

# The Role of Teen Magazines in the Commodification of Adolescence.

23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2004.  
BA Visual Communication – Graphic Design

## Introduction

Teen Magazines, particularly those aimed at teenage girls have been around for decades, recently however there has been an increase in the number of magazines available to pre-teens. Successful adult magazines such as Cosmopolitan have introduced new “girl” editions to target the recently named “tween” market (age 8 to 12). This stems from the realisation that pre-teens have just as much buying power and pocket money to spend as teenagers. Brands attempt to entice the consumer while they are still young so that they will stay faithful to the brand throughout their lives and maximise the companies’ profits. Cosmo-Girl! for example, has Cosmopolitan’s next generation of readers conditioned to the brand by the time they’re 12 years old.

This study intends to argue that magazines distort children’s perceptions of social relationships by making them dependent on purchasing certain commodities. They link success in social interactions with make-up and clothing by excessively covering their pages in advertisements, endorsements and recommendations for products. I will consider the contributing factors that lead to the creation of the teenager and more recently the tweenager and reveal how the vulnerability of children plays an important part in the advertisers’ master plan. The main research will involve the content analysis of a number of girls’ magazines to ascertain to what extent they have been commodified. Each page of the selected magazines will be classified into 1 of 25 categories such as Beauty Tips, Fashion Spread or Relationships and will be examined for commercial content.

For as long as I can remember teenagers have looked to the media to learn life skills that school simply does not teach. Soap operas on television and teen magazines are the most popular sources to gain information on love, sex and relationships because they appear to tell it how it really is. Flirting and being dumped are prime examples of

where the teen magazine shines, crucially they offer information and assistance in a non-judgmental way. When a teen is too embarrassed to talk to parents or teachers about a problem, where do they turn? The smiling lady on the problem page of course. The magazine has an enormous responsibility to its readers who treat every word printed like a voice from the gods. The magazines have great influence at the time a teens' psyche is still developing, which means any traits or ideals the magazine communicates to its readers may stay with them throughout life. This is an incredibly privileged position to be in which should not be abused. Adolescence is thought to be the most confusing time of life with hormones and new emotions to deal with. So do these magazines just offer friendly assistance on the bumpy road through puberty or are they partly responsible for the ongoing commodification of adolescence?

## **Adolescence and Vulnerability**

Before the end of the Second World War teenagers were forced to take life pretty seriously, in fact they were not actually recognised as “teenagers” until 1942. Before then children were children until they became adults, there was no in-between. Their lives during these difficult times were mapped out for them: males would go out and get a job to help support his family or new bride and females would meet a man, marry and have children. In this period a teenager had limited freedom and economic power but was sensible and responsible nonetheless. During the 1950’s teenagers’ opportunities changed. Parents could now help their children achieve more from life by insisting they finished school, urging them to go on to university and thanks to a growing economy be more indulgent of their material wishes. After the deprivation of war, parents wanted to give their children everything they possibly could so teenagers started receiving pocket money and were released from jobs around the house. This meant they had more time to themselves to be social and form relationships with their peers. These relationships are essential if a child is to make it to adulthood in one piece.

The transition between childhood and adulthood known as adolescence is the development that bridges the transformation from child to adult. The period of adolescence varies from person to person, but generally falls approximately between the age of 12 and 18 and involves both physiological and psychological changes. The process of physical changes that children go through is better known as puberty and usually occurs between the age of 8 and 14 in girls and slighter later, between 9 and 16 in boys. During puberty the body produces hormones; oestrogen in girls, and testosterone in boys. Oestrogen and testosterone are responsible for breast development, hair growth on the face and body, and the voice breaking. Physical changes signify the start of various Psychological changes including; questioning of identity, and gaining personal independence. Lingren believes there to be two

significant psychological learning processes:

“Two primary developmental tasks of adolescence. These are: (1) identity — finding the answer to the question "Who Am I?" and (2) autonomy — discovering that self as separate and independent from parents.”

(LINGREN, H.G. 1995)

Finding the answers to these unasked questions happens almost accidentally as adolescents stumble through their problematic existence characterised by the physical, emotional, sexual and social changes that are taking place. Physically, teenagers often feel awkward, self-conscious, uncoordinated, embarrassed and even confused about their bodies' development. Emotionally, they experience new heightened feelings which often feel out of control and are confused with rational thoughts. Sexually, adolescents struggle with powerful hormones, but the most important changes come in their social lives. Socially, their world is just beginning, no more are their parents the centre of their existence. Instead their peers are their new family and they spend increasing amounts of time together. They start to make their own decisions and begin to question adult standards and parental guidance. As they challenge the world they are reassured by friends' advice which understands and sympathizes with their views. Their peers' opinions become most influential as they desperately want to be liked and seek acceptance in society.

Teenagers attach great importance to status symbols, such as clothing and possessions, to be “cool” they must fit in to a group and these symbols are one of the ways in which “coolness” is determined. This desperation to be liked by their peers makes them easy targets as advertisers use our insecurities to their advantage and adolescents have many insecurities. Fitting in, looking good and impressing the opposite sex are just a few of the things they worry about. Children lack adults'

knowledge, experience and maturity of judgement and those in adolescence are even more vulnerable than children as they're constantly aware of the added pressure of being "cool". The Advertising Standards Authority is aware of the possible dangers when marketing to children and has a strict code in place which must be adhered to by all types of advertising:

"Marketing communications addressed to, targeted at or featuring children should not exploit their credulity, loyalty, vulnerability or lack of experience:

- a. They should not be made to feel inferior or unpopular for not buying an advertised product.
- b. They should not be made to feel that they are lacking in courage, duty or loyalty if they do not buy or do not encourage others to buy a particular product.

*(ASA. The British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing, 2003)*

It seems like most advertisements targeting teens and pre-teens are doing exactly what these guidelines tell them not to. If an adolescents' peers all wear a certain advertised brand of shoe, and that brand is considered fashionable or "cool" if the adolescent does not buy those shoes they will be considered "uncool" and therefore unpopular and inferior. The brand names and their advertisers get away with this because it's not their advertisement directly making the adolescent feel unpopular, it's the peer pressure they receive for not buying the product. The brands are far from blameless though, when they create new products for the teen and pre-teen market this effect is exactly what they're aiming for and spend millions trying to make the product appeal. Once the market has deemed the brand "cool" the corporation manufacturing the item might as well have a license to print their own money, so a great deal of effort is put into the image of the brand. Some companies even employ teen consultants to generate new

ideas and keep up to date with trend spotting. In “Branded. The Buying & Selling of Teenagers” Alissa Quart talks of teens working with the clothing brand Delia\*s:

“Teen insiders and trendspotters spend hours each week e-mailing their corporate contacts with suggestions about clothes and magazines. They test advertisers’ new products—a lipstick that stays on for twenty-four hours, a fuzzy sweater, a TV pilot. They fill out advertisers surveys, sit in on focus groups, go out for coffee with marketers and share their innermost feelings about angora.”  
(Quart, 2003, p.24).

Using teens and pre-teens in this manner is pretty low and shows just how exposed they are to people ready to take advantage. Bragg & Buckingham’s research for the Advertising Standards Authority reported children strongly rejected the view that they were particularly vulnerable to media influence. As most adults would admit the media influences them in some way, this suggests that children are naïve and susceptible to media manipulation but they just aren’t aware of it yet.

## **The New Tween Market**

Traditionally women aged between 24 and 54 were considered the shoppers but recently advertisers realised they could direct adverts to a much younger audience and still be successful. Surveys show that by the time a child is 7 years old he or she has probably started receiving pocket money on a weekly basis. The latest research by Mintel shows the average pocket money of 7 to 14 year olds was £6.09 per week last year, a 61 pence rise on the previous year. It's estimated under 16's in the UK were given £59 million of pocket money and Mintel believe a child's weekly income will grow on average by 15% between 2002 and 2006 reaching a figure of £7.73 per week.

