NEW GIRL ORDER:
YOUTH, GENDER, AND GENERATION IN CONTEMPORARY TEEN GIRLS' MEDIA

by

Caryn E. Murphy

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

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A dissertation entitled

New Girl Order: Youth, Gender, and Generation

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Introduction

Warner Bros. released the movie *What a Girl Wants* in late March of 2003, pushing the teen girl comedy into theaters just as American troops were invading Iraq. The two events would seemingly be unrelated, as the sixteen-year-old star of the film, Amanda Bynes from the WB's hit comedy *What I Like About You,* had little to do with current events beyond the realm of fashion. However, as America went to war and Bynes' movie marched on theaters, Warner Bros. decided to alter the print ad campaign for the film, worried that it would otherwise be interpreted as a political statement. Print ads and posters showed Bynes posed in front of two British Royal guards, wearing a skimpy tanktop with a U.S. flag on it. She held one hand on her hip, and the other hand struck an assertive peace sign. The studio altered the ads at the last minute, digitally removing the peace sign and placing Bynes' offending hand in a "more neutral pose."[1] It is significant that the studio worried about the potential influence that the image might hold within and outside of their target teen girl demographic. A spokeswoman from the studio explained that this was a marketing decision, and that "the movie, a teen comedy about a girl who travels to London to find her long-lost father, isn't war-related or even political."[2] The studio's willingness to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to alter the existing print ad campaign signals their reverence for the teen girl audience and their desire to reach that audience effectively.

It is impossible to measure the impact of the changes in the film's media campaign, but *What a Girl Wants* became a modest hit, cementing the star status of Bynes at Warner Bros. Although major combat in Iraq had ceased before the film made its way to video and DVD, the digitally-altered image of Bynes also became the cover art for these formats. Throughout the campaign's changes, the film's tagline remained prominently displayed on the

poster: "Trying to fit in. Born to stand out." This slogan epitomizes the underlying thematic paradox of contemporary girls' popular culture. Girls' media promotes conformity while simultaneously flattering the teen girl demographic with messages about the importance of their individuality.

The film *What a Girl Wants* and the star persona of Amanda Bynes can both be understood as part of the popular discourse of Girl Power that emerged in the 1990s. As a series of statements about young women's social and cultural authority, the discourse proclaims that young women should reject passive feminine behavior; it associates girlhood with confidence, fun, and often beauty. Girl Power emerged through a boom in girls' culture products that began in the 1990s and continues today, but this is not strictly a new phenomenon. Girls aged fourteen to twenty were separated into a distinct market segment as early as the 1920s.[3] The term "teenager" was coined as recently as 1941 to describe young people who are older than children and yet not fully adults.[4] Marketers use the boundaries of the teenage years to address adolescents as a distinct demographic. This phenomenon has continued in boom and bust cycles since the 1940s. While both girls and boys comprise the teenage market demographic, in every generation the majority of youth market sales are driven by the consumptive power of teenage girls.[5] Although teenage girls typically have lower amounts of disposable income than teenage boys, the majority of teen-specific products (clothes, accessories, magazines, etc.) are marketed directly to them. In addition, especially in recent years, studies have shown that teenage girls in particular are the driving force behind major household purchases.[6]

The "teenage" demographic is not wholly driven by the needs of advertisers and manufacturers, however. The age distinction of adolescence developed in the 1930s and 40s

to coincide with changes in the structure of the educational system and the needs of the labor force which dictated that children should remain in school for a longer period of time, entering the workforce at eighteen or nineteen, rather than twelve or thirteen.[7] These changes helped to structure adolescence as a time of extended childhood and also impending adulthood, in which "teenagers" would take more time to develop into maturity.

The Baby Boom generation inspired a flourishing youth market in the 1960s, with a multitude of media and products designed specifically to appeal to the unprecedented size of the generation. The continuous expansion of youth culture in the 1960s worked to further separate youth from adulthood, by developing wholly separate spheres of culture for the age groups. While the mass media was in some ways responsive to the specific needs and demands of the youth market, they were also caught off-guard by the rise of the counterculture, as Thomas Frank has argued in *The Conquest of Cool*. Frank documents how advertisers and the mass media shifted gears in the late 1960s to incorporate aspects of the counterculture into a new form of "hip" consumerism for the youth market, setting a precedent for the co-optation of youth culture. Frank examines and questions what he refers to as, "the co-optation theory," in which "faith in the revolutionary potential of 'authentic' counterculture combined with the notion that business mimics and mass-produces fake counterculture in order to cash in on a particular demographic and to subvert the great threat that 'real' counterculture represents."[8] Frank argues that the relationship between the counterculture and business interests during the 1960s was actually more complex and interrelated than this standard co-optation theory allows, and my examination of girls' culture in the 1990s will reveal a similarly mired and multifaceted relationship between the two seemingly separate agendas of counterculture and big business.

Beginning in the early 1970s, the youth market continued through a series of boom and bust cycles, spiraling downwards in the 1980s,[9] until media marketers rediscovered the teen girl audience in the early 1990s. The decade saw the introduction of the term "Generation X" to describe those born between 1967 and 1979, but also significantly, "Generation Y" to describe those born between 1980 and 2000. Generation Y has also been referred to as the "Echo Boom," from the Baby Boom Generation (the children of the Baby Boomers). Advertisers have described this new generation of youth as the largest in population since the teenagers of the 1960s.[10] Much of the pressure to define Generation Y as a unified group with a coherent identity has come from advertisers. One of the major "products" marketed to this generation is consumerism itself, a trend that is visible in the proliferation of music, magazines, movies and television shows designed for and marketed to teenage girls.

The girls' culture boom that began in the early 1990s with television shows like *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-1999) and *Sassy* magazine (1988-1996) is markedly different than any that have come before it, primarily because Generation Y responds to and exists within a social context distinct from other generations of youth. The teen girls of this generation have been raised in a culture shaped by the feminist inroads of affirmative action, equal opportunity employment, and reproductive choice. The most intense struggles of the civil rights movement and the second wave of feminism took place before this generation was born. The "third wave" feminist resurgence that began in the early 1990s with Riot Grrrl culture on the West Coast has been a major influence in shaping the discourse of Girl Power as a system of knowledge about young women's social status. Although Riot Grrrls (the "grrrl" signifying a throaty, aggressive growl) claim that mainstream pop groups like the Spice Girls exploited

their revolutionary message to market young femininity as a commodity,[11] as Thomas Frank argues in relation to the 1960s counterculture, the relationship between the grassroots activist girls' punk movement and mainstream media industries is more complex. The "girl power" phrase has frequently been used to denote girls' empowerment through consumption, but as a multifaceted discourse it also holds feminist potential.

The characteristics of a generation are bound up with the negotiation of appropriate social roles and rules, and these roles are socially and culturally contextualized. They are intertwined with the educational system, the labor market, and the political tenor of the times. Although Generation Y is still in its early stages, it has already been poked and prodded by advertisers, marketers and public relations experts hoping to find the key to understanding this next great population boom.[12] This amount of focused attention from business culture has led some to argue that Generation Y is a "consumerist" generation, defined by their conspicuous consumption more than any previous generation.[13] However, this one-sided view of the developing generation ignores the equally vast potential for political activism and social altruism among this group. Teen girls' culture in particular has been a site of growing countercultural sentiment and activism since the early 1990s. The attention focused on teenage girls through mass media products has been responded to in kind by girls' development of DIY (do-it-yourself) media, including zines (independently-produced magazines)[14], websites, music, and videos.

I argue that the discourse of Girl Power can only be understood as emerging from the development of Generation Y as a target demographic for media and consumer products, the economic and social context of neoliberalism, and the competing meanings generated by mainstream cultural products (television shows, films, magazines, and music), cultural icons

(including Britney Spears and Beyonce Knowles), and independent productions and movements in the form of Riot Grrrl and DIY media. Girl Power has become synonymous with Generation Y, and although its vision of young women's empowerment has frequently been analyzed in terms of its postfeminist implications, I argue that the discourse acknowledges and circulates third wave feminist principles and ideals. In mainstream media products, Girl Power represents both optimism and apprehension about the social empowerment of a generation of young women; teenage girls have negotiated and resisted these ideas through alternative forms of media production.

Revolution, Girl Style

Expressions of third wave political and cultural activism began in the early 1990s in response to the media's circulation of postfeminism (the "backlash" phenomenon that Susan Faludi has examined[15]), but also in response to specific national events (Catherine Orr has documented the importance of the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill congressional hearings in 1992 as a mobilizing force[16]). The idea that third wave feminism is "young women's feminism" comes from the movement's early need to carve out its own territory, distinct from the second wave. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards discuss third wavers as the "daughters of the second wave" which is where the age distinction (which is rapidly falling out of favor) originates.[17] Additionally, part of the activist push for the third wave came from the Riot Grrrl movement, a loose coalition of young women in the punk music scene, initially in the United States and Britain. During the summer of 1991, two Olympia, WA bands, Bikini Kill and Bratmobile spent the summer in Washington DC, and the idea for a feminist punk movement emerged from their experiences in the city's male-dominated punk music scene. Riot Grrrl officially originated in August, during "Girl Day" at the International Pop

Underground Convention in Olympia. This separate day that highlighted female musicians also facilitated discussions among girl bands and organizational activities. Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, both girl bands, worked together during this time to compile a manifesto for the Riot Grrrl movement, their goal being an elevation of the status of women within the punk music scene. As they spread the word about the movement, several British bands, notably Huggy Bear, joined forces with them. By summer 1992, they held a three-day National Riot Grrrl Convention in DC, celebrating the growth of the movement. Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill acted as the unofficial spokesperson, and has said that it spread across the U.S. rather spontaneously, when she lied to a reporter and stated that there were Riot Grrrl groups in several cities. Hanna's vast overstatement apparently spurred organizational activity, and groups in many cities started meeting together as a result.[18] Riot Grrrl depended upon the circulation of music and zines, personal forms of media created in support of the original manifesto, which claimed in part: "BECAUSE we seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the status quo."[19] The focus on personal, individual activism is one of its many points of relevance to the third wave feminist movement.

Leaders of the Riot Grrrl movement called for a media blackout in 1993, fearing that mainstream representations of their movement in magazines including *Newsweek* and *Rolling Stone* were fundamentally altering its meaning and diminishing their authority to define themselves.[20] While other factors, including internal disagreements, played a role, their unwillingness to use the mainstream press to spread the word about their movement and its goals ultimately led to its stagnation. By the late 1990s, Kathleen Hanna had distanced

herself from the movement, and many other bands involved its development had either broken up or moved on.[21]

The Riot Grrrl movement was important to the development of third wave feminism in several respects. The message and the spread of Riot Grrrl provided a new space for feminist activism among young women and men, responding to the supposed "postfeminism" of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Riot Grrrl established the personal take on contemporary feminist politics that the third wave would embrace. It also demonstrated a love/hate relationship with the mass media and popular culture that the third wave continues to negotiate. The development of the third wave relied upon the stirrings of feminist sentiments among a new generation that Riot Grrrl helped to deliver.

Deborah Siegel argues that while the third wave established itself as a separate movement by defining itself against the second wave, it actually does demonstrate continuity with second wave goals of equality.[22] Early third wave writers have been criticized for formulating a personal rather than political movement, largely because early third wave anthologies were focused on issues of identity.[23] These anthologies actually serve as a form of consciousness raising (a major second wave tactic) and they inform a third wave politics of negotiating contradiction (historical, cultural, psychological) in feminism by recognizing gender, race, and class as interconnected axes of oppression. In these collections, young feminists explain how their identities conflict with what they view as an "ideal feminism" as a product of the second wave. They deny feminism as a script that dictates how women should live and embrace it as a source of empowerment that they inform with a multiplicity of identities.

The third wave has frequently been criticized because it lacks a specific political and activist focus. In seeking to address criticisms that the second wave movement only supported the goals of white, middle-class women,[24] the third wave has embraced not only multiculturalism, but also principles of individualism over unity. Leslie Drake has argued that the third wave seeks to be relevant to all women, whether or not women identify as feminists.[25] "The Personal is Political," a slogan that encapsulated the second wave movement to bring women's issues into the public sphere has taken on a new meaning. Siegel contends that third wavers use it to denote the idea that politics are practiced through individual expression and daily life, as in the Riot Grrrl movement. This fundamental alteration has changed the nature of the feminist movement from one of collective action around shared goals (as in the second wave) to one of individual action around local (or individual) goals. The implications of this shift in feminist practice remains undertheorized, a problem that this dissertation will address with a critical examination of third wave politics.

The Global Girl

The development of the third wave as a feminist movement of individuals rather than a collective group of women is undeniably influenced by the global expansion of neoliberalism. The term "neoliberalism" is somewhat confusing, as it actually refers to the economic policies of the New Right, beginning in the 1970s. Sociologist Ronaldo Munck explains the term: "Neoliberalism successfully articulated neoclassical economic theories with a liberal individualist conception of political freedom."[26] It developed as a theoretical response to economic policies instituted in the U.S. in the 1930s. The U.S. government responded to the Great Depression with Keynesian-compromise capitalism. This set of economic policies was responsible for establishing what is commonly referred to as the

"welfare state" or "welfare capitalism" in which the government is charged with intervening in labor and welfare policies for the benefit of the general populace.[27] Keynesian-compromise capitalism dictated that the government should provide labor and welfare policies (including social programs), as well as restrictions on the behavior of capital and interventions to stimulate the economy. This economic formation began to fall out of favor in the 1970s as inflation took off and the value of the dollar continued to drop.[28] The U.S. had begun to experiment with neoliberal economic policies in the late-1950s, and a shift towards neoliberalism was consolidated in the late 1970s.[29]

The theory of neoliberalism (which is distinct from its practice in the marketplace) is based upon economist Adam Smith's theory of the "invisible hand of the market," arguing that without state interventions or controls, the market will regulate itself to optimal levels of efficiency. Neoliberalism as a system of thought was developed by Milton Friedman is his 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom.*[30] The book did not receive wide acclaim until the 1970s and 1980s, when it was used as evidence in critiques lobbied against welfare capitalism, arguing that the government was serving a social role that ultimately limited individual freedom. Friedman explains that his economic theory relies on the role of competitive capitalism, or, "The organization of the bulk of economic activity through private enterprise operating in a free market – as a system of economic freedom and a necessary condition for political freedom."[31] In other words, the unimpeded operation of the free market will provide maximum economic efficiency (the best allocation of resources) and also create the social conditions necessary for human ("political") freedom. Friedman argues that welfare capitalism may be beneficial for the public as a whole, but government regulation of the economic and the social are detrimental to the autonomy of the individual, and thus must be

abolished. Rosemary Hennessy argues that since the 1970s, this deregulatory philosophy has worked to extend "the rationality of the market – its schemes of analysis and decision-making criteria – to areas of social life that have not been primarily economic."[32] Neoliberal economic policies have resulted in transformed conceptions of the public sphere and the private sphere as subject to the laws of the free market. It should be noted that in practice, neoliberalism is distinct from libertarianism; although these two schools of thought favor individual freedom from government control, neoliberal policies have consistently relied on government structures to promote ideal conditions for the accumulation of wealth while liberarian policies favor the reduction or elimination of these structures.

Ronaldo Munck argues that a second phase of neoliberalism began in the 1990s with "the triumph of neoliberal globalisation as discourse and practice … Capital mobility was facilitated, free trade was sanctified, labour was made more 'flexible' and macroeconomic management became fully market compliant."[33] These changes moved beyond the boundaries of nation-state, developing a global order of free market economies and dismantling welfare capitalism. The privatization of social services that has resulted from neoliberal policies has had particular effects and implications for the youth population. One example is the privatization of public schools. Arthur MacEwan explains:

> Societies have long designed school systems to meet a broad set of social needs – including the creation of social equality, social cohesion, and common values and language. When schooling is privatized and education becomes a commodity, these broader social needs are submerged beneath the need of the private school operators to make a profit and the decisions of individuals who are buying an education to meet their particular needs.[34]

The declining role of the state in funding public schools has opened up a gap that corporate (private) interests have stepped in to fill with sponsorships and advertisements that pervade

every aspect of educational life – from advertisements for Britney Spears' latest CD on the wall in the school cafeteria to textbook math problems that rely on counting M&Ms.[35] Not only has corporate advertising become ubiquitous within public school buildings, but corporations including Edison are actually running public schools, altering curricula with an eye towards skills training for corporate-sector needs.[36] As MacEwan argues above, these changes have altered the focus of education for youth, and altered or erased the notion of democratic citizenship upon which public schooling has been based.[37] Indeed, this distinction is evident in the shift between democratic citizenship in the welfare state and consumer citizenship in the neoliberalist state.[38] Students conceive of education as a commodity rather than as a social good, and they regard themselves as consumers. This is a process of individuation, in which the individual expresses his or her identity through consumption rather than through public, democratic citizenship.

Social sciences researcher Anita Harris has documented "the neo-liberal process of individualization" in her examination of the changing global conditions in which contemporary constructions of girlhood are taking place. Harris argues that, "The neo-liberal incitement of individualism, rational choice and self-realization bumps up against discourses of femininity, creating contradictory and complex positions for girls."[39] The recent expansion of girls' media hails young women with multiple messages proclaiming their freedom from constraints and their ability to create themselves and their own lives, unhampered by markers of gender, race, class, or sexuality. This process, in which young women conceive of themselves as individuals rather than as part of a democratic collective, has contributed to the development of the third wave feminist movement. The individual focus of the third wave, emphasizing personal politics and denying legitimate means for collective action among

women is directly related to the social effects of neoliberalism that have expanded from its economic origins. Nikolas Rose theorizes that within the neoliberal state, "The political subject is now less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body, than an individual whose citizenship is to be manifested through the free exercise of personal choice among a variety of marketed options."[40] The third wave feminist use of identity politics creates individual "choice" as the basis for a coalition that may or may not find formation.

Neoliberal social and economic policies and the rise of consumer citizenship have combined to influence the production of girls' popular culture products, flooding the market with a variety of options and creating new competition among various forms of media. I examine the boom in girls' media that began during the 1990s as it was influenced and driven by new market competition. In the early 1990s, *Sassy* magazine was essentially shut down when corporate sponsors felt that it was too open and liberal about discussions of sex and sexuality. Just a few years later, *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* (among others), magazines that had traditionally been marketed to adult women, successfully launched "teen" imprints: *CosmoGirl!* and *Elle Girl*, with virtually no protests from sponsors regarding their sex-related content. The broadcast television industry, in contrast, historically *undervalued* the teenage girl audience because it was considered too narrow to appeal to advertisers. The mid-1990s saw the rise of "netlets," smaller-scale broadcast networks that focused on appealing to smaller segments of the viewing audience that were considered "high quality" because of their consumptive power. The WB network, in particular, attained a level of success by focusing on the teen girl audience, a practice they began in 1997 and continued until 2006, when they partnered with UPN to form a new broadcast network, the CW.[41] Neoliberal economic

policies shaped the conditions under which media have been produced and marketed to the teen girl audience, and the social influence of neoliberalism is present in the vision of consumer citizenship and individual empowerment that these magazines, TV shows (as well as movies, music, and websites) proffer young women. The underlying question of how young women reconcile new understandings of feminist empowerment with messages of liberation through consumption is key to this dissertation. Neoliberal policies have had a direct impact on the formation of media conglomerates, and I argue that conglomeration has changed how teenage girls are targeted as a market for media and consumer products. In addition, mainstream media products represent young women's empowerment in terms of the neoliberal process of individualization that Harris identifies, and I examine this through the discourse of Girl Power.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation has grown out of my academic interest in the development of youth cultures and the roles that gender and generation play in the defining of youth in any particular era. As a teenage girl in the 1990s, I responded to media aimed at my demographic with some bewilderment, wondering whether feminism really was over. Although news of the third wave didn't reach my small Midwestern hometown (and possibly still hasn't), I took heart in the development of local, DIY media (usually in the form of zines distributed at the local coffee shop) that responded to media images and waxed poetic about other ways of being. Although the multitude of representations of young women in the contemporary media environment indicates that multiple subjectivities are being engaged, DIY media provided my first real recognition that there were visions of feminist empowerment that lay far outside the mainstream.

In the following chapters, I examine Girl Power through cultural products designed for and designed by Generation Y, following three essential areas of focus. The first is the development and influence of the third wave of feminism, coinciding with the maturation of this generation. The influence of the third wave as a movement "from below" has shaped notions of girls' liberation and contributed to the proliferation of images of empowered young women who have the freedom to be whoever they choose and to accomplish anything they desire.

The second area of focus is the role of neoliberalism as it has expanded in scope from economic policies and begun to affect real social and cultural changes. Neoliberal thought has shaped economic policies globally, and its influence can also be seen the development of social movements. I will argue that neoliberal influence has shaped the development of third wave feminist goals and conceptions of the "individual," having a real effect on notions of activism within the movement. I draw specific parallels between neoliberal economic and social policies and the third wave agenda for feminist resurgence, illustrating how these influences have combined to position consumerism as liberation in girls' mass media. Within these discourses, the promises of multiculturalism, social justice, and tolerance become lies, because the solution presented by "consumer citizenship" ultimately fails to support anything other than the dominant capitalist system. I document the ways that teen girls struggle with and attempt to resist the notion of consumer citizenship, particularly through the creation of DIY media.

The third focus is the underlying tension between business interests and countercultural interests working to define both gender and generation, particularly the gap between what it means to be a "girl" and what it means to be a girl in "Generation Y." Each

of these three areas of interest are inextricably linked in girls' media, and each plays a significant role in the shaping of this generation's youth culture. Media historian Mary Kearney, among others, has charged that the field of youth studies has long held a particularly masculine focus, maintaining a separation between "youth" and "femininity."[42] This critique of youth studies has been addressed significantly over the past ten years with multiple academic studies on the development and meaning of girlhood, and as such, it is not my focus here. The rapid growth of girls' culture studies opens up multiple questions for examination, including the development of girls' subjectivities and girls' cultural politics, both of which are key issues to my analysis.

Contemporary girls' media positions consumerism as liberation for young women, in part by marketing images of teen girls as highly sexual, autonomous subjects. The specific focus on girls as sexual beings relates to the representations of girls as icons of youth and vitality, but also to the creation of desires in the teen girl audience; these desires can be addressed but never completely fulfilled with product purchases. The discourse of Girl Power is about more than just consumerism, however, and critiquing its use as a marketing strategy ignores the other possibilities that it has raised. Girl Power representations can be viewed as positive, as they open up spaces for identification, resistance, and empowerment for teenage girls. The abundance and continuous circulation of girls' cultural products imbues teen girls with a cultural importance and authority that is inherently empowering. Cultural critic Ann Powers has noted that terms like "culture" and "power" when used in conjunction with the term "girl" are in some ways resistant to continuing stereotypes about the inferior role of girls within society.[43] Sexualized representations of Girl Power icons including Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, on the other hand, raise questions about the politics and practice

associated with the phrase. Coinciding with the rise of mass mediated visions of Girl Power has been a glut of popular press analysis on the "problem" of teenage girls. In the mid-1990s, Peggy Orenstein's Schoolgirls and Mary Pipher's Reviving Ophelia were bestselling books that detailed crises in girls' self-esteem that the authors related to a lack of achievement in education, depression, self-mutilation, and suicide.[44] The notion of Girl Power circulated heavily during a time when many girls appeared to be falling through the cracks of "normal" teenage girlhood, the message of empowerment having apparently failed to reach them.

In order to draw out the tensions between gender and generation, and the influences of the third wave and neoliberalism, I will focus on a number of media products produced specifically for the teenage girl audience. I will draw on examples from television shows, magazines, music, and films to illustrate the ways in which teenage girls are being positioned as teenage girls within Generation Y. However, I will attempt to balance this analysis with a discussion of media products produced by teenage girls, including zines and websites, focusing on the ways that teenage girls are negotiating opportunities for resistance to mass mediated notions of empowerment. Representations of teenage girls in contemporary mass media offer performative sexuality as the site of potential empowerment and self-actualization, but also contradictorily, as the site of greatest danger and potential ruin. The gap between the desires that these representations open up and the lived realities of teenage girls is addressed, but never fully resolved by consumptive practices. Girls' DIY culture shows the potential for tangible, activist resistance to the capitalist system that profits from the sexualization of teen girls.

The critical approach that I employ incorporates aspects of both cultural theory and feminist theory to illuminate and complicate a history of contemporary girls' media. I use

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to explore the industrial motivations behind girls' popular culture. Gramsci argues that hegemony operates through a continuous process in which the dominant social power seeks to win the consent of the subordinated, ensuring their participation in the process of their own subordination. Gramsci argues that the process takes the form of a struggle in which the dominant allow the subordinated to achieve small successes that continue the hegemonic process, but can never fundamentally alter the power relationship.[45] I develop this in relation to girls' popular culture, analyzing the potential for hegemonic resistance within mainstream and countercultural girls' media. While mainstream media attempt to close off opportunities for resistance and encourage dominant readings, girls can and do use these media products in subversive ways. One example would be the phenomena of DIY culture, in which girls make their own versions of the fashions/hairstyles/accessories in mainstream magazines without purchasing any brand name products. DIY culture also includes the creation of personalized media (music, zines, websites) that often directly imitate mainstream media in order to respond to them. These forms of resistance, in which girls acknowledge and avoid the power of mainstream media and its ability to circulate notions of "normalcy" in girlhood have genuine subversive potential.

In addition to the relations of power as expressed through the process of hegemony, I use Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as the circulation of power in society. Foucault argues that discourses are expressions that contain truths with real material effects (the classification of normal and abnormal, sane and insane, etc.) through which they serve as exercises of power.[46] His genealogical approach to history is concerned with how discourses are designated true and false in a society (how norms are established and where power

resides). This approach is focused on the relationship between power and knowledge: how we know what we know and who controls our access to knowledge.[47] This approach to historiography seeks to discover how discourses come to constitute what we recognize as "truth," and this specifically relates to my approach in terms of how and why I intend to examine girls' popular culture as a nexus of youth, gender, and generation.

Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* is of particular relevance to my study because of its exploration of how power is circulated through discourses of sex, and the notion that this process is productive, rather than repressive.[48] I use Foucault's theory of discourse and power to examine the ways in which representations of sexuality in girls' culture (with a particular emphasis on performative sexuality) can work as empowering and productive forces, changing the accepted boundaries of gender and generation in contemporary youth culture.

My critical approach utilizes feminist theory, with a particular focus on the developments of third wave feminist thought, to analyze the relationship between girls' popular culture and contemporary girlhood. Third wave theorizations have thus far been particularly rooted in identity politics, which has presented problems for the development of unified activism within the movement. Ednie Garrison has argued that the third wave concerns with issues of identity operate as an inherently political project. She maps out social and cultural conditions and concerns that separate the third from the second wave, identifying the unique "tools" of the third wave as print and visual media, music genres, and new technologies including the Internet. She argues that women have easier access to modes of production now than they did during the second wave, and that the third wave can embrace the democratic possibilities of technology, which wasn't a viable option in the second wave.

Most important, however, is Garrison's discussion of identity politics as a tactical maneuver, rather than a single informing strategy.[49] She references Chela Sandoval, an influential feminist theorist associated with U.S. third world feminism who sought to critique homogenization within the second wave, arguing that the third wave use of identity politics makes possible a differential consciousness that multiplies what counts as feminist politics and consciousness (it's on this basis that coalitions can be formulated).[50] Garrison argues that the consciousness raising efforts of the third wave are exploring what it means to be "women" while resisting identification with the object "woman."

In Garrison's formulation, collective action becomes possible across differences when it's recognized that the collective is formed based on consciousness rather than on a notion of fixed identity. This is informed by post-structuralist feminism, but also by second wave feminists including bell hooks, who argued that feminist consciousness should not originate in the body.[51] As Chris Weedon explains, feminist post-structuralist analysis is concerned neither with the abandonment of subjectivity nor of theory. It does not argue for relativism, but rather theory and practice are necessarily always partial, historically specific and interested.[52] An adequate feminism requires that the structural relations of inequality between different groups of women and their interests be recognized and addressed. Pluralism in societies is always structured by relations of power. My interest in exploring this theory is in addressing the question of whether it is possible to avoid relativism in practice. For example, if third wave feminism embraces "big is beautiful" pro-fat movements, responding to the unrealistic demands that beauty culture places on young women's self-image, is it possible or realistic for the movement to condemn pro-anorexics, a group of young women who embrace

anorexia as an aspect of their identity? While contemporary feminism may not promote relativism, in practice its momentum towards universal relevance robs it of a politics.

While this project is historical in nature, it is also partial and limited. I do not intend to claim it is a complete history of girls' culture, or even particularly girls' media from the 1990s forward. It is a partial history of social, cultural, and industrial factors that have contributed to the proliferation and circulation of girls' media in this time period, and as such it is necessarily an incomplete historical record. The history presented in this project is shaped by my own choices and areas of focus, and a much different project would arise from, for example, a historical case study of the rise of teen television in the 1990s.

In addition to the partial nature of my historical approach, I feel it is necessary to say a word about the use of key terms ("girl," "gender," and "generation") as they are employed in this project. It is not my intention to imply that any of these terms have a fixed referent, and in fact one of my underlying theoretical goals is to reveal how much ambiguity and continuous redefinition/reinterpretation is present in the usage of each of these terms within popular media. Throughout, I refer to Generation Y as the segment of the population born between 1980 and 2000; this represents a rough, inexact boundary, and different theorists who deal with generational demographics use slight variations.

A lot of the academic work that is relevant to the project at hand comes from the relatively new fields of girls' culture studies and third wave feminist studies. This project will build on and respond to the existing works in these fields, seeking to address some key questions that have thus far been ignored.

One of the most frequently cited girls' studies works is Susan J. Douglas' informal history of girls' media, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media.*

Douglas' study sets a valuable precedent for this project because it specifically focuses on the feminist implications of girls' media products (approximately 1960s-1980s), analyzing ways that the proliferation of girls' media products in the 1960s opened up avenues of negotiation and resistance among the teen girl audience. Douglas argues that the existence and development of specific media products for the teen girl audience was empowering because it privileged teen girls as important.[53] This is specifically a notion that I hope to draw out and build on in terms of the development of girls' popular culture in the 1990s. The current proliferation of girls' media has altered the meaning of contemporary girlhood.

Kelly Schrum's *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* is a relatively recent addition to the field of girls' studies. She argues that the teen girl market actually emerged much earlier than the 1940s, and she analyzes a number of media (films, advertisements, magazines) and sources (interviews, yearbooks, diaries) in order to develop her contention. Following Schrum's lead, I utilize as many sources that reflect the actual voices and participation of teenage girls as possible. My study is distinct not only in its contemporary subject matter, but also in its approach to discussions of race and racial issues. Schrum acknowledges but does not address issues of race that stratified and separated the teen girl audience from the 1920s to the 1940s (the time of her study). Issues of racial politics and particularly the 1990s discourse of multiculturalism are particularly relevant to my study and will be addressed throughout.

Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century by Anita Harris presents a uniquely compelling argument that I will address and develop through this project. Harris argues that as a society, we project our hopes and fears about the future onto the figure of the young girl. Teen girls come to represent both the best outcome of our society (unlimited

potential) and the worst case scenario (through delinquency, teen pregnancy, mental illness, etc.). Harris' book is a valuable resource for my study because of the way that she contrasts the material realities of contemporary girlhood with the expectations and desires that are fostered by contemporary popular culture products. Harris argues that girls are sold an ideal that very few can afford to buy into, although almost all think it is attainable.[54] My project is distinct from Harris' book because I am incorporating the influence of contemporary social and cultural factors (third wave feminism and neoliberalism) to analyze the fault lines in contemporary girls' culture. Further, Harris focuses on the social/cultural institutions that shape girlhood (schools, the mall) rather than the role that the media play in the structuring of gender and generation.

Within the past decade, a number of popular press books have appeared on the rising trend of consumerism in youth culture. Youth culture and consumerism have always been linked, to some extent, but most analysts seem to agree that marketing and consumption have become integral parts of youth culture. Books including *Consuming Kids*, *Born to Buy*, and *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids* have documented the new inroads of consumerism into youth culture as a whole and the personal lives/forms of expression of young people.[55] For the purposes of my study, the single most comprehensive book on this subject is Alissa Quart's *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*. Quart argues that teenagers now routinely participate in the process of consumerism by helping corporations to better reach their audience and market products to them. She documents the trend of teen consultants, peer-to-peer marketing, as well as corporate underwriting of public schools across the country. Quart's analysis is thorough and she discusses various forms of media that play into a system that perpetuates consumer citizenship among young people.[56] While her research will provide

some helpful starting points for my own discussion of girls' culture and consumption, the one major issue that I take with Quart's argument is that she does not implicate the role of gender in the process of defining consumer citizenship. While the majority of Quart's subjects are teen girls, and the products/methods that Quart is discussing are specifically marketing to this audience, she does not make any specific connections between girls' culture and consumer culture.

One of the most significant contributions that I hope to make with this study is an addition to the growing body of work on third wave feminism. The majority of third wave feminist texts are currently anthologies that work to build sentiment for the movement through relaying personal experiences. My project will analyze the real, tangible presence of third wave feminist influence in girls' popular culture, and I will critically examine the political implications and relevance of the movement as a whole. One of the key works on third wave feminist thought is Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's edited volume, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. Heywood and Drake establish definitions and cultural precedents for the movement, paying particular notice to the influence of U.S. third world feminism (Chela Sandoval, Gloria Anzaldua, among others) on the development of the third wave. The authors argue that young women should be able to bring their life experiences to inform feminism, rather than the other way around, and that feminism should be flexible and responsive to as many women's lives as possible.[57] The third wave thus embraces differences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others – but it embraces difference without espousing a particular political agenda. Though the movement is still developing, the "radical" nature of its early development has not yet inspired a similarly radical political agenda. In fact, critics of the third wave argue that it instead presents a kind

of relativism that erases difference (all forms of difference are equal to each other). I will discuss and examine the third wave in terms of girls' popular culture seeking ways in which its influence has been empowering and inspiring, and ways that the movement has failed to shape progressive feminist sentiment among young women.

The four chapters to follow focus on drawing out the nexus of youth, gender, and generation in contemporary girls' media. In Chapter One, I establish the context for the dissertation through an analysis of the industrial changes in the culture industries of the 1990s that led directly to a focus on teen girls as a key target demographic. I discuss various factors that have played into the rise of girls' popular culture and the form that it has taken since the early 1990s, beginning with the coinage of the term "Generation Y" by advertisers, making comparison between the movement to define this generation of youth and the earlier Baby Boom generation. This chapter examines the production of media for teen girls through magazines, websites, television, film, and music, examining how the contemporary climate of media conglomeration has necessitated the close interrelations of these media, as well as the culture industries' focus on specific target demographics. This chapter also introduces the concept of Girl Power in the 1990s as a corporate branding tool that was heavily influenced by a counter-cultural feminist movement.

Chapter Two focuses on the discourse of Girl Power and the creation and circulation of girl "icons" within the culture industries. I argue that while statements within the discourse have been analyzed as postfeminist, antifeminist, and consumerist, its vast and multi-faceted scope opened up multiple spaces for identification and resistance among young women in the 1990s. These spaces offer legitimate feminist potential within the discourse, and I indicate areas of intersection between mainstream notions of Girl Power and grassroots conceptions of

third wave feminism. The chapter closes with two cases studies demonstrating the significance and visibility of race and class within representations of Girl Power. The first examines Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera as girl icons who attained massive popularity in the late 1990s through the use of highly performative sexual personae. Although they come from similar backgrounds and both became exemplars of Girl Power, media coverage focuses on the distinctions between their personae, working to reward "appropriate" displays of young femininity and sexuality and to punish "inappropriate" performances. The second case study examines Brandy Norwood and Beyonce Knowles as multi-talented African-American performers who emerged as popular singers, actors, and dancers, while consistently maintaining "everygirl" personas. The characteristics that each of these girl icons is revered and reviled for in the pages of teen magazines and on websites produced by teen girls reveal struggles to define Girl Power and anxieties over the nature of representations of teenage girls in popular culture.

Chapter Three examines postfeminist reactions to the feminist potential of Girl Power, arguing that the cultural discussion about the empowerment of young women has been countered with statements and representations about the negative consequences of teen girls' social authority. I utilize Sarah Projansky's categorizations of postfeminist messages to examine responses to Girl Power, emphasizing backlash representations in teen films and representations of "equality and choice" postfeminism in magazines targeted at the teen girl market.[58] I further argue that (hetero)sex positivity is a major shaping force in contemporary teen girls' culture, and I discuss it within in terms of the cultural influence of hip hop music and the popularity of female rappers including Missy Elliott, Lil' Kim, and Foxy Brown. The popularity of hip hop in teen girls' culture is directly related to the 1990s discourse of

multiculturalism and also third wave feminist ideals of sexual agency. I argue that the extent of postfeminist reactions against Girl Power demonstrate the feminist potential of the discourse by revealing the cultural work that was enacted to negate or erase its legitimacy.

Chapter Four explores some of the ways that teen girls can "talk back"[59] to the mainstream media that are produced for them. I offer a brief history of girls' DIY culture, focusing on the rise of Riot Grrrl zines and their production and circulation among teenage girls in the early 1990s. Zines became a powerful, popular form of self-expression that were also instrumental to the development of third wave feminist communities, because they worked to spread "word of mouth" about the movement. In addition to zines created by individuals, I examine independent magazines including *New Moon*, *HUES*, and *blue jean* that emerged in the 1990s to encourage young women's active feminist media production. As the Internet became widely available in the mid-1990s, much of the photocopy-and-staple "zine scene" went online. I discuss the connections between zine culture and girls' websites, focusing on sites that are either completely designed by girls, or that rely heavily on user participation among young women. Girls' websites provide all manner of DIY media, including streaming audio and video productions, graphic design, poetry, and political commentary. My analysis focuses on how these sites work to open up areas of negotiation and resistance to mainstream Girl Power, either by confronting it directly, or by producing appealing alternatives to it.

Each chapter is designed to contribute to an overall picture of the "new girl order" that began in the 1990s and continues to bear fruit in popular and alternative media today. As Generation Y continues to come of age, young women are offered pleasures of identification in multiple forms of media. This dissertation seeks to understand the industrial imperatives

that work together to shape notions of contemporary girlhood, and Girl Power as a discourse of young women's empowerment (individual and otherwise) that open up opportunities for resistance and revolution.

Notes to Introduction

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[1] Lynn Smith, "Peace Sign Pulled From a Movie Ad," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 1, 2003, E3.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Kelly Schrum has documented this phenomenon in *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

[4] The first usage of the term is often credited to *Popular Science* magazine, as it is in Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York, NY: Avon, 1999), 8.

[5] Schrum, *Some Wore*, 19. Schrum further argues that girls were actually the first teenagers, at least in terms of consumer culture and popular culture. Boys were identified as teenagers in terms of the focus on social issues, including juvenile delinquency.

[6] Mary Celeste Kearney, "Girls, Girls, Girls: Gender and Generation in Contemporary Discourses of Female Adolescence and Youth Culture," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Southern California, 1998), 8. Kearney also cites Peter Zollo, *Getting Wiser to Teens*, 26-28.

[7] Schrum, *Some Wore*, 18-19.

[8] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago, 1997), 7.

[9] Timothy Shary, *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2002).

[10] Joan Engebretson, "Odd Gen Out," *American Demographics* 26:4 (May 2004), 14.

[11] Jennifer Drake, "The Mis-Education of Righteous Babes," *Growing Up Postmodern: Neoliberalism and the War on the Young,* ed. Ronald Strickland (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 181-204.

[12] See Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (NY: Vintage Books, 2000); Joe Marconi, *Future Marketing: Targeting Seniors, Boomers, and Generations X and Y* (Chicago, IL: NTC Books, 2001); New Strategist Editors, *The Millennials: Americans Born 1977 to 1994*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: New Strategist Publications, 2004); and Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1998).

[13] Howe and Strauss, *Millennials*, 266.

[14] Zines were instrumental in the rise of the third wave in the early 1990s. With the rise of the Internet, which simplifies production and distribution, the production of zines has changed, but individuals continue to create cut-and-paste versions.

[15] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War on American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).

[16] Catherine Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," *Hypatia* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 29-45.

[17] See Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

[18] Kearney relays this story in "Girls, Girls, Girls," (567) citing an article by Emily White (the original reporter that Hanna spoke with): Emily White, "Revolution Girl Style Now," *LA Weekly* Jul. 10 1992, 20.

[19] D.C. Riot Grrrl Manifesto, quoted in Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick, and Anita Harris, *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 22.

[20] see Farai Chideya, Melissa Rossi, and Dogen Hannah, "Revolution, Girl Style," *Newsweek*, Nov. 23, p.84-86 and Kim France, "Grrls at War," *Rolling Stone*, July 1993, 8-22.

[21] See Kat Long, "The Eye of Le Tigre," *Bust*, Winter 2002, 38-44.

[22] See Deborah L. Siegel, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). Chapter Five, "Rebels With a Cause," explicitly makes the case for continuity between the waves.

[23] See Barbara Findlen, ed., *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seal Press, 2001); Rebecca Walker, ed., *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (New York: Anchor, 1995); and Ophira Edut, ed., *Adios Barbie: Young Women Speak Out About Body Image and Identity* (New York: Seal Press, 1998) as examples of the personal, individual focus of the third wave movement.

[24] Recent historical scholarship has responded to critiques of the homogeneity of second wave feminism by uncovering the ways that concerns about sexuality, race, and class were central to the women and men who were involved in the movement. See Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Duke University Press, 2007).

[25] Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., Introduction, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 2-4.

[26] Ronaldo Munck, "Neoliberalism and Politics, and the Politics of Neoliberalism," *Neoliberalism: a Critical Reader*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 65.

[27] Al Campbell, "The Birth of Neoliberalism in the United States: A Reorganisation of Capitalism," *Neoliberalism: a Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 187-198.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ronaldo Munck argues that "global neoliberalism" began in the 1970s, kicked off by Chile's Pinochet military coup in 1973 and the "Chicago Boys," who were Chilean economists trained in the theories of Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago. See "Neoliberalism and Politics," 60-69.

[30] Friedman's *Free to Choose* was also key to the theoretical development of neoliberalism.

[31] Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (University of Chicago, 1962), 4.

[32] Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 75.

[33] Munck, "Neoliberalism and Politics," 62.

[34] Arthur MacEwan, "Neoliberalism and Democracy: Market Power versus Democratic Power," *Neoliberalism: a Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 173.

[35] Alissa Quart documents this phenomenon in *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2003), 11-12.

[36] See Quart's *Branded*, 215-224, for full documentation of this phenomenon.

[37] An additional critique is drawn out in Strickland, *Growing Up Postmodern,* 2.

[38] Lesley Hoggart documents this in "Neoliberalism, the New Right and Sexual Politics," *Neoliberalism: a Critical Reader*, eds. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 149-150.

[39] Sinikka Aapola, et al., *Young Femininity,* 7.

[40] Nikolas Rose, "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government," *British Journal of Sociology* v. 43, no.2 (1992), 172-205. This quotation is included on p. 34 of the online version of the article. Accessed: June 2005.

[41] They began to target teen girls with shows including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson's Creek*, and the *Gilmore Girls,* as I discuss in Chapter One. More recent examples include *One Tree Hill* and *Everwood.*

[42] Kearney explores this in "Girls, Girls, Girls." See especially Chapter One, "Where the Girls Aren't." She uses Barbara Hudson (author of *Gender and Generation*) to discuss the contradictory focus of youth studies in which only males can be "youths" because youth is defined in terms of rebellion.

[43] Ann Powers, "Everything and the Girl," *Spin,* Dec.1997, 76.

[44] Peggy Orenstein, *School Girls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994) and Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Pantheon, 1994).

[45] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1992.

[46] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Random House), 1977.

[47] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

[48] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*: *An Introduction*, (New York: Vintage, 1990).

[49] Ednie Garrison, "U.S. Feminism – Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologics of the Third Wave," *Feminist Studies* 26, 141-70.

[50] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 63.

[51] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

[52] Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999).

[53] Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994).

[54] Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

[55] Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York, NY: New Press, 2004); Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer*

Culture (New York: Scribner, 2004); and Murray Milner, Jr., *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[56] Quart, *Branded.*

[57] Heywood and Drake, *Third Wave Agenda.*

[58] Sarah Projansky outlines five categories of postfeminism in representations: linear/chronological, backlash, equality and choice postfeminism, (hetero)sex positivity, and representations of men as feminists. See *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 67-68.

[59] See hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.* South End Press, 1989.

Chapter One
She's All That: Targeting Girls in the 1990s

Flygirl Cosmetics is one of the many new product lines that have emerged since the early 1990s with an eye towards serving the teen girl demographic. Flygirl appeared on the personal care products scene in 2002 with an ad campaign that proclaimed:

> Deep in the center of the universe lies Flyworld
> Watching over the planet earth are four of Flyworld's very special Flygirls – Jami, Kiki, Chloe and Ginger
> These trendy Flygirls represent today's true girl image – not only with their groovy outfits, but also with their fearlessness and independence
> There is a Flygirl in all of us
> And Jami, Kiki, Chloe, and Ginger have come from Flyworld to bring it out in you...[1]

This campaign broadly typifies the marketing push that has focused on young women with an increasing intensity over the past fifteen years. Teenage girls and their concerns are tellingly placed in "the center of the universe," a privileged position from which everything else can revolve around them. The girl consumer is hailed by four different subject positions (Jami, Kiki, Chloe and Ginger) that she may identify with, and each represents a contemporary "true" vision of what it means to be a girl. This contemporary vision is not only borne out in external style ("groovy outfits") but in internal characteristics ("fearlessness and independence"). A "true girl" is a trendy consumer, but her appearance is really just a manifestation of her empowerment and self-reliance. Young women who are not yet "fly" have no need to worry; the campaign promises that Flyworld cosmetics can help to develop these qualities in any young woman.

Flyworld's marketing plays upon characteristics that are attributed to the generational values, attitudes, and beliefs of contemporary young women. The campaign (and a multitude of others like it) targets the teen girl audience with an image of "diversity," presenting four

options that the teen consumer may identify with, rather than one face of the campaign. It also flatters the demographic with messages about each girl's individuality, offering products as a way to enhance, rather than to establish a girl's unique characteristics. The careful balance established between the importance of external appearance and the development of inner strength, and between the marketing push for conformity and the promise of diversity and autonomy, is necessitated by the supposedly shared characteristics of this generation.

Marketers have invested millions of dollars into researching Generation Y, analyzing how young women see themselves in relation to the world around them, in order to better sell them products. Since the mid-1990s, the culture industries have been increasingly characterized by an environment of mergers and acquisitions, in which major media corporations have developed vertically integrated capabilities of production, distribution, and exhibition, and also horizontally integrated business interests across a wide variety of media industries. This conglomeration serves to enforce dominant ideologies in an advanced capitalist society. The philosopher Antonio Gramsci theorized hegemony as a system of social control through which the values of the ruling elites become the values of all people. Although capitalism best serves the interests of those in power and simultaneously exploits workers, it becomes "common sense" that this system must be maintained.[2] Cultural consensus is coerced through hegemonic cultural institutions including education, religion, and mass media, which operate to ensure that subordinated groups identify their own well-being with the interests of ruling elites. This process of hegemony is relevant to a discussion of contemporary media and popular culture because it is externalized; its workings are visible in the operations of culture industries that produce and distribute ideas about social roles, in this case, appropriate social roles for contemporary young women. In this chapter, I examine

the motivations of the power bloc (media industries) in producing and circulating "common sense" notions about youth and femininity.

There is no necessary relationship between the current generation of youth and the term "Generation Y," which is perhaps why this generation has been named so many times. The 78 million people born between 1978 and 1994 have also been referred to as the "Echo Boom," because they are the children of the Baby Boom generation (1945-1964), representing a similar increase in population.[3] The "Millennial Generation" was coined to focus on the largest segments of this current generation of youth and their coming of age around the turn of the millennium, an event that would shape the generation's shared history.[4] Don Tapscott's bestselling tome *Growing Up Digital* referred to this generation as the "Net Generation," arguing that they have unprecedented access to communications technology, including digital and wireless technologies that alter their conceptions of time and space. This generation's access to communications, particularly the Internet, differentiates them from generations that have come before. Younger demographics tend to adopt new technologies at a faster pace, and the current generation of youth is more technologically competent (based on percentages of adoption and usage of communications technologies) than any other.[5] While each of these labels have been used by market researchers and demographers, the most common label for the current generation of youth is the one that I employ in this project, "Generation Y."

The "Generation Y" label appeared in the popular press as early as 1994, often in articles explaining the relationship between "Generation X" (those born between 1965 and 1979) and this newer, younger generation.[6] The contrast between the two was stark. Generation X was viewed by advertisers and marketers and anti-consumerist and cynical, the first generation to be affected by parents' divorce in high numbers.[7] The newly minted

Generation Y, on the other hand, was an up-and-coming youth generation, about to provide the biggest youth consumer market in the United States since the 1960s. The burgeoning youth market was discussed in terms of its vast potential, with millions of teenagers driving the economy in terms of everything from movie ticket sales to the development of new digital technologies. Generation Y was first theorized on the basis of its consumer potential, both in terms of the generation's disposable income (larger than any previous generation's) and their documented ability to influence major household purchases for the family (including vehicles and home entertainment systems).

