"With compassion, insight, and humor, they unravel and demystify the messages girls confront throughout their development, and they offer adults useful tools to help girls resist their powerful pull. *Packaging Girlhood* is filled with useful information and practical suggestions for adults wishing to help girls critique and rewrite consumer culture's narrow and toxic portrayal of girls. Never judgmental and always illuminating, *Packaging Girlhood* reflects Lamb and Brown's deep respect for girls and their firsthand understanding of the dilemmas of parenting."

—Lynn M. Phillips, Ph.D., Department of Communications, University of Massachusetts at Amherst

"*Packaging Girlhood* is a must-read for anyone who cares about the health and well-being of girls. It exposes the marketing industry's assault on preteens and is filled with helpful suggestions for beleaguered parents."

—Susan Linn, Associate Director of the Media Center at Judge Baker Children's Center and Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

"Be prepared to be shocked and saddened as you come to see the world of sex, shopping, media, body fat, and self-esteem through the wide eyes of today's American girls. Be prepared, also, to find invaluable guidance and insight from authors Sharon Lamb and Lyn Brown, who know our daughters from inside out. This is a must-read for parents and teachers who want to steer girls away from marketing schemes that distort female power and authority, and toward true self-acceptance and authentic empowerment."

—Polly Young-Eisendrath, author of *Women and Desire* and *The Resilient Spirit*

"Parents constantly complain that they have only a small shovel to hold back the avalanche of products and messages that erode children's resilience and sap their self-esteem. Now they have this book. Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown's sharp analysis and patiently pragmatic advice is just what we need to sustain our daughters' quests for healthy identities."

—Michael Kimmel, author of *Manhood in America* and professor at SUNY Stony Brook

Packaging Girlhood

RESCUING OUR DAUGHTERS FROM MARKETERS' SCHEMES

Sharon Lamb, Ed.D., and
Lyn Mikel Brown, Ed.D.

ST. MARTIN'S GRIFFIN
NEW YORK

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Book design by Gretchen Achilles

www.stmartins.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lamb, Sharon.
Packaging girlhood : rescuing our daughters from marketers' schemes / Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown.
p. cm.
ISBN-13: 978-0-312-37005-3
ISBN-10: 0-312-37005-9
1. Children's paraphernalia—Marketing—Social aspects—United States. 2. Girls—United States—Social conditions—21st century. 3. Child consumers—United States. I. Brown, Lyn Mikel, 1956– II. Title.

HD9970.5.C483 U655 2006
306.3—dc22

2006002304

First St. Martin's Griffin Edition: May 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To our students, who inspire and teach us,
and to our families for their love and support

were real women pirates—would wear) and off-the-shoulder gowns and lace-up bodices, made of shimmering satin and pink sequins. Even the more traditional Halloween-type costumes speak to the ultrafeminine and increasingly sexy—pretty witches and gothic princess, sexy genies and hot devils who aren't scary but plan to "paint the town red in a stretch velvet leotard with fluffy marabou trim." As one of our surveyed girls told us, "I wore a devil outfit because it was simple and looked sexy."

Is it as limited and narrow as it seems at first glance?

Web sites sort their costumes explicitly along gender lines, with categories like "Princesses and Barbie" and "Star Wars and Sci-Fi," or even more pointedly "Girl Costumes" and "Boy Costumes." When we checked a promisingly neutral "When I Grow Up" category on one site, we found the same gender divide. There parents can find fifty-five costumes for boys and only twenty-two for girls. Of these, fifteen are cheerleaders, divas, and rock stars. Included in this "when I grow up" section was our number one thumbs-down nomination. Don't all parents wish their daughter will grow up to be a "French maid"?

There is something especially pernicious about all this. Fantasy for children is about trying on new roles, about imagining the unusual or impossible, about wearing whatever wild and crazy identity suits their fancy or captivates them at the moment. Why would we want—and, indeed, pay good money—to limit kids in such stereotypical ways? (We're including the littlest kids here. Don't forget to dress your infant in a baby Hulk, Spiderman, or Superman costume.) And why especially on Halloween? After all, isn't Halloween the night when the veil between the worlds is thin, when the real and imagined come close to merging? It's the one magical night when we can expect imagination to wander far and wide, to let carnival and spectacle overtake convention.

Do your daughter a big favor and encourage her to see herself as something other than the pretty princess, the sexy diva, the veiled genie, or the glittery fairy. Help her imagine that she has power over more than how she looks, how well she serves her master, or what prince she attracts. This Halloween, go ahead and raid the closet with her. Imagine that anything is possible. If her heart is set on glitter, at least help her imagine a feisty fairy who takes on the magical realm's evil dragon, a butterfly that saves the insect world, or a princess who can use a map to find her own way to the ball.

Fit for a Princess: The So-called Tween Years

"They're smart, they're Web-savvy, and they're a retailer's dream," gushes a *Good Morning America* online chat. Today's tweens are the children or grandchildren of baby boomers. This means there are a lot of them, and that translates into lots and lots of buying potential. To grab these young consumers, a great deal of attention has been given to the consumer psychology of kids this age: what they desire, are attracted to, and are likely to buy. But little to no attention has been given to their psychological health and well-being. For $5,000 or more you can buy a report that tells you what these girls are "into."

Who are these tweens? Well, marketers believe they're any kid from six or seven to about twelve years of age, although the upper end blurs into the teen market. What a range! This means the same kinds of things being marketed to middle school girls are designed to entice six- and seven-year-olds. Juliet Schor, author of *Born to Buy*, discovered that marketers have a term for this: KAGOY (kids are getting older younger). Not all girls are buying. There are still many differences in this age group. You may know one nine-year-old who plays with her stuffed animals and another who seems prematurely into shopping and designer clothes. The challenge to marketers is changing the former child into the latter, or finding that special niche of clothing that speaks to the nine-year-old who loves her furry animals—by, say, putting a cute monkey on the front of a T-shirt.

Fortunately, one thing remains constant throughout these years (and given the intense targeting of our daughters by marketers, this is a huge advantage): Preteen girls remain close to and seek guidance from their parents and still see family as an integral part of their lives. This means parents can be wonderfully influential during these years. The social and material world may be confronting them with an array of choices too often out of synch with their psychological and emotional development, but girls whose parents are available, media savvy, and responsive have an enormous advantage.

We think "tweens" is a misnomer, which is why we differentiate preteens from middle school girls. Eight-, nine-, and most ten-year-olds are radically different developmentally from eleven-, twelve-, and thirteen-year-old girls who attend middle school. Preteens delight in variety and take pleasure in collecting things associated with the kind of girl they are.

they are also drawn toward that appealing teen outlook that floods their world. Marketers know this, so preteen girl culture is fun, busy, brightly colored, and all consuming (pun intended).

To capture the frenetic energy with which marketers go after your daughter at this age, we shift gears a bit in this section and create one of those *Freaky Friday* moments. Let's live and breathe preteen culture, starting with a walk through J. C. Penney (although it could have been a walk through any number of other department stores). We move on to Limited Too, which has its own designs on this age group and which is helping to sell a version of tween that lasts a full seven shopping years (ages seven to fourteen). Finally, we walk through Claire's because, as you'll see, accessorizing becomes a huge part of training girls to be shoppers.

First stop: J. C. Penney

We are immediately confronted with the following on a pink T-shirt:

Official Cheer Bunny
We're hip, we hop, we're always on top!

Clothes make the girl, or so girls are led to believe, especially as they move into their preteen years. Clothing stores play to any nascent insecurity a girl may have about herself. Will she be popular? Will she be invited somewhere? With what group does she belong? Before a girl has half a chance to reflect on issues of belonging and desirability she is being confronted with a market that tells her she *should* be concerned about this—even when she's as young as eight! On the T-shirt mentioned above there is a silhouette of a bunny jumping in the air with two pompoms. Although bunnies are a feminine symbol, the word *bunny* here stands for something else and is suggested by the sexy phrase that follows: "We're always on top." Does "Playboy bunny" come to mind? It needn't. It's in the collective unconscious of a culture that girls are cute and cuddly and rather quiet, like bunnies. On the other hand, manufacturers are buying the Playboy license and retailers are selling the products to kids. (Recently teen girls in Britain protested the WH Smith stationery store because they placed Playboy stationery next to Winnie the Pooh and Disney stationery.)

Next to the Official Cheer Bunny T-shirt there is a shirt that has "Girls Team" and "74" on the front. Inside the 74 are words in script that describe girls to girls: friend, life, cheerleader, yea team, we won, all-star

champ, we are cool, rock, and shout. Champ is good, no? But rarely do you see a girl described as a "champ" without offering the alternative sports version of a "champ" right next to it: a cheerleader. The word *cheerleader* is all over girls' clothing. What about a shirt with "Pep Rally Rebel?" Those promising words are followed by "No fear all cheer." Well, of course. When girls rebel, we become anxious, so keep them all cheering and on the sidelines, and there will be no fear.

Girls sort through a heaping dose of stereotypes on this and any shopping excursion. There are

the Sassy Kitty—for the PUR-R-R-fect look

Spoil me . . . cause I'm worth it (flirty eye-lashed kitty)

Come to Cutie Summer Camp—Feel the Nature

Salon of the Stars—a Cut Above the Others

Recess Flirt—meet by the swings when the bell rings (lips in the background)

Recess stops around sixth grade; when does "flirting" start?

The fun doesn't stop there. They can mix and match those T's with fake sports pants that say things like "Varsity Fantasy League (it's only in her fantasy, we guess that she can make varsity!)" across her bottom. Speaking of sports, unlike boys who wear NFL, NBA, and NASCAR shirts, the logos that are given to girls aren't real. And this isn't because there aren't any girls' teams. Of course there are, but there are no Ts saying 2002 Women's World Cup Soccer Champs or Go, New York Stars! There is just generic stuff like Girls Varsity Tigers and Champions—Basketball All-Girls League. This is because marketers don't take girls' sports seriously.

One shirt quotes Gandhi: "You must be the change you want in the world." Okay, that's a nice sentiment. But it seems difficult for most girls to be the change they want to see in the world when they're wearing their "cheer bunny" and "prep school flirt" shirts.

Why do we moms buy girls these shirts? Because they seem harmless, it is what's out there, and girls want them. And we think that maybe if we buy girls shirts that label them as flirts, then they're not really sexy (like the teens they try to emulate), they're still our little angels.

