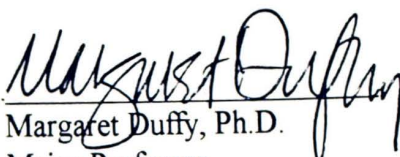


TEEN MAGAZINES SASSY'S AND BRIO'S INFLUENCE ON THE
SELF-CONCEPTS OF FEMALE ADOLESCENTS AS RELATED TO
SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY


PAIGE BLAIR JONES


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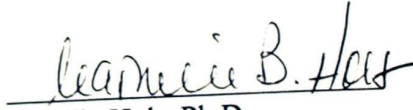

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of Female Adolescents as Related to Social Learning Theory

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

Austin Peay State University

Paige Blair Jones

December 1996

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Gerald Walker Jones and Mrs. Sherra Elizabeth Fox Jones, who have given me invaluable educational opportunities. I will always be indebted to them for their generosity and inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Margaret Duffy, for sharing her expertise and resources. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. Reece Elliot and Dr. Micheal Gotcher, for their invaluable advice and assistance. I would additionally like to thank Dr. Ellen Kanervo for her instruction and assistance and Mrs. Brenda Jarrell for her cooperation and assistance.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the teen magazines Sassy and Brio on the self-concepts and views of adolescent females. The specific elements of the magazines used were the fashion and cosmetics advertisements and the photographs accompanying feature articles. The subjects were 100 female students ranging from ages 12 to 15 at New Providence Middle School in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System in Tennessee where Sassy is available in the school libraries. Respondents completed a 20-item questionnaire and participated in focus group discussions which evaluated comparison of the self with models and self-perception of attractiveness. Results suggest support for the Hypothesis One that exposure to Sassy generates social comparison leading to dissatisfaction with appearance and at least a temporary negative self-concept and for Hypothesis Two that exposure to Brio lessens dissatisfaction with appearance, thereby raising the self-concept.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research indicates that the messages sent to adolescent females by teen magazines are powerful and probably have negative social consequences. The studies by Duffy and Gotcher (1996) and by Evans, Rutberg, Sather, and Turner (1991) reveal messages which tell readers that a woman's worth in society is mainly dependent upon beauty, fashion, and seduction. Several investigations such as those by Tan (1979) and Richins (1991) have shown that these recurrent themes in television and adult fashion magazines generate social comparison, adversely affecting the self-concepts of the women in the target audience. This research investigates whether self-concepts in adolescent females are similarly affected by exposure to teen magazines.

Rosenberg (1967) defines self-concept as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to [her]self as an object" (42). Wilmot (1987) identifies [*self by social comparison*] as a key element in the shaping of what one perceives as a popular image. He explains that "the entire process of establishing self-esteem is dependent upon our comparison with others" (55).

Schlessinger (1994) explains that self-esteem is only a vague reflection of what it used to be. In the past, self-esteem depended on the acts of effort and achievement that are the foundation of character. Today, however, it rests on being instead of doing. Indeed, popular teen magazines present women of worth as those who are physically beautiful and able to attract men. Schlessinger decries the absurdity of women acquiring self-esteem through mere physical beauty and/or their relationships with men. She states that if a woman wants high self-esteem, then she must "get it the old-fashioned way: she

must earn it through intellectual accomplishment” (9), and not by confirmation from a man or a glamorous image. Advertising and content in popular women’s magazines, however, promote exactly that as the key to a woman’s success.

Blair (1994) discusses where societal responsibility lies in promoting and continuing “the concept of woman as mere appearance” (20). She explains that much of feminist theory blames men, but asks what role women have in perpetuating this demeaning imagery. Feminist critics like Mulvey (1975) and Doane (1988) also question how women view other women. They focus on print advertising in magazines such as Vogue, Cosmopolitan, and Glamour. However, research for this thesis and other studies suggests that the initiation of women as producers of seductive images for themselves begins long before the use of these adult fashion titles by women in their young adulthood. It starts in earlier experiences including the impressionable teen years with the glossy, flashy portrayals of seduction in teen magazines.

Such research points out that teen magazines tell their readers that self-esteem is achieved through beauty and sex-appeal. Evans, Rutberg, Sather, and Turner (1991) report what they consider harmful content in the contemporary teen magazines Seventeen, YM, and Sassy. The researchers cite an overwhelming presence of articles concerning boys, sex, fashion, and beauty. This message influences its intended audience.