Marketers and public relations experts dissected the habits of Generation Y attempting to establish a "character" profile, for ease of communication with the group. They argue that this generation is both brand conscious and brand loyal, willing to spend more money on products that can be customized to suit their individual needs.[8] Public relations studies indicate that this generation is concerned about social issues, and particularly invested in environmental responsibility.[9] As a whole, the generation is seen as socially liberal, with more relaxed attitudes about sex and sexuality than previous generations. In terms of actual habits of consumption, Generation Y has been targeted as the single largest demographic segment purchasing communications technology and media products, including music, movies, magazines, videogames, cell phones, and computer equipment.[10] Marketers view them as a generation of multi-taskers, who cultivate short attention spans by engaging with a variety of media stimuli simultaneously.

The role that media products have played in identifying and targeting Generation Y has become increasingly important since the mid-1990s. Teenage girls, in particular, are targeted with a wider array of media products than at any time in the past. Teenage girls play

a more active and identifiable role in "Generation Y" than young women have ever played in generations of youth. The role of young women, not only as purchasers, but also as producers and tastemakers, has expanded with the recognition of this demographic as a key market segment. Mainstream media products and advertisers flatter teen girls with representations of themselves as mature, autonomous individuals. They offer depictions of teenage girls who are self-confident, assertive and self-sufficient. This focused attention on the teen girl market is related to several factors. First, estimates of teen girls' buying power shows that they are more dependable consumers than boys are, particularly in terms of retail apparel and personal care products, but increasingly also in leisure activities (the music industry and the film industry increasingly rely on teen girls for CD sales and ticket purchases).[11] In fact, the estimates of this demographic's buying power that were projected in the 1990s have proven to be conservative. Spending increased from $84 billion (of their own money) in 1997 to an estimated $153 billion in 1999, and continues to expand. It is estimated that the teen population of Generation Y will hit its peak numbers around 2010.[12] In addition, the market construction of this generation has been particularly focused on the feminine because of three aspects of this generation's buying power: disposal income, (perceived) influence on family purchases, and estimated future purchasing power. Marketers view Generation Y as the next big market for automobiles, home appliances, and furniture.[13] Research indicates that young women are the driving force in each of these areas, which has resulted in the push to establish brand recognition and loyalty based on their generational traits. The "new" focus on the youth generation becomes clear through a comparison between Generation Y and Generation X. The "Generation X" label began to circulate in 1993 and 1994, referencing the title of a Douglas Coupland novel about disaffected young people in their twenties. The pressure to

target Generation Y at an earlier age emerged from its size, rivaled only by the Baby Boom in importance to the development of the national economy. The total population of Generation Y is estimated at 76 million, compared with 80 million Boomers.[14]

During the 1990s, various culture industries turned their focus to the teenage girl demographic market. The impetus behind this shift towards niche marketing, particularly from industries that had never readily embraced this tendency before (the broadcast television industry, for example) has been encouraged by several economic factors. The first is the trend toward conglomeration among media companies, which picked up speed with mergers between major companies during the 1980s and the 1990s, aided by the deregulation of governmental restrictions on media cross-ownership. Historian Valerie Wee argues in fact that, "the cross-media marketing and promotional activities in 1990s' teen-oriented culture was marked by an unprecedented degree of intersection across multiple forms of media and distribution outlets."[15] Although companies within the culture industries, particularly the film industry, have long participated in mergers and buyouts, many scholars have examined the ways in which their focus shifted during the 1980s, towards streamlining their companies and focusing their corporate ownership on media interests in particular.[16] This trend of mergers between companies in the communication and entertainment sectors may have been accelerated by Rupert Murdoch's purchase of 20th Century Fox in 1985, and his News Corporation's subsequent launch of the Fox television network in 1986.[17] A series of major mergers that similarly enhanced the abilities of other telecommunications giants to profit across multiple media outlets followed, including the 1986 merger of Warner Communications (film, television, and music) with Time Inc (publishing).[18] By the end of the decade, Sony (electronics) merged with Columbia and CBS Records (film, television, and

music). Viacom, one of the largest interests in cable television, acquired Paramount Studios in 1994, Blockbuster Video in 1995, and the CBS network by the end of the 1990s.[19] In 1995, Disney purchased Capital Cities/ABC. By the end of the decade, Universal had merged with Vivendi, and by 2004, acquired the NBC television network.

These are some of the most notable examples of consolidation within media industries, and it is my contention that the focus on the teen girl demographic within these industries became intensified during the 1990s due to the synergistic mandates of these media giants. The rest of this chapter outlines the industrial shift towards the teen girl demographic during this time period, and the multiple synergistic connections that have resulted from the horizontal integration of media industries. Viacom, for example, owns cable channels including MTV, BET (Black Entertainment Television), Comedy Central, and Nickelodeon (among others). They also own film and television production and distribution companies, including Paramount and DreamWorks. They own and operate multiple websites including iFilm, alongside other holdings such as Viacom Consumer Products and the Bubba Gump Shrimp Company (a restaurant and market chain).[20] Their ownership across media industries encourages the corporate mandate to utilize the capabilities of cross-ownership to produce content that can be marketed through all of these formats.

The practice of using multiple media outlets under common ownership to promote a single media product is a synergistic one. Synergy, a management rationale for the efficient organization of a business, became the mantra of media giants during the 1990s, with each company seeking to dominate the global marketplace by producing and promoting entertainment content as efficiently as possible. Valerie Wee argues that the climate of media conglomeration in the 1990s led directly to the efficient exploitation of the teen demographic

market because, "As multimedia conglomerates continued to expand further into new entertainment media and technology, they became more active and efficient in parsing out and exploiting the existing media/entertainment markets."[21] She further explains, "Within teen culture, this resulted in an ever-expanding list of teen products in a variety of media, all of which originated from a single hit product."[22] As I examine the industrial developments in a variety of media forms throughout the rest of this chapter, I will pay particular attention to the ways that various forms of media under the same umbrella of corporate ownership have been employed synergistically to explore and exploit the teen girl market demographic.

This chapter looks at the segments of the culture industries that have been targeting teenage girls specifically since the early 1990s. The increasing importance of this demographic to advertisers can be seen in the proliferation of girls' media products in the form of magazines, websites, television series, movies, and music. I look at the development of girls' media products in each of these sectors as specific ways of targeting Generation Y, circulating meanings about appropriate modes of "youth" and "femininity." The development of different forms of media that were either long stagnant (magazines) or previously under-developed (television series) shows the desire of marketers to reach Generation Y, particularly teenage girls.

What a Girl Wants: The Growing Field of Teen Market Research

The development of new media for the teen girls' market, as well as a multitude of other products, is shaped by extensive market research, which has become a veritable cottage industry created by the demands of Generation Y. Teen market research is led by several major companies that work for corporate interests, surveying teenagers about their opinions on brands, products, and advertising campaigns. Although this kind of research on the youth

market dates back to the 1960s,[23] current practices in market research are more direct and invasive. In 1965, market researchers estimated that American teenagers controlled between thirteen and twenty-five billion dollars in disposable income.[24] Population projections showed that by the end of 1965, "more than half of the American population will be under twenty-five years of age."[25] Teenagers were buying fifty percent of all movie tickets, almost ten percent of all new cars, almost half of all records and cameras, and making at least twenty-five percent of cosmetics purchases.[26] Advertisers and marketers had begun to sit up and take notice of the burgeoning youth market in the 1950s when the baby boomers were children.[27] Marketers were often baffled by the trend-conscious youth generation, and found it difficult to sell reliably to teenagers, because items and brands went in and out of fashion rapidly.

Gilbert Youth Research developed a five-point plan in 1963, which they established to smooth the distance between the advertiser and the youth market. First, advertisers had to visualize the youth market in three distinct segments, "each with its own media, characteristics, motivations and appeals." Next, they were asked to choose a preferred segment of the youth market and design all appeals specifically for them. The third step involved research on the relationship between the market segment and the product, and the fourth was the creation of the ad campaign. The final step was to choose a media outlet (television, radio, magazines, billboards, etc.) suited for the age group in question.[28]

The segmentation of the youth market into different age categorizations ("children," "teenagers," and "young adults") was a revolutionary step in the early 1960s. Just a few years earlier, the entire market had been labeled "children," and they had been ignored in favor of appealing to parents, who were perceived as having more spending power. However, it is significant that the Gilbert Youth Research strategy contains no demographic distinctions

based on gender. Undoubtedly, teenage girls and teenage boys would respond to different kinds of advertising appeals, in different contexts, but the importance of the gender divide didn't factor into how the youth market was originally conceptualized.

Even prior to 1965, a number of films and hundreds of magazines were marketed specifically to young girls.[29] Teenage girls were a desirable demographic, not just because of their disposable income, but because of the belief that buying habits and brand preferences could be solidified during the teenage years. Marketers devised competitive strategies to reach the girls who would eventually be women making household purchasing decisions. In 1964, *Newsweek* estimated that sixty percent of new brides (who were also considered "homemakers") were teenagers.[30] By 1965, the teenage girl market was coming into its own in terms of spending power, and was specifically targeted (especially through teen magazines) for fashion, cosmetics, and popular music.[31]

By the 1990s, the Gilbert Youth Research plan had become hopelessly outdated. Factors including an increase in media outlets, mass media conglomeration, and the fragmentation of the market have dictated that demographic groups need to be addressed as specifically as possible, through as many avenues as possible. These changes in the marketplace have led to new marketing techniques, including not only include surveys and focus groups, but also peer-to-peer marketing campaigns, in which teens who are seen as "innovators" are paid to wear clothing or listen to music to inspire other young people at their schools to pick up similar items and start trends. Teens are also paid to market more directly to their peers, spreading the word about how great a new item is and where it can be purchased. In *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*, Alissa Quart documents how the market research industry has enlisted the paid complicity of teenagers in the

commodification of their lifestyle. She argues that these new forms of marketing have taken off because Generation Y responds best to peer-to-peer marketing, and because advertisements have become such a pervasive aspect of adolescent life.[32] Teens are not put off by the idea of marketing products to their friends because their lifestyles are already saturated with various advertising influences.

Teenage Research Unlimited (TRU) is the biggest and most successful market research firm that is dedicated solely to the youth market. The company was founded in 1982, but really began to take off during the 1990s, put to work by a variety of corporate interests seeking to reach the teen market. TRU has interviewed more than half a million teenagers during its lifetime, conducting both focus groups and "ethnographic interviews."[33] Their research includes quantitative data on trends and brands that are successful or unsuccessful, but they temper that information with qualitative interviews and studies that focus on how fashions and products become successful. In exchange for free merchandise or cash payments, teenagers tell TRU about how they make their purchasing decisions and how they establish brand loyalties.[34]

TRU and smaller market research firms including the Gepetto Group have become the major source of demographic information on Generation Y. They are consistently cited in popular press articles analyzing the wants and needs of the youth population. TRU discusses the generation in terms of the size of its population, its estimated buying power, and its established consumerist persona. The meaning behind the "Generation Y" label is being written by market research firms that have been paid to figure out how to sell products to this generation of youth. The popular press bemoans the consumerist nature of this generation

while relying almost solely on the consumer research of firms like TRU for generational analysis.

Market research expertise has been employed in various sectors of the culture industries to determine what girls want at any given time. Advertisers seek to create print ads and television commercials that young women will respond to, but the development of content is also subject to the watchful eye of market research and development. Teen girls' magazines, websites, television shows, movies, and music are created with the activity of consumption in mind. Cross-promotion is the unique and continually evolving feature of girls' media that emerged in force during the 1990s. The remainder of this chapter sets forth the developments in girls' media production that have changed the shape of the teen girl markets since the early 1990s, and the next chapter focuses on the synergistic potential captured by girl icons including Britney Spears and Brandy.

Who's *Sassy* Now?: Teen Girls' Magazines

By 1990, the market for advertiser-supported teen girls' magazines was dominated by three major players that had been established for decades. *Seventeen* dominated the market with the highest subscription numbers and newsstand sales. The magazine, which began in 1944 and once boasted a reader base estimated at six million young women,[35] remained the industry standard in the 1990s, although it was not nearly as popular as it had been at its peak.[36] The second player, *YM*, had gone through various incarnations since its launch as *Young Miss* in 1955.[37] Mary Kearney has tracked the multitude of changes in ownership and title that *YM* underwent between 1955 and 1990.[38] The title *YM*, was designed to be more "hip" than *Young Miss* and less cloying than the previous effort, *Young and Modern*. By the mid-1990s, *YM* trailed *Seventeen* magazine by approximately 200,000 readers per month.[39]

The third main title, *Teen*, was another industry stalwart, having debuted with beauty and fashion advice in 1960. These titles were not significantly differentiated from each other in terms of content and advertising,[40] a fact that may account for their neck and neck popularity with teen readers.

The teen girls' magazine market changed significantly in the 1990s due to the introduction of a new title, *Sassy*. *Sassy* officially debuted in 1988, the American sibling of a successful Australian magazine for teen girls called *Dolly*. *Dolly* was known for its open discussions of issues related to sex and sexuality, and *Sassy* followed suit, although it was uncommon for American girls' magazines to deal openly with these controversial issues. *Sassy* started with the mission of differentiating itself from the major players by addressing girl readers more casually, creating the atmosphere of friends having a conversation rather than adults telling teenagers what to do. Additionally, the magazine had an explicitly feminist mission informed by Sandra Yates, president of the American arm of its original publishing company, John Fairfax Limited. Yates bought the feminist *Ms.* magazine for Fairfax after *Sassy*'s launch, cementing the idea that the two could be viewed as "sister" publications.[41] *Sassy*'s editorial staff was a young group led by Jane Pratt (aged 24 when she was hired as editor) and they viewed sex education as key to empowering young women. As Molly Simms has documented in her account of the magazine's demise, *Sassy*'s frank discussions of sex and sexuality provided the first hint of trouble at the magazine. Simms chronicles a campaign against the magazine by a group called Focus on the Family Citizen, who were incensed by a headline in the debut issue, "Think You're Ready for Sex? Read This First."[42] The group felt that the magazine was encouraging young women to become sexually active, and it organized a boycott against *Sassy*'s advertisers that nearly bankrupted the fledgling publication. Within

the first year, *Sassy* was appealing to readers, asking them to write in and explain what they liked about the magazine and why they related to it.[43] *Sassy* then used this information to appeal directly to advertisers, offering it as evidence of the special relationship that the magazine had developed with teen girl readers during its short time on the market.[44] In 1989, Fairfax decided to divest its American publication and Yates put together a group of investors (called "Matilda Publications") to buy both titles. The conflicts over how *Sassy* discussed issues related to teen sex continued, and the magazine had trouble holding on to advertisers. Although the magazine's staff did everything they could to demonstrate the loyalty of their readership, advertisers cared more about their relationship with the concerned adult consumers represented by conservative protest groups than it did about the emerging teen girls' market evident in *Sassy*'s climbing circulation.

By 1990, Yates sold *Sassy* and *Ms.* to Lang Communications. Although the staff remained the same, *Sassy* responded to its third publisher in as many years with some major changes. In 1991, Jane Pratt told the *Orange County Register* that *Sassy* had "toned down its frank approach to sex." She further explained, "You want to give information about AIDS, pregnancy, whatever. Yet we can't come out and say they're having sex. We've learned to be really careful about how we present information."[45] *Sassy* was also branching out by spending more time exploring other social issues. The magazine offered investigative reports on subjects ranging from teen crime to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, expressing political opinions and encouraging readers to do the same. *Sassy* changed the editorial bent of the typical teen magazine by allowing the reader to have a more direct role in its production. Almost every feature in the magazine encouraged girls to write in with their comments. The monthly "Letter from the Editor" that opened the magazine always explained the job of one

staff member, encouraging readers to learn more about the process of magazine production. Every issue featured "Stuff You Wrote," a page of poems and thoughts sent in by teen girl readers. Additionally, beginning in 1989, *Sassy* offered an annual "Reader-Produced Issue" that allowed girls from across the country to design an entire issue. The magazine differentiated itself from the major players in the market by empowering its readership to understand how the process of magazine production works, and to see themselves as the focus of that process.

Sassy had a direct influence on the development of features and modes of address in the top three teen magazines. As *Sassy*'s readership numbers climbed, *Seventeen*, *YM* and *Teen* all looked to the magazine for inspiration on how to better connect with their readers. Although the top three titles were firmly entrenched, the nature of the youth market dictates that readership changes on a regular basis. *Sassy*'s different approach to reaching the teen girl market represented a threat that the top three could not afford to ignore. The editors at *Sassy* actually documented this process in a feature designed to address advertisers in the October 1989 issue. In this three-page section, the editors enumerated their monthly columns, feature stories, and style ideas that had been copied directly or offered in slightly different versions by the top three sellers at later dates. The editors argued that advertisers who wanted to connect with cutting-edge readers should get them at the source: a cutting-edge publication. They warned advertisers that, "Our competition has, on frequent occasion, chosen to imitate rather than innovate … Just make sure that you're paying for the real thing."[46] It's impossible to determine the success of any of the magazine's individual efforts with advertisers, but *Sassy*'s problems with ad sales continued throughout its run.

One aspect of *Sassy*'s editorial mission that was never copied by the top three titles on the market was the magazine's coverage of the Riot Grrrl movement. The mainstream press began to cover Riot Grrrl in earnest in 1993, but even then magazines like *Seventeen* only wrote about the movement to report that it was over.[47] *Sassy* wrote about Riot Grrrl as early as 1991, in a supportive and encouraging context. The magazine covered girl bands and the punk music scene, encouraging readers to support the movement's message of empowerment. By 1992, *Sassy* had added Zine of the Month to its regular features, encouraging readers to send away for independently produced magazines on various topics, often produced within the Riot Grrrl movement.

While their coverage and support of Riot Grrrl helped to define *Sassy* as an "alternative" publication, they had difficulty expanding their readership and increasing advertising sales.[48] In 1994, Lang sold the publication to Peterson Publishing, the company that published *Teen* magazine. Peterson fired the existing staff, and brought the message of *Sassy* in line with its longstanding youth market publication. No longer an "alternative" title, the revamped *Sassy* featured a tone and style much more similar to the top three titles in the market. The new *Sassy* lost readership quickly, and went bankrupt by 1996.

Sassy's history with the teen girl market is particularly interesting because it suggests that the market for teen girls magazines had trouble supporting product differentiation, and additionally that the size of the market was limited, able to keep only a small number of titles afloat. Advertisers responded to the needs of adult advocacy groups rather than the teen girl readership, effectively forcing *Sassy* to change its approach to the discussion of sex and sexuality. The content of teen girls' magazines then, was surveilled and controlled by outside

forces that prevailed upon editorial staff to convey messages of "appropriate" femininity, primarily the idea that sexual activity is reserved for adults.

These factors that are at play in the rise and fall of *Sassy*'s alternative voice on the magazine publishing scene appear to have lost their direct relevance in the market. Beginning in 1997, with the launch of *Teen People*, a new trend emerged in the teen girls' magazine market. *Teen People* debuted to high numbers, capitalizing on the continuously developing culture of youth celebrity in other media industries, including music, film, and television.[49] The magazine served as a sister publication to *People* magazine, aimed at an older demographic, and operated with lower overhead because of its ability to share content with the established celebrity and cultural affairs magazine. Major women's magazines began to launch teen imprints to develop a similar relationship, designed to target a young audience that would then "graduate" to the title aimed at adult women. *CosmoGirl!* launched in 1999, designed to lead young readers into *Cosmopolitan* magazine, aimed at an 18-46-year-old female readership.

The continuous introduction of new titles aimed at teen girl readers has forced some industry standards out of the market. *Elle Girl* was introduced on the heels of *CosmoGirl!* in 2001, hoping to establish a market that would eventually become a readership for *Elle*. The debut of *Elle* from Hachette Filipacchi Media U.S. led to the demise of market stalwart *Teen* magazine, whose corporate parent Primedia Inc ceased publication in 2002.[50] *Teen Vogue*, which launched in 2003, is the most recent addition to the group of publication imprints, and during its initial run corporate parent Conde Nast Publications was simultaneously marketing *YM* to the teen girl market. With the initial success of Teen Vogue, the publisher subsumed *YM*'s assets, including its website, and transferred all of the existing subscribers to *Teen*

Vogue.[51] *YM*'s market position had been declining steadily since the mid-1990s, adversely affected by the introduction of multiple new publications aimed at the same market segment. As of 2008, *Seventeen* is the only remaining player in the teen girl magazine market that has been on newsstands for more than fifty years.[52]

Teen Vogue represents a significant change to the marketplace, perhaps more so than any of the other new titles. In the strictest sense, *Teen Vogue* is not a new version of *YM*, but for all intents and purposes, what remains of the latter publication has become the former. This represents a shift from the traditional ideals guiding teen magazines' address to readers. For nearly a half-century, *YM* broached discussions of sex in a vague and guarded manner, if at all, focusing more on the dangers related to teen girls' sexuality (particularly rape, incest, and sexual harassment) than any other factor.[53] The magazine was replaced by *Teen Vogue*, an imprint of a magazine aimed at adult women that utilizes the same approach to teen readers that it does to adult ones. *Teen Vogue* discusses issues related to sex and sexuality in a frank and open manner, appealing to young women as rational adults, capable of making informed decisions. In fact, the magazine's focus on the body has drawn some criticism, but not from the same conservative advocacy groups that targeted *Sassy*. In a 2003 article, *USA Today* writer Laura Vanderkam singled out *Teen Vogue* as a magazine that "hawk[s] fake girl power" by marketing revealing clothing to young women as an external demonstration that they are independent risk-takers.[54] Vanderkam argues that the current spate of teen girls' magazines focus solely on fashion and beauty issues, targeting Generation Y girls as consumers rather than as citizens. Vanderkam explains, "These 'zines have scrapped the old model of making girls feel fat and ugly so they'd buy the advertisers' products. Today's teens wouldn't stand for that. So now the 'zines keep girls reading by preaching a new gospel: Girl

power goes to the mall."[55] Magazines aimed at this demographic have always featured a heavy focus on advertising, but Vanderkam singles out the new breed for criticism based on the way that they position the terms of individual empowerment firmly within the realm of conspicuous consumption.[56]

Other new titles on the teen girls' magazine scene include *Lucky* and *Twist*. *Lucky*, also known as the "magazine for girls who love to shop" is explicitly advertiser-focused, appealing to its readership very directly as consumers. When the magazine launched in 2000, it was described by an editor at a competing publication as, "A magazine that sees the world as 'a series of products to be consumed'."[57] The magazine contains little editorial content, focusing on the display of products and offering information on where to buy them. By 2003, however, *Lucky* began to feature teen stars on the cover (the September issue that year features Mandy Moore) to appeal to the youth market more directly. *Advertising Age* named *Lucky* "Magazine of the Year" in 2003, applauding the market innovator for finding a way to avoid the typical women's magazine mix of content with advertising by focusing almost solely (and very profitably) on the advertising. *Twist*, aimed at the 12 to 17-year-old age bracket claims to "celebrate real teenage girls as they are"[58] and offers celebrity gossip, fashion, and beauty advice for young women. *Twist* came on the scene in 1999, and although it has not developed extensive readership numbers, it has managed to stay in business with content that is relatively undifferentiated from all of the major market competitors.

Since the launch of *CosmoGirl!* in 1999, the teen girls' magazine market has shown continuous expansion in terms of the number of titles and the size of readership. The current titles in the market are essentially undifferentiated, offering very similar content to a narrow segment of the market. Dawn Currie's study of teen girls magazines indicated findings that

the majority of teen girls who read the top three sellers are Caucasians aged 13 to 16 years old.[59] The consequence of this industrial formation has thus far been the closure of two major titles (*Teen* and *YM*) and the impetus for market alternatives to serve the ignored segments of the teen girl demographic. A number of alternatives have developed since the early 1990s. *New Moon* and *blue jean* are two examples of independent magazines that have developed to combat the consumerist representations of youth in advertiser-supported publications, and I discuss these alternatives in Chapter Four. The main factors driving the continuing expansion of the teen girls' magazine market include the Generation Y population boom, the capability of established women's magazines of efficiently tapping into the youth market, and the growth of the Internet as an alternative and supplement to paper-based magazines and news sources.

Wired Girl: Teen Magazines Go Online

In 1994, user-friendly web browsers including Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer were making the Internet accessible in homes and workplaces across the country. As the new communication technology caught on, newspapers and magazines grew increasingly worried about the havoc that it could wreak on their subscriber bases. Simultaneously, hundreds of companies invested in the development of websites, unsure of how the Internet could be used to turn a profit, but certain that it was too valuable an opportunity to pass up. The Internet established new forms of community, organized around websites of central concern. Some of these new communities were particularly organized around the interests and activities of teenage girls. Although literally hundreds of websites were developed to address and appeal to teen girl web surfers, I focus on three examples of sites that developed early and have enjoyed major success with the teen girl market: gurl.com,

alloy.com, and delias.com. It is difficult to measure the traffic and demographic success of websites, and thus it is not my contention that these are the three most popular websites targeting teenage girls. These three sites have developed from different missions and philosophies and have enjoyed success over a significant (in the world of the Internet) amount of time. At various points, they have cross-promoted each other and been held under common ownership. All three of these sites are recognized market leaders in reaching Generation Y, with a particular focus on the teen girl demographic. The success of these sites spurred innovation in the paper-based publishing industry; in 1998, the majority of teen girls' magazines did not operate corresponding websites.[60] By 2000, all of the major paper-based titles had converted to offering interactive web sites with frequently updated content.[61]

gURL: A Place for Girls in Cyberspace

In 1996, www.gURL.com was specifically developed as an online magazine that would mimic and subvert the teen magazine format. Co-creators Esther Drill, Rebecca Odes, and Heather McDonald recognized that young girls respond to popular magazines about beauty, style, and pop culture, and they sought to create a feminist space for these concerns online. The website carries features that are similar to the most popular magazines for adolescent girls, but by creating the site as a girl "community," in which young girls actively voice their opinions and offer each other advice, the co-creators attempted to use the specific capabilities of the medium to empower young women.[62] In a nod to that idea, the name "gURL" appears to be an attempt to take the idea of location on the web (URL) and feminize it by placing a "g" in front of it. In other words, gURL.com is an online space specifically designated for girls.

The stated purpose of gURL.com is to provide a community space for girls online, where they can comfortably discuss all of the issues that affect their lives. The basic services it provides include: news updates, polls, message boards on selected topics, featured web sites, games, and web page hosting. To access some of these services, it is necessary to become a member because gURL.com attempts to protect its community space by only making chat available to registered users. The membership registration includes the strong suggestion that members should establish a screen-name alias. The relative anonymity that this provides facilitates discussion of controversial or difficult topics. In *Life on the Screen*, an early book about identity and Internet communication, Sherry Turkle argues that individuals can escape their physical characteristics and perform multiple identities through online interactions.[63] gURL.com emphasizes the material experience of gender and age, and so it doesn't encourage the freedoms that Turkle theorizes so much as it creates a space in which the implications and limitations of identity can be explored. gURL.com allows for relative anonymity, which encourages users to speak their minds and engage with uncomfortable and even controversial topics, but it does not create a fantasy space in which users actively ignore or deny their physical realities.[64]

Although it is difficult to measure the exact audience of a website, in 2002 Primedia estimated that gURL.com had "over three million registered users."[65] The site has also been successful enough to spin off in several directions. Drill, Odes, and McDonald have published two spin-off books that integrate information from the website. *Deal With It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain and Life as a gURL* (1999) and *The Looks Book: A Whole New Approach to Beauty, Body Image, and Style* (2002) are being positioned as contemporary replacements for *Our Bodies, Ourselves.*[66] The books are popular, critically

acclaimed, and they reiterate the site's philosophy of creating a healthy outlook for teenage girls. gURL.com is considered by many to be one of the most popular destination sites for adolescent girls.[67]

In 2001, Primedia Inc., at that time a corporate parent of *Seventeen* magazine, acquired gURL.com from Delia's. Delia's had been operating gurl.com as a site that was complementary to its own site, a move that was advantageous for the company because gurl.com was more community-based than commodity-based. Primedia purchased the site to complement its paper-based youth magazine titles including *Sixteen*, *Seventeen*, *Teen*, *Tiger Beat* and *Bop*.[68] By early 2003, Primedia had developed a cross-promotional alliance between *Seventeen* and gurl.com, in which gURL.com produced a fitness section of segment for *Seventeen* magazine each month, and *Seventeen* developed a strong presence on the gURL.com website (including a link that would allow users to subscribe to the magazine).[69] This alliance, arguably designed to help the aging paper-based publication remain relevant to young, hip readers was extinguished when company ownership was shuffled again. Primedia put *Seventeen* up for sale in 2003; Hearst Publications outbid several suitors to become the new owner, putting an end to the cross-promotional alliance.

It's possible to gauge some of the traffic flow to gURL.com by looking at other major websites that offer links to it. For example, there is a link to gURL.com from The Girls Project Online (www.girlsprojectonline.com), a feminist, federally funded site that archives media materials relevant to adolescent girls and their development. gURL.com appears to be one of the only commercial sites that is linked from this location. Additionally, links to gURL.com are available from: GirlZone, Grrls Online, Teen Scene, and *Bust* magazine's "Girl Wide Web." Overall, the sites that link to gURL are either youth-oriented sites,

feminist sites, or both. Significantly, various academic women's studies programs link to the site, as does Body Image Activists.[70] This indicates that the site is perceived as a positive space, one that encourages young women to develop a healthy body image. The site also functions as a web page host, so each individual web page is linked to gURL.com. The site furthers this association by frequently featuring the different web pages of its members, using a brief description to encourage "gURLs" to check out each other's sites. From www.gURL.com/members/bbs, it is possible to search member sites randomly, or by screen-name, title, or content. The sites that are linked to gURL.com give a clearer picture of how the site is perceived on the web by other, related communities.

Delia's: Where "Girls Rule"

Of course, not all of the websites developed for teen girl communities have explicit missions of feminist empowerment. Delias.com (one-time owner of gurl.com) began in catalog form and launched as a website in 1998. Delia's has trumpeted itself as the leading direct marketer to Generation Y, and built a website to target that demographic with content that would build the consumer base for its direct mail catalogs. Originally, Delia's targeted their website at girls between the ages of 10 and 24.[71] By 2000, the company had narrowed their focus to the 12 to 17-year-old demographic, reporting 6.75 million customers on a housefile of 12.3 million.[72] This means that they have had transactions with more than twelve million customers, over half of which were active in 2000. Spurred by the success, Delia's launched retail stores in 2001, operating 43 stores nationally by 2002.[73] Delia's spokesperson Beth Kressley has credited the company's success with teenage girls to their ability to act as a trendsetter, and their continual emphasis on the "girls rule" message of Girl Power, in which the website and catalog encourage young women to express themselves through consumer

products. The Delia's catalog is not unlike the contemporary teen magazines discussed in the previous segment; it presents teen girl individualism and empowerment in terms of fashion and consumption. Further, it utilizes teen celebrity endorsements and photo spreads to lend legitimacy to its cutting edge reputation.

Since 1998, Delia's has operated as a part of iTurf, a network of related sites that attempt to hit the same target audience with differentiated content. Delia's targets teen girls with the "Three Cs" – commerce, community, and content.[74] Commerce is the underlying focus, as Delia's markets clothing and accessories to the teen demographic. Delias.com provides a community space for the target market, and within this space Delia's provides related content (articles and regular features) to ensure that its target market is actively engaged with the website. The company has enjoyed greater retail success on the web than many others, primarily because it does not rely solely on the website for its revenue. The major sales for the direct marketer come from the catalog business, which predates the website and continues to operate in 2005. Instead, Delia's has used the web to complement their catalog business, bringing in new subscribers through the site.

Alloy and Generation Y

Alloy.com is similar to Delia's in several respects. Alloy also runs a mail-order catalog business, which launched simultaneously with its website in 1996.[75] Alloy.com bills itself as a "leading Internet destination and content provider for Generation Y."[76] While Alloy is not built on a mission of teen girl empowerment (as public citizens or as consumer citizens) it has differentiated its product through the acquisition of feminist media. In 2001, Alloy purchased Girl Press LLC, a small company that publishes empowering books for teenage girls.[77] It has also been operated as part of the iTurf network of sites, and it has

utilized the possibilities of cross-promotion for reaching the teen girl market. In 2004, for example, Alloy partnered with *Elle Girl* in a cross-promotional effort to bring more hits to the alloy.com site and more readers to the magazine. This deal was initiated based on the two parties' interest in the same demographic, rather than as a consequence of shared ownership. In 2004, Alloy claimed that their monthly catalog had a reach of five million teen girls.[78] The cross-promotion deal with *Elle Girl* promised to offer Alloy the reach and editorial voice of a magazine, and to offer *Elle Girl* access to Alloy's extensive subscriber list and significant number of online page views. The similarities between the target demographic and marketing capabilities of Delia's and Alloy resulted in Alloy's acquisition of Delia's in 2003.[79]

As a website targeting Generation Y, Alloy.com is of particular interest because of its overt ties to the teenage market research industry. Alloy runs 360 Youth, a company that "stages marketing events for Generation Y."[80] The company created a "viral Web and offline marketing program" that successfully launched recording artist Fefe Dobson for Island Def Jam Records.[81] Through the Alloy website, teens were allowed to compete, getting as many people from their school as possible to register on the site in order to win a free performance from the artist. The contest resulted in "more than 20 million in-school location media impressions in 357 schools nationwide; and 180,000 custom e-mails sent to teens from the 360 youth database,"[82] an impressive outcome for a relatively inexpensive promotion. This anecdote reveals the reach of Alloy.com in the contemporary media environment, and its role as a trendsetter among its subscribers.

The operations of gURL, Delia's, and Alloy illustrate two basic principles that underlie the production of media products for contemporary teenage girls. The first of these principles is the importance of cross-promotion. These three corporate-controlled websites

have all been partnered with each other in some form during their brief existences, either through the iTurf network or through mergers. These sites have all worked to cross-promote paper-based formats, including catalogs (Delia's and Alloy), teen girls' magazines (*Seventeen*, *Elle Girl*), and books (the gURL.com books, Girl Press LLC). Their success in the marketplace is also due to the emphasis that all three sites have placed on the second underlying principle: branding. All three sites have branded themselves as destination locations on the web for Generation Y; although they offer distinct content, they are all recognized trendsetters for the teen market demographic and they focus on this market above all else.

Teen TV: Teenage Girls and Broadcast Television

Perhaps more than any other medium, broadcast television has paid the least amount of attention to the teen girl audience. Broadcasters have typically sought the largest possible audiences, cutting across age and gender demographics. For a brief period during the 1960s, ABC (the third place network) attempted to target teenage girls with shows that featured teen girl protagonists.[83] These included *The Patty Duke Show* (1963-1966), *Karen* (1964-1965), *Gidget* (1965-1966), and *Tammy* (1965-1966). Media historian Moya Luckett has argued that prior to *The Patty Duke Show* most television series about adolescents focused on the male perspective, and the tide of girl-centered series from ABC formed a response to that trend.[84] This was part of the network's effort to market itself as the youth network, and it was ultimately unsuccessful because the majority of ABC's youth-oriented sitcoms failed to connect with audiences and thus garnered low ratings. Historian Aniko Bodroghkozy has argued that the television industry sustained a complex relationship with the youth audience during the 1960s because, while the industry values the youth market as potential consumers,

broadcasters were unwilling to engage with social and political controversies of import to youth. Along these lines, she argues that these girl-centered sitcoms from ABC failed because they were "clean teen" shows, representing young women "in ways that defused the 'threat' of youth rebellion."[85] She argues that broadcast television did legitimately engage the counterculture, but ABC's programming for teen girls was not a part of that phenomenon. By 1966, ABC had cancelled all of their girl-centered sitcoms, and altered its strategy to focus more straightforwardly on the young family audience. Until the 1990s, this experiment represented broadcast network television's most sustained flirtation with the teen girl audience during primetime, primarily due to industry imperatives that dictate broadcast television must appeal to broad audience demographics.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the broadcast networks approached the teen girl audience with renewed interest. The Fox Network, which launched in 1986, developed one of its first hit series in *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-1999), a show that targeted teen girl viewers. The success of *90210* on Fox led to the development of the NBC sitcom *Blossom* (1991-1995), a situation comedy focused on a gifted teenage girl and her single-parent family. NBC had difficulty scheduling *Blossom*. They introduced it as a mid-season replacement in 1991, but after airing it for a few weeks, pulled it until the following season. Mary Kearney has cited *Blossom* as the first girl sitcom of the 1990s, analyzing the ways that the sitcom engaged with feminist themes related to equal rights, individual empowerment, and self-expression through both the text of the show and the star's (Mayim Bialik) persona in promotional activities.[86] Although the audience was never stable, the show did remain on the air for several seasons, shifting slowly from a girl-centered sitcom into a more typical family sitcom with an ensemble cast.

My So-Called Life (*MSCL*) is one of the most fondly remembered teen television shows from a broadcast network, and it too faced multiple trials because of low ratings. The hour-long drama featured a teen girl protagonist, fifteen-year-old Angela Chase, experiencing a painful adolescence. The show was originally produced as a midseason replacement in 1993, but didn't make it to air until 1994 because ABC was unsure of how to market it. The network prevailed upon producers Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick to rework the balance between teen and adult-centered content on the show so that its teenage protagonist wouldn't alienate adult viewers.[87] While the producers complied, the show had difficulty finding an audience. ABC placed it in a Thursday evening timeslot against *Friends* and *Mad About You*, two situation comedies on NBC that were very popular with younger audiences. In discussing the cancellation of *MSCL*, which became official in May 1995 following a four-month hiatus, ABC President of Entertainment Stu Bloomberg asserted that the show "only got teenage girls"[88] (an audience of around nine million viewers). The network decided that it had no place for a critically acclaimed show with such a limited audience, because it was seeking larger audiences across wider demographic groups.

Fox, a newer network seeking to develop a competitive edge, demonstrated far more interest in targeting specific audiences, including young women. Fox achieved a large amount of its growth when the U.S. government agreed to make it exempt from the financial interest and syndication rules (Fin-Syn) that dictated the market behaviors of broadcast television networks. The big three networks, NBC, CBS, and ABC were only allowed to produce a small percentage of their own programming because the financial interest rule dictated that they had to seek content from outside producers, thus ensuring that the networks would not hold too much control over television content. In addition, the syndication rule

stipulated that when a program went into syndication, the ownership of that program would revert to the producer, and that the network would not profit from its sale. These rules held the big three networks in check, but Fox successfully lobbied for an exemption, based on the network's small size (when it launched, its owned and operated stations reached less than 20% of the national audience and it had few affiliates).[89] The FCC determined that Fox would provide new competition for the existing networks, and that an exemption from the Fin-Syn rules would foster that competition. Fox was then able to use Twentieth Century Fox Film and Television studios to produce its own television programming, cutting the costs it would have incurred by seeking series from independent producers. Further, Fox was able to profit off of the syndicated success of its own series.

During its early years, Fox strategically targeted specific demographics in order to gain advertisers and viewers. The network did not attempt to launch itself as though it were on equal competitive footing with the big three broadcast networks. Instead, Fox experimented with targeting audiences that were underserved, or rarely served specifically by the big three. As Kristal Brent Zook has demonstrated in *Color By Fox*, the network successfully targeted African-American viewers from the late 1980s into the 1990s with shows including *In Living Color* (1990-1994), *Martin* (1992-1997), *Living Single* (1993-1998), and *Roc* (1991-1994).[90] Fox also targeted working class viewers with the reality series *COPS* (1989-Present) and the edgy sitcom *Married...With Children* (1987-1997). *Beverly Hills, 90210* debuted in 1990, becoming the centerpiece of the network's appeal to teenage viewers and also the network's first successful hour-long drama. Series including *Melrose Place* (1992-1999), *Models Inc* (1994-1995), and *Party of Five* (1994-2000) also played into this market strategy for the network.

Beverly Hills, 90210 and *Party of Five* were both series that opened up new kinds of representations for teenage girls on television. Unlike ABC's strategy during the 1960s, Fox chose to invest in dramas rather than sitcoms for the teen girl audience, and the strategy paid off in loyal viewership from the 12 to 24-year-old demographic.[91] Over the course of ten seasons, *90210* offered storylines about teen drug and alcohol abuse, incest, and date rape, alongside continuing narratives that involved romantic and familial relationships. The show originally centered on Brandon (Jason Priestley) and Brenda Walsh (Shannon Doherty), twin siblings from Minnesota who were transplanted to Beverly Hills early in their high school years. This premise allowed for a clash between Midwestern "traditional" values and the "superficial" consumer culture of 1990s Southern California. Additionally, the characterization of Brandon and Brenda as twins was the key to setting up "equal rights" discussions in the Walsh household. Brenda would frequently demand the same rights and responsibilities that were offered to Brandon by their parents, on the basis of their shared age. During the initial seasons, Brenda was a forthright feminist, frequently arguing that gender distinctions should hold no sway in the household.[92] During the ten years that the series remained on the air, multiple female characters were introduced into the regular cast, at times advocating feminist agendas. The position of the series within the genre of melodrama (traditionally seen as a "women's" genre) supported the development of a spectrum of assertive, empowered female characters.

Party of Five similarly developed more than one strong female character. This ensemble drama centered on five children who were orphaned when their parents died in a car crash. The eldest son, Charlie Salinger (Matthew Fox), was charged with raising his four younger siblings. Similar to *90210*, the show dealt seriously with social issues including

death, teen drug abuse, sexual harassment, and cancer. The show's teen audience was courted during the first two seasons by the focus on storylines involving Bailey (Scott Wolf) and Julia (Neve Campbell), the two teenaged members of the Salinger household. Julia's character was a gifted student who would eventually attend Stanford; she was also an overt feminist who left Northern California to work for the National Organization for Women at the close of the series.[93] During seasons two and three, Bailey dated Sarah (Jennifer Love Hewitt), an intelligent and free-spirited character who eventually developed her own storylines on the series, separate from Bailey's, leading to a 1999 Fox spin-off, *Time of Your Life*, in which she became the protagonist. Claudia, the second-youngest member of the Salinger clan, was also a main character; her storylines initially related to the difficulties of early adolescence in a household with no real authority figures, but she was also portrayed as a talented musician who aspired to be a career violinist. The melodramatic conventions of the series helped to develop the young Salinger women as strong female characters that overcame obstacles in their personal and professional lives each week

These shows are merely two examples of the series developed by Fox to appeal to the teenage audience; it is not my contention that they served to create feminist viewers, merely that they opened up spaces for identification among teen girl viewers that had not previously existed. These shows were produced and allowed to develop because of the particular strategic position of the Fox network within the broadcast television industry. *90210* and *Party of Five* remained on the air over the course of many seasons with audience shares that were much lower than those of the big three networks, surviving because they attracted the teen girl market demographic. A comparison between *Party of Five* and the ABC series *MSCL* illuminates this relationship. At the start of the 1994 television season, ABC was the

first place network among viewers of all demographics, and Fox was in fourth place.[94] *Party of Five* debuted on Fox to an even smaller audience than *MSCL* found on ABC, and faced the threat of impending cancellation during its entire first season. At the end of the season *TV Guide* (owned by News Corp., which also owns the Fox Network) ran a feature asking readers to vote for the Fox Network show they would most like to see continue for a second season. *Party of Five* won the reader poll, and Fox renewed it.[95] In contrast, *MSCL* fans mobilized the largest Internet campaign that had ever been developed up to that point, devoted to saving their series. The campaign, Operation Life Support, raised money from fans that contacted the site, and then used the funds to buy ads in trade magazines, supporting the show's renewal.[96] Arguably, their efforts were a more impressive demonstration of fan loyalty and support, but they ultimately failed, primarily because of the market position of ABC in relation to the Fox Network. Fox had an incentive to capitalize on specific market segments, whereas at that time, ABC did not.

In 1993, when the FCC announced the expiration of the Fin-Syn rules for the entire broadcast television industry, two major media corporations announced their intent to follow Fox's example and begin new networks. The first was Warner Bros, announcing the launch of the WB network with television series developed at its own studios. The second was UPN (United Paramount Network) designed to utilize product from Paramount Film and Television Studios. In their economic analysis of the market entry of these new players, Larry Collette and Barry R. Litman argue, "UPN and the WB emerged during a disquieting period of disequilibrium in the television industry wrought by a mixture of technological transformation, intra-industry changes, and legislative mandate."[97] Both of these new networks launched within days of each other in January of 1995, operating on a smaller scale

than the Big Four broadcast networks, and reaching smaller audiences through their owned & operated stations and affiliates.

As these new networks struggled to take off, it was clear that they would need to define their target audiences more specifically than the major broadcast networks. The WB began as a joint venture between Time Warner, the Tribune Company, and the network's founder Jamie Kellner. At launch, it reached nearly 55% of the national audience, mostly with new stations in medium-sized markets.[98] The WB literally took pages from the Fox network playbook, rolling out new programming very slowly, and initially targeting African-American audiences with shows like *The Wayans Bros.* (1995-1999) and *Smart Guy* (1997-1999).[99] The WB purchased *Sister, Sister*, a sitcom about African American teenage twin sisters from ABC where it had aired for one season. This family-oriented program that focused on the girls' trials and tribulations of adolescence provided one of the network's early building blocks, remaining on the air until 1999. The series provides a tangible example of how the WB stepped in to pick up audience segments that were neglected by major broadcast networks, because even though the show's viewership declined between the move from ABC to the WB, the netlet continued to renew it based on its demographic reach. The WB's mimicking of early Fox strategies extended to an attempt at targeting working class families with *Unhappily Ever After* (1995-1999) from Ron Leavitt, producer of the early Fox hit, *Married...With Children.* Neither of these early efforts were particular ratings successes, but the WB's *7th Heaven* (1996-2007) provided a modest hit as a family drama, particularly popular with younger audiences.[100] Even from the beginning, the WB's Kellner (who formerly worked with *The Simpsons* and *Beverly Hills, 90210* at Fox) recognized the necessity of establishing the WB as a brand name in the television industry.[101] In order to

accomplish this, the WB chose Michigan J. Frog (a character from a 1955 Warner Bros. cartoon) as the network mascot, and they used images of the Warner Bros studio to establish a sense of place for the network. Each night of programming began and ended with images of the studio, and promotional efforts for the network were also located in recognizable studio space. In these promotions, characters from the WB's shows co-mingled, signifying that these characters exist in a television universe in which it's possible for all of them to know each and other and spend time together. This strategy attempted to brand the network for viewers as a place to spend an entire evening (primetime programming begins with voice-over narration that announces, "Welcome to the WB's Monday Night," etc.) rather than a channel on which to watch a particular show. Over time, this branding strategy became devoted to defining the WB as the youth network, and its various features were employed to successfully market the network to this demographic.

The WB began to build a base of shows aimed at teenage viewers, introducing first *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), then *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), and then *Felicity* (1998-2002) to lure in both young viewers and advertisers who were particularly eager to reach this market. Media scholar Lynn Schofield Clark has documented the solidification of the network's strategy to target youth audiences, which made the WB the top network for teenage viewers by 1998 (only three years after its launch), with a 32% increase in viewers ages 12 to 17 during the 1997-1998 season alone.[102] By fall of 1998, the WB had solidified a strategy of programming for the young female audience (approximately age 12-24 years old) with a high concentration of teenage girls. Although their ratings shares were much smaller than the major networks, the WB sold their viewers to advertisers on the basis of "quality," or the network's ability to deliver this desirable group of consumers.

In their analysis of the WB's entry into the broadcast television market, Collette and Litman explain that, "As the number of networks rises, the number of viewers a new entrant can expect to attract by duplicating programming of incumbent networks will decline, thus making the most profitable strategy one in which a new program type is offered."[103] The WB network's entry into the marketplace exhibits a couple of traits that bear this out. The first is the network's primary focus on the teen drama, a genre that was nearly irrelevant on the major broadcast networks when the WB began this strategy. The second is the WB's integration of product placement and cross-promotions stemming from its corporate ownership by Time Warner, an economic strategy that makes the network's focus on the teenage girl audience distinct from any previous approach of a broadcast television network. Further, as I will discuss below, the WB's efforts at cross-promotion eventually added to its branding strategy, helping to secure a perception of the WB as a broadcast network with teen-focused program content, advertisements, and produce tie-ins.