We notice that angels have been highjacked by marketers, too, making

their biggest appearance on preteen underwear—bras and panties for girls, mimicking the Victoria's Secret Angel Room and angel collection. In the little girl section, sizes 7 to 16, there is a bra and panty area that actually carries a size 4. The sign above the items shows two girls, one blond and one ethnic (as is common). One girl looks about ten, the other about seven. Both are so small and thin that surely neither is wearing a bra yet. They are both wearing lipstick, as if to say, "Mommy, I'm more grown up than you think I am. Buy me a bra!" An eight-year-old can wear bikini underpants that show the cartoon head of a woman asking, "Will I never be a princess?" Such slogans are preparation for the reverse message as the girls get older: The angel on the outside is harboring a little hottie underneath!

Limited Too

Our survey tells us that lots of preteen girls shop at stores like J. C. Penney primarily because Mom still has a big say in where and what clothes are bought. It is also confirmed by our survey that Limited Too is the place for cool girls who have their own money to shop for fashion. It also targets tweens exclusively.

Limited Too has a carnival atmosphere: bright colors, bright lights, and different sections of the store with carousels of accessories at every turn. Limited Too is the training ground for the middle school years; this is where a very specific notion of what it means to be a teenager gets marketed to seven-, eight-, and nine-year-olds. This is also where girls can experience what marketers believe is the "fun" of being a girl.

Part of the fun, according to the people who want to sell your daughter stuff, is accessorizing. How do accessories become so important to girls? Well, marketers make them cheap so girls can always buy a little something and parents can always give in to a little something extra after clothes shopping. Another reason is that it is part of the general adornment girls are taught from day one. (Remember those little ribbons on bald heads?) Every photo in a magazine, every girl on TV, every girl on a box of cereal or board game has some little extra something adorning her—a bow, a bracelet, earrings, a hair clip, a belt, a scrunchy. For boys it's simple—a baseball cap and *maybe* a pair of binoculars.

Limited Too's accessory carousels sell items that adorn more than just bodies. There are accessories for girls' rooms and for their lives: picture frames, games that involve collecting charms and thus buying different versions of the game to buy more charms, notebooks, pillows, posters, stuffed animals, mini-compact disc players, sunglasses, purses, buttons, and books. They're not just selling fashion, they're selling girl culture.

What's in this girl culture? A whole lot of boy worship. They have buttons, purses, pillows, and T-shirts that say "I love [*fill in latest pop star*]." Eleven- and twelve-year-olds sometimes get crushes on stars, yes, but pre-preteens and pre-pre-preteens? The eight- to ten-year-olds are given an important lesson that part of being a teen or preteen is developing a crush on one of these teen hunks and decorating yourself and your room with proclamations of love. At eight, nine, and ten, their rooms don't typically show this, but eventually they will. We wish that there were ways a girl could admire other girls through their room and clothing accessories—such as "Venus for President"—but that's not a part of girl culture to marketers.

Another message about what it means to be a girl happens through accessorizing, and that is the "rule" that even though girls must conform to the latest fashion trend, they must also be unique, special, and not like any other girl. Selling "special" to girls in very limited ways is like pretending they have choices within a very narrow box they must fit in. Take a look at the way the link bracelet that was popular in 2004 gave girls the "opportunity" to express what is special about them by inserting little sections or links (somewhat like charms) into a part of the bracelet made to receive those links. The choices are limited, too; we counted twenty-five different charms but only two about sports: "I love soccer" and a picture of a basketball. The rest were Lil Miss Attitude, Best Friends, Angel, Princess, Girls Rule (selling girl power again), Cutie Pie, and different designs of hearts.

Think of an eight- to ten-year-old you know and what these little symbols might represent to her at this point in her life. Would it be a piano for the piano lessons she loves? A goldfish for the fish in her room? A tae kwon do suit for the lessons she takes? A picture of a book because she loves to read? Or maybe a picture of Emma Watson because she loves the character Hermione Granger? You would then have a bracelet that represents something different, something that represents *your* girl rather than the generic "girl" with links of hearts, butterflies, and flowers. This selling of what marketers consider special is rampant and can make girls very anxious over time about the need to stand out and get attention without stepping over any lines.

A third message of girlhood is that girls of any age can have fun being

sexy. Every season there is some item of clothing that is forbidden. Our survey tells us that the very clothing girls think is "cool" is also the item parents are forbidding their daughters to wear. We asked a salesclerk if there are items girls want to buy but moms object to, and she said, "not really." The main thing she hears is that girls are allowed to buy something but can't wear it to school. So are moms separating school clothes from fun clothes? But shouldn't fun clothes be play clothes when you're eight, nine, or ten? The kind of clothes you can get dirty or feel comfortable riding a bike in, not a cami-bra, string panties, and a drop-waist skort?

Every message to a preteen girl says that it's preferable to pose on the beach rather than surf, to shop rather than play, to decorate rather than invent. One company defined it all on a journal, supposedly a place for a girl to put down in writing her true feelings, and yet the cover states:

> Pink
> *You are sweet and loveable*
> *You love surprises, chasing butterflies,*
> *And sliding down rainbows*
> *Dressing up and making believe are your favorites*
> *Everyone thinks you're special*
> *If you like pink,*
> *You're a princess.*

Is a journal a place for prefabricated dreams and predetermined aspirations? This is much too limited a vision of what a girl can be.

Claire's—"Where Getting Ready Is Half the Fun"

Claire's is a wall-to-wall preteen visual delight. A dizzying smorgasbord of color—bright and glittery and busy. Every small square of space is crammed with possibilities. "Over 80 million ears pierced worldwide" reads the sign at the entrance, reminiscent of the billions served at McDonald's. And, indeed, this store feels like the fast food of accessorizing. Seas of pink and purple tags hang from earrings, bracelets, and necklaces of every kind—retro, glamorous, delicate, brassy. "Real body jewelry," "Add a charm," "Classic candy collection," and "It's all about Bling" announce the signs. Black and white feather boas with matching black, white, gold, or silver purses and elbow-length satin gloves hang on the walls. Girls pick their way through narrow aisles of diaries and notebooks,

every color and design of flip-flops, peel-and-stick rhinestones, plush door hangers that announce "the Capricorn girl," rhinestone-lined "Spoiled" signs to hang on bedroom doors, body tattoos, glitter, "bling lip gloss," barrettes, hair ribbons, and fake hair extensions. Mirrors are everywhere to check out how the latest, coolest thing looks on you.

The magazines that girls read tell them they must have "the freedom" and "the power" to accessorize, so many of them choose to shop at stores like Claire's. The college-age salesclerk at Claire's tells us that girls ages three to twenty-one shop there. We didn't believe her at first; maybe the older girls, but that young? Soon after arriving, though, we overheard the following conversation between a mother and her three-year-old daughter, Emily. The mom's older daughter, about ten, was browsing nearby.

> MOM: Oh, look, here are some magnet earrings. Do you want them?
> THREE-YEAR-OLD: What for?
> MOM: Well, they're magnets. They stay on your ears.
> THREE-YEAR-OLD: Yes.

A few minutes later:

> THREE-YEAR-OLD: Buy *me* something too, Momma. You gotta get jewelry for *me*.
> MOM: We got you three things. We got you jewelry. We got you makeup. We got you earrings. Did you get enough, Emily? Oh, we got you four things . . . a pair of socks. No, five. There are two pairs here.
> THREE-YEAR-OLD: Yeah.

So the clerk was right. Girls as young as three shop at Claire's, although with more help from their moms than the older girls we saw giggling together in the back of the store.

We don't relay this interaction to criticize the mom. She was gentle and sweet with her daughter; she sat on the floor with her, explained things, and took her time with her. To Emily this was fantasy play, not much different from playing dress-up. For all we know Emily goes home to play soccer with her mom and help her dad cook dinner.

The front part of the Claire's store clearly geared itself to the Limited Too crowd, the preteens and middle school girls looking for the coolest

things—and also to the occasional mom who might briefly check out the store for any R-rated items before letting her preteen daughter loose. At the front was the "nice girl" stuff—the add-a-charm bracelets, bright lime green earrings, initial key chains, and colorful "jelly totes" with matching wallets.

Midway through the store, however, things took a slight turn. Along the walls were the edgy stuff that told another story of girlhood: funnier, irreverent, a bit nasty, sexy, and diva-like. Here was a line of lip jelly that said things like "Boys are smelly," "Trouble-maker," and "Drama Queen." Here were bright pink flip-flops that announced: "Hey, that butt needs kicking" and little boxes of cookies inscribed "Hey, you make me throw up" or labeled "Poison [playfully crossed out] cookies for a friend." A bright pink-and-orange plush baseball cap reads "Mrs. Timberlake," and address books and notebooks are covered with phrases like "You suck and must be punished," "Can't listen, you're dumb," and "It's all about me, deal with it." It is a diva's delight and a girl's version of Spencer's, a favorite store of boys that sells items that are rude, crude, and in your face.

Beyond the sale table, near the far back wall, are the products that little Emily was after—the pinkest, fluffiest, glitteriest Disney stuff imaginable: princess tiaras, Cinderella and Prince Charming purses, and Snow White makeup kits. Here are the dream net bed canopies, *Swan Lake* ballet slippers, and Dora the Explorer earrings and necklaces. Right next to all this is the boy-crazy stuff. Boyz File notebooks and other items say things like "Boys make great pets, every girl should have one." (Imagine selling something like that to a boy about a girl!) The Hottie Handbook announces: "Attention girls. . . . If you have a boyfriend don't bring him around me because you won't have a boyfriend anymore. . . . I sizzle. I scorch, hotter than any flame. Don't hate me because I'm beautiful. OK. Hate me if you want. . . ." Inside there's a Slam book–like system for rating boys on every page: "What makes him a hottie?" Is he "very hot, hot, medium, or mild?" Is he "so hot I'm on fire" or "warm enough to toast my buns." It's a good thing little Emily can't read yet!

