

PORTFOLIO ONE

A Costly Column for Teenage Readers

It's a typical lunch period at Athens High School, my friends and I are gathering around a Seventeen magazine looking at the column "Traumarama!" It was our daily routine to sit around the lunch table and discuss each story. I enjoyed reading "Traumarama!" because I thought the stories were dedicated to giving girls guidance when dealing with typical teenage problems. This column contains short stories about girls and their embarrassing moments. I could relate to this column because I was a typical teenager who also had many humiliating moments. "Traumarama!" is appealing to readers because real girls supposedly write it. There is always a small message at the end of each story on how to act in certain situations.

However, is this subtle advice helping or hurting readers? Carley Moore, an English teacher at New York University, wrote an article called "Invasion of the Everygirl: Seventeen Magazine, 'Traumarama!' and the Girl Writer" which not only helped me answer that question but made me realize the massive effects this magazine has on girls. Like other girls I was unknowingly influenced by "Traumarama!" Moore's article showed me that these stories reinforce negative thoughts on how girls view themselves.

Moore analyzed every "Traumarama!" story from 1994 to 2007 and found that the stories are extremely edited and harmful for girls to read. Moore's main argument is that "'Traumarama!' stories are rarely about empowerment and triumph, but rather shame and humiliation" (1249). She explains that part of this shame and humiliation comes from Seventeen's editors. The editors take stories that girls send in and change them so they fit a typical "Traumarama!" story. Moore calls these editors the "everygirl." She explains that Seventeen capitalizes on these stories; this "everygirl" writer represents herself as insecure and out of control, which fulfills the magazine's obligation to its advertisers who know that an insecure girl will buy more products" (1250). This editing gives girls a false sense of reality because they think what they are reading is actually true. Girls believe their peers write "Traumarama!" because Seventeen advertises that real girls actually send in their stories. Moore concluded that the stories were edited because they were never over 150 words, they had uniform word choice and similar beginnings and endings. When Moore looked at the "Trauma-

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A reverse outline
of a student essay

Reader's Thoughts &
Reception

Context
Setting —

1. what?
2. why?
3. For whom?

TENSION
(the problem)

Paper's central
purpose

Moore's main
argument/
thesis

Moore's support-
ing arguments

Reader's summary of
"left column"

1. Paragraph # 1

Introduction —
Setting the
reader up for
what this
whole thing is
about.

→ Inquiry paper?

→ Article review
paper?

2. Paragraph # 2

Summary of
reference text

rama!" stories from 1994 to 2007, she saw that most of these stories dealt with girls who were punished for acting "too emotional, too aggressive, too sexual, too mean, or too uncool" (1254). From her observations of the "Traumarama!" stories, she was able to derive three overlying categories. Moore's three categories are when girls "are too much for a boy, expose too much of their bodies, or are too smart or not smart enough for the situation at hand" (1254). These categories teach girls demoralizing ways to approach situations they encounter.

The first category Moore talks about is called ^{#7} "too much for a boy." Some girls may feel confident in talking to a boy they like, but "Traumarama!" portrays this confidence as being "too-much." Teenage girls are curious about boys and relationships so it is no surprise that Moore found that most of the stories fell under the "too much for a boy" category. Moore discovered that in "Traumarama!" when a girl was confident talking to a boy the stories would end abruptly with the boy never talking to the girl again. Moore explains that in this category it teaches girls that when dealing with boys its best "to play it cool, to hide any signs of happiness or excitement, and to extinguish all signs of desire" (1258). This category of stories shows girls that they should not make any moves towards boys and that boys must instigate a relationship first, which is false. Sadly, Moore uncovered that "only five out of these 63 crush stories from 1994-1995 end positively-either the crush comes to the aid of the girl or the two become romantically involved" (1257). Unfortunately, "Traumarama!" only expounds upon girls' feelings of self-consciousness and knocks them down.

The second most popular category Moore found was when girls were "exposing too much of their bodies." Stories that fall under this category end with girls quickly running away from embarrassment or shame because their body is at fault. An example of this is a girl being mocked for wearing a bikini without shaving her armpits. Moore explains that in the category of "exposing too much" it shows a girls body "as a site of exposure, discomfort, disgust and even danger" (1258). In this category the editors show the reader that it is mandatory for girls to take care of their bodies, or else it could result in an embarrassing situation. This type of story also gives girls the impression that they are always being watched. This paranoia makes a typical teenage girl even more self-conscious.

summary

explain & introduce
"too much for a
boy"

what harm does
it cause?

summary

explain and intro-
duce "exposing
too much of their
bodies"

what harm does
it cause?