By 1999, the WB was programming for the young female audience four out of five nights per week, targeting this market consistently.[104] The WB produced a number of series with strong female leads, contributing heavily to circulated notions of Girl Power." Examples of this strategy include series about young women with magical/mystical powers, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed (*1998-2006), as well as dramatic series featuring independent and intelligent female leads, including *Felicity* (1998-2002) and *Gilmore Girls* (2001-2007). The network has also used the teen male melodrama to strategically appeal to the young female market; examples of this strategy include *Dawson's Creek*, *Smallville* (2001-present), *Everwood* (2002-2006) and *One Tree Hill* (2003-present). These series feature teen male protagonists and are aimed at teen viewers as a whole, rather than teen girls

specifically. However, the production and the promotion of these series indicate the WB's continual focus on the teen girl audience. *Smallville* is an action-adventure show about a young Clark Kent/Superman, which the WB has consistently promoted as a romantic drama, in which Clark is entangled in a new passion-related dilemma every week.[105] Although *Everwood* ostensibly focuses on teenage Ephram and his family, the continuing narrative thread of the show over the course of its first three seasons has been the high school romance of Ephram and Amy, a dependable draw for teen girl viewers. *One Tree Hill* began life as a basketball drama, focused on lead actor Chad Michael Murray, who had previously been featured in the first two seasons of *Gilmore Girls*. Although the show has evolved into a more straightforward melodrama with less emphasis on sports, Murray's popularity among *Gilmore Girls'* viewers was certainly a boon to the initial success of the newer series. The WB has also experimented with different program genres. While most of their primetime series that target the teen audience are hour-long dramas, in 2002 they added a sitcom, *What I Like About You*, about a woman in her twenties raising her teenage sister. Again, this format was designed to appeal to a slightly broader audience (a young female demographic that skews older than typical WB programming, 12-38-year olds) while maintaining the existing base of teen girl viewers (promotions focus heavily on Amanda Bynes, the sitcom's recognizable teen star).[106]

The WB's focused targeting strategy has been successful on several levels. First, the network draws dependable ad revenue from marketing to this demographic. Second, it has pioneered synergistic strategies, using the popularity of its television series among young people to market other Time Warner products to them, particularly music.[107] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Felicity*, and *One Tree Hill* are all hour-long dramas that

have utilized music tie-ins. Kay Dickinson has analyzed the unprecedented amount of music licensing employed by the WB's teen dramas, explaining that for a single hour of programming the network might license up to ten songs, most of these originating with Time Warner artists.[108] *One Tree Hill* has actually integrated Time Warner artists into series storylines, featuring live music performances from bands that record on the Time Warner label.[109] This strategy is used to launch new acts, but it also can be used to create guest appearances for already-popular acts, drawing new viewers into the series. In 2005, *One Tree Hill* took this promotional push one step further by launching a national concert tour featuring series' star, Bethany Joy Lenz. The tour also included Michelle Branch and the Wreckers, Gavin DeGraw, and Tyler Hilton, and was promoted continuously through storylines on the series during spring 2005. The most common strategy, however, is a promotional snippet that the network includes at the end of a television program, in exchange for a break on licensing fees.[110] The network plays a brief segment of a song (or songs) featured in the episode over the image of the featured artist's CD cover. This aspect of the WB's branding strategy has helped to synergistically promote Time Warner products, but it has also added to individual series' reputation as teen trendsetters, abetting the WB's reputation as a destination for youth viewers. In addition, Lynn Schofield Clark has noted that programs developed for broadcast on the WB are later licensed to other outlets within the Time Warner company for syndication (*Dawson's Creek* has aired on TBS, *Charmed* on TNT, etc.). This approach helps to ensure the profitability of the network's programming as a whole.

The network's promotional strategies are not limited to cross-promotions within the Time Warner family, however. The WB has also succeeded in defraying costs through pioneering program production financing strategies. *Gilmore Girls*, for example, was the first

series developed by the Family Friendly Forum, a production group financed by corporate interests including Proctor & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson, and other major television advertisers. Another example would be the summer series *Young Americans*, from 2000, which heavily integrated product placement from the Coca-Cola company, its major sponsor. Finally, the targeted demographic strategy was successful in terms of audience numbers. Teenage Research Unlimited has estimated that the WB was the second most popular network among teenage girls (after MTV) with approximately 15% of teenage girls naming it as their "favorite."[111] While the network never produced a bona fide hit, making it competitive with the Big Four, it originated multiple long-running shows that maintained sufficient popularity with the target audience to remain on the air, actually seeing more of its series enter syndication than any other network between 1995 and 2003.[112]

UPN invested more time and effort experimenting with different target audiences than has the WB. Their original launch was focused on the promotion of a new *Star Trek* series, *Voyager*. The *Star Trek* property is a Paramount franchise; its audience has been established for decades. The network's original strategy was to mobilize this group of viewers (men ages 18 to 34 years old) and build the audience from there.[113] Although it has been difficult to target audiences based on class distinctions, UPN attempted to solidify this strategy in 1995 by capitalizing on the national United Parcel Service (UPS) strike.[114] UPN came out in support of the striking workers, promoting a "UPN for UPS" campaign slogan in an attempt to draw new viewers and create a specific parallel between its programming and the working class lifestyle. WWE Smackdown became UPN's only dependable ratings-getter, and by 2000, UPN President Adam Ware announced that the network had found its niche audience of

young male viewers.[115] Interestingly, many of the network's longer-running series have actually targeted teen girl viewers.

One of UPN's modest early successes targeted both young female and African-American audiences. *Moesha* (1996-2001), a situation comedy built around the established celebrity of teen pop star Brandy, made use of the young star's singing and acting talents. Brandy starred as Moesha, a teenage girl living in the suburbs, experiencing typical family-related angst. The series was originally developed for CBS, and UPN picked it up after the major network declined. Similarly, *Clueless* actually ran on ABC for its first season, and UPN picked it up after the major network declined its renewal. The series, based on a popular teen movie from Paramount studios, ran on UPN from 1997-1999. In 2001, UPN announced that it would purchase the rights to air *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* from the show's production company, 20th Century Fox, moving the series (and potentially its teen girl audience) from the WB to UPN. Although ratings for the series declined during the two seasons that it aired on UPN (2001-2003), this risky move brought UPN some notoriety and indicated the network's interest in targeting teen girl viewers. Beginning in 2003, network president Dawn Ostroff built young female viewership with the Tyra Banks reality series *America's Next Top Model* (2003-present) and the teen girl detective drama, *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007).

In January 2006, CBS Corporation and Time Warner announced their plans to shut down their competing broadcast networks, UPN and the WB, and combine their resources in The CW, targeting an audience of 18-34-year-olds. The venture was designed to complement the media holdings of each conglomerate while addressing a market inefficiency that resulted when their networks increasingly targeted the same audience of young female viewers. The CW planned its launch strategically to capitalize on the strengths of its partner companies, but

also on the lessons learned during the early years of UPN and the WB about the importance of network branding and target marketing. The new network premiered in September 2006 with a schedule cobbled together with the most successful programs from each of the former netlets. The WB contributed *Gilmore Girls*, *One Tree Hill*, and *Smallville*. The CW premiered with a new season of *America's Next Top Model* from UPN, as well as a new season of *Veronica Mars*. Although expectations were high, the new network failed to distinguish itself in the ratings during its first year. *Gossip Girl* (2007-present), a series about wealthy Manhattan teens, is the first breakout "hit" to emerge, and while the network is pleased with its notoriety and level of awareness among young viewers, it maintains low Nielsen ratings.[116] As of 2008, the CW has demonstrated a continued commitment to the young female audience, however; the new series announced for fall include an update of *Beverly Hills, 90210*,[117] featuring a new group of high school students, and *Surviving the Filthy Rich*, which is based on a popular series of young adult novels about wealthy teenage girls.

As with the WB and UPN before it, The CW values teen girl viewers in a manner unmatched by the major broadcast networks. Although Fox has flirted with the demographic again in recent years, with series including *Skin* and *Wonderfalls*, the network almost never gives a new series time to find an audience. Both *Skin* and *Wonderfalls* were cancelled after four episodes, an incredibly short period of time for audiences to find them and become invested.[118] The network's teen hit, *The O.C.* (2003-present) performed well from its debut and continues to draw a strong audience. Although the attitude about the value of the youth audience has changed at the major broadcast networks since Stu Bloomberg flippantly dismissed the teen girl audience, the success of the WB has created a situation in which the

other broadcast networks avoid the demographic because it is so effectively served by the netlet.

Girls on Film: The Feminization of the Youth Market for Movies

As discussed above, the WB's success with teen audiences was a useful tool in the cross-promotion of Time Warner music. Similarly, the success of the netlet's teen programming helped to create a crossover market for its teen stars. During the late 1990s, the WB developed its own star system, in which the teenage stars of WB programs also star in films produced or distributed by Warner Bros., with their weekly television series essentially serving as advertisements for the films. In 2003, the Warner Bros. movie, *What a Girl Wants*, launched in theaters with promotional help from star Amanda Bynes' weekly television series on the WB, *What I Like About You.* In 2005, the Warner Bros. movie *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* opened in theaters with a promotional launch from star Alexis Bledel's series *Gilmore Girls* on the WB. Beyond the cross-promotional capabilities of the TV network and film studio, Time Warner is vertically and horizontally integrated across media industries in multiple ways, giving it the capability of promoting films through online content (AOL), the release of a soundtrack album (multiple labels under Warner Music), and promotion on cable channels (TNT, TBS, etc.) to name a few.

Above and beyond the WB film/TV cross-promotions, the production of teen films exploded in the mid to late 1990s. Beginning with the success of the film *Clueless* in 1995, the youth market was viewed as a dependable demographic for lower budget, teen-themed entertainment.[119] The production of teen movies, in all genres, rose dramatically toward the late 1990s. There are several clear industry motives for targeting the teen girl audience. First, the WB's success with targeting the teen girl audience with television shows created an

opportunity to successfully market films to the same audience, as discussed above. Teen films are viewed by the industry as reliable investments, because they cost little to make and they hold appeal for the largest reliable movie-going audience. In *Generation Multiplex*, Timothy Shary argues that teen films of the 1990s helped to revive the industry as a whole when low budget features including *The Faculty*, *Never Been Kissed*, *She's All That*, and *Varsity Blues* became box office successes.[120] Second, as the Internet has caught on, audiences for film and television have steadily fragmented. Teenage boys have become less reliable ticket-buyers at the movies, and analysts argue that their entertainment spending is now more highly concentrated on video games and computer equipment. During this period of fragmentation, the teen girl audience has remained a reliable constant. Although marketers are still interested in reaching the teen boy demographic, increasingly they depend on teen girls to bring their boyfriends to a movie, rather than the other way around.[121] In 1997, Teenage Research Unlimited offered polling results that indicated Generation Y prefers going to the movies to any other leisure activity.[122] In a 2004 analysis of the teen girl audience phenomenon, Diane Brady argues that 10 to 18-year-old girls have become one of the most reliable segments of the moviegoing audience, making films including *The Princess Diaries*, *Freaky Friday*, and *Mean Girls* into hits.[123]

Third, teen movies attract product placement, which defrays the cost of their production and any potential risk for the studio. The teen girl audience is particularly attractive to advertisers, and teen films are viewed as one more avenue through which to reach the demographic. *Clueless*, in particular, which kicked off the current cycle of teen films aimed at young women, pointed to the possibilities for product placement and brand integration in a film. The narrative centers on a wealthy 16-year-old girl who is

hyperconscious about style, high fashion, and brand names. The teenagers in the movie each drive their own high-end vehicle, carry cell phones, and wear expensive designer clothing. The movie's popularity indicated that similar films might reach the same audience and effectively promote brand name goods.[124] By 2004, Warner Bros. was marketing the teen romantic comedy *A Cinderella Story*, which incorporates nine major brand tie-ins, including products from Eastman Kodak, Target, and Coca-Cola. The film's update of the classic fairytale replaced Cinderella's glass slipper with a Samsung wireless A500 cell phone, integrating the brand heavily into the film's narrative. Further, the studio's promotional campaign incorporated product tie-ins at Denny's Restaurants and Pottery Barn retail stores.[125] This kind of aggressive marketing campaign illustrates the ways that the film industry is attempting to exploit the teen audience, not just with cross-promotions of media products, but also with a wide range of goods and services.

A final reason for the increase in the production of teen films is expanding access to the global market. Hollywood studios view teen films as relatively inexpensive product that can be marketed abroad on the strength of the teen actors' star power, which is created through the international marketing of teen magazines, music, and television series. The importance of the global market became clear with the unbelievable success of *Titanic* in 1997. Director James Cameron's film was so far over budget by the time of its release that it was rumored to be the most expensive movie ever made. However, the movie defied expectations to become a blockbuster, grossing more than one billion dollars worldwide.[126] It was not only a success in the United States, but its nearly simultaneous release in multiple foreign countries ensured its profitability. *Titanic* was exhibited on 200 screens in China, which was believed to be the widest release that a film from the West had ever received

there.[127] The film was popular with teen girl audiences around the world. The success of the film in Japan was supposedly based on star Leonardo DiCaprio's fervent fanbase among young women in that country, a pattern that was repeated again and again as the film's ticket sales edged it into the black. Although the success of the movie is undoubtedly due to the fact that it offered a broad demographic appeal, teen girls were the audience segment most likely to see the film multiple times, a crucial element of its financial success.[128] *Titanic* provided an essential lesson for Hollywood studios: teen girls are a global, rather than national audience. Genre theorist Wheeler Winston Dixon has explained that in the contemporary film industry, "Teenage audiences dominate the global theatrical box office. One might thus argue that all films of the late 1990s might well be considered 'teen' films for the purposes of marketing alone, if for no other reason."[129] Teenagers have become the single most important audience for first-run theatrical release movies, based upon their available leisure time, disposable income, and their established consumer habits. This has led to an increasing number of Hollywood films that feature teenage protagonists, but it has also made clear the necessity of marketing all different kinds of films to this audience.

This industrial shift toward focusing on the teen girl demographic, a group that was virtually ignored by Hollywood during the early 1990s, has resulted in a plethora of representations of young women. Female screen teens have taken more assertive roles in this cycle of teen films than in any previous generation. Mary Celeste Kearney's research into the significant changes in representations of teen girls that have taken place since the early 1990s indicates that Hollywood films no longer limit teenage girls to plotlines involving heterosexual romance. Kearney argues that representations of girls have expanded to "incorporate contemporary feminist themes, especially the need for girls to develop

confidence, assertiveness, and self-respect apart from boys and through same-sex relationships."[130] The films that Kearney examines, including *All Over Me* and *The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Girls in Love*, emerged within the context of the independent cinema surge that began in the late 1980s and continued into the 1990s. Kearney argues that representations of teen girls' same-sex relationships circulate alongside traditional Hollywood narratives of heterosexual romance, privileging them with equal importance. I would further argue that even within the context of Hollywood productions in the 1990s, teen girls became protagonists in a wide variety of atypical narrative forms, as part of the industry's increasing focus on the youth market as a whole. Outside of the sheer number of Hollywood films with teen girl protagonists that have been produced since the success of *Clueless* in 1995 and *Scream* in 1996, an extensive range of subgenres have also been explored. Beyond romantic comedies and horror films, teen girls have starred in thrillers (*Wild Things*, *D.E.B.S.*), historical romances (*William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet)*, dramas (*crazy/beautiful*, *Save the Last Dance*) and black comedies (*Ghost World*, *Jawbreaker*). These represent just a few examples from within a continually expanding repertoire of representations of young women in contemporary cinema. The development of teen girl characters in genres beyond the heterosexual romantic comedy indicates the industry's comprehension of the complexity and desirability of the teen girl audience.

Girls Make Music

The music industry became one of the biggest promoters of Girl Power in the 1990s, using it to showcase a variety of teen girl pop singers. Although the rock music industry has always had room for young female vocalists, during a brief period in the 1990s young women ruled the Top 40 and Billboard Hot 100 charts with assertive pop tunes aimed at the teen girl

audience. Four of these pop stars, Brandy Norwood, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Beyonce Knowles, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. The industry imperatives that gave rise to a focus on the teen girl audience is the phenomenon under investigation here. In a manner similar to each of the other industries that I have discussed in this chapter, the music business has relied on cross-promotion to create awareness of and album sales for musicians. The marketing of teen girl pop stars accelerated into a boom during the 1990s due to the changing nature of the audience for music and licensed products from the music industry. At the end of the 20th century, Generation Y teenagers comprised the largest audience for popular music, with girl groups and teen girl solo acts achieving previously unheard of heights of success. This industrial shift was influenced by the Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s, and it attempted to utilize the empowering nature of Riot Grrrl to market a different kind of music (pop rather than punk) and music-related merchandise. The industry focus on female performers was not limited to the teen scene, however; women musicians of all ages took center stage in the late 1990s, from the explosion of the global pop phenomenon the Spice Girls to the all-female sold out world tours of the Lilith Fair concert.

Riot Grrrl emerged as a movement within the music industry in particular, although the movement was supported through alternative forms of media including zines and websites. The bands within Riot Grrrl, some of which include Bikini Kill, Bratmobile, L7, and Sleater-Kinney, were committed to forming a space for women within the male-dominated world of punk rock. They were idealistically devoted to shattering traditional conceptions of appropriate femininity, and they took on media production as a way to have a voice in the production of representations of the feminine. Riot Grrrl bands sang about issues related to sex and sexuality and violence against women. They brought feminine rage into the

punk scene, asserting their right to be heard and to define the terms of their own empowerment. Although this movement was small scale, attracting the most attention in the United States and the UK, it formed an important breeding ground for the feminist sentiments that would play out on a global scale in pop music throughout the rest of the decade, particularly influencing the mainstream concept of Girl Power.

The Spice Girls, who debuted in the UK in 1996, were the first mainstream band to put forth an agenda of "Girl Power," claiming an assertive, independent femininity. Riot Grrrls, however, claim that the Spice Girls notion of Girl Power owes its origins to the Riot Grrrl movement, and even cites fanzines (*Girlpower* and *Girlpride* are two examples) that seem to have directly influenced this concept.[131] The Spice Girls emphasized the concept of Girl Power as a positive outlook towards oneself and other women, valuing female friendships and self- esteem above relationships with men. Their "packaging," a five-member group that had been constructed from respondents to a newspaper ad seeking young women with the ability to sing and dance, was more audience-friendly than Riot Grrrl punk bands. Their first single, "Wannabe," placed first on the pop music charts in 31 countries, and in 1997 they won an MTV award, "Best Band in the World," cementing their status as a truly global phenomenon.[132]

Critics have argued that the Spice Girls notion of Girl Power was only one aspect of the extremely commodified nature of the group, used to sell them more effectively to growing ranks of teenage girls and corporate sponsors eager to reach this demographic. In a definitive article on the emergence of girl culture in music, Ann Powers argues that, "At this intersection between the conventional feminine and the evolving Girl, what's springing up is not a revolution but a mall. Girl Culture's impulse to make no distinctions produces a sense that

any choice is a good one, a creed of unbridled consumerism."[133] The Spice Girls participated in the commodification process by signing an unprecedented number of sponsorship deals, eventually receiving up to ten percent of their annual income from corporate sponsors (examples include Pepsi and Impulse body spray), while most artists receive virtually no income from these methods.[134] Additionally, the Spice Girls machinery marketed them as an entertainment commodity across a variety of media industries, using them to sell magazines, licensed merchandise, and their very own movie, *Spiceworld* (1997). By the time the band began to disintegrate in 1998, they had reaped untold millions from the global teen girl audience, selling their message of empowerment in virtually every country around the world.

The Spice Girls experience in the music industry helped to illustrate the importance of licensed products to the industry's bottom line in the 1990s. Reports estimate, for example, that the industry took in 1.55 billion dollars from licensed music merchandise (t-shirts, posters, dolls, etc.) in 1999, with over 70 percent of this estimated to come from pop acts that appealed to teen audiences.[135] Within just a couple of years of the Spice Girls' launch, the industry had moved to take better advantage of the commercial possibilities of music acts that appeal to young people. In late 2000, Maggie Dumais, who served as the director of licensing and merchandising for a company that represented Christina Aguilera and the Spice Girls, among others, was interviewed about the new possibilities for Generation Y merchandising. Dumais explained, "When the Spice Girls broke in 97, people were caught off guard and rushed to get product into the marketplace. Now we have more time to develop a cohesive line. We can schedule products so that they'll hit retail at the appropriate time, during the fourth quarter."[136] Her comments indicate that popular music artists are being marketed as commodities not unlike films or television shows, with "releases" of merchandise timed to

coincide with the needs of the industry (year-end revenues) and the optimal exploitation of the artist's popularity.

A counterpoint to the Spice Girls' commodified messages of Girl Power emerged in the form of the Lilith Fair tour in 1997.[137] The tour was organized by Sarah McLachlan, a solo female artist who had enjoyed some success within mainstream popular music. She organized the tour to showcase female artists (solo and group acts), initially referring to it as "Girlapalooza," in a reference to the popular alternative (mostly male) rock tour, Lollapalooza. During its first year, there were 35 tour dates on the Lilith Fair schedule, with varying acts, and each date sold out, making it the most popular tour event of the summer.[138] While the industry proclaimed that this event showcased the power of women within the music industry, without question it succeeded in drawing attention to the power of women as ticket buyers. Major solo acts including Jewel, Paula Cole, Shawn Colvin, Fiona Apple and Ani DiFranco emerged in the late 1990s, having built their audiences through the promotional push of Lilith Fair. The summer of 1999 saw the last Lilith Fair tour; although it remained popular, organizational difficulties had increased each year and McLachlan chose to put it on hold.

By the end of the decade, the music industry was acknowledging the importance of the demographic by targeting the teen girl audience with teen girl solo acts and groups including Britney Spears, Avril Lavigne, and Destiny's Child, but also with boy bands, including the Backstreet Boys, NSync, and 98 Degrees, designed to appeal to young women in a sexually non-threatening manner. New acts in the mold of already successful acts were launched continuously, promoted across industries through magazines, television series, film and film soundtrack appearances, and radio play. The kind of promotional push necessary to launch

new acts successfully was highlighted by a reality series on the WB, *Popstars*, which followed the design of a girl group, Eden's Crush, and resulted in a No. 1 single for the band.[139] By 2004, industry analysts determined that of online teens, girls spend 15% more on music than their male counterparts, making the demographic group responsible for the largest percentage of online music purchases.[140] This particular finding not only highlights the importance of the demographic to the music industry, but also the desirability of using the Internet as a cross-promotional marketing tool to reach these consumers.

The changing nature of the media industries in the 1990s, particularly the industrial climate of mergers and acquisitions, resulted in mass media conglomeration characterized by vertical and horizontally integrated media companies. This industrial shift necessitated a focus on specific audience groups, as well as synergistic production practices to ensure profitability. Generation Y, as the largest and fastest growing population segment, has emerged within this era of media conglomeration, becoming one of the main targets of the media, advertising, and consumer products industries. Teenage girls within Generation Y have been constructed as particularly desirable consumers, and their participation in conspicuous consumption has been encouraged through the development of a discourse of Girl Power, positioning individual empowerment as an inherently consumerist activity. Simultaneously, the media's focus on attracting teen girl viewers/consumers has led to an expansion of representations of adolescence in various forms of media, as well as representations of "acceptable" femininity. In the next chapter, I will discuss the circulated notions of femininity displayed through the production and distribution of teen girl icons through the mass media industries.

Notes to Chapter One

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[1] Flyworld Cosmetics Official Site. www.flyworld.com. Accessed: June 2005.

[2] See Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1992.

[3] Ellen Neuborne and Kathleen Kerwin, "Generation Y," *Business Week*, Feb. 15 1999, 82.

[4] Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 41.

[5] Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 22-24.

[6] See Laura Zinn, Teens: Here Comes the Biggest Wave Yet," *Business Week,* 11 Apr. 1994, 76-86.

[7] Anne Sutherland and Beth Thompson, *Kidfluence: Why Kids Today Mean Business* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2001), 8.

[8] Michael J. Weiss, "To Be About to Be," *American Demographics,* Sept. 2003, 28+.

[9] Joan Engebretson, "Odd Gen Out," *American Demographics*, May 2004, 14.

[10] Weiss, "To Be About," 28+.

[11] Pamela Paul, "Nouveau Niche," *American Demographics*, Jul. 2003, 6+.

[12] Linda P. Morton, "Targeting Generation Y," *Public Relations Quarterly*, Summer 2002, 46+.

[13] See for example: Zinn, "Teens," 76-86.

[14] See Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman, *When Generations Collide* (New York: Collins, 2003).

[15] Valerie Wee, "Selling Teen Culture: How American Multimedia Conglomeration Reshaped Teen Television in the 1990s," *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*, eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI, 2004), 87-98.

[16] Thomas Schatz makes this argument in "The New Hollywood." See *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 8-36. Also see Tino Balio, "Adjusting to the New Global

Economy: Hollywood in the 1990s," *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspectives*, ed. Albert Moran (New York: Routledge, 1996), 23-28.

[17] Wee, "Selling," 89.

[18] Although Warner Music Group spun off from Time Warner in 2004, becoming a stand-alone company, music from its labels continues to be heavily promoted on CW programming (including *One Tree Hill*, which has released three soundtracks through the post-spin off company).

[19] Viacom and CBS split into two separate entities in 2006.

[20] The holdings listed here are current as of May 2008. Until 2006, Viacom also controlled two broadcast television networks: CBS and UPN. In 2006, Viacom and CBS Corporation split into two separate entities, with the latter including the broadcast television interests.

[21] Wee, "Selling," 89.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago, 1997).

[24] Some analysts who examined the market as teens aged thirteen to twenty-two, rather than fifteen to nineteen, projected the total to be at twenty-five billion dollars. See Grace Hechinger and Fred M. Hechinger, "In the Time it Takes you to Read These Lines the American Teen-ager will have Spent $2,378.22," *Esquire*, Jul. 1965, 65-68+.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 23-24.

[28] Penelope Orth, "Teenager: What Kind of Consumer?" *Printer's Ink*, Sept. 20 1963, 70.

[29] Dixie Dean Harris, "And This Dear God is What They Read," *Esquire*, Jul. 1965, 50-51(105-106). See also Kelly Schrum's *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, on girls' market distinctions that took place prior to the market developments necessitated by the baby boom.

[30] Timothy Hubbard, "The $25 Billion-a-Year Accent on Youth," *Newsweek*, Nov. 30, 1964, 54-56.

[31] Dean Harris, "And This Dear God," 50-51(105-106).

[32] Alissa Quart, *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2003), 37-46.

[33] Teenage Research Unlimited official site. www.teenresearch.com. Accessed: June 2005.

[34] See Quart, *Branded,* 37-46.

[35] Schrum, *Some Wore,* 2-3.

[36] Dawn Currie cites figures from *Advertising Age*, showing that in 1994 the circulation of *Seventeen* stood at nearly 2,000,000 readers. This number has continued to deteriorate as more competition has entered the market. See Currie, 43; also *Advertising Age*, Feb. 21, 1994, 25.

[37] Dawn H. Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 42.

[38] See Kearney, "Girls, Girls, Girls," 164-165.

[39] See Currie, *Girl Talk*, 43; also *Advertising Age*, Feb. 21, 1994, 25.

[40] see Currie, *Girl Talk.*

[41] *Sassy* also cross-promoted *Ms.* magazine, advertising gift subscriptions to the (older) women's magazine in its holiday issue, Nov. 1988, 80.

[42] The headline appears in the debut issue of *Sassy*, Mar. 1988. Molly Simms reports on the short life of the magazine in "The Secret History of Sassy," *Bust*, Fall 2004, 68-73.

[43] This message from the editors appeared in the October 1988 issue of *Sassy* (27), mere months following the magazine's debut.

[44] "Sassy is So Cool," *Sassy*, Oct. 1989, 29-31.

[45] Simms, "Secret History," 71.

[46] "Sassy is So Cool," 29.

[47] Nina Malkin, "It's a Grrrl Thing," *Seventeen*, May 1993, 81.

[48] Dawn Currie refers to Sassy as the "alternative" publication title on the teen girls market, *Girl Talk*, 45.

[49] Andrea Haman, "New Spin-Offs Intensify Teen Girl Mag Competition," *Kidscreen*, Jul. 1 2001, 41.

[50] Jon Fine, "The Biz: Teen Title Crush Leads to Circ Cuts," *Advertising Age*, Jul. 7, 2003, 21. In addition, the paper magazine version of *Elle Girl* has been defunct; as of May 2008, ellegirl.com appears to offer current web content.

[51] "Min's Exclusive Analysis of Magazine Circulation, Second-Half 2004 (Part 3)," *Min Media Industry Newsletter*, Mar. 7, 2005.

[52] Most recently, *Seventeen* was acquired by Hearst Publications from Primedia in 2003.

[53] See Currie, *Girl Talk*, esp. Chapter 6, "From Pleasure to Knowledge."

[54] Laura Vanderkam, "Teen 'Zines Hawk Fake Girl Power," *USA Today*, Feb. 20, 2003, 13A.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Sharon Mazzarella has argued that the "content" of teen girls' magazines can never be effectively separated from the advertising, because they are intertwined to the point where it is impossible to make a distinction. See "The 'Superbowl of All Dates': Teenage Girl Magazines and the Commodification of the Perfect Prom," *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*, eds. Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Pecora (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 97-112.

[57] Quoted in Jon Fine, "Magazine of the Year," *Advertising Age*, Oct. 20, 2003, S1.

[58] Twist magazine official site. http://www.twistmagazine.hollywood.com. The magazine's "real girls" credentials are also used to describe it by other cites that offer subscriptions, see www.magazineline.com/public/Twist.htm.

[59] Currie, *Girl Talk*, 150.

[60] Kearney, "Girls, Girls, Girls."

[61] The exception would be *Twist* magazine, a title that has yet to become a major competitor in the market; they did not launch an official site until approximately 2005.

[62] Pamela Ivinski, "Gurl Power," *Print*, Jan/Feb 2000, 14-15.

[63] Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (London: Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1995).

[64] In "Making Connections," Chris Abbott asserts, "The Web is not so much an alternative world but a setting where respite can be achieved and issues explored in comparative safety." See "Making Connections: Young People and the Internet," *Digital Diversions: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia*, ed. Julian Sefton-Green (London: UCL Press, 1998), 84-105.

[65] Primedia Teen Internet Group, "gURL Media Kit," www.seventeen.com/mediakit/about/gurl.html, Accessed: 23 April 2003.

[66] Eric Copage, "Girls Just Want To ... ," *New York Times*, May 9, 1999, late edition, 9.

[67] See Ivinski, "Gurl Power," 14 and Anita Hamilton, "Chicks That Click," *Time*, May 15, 2000, 92.

[68] Valerie Block, "New Executive: Publisher's Teen Angles," *Crain's New York Business*, Oct. 1, 2001, 21.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Body Image Activists can be accessed online at: dolphin.upenn.edu/~guide/links.html.

[71] "Delia's and SegaSoft Plan On-Line and CD-ROM Promotions as Delia's Internet Traffic Increases 70%," *PR Newswire*, Aug. 20, 1998.

[72] Leslie Goff, "The 3 C's of Delia's," *Catalog Age i.merchant Supplement*, Aug. 2000.

[73] Kris Oser, "Shakira Featured in Delia's Promo," *PRIMEDIA Business Magazines & Media*, Jan.2002, 1.

[74] Goff, "The 3 C's."

[75] Jenna Schnuer, "Alloy," *Advertising Age*, Nov. 1, 2004, 16.

[76] "Alloy Online, Inc. and 17th Street Productions Acquires Girl Press LLC," *Business Wire*, Jan. 8, 2001.

[77] Ibid. Girl Press has published a number of books including the bestselling *Real Rules for Girls* by Mindy Morgenstern.

[78] Jon Fine, "Cross-Leveraging: Alloy and Elle Girl Ink Partnership," *Advertising Age*, Feb. 2, 2004, 8.

[79] Schnuer, "Alloy," 16.

[80] Fine, "Cross-Leveraging," 8.

[81] Tobi Elkin, "Fefe Finds Audience Via Web," *Advertising Age*, Jan. 12, 2004, 36+.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Historian Bill Osgerby places this strategy within the larger competitive picture between the three networks, arguing that ABC developed programming for youth and young families as a method of survival against CBS and NBC. See "'So Who's Got Time For Adults!': Femininity, Consumption and the Development of Teen TV – From Gidget to Buffy," *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*, eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI, 2004), 71-86.

[84] Moya Luckett, "Girl Watchers: Patty Duke and Teen TV," *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, eds. Michael Curtin and Lynn Spigel, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 95.

[85] Bodroghkozy, Aniko, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and Youth Rebellion* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 14.

[86] Kearney, "Girls, Girls, Girls," 436-444.

[87] James Ryan, "The Folks From *thirtysomething* Offer a Dose of Teen Reality," *Entertainment Newswire*, Aug. 12, 1994.

[88] Quoted in the *L.A. Times Sunday Calendar* section from November 1998, as reprinted on www.mscl.com.

[89] See Sydney Head, Thomas Spann, and Michael McGregor, *Broadcasting in America: A Survey of Electronic Media (Ninth Edition)* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), Chapter 3.1-3.6.

[90] Zook argues that Fox deliberately targeted the African-American audiences with programming until approximately 1994. See *Color By Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[91] *Party of Five* never achieved the same heights of popularity enjoyed by *90210*, but it enjoyed more critical acclaim, winning a Golden Globe in 1996 for Best Drama series.

[92] This included Brenda's demands of driving privileges equal to Brandon's during season one (Episode 5: "One on One") and her discussion with her mother, Cindy Walsh about the implications of being a stay-at-home parent during the same season (Episode 7: "Perfect Mom").

[93] This is established in the episode, "All's Well." Original airdate: May 3, 2000.

[94] Diane Werts, "ABC Wants More Adults in Its Family Fare Mix," *Newsday*, Jan.1995.

[95] Andrew Clark, "The End of Parents," *Maclean's*, Nov. 23, 1998, 143-146.

[96] Rob Owen offers a thorough account of the Operation *Life* Support Internet campaign in his book *Gen X TV* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 157-184.

[97] Larry Collette and Barry R. Litman, "The Peculiar Economics of New Broadcast Network Entry: The Case of United Paramount and Warner Bros.," *The Journal of Media Economics* v. 10, no. 4, 6.

[98] Lynn Schofield Clark, "The WB Network," *Encyclopedia of Television* (New York: MacMillan), accessed Online: www.routledge-ny.com/ref/television/wbnet.html.

[99] The Wayans Bros featured Shawn and Marlon Wayans, younger brothers of Keenan Ivory and Damon Wayans, who starred in *In Living Color* during the early years of the Fox network.

[100] Schofield Clark notes the importance of Jessica Biel and Barry Watson, the show's teen stars, in establishing its youthful following. Notably, *7th Heaven* is also produced by Aaron Spelling, who is the producer behind *90210* on Fox.

[101] Schofield Clark, "The WB Network."

[102] Ibid.

[103] Collette and Litman cite Levin, 1971, Long 1974, Spence & Owen, 1977 and Steiner, 1952 on this phenomenon.

[104] In the 1999-2000 season, the WB's primetime schedule included: *Felicity*, *Jack & Jill*, *7th Heaven*, *Safe Harbor*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Popular*, and *Charmed* – all hour-long series that targeted the youth audience, most of which targeted the teen girl audience specifically.

[105] See Miranda J. Banks, "A Boy for All Planets: *Roswell*, *Smallville* and the Teen Male Melodrama," *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*, eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI, 2004), 17-28.

[106] *What I Like About You* aired on the WB from 2002-2006.

[107] See Valerie Wee on this practice.

[108] See Kay Dickinson, "'My Generation': Popular Music, Age and Influence in Teen Drama of the 1990s," *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*, eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI, 2004), 99-111.

[109] This is one of the many strategies that the series has employed to push Time Warner artists. Other strategies include the release of a soundtrack album, promotional spots in exchange for a break on licensing, and music promotions on the series' website.

[110] See Valerie Wee.

[111] Peter Zollo, *Getting Wiser to Teens: More Insights into Marketing to Teenagers* (Ithaca, NY: New Strategist Publications, 2003), 345.

[112] Schofield Clark notes this in "The WB Network."

[113] Collette and Litman, "The Peculiar Economics," 14.

[114] Brian Lowry, "The Whims of War," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 26, 1999.

[115] Marc Berman, "Netlets are Here to Stay," *Mediaweek* Jan. 24, 2000, 30-36.

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[120] Timothy Shary, *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2002), 10.

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[125] Todd Wasserman, "Tie-Ins: Samsung, Coke, Target Feel Cinderella Story Magic," *Print*, June 28, 2004.

[126] John Horn, "Disaster Epic Sets Worldwide Box-Office Record," Associated Press release, Feb. 24,1998.

[127] Ibid.

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[129] Wheeler Winston Dixon, "Fighting and Violence and Everything, That's Always Cool," *Film Genre Reader 2000*, ed. Wheeler Winston Dixon (NY: SUNY Press, 2000), 127.

[130] Mary Celeste Kearney, "Girlfriends and Girl Power: Female Adolescence in Contemporary U.S. Cinema," *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*, eds. Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 125-142.

[131] Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (London: Continuum, 2002), 462.

[132] Ibid., 460 and 464

[133] Ann Powers, "Everything and the Girl," *Spin*, Dec. 1997, 80.

[134] O'Brien, *She Bop II*, 460-61.

[135] Simon Ashdown, "Tween and Teen Pop Products – Music to Retailers' Ears," *Kidscreen* Oct. 1, 2000, 78.

[136] Ibid.

[137] The Lilith Fair name has biblical roots, according to McLachlan. She argues that Lilith, Adam's second wife, refused to submit her will to her husbands, making her "the world's first feminist." See O'Brien, *She Bop II*, 470.

[138] O'Brien, *She Bop II*, 470.

[139] Wee, "Selling Teen Culture," 87-88.

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Chapter Two
"Depend on No One Else to Give You What You Want": Teen Girl Icons and the Discourse of Girl Power

> "If you let me play sports …
> I will have more self-confidence …
> I will be more likely to leave a man who beats me …
> I will be less likely to get pregnant before I want to."[1]

The above text is quoted from the award-winning "If you let me play" campaign that Nike ran from 1995 through 1998 in order to sell athletic shoes to young women. The advertising push featured print ads and 30-second television commercial spots that offered images of young women and girls finding personal empowerment through athletic involvement. This long-running, successful advertising campaign represents a major shift in Nike's attitude towards teenage girls as a target market. During the 1980s and early 1990s, Nike either ignored young women or advertised to them through appeals designed to focus on the link between being very thin and being attractive to the opposite sex. In contrast, the "If you let me play" campaign focused on young women's emotional well-being and ability to improve their own self-confidence and self-esteem through physical fitness. The campaign capitalized on social concerns about young women's development of healthy self-esteem, and it also participated in the larger discourse of "Girl Power" that emerged in the mid-1990s.

The "Girl Power" phrase first appeared in Riot Grrrl music and zines, and entered the mainstream consciousness by 1997 as the motto of globally successful pop group, the Spice Girls. I rely heavily on examples related to the Spice Girls' usage of the phrase in this chapter, in part because their worldwide popularity was inextricably linked to this message of empowerment. Girl Power is a series of statements about young women's social authority; it rejects ideals of passive femininity in favor of individual agency. The idea of Girl Power,

present but not mentioned by name in the Nike ad campaign discussed above, is not limited to the realm of music and advertising. Statements about Girl Power have circulated in a variety of media sources including films (*Bring it On*, *Clueless*), television series (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Popular*), magazines (*CosmoGirl!*, *Seventeen*), websites (gURL.com), coverage of women's athletics (the Women's National Basketball Association), and institutional sources, such as the federally-funded Girl Power! program that launched in 1997. As a discourse, it has become an integral part of how young femininity is thought about in society.

Girl Power is a contested concept because it has been closely associated with the capitalist exploitation of the teen girl market. Media scholars have interrogated the discourse and its circulation, seeking to define it in terms of the ways that it has been used to sell products alongside a notion of "empowerment" to young women. In many analyses thus far, Girl Power has been critiqued as a primarily negative phenomenon that capitalizes on social concerns about young women, callously exploits teen girls as a market for products, and evacuates Riot Grrrl (an "authentic" feminism) of its true meaning. In this chapter, I examine the discourse of Girl Power in order to argue that it has legitimate feminist potential that aligns it with third wave feminism in important ways. Girl Power has been rejected as a site of legitimate feminist empowerment by some scholars in the field of girls' studies, and I intend to recuperate the value of examining it as a flexible, complex discourse by analyzing its relationship to the principles and ideals of third wave feminism. The goal of this examination is twofold; first, I argue that because of the terrain it shares with third wave feminism, Girl Power is a site of greater feminist potential than has previously been recognized. The discourse of Girl Power represents the dominant ideology of patriarchal capitalism, but I argue that it also exhibits the potential for resistance through its incorporation

of third wave feminist thought. Second, comparing these two discourses illuminates the political problems of the third wave as a movement that emphasizes individual choice and activism. At the end of the chapter, I illustrate the multifaceted workings of the discourse of Girl Power and its feminist potential through two case studies of mediated representations of young femininity.

The first case study compares Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera as teen pop stars whose music and public personae participated in the discourse of Girl Power during the late 1990s. I examine these pop stars as Girl Power icons whose similarities and differences played out in debates over femininity, sexuality, and authenticity in the pages of teen girls' magazines and on teen girls' websites. The third wave feminist emphasis on sexual empowerment is in some ways represented by the attempts of each of these pop stars to offer and control a youthful, highly-sexualized image. The debates over the on and offstage personae of these icons and the relationship between their performative sexuality and their teen girl fans opens up several avenues through which to discuss third wave feminist empowerment in practice.

The second case study examines Brandy Norwood and Beyonce Knowles as parallel examples of young African American women who became icons through their status as multi-talented professionals. Race plays a role in the discussion of these young women in the media, coinciding with the 1990s discourse of multiculturalism that also plays a large role in theoretical formulations of the third wave feminist movement. I will examine media coverage of these young women, focusing on how they are represented as Girl Power icons who are "average" (beyond their star status, they are overwhelmingly portrayed as being "normal" and "just like you") and simultaneously "powerful" (this concept denotes a variety of meanings

which I will attempt to examine in relation to depictions of these stars as icons). I intend to use this case study to examine the relationship of third wave feminist politics to contemporary discussions of race, femininity, and ability.

The Discourse of Girl Power

Representations of Girl Power emerged as part of the flood of attention focused on Generation Y, which I discussed in Chapter One. The discourse of Girl Power became a way of establishing distinctions between the young women of Generation Y and those of previous generations. During the mid to late 1990s, Girl Power offered a new way to speak about young women, and the attraction of the concept (combining the diminutive and sometimes pejorative term "girl" with the notion of "power") proved strong for artists, producers, marketers, media critics, and young women. While media critics have most often focused on Girl Power in terms of its circulation in popular music, the notion that the young women of Generation Y have been particularly empowered has pervaded all forms of mass media. The discourse of Girl Power builds upon existing feminist discourses, recognizing that young women in the 1990s grew up in societies shaped by the advances of second wave feminism. In its many forms, which I discuss below, Girl Power is a discourse of individual empowerment, offering young women the notion that they are able to achieve their goals and dreams and that they are active agents in their own lives. The circulation of the discourse has been aided by at least two powerful factors; first, it feels legitimately "new" because it is distinct from the discourse of heterosexual romance that has circulated in media produced for young women for generations.[2] Second, Girl Power resonates with concerns about young women's self-esteem that were prevalent in the early 1990s, coming to public attention with best-selling books including Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent*

Girls and Peggy Orenstein's *School Girls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*.[3] Girl Power appeared as a direct response to the concerns about teenage girls and self-image that were raised by these authors, and was thus discussed in the popular press as a solution to real, identifiable social problems.

> Michel Foucault's concept of discourse posits it as a series of statements that comprise the totality of a subject. There is an objective reality outside of discourse, but discourse is how individuals come to know that reality. Thus, discourse contains the interrelation of knowledge and power. Discourse contains the exercise of power from "imperialistic" or institutionalized sources, but as discourse makes that power visible, it also makes it possible to see, understand, and negotiate with the operations of power. Discourse is not neutral or static; as it involves the operations of power, it is always a site of continuous struggle over meaning.[4]

My contention is that thus far, examinations of Girl Power have ignored the extent to which this discourse is a legitimate site of contestation. Girl power is a discourse about young women and identity. By claiming to promote young women's empowerment, it draws attention to the social status of young women. Foucault theorizes that individuals construct "locales" (not a physical space, but a mindset that they carry with them) against and within power that is exerted through more tangible sources.[5] Girl Power has proven to be a powerful draw for young women (and not solely in the realm of consumption) who have engaged with it on their own terms, constructing their own locales within it that relate the discourse to feminism, social justice, and political activism. In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with how dominant forces exercise authority through the creation and circulation of discourse, and how this process engages with the production of knowledge that is resistant to patriarchal authority. I will discuss individual agency in further depth in Chapter Four, examining how resistance is enacted within discourse.

Spice Girl Power!

Girl Power is most frequently associated with the globally successful all-girl British pop group the Spice Girls, who promoted the slogan during their brief but incredibly profitable stint at the top of the charts in 1997 and 1998.[6] However valid this association, the discourse existed before the Spice Girls entered the pop culture lexicon, evidence of which is offered by the early 1990s content of *Sassy* magazine discussed in Chapter One, as well as the mid-1990s Nike campaign discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Girl Power is a series of statements made about the status of young women in the 1990s, and has continued to some extent, into the 2000s. These statements have circulated through mediated sources including magazines, advertising, music, television, and movies. The notion of Girl Power coincided with the recognition of Generation Y as a powerful market force, particularly young women; the popular press expounded upon the consumer potential of these teenagers, as well as their hopes, dreams, insecurities, possibilities for the future and their differentiation from the young women of generations past.

The Spice Girls were designed and launched by Bob and Chris Herbert, a father-son team who recruited the members of the band in 1994 through a newspaper classified advertisement calling for, "streetwise, outgoing, ambitious and dedicated" girls to form a singing group.[7] The Herberts had a vision that they could take advantage of inadequacies in the pop music landscape by marketing an all-girl group that would appeal to pre-teen and teen girl music buyers. The sound they were seeking was a complete turnaround from the male-dominated grunge music that was driving music sales at the time (with bands including Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers topping the charts). The Herberts felt that they could appeal to young women, who otherwise were not buying a lot of CDs and concert

tickets, and were not being appealed to in the pop music marketplace. They organized the group as five members who would display a range of feminine attributes. After recruitment, the girls (ranging in age from late teens to early twenties) were renamed "Ginger" (Geri Halliwell), "Sporty" (Melanie C.), "Baby" (Emma Bunton), "Posh" (Victoria Addams), and "Scary" (Melanie B.), to emphasize the differentiation in their performance personae. After working for months to put together an act, the Spice Girls left the Herberts to sign with Virgin Records, one of the big four record labels, with operations in more than 25 countries. This move to a major label helped them debut to global success; their first album, "Spice," hit number one on the charts in 33 countries.[8] Their high-powered manager Simon Fuller and the worldwide marketing capabilities of Virgin Records as part of a major media conglomerate were no doubt integral to their success, but the popular press often associated the incredible sales of the group with their ability to stay on message, the message of "Girl Power." The Spice Girls promoted Girl Power as a form of individual empowerment for young women, encouraging young girls to see themselves as active rather than acted upon by the pressures of their daily lives and relationships. They used their clearly defined "spice" identities to associate different types of femininity with individual empowerment. When asked about the connection of Girl Power to feminism, the Spice Girls explained to the British press, "We're freshening up feminism for the nineties … Feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it."[9] Their stance has been interpreted as anti-feminist, owing to quotes like these, but Spice Girls' slogans including "The Future is Female," "It's a Girl's World," and "She Who Dares Wins" owe much to the influence of the grassroots Riot Grrrl movement and the growing development of third wave feminist activism. The pop group utilized many of the terms of contemporary empowerment to market themselves, their music,

and a variety of licensed products to young women. The success of their strategies indicates one aspect of the appeal of Girl Power for young women at this time.

The success of the band is also responsible for much of the controversy surrounding their feminist (or potentially feminist) credibility. Cultural critics and academics have examined the Spice Girls' "message" very closely because it resonated with young women around the world. Frequently, these critics and theorists find that the kind of empowerment advocated by the pop music group is lacking in substance and the potential to inspire real activism, primarily finding fault with the Spice Girls for encouraging consumerism. Even theorists who recognize that the Spice Girls' notion of Girl Power owes much to the Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s use standard co-optation theory to argue that the Spice Girls's take the "organic" ideas of the grassroots movement and corrupt them through the process of mass marketing. Media scholar Dafna Lemish has analyzed the marketing strategy of the group and their resulting popularity, concluding that the empowerment they advocate is actually a "very narrowly defined sexual power."[10] Shelley Budgeon best sums up the underlying problem that academics find with the Spice Girls' philosophy; she writes:

> There is a consistency in a strong belief in self-efficacy and a belief in the possibility that individuals can change their external conditions. This type of individualism presents some serious problems. It is discouraging that the very advances won by the struggles in second wave feminism are now taken for granted by young women and have thereby become problematic. The result, to some degree, is an over-reliance upon the self to solve societal problems.[11]

The basic critique, repeated again and again in analyses of the discourse, is that while the pop group offers slogans, they don't back up their catchphrases with specific calls for activism or social change.[12] The Spice Girls' message, that young women can do anything that they set their minds to, is seen as superficial and ambiguous by many cultural theorists, because it

falsely locates the self as the solution to institutionalized problems. Even popular critiques argue that Girl Power is not capable of addressing the material realities of young women's lived experiences, because it does not effectively acknowledge them. For example, *Time* magazine dismissed the group as "commercial feminism,"[13] and *Rolling Stone* declared them a "co-optation" of Riot Grrrl.[14] Feminist media activist Jennifer L. Pozner famously quoted a line from the popular Spice Girls' song "Wannabe" when she dismissed Girl Power by writing, "It's probably a fair assumption to say that 'zigazig-ha' is not Spice shorthand for 'subvert the dominant paradigm.'"[15] In her study of representations of teen girls in popular culture, Ilana Nash rejects the phenomenon as young women in skimpy outfits singing songs written by middle-aged men; she goes so far as to claim that Girl Power songstresses are intentionally marketed as sexual objects for the pleasure of older men.[16] While this criticism may be valid in some sense, it also ignores the appeal of these images for young women, who are the real market force driving the success of girl-powered pop stars.

