



>> LIFE

Q&A: Writer criticizes negative women's magazine messages in new book

LISA EVANS

SPECIAL TO THE STAR

"Transform your sex life," "Update your wardrobe to look younger," "Find the secret to lasting weight loss."

Month after month, headlines like these grace the covers of women's magazines.

These publications are all about showing women how to improve their lives, but a new book, *Airbrushed Nation: The Lure & Loathing of Women's Magazines*, claims self-improvement articles may be doing more harm than good.

I caught up with author Jennifer Nelson, a Florida-based freelance writer who built a career writing for women's glossies, including *Fitness*, *Redbook*, *Self* and *Women's Health*.



Jennifer Nelson wrote *Airbrushed Nation*, a book that exposes women's magazines as harmful to self-esteem.

Q: Why did you decide to write this book?

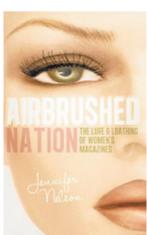
A: My daughter had hit the teen years and began to read some of the magazines I had coming into our home. When we began discussing some of the negative things they portray, it wasn't a positive message. So transitioning out of writing for them and developing the idea I could expose some of the negative paradigms, and bring them to the attention of other women, was intriguing.

Q: What are some of the negative messages you found?

A: Women's magazines approach their readers as though everything about them — from their relationship to their skills in the bedroom — is fodder for improvement. This constant assault on fixing everything about our lives, coupled with the airbrushed ideals the magazines perpetuate, have shown to lead to depression, loss of self-esteem and eating disorders. Three quarters of the cover lines on women's magazines have at least one message about changing your appearance via beauty products, dieting, exercise or cosmetic surgery. That's a lot of negativity being hurled your way by simply paging through a glossy magazine.

Q: Is there anything of value in them?

A: Yes, there is still value there in provocative essays, health informa-



tion is usually cutting edge, and political articles are attempting to be more balanced and informative. **Q:** You write about the false expectations these magazines give to readers, claiming we can drop a dress size in only a week. How can we still enjoy these magazines without falling victim to unrealistic claims?

A: There's a lot of 'buyer beware' mentality that needs to be considered when reading the women's glossies. Women need to ask themselves if the things they're reading

ring true. Is it realistic to drop three dress sizes in four weeks? Nope. The same with sex articles. No harm if you want to peruse the 'learn new moves in bed' pieces, but when content is packaged as though this is the move that will save your relationship or this is the move that will land you the man — these have to be taken with a dose of skepticism.

Q: What differences do you see between women's and men's magazines?

A: Men's magazines approach their readers from a completely different mindset. They treat readers as though they are perfect just as they are. There are no 'improve yourself' articles, no focus on anti-aging or remaining more youthful, the beauty ideal is certainly non-existent and

while some articles might provide service, like how to get six pack abs, that content is the exception.

Q: Do you think women's magazines can survive without these sensational stories or are they just part of the entertainment package women want?

A: Oh, I definitely think they can survive without those types of sto-

ries. I think women are demanding them and some magazines are starting to notice. *Glamour* (magazine) vowed to stop airbrushing when a survey they gave showed readers didn't want women's bodies to be altered even five pounds. I think women can and will demand both more in-depth articles and less negative messaging overall.



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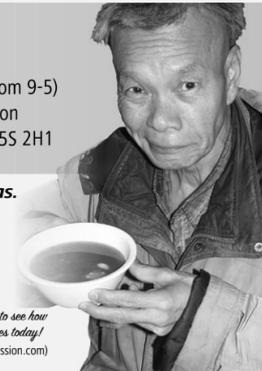
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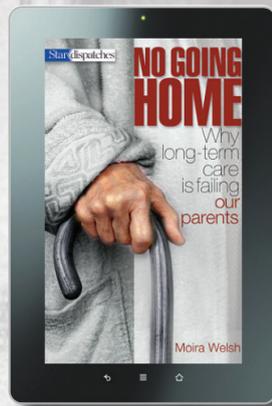
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NO GOING HOME

Why long-term care is failing our parents

Ten years ago, Star journalist Moira Welsh began to delve into the state of nursing home care in Ontario, embarking on a journalist's odyssey that continues to this day. In *No Going Home: Why Long-term Care Is Failing Our Families*, Moira delivers a moving piece of committed journalism, and a roadmap for Ontario families.

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