

Where have all the real issues gone?

By Evan.

One common misconception about magazines aimed at teenage girls and young women is that that is absolutely no and or inaccurate information about issues regarding choice and their bodies. In browsing through some of my sister's issues of *Teen People*, *Seventeen*, and *Cosmopolitan*, I found this to be partially true... to some extent. Before even really reading any of the magazines, I noticed most of the editors-in-chief were women, at least in the issues I looked at, in addition to having a mostly women staff. (The editor-in-chief of *Teen People* is a man however, along with the editorial director.) A thought crossed my mind as I was looking over the long list of women who worked at the different magazines: Most of the criticism they have gotten has been negative, and not always constructive. (Sometimes the negative is very constructive, at least in my opinion. Jean Kilborn's *Killing Us Softly* series is a perfect example.) I thought it would be interesting if different members of the choice community wrote to the women and men in charge of these magazines, and said things like, "I thought this article was really great, and focused on some important issues. I would love to see more of these." Or, "This article touched on an issue I thought was important, but there wasn't much else. I'd love to see more."

Of course for every article that at least scratched an issue relating to choice, or self care, there were hundreds more articles and ads that contradicted them. That seemed to be the most upsetting thing that was the same in every magazine. The reader is bombarded with thousands of confusing images and articles that don't present any positive views or opinions. Some of the articles I found more disturbing were called things like "10 Things Not to Do When You're Drunk" which ended up being a goofy list that included not tweezing your eyebrows or using a StairMaster; absolutely nothing about smart decision making to avoid a potentially dangerous situation. Another article I found interesting was a poll about the reader's first time. The poll included questions like "What are the top reasons you decide to wait?" Which then included a list of reasons that included "fear of pregnancy," (to which 93% of the girls polled said was a factor) or "fear of STDs" (to which 90% of girls polled said was a factor). The article also talked about using birth control and condoms, and quotes from young people giving advice to people considering taking the plunge with their significant other. With statistics like that, I was surprised the magazine didn't have a whole section devoted to information about birth control and STDs. No such luck. The high statistics seem like a scare tactic of sorts, telling people that pregnancy and STDs are out there waiting to get you, and not presenting information on them which seems like a way of scaring

people into being abstinent or prevents them from making healthy choices when it comes to sex.

Another scary thing about the magazines was the articles that asked guys questions about girls, dating, and sex. One featured an in depth conversation with five guys that was so-so, but the focal point was a large pink quote in the middle saying “I’ve hooked up with girls just to get them to stop talking.” The others share the same tone. They all perpetuate the stereotype of the emotionless male with no regard for the girls he’s sleeping with, or her feelings. This can also play into an anti-choice message, because it makes girls think guys aren’t supposed to care about those things, and that it should be all up to them (which is not true). There seems to be a lot of stress on maintaining a “good” reputation, (something the media tells us girl who carry around condoms don’t have) and keeping their sex life under wraps and secret, which plays into the larger social issue of how women and especially young girls are socialized to keep quiet, and not speak up for themselves. Would a girl feeling the pressure to maintain a “good” reputation while being encouraged not talk about her sex life carry around condoms? That probably is different for every girl, but for those that are affected by those standards, what happens when she encounters the guy who can’t be bothered to take her feelings into consideration, or even carry a condom or two with him?

What it all seems to boil down to is that idea that men are supposed to treat women like objects and women are supposed to act as such. It’s a scary aspect of the binary gender system, and is taking its toll on our culture everyday. Where is all the information about alternative forms of gender expression? Where’s the five page spread about emergency contraception and good decision making? Reading these magazines, I didn’t find anything that even touched on those issues, and I was somewhat scared to give them back to my fourteen year old sister to return to her closet where she has a giant stack of them. I would personally like to see a huge letter campaign to the editors of these magazines. I’m not saying they should have nothing about fashion and makeup, then they wouldn’t be fashion magazines. At the very least, all I’m asking for is more information. The one or two pages I found in the different issues seemed to be at least pointed in the right direction. I’d also like to see my sister reading alternatives to these magazines and for more alternatives to start popping up. Choice issues exist because of a cultural attitude that women shouldn’t have the right to decide what to do with their own bodies. With a lot of people reading these magazines, and most likely skipping over the pages that have one or two sentences that a lot of people really need to hear, I’m not surprised. I say, bring on the change, and bring on the alternatives. That’s a stack I’d love to see in my sister’s closet.