What does Claire's sell besides accessories? It sells younger girls the ultimate fantasy of sweetness, innocence, Prince Charming, and winning Prince Charming by beating out other girls—in other words, competition over boys. Because she is probably not shopping alone, it sells her a closeness with her mother associated with consuming these things. And if you think of the store space as a metaphor for girlhood, it sells girls a stereotypical view—that girls should show their perfectly nice, sweet, innocent

smiley sides in public (at the front of the store) and hide those irreverent, resistant, "bad girl" parts of themselves (at the back).

We think even this doesn't quite capture the crux of the issue. The real trouble with Claire's and other stores like it is that it sells every aspect of girlhood contained in that box we mentioned earlier: the good, the bad, the funny, the sexy—and now even the resistance, that edginess and irreverence that once gave girls a pathway out of the magic kingdom and the pressure to accessorize in the first place. Claire's sells girls a false sense of choice and possibility, a feeling that they can create a resistant girlhood by creatively matching the "friend" bracelet with the body tattoos and troublemaker lip jelly. But it's a closed circle or maybe a hall of mirrors. The resistance to gender stereotypes is now sold at the same store that perpetuates them. It is like the time when sixties tie-dyed shirts lost their roots in the counterculture and became available at Sears and Bloomingdale's. Don't think about what it really means to challenge or take a political stand. Just buy the appearance of taking a stand. And selling resistance means, of course, containing it, restricting it so that it is manageable and not really resistance at all.

Clothes Make the Girl: The New Teens

Junior high is a tough age by any standards. Middle school girls enter and participate in a world in which their bodies are up for constant comment: "My face is up guys," reads one shirt. "Objects under shirt may be larger than they appear," reads another. It's not just the boys that check out what the girls are wearing. Other girls are checking out where a girl shops and making comments. Dress codes tell them that they will be checked over by teachers and paraprofessionals in schools to determine how appropriate their choices are.

This new visibility (and constant monitoring) can be annoying or intoxicating. Girls want to stand out by fitting in. They want to say something about who they are, but they're not yet sure of who they are. Marketers love anxiety. They fill those uneasy spaces with products that girls can use to form a statement—bracelets, skirts, hair color, T-shirts.

Selling individuality really begins in middle school. Caught between a rock and a hard place, girls want to fit in and show that they are different and unique through the way they dress. Marketers tell them that the clothes they buy can help them create a special look. Middle school girls

GIRLS ONLY: COMMERCIALS

There tend to be fewer commercials on the educational shows for the very young set, but fewer doesn't mean they don't exist. Marketers have made the most of the fact that children watching cartoons can't easily distinguish when a show ends and a commercial begins. Because nearly every *Playhouse Disney* commercial invokes Disney products, kids really don't know when they're being taught compassion and when they're being sold Mickey Mouse or McDonald's. One minute there is a segment on *Playhouse Disney* in which Clay—an actual lump of talking clay—teaches something or sings a song, and the next there's Ronald McDonald skipping around and singing about how he "loves to be a part of *Playhouse Disney*." The move from show to product is so quick, smooth, and seductive, *we* could hardly track it. From a kid's point of view, it must seem like the playhouse has its own fast-food restaurant. Although PBS doesn't have as many commercials, they are increasingly present in the form of fast-food sponsors such as Chuck E. Cheese's and McDonald's. You can also find them here and there *in* the shows, such as the trip to the Cape Cod potato chip factory in the "now for us kids" break between Arthur cartoons.

The commercials between shows sell more than products; they sell kids on how to be a cool, hip, and "normal" girl or boy. They make no pretense to educate, so they can utilize stereotypes to the fullest—to poke fun and make kids laugh, to grab attention, to create desire where none exists. Whatever it takes. Younger viewers get ads for tween shows, while preteens are pointed toward Teen Nick and PG-13 movies. While TV for young viewers makes some attempt to represent and mingle male and female characters, commercials are almost completely gender-separate spaces. Except for a few sugary cereal and candy ads, toy manufacturers have all but given up on a world in which boys and girls play together or like the same things.

We watched Nick for many hours. On one of our typical watching days, commercials surrounding popular shows like *Rugrats* suggest that only boys play Legos (Alpha Team), that space is the final frontier only for boys (Lego Star Wars), that only boys play Game Boy Advance and PlayStation, that only boys play with fast cars (Matchbox Hero City) and action figures (Spiderman and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles—"You have the power!"), that only boys play at war (G.I. Joe: Valor vs. Venom), and only boys "surrender now and prepare to fight" their Pokémon. The girls we know who love Pokémon and are addicted to their Game Boys will never see themselves on these commercials. The commercials are dark and filled with words and images that reflect power, control, and fearlessness; boys fight sinister things and evil forces, and they win. Girls are intruders in this world or serve as backdrop.

Girls, commercials suggest, are princesses (The Disney Princess Collection), fairies (Fairytopia), exotic fashion divas (Bratz World Tokyo a Go-Go), or surfer babes ("Don't you want to be a Cali girl?"). They want cuddly animals to exercise with (Care Bears work out to songs like "Let's Get Physical"; a four-year-old girl on a commercial tells us, "I'm shakin' it"), to hug (Fur Real Luv Cubs), and to sing with (Serafina, a fluffy white singing kitty). They want little dolls that suggest they someday will have lots of babies (5 ❤sie dolls) and do housework (Dora's talking kitchen). And they're really into clothes and accessories they can wear when they go out dancing (Polly Pocket, Bratz, Barbie). These commercials mix hearts, hugs, and giggling girls with "clubbing," hot-tubbing, wearing makeup, and looking cute in a sexy kind of way.

It is not always easy to see patterns in the images and messages your children are subjected to over the course of a day, week, or year, but they are influencing your child's sense of the world. Parents need to appreciate the issues that intersect with sexism, such as racism and messages about aggression. For instance, when Mary Strom Larson from Northern Illinois University tracked TV commercials on shows rated safe for the youngest viewers (two to seven years old), she found an astonishing 37 percent of commercials contained at least one aggressive act. What's more, she found that commercials featuring "white children only" contained the most physical, verbal, and "fortuitous" aggression—aggression not caused by a character but by something like an explosion. Larson concluded that there are a "wealth of models of aggressive behavior" available to children, and she remains concerned that so much fortuitous aggression cultivates fear of a "scary world" in the youngest viewers.

You may think it's best just to turn off the TV. It won't work—at least not for long. Advertisers are aware of TiVo and the option that DVD movies provide of skipping trailers and ads; it is the reason that immersive advertising and product placement in kids' shows are on the rise. Preventing TV is an ostrich-with–its-head-in-the-sand maneuver. It's not just the world of TV that is bombarding your child with products and gender messages; there are also Web sites, fast-food restaurants, movies, billboards, and toys. The real issue is the big corporations that are out to sell your

kids everything. So after you join Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (www.commercialfreechildhood.org), bring the healthy snacks and sit down beside her to teach her how to be a critical consumer. If you watch with your daughter, you will be able to know and question out loud what is really being sold to her. That counts for gender messages, too. Preschoolers are not too young to hear (and imitate) your questions and observations, so when you see a gender message that could be destructive, you can turn it into an opportunity to discuss what girls can be and wonder why the TV doesn't show that.

Let's be realistic. Most parents sometimes use TV as a babysitter. You therefore need to know your babysitter. Check references and see what your daughter is being taught. While you're getting that last bit of work done and your daughter is watching cartoons, ask her to come get you when she sees an example of a cool mom or two girls helping each other and succeeding! She'll keep an eye out for the good stuff as well as what's missing. TV can educate, but only parents can be sure the educational messages she gets are the ones you want her to receive.

DISNEY GIRLS

One place to begin this education is with Disney characters. Disney's monopoly on fantasy is so pervasive, however, that it's hard to know where to begin. In fact, Disney is the first thing we think of when people tell us that parents should simply throw away the TV. Disney's version of girlhood is everywhere—in department and specialty stores, catalogs, books, magazines, movies, TV, CDs, and, of course, the theme parks. The Disney girl adorns clothing, toys, room decor, sneakers, accessories, makeup kits, and purses. Unless you plan to lock your daughter in a tower, the Disney girl needs to be confronted head-on.

Who is she? Consider the catalog copy announcing a set of Princess Dolls, the most popular of all Disney girls for the three-plus set:

> Belle is ready for an evening with Beast, Cinderella is off to the ball, Tinker Bell is full of mischief, Mulan will bring honor to us all, Esmeralda wishes to help all the outcasts, Aurora dreams of Prince Phillip, Snow White longs for her Prince, Ariel wants to be part of his world, Jasmine's ready for a magic carpet ride, and Pocahontas discovers the colors of the wind.

We can tell a lot from this short description and the dolls that accompany it. Disney girls are typically princesses or repackaged as princesses even if they aren't ones in the stories told about them. They're always ready for, longing for, hoping and dreaming for a man, whether beastly or princely. They "want to be part of his world," not create their own world; ride *his* magic carpet, not hers. They care and nurture, especially animals. They are sweet-faced, big-breasted, small-waisted visual delights. Is that all? Because Disney's animated movies create the stories that drive their merchandise sales, we decided to take a closer look at Disney girls in film. We came up with the following themes:

Disney girls are women with Barbie doll bodies. And, like Barbie, one small size fits all. The form-fitting clothing of these heroines proves it. They have the exotic made-up faces of women and the gowns and midriff-baring (Jasmine in *Aladdin*) bikini tops (Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*) of women. Not real women, of course—they're too perfect—but the male fantasy version. They arch their backs (did they use the same template for the Victoria's Secret bra ad as they did for *The Little Mermaid* and *Pocahontas* bursting out of the water scenes?), toss their hair, smile sweetly, and speak softly. They're pretty when they're angry. Let's face it, changing skin and hair color and adding some exotic clothing does not a woman of color make. The one exception to this is Lilo and her older sister in *Lilo and Stitch*. What a relief to see real girls' bodies, faces, and personalities. No surprise—they don't make the princess doll set.

Disney girls and women are gossips and chatterboxes. "Girls talk too much," Peter Pan complains after Wendy accosts him. Women in *The Little Mermaid* gossip around the washtub. Ursula the Sea Witch warns Ariel, "The men up there don't like a lot of chatter." In Dumbo, a mean-spirited female elephant announces to her friends, "Have I got a trunk full of dirt."