Jessica K. Taft offers one of the most comprehensive analyses of Girl Power as a discourse in her article, "Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance." As is clear from the title, Taft sees representations of Girl Power in popular culture texts as problematic; she argues that social activist groups for young women are the solution to the superficial vision of girls' empowerment circulated in pop music, movies, and television shows.[17] Although Taft acknowledges that the discourse does not hold a fixed meaning and is open to constant definition and re-definition, she outlines four basic meanings of the discourse that work to define female adolescence as a non-political space; these are "Girl Power as Anti-Feminism," as "Postfeminism," as "Individual Power," and as "Consumer Power." Taft argues that the Spice Girls circulate anti-feminism by creating a

clear separation between feminism, which the group rejects, and Girl Power.[18] The postfeminist meaning of Girl Power circulates the idea that not only have young women achieved equality, they are now positioned advantageously compared with young men, thus driving a nail in the coffin of feminist debates. Meanings of Girl Power as individual power signify that young women must only decide what it is that they want, and they are capable of earning it or achieving it. Taft argues that this meaning obscures very real differences of race, class, and ethnicity, and encourages young women to avoid seeing systems of inequality as embedded structures. Consumer notions of Girl Power encourage young women to associate empowerment with products that they can purchase in order to fulfill the identities that they choose. An additional implication of girls' consumer power that Taft does not take into account is the way that popular press coverage of Girl Power often emphasizes the disposable income of Generation Y, clearly correlating media representations of strong young women in films like *Clueless* and television shows like *Dawson's Creek* with girls' desirability as a market for products.[19]

Taft's position is that these meanings of Girl Power coalesce to discourage organized social activism because the discourse positions teenage girls to believe that social inequalities exist on an individual, non-systemic level, and can be overcome through the mental, physical, and economic strength of the individual girl.

Riot Grrrl Power

Taft's analysis does not consider the possibility of Girl Power as "third wave feminism" or the close relationship between Girl Power and third wave feminist politics, in which activism is also positioned as individual and heavily based in identity politics rather than collective, social action. In this section, I examine similarities between the Riot Grrrl

movement and mainstream Girl Power, seeking to understand how grassroots feminist activism relates to the mass media phenomenon. This analysis creates a basis on which to argue for a fifth meaning of Girl Power, "Girl Power as Third Wave Feminism," to contribute to Taft's analysis and to bring the discourses into the realm of contemporary feminist concerns. While Taft acknowledges the influence of Riot Grrrl and third wave feminism on the discourse of Girl Power, she argues that the circulation of the discourse in the mass media served to eliminate any legitimate feminist politics. In contrast, I argue that the Riot Grrrl movement and Girl Power are similarly concerned with valuing femininity in male-dominated arenas, embracing sisterhood by encouraging women to be mutually supportive, and claiming individual authority/agency as empowering.

The Riot Grrrl movement attempted to establish a space for women in the traditionally male-dominated punk music scene. Dafna Lemish argues of their political project, "Their music style, forms of performance and body display, as well as celebration of girl-talk and female friendship and networking, creates a special space for a rebellious female voice."[20] This same project is evident in the vision of Girl Power advocated by the Spice Girls. As an all-female group in the male-dominated pop music scene of the mid-1990s, they discussed Girl Power as valuing female friendships over relationships with boys, establishing personal autonomy, and talking back to authority. This message of Girl Power was disseminated not only through their music and multitudes of licensed products, but also their stage performances, their book *Girl Power!*, their movie *SpiceWorld*, and their product endorsements including a global marketing campaign for Pepsi Cola. The Spice Girls spell out the terms of the individual empowerment that they advocate in their official book. They write:

> Girl power is when … You help a guy with his bag
> You and your mates reply to wolf whistles by shouting 'get your arse out!'
> You wear high heels and think on your feet
> You don't wait around for him to call
> You stick with your mates and they stick with you
> You're loud and proud even when you've broken out in spots
> You believe in yourself and control your own life[21]

This brief manifesto calls attention to a myriad of similarities between Girl Power and the Riot Grrrl movement, including a call for young women to refuse being treated as sexual objects, and to embrace both sisterhood and self-actualization. The Riot Grrrl manifesto states, for example, "BECAUSE I believe with my wholeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real,"[22] a sentiment remarkably similar to the Spice Girls' philosophy. Riot Grrrls have emphasized self-defense as a key component of building women's self-esteem; the Spice Girls have similarly advocated girls' physical strength and athleticism as a marker of independence. Although Riot Grrrls claimed investment in social struggles related to race and class, the movement has frequently been critiqued as a domain of young, middle-class white women.[23] Though the Spice Girls message appealed to young women of different backgrounds around the world, their personae made only minimal nods to race and class differentiation.[24]

The easily identifiable differences between Riot Grrrl and the Spice Girls' concept of Girl Power lie in their genres of music (punk vs. pop) and their methods of distribution (small-scale, independent records labels vs. a global media corporation). Riot Grrrls advocate taking control of cultural representations by starting record labels and distributing alternative media. The Spice Girls were intentionally manufactured by male interests (first the Herberts, and later manager Simon Fuller at Virgin Records) to take advantage of a perceived opportunity in the marketplace. This does not negate the resonance of their message or

explain away fans' engagement with it. It demonstrates the importance of teenage girls to media producers in the 1990s, and the concerns of these producers about how to best reach young women as an audience.

Riot Grrrl and Girl Power significantly diverge in their approaches to cultural standards of beauty. Riot Grrrls have embraced body image as a key issue; they actively reject the thin feminine ideals that are promoted in mainstream media. They have incorporated punk techniques of "uglification" including the use of tattoos and piercings to signify a rejection of dominant ideals. In addition, Riot Grrrls have been involved in fat-positive communities, and have innovated strategies to subvert or resist objectification.[25] In contrast, the Spice Girls represent traditional ideals of feminine beauty, and they seem to embrace identification. Although the Girls have stated that Girl Power is about feeling confident no matter what a girl looks like, their embodiment does not bear this out.[26] This represents a major separation between the ideals of Riot Grrrls and Girl Power, but it does not indicate that Girl Power is inherently apolitical. Its principles of assertive femininity and sisterhood are not completely undone by its failure to radically critique traditional beauty ideals. In the next section, I expand on the association between the Riot Grrrl movement and Girl Power, arguing that it is possible to understand the discourse as an iteration of third wave feminism.

Girl Power as Third Wave Feminism

Third wave feminism is a cultural movement that works to associate value with femininity. The connections between Girl Power and the third wave require further analysis, beginning with the roots of third wave feminism in U.S. third world feminism. In

Methodology of the Oppressed, Chela Sandoval outlines tactics and strategies for the survival and growth of what she terms "U.S. third world feminism":

> Meant to signal a *conflagration* of geographic, economic, and cultural borders in the interests of creating a new feminist and internationalist consciousness and *location*: not just the third world *in* the first world, but a new global consciousness and terrain that challenges the distinctions of nation-state.[27]

She argues that third world feminism should not be theorized as a binary opposite to Western second wave feminism (or what Gayatri Spivak has termed "hegemonic feminist theory"[28]) but as interrelated and necessarily conjoined forces. She writes, "U.S. third world feminism provided access to a different way of conceptualizing not just feminist consciousness but oppositional activity in general: it comprised a formulation capable of aligning U.S. movements for social justice not only with each other but with global movements toward decolonization."[29] Global movements become possible in part through the use of identity politics. Sandoval theorizes an oppositional consciousness that utilizes a "mobility of identity...for the self-conscious production of resistance."[30] To demonstrate this, she offers a model based upon the oppositional consciousness produced by third world feminism. Feminist scholar Ednie Garrison explains that in this model, "Identity politics becomes a tactical maneuver rather than a single informing strategy; this move allows for the possibility of constructing social movement coalitions built on less-essentialized or strategically essentialized affinities."[31] The distinction between "tactics" and "strategies," as formulated by Sandoval, is key to understanding these dynamics. "Tactics" are alterable, and can be put to use as necessary to serve a larger "strategy," or ideology that is utilized in one's engagements with the relations of power. Garrison argues that identity politics are frequently put into play as a strategy, an essentialized oppositional mode that limits their ability to

challenge the relations of power. Sandoval's framework, however, suggests that identity politics can be used as tactics; aspects of identity can be put to use as necessary, and shifted/changed as necessary, in order to suit the purposes of a larger feminist strategy. The ideology that Sandoval argues for is the differential oppositional consciousness. This position alone is powerful enough to recognize the hegemony of the other forms, which must be disrupted in order to create a truly feminist consciousness.

Sandoval argues that traditional, seemingly essentialized strategies of identity politics, including race, sex, class, and gender, need to be performed and put into play in tactical combinations that expand the possibilities of Western or hegemonic feminism. This move opens up Western feminist thought, increasing its power and possibilities of practical use, because it becomes relevant and applicable to the experiences of "women." By "women," I refer not to a fixed or universal category of analysis, but to a shifting, changing, alterable, and questionable subject position. Third world feminist authors tactically invoke identity politics to challenge the "fixed" assumptions of an illusory power structure.

The third wave responds to the idea that second wave feminism became synonymous with liberal feminism, especially in mainstream media representations. The third wave attempts to continue the goals of the earlier movement as a diverse project made up of a multitude of concerns informed by myriad feminisms. The parallel that young women theorizing the third wave see between their feminist thought and U.S. third world feminism lies in the potential for alliance among different types of feminism. Third wave feminist writing often portrays the goals of the second wave in a negative light (for failing to address the needs and concerns of women along lines of difference including those of race, class, and sexuality) and it attempts to address these criticisms by formulating the third wave as a

reclamation of the power of femininity. The third wave attempts to open up feminism to different kinds of experiences and personalities, responding to a perception that the second wave supported a liberal feminism that had to be lived as a script, not allowing for the very real contradictions that are wrought by everyday life.

Riot Grrrl and the third wave are not synonymous, although they are closely related. As it emerged in the 1990s, third wave feminism was theorized as the realm of young women who were the daughters of the second wave movement. As recipients of the social advantages gained by the second wave, third wavers see social issues (not solely those directly related to gender equality) in a different light. Sarah Rasmuson, who originated the definition of the third wave for the *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements* claims that as a cultural feminist movement, the third wave is invested in a global range of social issues, including issues like immigration and global warming that have not typically been considered gendered.[32] This complex formulation of the interests and activities of a third wave feminism attempts to articulate that that the movement is concerned with issues of social justice, not simply those that are directly related to gender and sexuality. Additionally, third wave theorists attempt to incorporate an understanding of difference for the purposes of coalition, not a homogenization of difference into a unified feminism.

Ednie Garrison has argued that there is a specific relationship between the historical accomplishments of third world feminism (as theorized by Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed*) and the development of the third wave. She writes, "The emergence of a 'Third Wave' owes a great deal to critiques of the homogenization of the category 'women' articulated most directly in the political and intellectual work by radical women of color, poor women, and lesbians dated from at least the Second Wave."[33] While in many ways third

wave feminists are seeking to continue the equal rights projects of the second wave, they are also specifically responding to critiques that the second wave coalesced around the concerns of middle-class white women. In *Third Wave Agenda*, Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake clarify:

> Although we owe an enormous debt to the critique of sexism and the struggles for gender equity that were white feminism's strongest provinces, it was U.S. third world feminism that modeled a language and politics of hybridity that can account for our lives at the century's turn. These are lives marked by the realities of multicultural exchanges, fusion, and conflict, lives that combine blackness, whiteness, brownness, gayness, bisexuality, straightness.[34]

They claim that the intervention of third world feminist concerns into the "white feminist" domination of the second wave informs the politics and methodology of the third wave. The mode through which this relationship progresses becomes contingent on the differential oppositional consciousness. In other words, the third wave is explicitly recognizing that many factors of identity shape feminist concerns, and that not all of those factors of identity are in play at all times. The third wave is informed and strengthened by contradictions. Heywood and Drake also note the danger of appropriation, in which the recognition of third world women's experiences comes to denote a unified third world subject. They explicitly argue that part of the third wave project is "negotiating multicultural and antiracist standpoints amid the ongoing tensions between borrowing and appropriating."[35] The answer that they pose to the continuing threat of appropriation and homogenization is keeping the terms of feminist theory (the notions of "women" and "feminism") in play by constantly questioning and expanding them. Identity politics are used to combat homogenized ideals and representations of "women," and to complicate the universalizing tendencies of the term.

In *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards assert that third wave feminism is personal; it utilizes women's personal experiences and personal background as the foundation for politics.[36] The personal nature of the movement indicates the importance of identity politics to its struggles. Third wave feminism calls for an understanding of individual lived realities in order to form coalition across boundaries of difference. Further, Baumgardner and Richards (who serves on the board of the Third Wave Foundation for feminist activism) are strong proponents of a reclamation of the term "girl" and the femininity associated with it. They argue in *Manifesta* that women can embrace femininity and its accoutrements for their own individual purposes, without participating in their own patriarchal oppression. They term this "Girlie Culture," and frame it as a response to critiques that the second wave had a "dress code," or posited an ideal feminist that few women were capable of embodying. "Girlie Culture" embraces femininity as a tool of self-expression and individual empowerment and is utilized tactically to associate value with aspects of femininity that have traditionally been associated with weakness, passivity, and objectification. In an interview with Baumgardner and Richards, Tamara Straus sums up their definition of the third wave as those who "want to continue the fight for equal rights, but not to the detriment of their sexuality. They want to be both subject and object."[37] Amy Richards explains a common misconception in the interview, stating, "What people don't understand is that talking about sex and sexual self-esteem is talking about equality."[38] The third wave movement argues that the battle for equal rights should be fought through establishing a cultural value for femininity (recognizing multiple and contradictory femininities), rather than through claiming the rights associated with masculinity for women.

All of the above aspects of the third wave come into play when establishing a meaning of Girl Power as "third wave feminism." Although Girl Power and the third wave are not one and the same, the discourse of Girl Power participates in the same feminist project by focusing on identity, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The Spice Girls' message of Girl Power places an emphasis not just on knowing who you are and what you want (identity politics and self-actualization) but on sisterhood (coalition). Beyond their stated message, the Spice Girls' performance of identity participates in a reclamation of femininity, working to associate passivity ("Baby" Spice), sophistication ("Posh" Spice), athleticism ("Sporty" Spice), attitude ("Ginger" Spice), and rebellion ("Scary" Spice) with cultural power. The combination of the Spice Girls' notion of Girl Power with their glamorous and sexual personae illustrate the third wave feminist goal to be both subject and object. The Spice Girls engage with and offer the multiple/contradictory identities that the third wave claims to embrace; third wave feminism places an emphasis on embracing individual authority and infusing femininity with cultural value, and the Spice Girls have literally made these terms of empowerment their message.[39]

Third wave feminism and Girl Power can both be characterized by an open nature renders them flexible and responsive to multiple agendas. The third wave movement emphasizes individual rather than collective strategies for change, altering the meaning of the famous second wave slogan, "the personal is political," as Deborah L. Siegel documents in *Sisterhood Interrupted.*[40] Siegel explains the shift between the second wave movement as concerned with how aspects of women's daily lives (domestic roles, employment opportunities, family planning) were inherently political, while the third wave ascribes political import to personal, individual decisions, claiming an activist interest in any and all

issues related to social justice. While the movement's focus on the politics of the individual is problematic, this is another area in which a specific parallel can be drawn to the Spice Girls' vision of Girl Power. Dafna Lemish argues that:

> The Spice Girls use compelling language to encourage girls to get out "there" and do "it" – yet, they never offer any suggestion of what kind of social space it is that is "there" and what "it" constitutes. The promise of freedom exists – but no purpose for that freedom: A freedom to be where? To do what? No particular future is offered, no portrayals of professional or personal alternatives [...] In many ways this ambiguous discourse represents a sense of real confusion to young admiring girls.[41]

This rich critique also applies to theorizations of the third wave movement as being completely open to the interests of the young women who participate in it. Jennifer Baumgardner has stated that she resists the temptation to try to define the third wave on specific terms because she does not want the movement to be defined by its limits. In her interview with Tamara Straus, Baumgardner explains, "People always ask us what the most important issue is, and my response is, name an issue. If that's what you're interested in, then it's the most important, whether it's eating disorders, sexual harassment, child care, etc."[42] The third wave claims to be completely open to the interests of those who participate in it, as is Girl Power activism. Lemish and Taft both take a negative view of this "open" quality, arguing that it hinders or completely shuts down the potential for young girls' political participation. However, academic studies of Spice Girls' fandom do not lend weight to this critique.

In a study of Spice Girls' fandom, Bettina Fritzsche concludes that young women understand Girl Power according to their own backgrounds, and individuals define the pop group's message in different ways.[43] Young women relate to the Spice Girls' image of empowerment through their individual lenses of identity politics; part of this identification is

made possible through the group's representations of different types of femininity, but part of it is also each individual fan coming to terms with Girl Power. The concept is not wholly constituted by what the Spice Girls say it is; instead, individual girls understand it on their own terms. In a similar study, Shelley Budgeon found that British teen girls place a high premium on self-determination ("the importance of inner strength, authenticity, and being true to oneself"[44]) and exhibit fragmented identities consistent with the social conditions wrought by late capitalism. The girls that she interviewed expressed a vision of self-actualization through Girl Power consistent with the Spice Girls' message, although they articulated it in terms of their individual realities. Dafna Lemish's study of middle-class Israeli girls turned up similar findings, with teens responding that they understood the Spice Girls as feminist, as independent of men, and as using their femininity to express their autonomy.[45] The respondents in this study indicate that they relate Girl Power to their lived realities, and legitimately find it empowering. These cross-cultural findings are a testament to the open nature of the discourse of Girl Power, and they negate criticisms of the Spice Girls' message as one that proffers style over substance. Although the discourse of Girl Power is problematic, it holds at least some feminist potential in terms of how it is understood and utilized by the teenage girls who are its subjects. Girl Power and third wave feminism both advocate individual approaches to addressing social problems. Third wave feminists emphasize the interests of the individual as a way to avoid creating a unified movement for social change that primarily serves the interests of a specific group of women. Girl Power positions young women as individuals in order to more effectively address them as consumers. Framing equality of women and girls on individual terms is inherently problematic, and *both* third wave feminism and Girl Power need to be critiqued on this basis.

Baumgardner and Richards argue that "Girlie Culture" requires a politicized consciousness; they reject Girl Power as commodified and inauthentic because they assume that teenage girls are not capable of using it tactically.[46] As discussed above, however, academic studies of Spice Girls fandom deny the validity of this assumption.

I have relied on the Spice Girls as a major example throughout this discussion because of their use of Girl Power as a slogan and brand, and the role that the pop group played in its global circulation. However, Girl Power extends beyond the realm of popular music, and the introduction of other examples will help to clarify the ways that statements made within the discourse have demonstrated a close relationship to third wave feminist thought. First, I return to the Nike campaign, "If you let me play," introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Liz Dolan, Nike's marketing vice president, conceived of the campaign as, "'a call to action' and a way to boost sales by convincing parents that athletics are good for their daughters."[47] Nike sought to exploit the teen girl buying power of Generation Y, and the strategy was successful; their sales to women increased from 15% to 25% of total U.S. sales between 1993 and 1997.[48] The marketplace for sales of athletic equipment to young women opened up due not only to the size of Generation Y, but the impact of the civil rights statute Title IX, which prohibits gender discrimination in education and thus has been interpreted as requiring that girls be allowed equal opportunities with boys in school-funded sports. Nike complemented the "If you let me play" campaign with a website for teens called "Play Like a Girl." During the height of the campaign, the site featured an essay by a 15-year-old named Karli who explained, "When my mom was younger, if someone said you play (or run or throw) like a girl, it was considered an insult. But I think it's like a compliment now … So when someone says I play like a girl, I ask which one? Lisa Leslie or Dawn Staley or Mia Hamm?"[49] Karli

associates herself with world-class female athletes in order to change the meaning of the insult and associate her femininity with athletic ability. Through the campaign and the website, Nike participated in Girl Power, offering a space for young women to associate a feminine identity with being athletic and empowered. Their campaign featured average-looking young women of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, appealing to the multicultural demographic makeup of Generation Y. They appealed to young women as consumers, but with a vision of empowerment through strength and physical ability. The campaign is an example of Girl Power as "individual power" and "consumer power" as Taft defines them, but it also acknowledges and engages with social justice issues (spousal/partner abuse, birth control and sexual health) that are major concerns of third wave feminism.

The second example of Girl Power as third wave feminism is institutional. Since 1997, the United States government has funded a Girl Power! program focused on improving young women's self-esteem. The campaign has circulated through print materials[50] and a website (www.girlpower.gov) that offers a space for young women to form a community online to learn about issues related to physical/sexual health, hygiene, substance abuse, and self-esteem. Girl Power! is operated by the Department of Health and Human Services, and signifies an institutional recognition that the concerns of adolescent girls are distinct from those of adult women (who are addressed through the Office of Women's Health). Girl Power! encourages teen girls to address social problems including substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases on an individual/local level by offering instructions on how to participate in community programs geared towards improving girls' self-esteem. Similar to the third wave, the campaign encourages individual activism on social issues that are not

necessarily gendered, and at a base level, it is concerned with young women's emotional health and self-esteem.

Finally, Hillary Carlip's 1995 anthology *Girl Power: Young Women Speak Out!* provides a strong parallel with the political project evident in the early writings of third wave feminists. This assertion is backed up by the personal nature of such key third wave texts as *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation* (1995, 2001), *to be real: telling the truth and changing the face of feminism* (1995), and *Adios Barbie: Young Women Write About Body Image and Identity* (1998). All of these anthologies rely upon personal narrative as the foundation for political activism and identity.[51] These texts present multiple feminist voices that attempt to complicate the monolithic illusion of a Western feminism that can speak to the concerns of all women. In this way, third wave feminism is locatable; every author asserts her own feminism and locates its meaning within aspects of her identity.

The anthology format becomes an experience of differential oppositional consciousness because it offers different voices (identity positions) equal emphasis and status. *Listen Up* offers the perspectives of women who identify as non-white, lesbian, Jewish, old, young, fat, Latina, professional, working-class, single mothers, and the list goes on. Uniting these variant perspectives under a single banner draws them together as pieces of the puzzle that makes up third wave feminism. It attempts to establish a place for each of these perspectives, and while it acknowledges their differences, it also symbolizes a form of coalition. Carlip's anthology brings this third wave project under the banner of "Girl Power," offering essays (sometimes reproduced in their original, handwritten form, highlighting their authenticity) from teenage girls about their lived experiences and the social conditions that shape their daily lives. Carlip acknowledges that her project was heavily influenced by the

Riot Grrrl movement, and the consciousness raising events she attended at a Riot Grrrl conference. She places *Girl Power* within this consciousness raising, writing, "I now feel that a part of claiming and reclaiming our power as girls and women is taking back those words that were once ours and have been abused and misused, and giving them a new and different connotation."[52] She lists words that have been used as labels and insults against young women, including "girl," "chick," "jock," and queer" as part of this project of reclamation. *Girl Power* is a mass market paperback, published by a major media conglomerate (Warner Books, part of the Time Warner corporation) that participates in the third wave project of identity politics and consciousness-raising.

These examples are intended to illustrate the open nature of Girl Power as a discourse. The strong association formed between Girl Power and popular music, which I discuss further in relation to the case studies in the next sections, is one dimension of Girl Power. Representations of Girl Power have appeared in movies (particularly in the mid-1990s revival of the teen slasher genre, including *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*), television (with heroines in series including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *Charmed*, among others) and have entered girls' consciousness via the classroom and the Internet. It is not productive to dismiss Girl Power as a crass marketing tool when the discourse has become a part of young women's daily lives. In the following case studies I engage with the discourse in terms of the ideas circulating within it relating to femininity, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and ability through an examination of teen girl icons. In the conclusion of this chapter, I continue to negotiate the meaning of Girl Power as third wave feminism, arguing that the discourse circulates legitimate feminist ideas to the point where it cannot be dismissed as a instance of standard co-optation.[53]

Case Study One: Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera

Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera (Britney and Christina) emerged as pop music stars on the Girl Power scene in the late 1990s, but both girls got their start together on the cable Disney channel's *New Mickey Mouse Club* in the early part of the decade. Born a year apart (Christina in 1980, Britney in 1981) the two have shared parallel successes in the television and music industries that led to constant comparisons between their onstage personae and their offstage public lives, positioning these teen girl icons against each other as competitors for the same market share. They have both been overtly labeled by the mainstream media as representative of Girl Power; they have participated in the discourse by offering representations of assertive, performative sexuality; as teen girl icons, they emphasize femininity as accessible, playful, and fun. Britney and Christina have both been marketed as products through media conglomerates, and they have participated in this process by associating their artistic personae with a variety of brand names. I examine both of these icons as examples of the connections between Girl Power and the third wave because they (each in a different way) emphasize the performative nature of identity and the multiple and contradictory meanings that are opened up by this kind of play, constantly negotiating the subject/object dichotomy in their attempts to control their iconic images. In their slightly varied embodiments of Girl Power, Britney and Christina also demonstrate how consumerism becomes intertwined with identity in mass media representations.

Britney and Christina have both been shrewdly marketed to teenage girls as icons of success and empowerment. As their careers took off, controversy arose regarding their status as teenage performers with highly sexualized onstage images.[54] Britney countered these criticisms by becoming a spokesperson for the abstinence movement. Christina initially

responded with a similar move, but eventually took more direct control of her image by embracing her Latina heritage and establishing her role as writer/producer of her music and pushing the envelope with her sexually suggestive concert performances even further. Both of these teen icons have negotiated the subject/object dichotomy throughout their careers, although their strategies have differed.

The multitude of popular press biographies of Britney all emphasize her girl-next-door qualities as an average kid from a middle-class family in Kentwood, Louisiana who dreamed of becoming a singer. The narratives that they construct allow spaces for fan identification, making Britney's glamour and superstardom seem approachable and accessible to young women. They mask or ignore the childhood years that Britney spent in New York City building her career, making her celebrity appear instant and attainable. These average-girl narratives participate in the discourse of Girl Power by assuring Britney's fans that she is just like they are, and thus, they are just like her. For example, in Maggie Marron's biography, *Britney Spears: Stylin'!*, she assures readers that Britney is an average girl. She writes:

> Friends and fans agree that one of the best things about Britney is that despite her superstardom, she's still the same old girl. She loves hanging out with her friends at the mall when she goes home, talking on the phone, and playing board games. She may be the girl all guys want to date, but she's down to earth enough that girls still love her like a best pal. If you met her on the street, you would probably think she was just your average, ordinary, everyday teenager. But Britney has a plan. As she told Donna Freydkin, a reporter for CNN Interactive, 'I want to conquer the world.'[55]

The activities and interests of potential teen fans (shopping, talking on the phone) are brought together with Britney's ambition, normalizing the idea of being an average teen girl who also fantasizes about world domination. Further, this narrative defuses the competitive threat to young women that is presented by Britney's onstage sexual persona, again by presenting her

as an "average" wholesome young woman who is more interested in being a friend to her teen girl fans than she is in stealing their boyfriends. This narrative encourages teen girls to identify with Britney and simultaneously to idolize her as a teen girl who can realistically claim world domination as a career goal.

The construction of the Britney Spears pop star identity is key to her iconic status in the discourse of Girl Power. Britney's onstage persona differs greatly from the girl-next-door persona she emphasizes in magazine and television interviews. In concert performances and music videos, Britney has performed in sexually provocative outfits and poses, constructing an adult sexuality from the playful stance of a teenage girl. In the first video from her debut album, "...Baby One More Time," Britney dressed in a Catholic schoolgirl outfit, dancing and performing the song's suggestive lyrics as a teenage girl who desires and understands that she is desired in return. The video was controversial with adults, but popular with young women (and men). It is one small piece of an overall marketing strategy that has emphasized Britney's persona as a constant play between childlike innocence (the schoolgirl outfit) and adult sexuality (the lyrics and dance moves).

Britney's play with identity, particularly her emphasis on the girl-next-door persona, encourages young women to identify with her as they covet her celebrity status. Britney acknowledges this kind of identification in her own biographical project, *Britney Spears' Heart to Heart*. She writes:

> I know that lots of little girls dream of becoming stars one day, and I'm not sure what made my mom realize this was anything more than some phase I was going through. Yes, I had talent, but there's a lot of talent out there. And talent, I can tell you, is not enough. It takes a whole lot more than the ability to carry a tune to make your dreams come true. It takes a great support team.[56]

The level of seemingly instant fame attained by Britney requires a strong marketing campaign. In order to exploit the market opportunities presented by Girl Power, Britney's team focused on her image rather than her music. One biographer writes that Britney's label Jive Records, part of the major media conglomerate Sony, spent a year perfecting her image as a play between "cute and wholesome" and an adult level of sex appeal.[57] Jive Records invested six months of advance marketing in Britney, including a three-month, twenty-eight city tour of "the malls of Middle America" which was sponsored by teen magazines including *YM*, *Teen*, *Seventeen*, and *Teen People*. [58]

It is significant that these marketing efforts demonstrate the label's desire to market Britney specifically as a girls' cultural product, rather than as a pop songstress for wider audiences. Jive Records used teen girls' magazines to finance and cross-promote the mall tour, and also to build Britney's name recognition with their teen girl readers. When her album, ... *Baby One More Time*, was released in January of 1999, seventeen-year-old Britney became a major pop phenomenon. *Billboard* magazine reported that she was the youngest female in *Billboard* history to have a simultaneous No. 1 single and No. 1 album debut, the first new female artist to achieve this feat, and the first new artist (male or female) to have a single reach No. 1 during the same week that her album debuted at No. 1.[59] Teen girls were the major market force behind sales of Britney's debut, providing a demonstration of the market power of Generation Y.

The Jive Records marketing team also took a page from the Spice Girls' playbook by signing Britney up for multiple product endorsements as quickly as possible. During the circulation of her first album, Britney was also shilling for Pepsi Cola and the National Milk Board's "Got Milk?" campaign (which prominently featured lyrics from her hit single "...

Baby One More Time" in print ads, simultaneously selling milk and her album to teens). Her management team apparently did not worry that Britney's association with product endorsements would keep her from being taken seriously as a musician. An early star biography paints these product plugs in an interesting light:

> Next came the even more high-profile Tommy Hilfiger modeling gig. Check out any magazine aimed at girls and young women: Britney is prominently featured in two-page advertisements, posing with headphones and Tommy jeans and a tank top. The fashion spread isn't limited to the glossies: Britney's on billboards all over America.[60]

Britney's use of her image to sell jeans for Tommy Hilfiger is portrayed as a modeling job, positing that she is both a model and a singer (a multi-talented performer) whose glamorous career doing "fashion spreads" (actually: paid advertisements) happens to contribute to the establishment of her career as a pop singer by disseminating her image through media outlets across the country. Although Britney's career has been relatively brief, her product endorsements are too numerous to count, including a line of licensed products and her own signature fragrance. Similarly, the marketing blitz for Christina's Girl Power message also paralleled that of Britney's in terms of product endorsements. Christina was featured in ads for Skechers shoes, Clairol Herbal Essences shampoo, and Coca Cola. Her 2000 tour was sponsored by a partnership between Sears and Levi's who promoted Christina in exchange for the opportunity to associate their products with her image.[61] Product endorsements have played an integral role in establishing her image and furthering her career. The strategy as a whole is key to understanding the mass media address to Generation Y, and how consumerism is normalized as part of youth identity in teens' popular culture.

Britney's iconic image offers multiple and contradictory meanings to her fans, in part because of her intentional play with the performance of sexual autonomy. In response to the

negative press that she received for marketing sexualized images to young women, Britney became a high-profile spokesperson for the abstinence movement that has flourished in recent years due to extensive funding from the George W. Bush administration. In 2000, when the *British Medical Journal* examined the (in)efficacy of abstinence vows in preventing pregnancy and STDs, they proclaimed virginity the "new rock 'n' roll," arguing specifically that representatives like Britney Spears had spurred the makings of a movement.[62] During her most successful years as a performer, Britney was the poster-girl for the abstinence movement, and spoke openly about being a "pledge-keeper,"[63] subscribing to the philosophy of the faith-based Baptist abstinence group, True Love Waits. Britney's status as the face of the movement reached global proportions. In December of 2000, "The Church of England hailed her as a 'great ambassador for virginity,'" and, "the Irish Government [was] using her in a pro-virginity campaign with the slogan 'Do a Britney.'"[64] Her playful, performative sexuality (readily on display in her music videos and onstage performances) was simultaneously associated with abstinence as a form of individual autonomy. She garnered approval from institutional sources (churches and governments) that counterbalanced her widely-circulated sexual persona, encouraging teen girl fans to read Britney's iconic image as a balancing act between these contradictory identities. Melanie Lowe's study of Britney Spears fandom indicated that girls reacted negatively to her "innocent" image, but continued to identify with her, even as they criticized her.[65]

A number of girls' popular culture icons have been associated with the discourse of Girl Power and the abstinence movement. At one time or another, Britney, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson, and tennis star Anna Kournikova all spoke openly about their decisions to remain abstinent.[66] As spokespersons for the movement, they made direct

connections between their abstinence and their status as "role models" for young women.[67] These teen icons stated that they would choose to remain abstinent so that young women could look up to them; simultaneously, these icons dressed provocatively, posed for sexually suggestive photographs in men's magazines including *FHM* and *Maxim*, and maintained their images as objects of desire in public performances. The contradictions inherent in this discussion illuminate the subject/object dichotomy with which third wave feminism attempts to engage. Britney attempted to counterweigh a sexualized stage persona that helped to sell records and market her as a brand image with an abstinence pledge that allowed her to maintain her sexual agency in the face of harsh criticism.

As a major trend among young women in the entertainment industry, abstinence holds significance within the discourse of Girl Power. Teen icons discuss abstinence in the pages of teen girls'magazines, associating it with achieving self-confidence and self-actualization.[68] This is typical of the rhetoric that surrounds abstinence in teen girls' cultural products. Vows of abstinence are seen as signs of personal strength, or individual power, implying that young women who do engage in sexual activity are weak, and are doing something wrong. The message of empowerment that Britney advocates becomes muddled as she suggests that young women should own their sexuality, as long as they simultaneously maintain an "innocence" that is part and parcel of their status as strong, sexual beings.

Britney has capitalized on the contradictory possibilities of presenting an image that is both "sexy" and "innocent" (both active, desiring subject and passive object of desire). Evan Annett, a high school student who analyzed the trend of abstinence and pop music for the *Montreal Gazette* makes the argument that Britney's sexualized onstage persona, in which she has performed suggestive numbers while barely clothed, writhing with a live snake, is

somehow indicative of contemporary empowerment.[69] He argues that in the formulations of young female pop singers, "Sex becomes a mass spectacle… [They] seize their audience by its lustful heart. Off stage, however, the starlets then deny that they intended to be so provocative."[70] Annett further argues that this is a stance of double empowerment, in which the icon can receive desire, but does not return it. Although he sees this as "empowerment," Britney's career trajectory seems to demonstrate that when sex is conflated with power, teen girl icons can only maintain their authority by attracting sexual attention and then refusing to acknowledge it, which fails to resolve tensions between subject and object positions. Britney lost control of her carefully designed image after announcing that she and then-boyfriend Justin Timberlake had engaged in premarital sex.[71] She has yet to regain her previous levels of popularity, and much of the media attention focused on her during the course of two marriages and the birth of her children has been resoundingly negative.[72]

Christina's route to becoming a teen icon is similar to Britney's, but at the same time more firmly rooted in recognizable aspects of the Girl Power discourse; in addition, she has demonstrated a greater degree of identity play in marketing herself and her image. Christina stuck with her Disney roots following her seasons on the *New Mickey Mouse Club*, introducing herself on the pop music scene with a single on Disney's *Mulan* soundtrack. *Mulan* presents Disney's vision of a multicultural, empowered heroine; the title character is a young Chinese girl who dresses as a man in order to go into battle in place of her elderly father, and she eventually saves China through her superior strength and skill as a warrior. Christina biographer Molly MacDermot describes Mulan as a "strong, independent, spirited girl, who represents the same 'girl power' Christina strives for."[73] Christina's song on the soundtrack, "Reflection," describes a young woman's struggle with issues of identity, as the

person she appears to be on the outside is not who she is on the inside – a theme that resonates with the identity concerns of Girl Power politics. Christina told a biographer that, "The song's theme – the struggle to establish your identity – was something I could really relate to as a teenage girl myself,"[74] consciously tying the song to adolescent girls' concerns related to identity and empowerment.

The launch of Christina's debut solo album was preceded by a marketing campaign that matched Britney's in scope and expense. Prior to the album's launch RCA, which like Britney's label Jive Records is owned by Sony, spent at least one million dollars on voice lessons, writers, producers, and a variety of marketing efforts to support the production. To reach teen girl audiences in 1999, Christina's marketing team utilized a relatively new form of viral marketing through the Internet. According to Christina biographer Christine Granados, "A company called Electric Artists hired workers to surf the net and create a buzz about Christina. The people at Electric Artists posted information on message boards on such web sites as www.alloy.com and other hip teen sites like www.gurl.com" [75] (two teen girls' websites discussed in Chapter One). Electric Artists visited chat rooms to locate teen girls online and have one-on-one interaction about Christina, and they also asked America Online to offer features that would help promote the singer. This strategy was successful as the album's first single, "Genie in a Bottle," debuted at No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts, introducing Christina as a major force in pop music and demonstrating the potential of the world wide web in marketing to teenage girls. Additionally, shortly after the debut of her album she landed a guest spot on the Fox teen melodrama *Beverly Hills, 90210*, in which she showcased songs from the album.[76] The marketing strategies behind Christina's debut demonstrate the branding of her image as a girls' cultural product, seeking teen girl audiences.

Christina's debut album demonstrates her engagement with the discourse of Girl Power. The sexually suggestive lyrics of the song ("If you wanna be with me baby/there's a price you pay/I'm a genie in a bottle/You gotta rub me the right way") helped to shed her Disney image while simultaneously providing fodder for debates about teen girls' sexuality in pop music. The second single, "What a Girl Wants," is a more straightforward contribution to the Girl Power discourse that Christina has described as, "a song about young women being strong and clear about their own wishes and desires."[77] This returns to the themes of strength, self-determination, and self-actualization offered by the discourse of Girl Power, associating these themes with Christina as an average, everyday girl who also happens to be a famous pop singer.

Initially, Christina's marketers downplayed her ethnic heritage. However, as controversy arose surrounding her onstage performances in skimpy clothing doing sexually suggestive dance moves, her team sought new ways to help her reach and relate to her audience. She followed Britney's example by taking an abstinence stance, but her pledge to wait until marriage never attained the level of publicity that Britney's had reached. In short order, Christina moved to separate her identity from the "sexy"/"innocent" balancing act that Britney utilized, and she did this by publicly claiming her Latina heritage (her father, who left the family when she was very young, was from Ecuador). This represented a major shift in the construction of image because, as a blond-haired, blue-eyed teenager, she did not display visible markers of Latina identity. In 2000, Christina recorded a Spanish-language pop album, *Mi Reflejo*, which not only attempted to capitalize on the Latin music trend that was prevalent in the pop scene with successful singers including Ricky Martin and Enrique Iglesias, but also recalled the roots of her career in the "Reflection" single for the *Mulan*

soundtrack. The album was moderately successful, but Christina entered into highly-publicized feuds with her management and her label over control of her image.

Christina demanded a major marketing shift, and her 2002 release, "Stripped," was the result of this struggle. In marketing the new album, Aguilera (who had claimed that she wanted to be taken seriously as an artist) posed nude or semi-nude for a variety of magazines including *CosmoGirl!*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Maxim* (aimed at the young male demographic) and she released a sexually suggestive, sadomasochism-themed video for the first single off of the album, "Dirrty," (with the double "r" as an apparent reference to the Riot Grrrl growl). Christina had complete control over the song as both writer and producer, and the effort was not as well-received by fans as her previous albums had been. In her tour to promote the effort, Christina's set list included songs about controlling her career, self-actualization and dancing.[78] Her sexual empowerment (in which she offered no apologies or denials for her performances of desire) did not translate into record sales, and apparently did not resonate with the teen girl fan base that she had cultivated with her first album.

Britney and Christina are teen girl icons who were constructed through similar processes of image making and brand identity formation that suit the imperatives of media conglomerates and global corporations. These icons have been successfully marketed to young women on a global scale as part of Generation Y's discourse of Girl Power. Their performances of multiple and contradictory modes of identity have emphasized young femininity as sexual, playful, and empowered. Jessica Taft's critique of Girl Power as "individual power" and "consumer power" applies to the formation of these young women as icons, but they also demonstrate the aspects of Girl Power that reverberate with third wave feminism. The contradictions inherent in these icons' representations of empowered sexuality

open up spaces for young women's engagement with flexible identity performance, as well as an association between youth, femininity, and desire.

Case Study Two: Brandy and Beyonce

In this case study, I focus on the significance of racial identity within the discourse of Girl Power. Brandy Norwood and Beyonce Knowles (Brandy and Beyonce) are African American teen icons that demonstrate the visibility of race within Girl Power, and the implications that racial difference holds within this discourse. Unlike the teens icons in the case study one, Brandy and Beyonce became icons as multi-talented, multi-faceted performers. I examine the connection between racial identity and the demands placed on these icons to demonstrate multiple artistic talents in order to achieve global circulation within mainstream media. While Britney later used her pop stardom to attempt to launch an acting career with the Girl Power film *Crossroads* (2002), Brandy launched her career as an actress and a singer simultaneously. Beyonce launched her career through a pop group, Destiny's Child, as a dancer, singer/songwriter, occasional choreographer, and she later parlayed her success into careers in acting and fashion design. As teen girl icons, Brandy and Beyonce indicate girl power's relationship with the third wave of feminism by bringing aspects of racial identities into discussions of young women's empowerment and developing modes of address specifically to reach African American teen girl audiences.

Brandy launched her acting career just prior to the release of her first album, first in a small role on the short-lived CBS sitcom *Thea* (1993), and then in the title role on UPN's first successful sitcom, *Moesha* (originally developed for CBS), which premiered in 1996 and ran through 2001. Brandy biographer Matthew Newman argues that the show's success was due to its "funny but realistic portrayal of African-American kids. Up until UPN gave *Moesha* the

green light, black kids looking for an accurate reflection of their lives had to sift through the slapstick world on shows like *What's Happening!!* or the posh unreality of *The Cosby Show*."[79] The association of Brandy's real-life persona with that of her character's contributed to the aura of "realism" that *Moesha* cultivated. Newman calls Brandy's portrayal of the smart, headstrong Moesha "the most accurate TV portrayal of a black teenager ever."[80] The show was not designed to be a "colorblind" sitcom (a critique that has been applied to *The Cosby Show*) but instead a series with an African American cast that would appeal to the urban viewing audience that UPN sought to reach.

The show focused on Moesha's struggles with adolescence, and the larger family issue of her single father's decision to remarry. Show creators Sara Finney and Vida Spears envisioned the series as a positive but realistic portrayal of African American family life. Spears explains their thinking, "The images out there of black families are so negative. They're falling apart, there's somebody missing in the home. But most families are hard-working … they work to raise their families, they love their children, and they want to give them everything they can."[81] This vision for the series as one that would provide portrayals of African American family life that would appeal to African American viewers may explain why CBS passed on the pilot in 1995. Ralph Farquhar, an African American writer/producer on the show, felt that the new networks (the WB, UPN) offered more opportunities for diversity than the majors (CBS, NBC, and ABC), especially behind the camera. *Moesha* developed its marks of authenticity as a show written, produced, and starring African Americans for a new network specifically seeking African American viewers.[82]

Moesha was initially a success with young, urban audiences. The series delivered teen viewers, but also a high percentage of black viewers, and UPN used its success to establish a

target with "sitcoms that are young, urban and black."[83] Following the success of *Moesha*, UPN premiered five sitcoms featuring African-American casts. This kind of strategic targeting followed the example set by Fox during its early years of building an audience by appealing directly to an underserved audience segment. UPN read the ratings success of *Moesha* as a chance to connect with African American viewers rather than young female viewers as a whole, crossover audience; this strategy translated into a two-hour block of family sitcoms with African American casts including *Goode Behavior*, *Malcolm & Eddie*, *Sparks*, and *Homeboys From Outer Space*.

The result of UPN's development of African American sitcoms seems to have been the dampening of *Moesha*'s potential as a crossover hit. When network president Lucie Salhany was questioned in 1996 about UPN's participation in the trend of "ghettoization," she denied the accusation, but the polarization of audiences that began in the 1980s with the rapid expansion of niche market cable channels was continuing to grow.[84] UPN marketed *Moesha* as part of an entire line-up of programming aimed at African American audiences, rather than as a family sitcom with general appeal to all audiences. Sheryl Lee Ralph, who portrayed *Moesha*'s stepmother Dee, expressed frustration with this tactic in 1999, arguing, "We're exactly what the American public says it is looking for: an honest presentation of family life, regardless of color, regardless of ethnicity."[85] Increasingly in the 1990s, the racial and ethnic make-up of a series' cast seemed to play a large role in its audience appeal; by the end of the decade, the series that were most popular with black audiences barely overlapped with the most popular programming among white viewers.[86]

Moesha was one of UPN's top-rated shows during its first two seasons, but in season three the producers altered its formula in order to make it a more friendly lead-in to the new

UPN acquisition, *Clueless*, a sitcom based on the film of the same name which featured a mostly-white, upper class cast of characters. *Clueless* originally aired for one season on ABC (1996-97), as part of the TGIF block on Friday nights that drew young, white family audiences.[87] In an effort to draw white viewers to both sitcoms on UPN, producers had Moesha transfer from her all-black public high school to an all-white private school. Newman quotes one of the show's writers as observing of the shift: "The sister's gone suburban."[88] When ratings dropped, the show was returned to its original form for the fourth season, and again found a loyal viewership among African Americans. The implication of this struggle is that there was very little potential for crossover audiences between the two series; the young, African American viewership for *Moesha* declined to tune in as its storyline increasingly paralleled that of a sitcom about wealthy white teens that previously aired on a major broadcast network.

Moesha's failure to crossover from its established niche audience further adds to the perception of the authenticity of its representations. The show's writers had developed the "realistic" tone of the series by scripting "ghetto slang"[89] for its teenage characters and complicating the sitcom format through the ongoing problems that Moesha would deal with over a number of episodes, rather than resolving every problem completely within half an hour. As a high school student, the character deals with serious family issues and faces quandaries related to school, relationships, and racial identity with her friends. After high school, she struggles to choose between college and a professional career (first taking a job at an African American magazine, later deciding to return to school). The show's authenticity as an African American text was further cemented by high profile fans, including hip hop star Busta Rhymes, whose declaration of support for the series effectively associated his persona

with its representations.[90] Jane D. Brown and Carol J. Purdan's study of the racial and gender differences in teens' television viewing habits found that in 2001, *Moesha* ranked 3rd among shows watched by black teens, and did not place in the top ten of shows watched by whites.[91]

As a series about an adolescent girl, *Moesha* engaged directly with the discourse of Girl Power. In the season one episode, "Million Boy March," Moesha fights against a sexist boy from the senior class who thinks that women belong in the kitchen. The episode brings together discussion of the interlinked nature of gender and race-based inequalities (as is evident in the title, which references the "Million Man March" on Washington DC in 1995), but also how structures of authority relate to age. Moesha is a freshman girl who is not afraid to stand up to a senior boy when she disagrees with him. In the season two episode, "Strike a Pose," Moesha stars in a fashion show, but simultaneously receives an education about the value of intelligence over personal appearance. The lesson emphasized in the episode is that self-esteem and empowerment are not superficial, and cannot be attained through style and beauty alone. These representations of Girl Power took place within the context of authenticity developed by the series, thus relating Girl Power to its African American teen girl viewership.