Media exposure has a definite effect on viewers, according to Riffe, Place, and Mayo (1993), whether one’s theoretical perspective is based in persuasion models, social learning, or development theory. In applying this to gender research, the researchers explain that a majority of viewers internalize media images which present beautiful,

fashionable, seductive women as most powerful and successful among women in our society. Similarly, Griffin, Viswanath, and Schwartz (1994) point out that advertising seems to be obsessed with gender and sexuality, and that this “fictional or quasi-fictional world of imagery continues to saturate our media with models against which to gauge our own identities” (492).

According to some studies, young women in their teen years avidly seek out references by which to gauge their identities, and teen magazines are a popular yet dangerous source. Duffy and Gotcher (1996) argue, for example, that teen magazines like YM act as guides for adolescent females. The images offer a singular view of gender relations, a view which the researchers believe is damaging to the welfare of the magazine’s readers. They further state that there is significant research from empirical studies and popular literature which illuminates the power of mass-mediated messages in influencing the behaviors and self-images of readers.

Richins’s (1991) study is one example of such research. She states that readers “(consciously or unconsciously) compare their more mediocre selves and lives with the idealized images and find themselves lacking” (71). Richins surveyed female college students to determine how comparison with models in ads from fashion magazines affected their self-perceptions of physical attractiveness. Seventy-one percent of her subjects reported that they do compare themselves with the models in the ads, and 49 percent of the respondents said that they wished they looked more like the models in the ads. Focus group interviews revealed that participants felt dissatisfied and even unhappy with themselves in comparison with the models in the advertising.

Jennings-Walstedt, Geis, and Brown (1980) also found that long-term exposure to sexist portrayals of females in television advertising and programs contributes to adult women adopting these values and ideals, thereby creating a negative self-image.

In a related survey conducted by Tan (1979), high school students reported that beauty, sex-appeal, and youth are most important to a woman's success in society. He explains that the media affect audience conceptions of social reality by emphasizing the themes of physical beauty and sex-appeal repeatedly. Since teen magazines reiterate the same motifs, it is reasonable to expect analogous results.

The purpose of this research is to determine how teen magazines influence the self-concepts of middle school females. The study exposed 100 female students between the ages of 12 and 15 to Sassy, a secular teen magazine, and to Brio, a teen magazine which promotes a different perspective from the Christian viewpoint.

According to Sassy's media kit, the magazine's editorial content offers articles that cover "fashion, beauty, relationships, pop culture, and current trends" (3). The mission statement says that Sassy strives to "promote self-esteem, self-expression, and self-empowerment for the independent, young woman" (1). The circulation, which includes newsstand sales and subscriptions, is approximately 700,000. The magazine's advertising policy dictates that it will not accept alcohol or tobacco ads since adolescents are its target audience. Clothing and cosmetics dominate Sassy's advertising.

Brio's media kit states that the magazine offers articles that cover education options, career choices, and spiritual development as well as fashion, beauty, and relationships. The mission statement says that Brio strives to help young women build "a

healthy relationship with God, a positive self-esteem, and healthy relationships with the opposite sex”(1). The magazine is published by Focus on the Family which is a Christian organization founded by Dr. James Dobson. The circulation which includes only subscriptions is approximately 170,000. The magazine’s advertising policy dictates that it will not accept alcohol or tobacco ads since adolescents are its target audience. Christian music, fiction, and charity organizations dominate Brio’s advertising.

Sassy, approximately 140 pages in length, was chosen because of its availability through the library to the student body at New Providence Middle School in the Clarksville-Montgomery County, Tennessee School System. Brio, approximately 30 pages in length, was chosen because its format closely parallels that of Sassy, and it is the only periodical of its kind that differs in content from other popular teen magazines. The vast difference in length between the two periodicals is in the number of advertisements. They comprise approximately 50 percent of Sassy and 15 percent of Brio.

A brief overview of the content of the two magazines further illuminates the material in the study. Sassy’s September 1995 cover features a female in white satin, button-down pants, black ankle boots, and a silver satin jacket sitting with her legs spread apart. Her eyes are slightly narrowed, and her mouth is parted in a half-smile. The pose is sexually provocative, and the clothing is flashy. The female appears to be between 18 and 21 years old.