Disney girls mother and do the housework. And not only Snow White and Cinderella. Wendy mothers the Lost Boys, while the native woman in *Peter Pan* admonishes her, "No dance! Go gettum firewood" (adding a little racism to the mix). The little girl who catches Mowgli's eye in *The Jungle Book* sings, "I will have a handsome husband, and a daughter of my own. And I'll send her to fetch the water. I'll be cooking

in the home." The soldiers in Mulan sing about a girl worth fighting for who cooks and waits at home.

Disney girls have lovely voices. From Snow White to Pocahontas, those girls can really warble. It's part of what makes them beautiful. They sing their desire and woes to animals and other nonhuman creatures because, and this is important:

Disney girls have no support systems. Except for Lilo who has her big sister, Disney girls don't have girlfriends and very little family. If they do, they leave them for princes or beasts or bandits (*Robin Hood*). Even after proving themselves, they find real honor with a husband (*Mulan*). They typically don't have mothers, and their fathers tend to be buffoons (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*) or authoritarian jerks (*The Little Mermaid*).

Disney girls can't resist a mirror. Check out Tinker Bell measuring her hips in a hand mirror. She is clearly shocked at what she sees. Are they that wide? Dated, you say? Elastigirl, the mother in the Disney/Pixar movie *The Incredibles*, checks out her hips in a mirror in the same fashion. It seems that saving her family and the world just has to wait. Disney girls can make mirrors out of anything. Cinderella checks her hair in a wash bubble and later in a pond. Lady of *Lady and the Tramp* catches her image in a water bowl.

Disney girls are incomplete without a man. It is not only romance, it is romance in a reality that affirms male power. Male power is what Disney does best, and not just in the old Disney movies. Every Pixar movie to date is a male journey story. Yes, girls exist as primary characters in *A Bug's Life*, *The Incredibles*, *Finding Nemo*, and *Cars*, but the main character is male. Men provide the energy, the rules, and the hope for safety (*Mulan*, *Pocohontas*), while we're reminded with one-liners that girls are crybabies (*Chicken Little*) or need to be rescued (almost every movie). Disney girls will do anything to meet or be chosen by the man of their dreams. Ariel gives up her voice; Tinker Bell betrays Wendy; Cinderella's stepsisters fight over the prince and betray her. Disney is brilliant at retelling history and creating romance where none existed: between Pocahontas and John Smith or between Mulan and her officer. A girl can't have her own story or live a life of bravery unless, in the end, she assumes her rightful place. She is not a Disney girl unless she marries.

Powerful Disney women are evil and ugly. Except for the grandmother spirit in *Pocahontas*, who shows up again in *Brother Bear*, when adult women exist they are typically vengeful and jealous of the Disney girl. They are also powerful and ugly: wicked stepmothers and queens (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*), ugly monsters and witches (*The Little Mermaid*, *The Sword and the Stone*, *Monsters, Inc.*). They are cruel and vengeful (Cruella DeVille in *101 Dalmatians* and the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*). Female power is itself evil: "It's time Ursula took matters into her own tentacles!" It is pretty clear to any little kid watching that dark skin is associated with evil. Check out Ursula or the evil queen in *Snow White* at their villainous peak. And while women with power will meet their demise in the most horrible ways—a stake through the heart, a car accident—Disney girls who recognize male power are rewarded with a place in his world: "Here she stands, the girl of his dreams" (*Cinderella*).

Disney girls are innocent. Tarty female characters in Disney movies pop up in funny places, usually in groups to underscore the Disney girl's singular innocence or to affirm a character's manliness: the busty barmaids in *Beauty and the Beast*, the sexy harem dancers in *Aladdin*, the vampish muses in *Hercules*. They are the girls that male characters like to flirt with but won't marry.

Let's be fair. We have welcomed the feisty, clever, and brave Disney girl of recent years. Look how Ariel defies her father and follows her heart! Isn't it great that Beauty is also a bit of a nerd and defiantly rejects the big handsome lout who pursues her? Isn't Pocahontas fearless, and isn't her relationship with her grandmother wonderful? Mulan really proves girls can do everything a guy can and, in this case, better than any other guy. Who wouldn't want their daughter to have such presence of mind and such impact on the world around her? The problem is that so much of the courage and feistiness is either in pursuit of romance or later put aside for it. Beauty endures horrific abuse to change her man; Ariel gives up her voice for her man; Pocahontas's goal is saving her man as much as preserving her homeland; Mulan's amazing feats dissolve in the presence of romance. This feels like a bait and switch. Draw a girl in with promises of something different and then bring in the same old thing through the back door.

Mulan, for example, was praised for being the first Disney film to present a tough girl, a girl who can fight, but it is ultimately at the expense of both boys and girls. The song lyrics tell at least part of the tale. "I'll Make a Man Out of You" is sung by Mulan's officer (who will fall in love with her) to his new recruits. The officer insults his soldiers by calling them girly men. One has to wonder how a five-year-old girl, who thinks being a girl is a pretty cool thing, feels when she hears the captain sing about the weakness of girls or when Mulan asks, "How about a girl who's got a brain? Who always speaks her mind?" and the soldiers say, "Nah!" When romance and tradition overtake the story, will she believe Mulan's courage really matters very much?

More recently another theme emerges in Disney movies:

New Disney girls star in straight-to-video sequels. Like a low-budget afterthought, *Peter Pan: The Return to Neverland*, *The Jungle Book 2*, and *The Lion King 2: Simba's Pride* all feature lead girl characters. Regardless of their central role, it is hard to get past the fact that girls weren't important enough to feature in the first blockbuster version. Girls in these movies are brave, but they have a lot to prove. Like other Disney girls, they don't have girlfriends; they seek respect in a male world, and so they have to show they're as brave, as strong, and as smart as boys. This means enduring a running commentary about their icky girlness. Ballou demeans Shanti, Mowgli's friend. When Jane, Wendy's daughter, says to Hook, "Not so fast. You'll have to answer to me," his response is "A little girl!" and derisive laughter. Jane has to deal with another catfighting Tinker Bell and with the Lost Boys' insults: "But she's a girl!"

As we saw in our review of girls' clothing, girls have two pathways out of this dilemma: to be one of the boys or to be for the boys (never one of the girls or for the girls, of course). When Jane punches Peter, he says, "You're sure not Wendy!" Nope, she's a true Lost Boy and proves it by learning to spit in her palm before shaking hands. Kiara, Simba and Nala's daughter in *The Lion King 2*, makes the other choice. She falls in love with and redeems Kovu, the son of evil Zira. In the end we "can feel the love tonight," and we also know there is a new king of the jungle, but it isn't Kiara.

What's a parent to do? Well, there are some wonderful movies out there, so you can avoid most Disney movies, especially the older movies that are recycled every few years, where the stereotypes are worse (although the rest of the products are hard to ignore). More important, ensure that movies with really strong girl characters are in your daughter's

collection and life, movies such as *Matilda*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Spirited Away*, and *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*. We recommend not showing most Disney films to really young girls or boys. Violent themes and images in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Pocahontas* really aren't for little kids, and do kids really need all that obsession with romance so long before it means anything to them? It is better to find ways to support egalitarian friendships with boys or bravery and a sense of love, loyalty, and compassion that isn't connected to getting a boyfriend.

If they are watching, watch with them. Tell them about the real story of Pocahontas the twelve-year-old girl, and the tragic true story of the Powhatan nation. Most of us don't know this version, but it is easy enough to find in the library or on the Web. Ask them why characters put down girls or why girls have to prove themselves to boys or fall in love with boys at the end of every movie. Ask them what they see that seems unfair, what they have questions about, what they like and dislike. If Disney stories can be used by parents to teach their daughters to notice and question stereotypes, maybe they are useful after all.

WHERE'S FIONA?

How do girls fare in other animated movies? In the first *Shrek* movie, Princess Fiona discovers that "love's true form" is not quite the Cinderella fantasy she had in mind. It's not a bad message and it's a nice antidote to the Disney films. In *Shrek 2*, Fiona has a chance to break the fairy godmother's spell and change both herself and Shrek, her ogre husband, into beautiful human forms. She chooses to stay real, to stay with "the one I fell in love with," and we all applaud her for that. Both movies were hugely popular, in part because they were brilliantly animated, funny, and irreverent, and also because of the decidedly anti-fairy-tale message that looks don't matter.

Wrong. Looks do matter. A lot—at least post-movie. *Shrek 2* was DreamWorks' biggest merchandising campaign to date, with more than eighty licensing agreements, using Shrek characters to promote the likes of Burger King, Pepsi, General Mills, Dial Corporation, M&M's, Hewlett-Packard, Activision, and even the U.S. Postal Service. So big, claimed Ann Globe, head of marketing and promotions for consumer products at DreamWorks, that, "we could 'Shrek' you out from head to toe."

So where is Fiona the ogre? Like Waldo of *Where's Waldo* books, you know she exists and see her every once in a while if you look hard enough,

in the cutting. The message to the girls who read them is mixed. While these problems are presented as warnings to girls (this could happen to you), the suffering is glamorized. These books are invitations into a way of being different that is dramatic and into a way of making typical adolescent pain that finds no safe expression into an exciting illness. They are manuals of a sort.

Readers who write reviews online seem to be mostly interested in the accuracy in an author's portrayal of the illness. Of *Fat Chance* one girl wrote, "I'm in seventh grade and I thought this book was very unrealistic." And for a book on anorexia, *The Best Little Girl in the World:* "Still caught in the hell that is this disorder, I found this book insulting and quite revolting."

More interesting, though, are the warnings to other cutters and "eds" (eating disordered people) out there about "triggers." One girl wrote that a book about anorexia "gave her tips on how to hide [her] problem more." Another who read self-injury books wrote, "Don't read this book if you are easily triggered." One girl was "a bit inwardly glad that the book did not suggest any way to 'cut' other than with a pair of scissors." A girl who identified herself as a "cutter" who loved *Cut* said, "It describes the feeling. The relief of a cut. The joy in the feeling it allows you for [a] split second. The addiction to it, and the withdrawal of it." She added, "I don't suggest this book if you still cut or think of it. I had a relapse in reading it myself."

Considering how popular issue books are with girls, it strikes us that these books imply that the only interior life girls can have or that we take seriously is the result of pain or loss. In most of these books the implication is that the other girls, healthy girls or popular girls (and they can actually be the same girls), have no interior lives, that they are fraudulent, superficial. There is something deeply problematic about this. We've noted how it divides girls, but it also connects pathology to girls' "true" nature, leading them into a billion-dollar self-help industry. Girls who are complex, real, and have deep feelings are those who are deeply *troubled.* Is this an invitation to a girl? We think so.