This is essentially based on the state of the economy, if the parents are earning well then the child will also reap the benefits. If there is an economic downturn, the level of rise may slow down but there is little evidence of that up to now.

A recent study by Goldfish Financial Services found just over half of children aged 11 use their money to buy sweets and 9/10 were terrible at saving. Girls were found to be more likely to spend it on comics and magazines, 46% buying them weekly compared with just 30% of boys. Armed with these statistics, corporations' marketing teams were able to spend considerably more targeting young teens and tweens. Not only for products within the traditional area of children's spends but for more 'grown-up' sectors such as clothes and mobile phones. The corporations' knowledge of children's pocket money and their spending habits enables them to use a child's vulnerabilities as a marketing tool against them. A child's pocket money is intended to teach important financial skills such as; sticking to a simple budget, saving money towards a goal, choosing among competing priorities and shopping and spending wisely. With parents more likely to give in to their child's pestering, and 1 in 10 parents admitting to giving their child extra money on the quiet, (telling them not to tell the other parent) this teaches a whole separate set of life skills than those which are intended.



Children are maturing much earlier, advances in public health and nutrition has brought the first signs of puberty down from an average age of 15 to 10. These early developing pre-teens aged between 8 and 12 years old have become known as “in-betweeners” or “tweens” due to their stranded position between childhood and adolescence. This distorts our conventional ideas of the difference between childhood and adolescence because tweens display traits of both childhood and adulthood which makes the tween very hard to define. Physically the tween may be as developed as a teenager but psychologically they’re a few years behind.

Marketing specifically to children took off after two important events took place. First the release of the blockbuster movies Jaws and Star Wars which initiated the branded merchandise explosion, and second the blocking of the Federal Trade Commission’s attempt to impose regulations on child-oriented advertisements. The lack of regulations in the years that followed led to a widespread production of branded merchandise. Action figures, Games, Clothes, Bed sets, Wallpaper, Carpet, Curtains, Stationary and Kitchenware are just the tip of the iceberg. Movies use these branded products to gain more profit, reach a larger market and prolong exposure. The branded merchandise phenomenon doesn’t end with the movie producers, recently children’s television programmes such as the “Teletubbies” and “Bob The Builder” have brought out their own branded line of toys, clothing and bedroom sets which market products to even younger children.

The tween age is now considered the perfect time to start gaining customers for some select commodities “and prepping the kids to be the sort of teen consumers that companies wish for,” (Quart, 2003, p5) so now alongside adverts for toys and sweets, adverts for mobile phones and designer clothes have started appearing.

It's thought that an increase in single parents who work longer hours, together with the marketers' aggressive targeting has triggered the developing market. Phil Evans from the Consumers' Association said: "A lot of this is down to parental guilt. We work for so many hours that we try to make up for it by endlessly buying our children things."(Ananova, 2001) In a way he is correct, easily manipulated tweens are more likely to persuade a guilt-ridden parent into spending more money to make up for the lack of time spent with them. Most brand marketing aims to gain the attention of the tween market so they will stay loyal to the brand throughout their lives and remain faithful consumers:

"Brand imprinting begins at a young age. The tween years seem particularly fertile for building brand equity, given the intellectual and social changes tweens experience." (Sutherland & Thompson, 2003, p149)

Businesses now specifically develop sub brands or extensions to introduce children to the brand earlier, for example The Gap has many sub brands to suit all ages and styles; Baby Gap, Old Navy and Banana Republic. Branding is the latest added pressure young teens and pre-teens have to worry about. The importance of being liked and fitting in is central to a tween, and wearing the correct labels is absolutely essential:

"Clothes are very important at my school," adds Renee, a thirteen-year-old from affluent Westchester County, outside New York City.

"Brands designate social position." (Quart, 2003, p18)

Beauty, intelligence and achievements are also important factors in the designation of social position and commodities also play a key role. Mintel conducted further research into what children spend their pocket money on:

“By the time they reach the age of 11 or 12 most girls are already used to spending their pocket money on clothing, toiletries and cosmetics and going out. These things become even more important once they are in their early teens (by which time 80% are spending money on going out, 66% on buying CD’s and tapes, 62% on clothes and 61% on toiletries). There is a need for products aimed at this group to be sophisticated enough to suit these “kidults” whose tastes seem more similar to the 20-25 year group than to traditional children.”  
(Mintel, 2003, p2.)

It didn't take long for the teen magazine market to catch on and over the past 5 years there has been a large increase in the number of magazines available to children, particularly those targeting girls as young as 8 or 9 years old. Successful grownup magazines began to reproduce their winning formula for children, Cosmopolitan introduced Cosmo Girl! and Elle produced Elle Girl which paved the way for all other magazines to follow in their footsteps. These new magazines sit next to old favourites such as J17 and Sugar to compete for the consumers' pocket money. The new magazines are part celebrity fanzine and part sophisticated fashion education, a must for girls aged 9 going on 19. The magazines' content seems a little contradictory; adult imagery and naïve young concerns are entwined within the pages giving a muddled view of the ideal young woman. Perfect perhaps for the “kidults” mentioned above, sophisticated style coupled with immature inexperience. The majority offer motivating stories, advice, training in self-confidence (“Kiss With Confidence - Seven Ways To Make Him Come Back For More” and “Get Over Him! We Show You The Easy Way How” from J17) and a touch of feminism slipped in-between the celebrity gossip, beauty tips and

immense fashion spreads that feature often unaffordable and unobtainable style. Girls looking to these magazines for assistance in their teens or pre-teens may be getting far more than the friendly advice they bargained for.

## Analysing The Magazines

After viewing the selection of magazines available at the newsagent I was able to establish which were aimed at the young teen and tween market. To find out which magazines are particularly popular with the readers themselves I surveyed 25 girls aged 8 to 15 and asked them which magazines are their favourites (see fig. 1) and which sections of the magazines they enjoy reading most (see fig. 2).

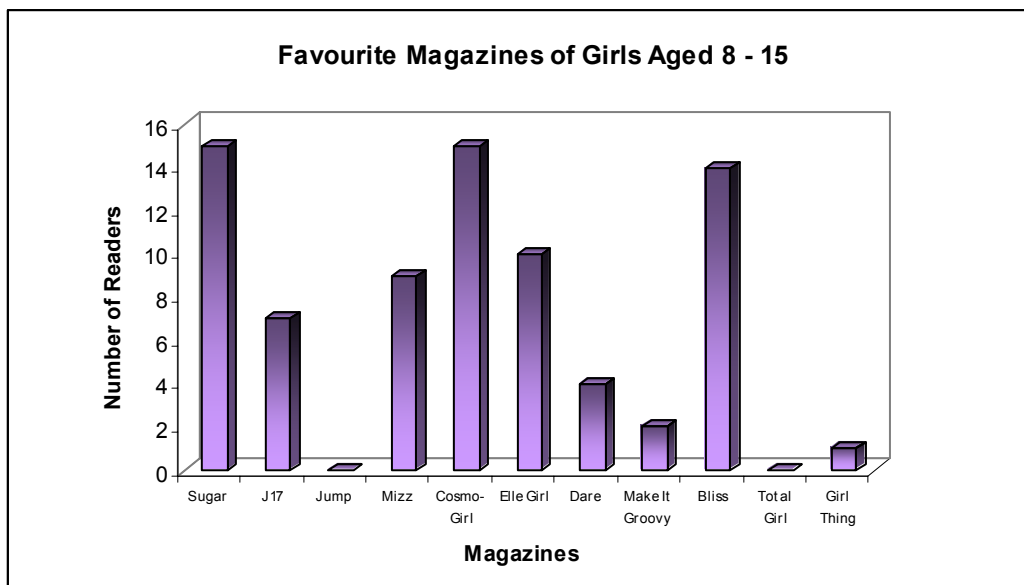


Fig. 1 – Chart showing favourite magazines of girls aged 8-15.

