

Fan Magazines Seek To Cultivate Market Of Girls 9 To 14 Years Old

By MEGAN ROSENFELD
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Washington — Once upon a time, say about 15 years ago, little girls wore saddle shoes and crinolines, didn't worry about pimples until they were 13 and got 25 cents a week allowance, which they spent on toy lipsticks and Mickey Mouse ears. Nowadays they wear miniskirts and maxiskirts and skinny white boots, worry about pimples as soon as they hit nine, and get a dollar allowance, which they spend on teen-age fan magazines.

There are now 10 of these glossy, comic-book sized publications appearing regularly on your drug store magazine rack. They claim more than three million readers, who are almost invariably girls between nine and 14.

THESE girls represent a market that never before has been pursued with as much enthusiasm as it is today and the publishers of Flip, 16, Spec, Loving Fashions, Fave, Tiger Beat, Teen Life, Teen, Star and Tiger Beat Spectacular, know they've got a hot thing going.

They reflect—and promote—the young pop star whose world of rock is distant from Woodstock, Joe Cocker and Alice Cooper. It is pop rock, soft rock—rock filtered by television. The magazine's target is not the groupie or the relatively wordily teeny-bopper.

It is the ubiquitous, bubble-gum chewing, my-mother-doesn't-understand-me type that always has been found in rec-

rooms. And according to statistics compiled by Action for Children's Television, she will have spent 15,000 hours in front of a television set—compared to 11,000 hours in school—by the time she finishes high school.

THE CURRENT King of Bubblegum is David Cassidy, 21, star of the Partridge Family series. His face has been on the cover of all the magazines for the last year and still is holding strong.

Danny Osmond, 14-year-old member of the Osmonds, a brother singing act from Utah, is a major challenger, however, as is Bobby Sherman, 26, Sherman, a singer and veteran of three series, has been a "fave" for almost five years, only occasionally cresting the wave but never sinking under.

Television programs aimed at youngsters introduce new faces to the market place; new faces provide grist for the fan magazines, whose copy in turn is an ingredient in the alchemy of stardom. Concurrently, the magazines market their own star-related products, which sell faster as the star's popularity is boosted.

CASSIDY for example, landed his role in The Partridge Family after an appearance on Marcus Welby, M.D. produced an onslaught of fan mail and subsequent stories in the fan magazines. Now the number of products attached to his name is endless—including a line of clothes.

Consciously or not, the fan magazine publishers are employing a formula used by many other currently successful periodicals. They are focusing on a specialized audience, researching it, then using the magazines as merchandizing vehicles for "matched product."

Newsstand and subscription sales prime the pump for at least an equal amount of profit from mail order business. Four magazines—16, Spec, and Loving Fashions, (all published by the same company) and Star—do not sell advertising to outside concerns but promote their own "house products."

OTHER magazines use a combination of advertising—the usual plugs for records and deodorants as well as promotions for in-house products.

At first glance the hyperbolic titles of the articles make these magazines look more like teen porno magazines than simple gossip sheets. Ten-year-old girls are invited to learn "David's love secrets," or to send away for "all his measurements," or "Bobby's love schedule."

Behind the covers and the exclamation points, however, the magazines generally reflect a convention, Horatio Alger-ish morality that their editors say the customers demand. The word "love" is an all-purpose noun, verb and adjective. It is used in connection with any idol and sexual overtones are not necessarily translatable in adult terms.

DAVID is a "love," therefore anything he does is a "love trick." Mostly the same stuff American Girl used to push to Girl Scouts—smile, act interested in others, don't be pushy or conceited, don't eat french fries and soon you'll be beautiful and boys will like you.

Some parents may be no happier with the definition of "love" being handed their impressionable daughters via these magazines than they were with the sex-is-dirty morality once handed them.

They're likely to be even less pleased with the latest entry in the field: Star, whose sexual connotations are more explicit.

The first issue featured a "great kiss debate" ("Should a star kiss a fan? What is your secret kiss-me signal?"), the "kiss king of the sexy six sweepstakes," (send in your lipstick print on the mouth of your favorite star) and "take a shower with David," with pictures of him half naked.

JUDGING from the television shows and the magazines the ideal hero is someone who combines respect for parents and a happy family life with a smattering of rebellion (long hair and anti-war sympathies). They get into scrapes but everything turns out happily because they are basically good and honest and cute.

The idols are expected to be as untouchable in real life as they are on TV—the fans, don't want to hear about them drinking, smoking (not even cigarettes, let alone that other stuff), gambling, taking drugs or sleeping with anyone unless they're married.

The appeal of these fluffy-haired heroes who give advice, write diaries, and donate their clothes to contests may be hard to fathom for non-fans. With delicate features, toothy smiles, soft complexions and slight bodies, they are the quintessence of cuteness. "The 'look' is unthreatening, friendly," says one magazine editor.

