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Undergraduate



# Girl Power, Reinstated.

By: Elizabeth Rojas

At present, a generation of impressionable teenage girls are being influenced by their favorite celebrities, television and film stars, musicians, and well known socialites. These entertainers—majority women—have the power to influence the behavior and actions of these teenage girls, fostering the idea that dressing and behaving disreputably is “trendy,” and “in style.” These ideas, being heavily implemented into the heads of these teenagers are causing this generation to appear more mature, engage in mature activity, and grow up at a faster rate than the norm. The questions that must be asked in turn, are “Is teenage society changing their norm,” and “Will older generations and parents allow this change to take place?” In researching the power of influence, and examining cases of celebrity infatuation, it is important to recognize the problem of teen girls today being too easily influenced by women in the media, and submit to behaving in the ways the media targets them to behave. It is also important to recognize that change needs to be implemented by means of having positive, well-rounded female celebrities advocate for healthy behaviors in girls,

and restore a healthy body image, as well as strong self-esteem.

People so often throw around the terms feminist and sexist, feeding into the general idea that men are more powerful than women, and should be held in a higher regard (Grant, 2013). In a piece by New York Times journalist Adam Grant, entitled “Why Men Need Women,” he states, “It’s often said that behind every great man stands a great woman. In light of the profound influence that women can have on men’s generosity, it might be more accurate to say that in front of every great man walks a great woman. If we’re wise, we’ll follow her lead” (Grant, 2013). In this opinionated piece, Grant points out the influence women have on men’s generosity and “soft side.” While this is true, the important thing to notice in this piece lies in the context, in which Grant, a man, acknowledges the fact that women should no longer be placed standing behind men, but rather, in front of men, leading their path. Women are influential in this way.

Women are influential by means of the qualities of care, empathy, and sensitivity, which are very commonly and easily expressed. Teenage girls are more

easily influenced by the advertisements they are exposed to on TV, and in social media, as well as in magazines, and book portrayals. As stated by K. Nola Mokeyane of Global Post, “Teenagers are exposed to all sorts of media outlets, from television, movies and advertising to social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram,” making them easily influenced by the things they see on these sites (Mokeyane, 2014). Some well-known and acknowledged female role models have included Oprah Winfrey, Katie Couric, Princess Grace of Monaco and Jackie Kennedy Onassis. These women, each inspirational for their work—whether it be in television, film, politics, or news media—have gained the respect of the American people in one way or another. Each of these women are rightfully famous, particularly as a byproduct of their personal successes.

Today, many young girls idolize celebrities like Miley Cyrus, Kim Kardashian, Megan Fox and Beyoncé Knowles. These stars, although hard working, and often talented in some way, are being used by a variety of public and social media outlets, as well as marketing and public relations firms to get people to buy a product or dress a certain way by means of endorsements. In *Codes of Online Sexuality: Celebrity, Gender and Marketing*, author Jacqueline Lambiase suggests that female celebrities are primarily used for their sex appeal, especially in marketing and press for product endorsement, and online advertisements (Lambiase, 2014). She states “Celebrity sexuality has been used

throughout the age of Hollywood to promote movies, to sell products, and to entice viewers to identify with celebrity images”(Lambiase, 2014). From this, it can be understood that while women do in fact care for their self-image and representation, they also are aware that their “superstar” roles as celebrities, including having to target a male audience, are easily attained through sex appeal.

From all aspects of the modern day celebrity, being famous is not so much a byproduct of good work, but rather a lifestyle. The way some female stars portray themselves leads to young girls wanting nothing more than to look like their favorite celebrity, meaning that scandalous clothing and non-age appropriate attire is prominent. According to The Women’s Media Center’s yearly publication, *The Status of Women in the U. S. Media 2013*, “Girls as young as age six are starting to see themselves as sex objects, based on a combination of media influence, a mother’s parenting and religion”(Klos, 2013). Although this statement includes a mother’s parenting and religion, the true power lies with media influence.

As *Family Circle* Magazine journalist Deborah Swaney says, “Merchandising linked to girls’ idols doesn’t stop with dolls. According to a report by the NPD Group, girls 8 to 12 years old now spend \$500 million a year on beauty products of all kinds, including those endorsed by their idols (Swaney, 2014). Thus, parents’ concerns are not unwarranted. Stores target young girls and aim to dress

teens like their so-called role models, making age appropriate clothing hard to find. As *Family Circle* again states, "It's a coast-to-coast lament as mothers of girls shop among racks of child-size swimsuits with padded chests and slinky underwear for 8-year-olds" (Swaney, 2014). Celebrity endorsed trends are not only marketed to young teenagers today, but also to young children. In turn, these children and teenagers will not grow up with an understanding of age appropriate clothing unless alternatives are shown to them by something or someone other than the media.

In addition, female celebrities are able to connect with their fans on a personal level through social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram, where fans and followers can easily access anything these celebrities say and think (Mokeyane, 2014). This makes access to these celebrities' lifestyles instantaneous. In retrospect, these celebrities are branding themselves with the things they wear, the company they keep, the words they use, and their goals in life. While these celebrities are constantly working towards a good representation of themselves, they also need to understand that the things they do influence all ages of girls, mostly ranging from young teenagers to young adults.