Brio’s September 1995 cover features a female in a conservative green knit top and blue jeans. The view is from waist upward. Her facial expression is a broad smile. The pose and clothing are conservative. The female appears to be between 14 and 16 years

old.

Sassy's coinciding captions read, "Boy-Magnet Beauty," "Hair & Makeup: Go Flirty," "EXtreme Sports," and "Fall Fashion Hip List." The table of contents contains such titles as "Daredevil Dressing," "Finding Free Condoms By Phone," and "Some girls have real power; others just take off all their clothes." All of these statements relate to appearance and attracting the opposite sex. Only the caption about sports goes into another topic area.

Brio's captions read, "Great Money Making Ideas," "Book Bonanza," "How to know if you're liking the right guy when looks aren't everything," "The 3-Minute Make Over," "10 Cures for Gossip," and "Tools for Spiritual Growth." The table of contents includes such titles as "Eating the right foods can help you stay in peak form," "Help! I have oily skin," "On-the-go Glamour," "If you love reading, you'll have a great time with these books," and "How to Earn Money for College." While Brio includes the issues of appearance and relationships with boys, it also addresses intellectual topics such as reading, education, jobs, and personal values.

In analyzing the students' survey responses and focus group comments after exposure to the magazines, this study examines what messages the readers absorb and how these magazines affect their self-concepts through social comparison. The study proposes that the emphasis on physical attractiveness and sex appeal in both the advertisements and feature articles of Sassy affects the self-concepts of its readers differently than Brio which focuses on education, career aspirations, and moral maturity.

CHAPTER 2

HYPOTHESES AND RATIONALE

Since the research conducted by Richins (1991) and by Tan (1979) shows that advertising in fashion magazines and television generates social comparison in college and high school women, it is important to study how exposure to teen magazines affects adolescent females.

Hypotheses

1. Exposure to Sassy will generate social comparison leading to temporary negative self-concepts among its audience members.
2. Exposure to Brio will lessen dissatisfaction with personal appearance among viewers, thereby temporarily raising self-concepts.

Rationale

Because communication researchers have found that television commercials and magazine advertisements adversely affect the self-concepts of college and high school females, it is reasonable to expect adolescent females to incorporate the values presented in teen magazines into their self-concepts.

Results of an advertising recognition and recall-by-age study conducted by Dubow (1995) show that under-18-year-old teenagers have greater recall, recognition, and day-after recall of advertisements than young and older adults. Harper and Marshall (1991) administered Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale to 201 adolescents and discovered that girls reported more problems and lower levels of self-esteem than did boys. Therefore, adolescent females are especially vulnerable to messages in advertising.

Because Sassy is available in the New Providence Middle School library, and 73

percent of the female students report reading this magazine before school a couple of times a week and during their biweekly library visit, as ascertained from an earlier in-school survey, it is likely that the advertising and feature articles have had some influence on the students' views and self-concepts.

Since Brio is available through subscription only and is not on newsstands or in library periodical collections, it is likely that this will be the first exposure of this magazine to the students in the research. The broader focus of the magazine's subject matter and the use of ordinary females in its photographs as opposed to professional models, however, was hypothesized to have a different effect on the audience's self-concept, even if only temporary.

The research attempts to answer the following questions concerning the teen magazines Sassy and Brio:

- 1) Do readers compare themselves with the images presented in the magazines?
- 2) What do readers report about their own self-concepts?

The term self-concept must be defined as various researchers use relative terms such as self-perception, self-esteem, self-image, self-awareness, self-identity, and self-concept. All of these terms have been used in correlation with Social Learning Theory which explains that people learn and develop their self-concepts through social interaction and comparison with others.

Wilmot (1987) identifies self-awareness, self-perception, and self-esteem as components of the self-concept. He explains that self-awareness falls under two categories: subjective and objective. The subjective is the more common and is when a

person is not focusing on him-or-herself, but is subconsciously aware of his or her role in relation to other people or things he or she is interacting with. Objective is when a person turns inward and views him or herself as another object in an interaction.