"They look like girls," says an uninitiated adult observer, thumbing through 16.

Aside from the latest breathless reports from these "fabulous soulmates," the magazines feature:

QUIZZES. "Can you pass Denny's love test?" Questionnaires. "My two favorite TV shows are . . ."

Advice columns. "Dear Karen: I'm only 11 so I know I'm not quite ready for boys yet but . . ."

Exchange pages. "Does anyone have any ideas on how to get your mother to trust you? I've tried everything from A to Z!"—Sandra."

And letters. Bagful after bagful, (both Flip and 16 get at least 15,000 a week) asking questions, seeking advice, making comments and sometimes just saying hello.

They form the basis of many editorial decisions (i.e. whose face to feature). The editors are likely to forget the bitter experience they had with the Monkees, who were the hottest thing in show biz until the bottom inexplicably fell out of the market.

EDITORS failed to notice

that the four imitation Beatles were no longer receiving their usual 20,000 letters a week and continued to feature them on the covers of magazines that did not sell. Flip for one, lost \$50,000. Now they pay close attention to what doesn't come in, as well as what does.

The recent death of Peter Duel (of TV's Alias Smith and Jones) who was one of the faves, produced hundreds of calls, letters, poems and other tear-stained expressions of sympathy.

Strangely enough, Duel was one star who reportedly was chafing at the bit of teen-age hero worship and concerned about cultivating a more mature audience.

TWO NEW York based editors of teenie magazines (and heads of budding empires) provide contrasting views of the power behind the pulp.

Stephen Kahn, editor and publisher of Flip, has an office to be proud of—a chrome and leather, fuzzy-carpeted den on New York's Park Avenue. His N.Y.U. law degrees hang proudly — if unnecessarily — next to photographs of his poetess wife Eleanor and two-year-old son Andrew.

Once the youngest syndicated columnist in the country (at 13 he solicited advice for teen-agers from athletes at the 1952 Olympics and sold it to the International News Service), he used to write, edit and lay-out the magazine himself. Now he has a staff of 10 with plans to hire more people next year.

FLIP HAS a circulation between 280,000 and 350,000 each month ("If there's a measles epidemic you don't sell magazines," he explains). He added outside advertising last year, bringing in an additional \$50,000 and has a goal of \$220,000 worth for next year.

In addition to the magazine sales and advertising revenue, Youthways Corporation — the parent company of which Kahn is president—has a Flip teen library (with titles like "Flip's Confidential Files") (a mail order business "The Grooviest Pin-Ups"), and has plans for a radio show, a television quiz show for teen-agers, and youth marketing.

Youth marketing is a relatively recently discovered aspect of the ubiquitous consult-

ing business. Kahn is hired by straight outfits like banks and insurance companies to tell them how to sell their products to teen-agers.

"DO YOU realize that most 12 year olds don't even think about life insurance?" he asks incredulously. "But if you get them started with one company they'll probably stick with it all their lives!"

His staff regard their work philosophically and, believe it or not, enthusiastically.

"These little girls have a lot to give and they must channel it somewhere," says Editorial Director Valerie Berger. "Sometimes they're just searching for some reason for being and the magazine is a way of saying to them 'hey, you're alive.'"

Gloria Stavers has edited 16 magazine for 14 of its 15 years. Her empire includes Spec and Loving Fashions and their related mail order businesses. 16 and its sisters do not carry outside advertising, relying on in-house promotions for posters and fun time kits and their combined circulation of 1,620,000.

A TALL dark-haired former model, Miss Stavers got into pop journalism during a period of unemployment. She's about 35, divorced, no children, works 12 hours a day and rules with an iron hand.

Basically, 16 and spec are the same. "If they'll buy 'em, why not?" explains Gloria Stavers. Loving Fashions completes the triumvirate; its specialty is clothes that kids are supposed to like and be able to afford (none of them cost more than \$16).

THE POP media industry's frank aim is to create needs where none existed before—new and better deodorants, new and more exciting kissable posters, new and more lovable faces. Love and happiness are only \$2 and order blank away.

Star and its more explicit use of sex to sell magazines (and products) may or may not be a harbinger of the future. Asked if the magazine may be resisting backlash, editor Nancy Hardwick said:

"We like to raise a little more hell than the other magazines. They have all these sensational titles and then the articles are big disappointments. We are out to sell the

whole truth, really get to the nitty-gritty. We have a more journalistic approach and give the girls more for their money."

STAR has a big corporation backing it—the Petersen Pub-

lishing Company in Los Angeles, which is one of the largest publishers of specialty magazines (Hot Rod, Motor Trend, Guns and Ammo, Skin Diving, etc.). They also publish Teen, but Star is not com-

peting with it because they're aimed at different audiences; Teen, the fashion, gossip, tamer publication, is aimed at 16 and 17 year olds, while racy Star is for the 10 to 15 year olds.

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