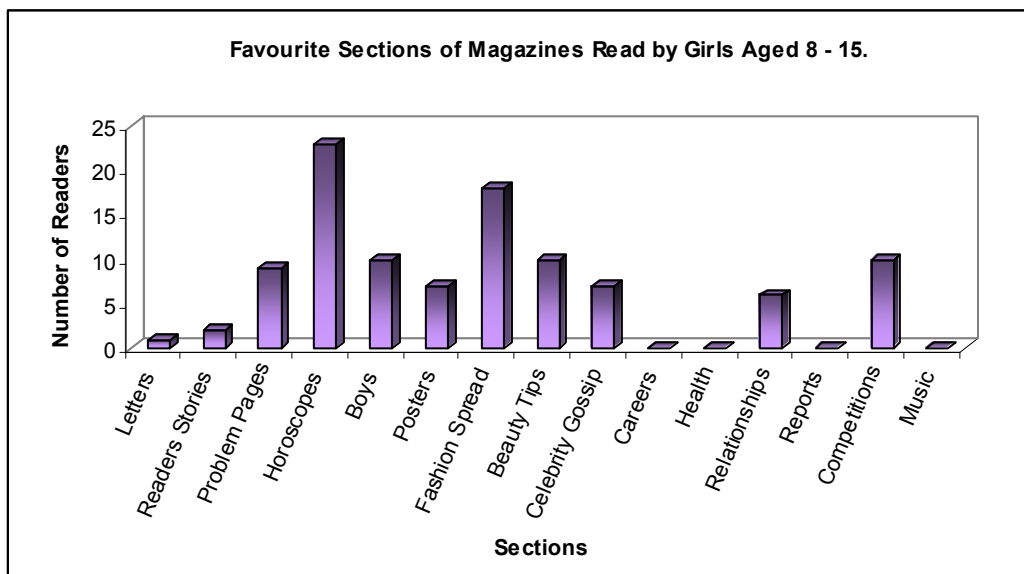


Fig. 2 – Chart showing favourite sections of magazines read by girls aged 8-15.

I analysed the 7 most popular magazines' content, these were Cosmo-Girl!, Elle Girl, Bliss, Sugar, J17, Mizz and Dare. I took each of the magazines in turn, analysed each page's content and categorised it into one of 26 categories: Contents, Letters, Adverts, Beauty Tips, Beauty Promotion, Celebrity Gossip, Celebrity Interviews, Celebrity Style, Fashion Spread, Fashion Tips, Health, Career, Reader Stories, Reports, Mind Body & Spirit, Love, Life, Boys, Sex Advice, Relationships, Posters, Music, TV & Movies, Horoscopes, Competitions and Classifieds. I found that like many women's magazines a large proportion of the pages were made up of adverts. The worst offender was Sugar with 30% of it's pages filled with advertisements (see fig. 3). Many of the other magazines I looked at had far more advertisements in total but the percentage of advertisements was far lower due to them containing more pages overall. Close second was Elle Girl with 26%, then came Cosmo-Girl! with 23%, Bliss with 22%, J17 with 19%, Dare with 16% and Mizz with just 15% of it's contents made up of advertisements.

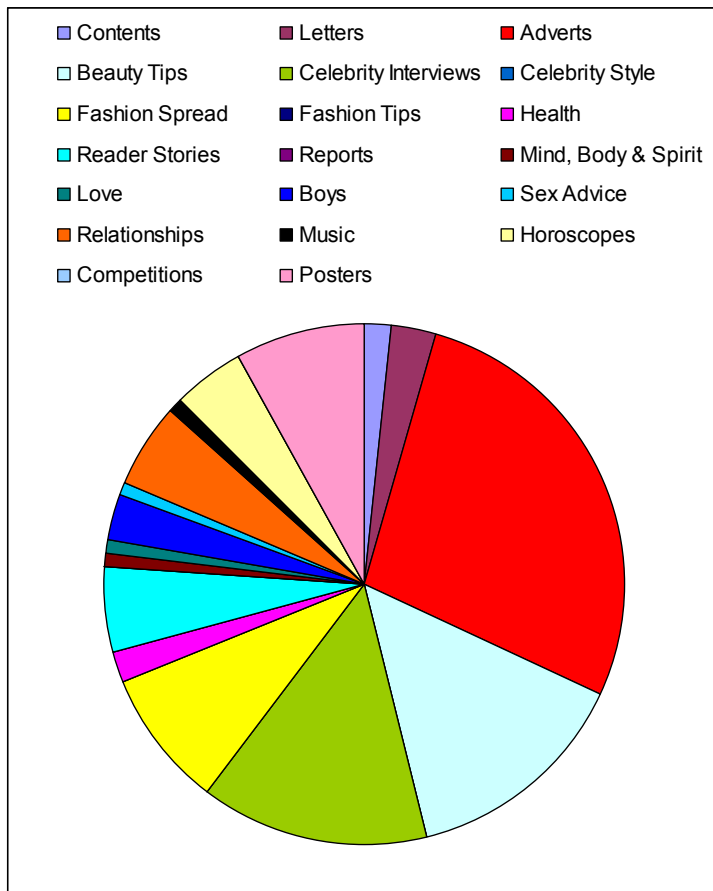


Fig. 3 – Sugar Magazine Content Analysis Pie Chart.

As I scrutinized each page it became clear that it wasn't just the adverts trying to sell the reader commodities. In almost every section of most of the titles I looked at, the magazine would recommend a product or style which you achieve as a result of buying a product. For example in an article in Cosmo-Girl! entitled "165 ways to wow him" we are advised to "Wear your hair as close to natural as possible, Frizz-Ease is allowed!" and "Treat yourself to a manicure or an eyebrow shape and keep it up at home, we love the new range from Ruby & Millie." Linking these specific products to wowing a boy seems a little out there but these magazines use the reader's insecurities to their advantage. Young teens and tweens have very little information on these subjects available to them so in a way these magazines are an informative form of sex education:

"Children value the media as a source of information relative to other sources, such as parents or school. The children were generally very critical of the sex education they received at school, and many also found it embarrassing to be taught about such matters by their parents. They preferred media such as teenage magazines and soap opera on the grounds that they were often more informative, less embarrassing to use and more attuned to their needs and concerns." (Bragg & Buckingham, 2003)

So if the magazine that is helping with sexual problems and teaching flirting techniques suggests using Ruby & Millie products will increase their chances with the boys, they will of course believe it. Clothing, accessories, hair styling equipment, hair and make-up products, perfumes, skincare, jewellery, music, movies and mobile phones are just a few of the items these magazines advise the reader on. The persuasive power these magazines are allowed to have over impressionable young children amazes me, they seem to be selling devices disguised as friendly help for teens.

I began tallying the total number of pages in each magazine which were not selling commodities in any form. In some cases there were not that many. I then compared it with the number of pages in the whole magazine and worked out how much of the magazine was intent on getting the reader to buy. Dare came out with just 38% of it's pages urging us to part with our money (see *fig. 4*). Next was Mizz with 46%, J17 with 52%, Bliss with 56%, Cosmo-Girl! with 66%, Sugar with 78% and Elle Girl with a whopping 80% of it's pages influencing the reader to splash out on the latest look. That's just 23 pages advertisement free in the whole magazine.