Brandy biographer Anna Golden placed Brandy's teen icon persona squarely within the discourse of Girl Power, explaining her to Generation Y:

> This generation has come of age, and raised its own idols, the people they admire. And without exception, they're young. They stand for different things from their predecessors. When the Spice Girls talk about Girl Power, they're just putting into words the feelings of every young woman who's out there and wants her rights. They're not going to be used. Women have a power today that they never had before. They may still look at the boys, and put the posters on their walls, but they're also out there doing it for themselves. Exactly like Brandy.[92]

Through six on-air seasons, *Moesha* continued to be one of UPN's most successful shows, delivering young, female viewers, particularly within the African American audience segment. In 1999, the series remained "UPN's highest-rated show among teens and young women."[93] Further, in 1999 one reviewer compared the relative success of *Moesha* with the WB series *Felicity*, a drama similarly built around a young female lead. The reviewer found that while *Felicity* held a larger audience in terms of raw numbers (possibly owing to the superior audience reach of the WB)[94], the audience for *Moesha* (at this time in its fourth season) was increasing while the former series was in decline. The percentage of the show's female viewers ages 18-to-34 years old had increased by 33 percent from the previous year making it one of UPN's strongest and most competitive programs.[95] The major distinction that this reviewer fails to note is that *Moesha's* viewing audience remained heavily skewed towards African Americans, while *Felicity* and the majority of the WB's teen-targeted programs, were popular with young, white viewers.

Brandy's music career also emphasized her authenticity as an African American teen icon while simultaneously demonstrating her commitment to Girl Power. While her audience was more specific than that of the Spice Girls', her interpretation of the concept of Girl Power was essentially the same. Brandy's self-titled debut album was released in 1994, following the cancellation of her first sitcom, *Thea*. The album featured her hit single, "I Want to Be Down," and earned two Grammy nominations for the fifteen-year-old singer, including one for Best Female R&B Performance. As a genre of music, rhythm & blues has typically been the domain of black performers, and sales for the album were driven by African American teens.

Brandy first demonstrated real crossover appeal as a singer/actress in 1997, starring in ABC's musical version of the fairytale, *Cinderella*. The production featured an all-black cast, including singer/actress Whitney Houston as the wicked stepmother, and drew the highest ratings that ABC had garnered for Sunday prime-time in fourteen years.[96] The success of the program, watched by 60 million viewers, indicated that Brandy held appeal for wider audiences than she reached through UPN and her R&B albums. She moved further into crossover success in 1997 by becoming a spokesperson for Cover Girl make-up (targeting the teen girl market). The cosmetics company later sponsored her "Never S-A-Y Never" tour in 1999. Brandy also became one of the few African American performers to be featured regularly in the pages of *Seventeen* magazine, which circulated among a large, but mostly white readership.

Brandy maintained an "average" good-girl image throughout her years as a teen performer. Her concert performances did not inspire controversy; instead, along with her role on *Moesha*, her persona as an R&B songstress was carefully tied into her wholesome overall image. As teen biographer explains, "She has enough on her plate, singing, acting, just being Brandy, the teen icon, the Princess of R&B. And a normal, good person on top of everything else."[97] Her portrayal of Cinderella was strategically aligned with her overall image as a teen R&B princess. Although Brandy was "out there doing it" for herself, developing crossover appeal required maintaining her good-girl image. As a teenage African American singer and sitcom star, Brandy observed different standards of behavior than Britney and Christina were held to, although each teen's stardom was nearly simultaneous. Brandy was closely associated with the "authenticity" of the average teenage character Moesha, and she could not have maintained her popularity and marketing (including several cover shoots for the teen

magazine *Seventeen*[98]) with the performative, sexual identities that Britney and Christina both cultivated. Instead, Brandy's success depended on her status as a multi-talented performer and role model. One example of how Brandy's good-girl image was used to open up her potential for crossover success comes from a typical teen magazine interview. In a July 1999 cover story (following Britney and Christina's launches as pop singers) Brandy, on the list of *Seventeen*'s "hot" performers, is asked about her fresh tattoo. The staff writer is curious about how the twenty-year-old's mother reacted to her newly-acquired body art.[99] Brandy responds gamely that her mother handled it well, but the interview raises questions about Brandy's image and her perceived individual autonomy. As an adult woman, Brandy still maintains the image that she is dependent upon her parents for approval in a manner similar to that of her adolescent fans. This runs counter to images of Britney and Christina as teenage girls who project the sexuality of adult women.

Brandy's counterpart in girl power discourse is Beyonce Knowles, the focal point of the African American girl group, Destiny's Child. Although Beyonce's initial success as a performer came through group performance (first as a quartet, eventually a trio) she was always the center of the group, and the only member to withstand a multitude of personnel changes.[100] Beyonce got her start as a dancer/singer/songwriter at a very young age, owing to the support of her parents who have worked as managers, producers, choreographers, and clothing designers for the group. Beyonce emerged as a strong proponent of Girl Power in the late 1990s through musical calls to action for feminine independence, but she framed her approach to individual empowerment in slightly different terms than her peers. Destiny's Child member Kelly Rowland recalls how the girls' attitudes about self-determination were shaped by the years they spent training with Mathew Knowles, Beyonce's father and the

group's manager. She writes in *Soul Survivors*, the book co-authored by three of the most well-known members of the group:

> Mathew always taught Beyonce and me important life lessons such as, don't let boys get up in your business – they sure won't ever let you get up in theirs. That's just the way it is, unfortunately. Men tend to be very serious, whereas girls can be very emotional. But girls sometimes tend to let guys get in their ear and head, and that becomes a problem. I personally don't believe you should ever let a man get up in your business – it doesn't matter if he's a boyfriend or not.[101]

The rhetoric here is stronger than typical iterations of Girl Power. Kelly not only describes the value of individual empowerment, but also of avoiding men as a corrupting influence. In the same section of the book, Beyonce describes how she dated a young man for several months, but never told him that she was in Destiny's Child. She describes the decision to keep her performing life separate from her private, romantic life as her "prerogative."[102] While Girl Power advocates including the Spice Girls, Britney, and Christina emphasize that relationships with boys should be fun and taken less seriously than female friendships, Beyonce argues that self-actualization is of primary importance, and boyfriends represent a potential threat to a girl's empowerment.

Beyonce also introduced raced terminology into discussions of young women's empowerment, adding the term "bootylicious" to what I am terming the Girl Power lexicon.[103] Bootylicious is seemingly a synonym for Girl Power, but it refers more directly to sexual empowerment. The word "booty" itself has circulated significantly in African American hip hop music, and refers to a full-figured woman's posterior. Beyonce popularized "bootylicious" as a concept through a song that defined it as women's physical self-confidence that allows them to be assertive subjects. Beyonce's mother, Tina Knowles, describes the concept in her book on the group's personal and fashion style, writing:

> Being bootylicious has less to do with what outfit you're rockin' and more to do with the frame of mind and the confidence you exude [...] It's the idea of feeling comfortable in your skin, feeling happy with yourself [...] The other key is to be sexy without looking nasty, or 'stank' as we call it...Sex appeal should be something that's implied, not stated. That's what the 'bootylicious' philosophy is all about.[104]

She ties the terms of individual empowerment to physical appearance and confidence that walks a blurry line between appearing sexually confident (which is good) and appearing sexually available (which is bad). She goes on to bear out this distinction by comparing the characteristics that comprise being "bootylicious" vs. "hootchylicious." The underlying theme of the lists that she develops is "Respecting the line between sexy/classy and nasty/trashy."[105] The line being drawn here about appropriate displays of sexuality and femininity are not lines that are drawn in terms of the teen icon images of Britney and Christina. Although, as I discussed in the first case study, Britney and Christina drew criticism from concerned adults, their sexualized images did not seem to hurt their relationship with fans. Tina Knowles draws different parameters for the image of Destiny's Child, presumably in part because she is a parent, but it also seems tied to the same unspoken standards of behavior for African American mainstream performers that Brandy navigated in her career as a teen icon.

The popular appeal of "Bootylicious," which was a major hit for Destiny's Child is an important reason to examine how it adds to the discussion of Girl Power. While the lyrics of the song echo sentiments expressed earlier by the Spice Girls, Britney, and Christina (including sexual desire and withholding, self-confidence and individual autonomy) there is some differentiation between being "bootylicious" and having "girl power." Destiny's Child uses the word "booty" which is connoted as an African American slang term that refers to a

woman's backside, to lend the song a hip hop connotation. The song's use of raced terminology opens up a specific space within the Girl Power discourse for African American identification. The pop group is addressing African American girls (and fans who identify across boundaries of race, gender, and/or age) with their message about empowerment and self-confidence, which is clearly sexual in nature. Beyonce's use of the term engages in the same kinds of contradictions wrought by Britney's sexual/innocent persona, and this is illuminated by comparing bootylicious to what it isn't: hootchylicious. This invokes a raced term, "hootchie," to establish that the former is positive, healthy self-confidence that can be contrasted with the latter: negative, insecure, attention-seeking that locates self-worth in sexual attention from males.

A major change in the pop landscape that can be traced directly to the Spice Girls is that young female performers are expected to establish a position on young women's empowerment. Unlike the African American girl groups of the 1960s that Susan Douglas has written about in *Where the Girls Are*, the "message" of Destiny's Child extends beyond the lyrics of their widely-circulated radio hits. Many of their songs are about women's sexual self-esteem and financial independence and members of the group, particularly Beyonce, were frequently interviewed about their music and its perceived impact. Tina Knowles finds it necessary to explain the meaning of bootylicious because the group was inventing a new language to talk about girls' self-esteem that incorporated the idea of inner strength and self-confidence with the idea of taking pride in one's outward appearance.

One of Destiny's Child's most direct anthems on the subject of young women's empowerment is "Independent Women Part 1," a song that is prominently featured on the soundtrack to the Girl Power film *Charlie's Angels* (2000). The movie is a film version of the

successful ABC television series (1976-81) that focuses on three female investigators who were trained as police officers, but left to work for a private firm when they were not taken seriously by the male-dominated institution of law enforcement. The film's multicultural cast, featuring Asian-American actress Lucy Liu, was a departure from the all-white Angels of the television show. The series traded heavily on the sex appeal of its stars, and the film version provides some acknowledgement and parody of the way that the television show would direct the male gaze to the physical attributes of the "Angels." In other words, the film version acknowledges that the television series presents outdated representations of women by offering a "wink" at those representations and playing the idea of sex appeal for laughs. The women of the film version use their physical appearance to manipulate men, but the situations (and often the outfits) in which they do this are so over-the-top that they appear ridiculous. The song "Independent Women Part 1" heavily participates in this process because it is lyrically drawn into the narrative of the film (including shout-outs to the actresses who star in the film: "Lucy Liu/with my girl Drew, Cameron D and Destiny/Charlie's Angels") thus making the narrative of the song a part of the narrative of the film. The lyrics of the song focus on consumer independence; the narrative expresses the satisfaction of a young woman who is explaining to a man that she does not seek anything from him outside of companionship. The chorus addresses women directly, encouraging them to "throw your hands up" in agreement with the sentiments expressed in the lyrics. Beyonce claims that the song is "about working hard and accomplishing what you want out of life and being able to provide for yourself."[106] Although this is fairly direct Girl Power rhetoric, she ties this in with aspects of young femininity that are not often discussed in mass mediated renditions of Girl Power, including single motherhood, arguing that no matter what their circumstances, young

women should not have to be dependent on others (boyfriend, parents) to establish their self-worth.

It is significant that in "Independent Women Part 1," Beyonce's iteration of Girl Power specifically refers to consumer power. The song's lyrics proclaim women's independence through the purchase of clothes, shoes, a house, and a car, among other items. The repeated line, "Depend on no one else to give you what you want," clearly refers to material possessions. This focus on consumer power stems from a generational attitude that consumer power is real power; the fact that this is relevant to young women's lives is supported by the massive popularity of the song. Further, Beyonce writes proudly of the perceived impact of the song on Japanese youth culture; she delineates a cultural shift in which teen girls began to support themselves rather than relying on boyfriends because the song made it a trend to do so.[107] While she may be overstating the impact of the song, the trend that she observes in Japan is certainly tied into the discourse of Girl Power and discussions of young female empowerment in the mass media.

Beyonce formulates Girl Power as the ability to evade patriarchal authority through financial independence, which directly engages with the consumerist emphasis placed on Generation Y. Beyonce's positioning of consumer power as liberation would be critiqued by the same sources who find fault with the Spice Girls, but it does value feminine agency and voice resistance to system gender inequalities. Consumer power becomes an idealized and yet attainable form of individual agency for this generation. Young women growing up in a world shaped by major equal rights struggles experience equality as directly linked to their ability to support a dominant ideology of consumer capitalism. Girl Power does not simply co-opt third wave feminism in this instance, however; it presents consumerism as a form of

individual tactical resistance to the social problem of gender inequality. In so doing, it acknowledges the existence of gendered oppression and advocates struggle.

In a manner rivaling the Spice Girls, Destiny's Child has met with global success. Their 2001 release "Survivor" provided the biggest opening sales that an album from Columbia Records had ever generated, debuting at No. 1 on the Billboard charts, and simultaneously debuting at No. 1 in nine other countries.[108] Beyonce has become a recognizable brand identity, associating her pop star icon image with Pepsi Cola, among others, although she has been more selective in choosing the number and kind of products that she will endorse than her teen icon peers. Beyonce's string of product endorsements have followed her attainment of global success, rather than emerging simultaneously as part of a marketing team's participation in iconic image-making prior to the launch of her debut album. Beyonce has used her name recognition to launch a solo music career and an acting career, first in the MTV musical production *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* (2000) which capitalized on her musical abilities, and then with non-singing roles in comedies including *Austin Powers: Goldmember* (2003) and *The Pink Panther* (2006).

Brandy and Beyonce demonstrate different aspects of the significance of African American identities within the discourse of Girl Power. Brandy and Beyonce both established their identities as teen icons by being "every-girls" who are also multi-talented and versatile performers. Brandy's racial identity became visible through the icon status she developed on *Moesha*, an African American family sitcom produced and marketed to highlight its markers of authenticity for this audience, as well as her career as a legitimate R&B performer. During Brandy's emergence as an actress and singer, her persona was decidedly nonsexual, and focused on her youth. While Brandy demonstrated limited crossover appeal, Beyonce

brought a mode of address, using African American slang in hip hop-inflected pop music, to a global audience. She infused the discourse of Girl Power with visible aspects of identity and the concerns of young, black femininity. Beyonce's sexuality has been more actively featured in the creation of her image, but the boundaries of these representations are carefully constructed and monitored by her handlers (in this case, her parents) to avoid tainting her established brand identity. Both of these performers contribute to the meanings of Girl Power, and they specifically contribute raced meanings of Girl Power to the overall discourse.

Conclusion

The discourse of Girl Power is a complex and enduring phenomenon that has brought key tenets of third wave feminist thinking into mainstream discussions since the mid-1990s. Girl Power has been critiqued as a co-optation of Riot Grrrl grassroots activism because a certain level of authenticity has been accorded feminist activism that resides in small-scale, subcultural movements. The circulation of the Girl Power discourse has brought the revolutionary thinking behind the Riot Grrrls into the hearts and minds of teenage girls around the world, displaying its impact in terms of young women who purchase the "message" in terms of cultural products and relate it to the circumstances of their daily lives. These young women do not read Girl Power as a diluted form of feminist activism; instead, the mass media encourage them to read it as a discourse of empowerment that is specific to their generation, its interests, and abilities. The underlying connections between counter-cultural interests and business interests are far more complex than co-optation theory would suggest. Media conglomerates have not sold Girl Power as an empty construct, or a product without a purpose. Instead they have picked up relatable ideas about young women's social status and authority that may derive from the counter-cultural movement, but do not necessarily deny its

interests. Mass marketing has brought Girl Power far beyond the limited reach of the Riot Grrrls, and although they have associated the message of Girl Power with specific products, this does not negate the circulation of the message.

The discourse of Girl Power is utopian and idealized, easily blurring real aspects of difference under the banner of slogans that encourage girls to own their strength and independence and find pleasure in their femininity. However, research has indicated that teen girls read the discourse as personal, relating it to their circumstances of identity politics; it is not the "Girl Power" trumpeted by the Spice Girls that resonates on a global level, but the ways that young women in countries around the world can accept or reject aspects of the discourse on an individual basis.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Girl Power has worked to circulate third wave feminist ideas. As a cultural feminism, the third wave is a counter-hegemonic discourse that engages in struggles over identity and representation. Girl Power has circulated some of these struggles to young women through mainstream media channels. This relationship is key to my examination of contemporary feminism in teen girls' popular culture because this new wave of feminism must be understood in terms of its problems as well as its potential. The critique that Girl Power prevents girls from recognizing the institutionalization of social and economic inequalities and thus prevents young women from effectively organizing against these oppressive forces must also be used to examine the third wave's utopian formulations of feminist coalitions based in identity that respond to social issues through the political action of everyday life.

While I have focused on only a few, there are a multitude of Girl Power icons circulating within the discourse, contributing to its meaning and its resonance with young

women. The sheer number of representations originating from singers, actors, athletes, and fictional characters, indicates the saturation of this discourse and the ways that it has become inextricably linked with Generation Y. The proliferation of mass media designed to appeal to teen girls from the 1990s forward has similarly been a proliferation of representations and negotiations of Girl Power.

The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate the exercise of authority by the mass media in constructing and circulating global icons of Girl Power, and how empowerment has been framed through these icons as representations of youth, femininity, and sexuality. A comparison between the case studies demonstrates the higher demands placed on African American performers to be multi-talented and simultaneously accessible to teen girl fans. This distinction is further drawn out by the different marketing strategies used to launch the performers in case study one and the years of career-building behind the successes of the performers in case study two. Britney and Christina opened up serious discussions about young women and sexuality through their performances of highly-sexualized identities, and they have introduced contradictions into these identities by refusing to claim them as anything beyond performance. Brandy and Beyonce have brought African American identities to the discourse of Girl Power, relating its notion of individual empowerment to the specific concerns of young black women. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the feminist potential of the discourse by examining cultural responses to it, including efforts to negate young women's social empowerment. Postfeminist responses to Girl Power counter the discourse by representing the negative consequence of girls' authority and denying the relevance of continuing gender inequalities. These postfeminist reactions against

Girl Power demonstrate its legitimate feminist potential by revealing the amount of effort that has been invested in discursive struggle over the nature of youth, femininity, and power.

Notes to Chapter Two

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[1] Quoted in Phil Linsalata, "Nike's Latest Campaign Targets Self-Esteem," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Sept. 24, 1995, Find Articles, http://www.findarticles.com, accessed online: May 15, 2006.

[2] See Dawn Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Ana Garner, Helen M. Sterk, and Shawn Adams, "Narrative Analysis of Sexual Etiquette in Teenage Magazines," *Journal of Communication* 48:4 (1998), 59-78; and Meenakshi Durham, "Dilemmas of Desire: Representation of Adolescent Sexuality in Two Teen Magazines,"*Youth and Society* 29 (1998), 369-389.

[3] Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Pantheon, 1994); Peggy Orenstein, *School Girls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994).

[4] John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works* (London: Verso, 1993), 15.

[5] Ibid.

[6] More completes histories of the Spice Girls' career trajectory are offered in Lucy O'Brien's *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (New York: Continuum, 2002) and Susan Hopkins' *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture.* Pluto Press Australia, 2002.

[7] Jack Kroll, "Wannabes," *Newsweek* Jul. 14, 1997, 67.

[8] Karen Schoemer, "The Selling of Girl Power," *Newsweek*, Dec. 29, 1997, 90.

[9] Qtd. in Susan Douglas, "Girls and Spice: All Things Nice?" *Nation* Aug. 25, 1997, 21.

[10] Dafna Lemish, "Spice World: Constructing Femininity the Popular Way," *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2003), 27.

[11] Shelley Budgeon, "'I'll Tell You What I Really, Really Want': Girl Power and Self-Identity in Britain," *Millennium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World*, ed. Sherrie Inness (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 132-133.

[14] This critique is repeated by Shelley Budgeon, Bettina Fritzsche and Dafna Lemish, cited in this chapter.

[13] Nadya Labi, "Girl Power: For the Next Generation Feminism is Being Sold as Glitz and Image. But What Do the Girls Really Want?," *Time*, Jun. 29, 1998: 60.

[14] Noted by Bettina Fritzsche in "Spicy Strategies: Pop Feminist and Other Empowerments in Girl Culture," *All About the Girl*, ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge 2004), 155-156.

[15] Jennifer L. Pozner, "Makes Me Wanna Grrrowl: Spice Girls' Pre-Packaged Power Speak Reduces Feminism to Skintight Soundbites," *Sojourner*, 1998. Qtd. in Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

[16] Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 222.

[17] Jessica K. Taft, "Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance," *All About the Girl*, ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge 2004), 69-78.

[18] Taft writes, "Even as they invoke some type of connection to feminism, they make clear that Girl Power *is not* feminism, but instead is going to be a new way of being girls/women, one that kicks feminism, not embraces or extends it." Ibid., 71.

[19] See for example Labi, "Girl Power," 60.

[20] Lemish, "Spice World," 18.

[21] The Spice Girls, *Girl Power!*, Citadel Press, 1997, 7.

[22] Qtd. in Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo's "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from Within," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1998), 813.

[23] See Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1998), 576-609.

[24] The only African-American member of the group is termed "Scary" Spice, a representational strategy that is overtly problematic.

[25] Kathleen Hanna, in particular, has advocated that Riot Grrrls should use markers to write words (like "slut" and "incest survivor") on their bodies. This technique of "self-labeling" helps grrrls to identify each other for the purposes of community building, but it is also intended to arrest the attention of men who are looking at their bodies, and make men aware of the power invested in gendered looking relations.

[26] Catherine Driscoll contradicts my argument on this point. She has documented how riot grrrls influenced fashion trends including " 'little girl' looks or 'hypersexy' looks as part of a resistance to what was often perceived as a desexualization of girls among feminists." See Catherine Driscoll, "Girl Culture, Revenge and Global Capitalism: Cybergirls, Riot Grrls,

Spice Girls," *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 29 (April 1999), EBSCOhost, accessed online: 22 May 2005.

[27] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 191.

[28] Gayatri Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985), 245.

[29] Sandoval, *Methodology*, 41.

[30] Sandoval, *Methodology*, 42.

[31] Ednie Garrison, "U.S. Feminism – Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologics of the Third Wave," *Feminist Studies* (Spring 2000), http://www.findarticles.com, accessed online: Sept. 15, 2003.

[32] Sarah Rasmuson, "Third Wave: Women, Feminism, and Today's Issues," *Women and Gender Studies Newsletter*, April 2003, http://www.wgst.intrasun.tcnj.edu. Accessed online 15 September 2003.

[33] Garrison, "U.S. Feminism," http://www.findarticles.com.

[34] Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 13.

[35] Ibid., 10.

[36] Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 20.

[37] Tamara Straus, "Lipstick Feministas," *MetroActive*, Dec. 12, 2005, http://www.metroactive.com/papers/cruz/11.29.00/feminism-0048.html, accessed online: May 20, 2006.

[38] Amy Richards, qtd. in Ibid.

[39] *Empowering Adolescent Girls*, for example, offers the exact same program for young female empowerment that the Spice Girls discuss ad nauseum in their efforts to promote their band. The book gives an overview of the "Go Grrrls" curriculum (the title of which is an obvious reference to Riot Grrrl) including establishing a positive body image, establishing a positive mindset, making and keeping friends, establishing independence, and asserting control over sexual healthy/activity. See Craig Winston LeCroy and Janice Daley,

Empowering Adolescent Girls: Examining the Present and Building Skills for the Future with the Go Grrrls Program (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

[40] Deborah L. Siegel, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

[41] Lemish, "Spice World," 26.

[42] Qtd. in Straus, "Lipstick Feministas."

[43] Fritzsche, "Spicy Strategies," 155-162.

[44] Budgeon, "'I'll Tell You,'" 122.

[45] Lemish, Dafna. "Spice Girls' Talk: A Case Study in the Development of Gendered Identity," *Millennium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World*, ed. Sherrie Inness (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 145-168.

[46] Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta*, esp. Chapter Four.

[47] Linsalata, "Nike's Latest."

[48] Nina Munk, "Girl Power," *Fortune*, Dec. 8, 1997, 132+, Proquest Research Library, accessed online: May 18, 2006.

[49] Qtd. in Ibid.

[50] Examples include: *Girl Power! Have You Got it?* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997; *Girl Power! How to Get It.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998. *Girl Power! Across the Country* (community education kit). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000.

[51] Additional third wave anthologies that follow this pattern include: Dicker, Rory and Alison Piepmeier, eds. *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century.* Pennsylvania: Northeastern University Press, 2003 and Karaian, Lara, Lisa Bryn Rundel and Allyson Mitchell, eds. *Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms.* Toronto: Sumach Press, 2001.

[52] Hillary Carlip, *Girl Power: Young Women Speak Out!* (New York: Warner Books, 1995), 7.

[53] This returned to Thomas Frank's critique of the standard narrative of co-optation in *The Conquest of Cool.* Frank argues that the relationship between the development of countercultural ideas and mainstream interests is far more interrelated and characterized by dialogue than the generally accepted theory of co-optation allows.

[54] These controversies have been documented by Susan Hopkins in *Girl Heroes*. Early discussions of Britney's sexual persona include Chris Mundy's "The Girl Can't Help It," *Rolling Stone*, May 25, 2000, 46+ and Rebecca Boone et al., "Britney and the Back-lash," *Off Our Backs*, Jan/Feb 2002.

[55] Maggie Marron, *Britney Spears: Stylin'*! (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1999), 8.

[56] Britney Spears and Lynne Spears, *Britney Spears' Heart to Heart* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 21.

[57] Beth Peters, *True Brit: The Story of Singing Sensation Britney Spears* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 4.

[58] Ibid., 6.

[59] Britney's *Billboard* achievements are documented in Ibid., 8.

[60] Jan Gabriel, *Britney Spears Backstage Pass* (New York: Scholastic, 1999), 6.

[61] "Sears and Levi's Hit a Summer High Note with Pop Music Sensation Christina Aguilera," *Business Wire*, April 13, 2000, Find Articles http://www.findarticles.com, accessed online: June 1, 2006.

[62] Gavin Yamey, "Website of the Week: Abstinence," *British Medical Journal* (International Edition), Vol. 321 Issue 7275 (16 December 2000), 1538.

[63] Grace Bradberry, "Oops, We Don't Do it All, Say Britney's Peers," *Weekend Australian*, Jan. 6, 2001, 10.

[64] Cathrin Schaer, "The New Trend of Virginity," *New Zealand Herald*, Jan. 20, 2001, LexisNexis, accessed online: April 14, 2005.

[65] Melanie Lowe, "Colliding Feminisms: Britney Spears, 'Tweens,' and the Politics of Reception," *Popular Music and Society*, June, 2003, http://www.findarticles.com, accessed: June 1, 2006.

[66] "The Virtues of Virginity," *Evening Post* (Wellington), Feb. 19, 2001, 3.

[67] Matthew Continetti, "Blonde Ambition," *Weekly Standard*, Apr. 16, 2004, *LexisNexis*, accessed online: Apr. 14, 2005; Jessica Simpson has also stated directly that it is her "goal" to be a positive role model – reported by Elysa Gardner in "The Britneys are Coming," *USA Today*, March 17, 2000.

[68] Jessica Simpson has continued to use abstinence to further a "good girl" image for herself, discussing it with teen magazines even in the second year of her marriage. In February of 2004, Jessica told *Seventeen* magazine that abstinence was "better for my self-confidence" and *Seventeen* presented this as a decision that she made to "[stay] true to herself."

[69] The performance he refers to took place at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2000.

[70] Evan Annett, "Virginal Icon: Britney Spears has Good Reason to Deny her Sex Appeal," *The Gazette* (Montreal), Jul. 30, 2000, LexisNexis, accessed online: Apr.14, 2005.

[71] Spears told *W* magazine that she was no longer a virgin in 2003.

[72] In examples too numerous to recount, the popular press has focused on Britney's first marriage (which lasted less than 48 hours), her second marriage (to an unemployed father of two), and her struggles with pregnancy and new motherhood.

[73] Molly MacDermot, *Christina Aguilera: The Unofficial Book* (New York: Virgin Books, 2000), 34.

[74] Qtd. in Susan Korman, *Christina Aguilera* (Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), 10.

[75] Christine Granados, *Christina Aguilera: A Real-Life Reader Biography* (Bear, DE: Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2001), 20-21.

[76] The songs she performs in the episode include "Genie in a Bottle" and "I Turn to You."

[77] Korman, *Christina Aguilera,* 46.

[78] John Aizlewood, "Christina is Wholesome Despite Dirrty Dancing," *Evening Standard* (London), Nov. 3, 2003, Find Articles: http://www.findarticles.com, accessed: June 1, 2006.

[79] Matthew Newman, *Brandy* (Chelsea House Publishers, 2001), 31-32.

[80] Ibid., 32.

[81] Anna Louise Golden, *Brandy* (NY: St. Martin's, 1998), 70.

[82] The notion of "authenticity" is problematic when dealing with representations, particularly representations of young femininity that are originated by adult writers, directors, and producers. The idea that Moesha was a realistic, relatable character was frequently repeated by writers and producers on the series, and in interviews Vida Spears and Ralph Farquhar have elaborated that they sought to create the character as a recognizable African American teenager through her attitudes and behaviors, personal style, and modes of speech.

[83] Ann Hodges, "UPN Targets Young Urban Blacks," *Houston Chronicle*, Aug. 26, 1996, 4.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Lawrie Mifflin, "UPN's Moesha, the Nonwhite Hit Nobody Knows," *New York Times*, Sept. 26, 1999: Section 2, 29.

[86] Tamar Jacoby, "Adjust Your Sets," *New Republic*, Jan. 24, 2000, 21.

[87] Gary Levin, "*Clueless* Set to Lead UPN's Tuesday Night," *Daily Variety*, May 21, 1997, LexisNexis, accessed: Dec. 26, 2005.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ryan A. Nerz, *Brandy: Scene* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1999), 20.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Jane D. Brown and Carol J. Pardun, "Little in Common: Racial and Gender Differences in Adolescents' Television Diets," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, June 2004, 27.

[92] Golden, *Brandy*, 171.

[93] Jenny Hontz, "UPN Axes 'Legacy,' Reups 'Moesha'," *Variety*, Apr. 5-11, 1999, 53.

[94] Both UPN and the WB began with affiliate stations in the low-power UHF spectrum, but the WB managed to use its corporate parent's ownership of WGN (carried by cable providers nationwide) to reach millions more viewers with its prime-time programming. This strategy helped the WB to build brand identity and awareness of its network offerings more quickly than UPN.

[95] Lawrie Mifflin, "A Rival Gains on 'Felicity'," *New York Times*, Mar. 17, 1999, E9.

[96] Newman, *Brandy*, 42.

[97] Golden, *Brandy*, 70.

[98] Brandy was featured on the cover of *Seventeen* in April 1995, November 1997, and July 1999.

[99] O.J. Lima, "Brandy," *Seventeen*, July, 1999, 82.

[100] A more complete history of the group, including the multitude of changes in its lineup can be found in Lynn Norment's "The Untold Story of How Tina & Mathew Knowles Created the

Destiny's Child Gold Mine." *Ebony*, n.d. Find Articles, http://www.findarticles.com, accessed online: 24 May 2006.

[101] Beyonce Knowles, Kelly Rowland, and Michelle Williams, *Soul Survivors – Destiny's Child* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 63.

[102] Knowles, et al., *Soul Survivors,* 63.

[103] Beyonce Knowles is one of several songwriters credited for this title.

[104] Tina Knowles (with Zoe Alexander), *Destiny's Style: Bootylicious Fashion, Beauty, and Lifestyle Secrets* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 8.

[105] Ibid., 23.

[106] Knowles, et al., *Soul Survivors*, 131.

[107] Ibid.

[108] These successes are documented in Norment's "The Untold Story."

Chapter Three
Girl Power in a Postfeminist Context

In Chapter Two, I argued that Girl Power has legitimate feminist potential that has been underestimated in most scholarly work up to this point. Examining the phenomenon itself is one way to understand its feminist potential, but the reactions and responses to Girl Power that have arisen in the media provide another important avenue of investigation, forming a postfeminist response to the feminist potential of young women's social and cultural authority. I argue that this response against Girl Power has emerged since the late 1990s (continuing in the present moment) and that it demonstrates social fears about young women's empowerment.

The term "backlash" is famously associated with Susan Faludi's 1991 book by that title, in which she argues that a backlash against the gains of second wave feminism was heavily circulated by the media during the 1980s. Faludi documents the ways that print media, television, and movies presented the so-called negative side of the gains achieved by second wave women. These representations offered a two-pronged vision of women's position in society. First, Faludi argues that media coverage of women was overwhelmingly postfeminist, demonstrating that equality had been won, and feminism was over. Second, these representations (often simultaneously) depicted women as unhappy with the gains of feminism, arguing that "equality" had made women's lives more stressful and difficult. Women's gains in the professions, for example, were muted by the fact that career women were (supposedly) less likely to marry and have children than non-professionals. Faludi argued that this backlash was symptomatic of the typical ebb and flow cycle of feminist

activity in which historically time periods that have produced feminist gains have been followed by time periods characterized by backsliding and reactionary politics.[1]

In a similar way, the advent of Girl Power in the mid-1990s represented feminist gains. Girl Power, as influenced by grassroots feminism, is an articulation of the strength and cultural authority of young women. Although many representations of Girl Power offer very limited visions for the scope of this authority, the multitude of representations and the media industries' reliance on the teen girl market combined to open up a range of aspirational possibilities for young women during this time. Girl Power was followed by an attendant backlash, approaching the size and scale of the postfeminist backlash documented by Faludi. I argued in Chapter Two that the discourse of Girl Power has built-in postfeminist implications. This chapter does not seek to argue that girl power is in some ways inherently feminist (it is always a contested concept, linking messages about the possibility of young women's empowerment with individualism and a separation from collective action and social movement) but it does seek to look at the ways that young women's empowerment has been questioned and undermined by the mass media. I am terming the phenomenon that I document in this chapter a backlash against the feminist potential of girl power, in order to make the stakes clear.

Research on postfeminism within feminist media studies has taken two major directions since the early 1990s. One school of thought, emerging primarily from Australia and Britain, argues that the term postfeminism signifies a change of direction within feminist studies from a focus on inequality to a focus on difference. In her book *Postfeminisms*, Australian scholar Ann Brooks explains:

> Postfeminism is about a critical engagement with earlier feminist political and theoretical concepts and strategies as a result of its engagement with other social movements for change. Postfeminism expresses the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism, and as such represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks. In the process postfeminism facilitates a broad-based pluralistic conception of the application of feminism, and addresses the demands of marginalized, diasporic and colonized cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and post-colonial feminism.[2]

U.S. television scholar Amanda Lotz uses this definition of postfeminism in *Redesigning Women* to inform her approach to the study of recent representations of women and femininity in broadcast and cable television She argues that it is possible to reclaim the term "postfeminism" and reposition it from its negative connotations for feminist thought.[3]

Lotz uses this postfeminist approach to argue that recent television programs present a range of feminist ideas and feminine identities for viewers to respond and relate to, and thus offer the possibility of multiple modes of identification. I reject use of "postfeminism" in this context; what Lotz describes is the third wave feminist position. Lotz does not acknowledge the existence of third wave feminism in the academy or in United States culture, which is perhaps why she adheres to "postfeminism" as a descriptor for the direction of her study. Third wave feminist theory is not yet regularly employed in the field of media studies although authors including Kathleen Rowe Karlyn[4] and Merri Lisa Johnson[5] have produced media scholarship that utilizes the third wave as comparable to Lotz's use of "postfeminism." My project here is to contribute to the growing body of work on the third wave, particularly in terms of how it relates to media studies, and so I adhere to the understanding of the term postfeminism as referring to "past" or "after" feminism that has been utilized by media scholars including Mary Douglas Vavrus,[6] Diane Negra,[7] and Sarah Projansky.[8]

In her 2005 book *Watching Rape*, Projansky meticulously examines articulations of postfeminism in the media, and argues that postfeminist statements fall into five interrelated and overlapping categories. She uses these five categories to analyze postfeminism in representations of adult women and sexual violence, focusing on film and television. In this chapter, I use her categories to examine the backlash against the feminist potential of Girl Power that began in the late 1990s. The categorizations that Projansky makes in order to offer a complete and complex definition of postfeminism are based on visible trends in media representations of feminism and femininity following the second wave of feminism. My intent is to explore how these same trends in representation relate to the phenomenon of Girl Power and the feminist potential that it demonstrates.

The first category that Projansky identifies is linear/chronological, in which postfeminism is positioned as the logical next step (or era) following prefeminism and feminism, which it therefore presumes to have ended. The second category is the backlash against feminism, as examined by Susan Faludi, including statements on the negative results feminism has wrought for women. Third, equality and choice postfeminism argues that feminism has ended because men and women are now equal, and that women's equality is characterized by their ability to make choices (regarding career, family, reproduction, etc.). Fourth, she terms (hetero) sex positive feminism as a liberalization in cultural attitudes regarding women and sexuality that resulted from the second wave, but simultaneously polices women's sexuality to maintain appropriate boundaries. The final category, "men can be feminists too," positions men as sympathetic to feminist goals, but becomes postfeminist through representations of men as higher-quality feminists, who are more capable of understanding women's roles within society and the forces that shape these roles.[9] My

analysis in this chapter draws on these ideas, shaping them and relating them directly to trends in the development of Girl Power narratives that seek to negate or deny young women's social authority.

While media scholars have often denied the legitimacy of representations of empowerment within the discourse of Girl Power, I argue that the threat posed by young women's empowerment is real enough to warrant a specific response that would seek to contain and/or erase it. Projansky explains that her categories "illustrate the adaptability and pervasiveness of the assumption in popular culture that feminism existed, was wholeheartedly absorbed by the mainstream, and therefore is no longer needed."[10] My intent is to explore these categories and their potential for application within the specific context of the discourse of Girl Power. My analysis in this chapter reveals the utility of postfeminism as a theoretical tool that engages with cultural responses to feminist gains, as well as the multi-faceted nature of Girl Power.

Girl Power as an "Era"

"Feminism is OVER!" decreed the Spice Girls in 1996. They positioned Girl Power as its new and improved successor, designed to capitalize on the achievements of second wave feminism without weighing young women down with concerns about continuing gender oppression. Girl Power was celebrated in national news magazines as evidence of young women's economic privilege, physical strength, and growing sense of confidence. In her study of female celebrity culture, Susan Hopkins positions Girl Power as a linear result of feminism when she writes, "Girl Power is a postfeminist movement, in the sense of coming after and perhaps overcoming feminism."[11] She denies the relevance of the discourse to

continuing discussions of gender equality, a trend which has also been mirrored in popular press coverage.

In June of 1998, *Time* magazine published a now-infamous cover story headlined, "Is Feminism Dead?" The cover shot featured three renowned feminist leaders in black and white alongside a full-color shot of fictional television character Ally McBeal. The design of the cover encouraged readers to answer "yes" to the question posed by urging a mental comparison between political activists from feminism's past and the neurotic and insecure TV heroine of the day. Inside the magazine, Ginia Bellafante's story was titled, "Feminism: It's All About Me!" and it returned to the theme that feminism was "over." Bellafante argued that not only were women uninterested in struggles for social, political, and economic equality, but that the overriding concerns of women were individual, rather than collective.[12] This article appeared alongside a piece called "Girl Power!" by Nadya Labi which focused on the attention that media industries were currently lavishing on this target market.[13] Labi chronicled trends including "seriously empowered heroines"[14] in Hollywood films and a rise in young women's participation in athletics. Although she made nods to the crass commercialization of girl-powered culture and a rising tide of young women reporting body image dissatisfaction, she countered these criticisms with a discussion of the new diversity present in teen girls' magazines. The new market entrants distinguished themselves from the old guard by focusing on more than just boys and fashion, and by featuring (or claiming to feature) models of a wide range of body types, as well as racial and ethnic backgrounds.[15] The juxtaposition of these two articles clearly positioned Girl Power as postfeminist; it provided a new focus on women's empowerment, following the "death" of feminism.

Girl Power initially resonated because of cultural fears surrounding young women's self-esteem, educational attainment, and opportunities (or lack thereof) for the future. By the late 1990s, popular press articles and books argued that girls had become particularly empowered in terms of self-esteem and educational ability, at least in part as a natural result of the attention focused on them. They asserted that there was no need for Girl Power, and the focus on the position of young women in society that came along with its barrage of mass media representations. In fact, they claimed, the attention and resources that had been focused on empowering young women had resulted in a generation of disempowered young men. The need for Girl Power had passed, not only because young women were already empowered, but in actuality, their privileged status had the negative effect of diverting attention from the real "crisis" in young boys' self-esteem, educational attainment, and future outlook.

The most sustained example of this discussion took place in terms of gender and education. In 1992 the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published "How Schools Shortchange Girls" based on research from David and Myra Sadker. The report indicated that public education favored a masculine style of teaching and learning, and in more direct terms, that boys were directly favored over girls in the classroom.[16] The AAUW report was widely publicized, and linked to classroom initiatives to correct the gender imbalance, particularly in the fields of math and science. By the late 1990s, the Sadkers' research methods had come under fire, and the popular press had begun reporting on how boys suffered as a result of Girl Power initiatives. The headline, "How Boys Lost Out to Girl Power" ran in the *New York Times* in December 1998.[17] The attention-grabbing title actually misrepresents the content of the article, in which Tamar Lewin reports that race and class are

more serious sources of inequity in the classroom than gender. Although Lewin quotes several academic researchers on the seriousness of an achievement gap between black and white students, she mutes the implications of the combined effects of race and gender with rhetoric such as, "By all kinds of measures, though, girls rule in school."[18] The conclusion that Lewin supports is that boys have suffered at the hands of girls' empowerment, and that non-white boys have suffered the most.

In 1999, MSNBC.com published an opinion piece by Celeste Fremon titled, "Are Schools Failing Our Boys?" Fremon argued that public schools were becoming intolerant towards the "natural" aggressive tendencies and shorter attention spans of male students, and that their institutionalization of more feminine modes of conduct worked to steer young men away from the pursuit of higher education. Fremon's analysis pays no attention to the roles that race and class play in educational achievement disparities, instead focusing on how boy's learning disabilities and depression are likely to go undiagnosed due to "education's feminization."[19]

The achievement gap between boys and girls captured media attention (both in favor of and against Girl Power) by presenting girls' and boys' social and economic status as a zero-sum game, in which gains for either group meant losses for the other. Postfeminist author Christina Hoff Sommers capitalized on the attention given to the issue with her 2001 book, *The War Against Boys.*[20] The revealing subtitle, "*How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men*" demonstrates the author's position on who has waged the "war" in question. Hoff Sommers argues that by the mid-1990s, feminist interest groups had successfully infiltrated public school curricula to the point where they dictated teachers' priorities and the dynamics of the classroom environment. She cites Tamar Lewin and

Celeste Fremon, and also Judith Kleinfeld, a psychology professor at the University of Alaska who had published research on the gender gap in student performance.[21] Kleinfeld argues that the achievement gap between boys and girls is smaller than is reported, in part because while boys outperform girls on standardized tests, they also skew more heavily towards the low end of the scoring range (more boys than girls receive below-average scores). Her main proposition is that minority boys tend to score lowest in terms of grades, standardized test scores, and measures of self-esteem. But the point picked up by Hoff Sommers, in her effort to frame the debate in terms of gender rather than race was the following quote from Kleinfeld: "In their zeal to advance the interests of women and their own organizational interests, the AAUW and other feminist advocacy groups have distorted the achievements of women and the experience of girls and boys in schools."[22] Hoff Sommers read this as support for her argument that all boys had been unfairly targeted in classrooms in favor of serving girls' interests.

One of the main points of evidence put forth by Hoff Sommers as an effect of the "war" waged against young men was declining college enrollment by this group in the late 1990s. In December of 1998, another article from Tamar Lewin made the front page of the *New York Times* with the headline, "American Colleges Begin to Ask, Where Have All the Men Gone?" Lewin cites United States Department of Education statistics indicating that by 1996, 8.4 million women were enrolled in college, as compared to 6.7 million men.[23] Several reasons for this gap are suggested in the article, including boys' lack of interest in education, a strong economy that offered appealing job opportunities (particularly in computer-related fields) to high school graduates, and girls' increasing levels of success in high school. Lewin spoke with administrative officials at several college campuses who were employing

consultants to help them appeal to boys with their recruitment materials. Lopsided enrollments that favored young women are discussed in the article as a problem to be solved, rather than as a mark of how far women have come.

Hoff Sommers used the gender gap in college enrollment as still more evidence that the educational system favors girls over boys, and by extension that Girl Power is unnecessary and destructive. She cites Brendan Koerner's article "Where the Boys Aren't" from *U.S. News and World Report* in early 1999, and his statistics that women were expected to earn 57% of all bachelor's degrees by 1999, "compared with 43 percent in 1970 and under 24% in 1950."[24] She ignores, however, the provocative conclusions that Koerner made from the statistics. The reporters who worked on the article supported the idea that male college enrollment was low because in a time of economic growth, solid job opportunities were available to young men graduating from high school. Koerner argued that this trend could wind up being worse for women than for men, citing Judith Sturnick from the American Council on Education: "She says higher education could become devalued because of its increasing feminization—the same phenomenon that has occurred with elementary school teachers—and that earning a bachelor's degree will someday be considered a foolhardy economic decision."[25] In other words, the trend towards highly-educated females does not necessarily indicate a trend towards highly-paid females, or gender equity as a whole. Hoff Sommers and other conservative voices in the popular press ignored these implications in favor of reporting on how girls' achievement had supposedly negated boys' potential for success. As this trend has continued, major newspapers have continued to report on the gender gap that favors girls in terms of high school graduation and college enrollment; they

continue to attribute this gap to Girl Power, and to construe it as a "problem" for young men.[26]

Christina Hoff Sommers reserved special vitriol for the government-sponsored Girl Power! program that launched in 1996 as an effort to support girls' self-esteem and educational achievement, and help them to avoid adolescent pitfalls including substance abuse and depression. In 2002, the conservative *Weekly Standard* published her article, "Girl Power! and Other Federal Idiocy," in which she argues that the Department of Health and Human Services program distributed "feminist propaganda" training girls to believe that they are better than boys.[27] Hoff Sommers initially claims that there is no evidence that Girl Power! is succeeding in its mission, but goes on to credit it with teaching girls to view boys "as a hostile rival tribe with whom they are competing."[28] One of her criticisms is that the program was designed solely for girls, with no similar initiative launched for at-risk boys; she goes on to argue that the parallel program planned for 2002, Boy Talk, seeks to eliminate young men's "natural" masculinity by encouraging them to communicate more openly about their problems. She accuses the planners behind Girl Power! and Boy Talk of valorizing femininity to the point where they have attempted to erase gender differences in favor of making boys into girls.[29] Her main contention is that Girl Power! has detracted from a more necessary focus on social problems related to boys; in her view, the resources dedicated to this program dictated that no resources should be directed towards programs related to boys.

Hoff Sommers is not the only prolific opponent of Girl Power. Her sentiments are echoed in other popular press books including Lionel Tiger's *The Decline of Males: The First Look at an Unexpected New World for Men and Women* and Richard T. Hise's *The War Against Men.*[30] Susan Faludi examines similar subject matter in her cultural history, *Stiffed:*

The Betrayal of the American Male. Faludi does not relate the phenomenon of low self-esteem in boys to Girl Power, but instead argues that the cultural value associated with masculinity has been declining over a long period of time, culminating in a generation of young men who do not clearly see their roles in society, or possibilities for their futures.[31]

The key point to note about the multiple participants in the popular press debate regarding educational achievement is that no substantive attention has been given to the most obvious disparity, the white/non-white achievement gap. Although many of these authors report that minority males are far less likely to attend college than white males or females, or minority females, the focus of their arguments is always on perceived gender inequity. The focus of their claims is that Girl Power is unnecessary because girls are already privileged. Further, the argument implies that *all* girls are already more privileged than *all* boys, and all girls are responsible for boys' educational disempowerment. Girl Power is unnecessary, they argue, because girls already have more than enough authority. Girls' gains, however, are not in the service of gender equity; instead they wield their power at the expense of men.

Sisterhood is Dangerous

Susan Faludi argues that the backlash against second wave feminism has been visible in all forms of major media, and that it makes two separate claims: that feminism has succeeded and women have won gender equality and that women's lives have been negatively impacted by the gains of feminism. These two claims seem to contradict each other, arguing both that women have "won" equality and that women's lives are worse because of their "gains." Backlash media thus support a postfeminist agenda in two ways, claiming that feminism is over because women have won (indicating that feminist struggles have become unnecessary) and that feminism is over because women no longer want it. In order to support

these claims, Faludi argues that backlash representations present feminism and women in a negative (and even demeaning and derogatory) way, thus "lashing back" at the actual successes of the feminist movement. The backlash against second wave feminism has worked to slow the tide of social and political struggles for equality and to raise questions about the advisability of equality in general. Faludi documented backlash representations that advocate a return to "traditional values," in which women were homemakers and men were breadwinners.[32] These representations argued that things were better for both men and women when gender roles were clearly defined and separated, and that feminism represents a threat to the family, the workplace, and society at large.