Don't fool yourself into believing that reading a novel on the subject is a good substitute for talking about these issues with your daughter. Parents need to deglamorize these problems by having real conversations about the feelings that underlie them and not the symptoms themselves. Because these books present destructive ways of self-expression and coping with pain, parents need to counter them with detailed and realistic alternatives. Pointing out all the ways that the culture, her peers, and her

school conspire to make girls feel so unspecial unless they are Ophelias is a good start. We also think parents can point out to their daughters that the command to stand out sets her in competition with other girls who are also trying to be different and stand out. Joining with other girls could be her also salvation. Girls can express real feelings and passion in healthy, constructive ways by reaching out and doing good, and these are not only as deep but ultimately more powerful.

The moral of all these books is that when we teach girls to express the range of feelings, including their anger, when we teach them that the striving for perfection is fruitless and that growing up involves building a strong sense of self through investment in activities, they are less likely to cut, throw up, or starve themselves. This message has to start young, but it is not too late to welcome that critical, complex voice in an active and proactive girl in middle school.

Magazine Reading

To some parents any reading is good, but we disagree. A constant diet of books that reinforce girl stereotypes or that have succumbed to product placement, magazines that sell image, and spin-offs from TV shows tell us that some reading can be actually harmful. The research on girls reading magazines supports this. Psychologists have shown that even with elementary school girls the more they realize that thin and sexy is the ideal, the more they want to attain it, and the less happy they are about themselves.

THE NATURE OF GIRLS: MAGAZINES FOR THE YOUNGER SET

With great names like *Spider*, *Cricket*, *Your Big Backyard*, and *Zoobooks*, the magazines younger girls are likely to read are gloriously gender neutral. It is not until she's a few years older, when she's introduced to "girls' magazines" that point her in the direction of *Cosmo*, will your daughter receive the explicit message that boys and girls are almost nothing alike, that they inhabit not only different worlds but different planets, and that "planet girl" revolves around crushes, embarrassing moments, and the latest fashion. For the time being, though, she's on terra firma and the whole world is her canvas—or is it?

We checked out some of the more popular kids' magazines to see if the impression of gender neutrality is a reality. For the most part these are

generically kid-friendly and advertisement-free, or at least reduced, zones. But parents do need to be on their toes because gendered messages are subtly and not so subtly present.

For example, while nature stories such as "Going Head-to-Head with Warthogs" in *Zoobooks* have no real connection to gender, we noted that the illustrations show more male animal handlers and scientists. Women are shown admiring a spider's web or engaging in traditional activities such as weaving. If both men and women are present, the man might hold a sea turtle while the woman measures its shell. A man looks through the microscope, and a woman holds up the beaker. It's interesting how nature can be framed in gendered ways. An issue of *Ranger Rick* has a feature called Living Lace: "Nothing says summer like a field of white lacy flowers. But there's more to these beauties than just looks. Read on." We then see pictures of camouflaged insects and animals seeking food, accompanied by a pretty blond-haired girl crouched in a field of Queen Anne's lace and looking at the camera. (Why isn't she at least discovering one of those camouflaged insects in the flower petals?) Alongside her photo are sidebars with directions about how to press flowers and color the lace by placing bouquets in dyed water. In the same issue a fictional account of discovering real dinosaur eggs in a natural history museum features an intrepid boy and his paleontologist father. The next story is about dinosaur bones and shows a boy goofing off, pretending his arm is caught in the jaws of a large skeleton, while a girl tries to pull him away. The message? Girls are pretty and cautious; boys are fearless and fun.

Girls and women are more likely to be featured in these magazines when the topic turns to food preparation, crafts, or child care. In *Ranger Rick* we see a photo of girls sitting in a doggy diner; the story includes a recipe for homemade dog bones. In *Highlights* (ages two to twelve) an explanation of how a camel keeps the dust out of its eyes is illustrated with a cartoon of a girl riding a camel and holding a young child in front of her. In the same issue a Bahamian tale about Sister Felice, "a woman of magic" and "the best cook on all of Andros Island," tells a story of how mischievous elfin creatures called chickcharnies are tricked into eating guava duff and turn into chick hens. Readers are directed to the *Highlights* Web site for guava duff recipe.

More than any of the other magazines we reviewed, *Highlights* has very clear gendered messages. We would say it hasn't adjusted to the times, but the newer magazines don't fare much better. Sports stories nearly always feature stereotypical boys, and the illustrations, especially

those geared to younger kids, tend to be more stereotypically coded: boys playing Ping-Pong, making maps, getting lost in caves; a matching game with one girl pig dressed in a pink dress holding flowers and four boy pigs—a baker, a baseball player, a carpenter with his tool belt, and a pig in shorts with a book. (This last pig could be male or female, but given the really pink pig, it seems more like the other boys.) A feature about two boys, Goofus and Gallant, teaches good manners (as though girls don't need these lessons), The Bear Family's grandma is in a pink dress and pearls. Another feature, For Wee Folks, connects play and work with stereotyped pictures of girls having tea parties and mainly boys playing with trucks.

Many of these magazines have fictional short stories, which are generally fun and interesting. Still, messages about the "true nature" of girls and boys come through more often than we'd like. In one issue of *Spider*, a story, "The Pickle Queens," begins with brother Marcus and his dad heading out for soccer practice. This leaves the house to mom and the girls who are pickling tomatoes for their elderly neighbor, Mrs. Banks. Mrs. Banks has "the cheeriest smile and the cheeriest ankles in town" because, as she told the girls, even if you needed two canes to walk, as she did, if you dressed up your feet in bright pink ankle socks, "you fooled your feet into thinking they could still dance." The girls decide to pickle "something pretty" for their cheery neighbor, so they fill a jar with pink socks and label it Pickled Pink. Mrs. Banks sounds a lot like *Highlights*' Miss Dinsmore in "As Cheerful as Cheerful Can Be," who lives all alone and can't decide what color to paint her drab house. When she ends up with a houseful of neighbors, she realizes what real cheeriness is.

Cheerful, pretty, and cute are exclusively reserved for girls. The cover of an issue of *Click* (for ages three to seven), has a little boy looking at a turtle, and inside we read about Amy and Martin and Grandpa fishing for rainbow trout. Amy says things like "Ooh! I bet they're really pretty!" and (about some ducks) "Oh! They're so cute!" Although both kids wade into the water, Martin does the frog catching. In the same magazine is "A Pond for Maddie" in which Maddie and her family find an old artificial pond behind their new house and decide to clean it up. "Even with big, thick gardening gloves, [Maddie] didn't want to touch anything." When they buy plants for the pond, Maddie asks, "What about water lilies? . . . They're the prettiest!" In a *Highlights* regular cartoon feature, The Timbertoes, the kids are brainstorming what to do for Father's Day. The girls want to make breakfast; the boy wants to sweep the shop. When the girl

picks flowers, the boy thinks, "Silly idea." Pa likes them, of course, but in the few minutes it takes your daughter to read this simple cartoon, she is treated to a series of stereotypes about cooking, pretty flowers, and the differences between boys and girls.

There are a few stories and features that went against type, especially in the nature-focused magazines but also in some of the others. In *Ladybug* (for ages two to six) we read about "Max and Kate." Kate finds her grandpa's old fishing things, and Max gets a little scared. He says, "These are nice to look at, but I don't want to catch any fish." But Kate's not afraid: "Look, I've caught two big fish already" (two stuffed animals in a net). Such stories tell girls that they can take initiative and be bold; they tell little boys that it's okay to be afraid every once in a while.

There are lots of wonderful stories and activities in these magazines, and maybe because there is some awareness that advertising is not good for little kids or that nature and reading are for everyone, they are an oasis amid the ever-increasing competition for product loyalty. (Although you might want to nix *National Geographic Kids*. It is loaded with advertising for junk food, cartoons, movies, and computer games. There are other ad-free magazines that do nature better.) Because children can't really distinguish between fantasy and reality, it is especially important to question gender stereotyping when you see it. For example, kids this age are too young to understand the generic use of the pronoun *he*. When you don't vary pronouns or when boys and girls are repeatedly associated with certain things—girls with pretty, boys with sports—children think this is really how the world is. We suggest that while reading with your daughter, you ask questions, pose alternatives, and change pronouns. And then discover with your daughter what it's like to go head-to-head with a warthog.

SEVEN GOING ON FOURTEEN: MAGAZINES FOR TWEENS

Once girls have left *Highlights* and *Zoobooks*, they're introduced to magazines designed specifically for girls. With a few exceptions this means girls move away from being educated about the world of nature, entertained by goofy jokes and riddles, and challenged with puzzles and mazes, to being educated about a world of fashion, beauty, and boys.

The average reader of teen magazines is twelve, which means many ten-year-olds are reading them. There's a difference in tone and content between magazines designed for nine- to ten-year-olds and those designed

for twelve-year-olds and older. In some cases it's a difference of degree. For preteens, boyfriends are called "crushes," beauty has to do with hairstyles and products, and fashion focuses on the brightly colored accessories from Claire's, "Smackers" lip gloss, and cute tops from Limited Too. Leaving the teen magazines such as *CosmoGIRL!* and *Seventeen* for the time being, we'll focus on those aimed at the younger set: *American Girl Magazine*, *Discovery Girl*, *Girls' Life*, and *New Moon*.

We were struck by the trend to define a teen girl as younger and younger. Still, these preteen magazines are better than the teen magazines marketed to middle school girls. Yes, there are regular features, captions, and stories that make us cringe: false girl power promises like "the fun and freedom to accessorize" and "the great debate: looks or talent" (surely there are greater debates), and lots and lots of stories about crushes on and rejections by boys. But there are also stories by girls themselves about getting messy, staying close to Dad, daring to be different, and surviving tragedy, and also about girls from around the world.

The most popular preteen magazines are *Discovery Girls* (for girls seven to fourteen), *American Girl* (seven to twelve), and *New Moon*, the "Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams" (eight to fourteen). We also include *Girls' Life*, or *GL* (for girls ten to fifteen), because it includes preteens in its targeted age range.