3. Paragraph #3

Harm #1

Traumarama!
teaches girls
to be passive

→ reinforcing a
dangerous (and
false) gender
norm

4. Paragraph #4

Traumarama!
teaches girls
to be modest
or risk social
criticism/rejection

→ reinforcing a
dangerous gender
norm (rape
culture?)

explain & introduce
"too smart or not
smart enough"

what harm does
it cause?

summary

Moore's feelings:
frustrated —
argues about
Traumarama!
dangers
Author's feelings

STORY

connection
to Moore's
categories

The final category of stories, "too smart or not smart enough," is about how girls need to find a balanced amount of intelligence. An example of a story in this category would be a girl feeling ashamed of getting a good grade on a test. Even though it is the smallest category, it still has a huge impact on girls. Moore stresses "girls in these stories do not feel good about being smart. They cannot because the daily embarrassments of being a girl overshadow any success they might achieve" (1261). This is by far the most impactful category because it teaches girls that they should not be too smart yet not act dumb, which is extremely confusing for the reader to comprehend. "Traumarama!" emphasizes that girls who are "too smart" or "not smart enough" will be humiliated in some sort of way.

Moore argues that all three categories have an extremely negative lesson or consequence. "Traumarama!" does not help young teenage girls when it comes to views on their body and boys. When girls read this column, it leads them to believe that they are constantly being watched, judged and ridiculed. Moore is upset that "these stories, in fact, tell girls that it is not okay to be real or imperfect" (1264). I was also disappointed by the actions of Seventeen magazine and how they portray girls in a negative manor. Moore made me realize that "Traumarama!" is a poorly written column that puts girls down. After reading Moore's article I decided to look at a "Traumarama!" story to decide if any of Moore's three categories actually apply. Test it out

This is a "Traumarama!" story from the December 2012 issue "I saw my friend pop up in FB chat, so for fun, I sent her a baitmessage that said, 'Hey, babe, come over ;).' She didn't respond, so I checked our chat again. Instead of her name, I had sent it to this hot guy from school—I'd never even talked to him before! I quickly told him it was a mistake and signed off, but he must think I'm so lame!" ("Traumarama"). This story fits perfectly into Moore's two categories of being overly into a boy and being ashamed of having intelligence. This specific story teaches girls to fear what a boy may think. The overly into a boy category is in the beginning of the story when the girl accidentally messaged a cute boy. This part of the story shows readers that it is bad to approach a boy you like. As soon as she found out she mixed up the names she was instantly humiliated and the story ends suddenly with the writer saying, "I'm so lame." When she says, "I'm so lame" it shows that she thinks of herself as someone who lacks

5. Paragraph #5

Traumarama!
teaches girls
to hide their
intellect so as
to be accepted

6. Paragraph #6

Summary of
Moore's points
and connection
to author as
someone learning
and agreeing.

7. Paragraph #7

Trying out
Moore's methods
and argument —
a test on
another
traumarama!
story

intelligence. The girl in the story also fears that this cute boy thinks she is stupid. This fits in effortlessly with Moore's ashamed of having intelligence category. There is also another problem that Moore does not discuss and that is online bullying. Sending someone a bait message may seem humorous at first but I do consider that a form of bullying. This excerpt is a prime example of how "Traumarama!" creates this consistent cycle of negativity, which is a cruel cycle I have personally experienced. *★ connecting to author!*

Being a naïve teenager I often would turn to "Traumarama!" for advice on what to do in certain situations. I listened to the magazine's advice because I thought that was a way to fit in. "Traumarama!" gave me horrible advice on how to handle friends, boys, and my own body. By listening to "Traumarama!" I was only putting myself down and this made my confidence level plummet. During my senior year of high school I eventually grew out of the magazine and it was not until reading Moore's article that Seventeen once again sparked my interest. Moore's article gave me a completely different outlook on this magazine. I realized that I had experienced all three of Moore's "too much" categories. I can remember not talking to my crush because I did not want them to think I was obsessed, not answering questions in class because I did not want to seem too smart, and not wanting to go to the beach because I thought my body was not good enough. Moore's three categories of "too-muchness" played a huge role in not only "Traumarama!" stories, but in my life as well. "Traumarama!" does not make girls self-conscious- every teenager goes through these stages- but they significantly make the problem worse by offering fake stories that only criticize girls' every move.

to author!

8. Paragraph #8

Personal connection to the content of this essay

leads to the "why does this matter?"

This is why.

Why did the author pick this topic. Here! →

connections to the 3 categories

the "so what"

Works Cited

- Moore, Carley. "Invasion of the Everygirl: Seventeen Magazine, 'Traumarama!': And the Girl Writer." *Journal of Popular Culture* 44.6 (2011): 1248-1267. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 7 Jan. 2013.
- "Traumarama: Everyone Has Had Humiliating Moments." *Seventeen* Dec. 2012: 150+. *General OneFile*. Web. 13 Mar. 2013.