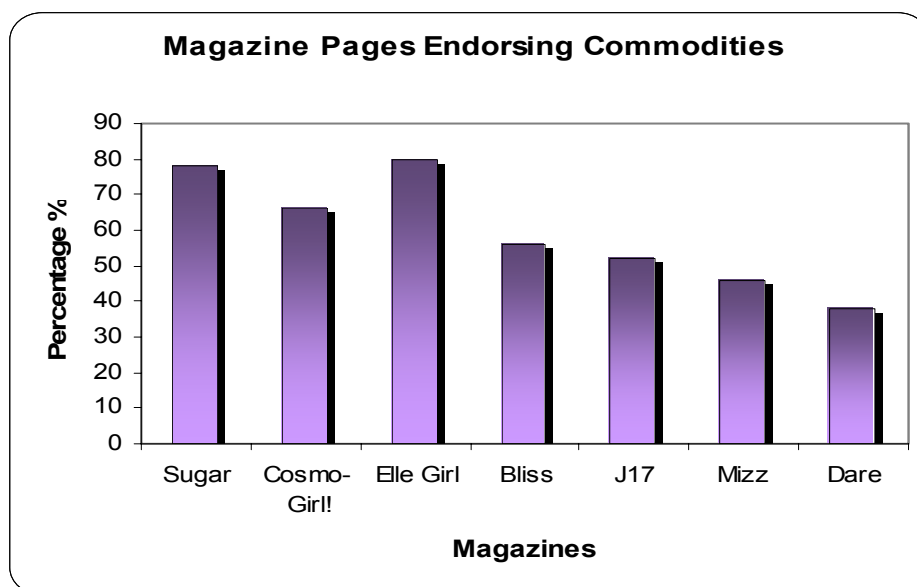


Fig. 4 – Chart showing the percentage of magazine pages endorsing commodities.

In a way this type of endorsement has far more influence on the reader than a full page advertisement as it is not being recognised as an advertisement by the child. I also noted which pages and sections of the magazine these endorsements were appearing in and was shocked to find it wasn't just the beauty and fashion pages. Contents pages, letters pages, relationship pages and boys' pages in nearly every magazine contained recommendations or endorsements of some description. For example in J17, the letter from the editor (see *fig. 5, page 16*) contains recommendations for products such as knickers, boots and lip gloss. These magazines are overloaded with commodities.



# Welcome to the **October** issue of **J17**



**E**at your heart out, *Sex And The City*! This issue, myself and our fabulous fashion ed, Kelly, jetted off to **New York**, Sarah Jessica Parker-style, to bring you six of the **finest fashion trends** you'll want to wear this season (p68). Sadly, it was more work than play but we still managed to have a top time with the **fab US crew** out there as the pics below suggest! A magazine is only as good as the team that produces it, so a special shout goes out to Kelly for organising the whole trip with minimal help and managing to bring you, dear reader, **first class fashion**.

Once you've decided what you'll be **wearing this season**, you'll no doubt want to **lust over our fittest rock boys** (p53), have a nose at our **sex survey results** on p48 (thanks to all of you who replied so honestly), and lose yourself in our **special report on teen murders** (p38).

Be inspired, too, by the three girls who've chosen a very **different way to live their lives** (p34)

- even if they do still fancy Justin like the rest of us! And have all your **period worries** sorted with our special feature on everything you need to know about **that time of the month** (p102).

Lastly, please do email me, [anna-lou.weatherley@emap.com](mailto:anna-lou.weatherley@emap.com), with all your thoughts, opinions, requests... anything! And let me know what you think of J17.

See you next month!

Anna-Lou and the J17 team



Our Michael cosies up with it's 'D lovely, Jarrelle



Alma, see our fab US assistant Ben, in the studio



Another of the crew, Ben, in the studio

### ED'S FAVE THINGS

This month, I can't resist

- Cool comfort: BOOTS, £34.99, CONVERSE @ OFFSPRING
- Say 'x' curls: KNICKERS, £11, BONDS
- I live for lip gloss: LIP GLOSS, £2 EACH, ESTÉE LAUDER
- I can't get enough of coffee! CUFF, £4, DVA @ MRS SELFRIDGE
- Get snugly: TOP, £21, GOSL

# J\*17

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The team (and what we were like at J17)

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Deputy Editor Emma 'Gladys' Armstrong

Features Editor Elizabeth 'Candy' Matthews

Deputy Editor 'Michael' Younger

Editorial Assistant Sarah 'The Girl' Williams

From Jessica 'wearing blue tight' Weiss

Art Editor Stuart 'Wesley' Johnson

Deputy Art Editor Zara 'Lolita' Filippovitch

Picture Editor 'Lolita' 'very girly' Beaton

Features Editor Kelly 'big hair' Manning

Deputy Features Editor Angela 'a good girl' Robinson

Art Editor 'Lolita' 'a good girl' Robinson

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**Sagittarius**  
23 Nov-21 Dec

**YOU:** Recent events have left you feeling more positive than you have in ages, your newfound self-belief impresses someone in power at the end of the month, so don't listen to any criticism from others.

**Your big love dates**  
1st, 14th, 23rd, 29th

**IF YOU'RE SINGLE:** You win some, you lose some – either way it's not the end of the world. Sure he was fit, but it's time to move on – the party season's just around the corner!

**IF YOU'RE DATING:** Are you with him because you're mad about him, or because you want to impress your mates? If you play with other people's emotions – it might be you who gets hurt.

**IF HE'S A SAGITTARIUS:** He's been happy to plod along in a relationship for a while now but December's going to see a big shake-up in Sag's boy's love life!

**Earn your libertine stripes this party season in this lacy dung. £6.99**



**Capricorn**  
22 Dec-20 Jan

**YOU:** A big energy boost from the stars means Capricorn girls December is all about having fun. You're concentrating on your mates right now, and they're loving your company!

**IF YOU'RE SINGLE:** You've been thinking a lot about your ex recently – and about getting it back on. The stars indicate that should you go for it, you could be in for a nice surprise.

**IF YOU'RE DATING:** Lucky you! December's going to be a loved-up month for Capricorns. Right now, you're the couple making everyone else jealous so enjoy every minute of it.

**Your big love dates**  
8th, 11th, 22nd, 25th

**IF HE'S A CAPRICORN:** Capricorn boy has a secret – he's in love, big time. He's scared of getting hurt, but give him plenty of time, and he might 'fess up sooner than you think.

**Capricorn girls are feeling all loved-up so get romantic in girly French knickers! £5.99, H&M**



**Aquarius**  
21 Jan-19 Feb

**YOU:** You're feeling anxious about a friendship and by mid-month things will have come to a head. But just stay calm, and you will be able to sort things out.

**Your big love dates**  
2nd, 5th, 26th, 30th

**IF YOU'RE SINGLE:** You've been confused about a certain lad's feelings for a while, but by early December you'll know the score. The future looks bright, so tell him you're the girl he's been looking for.

**IF YOU'RE DATING:** Boys are rubbish at giving compliments, so give your lad a break – he's just shy. He's crazy about you really! Flirt with another lad so your boy isn't giving you more attention, work!

**IF HE'S AN AQUARIUS:** He's feeling friendly and sociable this month, so make sure you show him that you're equally up for a good time – and dress to impress!

**Party-ing Aquarius will never let his love games slide. £3.99, New Look**



**Pisces**  
20 Feb-20 Mar

**YOU:** You're hilarious. Pisces girl, but try to keep the practical jokes to a minimum this month – you could find one backing badly!

**IF YOU'RE SINGLE:** He might have a sex-back like Abs, and the face of Timbo, but do you have much to talk about? Forget the pretty boy and pay more attention to that boy mate of yours who shares your sense of humour.

**Your big love dates**  
13th, 18th, 21st, 31st

**IF YOU'RE DATING:** This month, you just want to go out and party. That's cool, as long as you make a lot of time to give your boy some attention, too – he's been feeling unwanted recently. Take him out with you.

**IF HE'S A PISCES:** Cop! It seems Pisces boy has fallen for two girls! So if you've got the hots for a fishy boy, give him plenty of space – he's confident enough already!