Seven to fourteen is a ridiculously wide age range. This means the magazines most often shoot to the middle or high end of the age range, figuring younger girls want to feel or appear older and can be easily brought along. None of these magazines are appropriate for seven-year-olds.

Because these magazines sell a version of girlhood, girls reading them try to figure out what a normal girl should feel, think, and act like and what she should wear or buy to create the image of normal. Each one of these magazines has a decidedly different view of American girlhood.

American Girl is the youngest of the preteen magazines, although the letters from girls suggest that readers are as likely to be twelve and thirteen as they are eight or nine. Content and photos suggest American girls are squeaky clean and like pets, cooking, giggling with friends, foolish fun, and crafts. They shine, have heart-to-hearts, volunteer in their communities, and lend a helping hand. They also play sports, explore the natural world, and do brave things. They say "I'm sorry" a lot, make pretty cards, and have bedtime blues. They are encouraged to be nice, be cheerful, and change the subject when something irritates them. For this

reason, *American Girl* magazine has a finishing-school feel to it. The few ads are either for expensive *AG* products and such things as boarding schools. ("Every day I practice English riding at the stable. . . . This year *I* brought my own horse, Audacity, to boarding school.") American Girls are supernice, but they don't seem particularly real or very deep or complex. We know lots of eight- and nine-year-olds who are living with family stresses and personal struggles. Advising them to smile through it, drink herbal tea, or just keep trying doesn't quite do justice to their lives. *AG*'s "normalcy" is once again that perfect girl image that is too hard for real girls to live up to.

Unlike *AG*, which seems mostly age appropriate even if its view of girlhood is limited, it is hard to understand why *Discovery Girl* is marketed to seven- to fourteen-year-olds. According to their publisher, "*Discovery Girl* provides a forum for girls to speak out about the challenges they face each day . . . helps your daughter connect with girls across the country" so she can "become the self-confident, creative, and healthy young woman you want her to be." There are lots of stories written by girls; in addition, girls of different sizes, races, and styles rather than digitally enhanced supermodels grace the pages. We especially like their Behind the Scenes and Over There sections that showcase real girls around the United States and in other countries. Discovery Girls discover more than their own voices. Along with the purple and pink pages enhanced with cartoon girls and lined with stars, flowers, and hearts, they discover a world of consumerism through boys, fashion, and beauty. There is a blatant teen edge to the magazine that is absent in *American Girl*. Gotta-have-it fashion spreads, shopping tips, CD and DVD reviews, and hair advice with lots of product placement prepare girls to "dare to be different"—by buying the same things. The *DG* girl has more problems than the *AG* girl, but they are all personal and relational: Her body is changing; she fears rejection; she's into guys, shopping, and popular culture. This is hardly the stuff of most seven- and eight-year-old girls' lives, but it's excellent preparation for teen magazines such as *Girls' Life*.

GL is a teen magazine shamelessly masquerading as being for a preteen audience. *GL* is fun, no doubt about it. It is filled with quizzes, advice, and celebrity interviews, as well as a few good regular features such as One Girl/One Solution. The primary problem with *GL* is the series of contradictions that are too mature for ten-year-olds to grapple with: "free to be me" ads for products girls must have to be cool; advice about being your own person with suggestions about how to attract, kiss, and keep boyfriends; information about healthy body images interspersed with ultrathin girl models. There is very little diversity. Not surprisingly, this magazine marks the beginning of "mean girl" talk, boyfriend jealousy, makeup, popular culture, and consumerism. Filled with thin blond models, ads for "boy crazy" trading cards ("So many boys, so little time"), and makeup, *GL* is a not-so-subtle education about the material world of prepackaged girl culture and promises a straight-line prequel to more highly sexualized teen magazines like *CosmoGIRL!*.

New Moon makes a different promise. It is the only magazine for girls without any advertisements. It is also the only magazine with an editorial board made up of girls. *New Moon* sees itself as "an international magazine for every girl who wants her voice heard and her dreams taken seriously." While "dreams" buys into the stereotype that girls dream and boys like action, *NM* is more blunt about its purpose—"to build healthy resistance to gender inequities"—and they have zero space for fashion and beauty products. To that end, their departments have names like Women's Work, Girl Talk, Girls on the Go, Herstory, and Girls Act Out. Their girl-written features—"Visit the Birthplace of Mother Teresa," "Hot on the Trail of a Disease Detective," and "Look at What's Hiding Behind Harry Potter"—give a sense of action, independence, and media savvy. Our favorite is their annual twenty-five-most-beautiful-girls issue, an in-your-face response to *People* magazine's fifty most beautiful people issue. While *People* goes for outer beauty, *New Moon* redefines beauty as "good hearts, great works, and activism" and showcases a diversity of brave, unique, creative girls. The normal *New Moon* girl would rather do than be done to, see rather than be seen, and create culture rather than consume it. Like the other magazines, though, *New Moon* seems geared more to ten and up than eight and nine. But more than any of the other magazines it provides a view of girls as people of substance.

Magazines like *GL* and the rest of consumer culture see the spark of young girls and want to direct it toward buying and posing and becoming interested in pop stars. (Why read about real girls when an Olsen twin may have an eating disorder? When Paris Hilton's life has gotten even more glamorous?) A magazine like *New Moon* may be too real and no longer work when girls get to be thirteen or fourteen. They have developed anxieties that teen magazines promise answers to and may no longer believe in the values that a magazine like *New Moon* espouses.

We want to teach moms how to help their daughters stay invested in the real and the reality of their lives in the fullest sense, beyond looks,

crushes, and decorating. When they read magazines about their interests—for example, *Track and Field*, *Figure Skating*, and *Mac Addict*—and not magazines about their gender, that will be a start.

ARE YOU A HILARY OR AN AVRIL? COSMO GIRLS CATEGORIZED

> I read [magazines] from beginning to end. I like reading about fashion and makeup and hair tips.
>
> —RACHEL, *age twelve*

Teen magazines are everywhere a high schooler or middle schooler goes. She sees the covers of these magazines on a weekly basis, and these covers tell her what she should be interested in and what she should be anxious about. Magazines such as *Twist*, *J-14*, *YM*, and *Teen* are more for middle school girls. The letters written in and the humiliating experiences of real girls presented show the age range as eleven to fifteen. Magazines like *Seventeen*, *CosmoGIRL!*, *Teen People*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Glamour Girl* are purportedly for an older teen crowd (their similar letters and experiences of real girls show the age range of fourteen to nineteen). Unfortunately, in spite of these age ranges, our survey tells us that both middle school girls and high school girls are reading them all—cover to cover.

Rather than expose the repetitiveness of stereotypes about bodies, consumerism, and romance in these magazines, we thought we'd look at a few problems that are less blatant. It's obvious to even the youngest girl in these groups that all the models are thin and pretty, but maybe not as obvious to most white girls that there is very little racial diversity. If a girl is African American or Asian, she will have to look hard to find a girl like her in these magazines. The July 2004 issue of *Seventeen*, showed eighty-one white girls, five African American girls, one Latina, and one Asian girl.

These magazines try to sell girls a sorry substitute for diversity. After all, today's generation was raised in schools that gave clear-cut messages about diversity and tolerance, and advertisers have known since the old Benneton advertisements that diversity is hip. The type of diversity these magazines pretend to offer are diverse categories of girls. Fashion shoots, faux stories, question-and-answer columns, and special inserts all provide girls with a variety of categories with which they can label themselves. The magazine's message about girls being individuals is really telling them they need to fit into a set number of boxes. Those ever-present questionnaires

will tell girls after they count up their scores whether they are a chilled-out chick, fair weather fan, or sunshine sistah. Fashion features will have them label themselves as either a busty babe, hippie gal, curvy chick, or skinny sistah, or just label their body shape as star, pear, apple, or tube. These articles answer that all-important teen question "Who am I?" over and over via predictions and advice. They take advantage of your daughter's genuine self-analysis at this age and make a mockery of the heartfelt questions she has.

Surveys in teen magazines seem harmless enough, and of course the girls who take these quizzes don't take them totally seriously. The incessant categorization, however, gives a stronger message: You will be categorized, so get a jump on it and do it yourself. Moreover, the most important categories are about style. You will be read by your style, they proclaim, so you need to know everything you can about it.

These questionnaires not only categorize girls but also the crushes and pop stars the girls love, asking them to use the same makeup as their "role models" but never explaining why a pop star deserves to be a role model. How they sell products is sometimes very subtle. For example, *J-14* has virtually no traditional advertisements; however, in a feat of immersive advertising, every feature story about a star sells something. For example, the writer may guess at the makeup a star uses, never actually saying "Mary-Kate Olsen uses it" but instead "Shimmer like Mary-Kate." The feature then has several photos of Mary-Kate and several products beside her with brand name and price for a girl to choose if she wants to shimmer like Mary-Kate. We're sure Mary-Kate's publicist doesn't mind because while the article sells the makeup, it is also selling the star, her future movies, her CDs, and her upcoming line of clothing.

Below we've listed the kinds of stereotypes about girls that are presented over and over in these magazines with examples of headlines and text from the articles. If you want, you can play one of those teen magazine matching games—a game you'll never see in one of these magazines. Match the stereotype with the article title below:

Stereotypes

Girls love to shop

A makeover fixes anything

Girls are catty and can't get along

If two girls are popular, there has to be a rivalry between them

The most important thing in the world is getting a boyfriend

To get a boyfriend you need to look sexy

Articles

"Look Sexy in Those New Jeans" or "Score Sexy Summer Lips"

"Finding Your Inner Super-Model"

"Who's the Queen of the Divas?"

"Who's your Primetime Boyfriend?" or "Discover Summer Lovin—Is He More Than a Friend?" or "Who's Your Hip Hop Honey?" or "What's Your Favorite Dating Style?"

"How Does Hilary Handle the Haters?"

"I Want Her Hair"

"Dreamy Sleepover" (Featuring outfits for sleepovers)

If you matched each and every one of these articles to "Girls love to shop," you are right on target! (Of course other stereotypes abound, too!)

There are quite a few articles titled in a way that ask girls a question or invite them to respond, feigning interest in the real girl: "Tell us about your best kiss." Sometimes there are contests pretending that they want to know how girls really think: "Express yourself!" These questions draw girls into the magazines, teaching them that self-analysis at this very superficial level is an activity of girlhood. Boys' magazines (what few there are) don't ask boys to rate themselves, categorize themselves, or analyze their style. It seems tragic that girls buy into this superficial interest in them when the intent is to shape their interests toward buying more.