In the context of Girl Power, I argue that a backlash has circulated in response to its feminist potential. In this section, I discuss representations that demonstrate how Girl Power has empowered young women to a dangerous degree, inculcating them with a social and cultural authority that they are ill-equipped to handle. It is important to note from the outset that the backlash against the feminist potential of Girl Power is visible even in its earliest mainstream representations, participating in a struggle over the meaning of Girl Power itself. There are two major messages circulated by this backlash. The first is that "sisterhood is dangerous" which emphasizes that although female friendships are powerful, they are also laden with treachery and deceit, and ultimately harmful. This message asserts that Girl Power might be positive for the individual, but when empowered girls get together (forming a collective) trouble ensues. The second message is that Girl Power threatens the "natural" order in boy-girl relations, alienating young women from young men. This message asserts that while young women may be empowered, they are also unhappy as a result of it.

The pleasures and dangers of teen girl sisterhood have been extensively represented on film over the past fifteen years. These representations are not uniform; in some films teen girls' friendships are presented as bonds that are stronger and more affirming than familial ties, while in others teen girls are presented as incapable of truly being friends with one another. Backlash representations focus on the possible negative (sometimes catastrophic) impact of female community and collective action. Although Girl Power films do not constitute a formal genre, the films that I include in this discussion all share common traits. All of these films include teenage girls as main characters, their main subject matter centers around concerns related to adolescence, and they have all been discussed in the popular press as participants in the discourse of Girl Power.

Clueless, a surprise theatrical hit in the summer of 1995 that kicked off the Girl Power trend in film,[33] features a superficial bond between protagonist Cher and her best pal, Dionne. In voiceover narration, Cher lists the qualities that the two have in common: "Dionne and I were both named after great singers from the past who now do infomercials," and further explains, "She's my friend because we both know what it's like to have people be jealous of us." Cher and Dionne are not depicted as supportive, or even tolerant of each other's problems and interests. When they approach new girl Tai with an offer of friendship, their real goal is to make her over, and the bond that they achieve with her is even less substantive than the one that they share with each other. Cher and Dionne alter Tai's hair and clothing to make her more acceptable to their wealthy and trendy peer group. Cher convinces Tai that she should be attracted to Bronson, the handsome male ringleader of the group. When Tai's makeover fails to mask the indicators of her lower economic standing and Bronson rejects her, she is bereft. She begins to seek attention and popularity to a degree that leads Cher to

remark, "I've created a monster." Cher is visibly relieved when Tai reverts to the original object of her affection, a recovering drug addict (presumably more in keeping with Tai's socioeconomic status) who the more popular girl had formerly rebuffed on Tai's behalf. The story of the film focuses on why it is important to be a good person on the inside as well as outside, but in a more subtle way, it also demonstrates that Girl Power is individual, and friendship bonds between women are not to be trusted.

The spate of Girl Power films has produced some unabashedly positive representations of female friendship groups. Two independent features from Jim McKay, *Girls' Town* (1996)[34] and *Our Song* (2001)[35], present female friendship groups as urban tribes. In *Girls' Town*, the friendship between four teenage girls (two white, two African-American) is tested when one of the girls commits suicide. The three surviving friends discover that the suicide was predicated by a sexual assault, and they question why their friend never told them about it. The girls bond together to address their experiences of gender inequality within their immediate environment. They create a "wall of shame" in the girls' bathroom at school, listing the names of students and adults who have sexually harassed and assaulted female students (under the heading, "Subvert the Patriarchy"). One of the girls is a single mother, and they steal from the baby's father to buy clothes and food to support the child. Eventually, the girls approach the man who sexually assaulted their deceased friend and they physically assault him on a public street. The film deals realistically with the living and working conditions of the inner city, and consistently reaffirms the girls' friendship as the only support on which any of them can depend. The friendship between the three teenage protagonists in *Our Song* is similarly framed, although the story centers on the imminent separation of the girls, whose inner city school is closing due to hazardous building materials. The film deals

realistically with the choices available to African American and Latina girls from lower-income homes; one girl plans to finish high school and attend college, one girl is pregnant and plans to raise her baby by herself (with help from her mother), and one girl leaves high school prior to graduation in favor of a low-wage job. While the film is honest about the ways that the girls' life paths will diverge, it also affirms that the bonds of their friendship are real and lasting.

Jim McKay's films were independent features, distributed less widely in theaters and on video/DVD. *Our Song* was initially screened at film festivals, but never shown in the multiplex. However, positive representations of female friendships are also present in mainstream Hollywood fare from the Girl Power era. *Crossroads* (2002)[36], notably for being Britney Spears' initial foray into acting, focuses on a diverse group of three former friends who revive their childhood bonds as they graduate from high school.[37] The girls impulsively decide to take a cross-country road trip together, mostly because it suits each of their individual goals. During the course of the journey, they rediscover the importance of their childhood friendship, and they begin to trust and rely on one another again. Lower-class Mimi is pregnant, intent on traveling to Los Angeles to enter a singing contest. Kit, an African-American student who is part of the popular group at school, wants to get to L.A. to visit her fiance, who is in college. In a highly improbable turn of events, Kit discovers that her fiancé is actually the father of Mimi's baby. Upon discovering this she rejects him, and at the end of the film is planning to travel back to her hometown with Mimi, who has suffered a miscarriage. Lucy, the brainy valedictorian played by Spears, travels with the girls in hopes of reuniting with her estranged mother. When that plan fails, she determines to forsake her college career and aspirations towards the medical profession to become a singer. The film

stresses that although all three of the girls are from different race, class, and familial backgrounds, they can work together to overcome obstacles that any of them faces as an individual. The film closes with the line, "Right now we have each other," stressing the importance of the friendship for each of the girls.

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants (2004)[38] provides a similar example. Based on the first in a series of popular novels for young adults, the film follows the separate summer adventures of four sixteen-year-old girls who are lifelong friends, and who share custody of a pair of jeans. Like the girl group in *Crossroads*, the young women in the *Sisterhood* are multiethnic, from different types of family backgrounds, and they overcome individual problems with the collective power of friendship. Although the characters make a point of acknowledging their differences, particularly their dramatic differences in personality, the film affirms that their friendship bonds are stronger than any other forces that they encounter, and they are literally more present and supportive for each other than are any members of their actual families. The film's central theme, that friendship transcends difference, is conveyed metaphorically by the jeans that they share, which "magically" flatter each of them, although the girls vary significantly in terms of height, weight, and body type. *Crossroads* and *Sisterhood* are the two best examples of mainstream Girl Power films that showcase the strengths rather than the limitations of female friendships.

Athletics/competition films form a subgenre of Girl Power films, capitalizing on Generation Y's high level of participation and interest in sports. In 1998, Nadya Labi reported that 2.5 million girls were in involved in competitive high school athletics, more than eight times as many as were recorded just twenty-five years earlier.[39] Films within the subgenre devoted to girls' participation in athletics typically focus on traditionally feminine

forms of engagement with sports: cheerleading, gymnastics, and volleyball. *Bring it On* (1999),[40] a teen comedy about cheerleading, spawned two sequels and several imitations. In the original, cheer captain Torrance discovers that her team's choreographer has been stealing their winning routines from a squad of African American girls whose school can't afford to help them travel to competitions. Although Torrance forms a strong friendship bond with a new member of her own squad, members of the rest of the team are portrayed as deceitful and disloyal. The other two films in the series follow this formula: the success of the team depends on the heroine's plucky individualism and her ability to overcome their shortcomings as a group, rather than the team's ability to work together. *Stick It* (2006)[41] places the pattern established by *Bring it On* in the realm of gymnastics, with the heroine working to regain her status as an Olympic hopeful. She trains with a group of girls who do not respect her, but interestingly although they are a team, they are portrayed as viciously competitive with each other, as well as with her. *All You've Got* (2006)[42] again follows the formula by portraying the importance of individualism and self-reliance in a team sport, volleyball. *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (1999)[43], a mockumentary, centers on girls' participation in beauty pageants, rather than athletic competition. Although the scenario is presented ironically and played for laughs, the plot involves a contestant who is so desperate to win the local competition that she murders the other frontrunners.

The athletics/competition films are notable because they provide a semi-realistic backdrop for competition and in-fighting among young women. Although the majority of these films are about team sports, they assert the primacy of the individual, and depict the problems of communal effort and inter-reliance. Although these films don't necessarily present Girl Power in a negative light, they do work to present it as an individual, rather than

collective asset. In these films, the heroine can depend on herself (and may have one close female friend) but problems ensue when she attempts to rely on the dynamics of her group or team as an entity.

Backlash representations of Girl Power present the problems associated with girl group dynamics in an excessively negative light. A number of these representations show the clear influence of Daniel Water's 1989 cult film *Heathers*,[44] in which a member of the most popular girls' clique in school (Veronica) joins forces with a loner (aptly named J.D.) to revolt against the power hierarchy in the school's social structure. Veronica initially participates (albeit somewhat unwittingly) in J.D.'s plan to destroy the school's clique system by murdering the popular students who wield their authority over others, and then making their deaths appear to be suicides. As J.D. grows even more radical, Veronica rejects him. When she discovers his plot to blow up the school with explosives during a pep rally, making it appear to be a mass suicide, Veronica engages with him in a fight to the death. J.D. attempts to convince her that his mass suicide plan will send a larger message that high school society is a microcosm of society as a whole, and it cannot be maintained. Veronica remains unconvinced that the high school social structure is beyond repair, and she manages to subdue J.D. Instead of using his explosive device on the school, he wires it to himself. Before his time runs out, however, he tells Veronica that he underestimated her, saying, "You've got power. Power I didn't think you had." As the film closes, Veronica makes a "date" to hang out with an unpopular, overweight wheelchair-bound girl during the prom. The slightly optimistic ending implies that Veronica has decided to wield her "power" to subvert the hierarchical structure of high school cliques from within.

One of the earliest Girl Power films influenced by *Heathers* is *The Craft* (1996),[45] a horror film about the disastrous effects of four girls using witchcraft to improve their lives, mainly by improving their positions within their high school's social hierarchy. Sarah, the protagonist, is a new student having difficulty adjusting to the rigid divisions between cliques at her high school. She begins to spend time with three social outcasts who casually dabble in witchcraft. Prior to Sarah's introduction to the group, the girls' attempts at spells have had no effect; they are shown in the opening scene chanting, "Now is the time, now is the hour; ours is the magic, ours is the power" but when they are introduced at school, it is obvious that no one takes their "power" seriously. On Sarah's first day at school, she points the girls out to Chris, a popular boy who is flirting with her. He explains that she should avoid them because Nancy is a "slut," Bonnie has "burn scars," and he does not even acknowledge the third girl, Rochelle, who is African American.

After Chris rejects her, Sarah joins forces with the outcasts and provides the key ingredient ("natural" ability) to turn their loose coalition into an actual coven; in no time the girls are working real magic. Initially, they use spells to address the conditions of their disempowerment. Bonnie uses witchcraft to remove the debilitating scars that cover most of her body and sap her self-confidence; when they disappear, her self-esteem visibly improves. Before the spell she dresses carefully to cover her scars, carries herself awkwardly, and has difficulty making eye contact during conversation. When her scars disappear, she wears revealing clothing, stands up straight, and aggressively flirts with a boy she passes on the street, calling, "Don't be shy honey – nice ass!" Nancy casts a spell to access the all-powerful spirit that governs the universe; in the short-term, she uses it to improve her family's financial situation, allowing her to escape the conditions of poverty that make her a target for her peers'

disdain. Rochelle casts a spell for revenge against a racist girl who has been humiliating her at school. Rochelle specifically seeks to destroy the popular girl's looks by making her hair fall out, because she sees this as the source of her enemy's high self-esteem and self-confidence. Sarah casts a spell to make Chris, who called her "pathetic" and publicly humiliated her, become attracted to her.

Although their powers work to their advantage at first, things soon start to go wrong as the girls' spells spiral out of control. Their group is beset by jealousy and struggles for control between Sarah and Nancy, and soon they are unable to work constructively together. Nancy is so jealous of Sarah that she uses a spell to seduce Chris, and then kills him. Nancy then leads Rochelle and Bonnie in turning on Sarah (who wants to leave the group), and they try to kill her. Sarah eventually triumphs after accessing her internal power (she hears an otherworldly message telling her "reach inside yourself") and engages in a physical struggle with Nancy. At the close of the film, Rochelle and Bonnie discover that they no longer possess any powers. Nancy has been committed to an insane asylum, where she is not only locked up, but confined to a bed with physical restraints. Only Sarah remains powerful; she is the only member of the group who understands the dangers associated with her abilities. *The Craft* provides the earliest clear example of what media scholar Karen Hollinger terms the "manipulative female friendship film" in her typology of the genre. Although Hollinger focuses her analysis on films about adult women, her description of this type of film as representing "women's friendships as plagued by jealousy, envy, and competition for men"[46] accurately describes backlash representations within Girl Power films. Hollinger argues that manipulative female friendship films "teach women to beware of and fear one another,"[47] and in a number of Girl Power films, girls' friendships beget real physical violence.

Similar to *Heathers*, *Jawbreaker* (1999) is a backlash representation that also focuses on the most popular group of girls in school, but the film is sympathetic to their privileged perspective. The plot is set in motion when three girls plan a surprise birthday event for the head of their clique, and they accidentally kill her as they are attempting to kidnap her from her bedroom. They cover up the murder, but find they have to take a social outcast, Fran, under their wing when she discovers what they have done. They make Fran over and reintroduce her to the social scene; their efforts are mostly successful, but their plan comes apart at the seams when they are unable to work together. The film is dark comedy that depicts the girls' social authority (based upon their appearance and their wealth) as an out-of-control force that needs to be stopped. They are completely aware of the power that they wield, and as a result they are not only unable to form real friendship bonds, but they have no respect for human life.

Another dark comedy, *Sugar & Spice* (2001),[48] also presents the dark side of empowered young women working together. This time, the girls in question are five cheerleaders who band together when Diane, their team captain, gets pregnant. Although Diane and her boyfriend Jack have decided to stay together and raise the baby, they lack the financial support to get their family started. Jack naively thinks that he can support them by working at a low-wage job. Diane and her friends see the financial realities, and decide to address the problem by robbing a bank. The film comedically plays upon the fact that the girls are so attractive, sweet, and ditzy that they make highly unlikely criminals. The story unfolds as it is told from the perspective of Lisa, a social outcast who is jealous of the authority wielded by the girls bank robbers. In the end, Lisa declines to accuse the girls of criminal activity in favor of joining their cheerleading squad. The film closes with epilogues

for each main character, indicating that they were never tried and convicted for their crime; it is implied that they managed to get away with it because no one could believe that these young women could simultaneously be social successes and outlaws. The criminal heroines used their powers (beauty, athleticism, intellect, and social connections) to commit a felony and avoid punishment. Within the narrative, their friendship bonds create a social authority that places them above the law.

One of the most successful backlash representations of Girl Power is the 2004 film *Mean Girls*, starring Lindsay Lohan, who became something of a Girl Power icon in the early 2000s. The film stars Lohan as Cady, a new student at a suburban high school who is out of her element because she has been raised in South Africa, and home-schooled by her parents all her life. Lohan is quickly introduced to the typical high school clique system by two social outcasts, Janis and Ian. Janis holds a particular grudge against the popular girls' clique, the Plastics, and when she sees their interest in befriending Cady, she encourages the new girl to infiltrate their group for the purpose of bringing them down from within. However, once Cady becomes a part of the group, she is quickly corrupted by the power it brings her, and she begins to abuse her position of authority. It becomes unclear whether she seeks to destroy Regina, the most popular girl, because she wields too much social authority, or because of Cady's desire to date Regina's boyfriend.

Regina eventually turns on Cady and distributes a "slam book" (a collection of insults and hate messages against a number of girls, a few boys, and at least one teacher) that she attributes to Cady. The distribution of the slam book results in all-out war at the school, with physical fights breaking out between girls in classrooms and hallways. The chaos results in an all-girl group therapy session at school, led by a female teacher who derides low self-

esteem as the explanation for the girls' bad behavior. "I think they're all pretty pleased with themselves," she tells the principal. The teacher leads the assembled students through some exercises to help them find healthier ways to express themselves, which she sees as the source of their problems. In order to serve her own interests, Janis turns on Cady and reveals the entire plot against Regina during this therapy session. At the end of the film, Cady redeems herself by winning the prom queen tiara and breaking it into pieces, "sharing" it with all of the other girls in the class. This rings a bit hollow, though, because by this point all of the friendship bonds between women in the story have proven to be superficial and unreliable. The film offers summations of what happens to each character in the immediate aftermath; each member of the Plastics (including Cady) has gone her own separate way, apparently abandoning their "friendship" with ease.

Mean Girls claims an interesting pedigree, as screenwriter (and co-star) Tina Fey used the non-fiction parenting advice book *Queen Bees and Wannabes*[49] as source material for her script. The book argues that clique organization and membership plays a crucial role in teenage girls' self-esteem, and offers tips for parents on how to recognize whether their own child is a "mean girl" or an "outcast" and what to do about these situations. Like the film, the book focuses on the negative aspects of teenage girls' empowerment, arguing that girls do not know how to handle social authority, which is why they wield it unfairly over their less-socially-fortunate peers. There is no discussion of how boys handle social authority, or how they use or abuse the power of popularity. Both the book and the film treat social cliques and infighting as the problematic domain of girls. Boys do not participate in the wild backstabbing and deceitful machinations of the Plastics; instead, the boy that Regina and Cady fight over seems almost oblivious to the power struggle going on, and openly

disapproves of the aspects of which he is aware. Boys are positioned as moral superiors, above the kind of social climbing and status obsession that girls are "naturally" suited to participate in.

The success of *Mean Girls* kicked off a media obsession with girl-fighting that ranged from documenting the activities of "mean girl" socialites Paris Hilton and Nicole Ritchie (whose disputes with each other and other young women were extensively covered by the tabloid press[50] and captured on film in their reality series *The Simple Life*[51]) to a rise in girl-on-girl violence in public schools.[52] A trend of physical fights between girls that were captured on cell phone camera video and then posted on the popular video-sharing website YouTube arose in 2005, leading to media speculation on the origins of the phenomenon and its social implications.[53] While Jack Shafer of Slate.com has denounced these reports as "bogus trend" stories,[54] they have contributed to a larger discussion in the mass media about the ways that young women display aggressive behavior formerly associated with young men.[55] These mass media reports imply that girls have become more violent as a result of social empowerment that affords them the ability to reject feminine passivity and behave more like boys. In the introduction to their edited collection, *Girls' Violence: Myths and Realities*, authors Christine Alder and Anne Worrall argue that girls' physical aggression has not become significantly more common of they late, and they argue that the phenomenon must be understood in terms of the context of gendered inequalities that structure young women's lives, rather than as a result of young women's empowerment.[56]

Although far less popular than *Mean Girls*, the 2005 film *John Tucker Must Die* offers a similarly-themed interpretation of the downside of Girl Power. Kate, who describes herself as "invisible" is befriended by three girls who get to know each other in detention after they

engage in a physical fight over the title character. The three girls are from different social groups, but each believed that she was dating John, the wealthy and attractive captain of the basketball team, exclusively. In order to win vegan Beth's affections, John pretended to be interested in animal rights. To woo head cheerleader Heather, he used their shared experience of popularity and interest in basketball.[57] He impressed Carrie with his interest in her intellectual ability and multiple extracurricular activities. The girls respond to the news of their betrayal by lashing out jealously at each other; Kate convinces them that the true target of their rage is John himself, and that they should "get even."[58]

They begin to capitalize on their individual capabilities to attempt to destroy John's self-confidence, but he proves resilient. In one of their most memorable stunts, Heather spikes John's protein formula with estrogen and encourages him to "double up" doses. This culminates when John experiences an emotional breakdown during a basketball game. He takes a break from the game to steal a chocolate bar from one of his teammates and then asks, "Do my thighs look fat in these shorts?" Returning to the game, he misses a key shot. When his coach approaches him to berate him John responds, "I'm anxious and bloated and my nipples hurt!" He goes on to break down crying in a stereotypically feminine way wailing, "You're always yelling at me, but you never listen to me. What about *my* feelings?" Although John is apparently experiencing Christina Hoff Sommers' nightmare of Girl Power, in which feminists attempt to turn boys into girls, his outburst receives a positive response, netting him renewed positive attention from girls at school. The next day, one girl approaches John to tell him, "That's the most courageous thing I've ever seen any man do," and another sidles up to say, "A real man knows how to feel. I want to feel a real man." John is so

attractive and charismatic that he manages to overcome each of the humiliations that the girls design for him.

The girls eventually plot together to get back at John by using Kate as bait to attract him, and then destroy him. John has rejected each of them, and they feel that by using Kate to break his heart, they can effectively retaliate for the emotional pain that he has caused them. Their plan is to turn his manipulative tactics back on him, and reveal his true character to the entire school. While their plan succeeds, to an extent, Kate has trouble carrying it out when she becomes sympathetic to John. She tells Beth, Heather, and Carrie that she can no longer participate in their plan, and they turn on her. Carrie tells her, "He didn't fall for you – he feel for what we made you. Who were you before you met us?" and Heather chimes in, "No one." Kate's decision to stop participating is firm; not only does she believe that John has real feelings for her, but other people who know of the plan (her mother and John's brother) take the moral high ground with her. John's brother tells Kate, "Everybody knows how he can be, he is John Tucker. And yet still every girl in school lines up to date him." Kate comes to believe that it is okay for John to become involved with girls that he has no real feelings for, because the *girls* should know better. She decides that the plan to retaliate against him is wrong because the girls are attempting to hurt him intentionally, which is differentiated within the narrative from the hurt that John inflicted on the girls.

Kate confesses her role in the scam in front of a crowd of hundreds at John's birthday party. A boy in the crowd accuses Kate of ruining the party, and then throws a drink on her. In a show of solidarity, the other three girls join her, and also get doused with drinks. John interrupts to offer a confession of his own: "We all do it. I lie. I pretend I'm whoever I want to get girl … what I'm trying to say is, it's wrong." A boy in the crowd immediately

interjects, "Ain't nothin' wrong with hooking up with the finest girls in school!" and then a chorus of supportive chanting begins. The girls end up looking foolish because they have "unfairly" targeted and manipulated John, and no one else agrees that he has behaved badly. The moment is broken when Kate instigates a food fight that breaks the tension and apparently dissipates the heartache and pain that has caused the girls to plot against John in the first place. At the close of the film, he keeps his promise to reform; he still dates multiple girls, but he tells each girl that he dates that she is not the only one. Kate and the three girls from different cliques seem set to remain unlikely friends.

These backlash representations raise questions about the advisability of Girl Power. While they acknowledge that girls have access to essentially unlimited social authority, they question the ability of girls to use this power wisely. In each depiction, the girls' power spins out of control, partially because of the role of group dynamics and girls' inability to get along with each other. These representations thus reassert the primacy of the individual; an individual heroine may be essentially rational, but led to behave badly (with disastrous consequences) by the influence of other girls. They denigrate girl collectives by demonstrating how quickly girls' authority becomes corrupted and abused in a group context. Ultimately, these representations demonstrate that sisterhood is dangerous by depicting how collective authority becomes corrosive to the necessary social structure when girls decide to utilize it.

Power is Lonely

The second type of backlash representation demonstrates how Girl Power works to threaten or subvert the "natural" order of gender relations, alienating empowered young women from less empowered young men. These representations work with themes similar to

those that Faludi documented in *Backlash*, arguing that although young women are empowered, their strengths represent the source of their personal unhappiness. Although this type of backlash representation is visible in Girl Power films (*Mean Girls* provides another example here), I focus on television representations in this section, and backlash representations that take shape over the course of major character arcs in each series.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2001 on the WB, and 2001-2003 on UPN) is not only frequently referenced in the popular press as a prime example of Girl Power,[59] but the series has also developed a devoted academic following since its inception, resulting in a large number of articles and anthologies that dissect its universe.[60] With more than one hundred episodes in which the story unfolded, the series developed multiple meanings and possibilities for viewer interpretation, but the aspect of the story that I am concerned with is how Buffy's powers (her status as the "Chosen One" in the universe with the ability to slay vampires) worked to alienate her from the social order presented within the series. The series itself has been read as both feminist and postfeminist by varying sources, and the text is equally open to both of these readings.[61] The main story thread that I discuss here constitutes a backlash representation because while Buffy consistently excels at using her special abilities to slay vampires and defeat monsters, she just as consistently fails at participating in human relationships.

During the first three seasons, Buffy is in high school, and attempts to reconcile her desire to be a "normal" girl with the responsibilities associated with her super powers. In season two she falls in love with Angel, a vampire who possesses a soul and is attempting to redeem himself from his evil past. When the two become physically intimate, however, he loses his soul and becomes evil again. Buffy is forced to "kill" him by sending him to another

dimension because her super powers make her a preferred target for his evildoings. In season three, she briefly tries to date a mortal high school boy, but finds their relationship impossible both because she cannot tell him about her super powers and because she has not gotten over the loss of Angel. She dates another mortal, Riley, in season four when she arrives at college. Riley heads a covert military operation to fight the supernatural forces of evil, but his weapons are nothing compared to Buffy's natural physical abilities. When Buffy recognizes Riley's vulnerability, she becomes hesitant to take him along with her on missions; Riley experiences a crisis of masculinity in season five, and leaves Buffy. He tells her that he cannot be "enough" for her, making it clear that he views their relationship as competitive, and does not like losing the contest.

In the show's final two seasons, Buffy's relationship status is depicted as a constant source of her pain and depression. Buffy is overwhelmed by the pressure of her responsibilities as the "Chosen One" and as a single-parent figure to her younger sister, Dawn. She engages in an on-again, off-again relationship with a vampire, Spike, whose devotion to her does nothing to lessen her sense of isolation. When their intimate relationship begins in season six, Spike (being a vampire) lacks a soul, and is thus incapable of relating to Buffy on an emotional level. Their relationship has ended by the time he acquires a soul in season seven, but the guilt he experiences over the violence he committed renders him nearly catatonic, and he essentially becomes one more of Buffy's responsibilities. At several points in the series, it is clearly insinuated that she is drawn to inappropriate romantic partners because of her special abilities. "Normal" men do not interest her because their values and concerns differ significantly from her own; "superhuman" men cannot fulfill her because they do not similarly straddle the line between mortality and immortality.

The series finale offers some relief to Buffy's oppressive circumstances by invoking Girl Power as collective action. In a showdown between the forces of good (represented by Buffy and her friends) and the combined energies of every evil forces in the universe, Buffy's friend Willow uses witchcraft to call forth every young woman who was born with the potential to become the "Chosen One." The spell that she casts imbues them all with the physical gifts associated with the role, and they band together to defeat the forces of evil. The ending implies that Buffy's responsibilities will be lessened following this shift in the nature of her calling, but the implications of that shift are never depicted. Over the course of the series, Buffy's loneliness and alienation that resulted from her responsibilities were depicted in scenario after scenario, most frequently regarding her inability to find happiness with a romantic partner. The strength and independence that she utilized as a result of her powers were depicted continually as a high price to pay for an unsatisfying personal life.[62]

Veronica Mars (2004-2006 on UPN, 2006-2007 on the CW Network) employs a narrative strategy similar to that of *Buffy*, but places the title character's power within more realistic bounds. Veronica does not possess superpowers, but she is depicted as highly intelligent and driven. At the beginning of the series, she is a high school junior working as an assistant in her father's private investigation business, and secretly pursuing a high-profile case. Her best friend was murdered during their sophomore year, and although a man has confessed and been convicted for the crime, Veronica continues to follow leads and examine the available evidence. This case comprises a season-long story line, but in each episode Veronica solves a smaller case, usually originating with other high school students. Veronica's power derives from the fact that she is a social outcast, and she does not care about her peers' opinion of her. She is free to do what she wants, dress how she likes, and

cross multiple invisible social boundaries because she is not bound by her school's oppressive social hierarchy. Veronica's Girl Power, however, comes with the same price associated with Buffy's. Veronica's ambition and sense of justice continually impede her ability to be involved in committed relationships, and the series depicts her unhappiness as a result of the divide between the demands of her professional responsibilities and the possibilities for romantic love in her personal life.

As Veronica introduces herself in the series' pilot episode, she reveals that her popular boyfriend Duncan ended their relationship shortly before his sister (her best friend) was murdered. Her attempts to investigate the case drive further wedges between herself and Duncan, and at times it seems that he is a potential suspect in the case. She dates Troy for a short time, only to discover and put an end to his plan to sell illegal drugs and run off with his ex-girlfriend. Later, she begins a rocky relationship with Duncan's best friend, Logan, but finds that she cannot trust him because of his extensive involvements in various criminal activities. Veronica's volatile romantic relationship with Logan continues over the course of the series' three seasons, but the two are never together for very long because they lack the same strength of character. In season three, Logan asks Veronica to stop working on a dangerous investigation, and when she refuses, he leaves her. While her extraordinary abilities allow her to help many other people, she herself is unfulfilled because she is unable to find a partner who appreciates them.

While the series does not depict Veronica's romantic failures as completely debilitating, it does show that her loneliness provides a continual source of frustration and angst. In season two she reunites with Duncan (after confirming that he is not a murderer) but their relationship is stunted by the fact that she has grown and changed. When they dated

prior to his sister's murder, Veronica was not an amateur private detective; she was invested in social status and she worshipped Duncan. When they reunited, she stills sees herself as a social outcast and she has little interest in the trappings of social life with Duncan and his popular clique. In season three when Logan breaks up with her because of her commitment to her profession, she tells everyone who asks that she is fine, but later breaks down when she is by herself; she is unwilling or unable to lean on her father and her friends for support. While Veronica is an admirable heroine because of her fearlessness and disinterest in social acceptance, the series offers a backlash representation in terms of how these characteristics render her isolated.

Rebecca Feasey offers a similar analysis of the WB series *Charmed*, and the show's construction of how the supernatural powers of the central heroines (all witches) functioned within the narrative as an impediment to their personal relationships.[63] However, it should be noted that Feasey argues that the narrative struggles between feminist and postfeminist goals, and these tensions form part of the appeal for female viewers.[64] These backlash representations demonstrate that while young women can be powerful, and their power can accomplish great things, using their power creates obstacles to their personal fulfillment and alienates them from the social order. Buffy, Veronica, and the witches of *Charmed* are Girl Power role models because they are attractive, smart, and authoritative. It is these same qualities, however, that impede their personal and romantic fulfillment.

Free to Choose?

The third category of postfeminism that Sarah Projansky identifies is "equality and choice postfeminism." This aspect of the discourse focuses on the supposed success of feminism in attaining gender equity, and increasing the availability of choices for women. It

asserts that feminism is no longer necessary because it has succeeded.[65] This relates to Jessica K. Taft's examination of Girl Power as a postfeminist discourse, as I discussed in Chapter Two.[66] Girl Power has been used to assert that structural inequality either no longer exists, or is no longer significant. Each individual girl is able to succeed or fail based on her own merits, and this is presented as though choices and opportunities are equally available to all young women, regardless of race, class, or sexuality. Projansky argues that equality and choice postfeminism positions women as social, political, and economic equals whose primary struggles involve navigating the "choice" between obligations related to work and family. In teen girls' magazines, equality and choice postfeminism positions young women as equals who are navigating choices related to identity construction and self-improvement related to physical appearance.

This postfeminist discussion is put forth significantly in magazines that solely target teenage girls as a readership. Teen girls' magazines offer democratic beauty ideals, in which every young woman can be "beautiful" as long as she subscribes to the consumerist notion of beauty supported by advertisers. Articles, features, and advertisements in magazines targeted towards a teen girl readership assume that girls already possess the Girl Power characteristics of independence, strength, and ability, but they offer "choices" in terms of how to express these characteristics outwardly, creating "work" associated with expressing Girl Power as both self- reliance and traditional femininity. Further, these magazines demonstrate that beauty is something that can be purchased through specific products and brands, and that it is equally available to all young women (a position which presumes a significant amount of disposable income). Robert Goldman has argued that in the late 1980s advertisers acknowledged feminism in order to link feminism to femininity, a process that resulted in

what he terms "commodity feminism." Goldman writes of this advertising trend, "Feminism has been reduced to the status of a mere signifier, so that it may be re-encoded by advertisers as a sequence of visual clichés and reified signifiers."[67] In teen girls magazines from the late 1990s forward, advertisers similarly use girl power as a signifier. Advertisers construct a world in which girls' lives are shaped by equality and choice; they represent young femininity in terms of beauty, independence, athleticism, and intelligence, and they ask young women to display these characteristics outwardly through conspicuous consumption.

In her study of contemporary teen girls' culture in Australia, *Girl Heroes*, Susan Hopkins argues that "Cosmetics, fashion and beauty commodities used to be marketed with the implicit promise that 'this product will make you loveable.' Today these beauty products are sold with the suggestion 'this will make you powerful.'"[68] While Hopkins makes a valid point, I argue that through the process of commodity feminism, Girl Power is recoded in advertisements for these commodities; advertisers address young women as empowered subjects, and they work to associate the signification of empowerment with specific products. Girl Power is removed from any context of girls' social authority and represented solely in relationship to the development and maintenance of physical beauty. In *CosmoGirl*, bonnebell cosmetics advertises a powder and concealer combination with a close-up shot of an attractive girl and the tagline, "I can face change head on."[69] The advertisement constructs a world in which the only relevant difficulties that young women face can easily be conquered with a clear, glowing complexion. Similarly, Pantene Pro-V shampoo advertises "Curl Power," shifting any association between the Girl Power phrase and social and cultural authority to a solitary association between "power" and physical beauty.[70]

Commodity feminism is also visible in advertisements that utilize Girl Power as a signifier and consumer products as direct signifieds. A series of advertisements for Tommy Girl cologne in *CosmoGirl* and other teen magazines proclaimed the scent, "A Declaration of Independence."[71] The ads, each featuring an attractive model shot in close-up, incorporated iterations of the American flag, and the Tommy Girl logo in red, white, and blue. The advertisement works to form an association between abstract characteristics of individualism, independence, and patriotism with the commodity, thus making them available for purchase. Pond's Overnight Blemish Reducer addresses readers with the line, "YOU refuse to believe life is about trade-offs," associating the empowered young woman's reluctance to compromise with the purchase of face cream.[72] A 2001 advertisement for Timex shows a young woman in motion and her statement of empowerment: "I wish people would quit telling me I can do anything I want. I never thought I couldn't."[73] These advertisements construct Girl Power as an already-constituted identity; it becomes empowerment that is so obvious that it is taken for granted, and it finds its key expression through the purchase and display of consumer products.

Susan Faludi has argued that the backlash against second wave feminism particularly demonized women for trying to "have it all," meaning having both a fulfilling career and a family life. Features on "infertility epidemics" and the "husband shortage" served as warnings to young women who put off marriage and childbearing to focus on career development. Although the metaphorical notion that girls can "have it all" is present in any number of ads in teen girls' magazines, the phrase makes a literal appearance in an advertisement for Stuff, teen girl superstar Hilary Duff's product line.[74] Within the ad, "having it all" is redefined as having all of the apparel, accessories, and cosmetics to which

Duff has lent her name and seal of approval. In other literal associations, concerns about girls' self-esteem become a brand, Self Esteem clothing and accessories, advertised in *YM* with the tagline, "Inspire to Be."[75] Again, the tagline refers to the fact that teen girl shoppers already have high levels of self-esteem, which they express through clothing and accessories. Their role is not to "aspire," but to "inspire" others, and they do this by displaying their commodified, empowered identities.

Although these representations are less frequent, Girl Power is sometimes represented in advertisements as action and athleticism. An ad for Skechers shoes in *Teen People* draws on the style of classic James Bond movie posters, recasting the central role with a blonde heroine on the run.[76] An ad for pHisoderm face cleanser features a young woman in a martial arts costume, preparing for combat with two giant Q-tips; the complementary tagline, "Kick acne anytime, anywhere," refers to Girl Power strength and athleticism, and re-signifies these traits as related to "battling" blemishes.[77] Frequent advertiser bonnebell sponsored a 2003 essay contest for teen girls, asking them to explain how sports have impacted their lives. The "Be Everything You Are" promotion worked to associate the company's cosmetics with girls' athleticism, encouraging girls to embrace multiple identities and deny any distance between the accoutrements of traditional femininity and newer opportunities for social participation.

Commodity feminism and the neoliberal process of individualization work together in forming the address of teen girls' magazines to their readers. In her study of the development of neoliberal subjectivities, Marnina Gonick argues that individuals are prompted to surveil themselves in line with "the articulation of identity as choice and self-determination."[78] Gonick quotes Anthony Giddens when she writes that the process of individualization "involves an increasing tendency to self-monitoring, so that 'we are, not what we are, but

what we make of ourselves.'"[79] Features and advertisements in teen girls' magazines encourage readers to view the construction of identity as a continuous process of becoming and a limitless opportunity for self-improvement. An article in the August 2001 issue of *CosmoGirl* addresses readers with the headline: "Go Back to School as The Girl You've Always Wanted to Be!" The brief article offers tips to teen readers on how they can transform themselves in order to create positive changes in their lives. Advertising is complementary to this kind of editorial copy, because advertisers frequently play on readers' desires to transform themselves, and they suggest specific products to be of use in the effort.

Advertising campaigns in teen girls' magazines including *CosmoGirl*, *Seventeen*, *Teen People*, and *YM* frequently utilize Girl Power as a signifier that represents the ability to define the self. An ad for got2b hairstyling products in *Seventeen* proclaims, "You choose the attitude, we help you create it." bonnebell cosmetics addresses *Teen People* readers with a full-page close-up of a teenage model and the tagline, "Be whatever you decide. It's beautiful." Readers are encouraged via the mode of address to see themselves in the ad, which implicitly flatters the reader's existing characteristics while gently suggesting that choosing to use the cosmetics will help her to communicate her chosen identity with other people. Secret deoderant advertises three scents (Genuine, Ambition, Optimism) as three different personalities, assuring *CosmoGirl* readers that these formulas named for abstract characteristics are "Made to match your strength and individuality" and "They're a sheer expression of you." The three scents are represented in the ad by separate images of women's feet. "Genuine" is represented by bare feet walking in sand, "Ambition" is a pair of feet in pink, open-toed high heels, and "Optimism" is represented by a single glass slipper, referencing the Cinderella fairytale. The Secret ad is an example of commodity feminism; it

takes Girl Power rhetoric of "strength and individuality" and reframes these abstract terms to refer to a strong deoderant and the choice between a limited number of self-defining options. The ad also participates in the neoliberal process of individualization by hailing readers to identify with each of the three "personalities" presented, and to see each of these as options (or "expressions") of the self.

The Brat catalog and website, offering apparel and accessories for teenage girls, advertises the ability to "Create Your Own Defining Look," along with Girl Power buzzwords: "Empowerment" and "Individual Style."[80] An unusual ad for Honeycomb cereal features a girl immersed in a pink bathtub full of milk and cereal and the tagline, "Anything but ordinary."[81] Within this frame, eating cereal becomes an expression of a unique, boundary-defying feminine personality. Melissa Shoes advertises the ability to express selfhood through footwear with the tagline, "Designed by Melissa. Defined by you," in *Seventeen*.[82] Another advertisement for Hilary Duff's Stuff features a 'handwritten' note from the star explaining, "I know who I am, but I'm not the same every day … Don't just live life, create it."[83] The advertisement encapsulates the relationship between Girl Power and individualization, as it encourages readers to constantly create expressions of selfhood with consumer goods; having authority is equated with taking control of one's own identity display.

Equality and choice postfeminism is also visible in the kinds of activism supported by teen girls' magazines. Magazines including *Seventeen* and *CosmoGirl!* present features on issues that are of major concern to young women, and these features emphasize individual concerns and personal appearance over collective action and political engagement. Consumer activism is prominent in advertisements for the Candie's Foundation in *Seventeen*; the shoe

company extols the virtues of its own public information campaign on teen pregnancy, linking the purchase of shoes with supporting the company's interest in the social issue.[84] Missy Elliott advertises Viva Glam from Mac Cosmetics in *Seventeen*, with all proceeds going to support the Mac AIDS Fund.[85] Readers are thus encouraged to participate in social activism by purchasing products for self-improvement.

Teen girls' magazines shut down the possibility that girls might use their "power" for organization and social change by instead stressing beauty work as a natural outlet for girls' authority. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf argues that if women are truly empowered (as postfeminist culture argues that they are) they should be able to choose whether or not to participate in the trappings of feminine beauty work.[86] Teen girls' magazines work to represent "beauty" as the only healthy, powerful choice.

In her discussion of equality and choice postfeminism, Sarah Projansky argues that "postfeminist representations depend on an assimilationist mode of representation to erase race as a legitimate social category for analysis. As a result, 'women' is meant to stand for all women but does so through the lens of whiteness."[87] Teen girls' magazines offer multicultural representations of young femininity, making no distinction based on race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic class factors and how they might affect the accessibility or attainability of Girl Power. The "declaration of independence" promised by Tommy Girl cologne is framed similarly around a blond, blue-eyed model and an African-American model in separate full-page advertisements. Although Skechers places a white, athletic heroine at the center of the action in its shoe ad, African American and Asian girls are posed as action heroines within the frame. An advertisement for Secret deoderant features an attractive Indian woman costumed as a princess and the tagline reads, "When you're strong, you

sparkle."[88] The majority of models featured in these magazines are young white women, but young women of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds are regularly represented with the same rhetoric of equality and choice that forms the dominant mode of address within their pages. An advertisement for Rajman swimwear in *CosmoGirl* features a young Asian model cavorting on a beach in a swimsuit. The ad reads: "This young Betty is," followed by a column of Girl Power attributes: "spontaneous, independent, hyper, street sweet, confident, alternative, global, sharp, fearless," and "urban."[89] Within the frame of the ad, racial and ethnic identity is visible but unnamed; the relevance of racial and ethnic identity is denied in favor of a "global" identity that may be claimed by anyone who purchases the exclusive line of department store swimwear.

Marnina Gonick argues that this type of assimilation displaces social attitudes and structures onto the individual. She writes:

> When girls encounter neoliberal discourse espousing a conviction that 'anyone who works hard can get ahead' and 'women have made great gains towards equality,' they are led to understand their own experience of successes and failures as a product of their individual effort. How they are positioned within the changing cultural, political, economic, and social climate insistent on a direct relationship between individualism and individual aspiration does not get factored in.[90]

Assimilationist representations of young femininity deny the relevance of race and ethnicity as factors of difference that have real material effects in young women's lives. They represent whiteness as the norm, and they reinforce this by framing young women of other racial and ethnic backgrounds with the same rhetoric of commodified empowerment that is used to create the white norm.

Teen girls' magazines present Girl Power as a foregone conclusion, rather than as a possibility for individual girls' empowerment. They address young women as already strong,

independent, smart, and pretty, but flood them with messages about how best to employ these attributes for individual advantage. These magazines flatter young women with messages about their social authority and cultural importance, masking not only young women's experience of difference, but also their real factors of dependence. The readership for teen girls' magazines (which often skews younger than the teenage years) are not only economic dependents (depending primarily on their parents for financial support), but also systemic dependents (not yet recognized as full citizens under the law). Teenage girls have different legal rights than adult women, for example; they cannot participate in the political system by voting until they reach age eighteen, and they are legally bound to the educational system. Teen magazines address these young women as autonomous individuals, though they literally do not hold the rights and responsibilities associated with full citizenship.

Susan Hopkins argues that within Australian teen magazines, "Feminist issues become a question of how best to work the system for individual advantage. The assumed girl reader is self-possessed, articulate, aware, cool and confident."[91] Teen magazines in the United States formulate a similar mode of address in which the reader is flattered as already equal within the social system (and sometimes represented as more than equal). Equality is represented as the ability to make choices, and magazines frame the available choices in terms of identity construction and self-improvement. The continuous construction of the self is linked again and again with commodities that contribute to the attainment of physical beauty and the power to create the self as an object. Teen girls' magazines utilize the rhetoric of equality and choice to place Girl Power within the realm of patriarchal capitalism, attempting to deny the subversive possibilities of the discourse.

(Hetero)Sex-Positive Feminism

In this iteration of postfeminist discourse, Girl Power is represented in the media as young women's ability to represent themselves in a sexualized manner, through style of dress, modes of speech, and attitude. (Hetero)sex-positivity is accompanied by the contradictory message that young women should not actually *be* sexual. The revealing clothing, suggestive lyrics, and confident poses of teen pop stars including Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears were offset by their participation in pro-abstinence social causes. In the late 1990s, they were positioned as "role models" who used sexuality as performance, but denied any sexual pleasure or agency.

Although the discourse of Girl Power is multi-faceted, over time the vast majority of representations of young women's empowerment and notions of girls' cultural authority have come to focus almost exclusively on sexual empowerment. A trend towards the increasing sexualization of teenage girls has picked up speed since the late 1990s, when it gained currency through popular performers including Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, as I discussed in Chapter Two. Young women who enact sexualized personae (as Spears and Aguilera have) are expressing their personal, individual empowerment. In these representations of girl power, young women express their confidence and autonomy by dressing and behaving provocatively. The overt sexualization of teen girls' culture is part of a backlash trend, not because sexual empowerment is illegitimate, but because this trend reduces girl power to physical/sexual display. The vague nature of girl power's promises that girls can "do anything" and "be anything" are made specific by representations of young women whose cultural authority is predicated on their ability to display themselves as sexual objects. Sarah Projansky argues that in representations of adult women, "This celebration of

women's play with the heterosexual male gaze – their invitation of the gaze and their own fascination with and attention to the object of that gaze (their own bodies) – not only intensifies heterosexuality within the postfeminism depicted in the popular press, but it also ensures a place for femininity in postfeminism."[92] Within Girl Power, girls' self-objectification is presented as a "choice" and rewarded as an expression of empowerment. This choice reifies heterosexual male desire as central to young women's self-concept and reinscribes particular terms of femininity in teen girls' identity construction.

Girl Power has become interrelated with girls' performance of sexualized identities because of its rebellious message that young women can be anything they choose, and that they do not have to fit into idealized cultural notions of young femininity. Femininity has long-standing cultural association with passivity, shyness, and naivete. Girl power opened up femininity to associations with action, assertiveness, competitiveness, and even aggression. These characteristics translate easily into the sexualization of young women; they perform assertiveness and competitiveness within the realms of beauty and sexuality; sexual personae make young women's rebellious identities visible. Within the postfeminist response to Girl Power, the message of empowerment is turned against young women, so that they are rewarded for portraying themselves as sexual beings, but little else.

Hip hop culture is one of the most visible arenas of (hetero)sex-positive feminism within the discourse of Girl Power. The discourse of Girl Power circulates the notion that young women are subjects rather than objects of popular culture; hip hop does not act on them, they are capable of acting upon it. Hip hop has largely been defined as a masculine space, partially because the majority of rap artists are male, and the music industry operates on a logic that indicates that the majority of rap album buyers are male (male artists producing

for a male audience). Within this masculine formation of hip hop, debate has raged since the 1980s about how male rappers represent women through the language that they use to write about women, the roles that women play in rap videos, and how female fans respond to rap music. This debate has largely focused on concerns over rampant misogyny in hip hop; the basic argument is that women are objectified by male rappers because of the way they are depicted as scantily-clad sexual attractions in music videos, and that they are demeaned as "bitches," "hoes," and "golddiggers" in rap lyrics. Women who participate in hip hop as rappers, dancers, music video stars, and as listeners/fans are then participating in the process of their oppression; they are supporting an expression of power and cultural authority that devalues them. Hip hop is significant because it has become increasingly influential in all mainstream popular culture. Hip hop inflections are visible in the sexualized personae of pop stars Britney and Christina, for example, both of whom often collaborate with well known hip hop producers and rap artists.[93]

At its roots, hip hop is a social movement, comprised of more than just music. The politics of hip hop are rooted in African nationalism, responding to the social and economic conditions that black youths faced in New York, starting in the 1970s. East Coast hip hop emerged before West Coast hip hop, which was more of a response to gang activity and the criminalization of black youths in urban areas on the West Coast. In other words, hip hop emerged as organic forms of expression relating to the social conditions faced by African-Americans, and as a response to a larger power structure that defined young black people as disempowered. Rap music is just one element of hip hop culture. The four major elements of hip hop artistry are: MC-ing (rapping), DJ-ing (working the turntables), B-boying

(breakdancing), and Graffiti. These elements came together, beginning in the 1970s, to form hip hop as a grassroots movement with political and artistic implications.