The power of influence is one that can completely affect and change a person. Influence, according to a theory by Professor Robert Cialdini, comes with six different principles, all which play a part on the influence of

celebrities and the media's affect on teenage girls (Hallett, 2014). The first principle is reciprocity, which is seen with celebrities and teens. Although this interaction of feeling "indebted to a person," does not happen on an intimate level with celebrities and teens, a feeling of the fact that a celebrity has done or given something to a fan is often experienced. One might feel that mimicking or reciprocating by paying attention to style or fashion is a way to repay a celebrity. The second principle of consistency falls directly in hand with the first. Once someone gets into the habit of appearing or behaving a certain way, it is important to keep consistent, in order to manage an appearance.

Social proof and liking are the third and fourth principles of influence, which both have to do with societal acceptance of a look or behavior. When teen girls see pictures of others wearing something daring, or a celebrity endorsing something they own, it is a commonly accepted occurrence, making it easily influential. Lastly are the principles of authority and scarcity. When something is unique to an individual, or hard to get a hold of, scarcity is a large principle of influence. In turn, attaining something of scarcity leaves an individual feeling authoritative, and often, in control of a situation. Since so many of the things celebrities have are expensive or limited edition, the more rare the item the better, giving the feeling of authority once the item is attained.

These six principles can all directly correlate to the power of influence

celebrities have over others merely by means of pictures in the tabloids. This is then the psychology the minds of teenage girls go through when wanting to be like the people they look up to. In addition to acknowledging and understanding the principles of influence, putting these tools to work can be beneficial for teens and young girls.

According to Tom Hallett, the journalist explaining Cialdini's six principles, he states, "By knowing about the principles, you can become resistant to people who try to use them to manipulate you," making these tools work in the favor of young girls and teens (Hallett, 2014). This power of influence is not always a bad thing, particularly in the case that the person being looked up to is admirable with good reason.

More importantly than the ideas of influence, and the appearance and behavior teen girls have today, based on celebrity influences, is the idea that this shift in teenage behavior could be harmful to the teen (Negative, 2014). In so many cases, glorifying and looking up to a celebrity can cause emotional and mental harm. Often, appearances are associated with negative body images, and can lead to behavioral issues harmful to the body. These can range from mental disorders, to things like anorexia and bulimia (Negative, 2014). As Global Post writer K. Nola Mokeyane states, "Teens should be taught to value their own definitions of beauty above all else." (Mokeyane, 2014). With this comes an important

understanding that teens should indeed see and acknowledge inner beauty before trying to change themselves for the benefit of others.

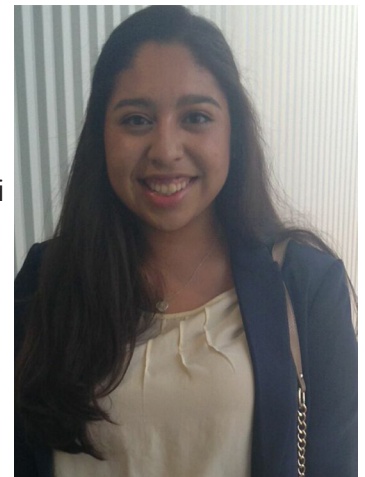
The primary way to fix the impending shift in the minds of teenage girls is to present them with positive messages from the media, encouraging them to seek their inner beauty instead of trying to promote dress and behavior that is not age-appropriate. In addition, positive and well-rounded celebrities should be endorsed more than those who advocate outer beauty and glorify negative behaviors (Mokeyane, 2014). These people may include the likes of: Jennifer Lawrence, Anne Hathaway, Hilary Duff, Kate Middleton, Michelle Phan, and Sara Bareilles. These females all have been in the limelight; however, handled their situations involving the press with grace, and maturity.

As better examples are set for young girls and teens, society might then see another change, hopefully influenced by role models who are famous as a byproduct of hard work, and positive endorsements. In addition, bi-monthly or yearly assemblies in schools should be held to remind young girls and teens about self-worth, and positive body images, as well as high self-esteem. Large companies and corporations can also participate in promoting healthy mind and body images instead of promoting photo-shopped images of females. The body care company, Dove, is currently doing this with their *Campaign for Real Beauty*, using real women and men in advertisements

rather than paid models (The Dove, 2014). This marketing strategy lends itself to the idea that society can create a generation of young girls and teenagers happy and comfortable in their own skin, influenced by people with positive life goals and missions.

In conclusion, the path to creating a society of well-rounded and influential females may not be easy, but with good implementation, and strong commitment to positive media, marketing and advertising, it can be done. It is no question that teens are easily influenced by the things they see, read and hear. Because of this, they can be just as easily influenced in a positive manner by being exposed to positive messages from the media, and a form of a positive message on a school-wide level. By doing these things, the future of girls in terms of thinking, appearance and behavior will be fostered by positive thinking and optimism.

Elizabeth Rojas is a sophomore at the University of California, Merced. She is currently pursuing a degree in Cognitive Science with a Public Health minor. Elizabeth has been passionate about Women's Studies since attending her alma mater, Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, in La Canada, California. Elizabeth has aspirations of becoming an Obstetrician-Gynecologist, and is currently a member of Phi Delta Epsilon International Pre-Medical Fraternity.



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