**It's time to show some love, Pisces – we bet that suit looks £3.50, New Look**



**Aries**  
21 Feb-20 Apr

**YOU:** You're starting to see a lot more of a new mate, but it's important you still save time for old ones. And how about a special thank-you to your most loyal supporter – your mum!

**IF YOU'RE SINGLE:** You've got it so sussed right now. So what if there's no special tid around at the moment – are far more important things to think about.

**IF YOU'RE DATING:** Your family has never been too impressed by your lad, but this month they finally start to warm to him. Hurra!

**Your big love dates**  
4th, 15th, 24th, 26th

**IF HE'S AN ARIES:** The cocky boy you used to know and (secretly) love has a shock coming this month when he realises that not everyone's going to fall for his many charms. Now that his ego's shrunk a bit, there might be room for you!

**Smart. His girl are never back for work – and not on these terms. £3.50, H&M**



**Taurus**  
21 Apr-21 May

**YOU:** You've blasted onto a new scene, and your social life has never been so exciting. But something you said innocently may have been misunderstood – so you need to clear the air.

**Your big love dates**  
6th, 13th, 24th, 29th

**IF YOU'RE SINGLE:** Boys are falling over themselves to get close to you this month, and by the 24th you'll be celebrating a very passionate Christmas.

**IF YOU'RE DATING:** You're starting to think about what you really want out of life. A fresh start might be in order, whether that's ditching a boy who makes you unhappy or injecting some excitement into a relationship.

**IF HE'S A TAURUS:** Taurus boy is very popular with the ladies right now, but don't see that as a threat – just be glad he's got a personality that'll make him a good mate, as well as a boyfriend.

**New Year means a new start for Taurus – and that includes new knickers. £3.99**



Fig. 6 – Horoscopes from Bliss magazine, December, 2003.

At the bottom of each sign's forecast there is an image containing a pair of knickers and a caption, such as: "Capricorn girls are feeling all loved-up, so get romantic in girly French knickers! £5.99, H&M." and "New Year means a new start for Taurus – and that includes

new knickers! £9, Bonds” and “It’s the season to show some love, Pisces – we love these natty knicks! £3.50, New Look.” The research I have carried out tells me the most read pages in a teen or tween magazine are the horoscopes (*see fig. 2, page 12*). This is because the consumer reads them for hints about the boy or girl they have their eye on, or how their date will go on Saturday. Horoscopes are quite personal and consumers will often make a connection between the forecast and their lives, however small, which strengthens the bond between reader and magazine. Putting recommendations for knickers on these high-ranking pages will have a great deal of influence on those who read their horoscope. Targeting teens and tweens via their star sign, specifically on a more personal level is a depressing discovery but it doesn’t stop there. I was astonished to see endorsements in J17’s 4 page special on the subject of periods (*see fig. 7, page 19*).



Amongst the advice on periods the pages are covered in branded products and J17 recommendations. Issues such as periods should be dealt with very delicately and although a lot of the content was informative, it appeared biased towards the leading brands of tampons. In fact in the whole 4 page special there was only one instance where sanitary towels were mentioned: "Always Ultra Night (£1.79) J17 verdict: Comfy, and they keep you clean all night." All other recommended products were from Lil-lets so it seems the 4 page special was probably being sponsored by the most featured brands: Tampax and Lil-lets. On closer inspection the article "How to insert a tampon" becomes "How to insert a tampon: It's tricky at first but you'll soon get the hang of it, especially with the Tampax step-by-step guide and using a Compak tampon." (Compak being one of Tampax's best sellers) The Tampax and Lil-lets website addresses also appear in the text on three occasions, but not a single mention of a teens' health oriented website such as [www.likeitis.org.uk](http://www.likeitis.org.uk).

This 4 page special gives the impression to teens, tweens and parents that it's helping them to understand sensitive issues. In actual fact it's making them aware of certain brands so when they're faced with the decision of selecting a tampon from the vast variety available, they will naturally choose the brand they're familiar with, without hesitation. Playing on children's vulnerability in this way is unacceptable and the magazines responsible should tone down the amount of endorsed commodities they feature in each issue.

Whilst analysing the magazines I also made a note of the prices; Cosmo-Girl! £1.55, Dare and Mizz £1.60, J17 and Bliss £2.00, Sugar £2.10 and Elle Girl £2.20. It seems (with the exception of Cosmo-Girl!) the magazines charging the most for their product are those which contain the most advertisements and the most commodity fuelled pages. This should not be the case, if the magazine is overflowing with advertisements, surely the consumer ought to be rewarded with a lower price. This point alone suggests the producers of such magazines are only concerned with money and not the influence

they have over children. Teen and tween magazines carry a huge responsibility of teaching positive messages to their readers which they take very seriously where sex is involved, editor of Sugar Claire Irvin says:

"Information is power. When we give information on sex, we always say it should be in the context of a loving, trusting relationship and readers should be over 16."

(GOLDWIN, 2003, Mirror)

But when it comes to commodities they seem a little more laid back, almost unaware of the damage that commercial battering such as this has on vulnerable tweens and teens. The magazines' editors and writers are aware of the power they have over their audience and should put it to better use than suggesting a particular brand of shampoo.

## Conclusion

Advertisers use children's vulnerability to drive their behaviour without their knowledge. They begin shaping their perceptions on everything around them in early adolescence, "use this and be fashionable," "wear this and be cool." A tween or teen eager to fit in and desperate to be liked, will do almost anything to be "cool" and the marketers use this to their advantage. Our cultural environment conditions our actions, and as tweens and teens move away from the family environment, and rely more on peers, magazines and television for advice, the advertisers, to a certain extent, are training our children's thoughts. This makes advertisers very influential people, who need to be aware of the values that they are transmitting to young people. The advertisers however are shrewd and will stoop as low as the client needs them to in order to boost product sales. Like advertisers, the editors and writers of tween magazines are also very influential. They can make or break a product to a particularly large group of potential consumers. They determine which advertisements are suitable for their readers, which products are suitable for the magazine's image and which products they feature and recommend to their readers. In a way these magazines play god to all those who read them, deciding everything from what they should wear to what they should say or do. This means the reader of the magazine is buying into a whole lifestyle that's often unattainable for tweens and teens. The majority of readers probably only have a few pounds pocket money per week to spend so a magazine is the perfect price and offers comfort in their mixed up world. Magazine images become almost sacred scriptures that tweens aspire to, and will nag parents until they give in and go shopping. The amount of responsibility placed on teen magazines' shoulders is immense. They need to be "cool" enough to appeal to the tween consumer, but not too cool so the parents will not allow them to be bought. They need to contain informative advice without sounding condescending, interesting articles without lecturing and advertisements without going over the top.

The balance between commodities and informative content is often lost and the results are visible in many of the magazines analysed in this study. It is too easy for these magazines to become just-for-profit publications which disregard the well-being of it's consumers in favour of deals with corporations. The main concern of these magazines should be assisting tweens on their journey through adolescence in any way they can. Instead it seems they use tweens' naivety and inexperience to promote products and brand names disguised as friendly advice on the latest look. This is simply unacceptable behaviour. Abusing children's trust in this way is completely disgusting. Many magazines in this study seem to have sold out to advertisers and companies featured heavily on their pages simply to make more money. Magazines should have a code of ethics which includes restrictions on the number of commodities featured within a magazine to limit the impact of commercial battering on tween consumers. This would hopefully bring the balance of teen and tween magazines back in favour of informative content and stop the profit hungry magazines filling their pages with commodities and taking advantage of their powerful position.