The original grassroots nature of hip hop left it open to local, community participation. Anyone could rent or buy equipment to set up impromptu street shows, and artists could perform freestyle, without any equipment at all. Both women and men were involved in the development and progression of hip hop, even from the earliest days. The interesting trend that emerges then, in histories of hip hop, is the way that women's participation is downplayed or ignored in the interests of defining hip hop as a masculine space. One of the first historical accounts of hip hop is Nelson George's *Hip Hop America*, published in 1998. George argues that hip hop culture emerged through local neighborhood participation in urban areas and then it became a cultural movement that had a mainstream impact. In it, George is dismissive of the role of women in hip hop, claiming that hip hop would be the same with or without women's participation as rappers, breakdancers, and artists. He writes, "In the twenty-plus years of hip hop history on record … there are no women who have contributed profoundly to rap's artistic growth."[94] He lists a number of popular female rap artists including MC Lyte, Foxy Brown, and more recent success stories Lil' Kim and Foxy Brown, only to conclude, "I would argue that if none of these female artists had ever made a record, hip hop's development would have been no different."[95] The contributions of women, in George's estimation, have not been significant enough to have an impact on the formation of hip hop as a masculine space. Jeff Chang presents an extensive history of hip hop in *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, an examination of what he calls the "hip hop generation." Unlike George, he does not dismiss the artistic contributions of women directly; instead, he passively sidelines women by focusing the vast majority of his analysis on male hip hop artists and

fans. The reason this trend is so provocative is that it attempts to claim a significant role for hip hop in the culture at large. In George's and Chang's estimations, hip hop is a "culture" (a whole way of living), a "movement," a country (as George titles his book, *Hip Hop America*), and it is informing the politics and practices of a "generation." Their historical accounts of this phenomenon support the notion that it holds no significant role for women.

Feminist author Nancy Guevara argues that the role of women in hip hop has intentionally been downplayed. She writes, "The undermining, deletion, or derogatory stereotyping of women's creative role in the development of minority cultures is a routine practice that serves to impede any progressive artistic or social development by women that might threaten male hegemony in the sphere of cultural production"[96] Guevara argues that women have been active participants in the formation of hip hop from its inception, and there is motive behind portraying women as objects, cheerleaders, and bystanders within the culture.

A number of feminist authors have sought to address the controversy over misogyny in rap and the erasure of women from histories of hip hop by theorizing hip hop feminism. In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose critiques Nelson George's analysis of hip hop as a culture without women. She argues that rap music provides an ongoing dialogue between men and women about social roles and rules related to gender and sexuality. Female rappers like MC Lyte and Yo Yo, or more recently Eve, Lil' Kim, and Missy Elliot respond to male rappers through their music. Rose claims that there are three predominant themes "in the works of black female rappers: heterosexual courtship, the importance of the female voice, and mastery in women's rap and black female public displays of physical and sexual freedom."[97] From her perspective, these themes form a basis from which black female rappers negotiate multiple

identities and social boundaries in an ongoing conversation, utilizing hip hop as a representational tool, rather than allowing it to be used to represent them. Female rappers participate in its process of meaning-making, and they complicate the social authority of hip hop by presenting multiple feminine identities (black women as sexual, as powerful, as actors and as acted upon) within it.

In response to the controversy over misogyny, Imani Perry in "It's my Thang and I'll Swing it the Way I Feel" seeks to understand the ways that hip hop and rap music may be empowering for women (considering the subjectivity of listeners, as well as performers). Perry writes that rap music provides a socially acceptable space for black women to express their sexuality, and their voices, in a way that they are not allowed to in the culture at large. Hip hop is then responsible for expanding the representational possibilities for black women within mainstream culture, creating a space for the discussion and expression of black female agency and sexuality.

In one of the defining texts on women and hip hop culture, *Check it While I Wreck It*, Gwendolyn Pough argues that the black feminist "voice" in hip hop is about the assertion of authority in the construction of identity (86). Female rappers including Missy Elliott, Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim, Trina, and others create highly sexualized persona in which they claim sexual agency. According to Pough, these women claim power related to their ability to be seen as sexual beings who claim desire and pleasure. Other feminist scholars have noted however, that while these rappers claim the ability to define themselves, their vision of femininity does not differ significantly from the value of femininity as described by male rappers. For example, in a feminist analysis of contemporary hip hop culture, Ayana Byrd argues that female rappers who attempt to claim power via their sexuality end up reinforcing

the stereotypes circulated by male rappers, because they do not work to define themselves as *other* than sexual.[98] While female rappers display their bodies and discuss their sexual desires, they do not deviate from the heterosexual norms established and reinforced by male rap artists. They do not contribute to a different vision or understanding of women as sexual beings. In a 2007 interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Lil' Kim claims that, "At the end of the day I proved that sex sells."[99] The interviewer does not note that this concept was never actually a contested one.

The discussion of women's roles within hip hop has been taken up by factions who argue that it is a sign of cultural advancement that black women can have a voice in the larger culture, and that they can present themselves as sexual beings, rather than being represented by others. Alternative readings of hip hop music are possible, and in some ways encouraged because an integral aspect of the cultural encourages individual rap production. Overwhelmingly though, in mainstream rap music, there are very few female rappers and they offer largely similar renditions of heterosexuality, which work to position one kind of acceptable sexuality for young women. This is not to say that hip hop fans all relate to female rappers in the same way, or view these stars as undifferentiated in their message. Within the majority of mainstream hip hop culture, including rap music and videos, women's roles are primarily defined in terms of how they relate to heterosexual relationships. To make a point of contrast, M.I.A. is a Sri Lankan woman who raps about global politics, feminism, and immigration; her work is distributed via a small, independent record label, and is not played on popular radio stations or aired on MTV. Eve, Foxy Brown, Trina, Lil' Kim and Missy Elliott rap about heterosexual relationships in music and videos that are widely circulated by major media conglomerates. The example that they offer is based on performance, rather than

pleasure. The aim of the performance is unfailingly heterosexual; women are affirmed in their identities by sexual attention from men. Ariel Levy examines this phenomenon, which she terms "raunch culture" in her book, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*. Levy writes:

> This new raunch culture didn't mark the death of feminism, they told me; it was evidence that the feminist project had already been achieved. We'd *earned* the right to look at *Playboy*; we were *empowered* enough to get Brazilian bikini waxes. Women had come so far, I learned, that we no longer needed to worry about objectification or misogyny. [100]

Levy argues that although "raunch culture" advocates a sexual openness that masquerades as empowerment (in the form of loosening social restrictions of women's behavior), it significantly works to limit the kind of power that women hold within the social structure. She asserts that, "It's about endlessly reiterating one particular – and particularly commercial – shorthand for sexiness."[101] Girl Power's emphasis on being empowered by taking control of one's personal appearance is conflated with young women appearing sexually available; they signal to others that they're "in control" by representing sexual liberation through modes of dress and behavior. Raunch culture, as Levy discusses it, also emphasizes hyperfemininity. This helps to avoid any complications over the nature of the "empowerment" in question, as well as any confusion with the stereotype of the stodgy, buttoned-up feminist.

Levy examines raunch culture as an antifeminist phenomenon, and she frames its ramifications in terms of representations for, by, and about adult women. I argue that it is also visible in the overwhelming trend towards the sexualization of Girl Power that places little to no emphasis on young women's empowerment as related to ability, intelligence, or athleticism. Instead, the sexualization of Girl Power works to locate the realm of their cultural authority in beauty, consumerism, and sexual display. Girl culture marketers have encouraged and profited from this trend by producing the slogans and clothing for this sexual

empowerment. Abercrombie & Fitch sold t-shirts to young women with the line, "Who needs brains when you have these?" printed across the chest. Alloy and Delia's, which I discussed in Chapter One, offered girls "I'm Too Pretty to Do Math" and "I'm Tight Like Spandex," respectively.[102] Abercrombie & Fitch faced some controversy in 2002 when they decided to market thong underwear to girls as young as eight years old, but they also sold out their stock, indicating the presence of high demand. A double bind is formed by the terms of this sexual empowerment. Teen girls reject traditional notions of femininity by embracing sexual objectification, but they continue to be labeled and punished if they are sexually active. The terms of sexual empowerment within Girl Power are such that girls must portray themselves as sexual beings without actually *being* sexual. Traditional femininity is still enforced upon their sexuality, and the contradictory nature of this "empowerment" renders it meaningless.

The sexualization of teen girls' culture emphasizes standards of self-worth based on physical appearance; young women may resist these standards, but this trend within Girl Power works to navigate the discourse away from resistance to patriarchal authority. Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* links cultural ideals of beauty to the backlash phenomenon that Susan Faludi documented. Wolf argues that marketers linked a wide array of products to women's desired happiness, positioning beauty as the solution to their woes. She further documents real changes in public sphere regulation and legislation in the 1970s and 1980s that made it legal to discriminate against women based on their appearance. Responding to Arlie Hochschild's *The Second Shift*, referring to the household work that women are expected to do after working a first shift outside the home, Wolf argues that beauty becomes a "third shift."[103] It is work that women must perform in order to have access to feminist gains, and achieve full participation in society.

The Beauty Myth is relevant to the backlash against Girl Power because in a similar fashion, sexualized representations of young women make their empowerment contingent upon unattainable standards of beauty and physical perfection. The "work" that young women are empowered to perform is solely related to their appearance. The projection of a sexualized identity is key, and the terms of the performance are specific and homogenous. Young women must be thin, conventionally attractive, and tan. They must dress to emphasize their breasts and buttocks, wear specific name brand clothes and shoes, and they must wear make-up. Trends towards plastic surgery as a means of physical enhancement (discussed by both Levy and Wolf) are indicators of the effort that women put into establishing and maintaining the appearance of a culturally acceptable identity.

In her argument against raunch culture, Ariel Levy argues that cultural "role models" including Paris Hilton and porn star Jenna Jameson are indicators that women are judging themselves (and being judged) based on standards of beauty and sexuality that determine their worth. She argues that the trend indicates unresolved tensions between women's liberation and the sexual revolution, and that these tensions reflect a cultural inability to interrogate women's sexual empowerment. What does it mean to say that women are sexually empowered? When I examine this question in relation to Girl Power, it leads back to the notion that within the discourse, sexual empowerment is being used against young women, to fit them into a cultural ideal that, while different from traditional femininity, is similarly restrictive.

He's All That: Feminism Without Girls

In Sarah Projansky's description of the fifth category of postfeminist messages, "Men Can Be Feminists Too," she argues the emerging men's movement in the 1990s acted as a

direct response to the gains of feminism, and claimed for men the right to usurp traditional femininity in the form of emotionality as retaliation for the masculine authority that women had supposedly acquired through the gains of the feminist movement. She argues that within this category, masculinity is reified through representations of "men who take over women's roles as feminine subjects, feminists, or both."[104] Within the discourse of Girl Power, teenage boys are often portrayed as sensitive to feminist goals, and as figures of moral authority. This type of representation is visible as a trend in teen television dramas and in teen films. In this section, I focus on the male melodrama that became a stalwart of teen television programming on the WB in the late 1990s, and how this generic form positions young men as figures of moral authority who are central to young women's empowerment.

While a number of Girl Power narratives on television feature teen girl protagonists, the "Girl Power" label has also been applied to series that feature teen boy protagonists, but are popular with young female viewers. The WB aired a number of Girl Power series including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, *Felicity*, and *Popular*, but they also developed series with male protagonists including *Dawson's Creek*, *Smallville*, *Roswell*, *Everwood*, and *One Tree Hill* that were marketed to young women. Each of these series are hour-long, dramatic serials; although they often incorporate genre blending, they share a narrative focus on coming of age tropes. Girl Power series with female protagonists tend to position the heroines as articulate, intelligent, and authoritative within the narrative universe. In Girl Power series with male protagonists, the male perspective on coming of age is privileged, positioning young men as experts on the structural barriers that young women face. These narratives also position young men as uniquely sensitive and emotional within the story world.

While scholars have used postfeminism as a critical tool to analyze representations of women in television series designed to appeal to adults, including *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal*[105], there is very little academic work on what Mary Celeste Kearney refers to as the "teen-centered dramatic serial, "[106] and more specific to the purposes of this chapter, what Miranda Banks identifies as the "teen male melodrama." There are several possible reasons for this lack of attention. Although the teen male melodrama is rooted in older genre traditions, its popularity on television is relatively recent. The majority of teen-centered dramatic serials are relatively low-rated series that have been popular on networks with comparatively small audience shares. For multiple reasons, many scholars find the subject matter of adolescence lacking in appeal, or they may find teen melodramas to be of less interest than other teen-centered texts. For example, in her study of teen films and television series, Roz Kaveney declines to cover teen male melodramas including *Dawson's Creek* and *The O.C.*, opting to focus on texts that are more overtly comedic.[107] Teen male melodramas are the area of focus in this chapter because they demonstrate how concerns related to masculinity are brought to the center of Girl Power narratives and then marketed to young female viewers.

In 1998, the WB innovated by introducing a teen male melodrama into its schedule. The small network had already been investing in shows with young casts for a couple of years, hoping to appeal to the specific yet profitable audience of teenage viewers who were offered minimal teen-specific programming by the major broadcast networks. *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) first aired in mid-season, and although it usually placed near the bottom of the Nielsen ratings, it generated viewership among an audience group that the WB was attempting to cultivate: teen viewers, particularly teenage girls.[108] The series appealed to

young viewers with a male protagonist, Dawson Leery, positioned at the center of a romantic triangle. In season one, the initial drama focuses on Dawson's attraction to the new girl in town, Jen, and his oblivious response to romantic attention from Joey, the girl he has grown up alongside. Matt Hills has argued that the show's popularity was driven in part by its self-referentiality.[109] Dawson is a budding filmmaker, and he and the other teen characters make continual references to popular film narratives, especially those of teen films. This adds a layer of meaning for the viewer, as the series is constantly positioning itself as aware of genre stories that have already been told, while spinning similar generic narratives.

Dawson's Creek follows the basic genre form of the melodrama in which a selfless figure is positioned at the center of multiple intertwining relationships and music serves to enhance and emphasize the dramatic nature of the events that unfold. Miranda Banks points out that The WB utilized popular music within its teen male melodramas, and Lynn Schofield Clark notes in her analysis of the network that it was the first television network to promote music and artists in order to receive reduced licensing fees for music use.[110] Melodramas typically deal with social issues, and the teen form of the genre is particularly adept at engaging with serious issues of relevance to adolescence (sexual activity, experimentation with drugs, delinquency) and engaging with themes related to youth in crisis. The genre of melodrama has always been popular with women; in Classical Hollywood Cinema, melodramatic films were referred to as "Women's Films" and "Weepies" because their engagement with emotional resonance signaled that women were the intended audience. On television, teen male melodramas ostensibly offer a wider reach among youth viewers.[111] By positioning young men as central figures in the narrative, these series hold appeal for male viewers who may identify with the protagonists. Teen male protagonists also hold appeal for

heterosexual female viewers, however, as objects of desire. Series within the genre typically play with these possibilities, textually constructing the male protagonist as comfortable within his masculinity and as attractive to females within the narrative.

Miranda Banks cites *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Party of Five* on Fox as forerunners in the genre in her article on television's teen male melodrama. She argues that these two series established male friendship bonds as central to the genre (a trope repeated in *Dawson's Creek*, among others) and took steps towards erasing parental authority figures from melodramatic narratives of adolescence. Banks' analysis focuses primarily on the teen male melodrama as it is embodied by two action-based series that aired on the WB, *Roswell* and *Smallville*. Both of these series feature supernatural elements and action-based narratives, but they are grounded by teen male protagonists who balance their masculine super powers with feminine displays of sensitivity and emotionality. Banks describes the characters in these respective shows, "Max Evans and Clark Kent exemplify a new television hero who is motivated to action by enlightened dreams for an equal partner, emotionally fulfilling relationships and a sense of duty to his community."[112] While Banks doesn't overtly argue that the male protagonists in these series are feminists, she does claim that they embody particularly enlightened characteristics as a result of these two series generic blending of melodrama and science fiction. She continues, "Max and Clark are emotionally capable, thoughtful young men, aware of their masculine and feminine sides – and comfortable with both. They choose as their friends and lovers smart, self-confident girls, and they look up to their young companions with an affection bordering on reverence."[113] This admiration for the protagonist's female counterparts becomes the central feature of how young men are

presented as sensitive, emotional, and even as moral superiors within these melodramatic narratives.

Series on the WB including *Dawson's Creek* and *One Tree Hill* provide fairly straightforward melodramatic narratives in which young men operate as the central figures of moral authority around whom the narrative revolves. Both of these series feature central friendship bonds between young men (Dawson and his friend Pacey, Lucas and his half-brother Nathan, respectively) and young women are present as less central figures who are simultaneously sources of mystery and objects of desire for the protagonists. Within these narratives, young men become key boosters of Girl Power, urging female characters to desire more for their futures and to expect more for themselves.

These representations demonstrate that young men possess a more clear understanding of young women's abilities and opportunities; essentially, young men function as superior Girl Power feminists than young women do. Young men are positioned as sensitive, romantic protagonists in relation to more rough-edged young women. For example, in season one of *Dawson's Creek*, when the title character learns of Jen's past history of sexual activity and experimentation with drugs, he urges her to have more respect for herself and for her body. Similarly, in later seasons as Dawson transfers his affections to Joey, he encourages her academic and career aspirations. When Joey gets a major scholarship opportunity, she tells Dawson, "I never could have done this if you hadn't believed in me." Similarly in *One Tree Hill*, Nathan encourages his teen bride's musical aspirations and finds himself rudderless when she abruptly leaves him to go on tour.

The short-lived ABC series, *Life As We Know It* (2004-2005) provides an interesting example of this phenomenon because it is based on a British young adult novel, *Doing It*, in

which the three central male characters bond over the competitive nature of their sexual exploits. The translation of this narrative into television melodrama dictated that the central male characters required more complexity, and this is represented as sensitivity. Within the series, young women function as satellite figures to the young men whose emotions and desires drive the narrative. The perspective of the male protagonists, emphasized through techniques including direct address to the camera, presents young women as figures of authority, even as they are denied central roles in the narrative. The male protagonists' major struggles involve trying to guess what the women in their lives are thinking, and attempting to respond appropriately to the drives and desires of their objects of romantic interest.

The Fox network was not completely left out of the trend in teen male melodrama. Their early 1990s teen hit *Beverly Hills, 90210* had an ensemble cast, but throughout eleven seasons, Brandon Walsh continuously functioned as a figure of moral authority within the narrative. In the initial seasons, Brandon is textually drawn as a heroic figure because of his "outsider" perspective: he's a teenager from Minnesota who is largely unimpressed by the superficial nature of youth culture at Beverly Hills High. Several years after *90210* concluded, Fox introduced *The O.C.*, a primetime drama about wealthy teenagers in California's Orange County. The show is a typical melodrama in many respects, but the central relationship in the series is the friendship between two male protagonists, Seth and Ryan, rather than a romantic pairing. Similar to Brandon Walsh, Ryan provides the voice of moral authority in *The O.C.* because of his "outsider" perspective of his working-class background. Ryan consistently reminds the other major characters of the nature of class privilege and this contributes to how he functions as "heroic" within the narrative.

In a previous section of this chapter, "Sisterhood is Dangerous," I discussed several film narratives in which young men function as figures of moral authority. Although young men are not the protagonists of *Mean Girls* and *John Tucker Must Die*, they do function in these films as objective observers of the terms of young women's empowerment, and they offer disapproving voices within these narratives of young women's social manipulations and struggles for authority. Regina's boyfriend in *Mean Girls* and John Tucker's brother in the latter film offer advice that reminds the female protagonists of appropriate feminine social roles and rules. The female protagonist in each film is then motivated to alter her behavior in order to win the approval of these young men, who essentially dictate the boundaries of appropriate femininity. A similar relationship is central in a more recent Girl Power film, *The Devil Wears Prada*, which is not technically a teen film but did become a hit with the young female audience segment. The female protagonist, Andie, an aspiring writer in her early twenties, takes a job as an administrative assistant to a high-powered editor at a fashion magazine. As Andie is drawn into the manipulative and backstabbing world of high fashion, her boyfriend (a chef) functions as the voice of moral authority who consistently reminds her of her principles and her original goals. When Andie turns her back on the fashion world at the close of the film, it is implied that she does this in part to win back the reverence of her boyfriend by outwardly displaying how seriously she subscribes to the code of ethics that he has consistently voiced.

This category of postfeminist narratives focuses on the benefits of feminism for young women and men; the narratives imply that feminist advances allow young men to be enlightened on issues of gender equity. These narratives create frameworks in which young men are presented as superior in their feminism, and this trend is borne out in the

development of the teen male melodrama and in Girl Power backlash films. This type of postfeminist response to Girl Power neatly demonstrates how these categories of representation are interrelated. In teen male melodramas, men take on central roles as sensitive, emotional figures. This positioning reinforces the centrality of attaining heterosexual attention to the overall discussion of young women's empowerment. The choices available to young women are understood and articulated by male protagonists, emphasizing the importance of young men's roles as authoritative guides and nurturers.

Conclusion

By 2005, the phrase "Girl Power" had fallen out of vogue, although it still appears frequently in descriptions of books, films, and television shows that feature one or more female protagonists. While the teenage girl market continues to be lucrative for cultural producers and advertisers, Girl Power has fallen out of favor in popular culture due to the increasing currency of the "common sense" notion that young women are uniquely empowered. The strength of young women's cultural authority is no longer particularly notable.

The postfeminist response to Girl Power has circulated a number of cultural fears about the consequences of young women's empowerment that have also contributed to the decline of the discourse. Stories about girls' aggression in the news media and in popular trade press books present the "trend" of girl-on-girl violence as a natural result of girls' equality. The liberation of young women's bodies from the social bonds of passivity claimed by Girl Power have met a response in increasing fears about young women's sexuality and sexual aggression. A rising conservative movement has sought to limit sex education in public schools and advocated a return to "traditional" values, including placing a high

premium on young women's virginity. Organizations that promote abstinence including True Love Waits and Daddy's Little Girls have surged in membership since the late 1990s.

The development of neoliberal subjectivity and the emphasis on adolescent identity construction as a continuous process of becoming is emphasized in postfeminist representations of "equality and choice" postfeminism, as well as through multiple, interrelated narratives that position heterosex-positivity as central to any formulation of young women's empowerment. Postfeminist responses to Girl Power position young women's empowerment as a foregone conclusion, and this works to deny the continuing realities of young women's lived experiences of gender inequality.

In her examination of the relationship between Girl Power and feminist politics, Rebecca Munford argues that "girl power emerges as the site of that dangerous and deceptive slippage between third wave feminism and postfeminism."[114] My examination of the postfeminist response to Girl Power illustrates these slippages by demonstrating how the utopian possibilities of Girl Power have become reiterated as postfeminist representations. Postfeminist representations of Girl Power indicate the existence of genuine liberatory potential within the discourse, and the necessity of weakening or denying this potential by recuperating the terms of young women's empowerment within the hegemonic framework of patriarchal capitalism.

In the next chapter, I examine how young women create their own representations of young femininity that respond to and challenge mainstream representations of Girl Power. I focus on how teenage girls claim agency by becoming cultural producers, and I examine the terms on which young women's empowerment takes place within these independent media forms.

Notes to Chapter Three

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[1] Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991).

[2] Qtd. in Amanda Lotz, *Redesigning Women: Television After the Network Era* (University of Illinois Press, 2006), 21-22.

[3] Ibid., 22.

[4] Kathleen Rowe Karlyn, "Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave: I'm Not My Mother," *Genders* 38 (2003).

[5] Merri Lisa Johnson, ed., *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane Puts It In a Box* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

[6] Mary Douglas Vavrus, "Putting Ally on Trial: Contesting Postfeminism in Popular Culture," *Women's Studies in Communication*, 23:3 (2000), 413-428.

[7] Diane Negra, "Quality Postfeminism?: Sex and the Single Girl on HBO," *Genders* Online Journal, 39 (2004), http://www.genders.org/g39/g39_negra.html.

[8] See Projansky and Leah Vande Berg's "Sabrina the Teenage ...? Girls, Witches, Mortals, and the Limitations of Prime-Time Feminism," *Fantasy Girls: Navigating the New World of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, ed. Elyce Rae Helford (Lanham: MD, Rowman and Littlefield), 13-40. See also Projansky's *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (NYU Press, 2001).

[9] Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 67-68.

[10] Ibid., 68.

[11] Susan Hopkins, *Girl Heroes*, 2.

[12] Ginia Bellafante, "Feminism: It's All About Me!," *Time*, June 1998, 54-60.

[13] Labi, "Girl Power," 60-62.

[14] Ibid., 61.

[15] Labi quotes Christina Ferrari, managing editor of *Teen People*, on the magazine's mission to combat unrealistic body ideals (62).

[16] The American Association of University Women released a report, "How Schools Shortchange Girls," in February of 1992. See "The Educational System is Not Meeting Girls' Needs," *The Columbia Documentary History of American Women Since 1941*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 459-464.

[17] Tamar Lewin, "How Boys Lost Out to Girl Power," *New York Times*, Dec. 12, 1998.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Celeste Fremon, "Are Schools Failing Our Boys?" MSNBC.com, Sept. 22, 1999.

[20] Christina Hoff Sommers, *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[21] Judith Kleinfeld, "Student Performance: Males Versus Females," *The Public Interest*, Winter 1999, 3-20.

[22] Ibid., p.9 of 10 in online version

[23] Tamar Lewin, "American Colleges Begin to Ask, Where Have All the Men Gone?" *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1998.

[24] Brendan Koerner, et al., "Where the Boys Aren't," *U.S. News & World Report*, Feb. 8, 1999.

[25] Ibid.

[26] See Peter Simon and Mary Pasciak, "Gender Gap Among Grads Favors the Girls.," *Buffalo News*, Apr. 11, 2003 and Anand Vaishnav, "Lopsided at the Top: Girls Outnumber the Boys Among Valedictorians," *Boston Globe*, Jun. 6, 2004, B1.

[27] Christina Hoff Sommers, "Girl Power! and Other Federal Idiocy: Government-Sponsored Propaganda for Girls and Boys," AEI Online, posted February 2002, accessed: June 2007.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] see Richard T. Hise, *The War Against Men* (Elderberry Press, 2004) and Lionel Tiger, *The Decline of Males*, St. Martin's Press, 2000.

[31] Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, William Morrow & Co, 1999.

[32] Susan Faludi renews this cultural critique in her analysis of the media following the events of September 11, 2001. She argues that the media proclaimed a necessary return to traditional gender roles for men and women following the terrorist attacks. See *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

[33] Paramount, 2005. Amy Heckerling, the director of *Clueless*, was hailed as an expert on teen culture at the time of its release because it was her second teen film (the first being *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* in 1981) to strike a nerve with audiences.

[34] October Films, 1996

[35] IFC, 2000

[36] Paramount, 2002

[37] Directed by Tamra Davis

[38] Warner Bros, 2005

[39] Labi, "Girl Power," 62.

[40] Universal, 2000

[41] Buena Vista, 2006

[42] MTV Films, 2006

[43] New Line, 1999

[44] New World Pictures, 1989

[45] Columbia Pictures, 1996

[46] Karen Hollinger, *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 207.

[47] Ibid.

[48] New Line, 2001

[49] Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003).

[50] The public rivalry between Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie in 2004, but became an official rift by April 2005 (with both parties commenting on it to the press); their rivalry was regularly reported in *People* and *Us Weekly*, and also by then-emerging bloggers including Perez Hilton (www.perezhilton.com) and TMZ (www.tmz.com).

[51] The show aired on the Fox network from 2003-2005, and eventually moved to the cable network E! for its final two seasons (2006-2007). During season four (airing on E! in 2006), Paris and Nicole were filmed separately because the former best friends were no longer on speaking terms.

[52] See Claudia Rowe, "Violence Among Girls on the Rise," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 13, 2004, A1.

[53] Greg Hamilton, "Teenage Fights on Web: Disturbing, Demeaning," *St. Petersburg Times*, Mar. 4, 2007, 2.

[54] Jack Shafer, "Bogus Trend Story of the Week: The *Boston Globe*'s Story About Girl-on-Girl Attacks," Slate.com, Sept. 4, 2007, accessed: Dec. 7, 2007.

[55] See for example: Laurel J. Sweet, "The Claws Come Out on the T: Teen Catfights on the Rise," *The Boston Herald*, Oct.10, 2005.

[56] Christine Alder and Anne Worrall, eds., *Girls' Violence: Myths and Realities* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004): 16-17.

[57] Although Heather is played by pop star Ashanti, who is African American, the film makes no mention of race or her interracial relationship with John.

[58] The film was marketed with the slogan, "Don't Get Mad. Get Even."

[59] See Labi, "Girl Power," 60-62.

[60] See for example, James B. South, ed., *Buffy the Vampire and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003) and *Slayage: The International Journal of Buffy Studies*.

[61] In *Sex and the Slayer* Lorna Jowett argues that *Buffy* is sometimes read as postfeminist because of the series' representation of the heroine's struggles to balance personal and professional responsibilities (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 2005), 24. Carol Siegel and Patricia Pender offer third wave feminist analyses of the series. See Carol Siegel, "Female Heterosexual Sadism: The Final Feminist Taboo in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Anita Blake Vampire Hunter Series," *Third Wave Feminism and Television: Jane Puts It In a Box*, ed. Merri Lisa Johnson (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 56-90 and Patricia Pender, "'Kicking Ass is Comfort Food': Buffy as Third Wave Feminist Icon," *Third Wave Feminism*, eds.

Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 164-174.

[62] Rachel Fudge, "The Buffy Effect: A Tale of Cleavage and Marketing," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, Summer 1999, 18-21.

[63] Rebecca Feasey, "Watching Charmed: Why Teen Television Appeals to Women," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 34 no. 1, 2006, 2-9.

[64] In a separate analysis, Hannah E. Sanders argues that Charmed is a postfeminist representation that does not completely reject the gains of second wave feminism. See "Living a *Charmed* Life: The Magic of Postfeminist Sisterhood," *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press), 73-99.

[65] Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 67.

[66] Jessica K. Taft, "Girl Power Politics: Pop-Culture Barriers and Organizational Resistance," *All About the Girl*, ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge 2004), 69-78.

[67] Robert Goldman, *Reading Ads Socially* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 131.

[68] Hopkins, *Girl Heroes,* 102.

[69] Advertisement in *CosmoGirl*, 2001.

[70] Advertisement in *Teen People*, 2004.

[71] Advertisements in *CosmoGirl*, 2001.

[72] Advertisement in *CosmoGirl*, 2001.

[73] Advertisement in *CosmoGirl*, 2001.

[74] Advertisement in *Seventeen*, 2003-2004.

[75] Advertisement in *YM*, 2003-2004.

[76] Advertisement in *Teen People*, 2004.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Marnina Gonick, "Between 'Girl Power' and 'Reviving Ophelia': Constituting the Neoliberal Girl Subject," *NWSA Journal*, vol. 18, no. 2 (June 2006), 1-23.

[79] Ibid. Cites Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self: Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 75.

[80] Advertisement in *CosmoGirl* in 2001.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Advertisement in *Seventeen*, 2003-2004.

[83] Advertisement in *Teen People*, 2004.

[84] Advertisement in *Seventeen*, 2003-2004.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

[87] Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 74.

[88] Advertisement in *YM*, 2003-2004.

[89] Advertisement in *CosmoGirl*, 2001.

[90] Gonick, "Between 'Girl Power'," EBSCOhost, accessed online: August 2007.

[91] Hopkins, *Girl Heroes*, 28.

[92] Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 80.

[93] Christina Aguilera has collaborated with hip hop producers DJ Premier, Kwame, and Mark Ronson, among others. Britney Spears has collaborated with R. Kelly, the YingYang Twins, and Jason "Jay E." Epperson on various tracks.

[94] Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 184.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Nancy Guevara, "Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'," *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 51.

[97] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 147.

[98] Ayana Byrd, "Claiming Jezebel: Black Female Subjectivity and Sexual Expression in Hip-Hop," *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*, eds. Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 3-18.

[99] Tim Stack, "A Lil' Chat With ... Lil' Kim," *Entertainment Weekly*, Mar. 9, 2007: 30.

[100] Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 3-4.

[101] Ibid., 30.

[102] "From the 'Ew' Files, Depressingly Inevitable T-shirt Edition," *Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, Spring 2007, 20.

[103] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 25-26.

[104] Projansky, *Watching Rape*, 85.

[105] See Negra, "Quality Postfeminism" and Vavrus, "Putting Ally on Trial."

[106] See Mary Celeste Kearney, "Teenagers and Television," *The Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Television,* ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1996).

[107] Roz Kaveney, *Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 7.

[108] Deirdre Dolan quotes the head of programming as defining the network's audience target as 12 to 34-year-olds, see "The WB Knows Its Teens," *National Post*, Nov. 2, 1998. Within this audience segment, the WB consistently rated much higher among young female viewers.

[109] Matt Hills, "*Dawson's Creek*: 'Quality Teen TV' and 'Mainstream Cult'?," *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption, Identity*, eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI, 2004), 54-70.

[110] See Banks, "A Boy for All Planets" and Schofield Clark, "The WB Network."

[111] Mary Kearney refers to this narrative form as the "teen-centered dramatic serial" and argues that these series rely on coming of age tropes associated with adolescence, pairing them with social issues commonly dealt with in the genre of melodrama. See Kearney, "Teenagers and Television."

[112] Banks, "A Boy for All Planets, " 18.

[113] Ibid., 20.

[114] Rebecca Munford, "'Wake Up and Smell the Lipgloss': Gender, Generation, and the (A)Politics of Girl Power," *Third Wave Feminism*, eds. Stacy Gills, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 150.

Chapter Four
Empowered Girls: Articulations of Resistance in Girls' Independent Media

"Sometimes paper is the only thing that will listen to you." – Jennifer, Providence, Rhode Island[1]

The above quote from teenage "Jennifer" appears in Hilary Carlip's 1995 book *Girl Power!*, a compilation of the writings of girls that the author worked with in self-esteem and empowerment workshops that she led in the early part of the decade. Carlip collected their work as a testament to the diversity and strength of character of the young women of Generation Y. In the introduction to the book she writes:

> Coming of age in a time marked by social upheaval, volatile world issues, and deep personal challenges, how do young American women between the ages of thirteen and nineteen respond? How do they get a sense of who they are and where they belong? What defeats them? What gives them hope?[2]

Carlip finds the answers to these questions in girls' artistic expressions, which she takes as both statements of individual identity and as participation in a larger discussion of what it means to be young and female in a particular historical moment. The first three chapters of this dissertation have examined the discourse of Girl Power as a product of culture industries and mainstream media outlets, and how this discourse came to represent possibilities and fears about young women's empowerment during the 1990s. In this chapter, I examine how young women have participated in creating their own meanings of Girl Power, apart from the conceptions of mainstream media, and how young women have contested the authority of the culture industries in dictating priorities and concerns for this generation.

In researching this chapter, I have focused on girl's independent media production, particularly print media, and examples of girls' negotiations of mainstream media

representations of Girl Power. These negotiations form a kind of resistance, but as I will demonstrate, it is a resistance that takes place within the boundaries of an implied independent media community. In "Articulating Adolescent Girls' Resistance to Patriarchal Discourse in Popular Media," Meenakshi Gigi Durham argues that media studies conceptions of resistance have been androcentric, and particularly focused on individuals and individual actions. She outlines a theory of resistance that is explicitly related to feminist activism, and as such, she argues that it needs to be conceptualized as collective, or group-oriented. Durham is working towards a theory "that might eventually be helpful in empowering and mobilizing adolescent girls to collective political action in their dealings with patriarchal popular culture."[3] She cites Stuart Hall on her utilization of articulation theory as a tool to analyze how ideology, social forces, and discourse meaningfully intertwine. She writes, "According to articulation theory, the ideological meaning of a discursive practice stems from its place within a social formation."[4] Within a patriarchal society, femininity is articulated in a way that reinforces gender inequities and makes them appear to be natural and inevitable. Articulations, however, offer the possibility of discursive rupture or transformation, because they may alter or contradict the operations of power.[5]

In this chapter, I use articulation theory to examine how individuals are able to respond to the discourse of Girl Power through girls' do-it-yourself (DIY) media culture. My analysis is informed by Durham's feminist approach to articulation theory that emphasizes community relations. I argue that while DIY media appear to be individualistic, they in fact provide the basis of community and interrelationships through which young women can and have articulated resistant definitions of Girl Power. I draw particularly on examples of zines

(independently-produced magazines), more traditional magazines, and websites to demonstrate that through girls' media production, third wave feminist meanings of Girl Power are articulated, and these articulations challenge or deny patriarchal ideologies.[6] Although DIY media exist in many other forms, print media have been the most commonly produced and most widely distributed formats of girls' media.[7] Teenage girls have created DIY films, television programs (particularly through cable access stations), and music, but paper zines and ezines (to a lesser extent, as I discuss in this chapter) have been the most accessible forms of media for the largest numbers of girls.

The primary sources I draw on include girls' alternative magazines that have been distributed nationally (primarily *New Moon*, *HUES*, and *blue jean*), ezines (online versions of girls' zines), and girls' paper zines that have been archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society. My sample of archived paper zines includes approximately sixty titles, and each of these were created by young women in the 1990s and 2000s, and each include some discussion of gender politics, often in relation to mass media and popular culture. Although many of the zines in my sample were produced and distributed in the Midwest, primarily in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota, the sample also includes publications from the South, the Pacific Northwest, and the East and West Coasts. The WHS began collecting zines as early as the 1970s, and long-time WHS librarian James Danky (now retired) was instrumental in guiding the development of other archives of alternative publications, including the zine collection at Barnard College. Although it's difficult to gauge this claim, the WHS fanzine collection has been termed the largest of its kind in the country.[8] I do not intend to presume that the zines in my sample are representative of all zines produced by teen girls' during this time period. I draw on secondary

sources regarding zines produced across the country, and in other countries, to establish that the trends I observe in Midwestern zines are also observable in other works.

Girls' DIY media often appear to be unique projects, representing the personal perspective of the author/creator (although in some cases, they do have multiple authors). The personal subject matter covered in zines emphasizes the notion that these form of media are individual. Stephen Duncombe, one of the most widely recognized experts on zine culture, has written about how girls' zines often focus on issues related to sexual abuse and body image, for example. These are personal issues, and they are typically covered in zines as individual experiences, lending credence to the notion that these are not community media. Zines emerged as a major form of girls' media production in the 1990s, owing in part to the Riot Grrrl movement, which I discuss in further detail below. Riot Grrrl developed as a very loosely organized coalition of women, and as such it maintained a push-pull relationship between individual and community identity. This hesitance to claim a community or solid organizational strategy also contributes to the perception that zines produced by Riot Grrrls (or influenced by the Riot Grrrl movement) are individual, rather than community-based projects. As Riot Grrrl activities declined, girls' zine production continued during the 1990s. Girls' zines that are not explicitly tied to the Riot Grrrl movement but that demonstrate a commitment to feminist principles and discussions of individual identity are typically referred to as "perzines," an abbreviation for "personal zines." Again, the emphasis on the personal distracts attention from the ways in which these zines form a larger community, with each individual issue participating in an ongoing, open-ended discussion.

The girls' media that I discuss in this chapter share some common traits with consciousness-raising, a widespread tactic of radical second wave feminists. In consciousness-raising groups, women come to understand how their personal experiences are the result of political structures that support and enforce gender inequities. In the 1970s, feminist consciousness-raising groups were often structured non-hierarchically; groups of women would gather and take turns discussing their lives. Through this process, they would literally "come to consciousness" in terms of the ways that social and political structures enforced gender discrimination, and ideally these groups would then move to participate in political action to address these conditions.[9] Similarly, girls use zines and websites as a way to share their personal experiences and communicate their individual identities, but they also use them relationally, to develop solidarity with like-minded peers. Feminist author bell hooks has critiqued the efficacy of consciousness-raising as a political strategy, arguing that the technique itself encourages a focus on the self that does not necessarily translate into political action. She warns that strategies of politicization should focus on shared (rather than individual identity) and increase a sense of collective reality.[10] The communities that develop from the consciousness-raising efforts of girls' zines, however, are organized entirely around a collective reality that is articulated in opposition to dominant ideologies. Girls' personal media creations become political expressions when they are examined in relationship to one another, and this dialogue works to critique and negate patriarchal authority.

Theorizing Zine Communities

Much has been written about girls' independent media, particularly zines. These media products have been objects of academic fascination because they provide tangible evidence of

the place of individuals within discourse. Although girls' zine production expanded notably during the 1990s, zines themselves have been around for decades. Stephen Duncombe cites science fiction fanzines of the 1930s as some of the oldest examples of this media format.[11] In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins uses fanzines as evidence of fan communities, in order to examine how individual television viewers can be conceptualized as having a certain degree of agency, and the ability to negotiate readings of mainstream media texts. Girls' media scholar Anita Harris asserts that zines "first developed as a marginal space for youth expression during the 1980s."[12] Although there is some disagreement as to which publications should technically be defined as "zines," a solid definition appears in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*. Jennifer Wolfe and Elke Zobl define zines as "noncommercial, do-it-yourself magazines created as vehicles for self-expression. Although professional-looking, widely distributed examples exist, the typical zine is a small-circulation, cut-and-paste, photocopied publication edited by one person and distributed through the mail at a minimal cost."[13] This definition focuses on the individual aspects of zine production, and also emphasizes how the aesthetic values and distribution of zines clearly sets them apart from mainstream published products. In their edited collection of material from over 500 zine submissions, *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World*, Karen Green and Tristan Taormino define "girl zines" as DIY publications made by and for young women.[14]

In Mary Kearney's seminal article, "Producing Girls," she argues that media scholars need to examine not just how mainstream media (created and distributed by adults) represent girlhood, but how girls create media that offers alternative perspectives on youth and femininity.[15] Her 2006 book, *Girls Make Media*, puts this advice into practice by examining

media in multiple formats that girls have produced and distributed. Kearney devotes an entire chapter to Riot Grrrl and how the movement fostered the growth of DIY media and a chapter to girls' zine production.[16] Her examination of zines, however, is primarily concerned with how girls' zines express individual identity and this focus that separates her analysis from my own. Kearney does look at how girls' zines respond to representations of young femininity in mainstream media, but she is primarily concerned with how these express individual identity formation and coming to voice on a personal level, rather than how these zines reflect participation in a larger (often implied, rather than literal) community. Kearney's analysis is thorough and thought- provoking, and touches on all of the major titles that are often cited as notable examples of girls' zine production. My research furthers this kind of analysis by focusing on a group of zines from a specific region (the Midwest) and analyzing their content primarily with regard to community participation.

Kathy Bail's edited collection, *DIY Feminism*, similarly looks at zines as expressions of individual politics. The book is primarily focused on feminist activism in Australia, offering examples of DIY culture as created by young women, expressing personal identity rather than *identification* with a larger movement. Bail argues that the collection demonstrates a "generational shift" among young women in Australia that "stems from younger women's inability to find models of personal identity within the broader and seemingly institutionalized feminism established by older women."[17] She claims that there is no unified perspective represented by the work within the collection; in other words, there is no collective feminist "voice" in DIY culture.[18] Many of the included selections discuss how and why individuals

participate in DIY media creation as an alternative to accepting representations proffered by mainstream media.

In "All Media are Created Equal: DIY Identity in Alternative Publishing," Laurel Sutton argues that zines should fundamentally be theorized as individual forms of expression. She writes that zines, as a form of alternative media, operate as a response to the appeal-to-everyone, offend-no one agenda of mainstream media. In Sutton's view, "This is the unique feature of alternative media: they represent the words and thoughts of an individual who is solely responsible for their expression."[19] The emphasis on the individual and "sole responsibility" rejects the possibility of community participation through alternative media expression. She further argues that through zine production, authors do not address an acknowledged readership so much as they construct and address themselves. For Sutton, zine production is primarily about individual identity construction, a project that bell hooks would critique as apolitical, along the lines of consciousness-raising that fails to motivate coordinated political action. In Sutton's estimation, zines are a "public" place to establish identity and this individualized mission separates them from movements for social change.

Stephen Duncombe's *Notes from Underground* is one of the earliest and most frequently cited studies of zines and zine cultures. He examines Riot Grrrl zines and feminist zine production, but makes very little separation between these zines and perzines that circulated outside of Riot Grrrl-related circles during the 1990s. Duncombe's discussion of how Riot Grrrl zines relate to an actual or implied community is extensive; he argues that zine production has played a role in establishing limits and boundaries in terms of what it means to be a part of the Riot Grrrl community. According to his argument, while zines circulated

information about the movement to young women, they simultaneously kept it from continuing to develop in multiple directions.

In this chapter, I analyze multiple zines and alternative publications as artifacts of feminist community-building. My goal is to understand how these publications might foster and represent communities, and in turn how these communities articulate resistance to a hegemonic discourse of Girl Power. Throughout, I argue that zines can and have contributed to feminist activism. In the next section, I discuss how the Riot Grrrl movement inspired DIY media production, and how zines became a particularly accessible format for many young women. I then look at perzines as a separate but related trend in girls' media production, along with a mini-boom of girls' alternative magazines (*HUES*, *New Moon*, and *blue jean*) that developed during the 1990s. In each of these media formats, my focus is on how girls articulate their own definitions of "Girl Power" and how these articulations contradict the discursive authority of mainstream media. At the end of the chapter, I examine girls' online production, similarly focusing on conceptions of youth, femininity, and power.

Grrrl Power: Riot Grrrl and DIY Networks

The introduction of this dissertation offers some historical background on the Riot Grrrl movement, which combines the political implications of punk with feminism in order to create a space for women's artistic participation and authority within a masculine cultural genre. The mostly-female bands that originated Riot Grrrl were invested in changing conceptions of the punk music scene. They brainstormed ways to empower young women to participate in making change. At the level of fan participation, some of these methods were simply ways to make young women feel comfortable at punk rock performances. They established all-female

mosh pits so that young women could physically thrash in front of the stage without fear that the violent thrashing of physically larger male participants might hurt them. Riot Grrrl bands performed songs about women's personal experiences, including experiences of sexual harassment and abuse. They conceptualized their music as a way to address women as an audience, rather than as a way to seek greater acceptance from the mostly-male punk establishment.

Riot Grrrls also encouraged media production; primarily, early Riot Grrrls like Kathleen Hanna and Jen Smith of the bands Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, respectively, wanted to encourage young women in the punk scene to be music creators rather than fans. They sought ways to encourage girls to pick up instruments and participate in their own bands, rather than simply supporting their friends' or boyfriends' bands. This cultural production, however, extended to forms of media. Early Riot Grrrl manifestos made no real distinction between making music and making media. They encouraged young women to be artists, to be zine-makers, and overall, to express their thoughts in forms that might be shared. Riot Grrrls were picking up on the DIY ethics of punk, in which individuals utilize alternative forms of production in order to negate the operations of capitalism. Riot Grrrls combined this DIY ethic with feminism, circulating a call for young women to express the validity of their identities (their self-esteem and cultural authority) in opposition to a system of patriarchal capitalism. One segment of an early Riot Grrrl manifesto draws attention to how these politics were envisioned at the level of the individual. It states, "BECAUSE we seek to create the revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the status quo."[20]

Riot Grrrls imagined a movement that would be dispersed, non-hierarchical, and that would create a shift in culture through multiple iterations of individual action.

Riot Grrrl offered formative definitions of "Girl Power," which I will refer to as "Grrrl Power" in order to make a clear distinction between the production of meaning within the movement and outside of it. Grrrl Power was conceptualized as a way to address cultural expectations of passive femininity. Riot Grrrls encouraged young women not just to be active, but also to be aggressive in the pursuit of their ambitions. Grrrl Power means being physically strong, capable of self-defense and also potentially acts of physical aggression. Grrrl Power means being rebellious, responding to social expectations with a strong sense of identity and responsibility to a code of ethics that exists outside of a social script of femininity. Grrrl Power means rejecting competition with other women and embracing supportive community structures. All of these ideas were present in early Riot Grrrl manifestoes, and all of them were contested at one time or another as the movement grew. The notion of girl-supportive communities and in particular the principle of "Girl Love" provides a strong example of how Riot Grrrls positioned their movement as a cultural feminism that would respond to patriarchal capitalist standards for feminine behavior. Girl Love is frequently outlined with multiple principles that emphasize girls' self-respect and respect for others. In her examination of Riot Grrrl, Cherie Turner provides a list of Girl Love principles that includes "being powerful" alongside "knowing that you are connected to all girls and the way you view yourself is related to their self-image as well,"[21] for example. A 1992 *New York Times* article on the movement summarized, "Riot Grrrl literature and lyrics speak out against the competition and jealousy that they feel society encourages among young women; the Riot Grrrls want to replace those

attitudes with loyalty and support."[22] The Grrrl Power motto itself was intended to declare pride in being a girl and pride in femininity, opposing a culture that associates femininity with weakness and passivity. Marnina Gonick writes that Riot Grrrls "used it strategically, to distance themselves from the adult patriarchal worlds of propriety, class expectations, and hierarchy."[23] Zines played an important role in expressing this oppositional perspective, and in circulating ideas about young women's social and cultural authority.