Bem (1972) defines self-perception as an extension of self-awareness. He specifies that a person draws conclusions about him or herself in systematic ways and comes to know his or her own attitudes, emotions, and other internal states by examining them in personal behavior. Rosenberg (1967) defines self-concept as the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object. Wilmot (1987) simplifies this definition to a generalized view of oneself. He states that self-esteem is one's feeling of worth arising from a specific situation, and that the combination of all cases of specific self-esteem makes up the self-concept. He then goes on to use self-image and self-identity interchangeably with self-concept.

In light of these definitions, this study will refer to self-concept as defined by Wilmot (1987). Evans (1991) states that little is yet known about what concepts and values adolescents glean from the magazines they read. This study, therefore, will attempt to discover just such information.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various communications researchers such as Evans, Rutberg, Sather, and Turner (1991) and Duffy and Gotcher (1996) have conducted studies to analyze the content of teen magazines, but none have yet attempted to discover what messages middle school readers actually absorb from them in forming their self-concepts. While similar studies such as those conducted by Tan (1979) and by Richins (1991) have documented the influence of television advertising on high school females and of adult fashion magazines on college females, there has been virtually no research concerning teen magazines and their impact on adolescent females.

The number of teen magazines on store shelves is increasing because of high profitability created by their popularity among teenaged females. Donaton and Mandese (1993) report that NBC had editors working to produce a new publication for teens because of the prediction of high financial gain. Huhn (1993) provides the names of three new titles only available within the last three years: Dirt, Mouth2Mouth, and Tell.

Of the established magazines, Sassy is one of the most popular among young women. Gelman (1990) reports the three most recent purchases among females aged 13 to 16: Dick Tracy T-shirt, Sassy magazine, and Maybelline Shine Free compact.

Because of the rash of new teen magazines on the market targeting adolescent females, the increasing teen purchasing power according to Cohen and Chakravarti (1990), and the controversial sexually-angled advertising in such magazines, it is important to examine what kind of influence the magazines Sassy and Brio have on the self-concepts and views of the readers.

The following sources give relevant information in developing background for such a study. The articles researched address issues of sexually slanted advertising, advice columns, and feature articles in teen magazines such as Seventeen, Sassy, Teen, and YM.

The motivation behind teen magazine publication is primarily profit which indicates that editors' concerns for their audience is minimal. Bettman (1986) explains that it is therefore important to examine the media in light of consumer psychology and issues of adolescent socialization.

Duffy and Gotcher (1996) discuss the monetary motivation behind the teen magazine YM. They state that the "magazine does not exist to improve the lives of young women by giving them important information and support; it exists only to improve the lives of the magazine's owners, advertisers, and investors through increased revenues" (43). The researchers examine YM's media kit which is sent to potential advertisers. It states that the magazine's goal is to establish a long-term bond between advertisers and the audience. Because the content is similar, it is likely that the same motivation exists behind other popular teen magazines on the market.

Noxell and Maybelline suspended advertising in Sassy because of complaints by the Moral Majority according to Time (1988). The teen magazine responded to the criticism by printing an article entitled "Virgins are Cool" in its November 1988 issue. While perhaps admirable, the focus is still on sex or the absence of it which focuses entirely on the body and appearance as opposed to intellectual pursuits.

Duffy and Gotcher's (1996) content analysis of YM's advertising found that advertisements and articles send explicit sexual messages to teens. An article photograph

shows a young girl in jeans which hang below her abdomen to expose her underwear. A boy hovers over her with a rifle suspended from his right hand.

A September 1996 article in YM boasted the title, "What happens when your mom catches you masturbating." The article made such statements as "a door lock can be a girl's best friend." The focus of these magazines is almost completely on the physical, specifically a woman's sexual activity. The magazines state through their content and their advertising that unless a female has adequate sex-appeal and can attract a male, she is uncool and unsuccessful in society.

Several communications researchers explain that it is difficult for readers to escape the messages of such advertising. Jennings-Walstedt, Geis, and Brown (1980) found that long-term exposure caused women to adopt values and ideals such as the perfect body, face, and fashion as paramount to their self-worth. Following this line of thought, Yanni (1990) explains that women do not easily substitute images contrary to sexist illustrations, and Rakow (1992) states that women do not often assume alternative values in the face of such prolific advertising. Blair (1994) argues that "the female viewer is continually forced to look at herself through traditionally male eyes, to fit her personal history and her body into that money-making construct known as 'woman'"(20). She further elaborates that print advertising coerces women into adopting constructs of merely beautiful "mannequins." Much more vulnerable than adult women to the image of woman as mere appearance are adolescent females.