One of the most infuriating aspects of these magazines is the way they sculpt girls' actions and activities by showing what's typical and what's acceptable for them to do. An interview with Paris Hilton was particularly revealing. Most articles about her go on and on about her embarrassing porn video, her TV series *The Simple Life*, her fight with Nicole, her little dog, her exotic pets, her sense of fashion, and the parties and boyfriends. When asked what would be the most surprising thing about her that her fans don't know, she answered that she was an ice hockey player in high

school and one of the best on the team. That fact says volumes about the girl. Do you know what it takes to be a good ice hockey player when you're a girl in high school? We now have a totally different picture of Paris—as a disciplined, incredibly strong girl who woke up every morning at six o'clock for practice, who pushed her physical limits, and who probably got quite aggressive on the ice in order to be one of the best players. Rather than pursuing this interesting side of her in the article, it is mentioned and thrown away, like the wrong answer. In the summer of 2004 there were many articles about Paris Hilton, and only one mentioned this major aspect of who she was and, we bet, still is. Ice hockey is not the kind of activity these magazines want to encourage because it doesn't lead you into beauty and fashion or buying movies and CDs.

Sports aren't cool, at least not for girls. Publishers and editors pretend to be interested in girls and sports but often use a sport to categorize a girl or sell fashion. *Teen* had a two-page feature called "Sporty Girls" (remembering once again to categorize girls who play sports as different from other girls) that told of four summer camps or competitions featuring tennis, surfing, skateboarding, and . . . cheerleading. Sports are mentioned a second time in the same magazine in an article entitled "Where the Boys Are." If a girl wants to meet boys, she should hang out at the tennis courts or the arcade "and look pretty." Remember not to "challenge him and beat him at his game!"

A "summer fragrances" ad said it all. Featured were a girl and a boy and a surfboard on the beach, and written across the two kids were the words "For all the ways you play." Clearly *his* form of play is surfing, given he is the one holding the surfboard. Her form of play is teasing him. In a bikini bottom but no top and a six-button shirt that has only one button buttoned, she is certainly playing something. What fun!

In an effort to promote girl power, though, these magazines teach girls to get angry at any boy who says that girls aren't strong and can't play sports, reinforcing the stereotype that girls need to fight with their words and not with their bodies. In a feature about what boys say and what they mean, they have a boy saying "Girls don't surf" and claim that what he means is "Stay away from me—I'm a sexist pig." Yet in an entire summer issue the magazine does not show one single girl surfing. They are virtually saying, "Girls don't surf," but never "Stay away from us."

What activities are acceptable for girls besides the fashion, makeup, and boy-chasing activities that pervade? Because we were looking at summer issues, we found a few articles on summer jobs and how to spend time

during those free summer days. Remembering that girls can't have real jobs until they're sixteen, here is what's recommended. In "Cash In on Fabulous Jobs" the authors recommend walking dogs, explaining the Internet to senior citizens (which is rather patronizing to seniors but at least suggests some technical skill on the girls' part), baking and selling cookies, organizing someone's basement, becoming someone's "supersecretary," designing a Web site for someone else, going grocery shopping and running errands for someone else, babysitting, house sitting, holding a car wash, setting up a mini carnival for children, making crafts and selling them, taking care of others' plants or gardens, tutoring, and holding a garage sale. With very few exceptions this sounds to us as though they want these girls to practice being a traditional *uber*mom. Baking, organizing, crafting, gardening, taking care of kids and old people! What's absent? Did you guess mowing? Mowing people's lawns is probably the best way to make some cash before you're old enough for a real job, that and babysitting. But mowing was outside the box for these *Teen* authors. And instead of baking cookies and selling crafts, why not collect old CDs and rock-and-roll albums and sell these? How about just returning people's empties? How "fabulous" are these jobs? Well, not too. But as moms we can also vouch for the fact that taking care of our gardens, organizing the basement, tutoring kids on their schoolwork, and holding a garage sale aren't too fabulous, either.

What *should* daughters be doing with all that free summer time? According to these magazines they should be watching TV, going to movies, and reading trashy novels. According to *Teen*, here are some "ridiculously cool things" they might also try: write down the lyrics of their favorite songs, lie on their backs and say what shapes they see in the clouds (how original is that?), and learn how to read palms. (Mildly interesting, but "ridiculously cool"? We think not.) *J-14* thinks they can check out soaps, practice their karaoke (an okay plan if they want to be a diva), give their rooms a mini-makeover, make their own lemonade (again in the kitchen?), show off their "fave swimsuit" at the pool, send someone an e-card, or have a summer fling (just what we want our daughters to do when they're bored—have meaningless sex with someone).

We can think of other choices, such as volunteering to work on a political campaign, illustrating a book they like, writing a short story, helping out at summer camps, learning how to play guitar, practicing their basketball skills, or holding a mini soccer camp rather than a carnival,

offering to assist at their church or synagogue, learning how to surf, sorting food at the local food pantry, or walking dogs at the Humane Society shelter. Instead of being a mommy's helper, why not be a professional woman's helper for a day and learn what her day is like?

These aren't the kinds of things magazines suggest to girls who they believe hope to be divas and have hot boyfriends by the end of the summer. Pretending to be a girl's best friend, they tell her secret after secret, whisper tips as if standing right behind her at the mirror, and dish gossip galore. These magazines are fickle friends. Look how they treat the stars! On one page they will make a reader feel like Lindsay Lohan's BFF (best friend forever) when reading about her intimate woes; on the next page the reader learns about her catfight with another star. By showing no loyalty to any star and their willingness to betray any confidence or share any tidbit of gossip, magazines re-create the middle school scenario of cliques and status problems.

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS

The middle school girls who answered our survey told us they love the embarrassing moments sections of teen magazines the best. Every magazine for this age group has stories from real teens about humiliations, accidents, and embarrassing situations. Although the magazines set up the "perfect girl" image over and over again as something girls can and should work to attain, they also say that perfect girls are snobby, mean, full of themselves, and untrustworthy. So the embarrassing moments offer signs that girls who buy these magazines have an imperfect side. Just because they're flawless on the outside doesn't mean they are not vulnerable on the inside. While no one can be exactly like the perfect models in the magazine, they can share imperfections with them and still feel included. Embarrassing moments is a great hook; it is a way for girls to insert some of their own reality into the fantastic unreality of the pages before them.

These embarrassing moments feature lots of surprise happenings: skin revealings (bathing suit tops fall off), bodily sounds at the wrong time, accidents that reveal bodily functions (spilling a backpack and having supersize tampons roll out), eating too much, misunderstandings with boys. Anything that breaks the false image of put-together perfection will do. One girl wrote the following embarassing moment about eating birthday cake in the now defunct *YM* (our commentary has been added):

> After blowing out the candles and giving everyone a slice [*of course she's polite*], I dug right in [*but she's real, with hunger*]. It was so delicious that I wolfed it down [*and a bit bad*]. A little too fast, though, because I started choking and ended up coughing out a spray of crumbs all over the place. I was beyond mortified. [*That will teach her to enjoy eating*!]

This normalizes things. The normal girl is the one who carries tampons in discrete places, suppresses farts, doesn't reveal too much skin, and is mortified when she shows her messy humanity in public.

In the girls' groups that Lyn runs, the girls love to hear about the embarrassing things that happen to others. The less popular girls especially love to hear these stories because they feel they are being let in on something that makes them more like the popular ones. A bonding takes place that has to do with fitting in and status; social heirarchies momentarily disappear when we realize that everyone farts.

We agree these embarrassing moments stories have a wonderful quality about them. However, they don't suggest to girls that we are all complicated, that all of us present various selves to the world and struggle to integrate these selves into a whole person. Instead, they merely remind girls that it's better and even normal to present a false front most of the time and then reveal the cracks in that front so that other girls will like them—but not too many cracks or guys will not want them. What a thin line to walk.

GOOD GIRL AVRIL, BAD GIRL BRITNEY?

Most of the magazines that girls are reading feature their idols, and although idols change, you can be sure they will be contrasted as mean versus nice, good versus bad, hot versus innocent, alternative versus girly, and so on. We look at Avril Lavigne and Britney Spears as types that shift with each issue.

Avril Lavigne began her career as the skater high school girl who hung out with boys and didn't take her clothes off to get attention. She was the alternative to Britney. She actually played guitar when she sang and jumped up and down with punk excitement rather than thrusting her boobs and hips at us in MTV dance form. She was a girl rocker, and she was so popular that they just couldn't let her be. To get a larger fan base, to reach more kids, they had to mainstream her. The marketing ploy was to

clean her up, feminize her, keep her unique but not too unique, and make her a little more sexy once she reached eighteen. Voilá, the new Avril.

This repackaging takes away what was really unique about her (and possibly still is in reality) in exchange for broader appeal. Someone out there thinks that she's more appealing when she's presented more like a stereotyped "everygirl." That couldn't be right. You might ask your twelve-year-old daughter, "Why do you think you have to be liked by everybody?" But if you ask marketers and packagers why a cool and decent kid like Avril has to be liked by more and more preteens, and stay popular with those preteens when they become teens, the answer would probably have something to do with branding and selling and, in the end, making more money.

Listen to the way *CosmoGIRL!* writes about her:

- Avril, a self-described tomboy, says she's become "more girlie as she's gotten older."
- Avril says, "I love clothes and going to the spa to get facials and massages."
- Avril thinks Jessica Simpson is "sweet and pretty. . . . If I wanted to look like anyone else it would be her."
- "But for all the bad girl behavior and punk rock bravado, Avril is still just another girl who gets crushes on cute movie stars and musicians."

The same month, the same year, and, not coincidentally, the month her new album was being released, *J-14* was writing that Avril is "misunderstood."

- She's not a loudmouth.
- She's not a total tomboy. "I am actually really girlie. I love shopping. I'm really into face products, hair products, sleepovers, facials, and stuff."
- She's not just a guy's girl. She "has female BFFs [best friends forever] as well."
- She's not closed off to love. "Just like many girls, Avril daydreams about boys and being in love." And to top it off this tomboy, skater

girl, pop punk rocker says, "I'm looking forward to getting married and having a family."

