

Times Change (So Do Girls)

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

There are now 10 of these glossy, comic-book sized publications appearing regularly on your drug store magazine rack. They claim more than three million readers, who are almost invariably girls between 9 and 14. These girls represent a market that has never before been pursued with as much enthusiasm as it is today, and the publishers of Flip, 16, Spec, Loving Fashions, Fave, Tiger Beat, Teen Life, Teen, Star and Tiger Beat Spectacular, know they've got a hot thing going.

The steam is in the magazines' origins: Television and rock music, not those simpler, small-town pleasures of periodicals like calling all girls. There are puzzles, quizzes and games, but not like those in Jack and Jill. These are descendants of adult fan magazines, with the same teasing headlines and devotion to stars.

They reflect — and promote — the young pop star whose world of rock is primoy distant from Woodstock, Joe Cocker and Alice Cooper. It is pop rock, soft rock — rock filtered by television. The magazine's target is not the groupie or the relatively worldly teenybopper. It is the ubiquitous, bubble-gum chewing, my-mother-doesn't-understand-me type that has always been found in rec rooms. And according to statistics compiled by action for children's television, she will have spent 15,000 hours in front of a television set — compared to 11,000 hours in school — by the time she finishes high school.

The current king of bubblegum is David Cassidy, 21, star of the "Partridge Family" series. His face has been on the cover of all the magazines for the past year and is still holding strong. Donny Osmond, 14-year-old member of the Osmonds, a brother singing act from Utah, is a major challenger, however, as is Bobby Sherman, 26. Sherman, a singer and veteran of three series, has been a "Fave" for almost five years, only occasionally cresting the wave but never sinking under.

Television programs aimed at youngsters introduce new faces to the market place; new faces provide grist for the fan magazines, whose copy in turn is an ingredient in the alchemy of stardom. Concurrently, the magazines market their own star-related products, which sell faster as the star's popularity is boosted. Clothes, records, posters, stationery, diaries, pens, "personal soulmate kits," love patches, chokers, photo albums — the possibilities for marketing a good healthy star are limitless.

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

Consciously or not, the fan magazine publishers are em-

ploying a formula used by many other currently successful periodicals. They are focusing on a specialized audience, researching it, then using the magazines as merchandizing vehicles for "matched product."

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

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

At first glance the hyperbolic titles of the articles make these magazines look more like toy porno magazines than simple gossip sheets. Ten-year-old girls are invited to learn "David's love secrets," or to send away for "all his measurements," or "Bobby's love schedule." Page after luridly colored page promises "the most intimate pix ever," or how you could get to be so-and-so's girl; "Meet them, kiss them, and make them love you."

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

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

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

They're likely to be even less pleased with the latest entry in the field: Star, whose sexual connotations are more explicit. The first issue featured a "great kiss debate" ("Should a star kiss a fan? What is your secret kiss-me signal?"), the "kiss king of the sexy six sweepstakes," (send in your lipstick print on the mouth of your favorite star), and "take a shower with David," with pictures of him half naked.

Star is simply an evolutionary step in the process started by the other magazines. Although it is aimed at the 10 to 15 year old age group, time may prove that only the older girls are actually interested in Star's copy; on the other hand; the other magazines may alter their styles to keep up with the competition.

Judging from the television shows and the magazines the ideal hero is someone who combines respect for parents and a happy family life with a smattering or rebellion (long hair and anti-war sympathies). They get into scrapes, but everything turns out happily because they are basically good and honest and cute. The idols are expected to be as un-touchable in real life as they are on TV — the fans, don't want to hear about them drinking, smoking, (not even cigarettes, let alone that other stuff),

gambling, taking drugs or sleeping with anyone unless they're married.

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

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

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

Quizzes: "Can you pass Denny's love test?"

Questionnaires: "My two favorite TV shows are..."

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

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

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

They form the basis of many editorial decisions (i.e. whose face to feature). The editors are unlikely to forget the bitter experience they had with the Monkees, who were the hottest thing in show biz until the bottom inexplicably fell out of the market. Editors failed to notice that the four imitation Beatles were no longer receiving their usual 20,000 letters a week and continued to feature them on the cover of magazines that did not

sell. Flip for one, lost \$50,000. Now they pay close attention to what doesn't come in, as well as what does.

The girls are always on the look-out for new faces and no bit player appearing on "Bonanza" or "Mod Squad" goes unnoticed. If 16 Editor Gloria Stavers gets more than five letters in a week asking for pix and info about a performer, she tracks him down and puts him in the next issue.

According to Rickie Galobic, who answers the phones at Flip, the questions about the stars asked most frequently are: "Is he married?" and "Is he dead?"

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

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

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

Stephen Kahn, editor and publisher of Flip, has an office to be proud of — a chrome and leather, fuzzy-carpeted den on New York's Park Avenue. His N.Y.U law degrees hang proudly — if unnecessarily — next to photographs of his poetress wife Eleanor and two-year-old son Andrew. Chubby and mustachioed, he's candid, almost relaxed, and seems slightly embarrassed to find himself in charge of a magazine for giggling 10-year-olds.

Once the youngest syndicated columnist in the country (at 13 he solicited advice for teen-agers

from Athletes at the 1952 olympics and sold it to the international news service), he used to write, edit and lay-out magazine himself. Now he has a staff of 10 with plans to hire more people next year.

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

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

Youth marketing is a relatively recently discovered aspect of the ubiquitous consulting business. Kahn is hired by straight outfits like banks and insurance companies to tell them how to sell their products to teen-agers.

Three little girls were waiting at the drugstore magazine rack for father to finish thumbing through Hot Rod. One of them pointed to a copy of Fave and said,

"Look, there's a David Cassidy one!"

"There's another!" lisped her friend. They were only four and five years old, and they couldn't read, but they recognized the faces.

"And look, this one's introducing a new face!" the third exclaimed. "Why, he's cute!"

They're getting younger all the time...