Teenaged females use media to help shape their image in socialization with peers according to Kubey and Larson (1990). Regarding fashion and male-female relationships,

teens reported discussing shows such as Beverly Hills 90210 concerning what clothing their favorite actresses wore and whether or not a particular TV couple had sexual relations. Popular teen celebrities are often featured in the teen magazines with interviews and provocative photographs.

Weissman (1993), a reporter for Mediaweek, recalls reading Teen and Young Miss (now YM) when she was 12 years old. She explains that she thought she would find a shortcut to maturing inside the issues. She states that her younger sister avidly reads Sassy, and bases her mode of dress on the fashions portrayed in the magazine.

Jennifer Marks, a 15-year-old in Chicago, revealed her views about Calvin Klein's controversial ads which are featured in teen magazines such as YM and Sassy. Newsweek journalist Ingrassia (1995) reported that the teenager discussed an ad which showed a "young-looking girl in a skimpy tank top, her jeans pushed below her belly button" (60). Jennifer said, "I think she looks cute there. All my friends wear their pants down past their underwear. I don't think they're exploiting her at all. She's got the body to wear it. Why not? I can't believe there's controversy over this" (60). Teenaged females are being convinced by the media that if they have a sexy body, they should show it.

Waterman (1985) studied the various influences on identity development in adolescents. Research discovered that issues such as interpersonal relations and body image contributed greatly to teen self-esteem. He explains that sexual intimacy in teenage interpersonal relationships can have devastating effects.

Duffy and Gotcher echoed the danger of a teen magazine promoting sexual activity as part of a cool, successful image by citing statistics published by the Center for Disease

Control: “80% of young people are engaged in sexual activity and two-thirds of the 12 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases each year occur in people under 25” (45).

The availability of birth control information in Seventeen increased markedly from 1962 to 1982 according to Williams (1984). This information most often appeared in the editor’s letters to the readers. In September 1995, Sassy includes such titles as “Free Condoms by Phone” in its table of contents. The danger of teen magazines encouraging sexual activity among adolescents is obvious according to the statistics listed above. To tell a teen to use a condom is no better than putting the proverbial band-aid on one of the gravest dangers facing young people. The world seems to be ignoring the risk of emotional trauma from sexual intimacy among teens, which affects the self-concept.

According to Public Health Official Sheehan (1992), most teenage education programs accept that nothing can be done to prevent teenagers from having sex and concentrate on getting them to use condoms. “Yet this approach ignores the emotional problems associated with teenage sexuality” (36). She further explains that sex education is about nothing less than how and when we hand over this astonishing gift of the self” (37). To give one’s intimate self to another and then be rejected is a severe blow to the self-esteem.

Considering previous research on the sexist portrayal of women in the advertising of television, adult fashion magazines, and teen magazines; and the studies on the negative effects among high school, college, and adult women audience members, it is worthwhile to examine the influence of teen magazines on the self-concepts of adolescent females.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Subjects

Surveying the student population of a public school is one of the few ways to access enough female adolescents at one time for exposure to the two periodicals and subsequent surveying and focus group discussion. New Providence Middle School in Clarksville, Tennessee offers Sassy in its school library, so some students have been exposed previously to the magazine.

Four Health classes with a final total of 100 members of New Providence Middle School were exposed to slides and surveyed during April 1996. The subjects were all female and ranged from 12 to 15 years old. Students were asked to volunteer and obtain parental consent for this research.

Materials

The student questionnaire (see Appendix) has 20 questions pertaining to comparison of the self with the models of Sassy's advertising and feelings of self-worth. Included in the survey are items that measure respondents' self-esteem from Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale: "I am not satisfied with my body," "I feel good about myself," "I am pretty satisfied with the way I look," and "I feel unattractive." The questionnaire uses a Likert Scale and was adapted from the research instrument used in Richins's 1991 study with her written permission.

Procedure

Color slides were made from both magazines of the outside and inside front covers, the back covers, and the feature article photographs in the center of the

magazines. The slides were shown in chronological order as taken from the January through June 1995 issues of each periodical.

In the first segment of the study, all students viewed 24 color slides of Sassy and subsequently completed the questionnaire. This part of the study had two objectives: to determine if students compared themselves with the professional models in the ads and photographs and to discover whether they reported a negative self-concept after viewing the slides.