Her new album, supposedly full of songs from her diary, is advertised as a "girl power" album, but we mainly hear typical songs of teenage romance, defining girl power as the power to wait for the right time to have sex (as in "Don't Tell Me"). She uses the powerful metaphor of voice and choice (à la reproductive politics) to teach girls that they have choices about who they can go out with: "He wouldn't even open up the door/he never made me feel like I was special/he wasn't what I'm looking for. . . . We've all got choices, we've all got voices." Girl power—the power to pick the right guy. And the right guy is someone who makes you feel *special!*

Magazines will play up the sweet Britney, the Mommy Britney, and now the Dating Britney angle. But what will girls think when they see her packaged elsewhere? Check out the photo of Britney that promoters sent to such tween girl Web sites as RadioDisney. It is one from 1999 where she looks like a tween—cute, vulnerable, and awkward. Talk about bait and switch! Her pop bubblegum music appealed to younger girls from day one; her blond Barbie looks won admirers in even the three- to five-year-old set. Her first video, set in a school and with her dressed in a school uniform, created an image of a rebel schoolgirl that would appeal to fifth graders, tenth graders, and, unfortunately, grown men. In fact, two years after the success of that video, she hired Gregory Dark, porn director, to direct "From the Bottom of My Broken Heart."

Fast forward a few years to the video *Toxic* and we see Britney as a sexy flight attendant (male fantasy), who transforms into an evil villainess type, curls around on the floor in a glittery white leotard looking like a sexy kitten, and does some dance moves reminiscent of a lap dancer/pole dancer/stripper in their evocation of oral sex. Where can a girl go from here? In her video *Everytime*, she playacts a suicide. Naked in a bubble bath she is saved just in time by her hunky shirtless boyfriend who jumps into the tub and gives her mouth-to-mouth. So many of us make fun of girls for being drama queens, but at the same time we give them horrible ideas of how to create drama when they're feeling alone and depressed.

But how do you talk to a little girl about pornography when, hopefully, she hasn't seen any or has seen only intimations of it in cartoons, TV shows, and movies? One suggestion is to say, "I wonder why Britney keeps trying all these different ways of being sexy and not different ways of being her?"

BAIT AND SWITCH: THE LURE OF GIRL POWER ON WEB SITES

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention the plethora of girl power Web sites in cyberspace. Web magazines are another source of garbage for girls, so don't be fooled by the bright pink flashing *Girl Power* titles all over the Internet. Almost as soon as the phrase was coined, girl power was snapped up by the media and just about everyone else trying to sell your daughter something. What it sells is an *image* of being empowered. Once girls buy into that desire and go after that image, they're told that the way to get that power is through makeup, clothes, and boyfriends.

A case in point is the Web site gURL.com, which is a creation of the writers of the book *Deal with It*. The book has a shocking pink cover with an equally shocking cartoon girl in a yellow raincoat. Her back is to us, but clearly she is opening that raincoat to flash an unseen audience. It could be said that what is cool about this girl gone wild is that the girl is not ashamed of her body. Inside the book there is a ton of information about girls and their bodies and sex and sexuality. There is also info about pimples and mood swings. It would seem that the point of the book is to give girls information to empower them.

Cut to the Web site. When the book came out, we joined the Web site in order to get monthly emails from gURL.com. Month after month we've been receiving tips on how to do our hair, what to wear to proms and winter balls, quizzes about our "aura," and information about how to please our boyfriends. We can make our own "cyber-sweetie" or create an on-screen "boy band." Why a "boy band"? Probably so that girls can stand in front of it, sing, dance, and look pretty, or just be a groupie. But why not a band she can play the drums in? We guess she's too busy with makeup, hair, auras, and boyfriends. The authors of the Web site lured the girls in with a promise of information and power, and then continued to turn them into *Cosmo*-tweens.

Over and over again girls are sold a promise that their voice counts, that they have potential to do great things, that they are part of a larger world where what they do matters, and even that they are unique. Then the promise boils down to makeup, hair, clothes, and boys.

How can you make your daughter more savvy about this bait-and-switch tactic? Help her decode words such as funky, hip, cool, and awesome when it comes to style. All those words really stand for an attitude that defies convention. Funky = original = neat = weird in a good way. Talk about how companies are trying to sell *funky* to her, to mainstream it

to make her feel original and unique while telling her that everything that truly makes her original and unique also makes her vulnerable to being laughed at and left outside. You and your daughter together can make up words that capture this hypocrisy in action, such as faux funky or false funk or fake funk.

Steer her to some of the online resources we list at the end of the book. Looking at sites ending with .org is a good place to start, although not always reliable. These nonprofit agencies are usually very girl friendly and are short on ads. Take a good look at MySpace and ask your daughter if you can see the photos of her "friends." Don't be surprised if she has around two hundred of these friends. While the media (always interested in teen sex scandals) might scare you into believing that MySpace has tons of teen porn on it, more than 60 million teens are now using it to show who they are to the world. Some of them buy into a sexed-up image of themselves. Many of them show their faces, their pets, their interests, their musical loves, and more. Real kids, no matter how they represent themselves, are so much more interesting to talk about than lingerie models or other media stars.

Most important of all, decode the promise of "girl power" for her! Point out the problems of "Girls Rule" slogans when they're attached to shopping and sex. Admit that looking good and looking hip does make a girl feel more powerful, but then suggest that it is a problem when it's the only way girl power is described. She can be special and wonderful and do great things, but the world has taught her to *feel* powerful and special and wonderful only on good-hair days.

"BECAUSE YOU'RE MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE"

This is the tagline for the magazine *Teen Voices*. You have only to look at a cover to know you're seeing something unusual. The three or four or five girls smiling back at you are all different. They have different body sizes and different styles of clothing; they look comfortable in their differently colored skins. Their sweaters, T-shirts, bandannas, braids, jeans, and braces make them "every girl." Not the airbrushed, media-constructed, Hilary Duff kind of every girl but every "real" girl, the kind you'll see in your high school hallway. The girls have supremely confident smiles, arms around each other, and are leaning forward, posing in a way that suggests being a cover girl isn't their primary goal in life. Around them are the magazine's promises of more reality inside:

"Different Races, Different Proms: A Teen Takes on Racism"

"Latinas in Hollywood: Fed Up & Taking Charge"

"Cutting Classism: Are You Defined by Your Status?"

"Teen Novelist Brings Sheroes to the Shelves"

"Coming Out? Read 'Dear D' First"

"Going to the Gyno: Your Questions Answered"

"Taking Over the Turntables: Women DJs Chat Coast to Coast"

Here's a teen magazine "written by, for, and about girls" that takes girl power seriously. No girl-hating "you're failing to be beautifully perfect, so buy this product" messages. "*Teen Voices* only accepts advertisements from companies which do not exploit their audience or employees." Rather than makeup and hair products, they advertise colleges and girl-positive Web sites, books, magazines, and music. Now there's an original idea!

The real power of *Teen Voices* is that it takes seriously the notion of gender diversity—that there are many ways to be girls of substance. You won't see the old familiar types here—girly girls and tomboys; mean girls and nice girls—or the typical features touting makeovers and where to find the coolest accessories or prom dresses. Their interviews are with such people as outspoken Carol Moseley-Braun, edgy comedian and political commentator Janeane Garofalo, and such girl-inspiring music artists as Fefe Dobson. Under The Contents of Our Minds they list regular features such as "We Are Family," "Health," "Arts and Culture," and "Cultural Harmony." Their departments—"SHOUT! Notes," "Girl Talk," and "Top 10"—give girls the opportunity to speak out, ask hard questions, and create their own worlds.

Teen Voices is for girls who take genuine pleasure in the things real girls do, who feel and think and know they are on this planet for reasons other than shopping. The media would classify girls like these as nerds or activists, making them feel like outliers—different. The truth is that there are thousands of them. This teen magazine reflects and supports real girls, reminding them that romance, makeup, and fashion are just *part* of their lives, not their whole being.

BOOKS AND SERIES THAT HAVE STRONG GIRLS AND FEW STEREOTYPES

Our Recommendations in This Chapter

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

Pinduli by Janell Cannon

Stellaluna by Janell Cannon

Ramona the Brave (and other Ramona books) by Beverly Cleary

Magic Schoolbus series by Joanna Cole

Miss Rumphius by Barbara Cooney

Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech

I'm Gonna Like Me by Jamie Lee Curtis

Matilda by Roald Dahl

Sheila Rae the Brave by Kevin Henkes

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine

Pippi Longstocking series by Astrid Lindgren

Angela's Airplane by Robert N. Munsch

The Paper Bag Princess by Robert N. Munsch

Junie B. Jones series by Barbara Park

Protector of the Small series by Tamara Pierce

His Dark Materials (Golden Compass, Subtle Knife, The Amber Spyglass) by Philip Pullman

A Bad Case of Stripes by David Shannon

Eloise by Kay Thompson

Recommended by Trusted Librarians, Authors, and Parents

The Sisters Grimm by Michael Buckley

Landry News by Andrew Clements

The Report Card by Andrew Clements

The School Story by Andrew Clements

Bloomability by Sharon Creech

The Wanderer by Sharon Creech

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate Di Camillo

The Birchbark House by Louise Erdrich

Coraline by Neil Gaiman

Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George

Hannah, Divided by Adelle Griffin

Chester's Way by Kevin Henkes

Letters from Rifka by Karen Hesse

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

Witness by Karen Hesse

Born Confused by Tanuja Desai Hidier

Casa Azul by Laban Carrick Hill

The Canning Season by Polly Horvath

Everything on a Waffle by Polly Horvath

My Great-Aunt Arizona by Gloria Houston

Journey to the River Sea by Eva Ibbotsen

Devil in Vienna by Doris Orgel

The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson

All Alone in the Universe by Lynne Rae Perkins

Jojo's Flying Side Kick by Brian Pinkney

Sorceress by Celia Rees

Witch Child by Celia Rees

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff

The Serpent Slayer and Other Stories of Strong Women by Katrin Tchana

A Complicated Kindness by Miriam Toews

Each Little Bird Sings by Deborah Wiles

Love, Ruby Lavender by Deborah Wiles

Princess Academy by Shannon Hale