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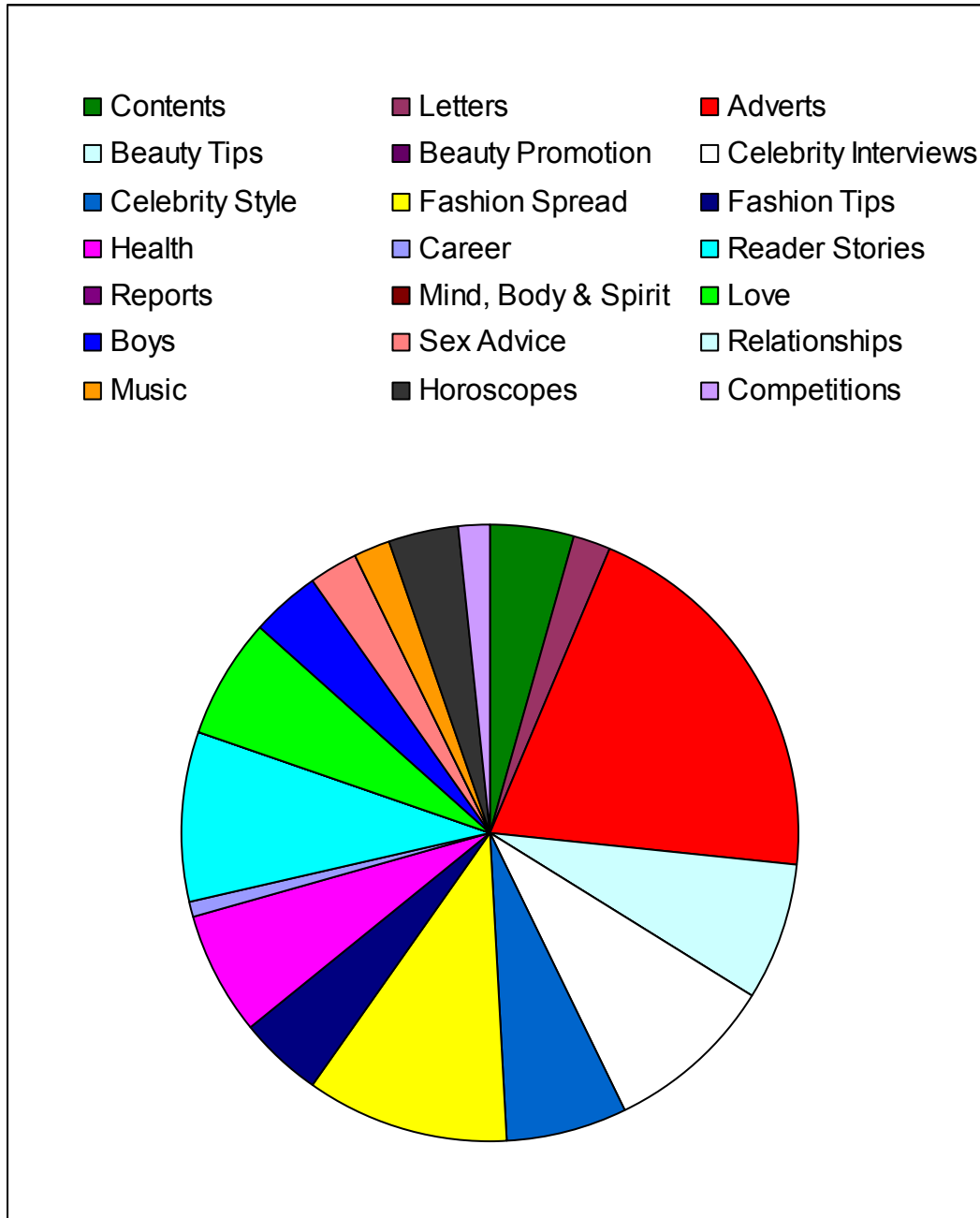
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## Appendices