In the second segment of the study, all students viewed 24 color slides Brio. Students were then divided into focus groups of approximately ten members where they discussed their feelings and perceptions freely. Students wrote their thoughts concerning the slide content down on blank paper and subsequently participated in an open discussion. Middle school faculty members experienced in moderating class discussions monitored the sessions and recorded the subjects' comments. The focus group segment of the study had two objectives: to determine what differences students observed between the advertising and articles in Sassy and Brio and to assess how this content influenced their feelings about themselves.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The first two items in Table One show that more than 60 percent of respondents compared themselves with models in advertising and wished they looked more like them. This supports Hypothesis One which stated that exposure would generate social comparison. It also supports Richins's 1991 study which found that more than 70 percent of college women compared themselves with models in ads and 49 percent wished they looked more like them. The second two items reveal that more than 50 percent were actually dissatisfied with their own appearance which is higher than Richins's findings where 35 percent reported dissatisfaction with appearance. The higher percentage in this study could be attributed to the turbulent emotional state of the teen years versus the more mature, stable state of college women as discussed by Wilmot (1987).

Table 1
Responses to Questionnaire Statements

Questionnaire Statement	* Percentage
Comparison	
"When I see models in clothing ads, I think about how well or badly I look compared to them."	65
"I have wished I looked more like the models in the personal care/cosmetics ads."	73
Dissatisfaction	
"When I see models in swimsuit ads, they remind me of how I am not satisfied with my body's appearance." **	51
"I wish I could change the way I look."	54
Efforts to Change	
"When I see models in ads, I think about how plastic surgery could make me look better."	36
"Sometimes the ads have motivated me to go on diets to lose weight."	44
Consumerism	
"Advertisements for clothing products make me wish I owned the item featured."	65
"When dressing for special occasions or buying clothes, I choose clothing that ads show as in style."	59
Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale items	
"I am pretty satisfied with the way I look."	32
"I feel unattractive."	34
"I feel good about myself."	45
*combination of answers 4 & 5 **modified self-esteem scale item	

Over one third have thought about plastic surgery making them look better, and almost half have tried dieting as a result of looking at an ad. This result corresponds with Mazur's (1986) study which stated that sexist advertising leads to increased use of surgery to alter appearance.

Only one third reported being satisfied with their appearance which indicates a negative self-concept according to Rosenberg's (1967) definition. In support of Hypothesis One, results of the first segment of this study suggest that female adolescents not only compare themselves with the images they view in teen magazines, but also find themselves lacking. Since Wilmot (1987) explains that self-concept is directly correlated with social comparison, and Rosenberg states that the content of self-concept includes feelings about physical attributes, it is logical to conclude that the dissatisfaction resulting from the comparison leads to a negative self-concept, even if only a temporary one.

One insight from the remarks in Table Two reveals that Sassy seems to encourage females to "grow up" in their physical appearances before they are emotionally ready to handle the consequences of sexual intimacy. Sassy's image is all about stimulating sexual desire. For example, the September 1995 cover boasts one caption reading, "Boy-Magnet Beauty." Duffy and Gotcher (1996) explain that the themes prevalent in YM glorify the beauty of sexual fulfillment "while its consequences are minimized" (45).

The particular comment which reads, "Sassy girls have a more adult look. Brio is too young for me" reveals that the speaker may be mistaking sex-appeal as the way to appear adult. This directly relates to the statement made by journalist Weissman (1993) who said that she thought she would find a shortcut to maturing inside the pages of teen

Table 2

Selected Focus Group Comments

Magazine	Comment
<u>BRIO</u>	<p>"The girls in these pictures look more like us; I feel like I look just as nice as they do."</p> <p>"I feel better looking at the girls in <u>Brio</u>; they look normal, like everyday people."</p> <p>"The topics in the articles are more mature."</p> <p>"They talk more about real life."</p> <p>"We are interested in more than just our looks."</p>
<u>SASSY</u>	<p>"<u>Sassy</u> just tells you about guys and your looks; what about jobs and college?"</p> <p>"<u>Sassy</u> girls have a more adult look. <u>Brio</u> is too young for me."</p> <p>"I'd like to look like the <u>Sassy</u> models do."</p> <p>"I've spent a lot of money on make-up to try to look more like a model."</p> <p>"I don't ever want to be fat, no matter what."</p> <p>"<u>Sassy</u> seems to think that we want to have sex with every boyfriend we have."</p>

