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Letters

Sex and self-esteem

I think you showed extremely poor judgment in your choice of artwork for "Teenage Turning Point" (SN: 3/23/91, p.184). The article discusses girls' self-esteem problems, yet Burt Silverman's illustrations include several degrading pictures of girls. While the boys are pictured either from the waist up or in baggy jeans, the buttocks of the girls are prominently displayed in two of the pictures. When girls are portrayed as sexual objects, it invariably affects their self-esteem.

One problem discussed in the article is that of girls not excelling in science. Yet here in SCIENCE NEWS, the blatant sexism of these illustrations seems to escape your awareness as being part of the problem.

*Ann Victoria Dolinko
Chicago, Ill.*

Some factors that may contribute to low self-esteem in adolescent girls seem to be missing from the studies you cite.

I excelled academically throughout my

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Cover: This photo shows the first all-sky map made with an X-ray-imaging telescope. The telescope, one of two on the Roentgen Satellite (ROSAT), has so far detected some 60,000 previously undiscovered X-ray sources and revealed new details about dozens of known structures ranging from quasars to supernovas. In this false-color image, blue denotes the lowest X-ray intensity, red the highest. (Image: Max Planck Institutes for Physics and Astrophysics/Extraterrestrial Physics)



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school career, yet had fairly low self-esteem in my adolescent years. I can attribute this low self-esteem to several factors, including many that relate to being female.

It was acceptable for boys to ask girls out for dates, but girls had to wait to be asked — and for those of us who didn't get asked, it was depressing (although it probably was just as depressing, if not more, to the boys who always got turned down). Then there was the pressure from boys (and one's own desire) to have sex, while society expected girls to remain celibate until marriage. Also, for some reason, we girls were obsessed with being skinny; many were caught up in the vicious, esteem-damaging cycle of losing and regaining weight. Lastly, we were coming to grips with the realization that we were growing up to be women in a man's world.

In some respects, it's just more difficult growing up female.

*Lisa Uhl
Mechanical Engineer
Portland, Ore.*

According to the American Association of

University Women, self-esteem can be measured by asking people if they "feel happy the way I am." Since the boys in the AAUW survey respond "always" far more often than the girls, girls are deemed to be flunking in self-esteem.

No one I know, male or female, claims to have felt so swell as a kid, much less as an adolescent. And I don't even want to *know* an adult who is "always happy the way I am."

If we posit that the so-called right answer is mere braggadocio, one interpretation of the survey results is as follows:

Some respondents — particularly boys — showed an ability to spot the prejudices of the test and answered as expected. Girls, with their earlier maturity, may not be as quick to say things they don't believe. Perhaps they have too much self-esteem.

Young women are seriously shortchanged when they are measured against a false and foolish yardstick. One hopes for more rigorous studies than this before schools are blamed for a problem that may not even exist.

*Florence Fogelin
Berkeley, Calif.*

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