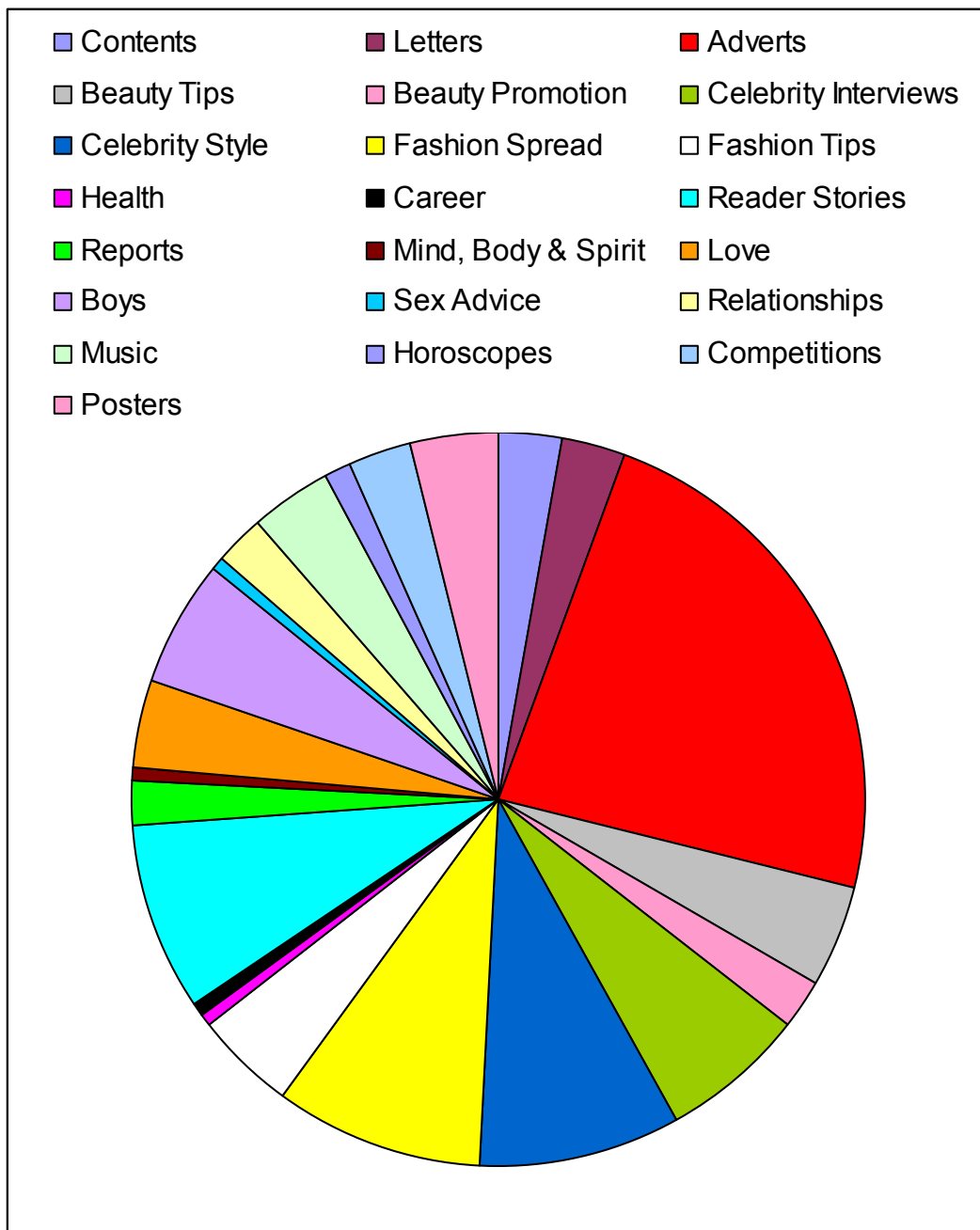
### Appendix 1

J17 – Content Analysis Pie Chart



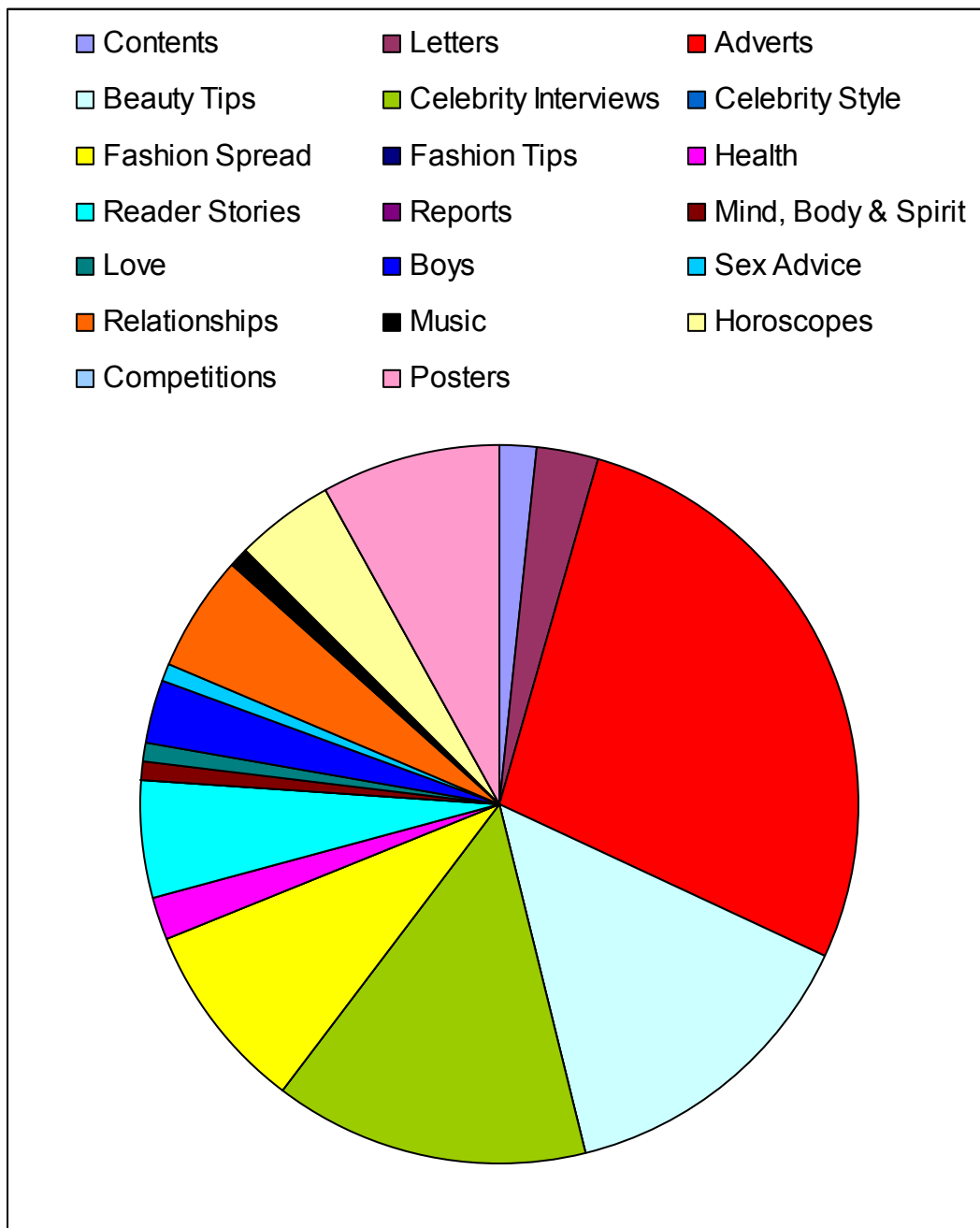
## Appendix 2

Bliss – Content Analysis Pie Chart



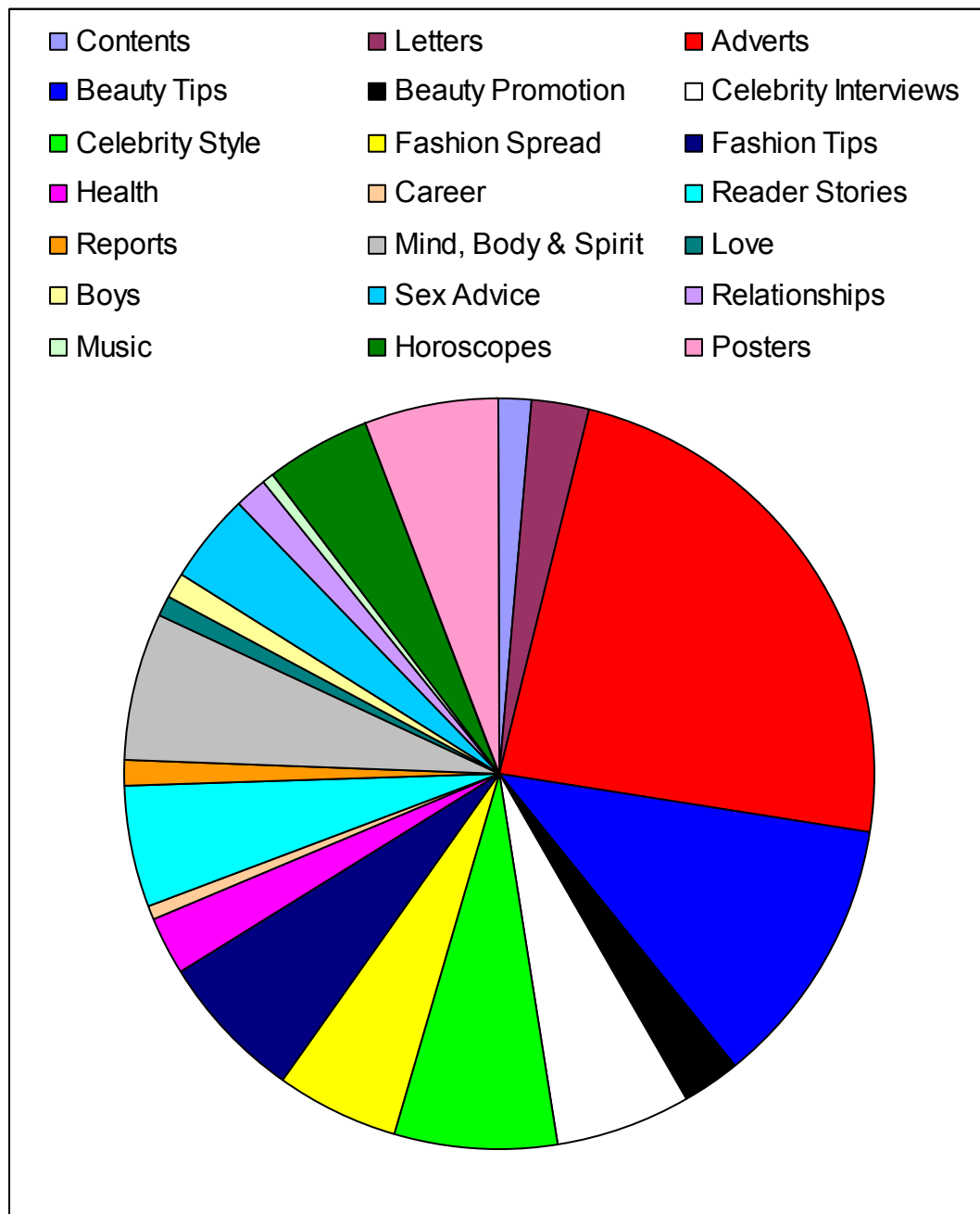
### Appendix 3

Sugar – Content Analysis Pie Chart



