

Women's Magazines Hard on Self-Esteem

I'm not feeling too good about myself right now. While I was waiting for a prescription at a local drug store, I browsed through the magazine aisle. I saw page after glossy page of beautiful women who spend extravagant amounts of money on fashionable clothing, regularly leave strategic buttons on their blouses unbuttoned, and strike funny poses wherever they stand. I've never been comfortable doing any of those and I'm pretty sure I wouldn't look that good if I did.

To be fair, the magazines did suggest many ways I could improve my appearance. Some examples include "How to Have Perfect Brows" (no mention of what to do about a moustache) and "How to Trim Your Tummy in Ten Minutes." I wasn't optimistic though, since, every one of the diet articles featured photos of women who have no extra weight to lose--unless you count excess eyeliner.

The magazines weren't just about beauty, of course. If I'd had more time, I could have tested myself on quizzes like "How at Peace are You?" and "Are Your Priorities in Order?" (This from the same magazine whose cover stories included "Start Getting Ready for Bikini Season?" and "Why Single Men are Attracted to Married Women.") This magazine also featured the quiz that sounded the most interesting to me: "Match the Celebrity Belly with the Celebrity Head."

I also learned that the second most effective pick-up line right now is "Can I buy you a beer," which was, according to the article, "successful 91% of the time" (although I'm not sure if it was successful at getting a beer or getting a date.)

Shockingly the number one pickup line was short and sweet: "Hi." As a happily married woman who has been known to say "hi" now and then, I'm very glad I learned this before it worked.

And there were a few articles that made me feel better about my appearance. For example, there was a collage of the worst behinds and bellies of well-known celebrities. I'm proud to say that my own body parts would be completely at home with the stars on that page. But, conspicuous by their absence were the butts and bellies of the magazine's editors and photographers.

Quite often useful information was gathered into reader-friendly lists: Three Steps to Serenity; Five Tips to Speed Up Fat Loss; Six Ways to Get a Better Butt . . . Bake a Better Cake . . . Have a Better Marriage and so on.

But the majority of the articles were discouraging as in the one on what's "out" (most of the contents of my closet) and what's "in" (cap sleeves, slim skirts, and tube tops--none of which I wear, though I do wear tube socks). This particular article was placed strategically on the same page as one entitled "Create Your Own Style," the understanding being, I guess, that I should check the magazine first.

The biggest blow to my self-esteem came after I saw what amounted to a fashion police report in one magazine. It ran a page of photos of unsuspecting women and thoughtfully marked big Xs across the photo when the individual pictured was breaking the rules of fashion as determined by--well, the magazine editors. Mercifully I wasn't pictured, but I did see several women wearing outfits similar to some I actually wear . . . wore.

Finally one magazine featured a very helpful article about an actual ailment called dysmorphic disorder. Apparently almost five million people suffer from this debilitating condition in which an excessive hatred of their appearance paralyzes them.

Gee, where would they get that?

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