, the reader will be supporting the notion that a man is supposed to take leadership in romantic relationships and a woman is supposed to follow her man's lead. We can see this in the beliefs that men are supposed to propose marriage to women, that men are the "heads" of their household and so on. Interestingly, perhaps the boldest suggestion in the article makes this the most clear.

> Send subliminal message. Enlist your friends to whisper, "Ask Katie out today" as they pass him in the halls, or slip little Post-its in his books or locker. He'll get the message. (p. 35)

The recipient of this tactic is sure to conclude that "Katie" wants to go out with him (unless he is the victim of a cruel prank). However, the "subliminal" message is clear that he is to do the asking.

One possible short-term consequence of following the advice in the article is that the reader will, indeed, "get the guy you've been dreaming of." All of the suggestions either reveal that the young woman is interested in her "crush" or are a step toward creating a situation where this will be made more clear. If the young man is interested in her, he can ask her out with little risk of rejection. Another possibility, though, is that her "sneaky" advances will be misunderstood and the oblivious target will decline because, for example, he doesn't give music lessons. Or the music lesson will not lead to a proper date because the teenaged boy doesn't understand the teenaged girl's larger project. Nevertheless, one might speculate that the approach suggested in this article may actually be a more effective approach to getting a date then the direct approach because teenaged boys may really not want girls to ask them out.

However, the "sneaky" approach to relations with men may be counterproductive in the long run, particularly in a long-term relationship where the woman may not get what she wants from her partner because she uses communication strategies that require him to discern the true goals behind her "sneaky" signals and then himself take the lead toward pursuing them. In short, the strategy promoted by the article may not result in long-term romantic fulfillment.

One can speculate about the consequences for other people in, for example, *Twist* readers' high schools if many teenaged girls are attempting to obtain dates by "sneaky" methods. First, it allows teenaged boys to reject girls who attempt to begin a relationship on equal footing by taking a direct approach to asking their "crush" out. In other words, if every girl in the high school rejected the "sneaky" approach and was straightforward in pursuing her romantic interests, the boys would have little choice but to submit to these kind of female-initiated relationships. But because some girls practice the "sneaky" approach, the boys can choose to be only in relationships where their girlfriends defer to their leadership. Many of the young men may be genuinely confused about the subtexts of the actions of their female classmates and miss opportunities to date young women who are interested in them. However, these high school males will at least get practice in the kind of relationship skills that they may need throughout their lives.

Second, then, other teenaged girls in the high school may be forced to adopt "sneaky" methods themselves since boys may reject those girls who take a more direct approach. Girls who learn about dating tactics from magazine articles, other media, friends and so on illustrate the social constructionist concept of "internalization." However, social constructionists also believe that the world of meanings, in this case the social institution of dating, acts back on us. This is called "objectivation." The constructions of dating relationships accepted by most high schoolers may make it harder for those who reject them to get dates and, thus, may support male privileges in dating relationships

Finally, the strategies put forward in "10 Sneaky Ways to Get a Guy by Tonight" may inhibit couples from creating new arrangements for organizing relationships. According to Stewart (1998), those couples who reject traditional gendered arrangements for living together must create new ones. By learning about romantic relationships in a setting where women must use "sneaky" tactics to communicate with men, couples may not develop the communication skills necessary to create new social arrangements. In other words, the strategies useful for getting a date in high school may not lay a good foundation for building long-term egalitarian relationships.

I will close with some observations about class and race in the article. The magazine appears to be aimed at young white women. This is apparent because most of the people pictured in the magazine are white. The article itself is illustrated by three photos of a young white woman—in one she is holding out two tickets; in the others she is taking guitar lessons and lifting weights with a young white man. The magazine also seems assume that readers have money to spend on dates—as well as to buy the products pushed in the "Stuff You'll Really Wear" section and to consume the media necessary to follow the snide celebrity coverage. It is possible that non-white and/or working-class readers of *Twist* may view the article differently than white middle-class or upper-class readers would. It is also possible that media aimed toward these readers may send different messages about dating relationships.

A note to my readers: One possible reaction to this essay is, "How can you make all these wild speculations about this harmless article? Can *Twist* magazine really cause so much trouble?" It is certainly true that this single magazine article by itself may not amount to much. However, this article is an example of the many messages we receive each day from the media, friends, family, coursework, and so on that construct a world of meaning. A more thorough analysis, one which is beyond the scope of this assignment, would be to examine many more media sources, for example, comparing articles in magazines aimed at

teenaged girls with those aimed at teenaged boys. However, for this assignment you need to focus on one text and speculate about its consequences as though it were an important source of socialization or as though people were exposed to many other texts like it (which may well be the case).

References

Stewart, Robert. 1998. "Explanations of Differences Between Females and Males." Pp. 63-69 in *Living and Acting Together*. Dix Hills, NY: General Hall.

"10 Sneaky Ways to Get a Guy by Tonight!" 2003. *Twist*, vol. 7, issue 2 (February), pp. 34-35.