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Teen Magazines: the Unhealthy Environment They Create and Their
Negative Influence

Magazines that target teenagers have an astonishing control over them and what they think, so much to the point where these magazines have become a harmful and deconstructive industry. Teen magazines create a glamorous world with skinny, flawless models, expensive clothes, and handsome boyfriends that diminishes the reality of almost every teen girl in the world. Today's youth seeks vital advice from these magazines, advice that they may not receive from their parents, but these magazines have lost sight of the important role they play in these teens' lives. These publications establish an image of perfection that initiates a sense of insecurity in many teenagers. Magazines overall produce a dangerous environment filled with uncertainty, misguided advice, and early exposure to sex.

One of the major issues among teenage girls is having a low self-esteem and a poor body image. "In fact, 59 percent of teen girls are reportedly dissatisfied with their body shape, 66 percent desire to lose weight, and over half report that the

appearance of models in the magazines influences their image of a perfect female body" (Brashich 67-68). Having confidence is vital to developing successful social skills, and teen girls lack this because of the models displayed as goddesses by magazines. "When teens have a poor body image, self-esteem dips. Relationships suffer too. Conversations with friends may center on dieting and exercise, to the exclusion of other topics. Teens focus more on how they look than on what they want to accomplish in life" (Kowalski). Teenagers with an unsatisfactory body image may even go as far as practicing dangerous eating habits. In a study conducted, "the odds of engaging in unhealthy weight-control behaviors (such as fasting, skipping meals, and smoking more cigarettes) were twice as high for the most frequent readers compared with those who did not read magazine articles about dieting and weight loss" (van den Berg, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, and Haines). How can these girls concentrate in school if they are skipping breakfast and dealing with eating disorders like anorexia? If magazines really had the readers' health in mind, they would consider advertising for wholesome and nourishing snacks, yet magazines are probably not willing to waste a page of their precious periodical to advertise for a company that may not be willing to pay them the big bucks.

Many magazines keep themselves on the market by advertising for companies who want to sell their products to teenagers. " In

the United States, few pure magazine and periodical publishers of size have remained independent. Most have been absorbed by larger media and entertainment companies" (Vogel 246). In order to keep an agreeable business relationship with the companies they advertise for, teen magazines, when writing articles, must keep in mind the best interests of these companies. For instance, if a magazine is advertising for a popular cosmetic line, this magazine cannot publish an article telling teenage girls that less make-up is better for the skin. "The media (on behalf of the companies that hire them) aim to plant the idea in our minds that we have a problem, and then offer us a product that will 'fix' it- for a price, of course" (Brashich 42). Magazines aim to make teenagers feel as if they are missing something because they know that teenagers will pay any price to feel popular and be the "it" boy or girl at school.

Pre-teens, girls between the ages of 12 and 15, have also become readers of magazines that are considered to be appropriate for older teens among the ages of 16 and 18, and this introduces them to topics that are beyond their understanding at such a young age. "Publishers of teen magazines, fragrance and cosmetics manufacturers, and the pop industry have all been accused of encouraging girls to become interested in make-up and fashion from a young age and to dress in a sexual way, potentially attracting the unwanted attentions

of adult males" (Benady). Over the past few years, there has been an increase in teenage pregnancies, and the critical question is, did teen magazines play a role in that rise? "Nevertheless, that has not stopped teen magazine *Bliss* advising readers as young as 14 to 'look five years older in five minutes' " (Benady). This is the advice that leads to teenagers lying about their age and using fake identification cards, which may lead to even more risky situations, like meeting older men and women or drinking alcohol. A popular teen magazine, *Sugar*, is a perfect example of a magazine that makes use of sexuality and boys to appeal to its girl readers:

Boasting it is the 'biggest and best' of the teenage magazines, this is filled with topless pictures of male pop stars. It even offers a website link to let readers watch one strip off. With articles such as 'The Single Girl's Guide to Partying' it is hardly intellectual stuff. It tends to focus more on grownup sexual issues than its rivals, which may be disheartening news to parents. (Vital)

Since when does a 13-year-old go to parties and have sex?

Editors should keep in mind that a girl as young as 12 can reach for one of their magazines, yet they continue to publish the same stories with the usual topics: sex, boys and fashion. It is reasonable, in fact practical, for magazines to inform teens about sexually transmitted diseases and how to properly use a

condom, but magazines cross the line by providing several positions that may increase the probability of having an orgasm and how to make themselves more desirable. If pre-teens are learning about sex and make-up at a younger age than they should, consequently they will begin to develop the state of mind of an older individual. Magazines are one of the main contributors to the corruption of the younger generations and there should be a limit to how far these magazines should be allowed to go and how much parents and educators should tolerate.

Teen girls must take a stand to protect their physical and emotional health, which teen magazines are putting on the line. As the major audience and consumers, magazines must listen to the opinions of its readers. "[Sarah Stinson, head of the eating disorders program at Fairview Red Wing Health Services in Minnesota] encourages young people to become activists: write letters to companies praising ads that show normal teens with different body shapes and sizes. Conversely, send complaints and boycott companies that exploit young people by sexualizing them or glorifying thinness" (Kowalski). It must be seen from this point of view: if teen girls allow these magazines to remain in the market, they are allowing themselves to be brainwashed and manipulated. Just like movies are rated, magazines should be rated too, to prevent a younger audience from reading something

that is targeted at an older group. Such suggestions have been put forth by one specific organization:

A campaign for government regulation of girls' magazines is being waged by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, which is demanding age guidance to be put on the front of magazines. The ATL's Ralph Surman, who is heading the campaign says: [Magazines] are promoting and glamorizing sexual activity and promoting promiscuity. These girls require a childhood, they are not fashion objects that can be exploited. (Benady)

Parents can also take a step forward in teaching their children about the media and the methods they utilize to manipulate. When their teens are watching television or flipping through the pages of a magazine, the parents can make use of the time by "answering questions and creating teachable moments about advertising and other media messages" (Dembling). Children are ignorant to the cleverly hidden mechanisms of commercials and colorful ads. "Kids need help developing sharp critical thinking tools to hack through their media jungle" (Dembling). Innocence is gone once a pre-teen begins to think about grown-up matters, so parents and teachers should begin to educate during early childhood so as teens, they can detect the techniques behind marketing.

Teen magazines diminish what a strong girl is capable of because they stress the importance of being fashionable, being a great kisser, and the knowing the latest celebrity gossip. They surround teen girls with an impossible standard of beauty that will always be beyond their reach. These magazines open the door to major issues such as eating disorders, teen pregnancy, and depression. Young women require intellectual magazines that promote healthy eating, provide information that stimulates their minds, and introduce role models that inspire them to reach for their dreams.

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