magazines. This maturity depends entirely on physical appearance and is the very issue Schlessinger laments. There is no shortcut to maturity, and true maturity depends upon discipline in effort and intellectual accomplishment. She states that if a woman wants self-esteem, she must "get it the old-fashioned way: she must earn it" (9).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Examination of the questionnaire responses and focus group comments suggests support for Hypothesis One. Advertising and article photographs in Sassy generate social comparison which fosters temporary dissatisfaction with personal appearance and negative feelings about the self. Three areas affected in young women's lives as a result of this comparison are time taken with appearance, distraction from intellectual interests, and physical and mental health.

The dangerous social consequences stemming from the feelings of inadequacy are that young women will put overzealous effort, even to the drastic extreme of plastic surgery, into trying to make themselves look like the models they see in the ads. Thirty-six percent of the subjects reported that they have considered plastic surgery. Sixty-five percent stated that ads for clothing make them want the item featured, and fifty-nine percent stated that they look at ads to give them ideas about what they should wear. A revealing focus group comment states, "I have spent a lot of money on make-up." This indicates that they are willing to spend time and money on clothing and cosmetics that create a personal image of sex-appeal, thereby perpetuating the image of woman as mere appearance and object for male pleasure. Sadly, even after such exertion, many females realize that they still cannot measure up to the professional models, leaving them feeling lacking as women.

Perhaps more devastating than the effort to attain the perfect body, face, and positive attention from males is the distraction from worthwhile effort in pursuing and developing intellectual abilities. Schlessinger (1994) points out that all women should

focus on “self-effort as the avenue to self-esteem and positive identity” (12). She explains that when a woman attempts to acquire her self-worth from her physical appearance and/or a relationship with a man, she is expecting far too little of herself. This supports Foster’s (1994) finding that most of her female students would prefer five pounds off their thighs than an A in their classes.

The negative self-concept created by continuous comparison of the self with popular images in media can prevent an adolescent girl from concentrating on goals of far greater substance. Readers of teen magazines like Sassy may miss the opportunity to excel in academics, thereby never attaining a successful career which could positively influence the self-concept and contribute to a more viable society. It is possible that when women succumb to the superficial portrayals of women in the media, they are squelching their potential for a positive self-concept which is not dependent on things which are largely uncontrollable such as appearance and the attention of men.

For the creators of Sassy to claim to be in business to foster the “self-empowerment” of young women is ironic. In trying to maintain physical beauty and sex-appeal, women are not empowered but enslaved. They spend their lives trying to improve their appearance for the satisfaction of others rather than trying to develop their careers and personal interests for self-satisfaction and improved self-concept.

A third dangerous consequence of adopting the idea of appearance and sex-appeal as most important in a woman’s worth is premature sexual activity which can lead to emotional problems, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy. Teen magazines promote provocative dress as power and discuss sex, condoms, and

masturbation as if premarital sex is expected, acceptable, and safe. Their message seems to eliminate shame and modesty from sex in the teen years in dating relationships. Public Health Official Sheehan (1992) explains that eradicating shame is “not simply fixing a public health problem. [It is] wholesale restructuring of the human personality” (37). She explains that taking a young person’s modesty and giving her a pill or him a condom is not a fair trade. In considering emotional and physical safety in sex, Sheehan asks, “Isn’t the real C-word for sex education ‘commitment,’ not ‘condoms’?” (38).

Examination of the focus group comments such as “The girls in these pictures look more like us; I feel like I look as nice as they do” supports Hypothesis Two which projected that the dissatisfaction ignited by the slides from Sassy would be lessened after exposure to Brio. The majority of the participants reported feeling better about their appearance after looking at the slides of ordinary females from the advertising and article photographs of Brio. The comparison generated by the second set of slides did not set unrealistic expectations because ordinary-looking females pose in Brio ads and photographs rather than professional models.