## Appendix 4

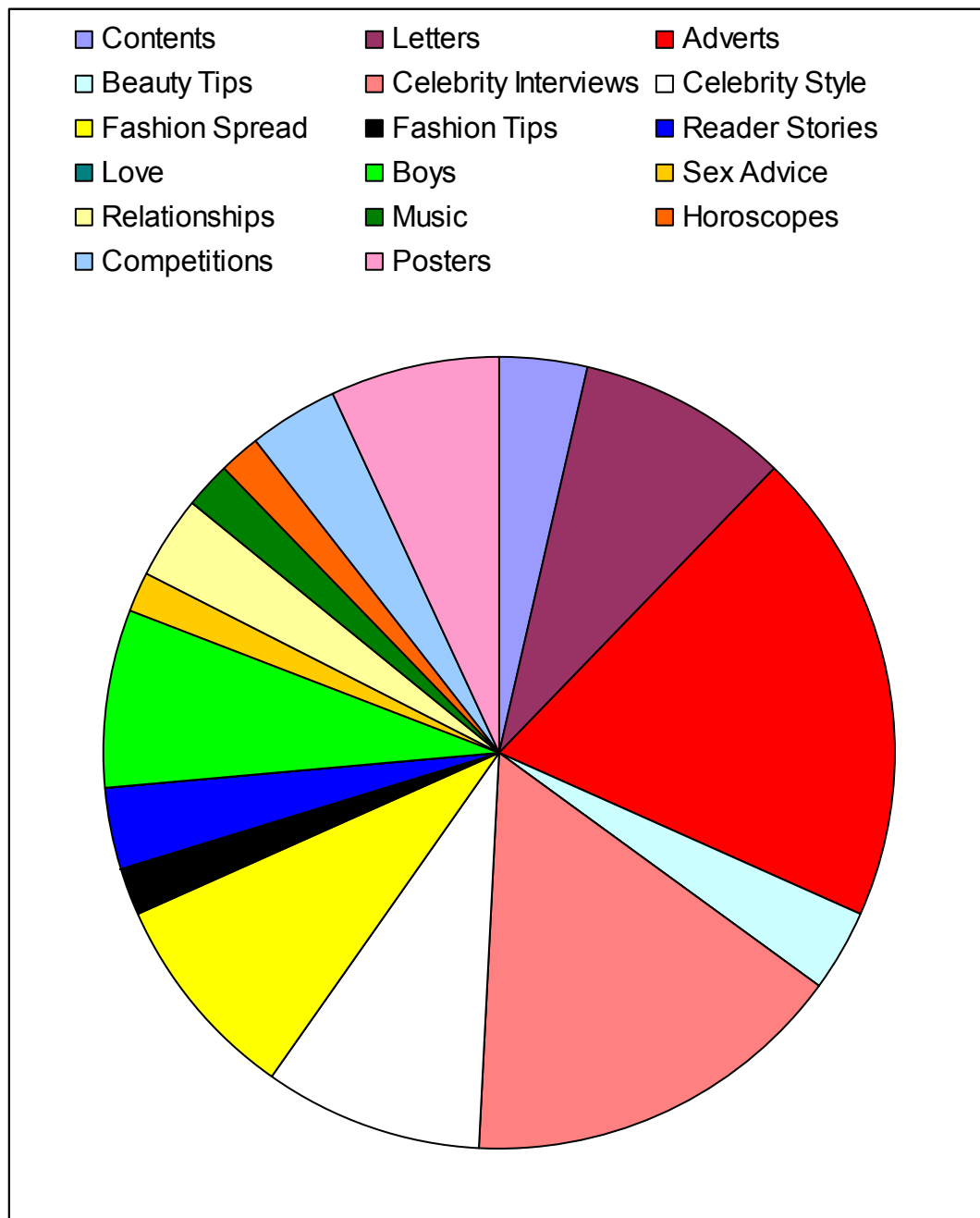
Cosmo-Girl! – Content Analysis Pie Chart





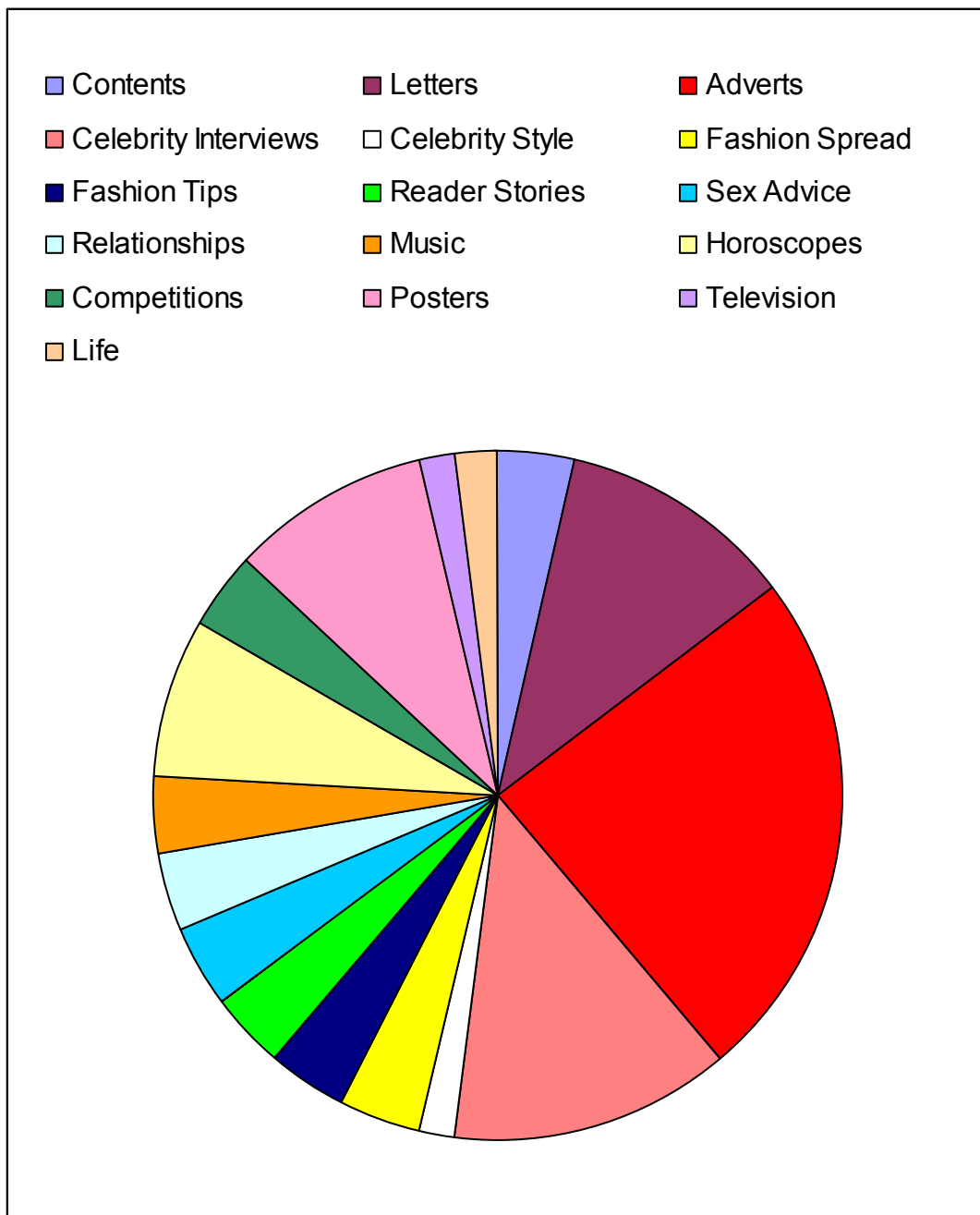
## Appendix 5

Dare – Content Analysis Pie Chart



## Appendix 6

Mizz – Content Analysis Pie Chart



## Appendix 7

Elle Girl – Content Analysis Pie Chart