Perhaps even more importantly, respondents noted the wider variety of topics addressed. In addition to fashion and beauty, viewers appreciated the article titles concerning jobs, college, literature, music, and hobbies. One focus group comment pertaining to Brio reads, “They talk more about real life.” Another comment in the same category states, “The topics are more mature.” The coverage of these intellectual subjects can encourage the readers to explore and develop their interests and abilities which could foster a stable, positive self-concept. Schlessinger (1994) addresses this issue when she

states that if “a woman does not dare to dream or endeavor to [an intellectual] purpose, a sense of meaning generally comes from excessive emphasis on a relationship with a man” (13).

The remarks made about Brio show that the more realistic perspective in the magazine engenders a more positive feeling about the self in comparison with the ordinary-looking models. This corresponds with Richins’s (1991) study which reported the following focus group comment, “You look at these ads and you feel inadequate, like you can’t measure up” (75). The students also observed that the topics covered in Brio address issues that have no relation to appearance and the alleged importance of male attention. Nearly all of the participants reported feeling good about their own appearances in comparison with the ordinary females pictured in Brio.

One limitation of this study concerns the method of exposure. Slides were projected on a screen, much larger than the images appear in the actual magazines, and students had no choice but to look at them. The treatment was related, however, to actual use by readers. Focus group participants reported that they study and discuss articles and ads with their friends. Also, questionnaire respondents reported that they look at ads to give them ideas about what to wear for specific occasions. Both of these activities among teens would require more than a few seconds.

The exposure to the slides of Sassy demonstrated that the comparison of the self with professional models in the advertising and photographs of feature articles can negatively affect feelings about the self, such as satisfaction with appearance. Though one could argue that the effects of viewing teen magazine photographs on the self-concept

may indeed be temporary, researchers such as Courtney and Whipple (1983) and Yi (1990) have counter-argued that long-term exposure, which comes with repeated reading of a magazine, has cumulative effects on the audience. Because female students at New Providence Middle School reported reading Sassy as well as other teen magazines on a weekly basis, it is logical to conclude that the publications continuously affect the views and perceptions of the girls.

Sassy presents a world where a beautiful appearance and sex-appeal are most important for a woman to be successful while promoting condoms as a means to escaping any possible consequences from sexual intimacy. Conversely, Brio presents topics which address the wide range of interests in most females' lives such as part-time jobs, summer reading lists, college applications, and career pursuits as well as covering fashion, beauty, and dating relationships.

Considered as a whole, Sassy and many other magazines like it offer a scant selection of choices on the road to success for today's young women. This study suggests that more publications like Brio might be beneficial. What the shelves are left with offer dangerous messages to the vulnerable teenagers who read them.

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STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is about advertising and article photographs in teen magazines. It is anonymous, and your name will never be associated with your answers.

The statements concern your feelings about the slides you just saw from the teen magazine Sassy. Circle the response that best represents your feelings or views.

1 = never 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always

1. Advertisements for clothing products make me wish I owned the item featured.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I like the models in ads for clothing items.

1 2 3 4 5

3. The ads are informative.

1 2 3 4 5

4. When I see models in clothing ads, I think about how well or badly I look compared to the models.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel good about myself.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Ads for clothing items make me think about my own wardrobe.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Ads for clothing items make me feel dissatisfied with the way I look.

1 2 3 4 5

8. When dressing for a special occasion or buying clothes, I choose clothing that ads show as in-style.

1 2 3 4 5

9. When I see models in swimsuit ads, they remind me of how I am not satisfied with my body.

1 2 3 4 5

10. The ads should give more price information.

1 2 3 4 5

11. The models display the clothing well.

1 2 3 4 5

12. Looking at the models in the ads make me wish I could change the way I look.

1 2 3 4 5

13. Ads for cosmetics make me wish I owned the product featured.

1 2 3 4 5

14. When I see models in ads, I think about how plastic surgery could make me look better.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I like the models in cosmetics ads.

1 2 3 4 5

16. I feel unattractive.

1 2 3 4 5

17. Sometimes looking at models in ads have motivated me to go on diets to lose weight.

1 2 3 4 5

18. I have wished I looked more like the models in the personal care/cosmetics ads.

1 2 3 4 5

Please go on to the next page.

19. I have used the products featured in the ads.

1 2 3 4 5

20. I am pretty satisfied with the way I look.

1 2 3 4 5

The following information is necessary for the study but will not be associated with your name.

1. I am (circle one) 12 13 14 15 16 years old.

2. I am (circle one) **Hispanic** **Asian** **Native American Indian**
 black **white** **other**