Riot Grrrls were not necessarily literally "girls." Although teenage girls were involved in the Riot Grrrl movement, especially in terms of zine production, many Riot Grrrls were young women in their twenties and early thirties. Jen Smith, a punk feminist actively involved in founding the movement has stated that in the beginning she felt "ancient" because she was twenty-two years old, but that she "recognized the vital importance of this opportunity for young women (women in their teens or those lacking access to or interest in a college campus)."[24] Their emphasis on girlishness was a conscious attempt to reclaim power and associate it with young femininity, in an effort to respond to cultural values that denied young women's full and active participation. Riot Grrrls were particularly concerned with issues related to body image and self-esteem, and how these concerns of feminine adolescence translated into women's disempowerment at any age. The Riot Grrrl movement has frequently been critiqued as a movement of white, middle-class women. Mimi Nguyen, a Vietnamese refugee raised in the United States, authored numerous zines that bore some relationship to Riot Grrrl concerns, but has stated in interviews that she feels somewhat ambivalent about the movement itself. In an interview archived in *Zines Vol. II*, Nguyen explains:

> Gender is presumed to be a social category that can be separated from race, class, or even nation. We talk about 'women's issues,' but *which* women are we

> talking about? I have a hard time relating to most feminist discourses on body and beauty issues, because they originate from a white middle-class 'American' context, and I didn't grown up that way and don't see myself reflected in that.[25]

While Riot Grrrls were invested in a cultural critique based on race, class, and sexuality, many of the women who were actively involved in the movement were middle-class and white. Nguyen, who authored zines like *Slant* and *Race Riot* that centered on representations of race and race-based discrimination, isn't dismissive of Riot Grrrl so much as she is longing for a similarly-networked community that is primarily committed to struggling with issues of racial identity. Her critique of Riot Grrrl, however, makes clear that the issues at the forefront of Grrrl Power weren't universally relevant to young women.

Grrrlzines

Riot Grrrl zines developed as a network of information about the movement and its political commitments. In *Future Girl*, Anita Harris writes that grrrlzines "also adopt and expand the punk philosophy of individual responsibility for the creation of social change. They have quickly become a place where young women can communicate with one another and plan to come together at conferences, concerns, and in city-based chapters or organizations in order to politicize other young women and agitate for change."[26] Her focus is on how zines serve as tools of communication that foster political activism and face-to-face networking. Riot Grrrls claim that zine production, circulation, and consumption serves as its own form of political activism, and that it is possible to use a zine to politicize readers. Zines did provide a way of networking, as zine writers would promote other zines and publicize Riot Grrrl concerts, meetings, and events. Zine authors communicated their own identities as Riot Grrrls through their work, often with personal testimonies about their life experiences and their commitment to

battling social conditions of disempowerment. More than that, however, individual authors communicated their participation in the larger movement and their membership in a perceived, shared community through the production of grrrlzines.[27]

Even among women who self-identify as Riot Grrrls, there is disagreement over whether the movement is primarily about individual or collective action. Early Riot Grrrl Jen Smith claims that the movement is devoted to individual development and community in equal parts. She writes, "The ways we exercise our ideas, our art, and our livelihoods are the ways in which we engage in activism. These processes construct both a physical and a psychic space for articulating our realities. By connecting with one another in these different spaces, we both create and participate in the making of our identities and our community."[28] Stephen Duncombe claims, in contrast, that all of the traditional markers of communities sounded the death knell for Riot Grrrl. As a movement devoted to cultural production, the creation of an identifiable community created boundaries for membership and participation. The conception of Riot Grrrl was that it would continue to reverberate and grow. As young women became involved in the movement, they would bring their political agendas and ideas to it, and this multiplicity of interests would send the movement spinning off in hundreds of different directions. Instead, Duncombe argues that as women came to Riot Grrrl, they stated their agreement with its founders' articulation of a mission. Grrrlzines express individual authors' personal experiences, but these are set forth within the parameters of identifiable, relatable areas of interest that Riot Grrrl manifestos put forth. Duncombe contends that this kind of zine production (and by extension, other forms of Riot Grrrl cultural production) actually worked to limit the potential of the movement to develop along hundreds of different directions. In her

article "Remapping the Resonances of Riot Grrrl," Anna Feigenbaum argues that the label is frequently applied to women with varying interests in punk, feminism, and community, to the point where the label itself loses an inherent meaning or ability to refer to an actual community.[29] In essence, her position is that "Riot Grrrl" picked up so many significations that it lost its original referent.

Grrrlzines are personal zines, reflecting an individual author's personality and priorities, but they are also explicitly tied to a larger overall mission. In my research, I examined many grrrlzines among the extensive collection archived at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. These grrrlzines often reprint parts of the Riot Grrrl manifesto, discuss Riot Grrrl bands, and use cut-and-paste photo images to make their participation in the larger movement explicit. The Chicago, IL zine *Rebel Grrrl*, published in approximately 2001, is essentially a compilation of information that would be valuable to individuals in the network.[30] The zine contains information and statistics on racism and homophobia, as well as a huge list of other zines that the author recommends. *Rebel Grrrl* includes a word search for the reader with terms related to feminism and politics, a feature that mimics the style of Kathleen Hanna's initial Riot Grrrl zine, *Bikini Kill: A Color and Activity Book.* A Midwestern zine called *Riot Grrrl* (not to be confused with any number of grrrlzines by this title) makes clear the author's personal connection to the movement and how closely she identifies it with her teenaged self. "Christina" writes, ""riot grrrl is me being 17 and having no friends and reading a girlzine for the first time and it being my everything."[31] The author's experience of alienation was erased when she found a community that she identified with, and she first experienced this community by reading another individual's expression of identity and identification with the movement.

The author of *Suki Girl* writes about her experiences in trying to create a literal network out of contacts that she developed by publishing her zine. In Issue #18, "Jessica" reprints a letter she wrote to Kathleen Hanna and the response she received, and she details her attempt to stage a Riot Grrrl picnic in Baraboo, WI. These efforts at networking were attempts to help the author overcome her extreme shyness, which she openly battles in the pages of her zine. In issue #13, "Jessica" expresses her personal definition of grrrl power as "being feminine doesn't mean being weak, docile, or silent."[32] Other issues of her zine engage with images of beauty circulated by mainstream media. "Jessica" creates collages that critique mainstream beauty standards, articulating a Riot Grrrl stance against the power of these images; one collage of images from fashion magazines in issue #13 is labeled, "Just Say No!" echoing the infamous anti-drug slogan of the 1980s. Each of these grrrlzines was authored by individuals, but the use of content and its manner of expression makes clear that they are participating in a larger networked dialogue about youth, femininity, and activism.

The demise of Riot Grrrl was widely reported, particularly after the movement's founders encouraged a media blackout in 1992. There was concern among Riot Grrrls that mainstream media coverage was having a negative effect on the development of the movement, not only because some of the coverage was unsympathetic, but because this coverage was attempting to pin the movement down. In *Girls Make Media*, Mary Kearney argues that Riot Grrrl didn't end at this point, and still isn't necessarily over. Portland's Rock and Roll Camp for Girls was founded in 2001 on Riot Grrrl principles of using DIY music production to combat low self-esteem and social disempowerment, and continues to operate as of this writing.[33] Cherie Turner claims that Riot Grrrl has continued to spread globally after word of

its demise slowed its spread in the United States. While Riot Grrrl chapters are still active stateside, she writes that notably Riot Grrrl groups have formed more recently in Europe and Australia.[34]

Perzines and Dispersed Community

The promotion of DIY media within the Riot Grrrl movement undoubtedly influenced trends in girls' media production as a whole in the 1990s. During this time, girls' "perzines" (personal zines) became a category in their own right, apart from other fanzines, and apart from grrrlzines. Although Riot Grrrl constituted an informal network at best, it's possible to easily identify grrrlzines through look and content. Perzines, on the other hand, follow no overarching organizational principles. These are, even more so than grrrlzines, the sole artistic and textual creations of their authors. The perzines that I examined have no unifying features other than the fact that their authors self-identify as young women. Although their appearance and approaches are all unique, these zines do appear to be engaging in an ongoing dialogue about identity and politics. Girls' zines provide alternative perspectives because they come from locations that are different from the locations in which mainstream media are produced. The zines I examined for this study were often authored and distributed in relatively small midwestern towns. The authors' perspectives reflect their individual locations. Girls' zines are authored by young women who use the format to represent themselves and their own interests.[35] They often constitute a direct response to mainstream representations of adolescent femininity that are produced by adults. Teen films and television offer representations of girlhood that primarily reflect the values, attitudes and beliefs of their adult writers, directors, and producers, and girls' zines engage with and talk back to these representations.

Zines are capable of attaining a geographically dispersed, if numerically limited, circulation because they are often passed from reader to reader. Sarah Dyer's zine *Action Girl* attained higher than average notoriety and circulation during the 1990s, and Dyer herself became known for her investment in girls' alternative media. In an interview with Tristan Taormino, Dyer claimed that the act of creating media is inherently empowering, and thus alternative media production and Girl Power are synonymous. Taormino quotes her as saying, "The great thing about girl zines, and other girl-power-related acts (putting on shows, making cool shirts, writing for zines, doing comics, you name it!) is that anyone can do them – it's a road to empowerment that is available to everyone … You don't have to follow anyone else's rules; you just do what's right for you, and you *are* girl power!"[36] Dyer's thoughts follow the ethos of DIY, rejecting the implication of mainstream Girl Power products (empowerment is something that girls buy) and emphasizing an alternative culture of production (empowerment is something that girls do). DIY publications are typically printed in small runs and distributed minimally; the process of production aligns the author with others who are committed to similar goals and ideals. This implied (sometimes explicit) community contributes to a shared understanding of the meaning of empowerment.

Although perzines lack even the informal organizational structure provided by the guiding principles of Riot Grrrl, they do express individual identity in relationship to real or implied communities. Further, girls' perzines frequently engage with issues related to feminist politics similar to the issues discussed in grrrlzines, and they articulate ideas of Girl Power that contradict more mainstream iterations of the discourse. DIY media production appears to be, and has been theorized as, a highly individualized method of communication. The common

zine history perpetuates a stereotypical image of one person, working long hours to cut and paste a zine together. Many girls repeat this narrative in their own zines, writing about the time that they invested in production. This narrative thus becomes shared, and an aspect of the community participation that perzines actually represent. In Green and Taormino's anthology of writings from girls' zines, writers frequently reflect on how they see their publication as an expression of their individual identity. However, these same ruminations quickly shift into statements about community participation and appreciation when authors conceptualize the value of their work and how they find fulfillment in it.

Community Functions of Girls' Perzines

Girls' perzines are always about community and group participation. When Meenakshi Durham argues that individual resistance to mass media culture has been mythologized, as I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, part of what she's critiquing are conceptions of media production as solitary and individualistic. In *Future Girl*, Anita Harris writes, "Zines are intended to provide spaces for creativity and productivity that is self-generated and self-controlled in a time when youth leisure and critique have been largely commodified."[37] This assertion describes the motivation behind starting a zine, but it doesn't account for the ways that zines coexist with one another. Girls' perzines perform community functions by reaching out to readers, claiming common ground with other zines, claiming participation in particular cultural scenes, claiming shared political ideals, and by publishing through communal efforts.

The widely circulated perzine *Pagan's Head* provides one example of how zines promote community by reaching out to readers. Pagan Kennedy published this perzine for six years, beginning when she was a young college student. Each issue of *Pagan's Head* was a

compilation of personal anecdotes, comments on culture, and free associations, but the author discovered that her readership spread far and wide within a short period of time. Writing from the persona that she created for herself, the "Pagan" identity that she circulated in the zine, she would ask readers to send her small gifts as evidence of their devotion. Readers would then comply, providing Kennedy with artifacts that represented some portion of her reading audience (which was impossible to measure due to the way that zines are reprinted and re-circulated apart from the efforts of their original creators). She has reflected on the ways that her solitary writing experiment became a shared project:

> So the 'zine started as an advertisement for myself, but became much more. It documented the personalities of my friends, the legends of my family, the goings-on in my group house, the aimless-hipster culture of Allston. As time went on, *Pagan's Head* became less *mine* than *ours*; other people began writing and cartooning for the *Head*, and often my best ideas came from friends.[38]

Apart from the process of creation, her zine creates a sense of community, shared experience, and shared *voice* among readers (people who have never met her, but relate and identify with her perspective on life).

Authors of zines often indicate their intent to participate in the zine community by offering zine reviews, lists of available zines along with contact information, or requests to be reviewed by other publications. Perzines often include the author's reviews of other zines, and these reviews seem designed to position the author's own zine within a particular point of dialogue in the perceived zine community. These reviews are not always positive, but more often than not girl zine authors encourage their readers to pick up literature that is similar to their own creation in perspective or cultural/political investments. "Jessica" of *Suki Girl* recommends a male-authored comic zine because "this isn't some fan-boy getting off on

drawing big tits and big guns."[39] She assures her readers that they will relate to and support the local comic's representations of gender politics.

Girls' perzines often make their community engagement clear by claiming involvement in particular cultural scenes. During the 1990s, a number of girls' perzines in south central Wisconsin focused on the author's participation in "rave" scenes. Raves are large dance parties that are typically held in unmarked, often unauthorized locations (such as unoccupied industrial warehouses). Raves were a countercultural fascination during the 1990s; they were popular among young people and often coincided with a notable amount of illegal drug use. In a manner similar to Riot Grrrl critiques of the male-dominated punk scene in the early 1990s, mid-1990s perzines critique Wisconsin's male-dominated rave culture and claim a space for girls' productive participation in the scene. "Jodie" and "Jenny," co-authors of *The Last Girlscout*, a mid-1990s Milwaukee zine devoted to rave culture, write about their aspirations to elevate the status of women within the scene from participants to leaders. They interview male DJs and party promoters, openly discussing their plans to use their zine to motivate women's positive participation in the scene's direction.[40] Issue number one advertises an all-girl "coming out" event in Minneapolis and urges zines readers to go: "I think it's time that us girls got more involved," Jenny writes, "Don't you?" Her framing of this question suggests that her imagined readership is female and her zine is designed to foster casual conversation over shared interests.[41]

Perzines that express shared political ideals and goals are one of the most common forms of implied community in alternative publishing. Within girls' perzines, discussions of feminism and women's issues are incredibly common; a typical format includes personal

statements from the author juxtaposed with information for an implied readership, designed to inspire community and politicization. The "editor" of *Hurricane Girl*, a zine published in Milwaukee in the late 1990s, writes about her commitment to using the format to establish community:

> Besides being a fun and creative political expression, this zine is, for me, an attempt at building a virtual community. If I can't be surrounded by women I respect and admire every day, the next best thing is being surrounded by them here ... The most important thing we can do is keep talking, ladies.[42]

The author compiles information on safe sex and local queer activism that she positions alongside anecdotes about her personal life and interests. Similarly, the author of *Balance Beam* informs the reader that she is using her zine as a tool to work through her grief over the recent death of her mother.[43] She charts the areas of her life over several pages and breaks them down into "personal" and "political" concerns, performing an act of consciousness-raising for the reader. Other feminist perzines combine personal narratives with political critiques in the areas of sexuality,[44] reproductive rights,[45] and continuing social inequities based on gender.[46] While these zines include personal content and reflect their author's individual perspectives, they similarly demonstrate community ideals in at least two important ways. First, the authors explicitly address readers and discuss shared political goals, including calls for dialogue. Second, these authors present information relevant to an implied readership with similar goals and ideals.

Some perzines are explicitly community based, because they are published by a collective, or via the support of an existing group. The Revolutionary Knitting Circle (RKC) in northern California is one such collective that the supported the publishing efforts of multiple girls' perzines in the 1990s. In an interview for the compilation project *Zines Vol. II*, members

of the RKC told interviewer V. Vale that their group began as a consciousness-raising effort and then formed a teen girl community. Although members of the group are aware of Riot Grrrl, they do not identify with the movement. Instead, they define their feminist stance as being "against the oppression of women,"[47] and they connect this position with multiple personal and political issues including women's health, the agenda-setting power of the media, and global politics. Although members of the collective publish their zines separately, their efforts are obviously influenced by their participation in a face-to-face group devoted to similar issues. One member of the collective, identified as "Toad," is a fifteen-year-old girl who tells Vale that the zines she has published are both "art" and a "cause" that contributes to building community.[48] *Women's Army*, another zine that is compiled and published by a collective, makes its politics clear in its mission statement: "We raise hell and make a ruckus in order to deconstruct the patriarchy and hierarchy within ourselves, our communities, and our world once and for all – (for all time and all people)."[49] Throughout the zine, the author is referred to as "we" and the relationship between the collective producing the zine and the community that they seek to build is explicitly discussed.

Perzines and Girl Power

As products of individuals who are participating in the development of community dialogue and politicization, perzines create and circulate meanings of Girl Power that directly challenge mainstream representations. In *Future Girl*, Anita Harris quotes the author of an Australian zine, *Her Heroes Aren't Gone*, who critiques the mainstream consumerist vision of young women's empowerment. She writes, "Now I see Spice Girls and supermodels and sparkly slogan shirts - their version of lame 'girl power' is so far away from our original vision

of 'grrrl power'; co-opted, watered down, marketable, profitable."[50] The author's uses of "grrrl" and her repetition of an oft-repeated Riot Grrrl complaint about co-opted Girl Power indicates her probable affiliation with the movement.

American grrrlzines and perzines offer some similarly direct critiques of mass-marketed Girl Power, and even more frequently these zines put the phrase to use themselves in their own contexts. In the zine *Talking Back*, Jennifer Maher critiques the ideal of Girl Power represented by teen girl icons, writing, "The pop star Brittany [sic] Spears at the age of sixteen got her breasts enlarged because she said she had low self-esteem. Yet after surgery she poses in skimpy clothes and the pictures are plastered on Rolling Stone so a new generation of young women can be made to feel uncomfortable."[51] She goes on to explain how Girl Power has become commodified, and she offers a basic analysis of the process of commodity feminism and the role that it plays in maintaining unreasonable beauty standards for women. Members of the RKC discussed their critique of beauty culture in their interview with Vale, telling her that mass-produced images of beauty seemed to promote a feminine ideal of frailty and physical weakness. The RKC attempts to combat these representations through their feminist collective consciousness-raising work. The mid-1990s zine *pixxiebitch* refers to Girl Power as a tool for young women; the author uses the phrase as a synonym for feminism and healthy rebellion.[52] The author of the Madison, WI zine *Candles for Girls* offers a poetic take on reclaiming pride and strength from aspects of femininity that have been culturally devalued. In a full-page screed she writes:

> When I lie about my opinion, I imply that my opinion does not matter.
> When I lie about my past, I allow myself to be ashamed.
> I will not run away from the disease in my life.
> I WILL NOT RUN AWAY FROM THE PEOPLE I AM.

My blood is my power.
My femininity is my power.

I will *never* hide these again.[53]

This author, who identifies herself as "Jennifer" is creating her own definition of Girl Power by claiming her body, her life experience, and her sense of self as sources of strength that she will use to take up space in the world at large. She acknowledges situations in which she was previously disempowered, and claims the authority to address these conditions of her own existence.

Girls' perzines often bring notions of Girl Power as feminism into dialogue with other political issues. *Too Far*, a zine produced in Emeryville, CA, critiques sexism and gender privilege alongside articles on social issues like homelessness.[54] *Abort! The Zine*, published in 2001, includes articles concerning neoliberal politics and critiques of exploited labor within a global economy alongside an article that argues that gender is a social construct enforced to serve the interests of patriarchal power.[55] A single issue of *Spikey Strikes*, published in 1993, contains information on proposed anti-gay legislation in Colorado, a treatise on lesbian feminism, an overview of key values of the Green Party, and a call for Farmers' and Workers' Rights. The author also provides an introductory critique of the beauty myth for readers, using *Mademoiselle* for the purposes of demonstration but assuring readers that any women's magazine will substitute. She then charges the magazine with multiple offenses including damaging female body image, lowering self-esteem, promoting heterosexism and lacking racially and ethnically diverse images and subject matter.[56] Features like these promote resistant reading practices to an implied community of accordant readers.

While the authors of these zines are invested in a certain amount of identity formation work, it is clear that they intend to communicate with others (and often motivate others) beyond the detailing of their individual histories and experiences. Girls' perzines frequently acknowledge distinct personal and political dimensions, and tactically employ aspects of both in order to reach out to readers and form common ground. Diana Morrow's zine *Princess* articulates the author's lesbian identity in response to what she sees as the heterocentric focus of mainstream publications. Morrow writes, "I believe that a great source of power for many women comes from thinking and writing about their lives and talking about how they're affected by the social system of which they are a part."[57] What she describes is essentially the radical feminist consciousness-raising process, and she sees zine production and zine communities as forms of political participation.

Although girls use perzines to express aspects of their identity, these alternative publications are not mere stand-ins for diaries, in which girls keep records of highly personal experiences. Zine production is an accessible way for young women to take control of the terms of their representation, and as they have done this, multiple functions have emerged that demonstrate how zines foster dialogue and community. Girls use their zines to address readers directly, to align themselves with other zines and zine producers, to declare their participation in cultural scenes and movements, to express shared politics with other zines and readers, and to represent communal commitment to particular goals and ideas. Through these community functions, girls' perzines have expressed resistance to mainstream commodified representations of Girl Power. They have negotiated ideas of girls' empowerment, associating Girl Power with feminism, broad-based political engagement, and anti-consumerism. In the next section, I look

at girls' alternative magazines that similarly foster community-based resistance to dominant ideologies. These magazines reach higher levels of distribution than zines, but they demonstrate a comparable commitment to DIY principles.

A (Maga)Zine to Fill the Void: Publishing Resistance for Larger Communities

New Moon: The Magazine For Girls and Their Dreams

The 1990s boom in girls' alternative publishing produced several publications that moved from cut-and-paste zines to more polished publications with wider, sometimes national circulation. *Bust* and *Bitch: A Feminist Response to Pop Culture* are third wave feminist publications that have successfully made this transition.[58] Both were started by young women who wanted to engage with cultural representations of women and femininity as an activist goal; Debbie Stoller and Marcelle Karp started *Bust* when they were young media professionals, and Lisa Maya-Jervis and Andi Ziesler similarly founded *Bitch* as a forum for feminist media criticism. Although these publications were involved in third wave feminist efforts to reclaim the word "girl," neither was particularly focused on or designed to address adolescent femininity. The DIY publications that I discuss in this section, *New Moon*, *HUES*, and *blue jean*, are all designed for and by teenage girls (to varying extents) and they each transitioned from small-scale beginnings to a more national reach. Within each of these publications, young women negotiate the parameters of Girl Power and establish their own definitions and priorities.

New Moon, which is subtitled, "A Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams," began publishing out of Duluth, MN in 1993 as a family project for Nancy Gruver, Joe Kelly, and their twin daughters. In an effort to combat their daughters' loss of self-esteem in adolescence,

Gruver and Kelly envisioned the magazine as a way to empower young women as authors and as readers. They created an editorial board run by girls aged eight to fifteen years old, and set guidelines to limit parental involvement in content. The magazine's mission of empowering young girls was conceived as multicultural and multiethnic; each issue of the magazine contains articles related to girls' experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, and power. *New Moon* has been advertising-free since its inception; it continues to publish bimonthly as of this writing and a one-year subscription cost thirty-five dollars.[59] Higher subscription rates and fundraising efforts offset the absence of advertising revenues. The subscriber base has been estimated at approximately 25,000 readers who are similar in age to the magazine's writers.

New Moon established itself as a community publication in Duluth by putting local girls in charge of its content. From the beginning, however, the magazine was also committed to establishing community with readers by soliciting submissions and contributions of all kinds. In every issue, regular features "Howling at the Moon" and "How Aggravating!" print letters submitted by readers about their everyday experiences of gender inequity. The magazine's cover art is typically chosen from reader submissions, in addition to poetry and occasionally feature articles.

The combined result of balancing editorial content from the girls' reader board with reader submissions is a magazine that functions similarly to a perzine. Regular features like "Dear Luna," the letters to the editors section of the magazine, include personal narratives from girls and boys from many different backgrounds who write about their life experiences and what the magazine means to them. In one 2003 issue, "Dear Luna" includes letters from a girl who writes about being adopted, a girl who (at age thirteen) feels she is growing out of the

magazine, a girl's perspective on women's social roles in Greek civilization, a girl's defense of the rapper Eminem, and testimony from a fourteen-year-old boy involved in the Wiccan religion who writes, "I'm glad this magazine exists to make girls feel good about being girls."[60] Letter writers frequently talk more about themselves than about the magazine, but they all express how they relate to it (whether positively or negatively) and often write about how they see it in comparison to mainstream publications. Many readers comment in appreciation of the magazine's ad-free format, with one reader summing up the effect, "When I read New Moon, I don't feel like a consumer, but like part of a community."[61] *New Moon* bills itself as a participatory endeavor meant to empower young women, and readers often express strong attachment to the publication based on its casual, straightforward approach to presenting information and the choices in girls' lives.

New Moon has fostered a complex relationship with mediated representations of adolescent femininity, and Girl Power in particular. As a magazine created through the input of young women, it consistently encourages readers to get involved in media production and to resist representations of girlhood that are "unfair" or "unrealistic." The magazine regularly lambasts the advertising industry, and instructs girl readers on how to make their voices heard by big business. In a 1999 article, "Media Madness," girl writer Jessica Lind-Diamond analyzes specific advertisements that create unrealistic beauty standards and potentially damage girls' self-esteem. She writes, "When I read magazines with a lot of advertisements, I find myself wanting more things and wishing my body looked different ... The message is that it's good to let others see who you are, but that you can only be yourself with the help of fashionable accessories."[62] A more recent feature by Jessica Norling, "Picture Perfect" outlines

the techniques that teen magazines use to make models appear flawless, including cosmetics, lighting, airbrushing, and photo altering.[63] Articles like these introduce media literacy skills to young girl readers and encourage them to critically question the appeal of advertisements. A 1995 article, "Making Choices: Girls Say No to Bad Ads" offers readers instructions and examples on contacting companies to express displeasure with the way that they represent women and girls in their ad campaigns.[64] Over the years, girls have written articles critiquing sexist representations in television advertising designed for young people,[65] rap videos,[66] and young adult fiction,[67] telling readers that these depictions are related to how girls are valued in society. Readers regularly offer input on this subject, including examples of positive imagery in advertising; in 2001, a 13-year-old reader complimented *Teen People* on their prom issue, which featured images of average-sized women in the dresses being advertised.[68] Submissions like these indicate that *New Moon*'s critiques of unrealistic beauty ideals perpetuated by advertisers resonate with its readers, who apply this perspective in their readings of other magazines and media.

Girl writers for *New Moon* have also critiqued representations of young women in film and on television. These articles typically offer statistics and examples for readers, followed by suggestions for activism. In a 1996 article, "Girls Talk T.V.," Monisha Randolph and Folashade Oni write about their experiences in an organization called "Girls Re-Cast T.V." that lobbied for better, more realistic representations of girls on television in the 1990s. They pass on their knowledge to readers, and suggest a form of viewer activism (writing letters to networks and producers, as well as not watching particular programs) as a way for readers to take a stand on the issue.[69] The authors seem just as invested in pointing out positive role

models (they note African-American teen Laura Winslow from the sitcom *Family Matters*) as they are in identifying the problem, suggesting their activism has clearly-defined goals. In 2002, a nine-year-old contributor wrote in to report that she designed a "GIRLPOWER!" film series for New York's Lincoln Center, with movies about "strong girls who have adventures."[70] The movies that she lists (*Matilda*, *The Secret Garden*) feature pre-teen girl protagonists who are multi-faceted and precocious heroines. In a 2005 article, Leah Larson explains step by step how she began publishing a quarterly zine (YALDAH) targeted to Jewish girls when she was only twelve, seeking to create an alternative to mainstream teen magazines for a specific audience.[71] Larson advises readers that if they have an idea they believe in, it's more than possible to follow in her footsteps. A 2008 edition of the feature "Go Girl!" profiled Club Ophelia, a girls' self-esteem organization that rewrote "Hamlet" to make Ophelia character more self-directed and thus create a better ending.[72] The magazine consistently combines its critiques of media representations with a focus on supporting or creating positive alternatives; it emphasizes a community vision for change by counterbalancing discussions of the problematic with everyday suggestions for participating in solutions.

Beyond the magazine's mission of empowering girls to resist negative imagery in mainstream media by producing their own alternatives, negotiations of the meanings of Girl Power have frequently played out in its pages. In letters and articles that focus on media, *New Moon*'s coverage indicates that girls are empowered when they are critical consumers who actively "talk back" to media representations. Girl Power itself is often discussed on more direct terms in features and submitted materials though, revealing its contested nature within this community. A feature on female characters in comic books from the late 1990s references

Girl Power in terms of brave, active women who use their wits to triumph over adversity.[73] In 2003, a ten-year-old subscriber wrote in to attest, "I love New Moon because it's about girl power," which she then connects to Girl Scouts, women's suffrage, and girls' unity.[74] Other readers connect Girl Power to feminism in their appraisals of mass-produced t-shirts for girls with anti-boy slogans; they submitted opinions including "If the company had wanted to print a feminist slogan, why didn't they do it outright instead of in a negative, roundabout way?" and "These messages are degrading and prejudiced and make girl power seem negative."[75] These readers make clear that they worry about the ability of mass marketers to create negative impressions of Girl Power, and their desire to protect it.

In a rare article by an adult woman, fifteen-year-old Della Ljungkull is profiled as the embodiment of Girl Power; author Jean Farrell writes that Della, who helps lead "Girl Power" weekends for at-risk youth, is socially adept, physically active, invested in academics, and nurturing with children and animals.[76] Ljungkull, who is African-American and raised by adoptive parents, is thus portrayed as an ideal of feminine agency and ability to which many girls would find it daunting to measure up. However, readers' submissions often define Girl Power with more accessible examples of girls' intellect and abilities. In a 2002 submission to "Howling at the Moon," a letter from twelve-year-old Xochitl explains:

> In science class, we did an experiment where we had to identify different kids of water by taste, smell, and appearance. There are only four girls in my grade, including me, and our group of girls was the only group who got all the right answers. That's girl power for you![77]

The writer takes obvious pride in academic success, and connects Girl Power to gendered competitiveness and achievement. In an issue later than year, eleven-year-old Celia wrote in to tell *New Moon* that Girl Power, "defined as 'a confident attitude among girls and young

women'" had been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.[78] Later in the same edition of "Dear Luna," a reader commends the magazine for recognizing that not all girls in the world share the same privileges as those in the United States and affirms: "I'm so glad that there's at least one magazine that tells girls the truth: that they are powerful and just as good as boys." This letter appears immediately before a reader's missive that warns: "There's a difference between equal rights and obsessing over girl power. Believe it or not, males and females are different ... and it's inappropriate to assume that the genders need to be treated EXACTLY the same."[79] The letter goes on to take issue with *New Moon*'s stance that Girl Power should be more about inner strengths than outer appearance. The editors respond with a brief note on the value of expressing and examining personal opinions, which is the strategy they typically employ in response to angry or negative letters.

The editors of *New Moon* shape its ability to function as a community space by including and responding to both positive and negative feedback from readers. In addition, the underlying mission of giving girls a "voice" is strengthened by the magazine's commitment to publishing material from young women who find fault with its articles, and sometimes its feminist perspective. In a 2003 letter to the editors, twelve-year-old readers Satpal and Nina write, "We have to accept the fact that boys and girls will probably never be treated the same no matter how hard we fight. So drop the whole girl power thing and come back down to earth!"[80] The editors respond that change may take place slowly, but it is possible. This represents a fairly conservative answer, considering the magazine's focus on forms of activism that require strong commitment and offer the promise of creating observable results. In 2000, *New Moon* introduced "Turn Beauty Inside Out" Day to improve awareness about unhealthy

images of young women in the media; as part of this campaign, girls from the magazine meet annually with representatives from the media industries and discuss their concerns, as well as the concerns that readers have submitted. The 2005 article "5 Ways to Create Your Own Revolution," which suggests using "meetings, strikes, rallies, or petitions"[81] to organize social change, effectively provides a summary of the oft-repeated editorial stance that regardless of their age and background, girls can make an impact by pursuing issues that they care about.

New Moon's utopian vision of empowering girls through media production has met with some disparagement. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards gently criticize the community established by this girls' publication in their third wave feminist book *Manifesta*, noting that the girls who create and organize the magazine's content are not trained in its business operations, which are run by adults. Further, they argue that the magazine's focus on self-esteem reflects an adult perspective on the key issues facing young women, and that it perpetuates the idea that girls are disempowered.[82] Their perspective is shaped by a visit to a *New Moon* editorial meeting in which they felt it was clear that although adults have a "hands-off" policy, they continued to serve an agenda-setting function. What the adult feminist authors do not seem to take into account, however, are the ways that pre-teen and teen girl readers respond to the publication and its ideas. In the magazine's letters to the editor, notes from girls who say that reading the magazine makes them appreciate *being girls* are more common than any other type of feedback. Baumgardner and Richards argue that the publication isn't legitimately empowering because they focus on how much more it could accomplish; in so doing, they ignore the ways that the magazine serves its mission by reaching out to girls that do relate to its message.

During fifteen years in business, *New Moon* has maintained its original commitment to creating an alternative space to nurture the development of girls' voices. Several measures indicate the publication's success including their continued ability to publish without advertising, their ability to continue recruiting girls to serve on the editorial board, and their ability to support other small publications, including *HUES*, which I discuss in the next section.[83] New Moon fosters a direct community through its girls' editorial board, but also an indirect community through its address to readers and inclusion of reader-generated content in every issue. This community has articulated resistance to the power of mainstream media to create limited representations of femininity, and has continually negotiated the boundaries of Girl Power, working to define the discourse as an alternative to a dominant ideology of patriarchal capitalism.

HUES

Twin sisters Ophira and Tali Edut started this publication with their friend, Dyann Logwood, when they were all in their late teens and sophomores at the University of Michigan. They developed *HUES* (Hear Us Emerging Sisters) as an independent magazine committed to multicultural representations of young femininity, but with higher production values than the typical DIY zine. They intended to counteract the limited options in the women's magazine market by creating a glossy publication featuring images of women with different body types, from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, and relevant stories about issues of concern to young women.[84] Logwood and the Eduts described themselves as "African-American and Israeli-American, short, thick chicks"[85] who were personally invested in creating a representation of their identities that other women, similarly frustrated with mainstream

publications, might relate to. They envisioned the magazine as a way to create and support oppositional consciousness by focusing on women's interests and strengths outside of the realm of beauty and fashion. The following is their mission statement, reprinted on the inside front cover of many issues:

> For once, wouldn't you like to open a magazine and see yourself in it? Someone who looks like she was created by two human beings, instead of by an airbrush. Not a supermodel. Not a superwoman. Just a real, live, down-to-earth sister like you ... It's a forum where women of all colors, sizes and identities can share our experiences, insights and recipes for power and attitude ... It's about our generation taking control and creating new images of ourselves, expressing who we are and how we wanted to be treated.[86]

The use of the word "forum" in this mission statement makes clear that the magazine is envisioned as a community, and as a conversation. It's open to the possibility of a multiplicity of individual identities, but brings these together by using terms including "we" and "our" to simultaneously address and include readers. It also incorporates the concept of generational identity and "taking control" of images that are related to third wave feminist concerns about creating change through cultural representations. *HUES* was designed to articulate a third wave feminist definition of Girl Power as strength, confidence, self-reliance, and a strong sense of individual identity. The publication is not strictly or specifically a teen magazine, but every issue covers a range of topics of interests to young women, with a particular focus on subjects like third wave feminism that would be difficult to find in mainstream magazines for girls or adult women.

Feminism is an implicit theme in every issue of *HUES*, and its young female writers frequently confront race privilege, identity conflicts between feminism and nationalism, and social apathy on discussions of gender.[87] Articles on film and television echo some of the

sentiments of *New Moon*'s girl writers. In a critique of 1990s television heroines including Ally McBeal and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Pia Guerrero charges that "today's female protagonists are incomplete unless they are romantically involved" and raises the question, "Will most viewers see that it is the television portrayals that are contradictory and potentially dangerous – not the modern woman herself?"[88] In an article on body image and fat acceptance, Ophira Edut argues against consumer feminism and consumer citizenship when she theorizes that the women's plus-size clothing industry is participating in a power hierarchy based "on a woman's ability to buy the 'right' image."[89] The idea of "power" and of course, "Girl Power" is productively engaged in articles like these that argue for critically resistant readings of fashion and advertising strategies, but the magazine also explicitly examined "power" in a theme issue on the subject in the summer of 1998.

The introduction to the *HUES* Power Issue identifies mainstream commodified Girl Power as a problematic trend that its articles will address and redefine by focusing on "natural" internal conceptions of power. The editors offer advice for readers who want to nurture their internal strength: "Create something – and try to do it without judgment. If you feel exposed, put your creation somewhere safe and haul it out whenever you need a reminder of who you are."[90] Although the advice isn't limited to making alternative media, it certainly resonates with the concepts of creative empowerment forwarded in *New Moon.* Later in the issue, a number of feminist luminaries offer their own definitions of Girl Power and many of them negotiate the boundaries of the phrase in order to understand it within the context of multiple identities. Belen Aranda-Alvardo, the Beauty Editor from *Latina* magazine claims that Girl Power is about creating beauty standards outside of the Eurocentric influence of mass media;

Bust's Debbie Stoller writes that it's about finding strength and pleasure in femininity; and Tara Roberts, Lifestyle Editor at *Heart & Soul*, a health and fitness magazine targeted at African-American women, contributes:

> I remember growing up to the flavor and stylings of teenage female rappers like Salt 'N Pepa, MC Lyte and Queen Latifah and seeing 'girl power' served up constantly as a spicy dish of independence, pride and assertiveness throughout hip hop music. For me, girl power is in no way a particularly nineties thing, and it certainly does not just have a White girl's face.[91]

These contributors, who are all actively involved in circulating representations of young femininity through their publications, articulate resistance to the discourse of Girl Power as a "new" 1990s trend that erases racial and ethnical experiences of identity in favor of a universal ideal of wealth and beauty. Instead, their definitions reveal that they find value in the phrase that bears no relationship to its mainstream associations with teen icons like Britney and Christina, athletic shoes, or revealing clothing.

The Power issue also features a critical analysis of action heroines in 1990s film and television, questioning whether the trend offers more complex representations of femininity, or simply new limiting stereotypes. The authors discuss the appeal of protagonists like Buffy and Xena, but critique these representations for positioning female authority (particularly physical strength) within the realm of fantasy. They suggest that these characters might inspire female fans to take self-defense courses in order to create *themselves* as more realistic action stars, a solution that supports the magazine's position on Girl Power as self-directed and self-defined.[92] The centerpiece of this issue is "Power Tools," writer Susan Gilman's agenda for young women seeking empowerment.[93] Gilman offers a twelve-step guide for individual changes that might help readers to feel more powerful in their everyday lives. The steps include tips on

developing a healthy body image and sex life, but no recommendations for constructively participating in communities (politically-motivated or otherwise). This agenda reflects a third wave feminist philosophy of creating change through individual acts on a daily basis, but considering the article's subtitle, "A Get-Real, Get-Ahead Agenda for a New Generation," its focus on the creation and promotion of the self indicates a lack of vision for collective effort towards social change. In the issue as a whole, the focus on discovering power in the inner self is completely separated from any concepts of *using* power to effect changes in society as a whole.

HUES published for nearly eight years as an alternative publication supported by grants and minimal advertising. Logwood and the Eduts continued to write and edit the magazine after they sold it to the New Moon collective in 1997, but by 1999 the magazine was too unprofitable to continue. *HUES* subverted some of the expectations of alternative media with its glossy full-color layout, a design that attempted to attract readers who might be used to mainstream women's magazines, but surprised to see representations of diversity in the format. In an interview following the publication's eventual demise, Logwood commented on its initial activist mission:

> When we sat down, it was like inner power that we were trying to achieve and trying to defeat the voices within that said, well, maybe I can't do it, or maybe I'm not as smart as, or maybe I shouldn't take risks, or maybe I need to be more focused on what I look like as opposed to what I think and feel. So we wanted to defeat all of those inner voices and outer influences that make women feel disempowered.[94]

It attained some degree of success, with a circulation of 100,000 issues reaching an estimated 300,000 readers.[95] The editors used the slogan, "More than a magazine, it's a movement" to emphasize their activist focus, and they promoted individual, independent conceptions of both

power and activism that embody third wave feminist perspectives on creating social change. Without a unified call to action, the "movement" the editors hoped to inspire failed to materialize and the magazine's focus on individual choices and individual resistance didn't significantly differ from the address of mainstream women's magazines.

blue jean magazine

In a format similar to *New Moon*, *blue jean magazine* was designed by an adult to combat low self-esteem among girls and to provide a participatory forum in which young women could create their own representations. Sherry Handel launched the print version of *blue jean magazine* in 1996, and when the publication failed after two years, she revived it in an online format in 2001. From the beginning, the magazine was free of advertising and run by an editorial board of teen girls in Rochester, NY who oversaw the content and layout. Issues typically included submissions from girls in many countries, and maintained an international roster of "Teen Correspondents" who were contributors. In a 1998 interview with TheInSite.org, assistant editor Mollie Goldstein affirmed that in its first two years, *blue jean* reached a circulation of more than 100,000 copies.[96] It's difficult to determine the actual numbers for the magazine's readership, but shortly after this interview, the magazine went bankrupt. Although it didn't achieve the success of *New Moon*, *blue jean* did put forth a similar mission of empowering girls by giving them access to the tools to create their own alternative media representations.

Handel's initial vision was a magazine that would empower girls by allowing them to create something substantially different than the representations that they encountered in mainstream girls' magazines. She recruited the first editorial board with a flyer that stated,

"We're starting this magazine for teen girls, focused on what young women are thinking, saying, and doing. Advertising free. No [articles about] make-up. No models."[97] Although the majority of the content would come from teenage girls, Handel set the terms for their involvement with the publication by seeking out girls who had no interest in writing about beauty and fashion. She selected applicants from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to help foster multiple perspectives and she created departments (Internet, Poetry, Environment, etc.) in order to ensure that a range of topics would be covered in every issue. Although the finished product is more polished, *blue jean* bears some resemblance to girls' perzines; each issue typically includes short stories, poetry, and often zine reviews and information on self-publishing that are common in the DIY format.

During its short publication run, *blue jean* maintained a particularly vibrant discussion of issues related to feminism and Girl Power. In an early issue, members of the editorial board offered their own definitions of "feminism," responding to charges that the term is outdated, or that its meaning has shifted into something negative. Most of the editors submit definitions based on gender equality, with some amending that feminists support a social order free from all forms of discrimination. One of the editors blames the mass media for altering the concept of feminism, while several girls seem to relate it directly to Girl Power. Their responses include, "Feminism is also not taking any BS from boys (and men) and NEVER acting stupid just to get a boy's attention," and "Feminism is a lifestyle that allows women to be all they are capable of being."[98] This brief article demonstrates a lack of consensus among the members of the editorial board that likely mirrors readers' sentiments, and it seems to clarify that the magazine doesn't have a defined agenda beyond providing a creative outlet for young women.

Unlike *New Moon*, *blue jean* never establishes a unified focus for its coverage of feminism and feminist issues; articles on Riot Grrrl feminism, Black feminism, and cultural feminism in the form of sex-segregated learning environments[99] seem designed to represent the diverse interests of the teen editorial board as much as they are attempts to relate to readers. These features are consistently informational in tone, and they avoid the kind of direct address to readers found in *New Moon*, the magazine that suggests girls follow five steps to creating their own revolutions.

Vickie Nam served as the executive editor of *blue jean* when she was in her early twenties, and later edited *YELL-Oh! Girls*, an anthology of young women's writing about their experiences of culture, gender, and racial identity. Her 1997 article "Why We Love and Fear the F-Word," was as close as *blue jean* came to setting the terms for discussion about feminism for its readers. In it, Nam casually addresses readers, confessing that she herself is sometimes reluctant to identify as a feminist because she knows that other people harbor negative associations related to the term. She then transitions into a commentary on mass-market Girl Power products, simultaneously criticizing the trend of using girls' empowerment to sell clothing and bumper stickers, and admitting that she wears a t-shirt that conveys a similar slogan. Nam then equates Girl Power with "teen feminism" and encourages readers to look into the politics behind the slogans and products that they wear. She writes, "Girl Power-ites cling to the idea that feminism isn't necessarily linked to political activism. These days it can be an attitude, a look, a written or verbal expression, and a state of mind that makes the teenage feminist a Girl Power-ite."[100] She advises girls to develop a critical consciousness in order to

participate in Girl Power from an informed perspective, because the history and complexity of feminist struggles can't be expressed in simple slogans.

In Nam's analysis, Girl Power has the potential to be an empowering social force, but also the potential to erase identities, differences, and life experiences; however, she doesn't want readers to adopt her perspective. Instead, she advises girls to educate themselves and to develop their own definitions of feminism. This article is indicative of how *blue jean* operates as a forum; it raises questions, ideas, and sources, and it encourages readers to do their own work and come to their own conclusions. A mission of girls' empowerment is enacted in *blue jean* through young women's content creation, the forum to express identities and opinions that are outside of mainstream media production, and the encouragement of girls' development as self-reliant individuals.

New Moon, *HUES*, and *blue jean* emerged in the 1990s as independent publications seeking to reach young women with alternatives to mainstream representations of idealized femininity. Each of these magazines were founded out of a desire to fill a perceived void in the marketplace by offering a text that was legitimately distinct from more common, mass-produced media. *New Moon* inspires and nurtures a girl community by making readers' contributions an integral part of the magazine, and by explicitly fostering individual and social activism. *HUES* addresses readers as a third wave feminist community, emphasizing shared goals and ideals, but an activism that takes place primarily at the level of the individual. Although *blue jean* had a shorter run, its experiment with girls' participatory media production in both print and online formats demonstrates the development of community from disparate identities within a single publication. These are not the only alternative publications for young

women that surfaced in the 1990s to counter the content and mode of address of mainstream magazines, but they exemplify the range of approaches to a singular mission of creating a space for girls' resistant reading and writing practices.[101] Many other small-market publications have addressed the diverse needs, interests, and capabilities of Generation Y. The magazines examined above maintained particularly strong engagements with issues related to feminism and girls' empowerment, and they developed readership communities in line with their missions to provide alternatives to mainstream publications.

E-Zines: Feminist Community Space Online

When *blue jean magazine* re-launched as an ezine (online publication) in 2001, creator Sherry Handel hoped that the ease of distribution represented by the World Wide Web would make it feasible to revive her vision of a by girls/for girls alternative publication. The revived publication only continued for two more years however; www.bluejeanonline.com was defunct by 2003. The growth of the Internet as a medium for communication in the mid-1990s opened up new avenues for feminist community building and activism, but it didn't change the face of alternative publishing as quickly or as decisively as was initially predicted. Although ezines emerged early on and personal web logs (blogs) have become a more recent cultural phenomenon, individuals continue to produce and distribute traditional paper zines. Girls' zines in particular have continued to flourish in off-line formats, for reason that I discuss in this section. Young women have used the Internet to establish ezines and personal websites (online versions of more traditional perzines), but many of the predictions about the utopian possibilities of the Web have yet to materialize.

In her early feminist guide to the Internet, *Net Chick: A Smart Girl's Guide to the Wired World*, Carla Sinclair predicts that online communication will cause a fundamental shift in human relationships. An introduction from Kristin Spence advises, "It's all about communication, power, equality. That's the big deal. And the reason why every woman owes it to herself, and to her community, to get wired."[102] Spence agrees with Sinclair, who co-founded bOING bOING, a cyberpunk zine that went online in 1995, that the Internet is primarily a networking medium that makes it possible to transcend the social boundaries created by gender difference. Sinclair promotes the benefits of the Internet in terms of diversity, interactivity, research, and cheap distribution. She theorizes that it makes individuals comparable to television networks in their ability to share perspectives and ideas with others. Notably, Sinclair's feminist perspective on the Internet is influenced by Riot Grrrl and she devotes a section of the book called "You've Got the Power!" to websites devoted to social activism, self-defense and body image. Her guide is meant to inspire female readers to empower themselves by getting online and participating in issues-oriented communities.

However, some of the same benefits that Sinclair trumpets are negated by zine-makers who argue that production costs associated with ezines negate the democratic possibilities of the medium. In order to create an ezine, individuals need access to computers and training; their publications are then only readily available to other users who have similar access. Feminist theorist Ednie Kaeh Garrison has argued that new technologies are particularly important to the development of the third wave, citing Laurel Gilbert and Crystal Kile's *Surfer Grrrls* as an accessible Internet guide for women.[103] A digital divide persists however, not only in access to the technology, but in terms of how individual users experience the Internet.

Positioning third wave feminism as an online movement runs the risk of excluding older women, people with lower-income status, and people with limited educational backgrounds, among other demographic groups.[104] Some paper-based publications, including *Bitch* and *Bust*, strike a balance with frequently updated online content that complements the release of the magazines, which are published every two to three months.

The proliferation of girls' ezines and personal websites should be viewed with a certain amount of caution, as it is reasonable to assume (and there is some evidence to support this assumption) that these trends are driven by higher participation among educated white girls from middle-class or higher income households. However, among these users, the Internet is being negotiated as a tool for both communicating personal identity and social/community networking. In a study of electronic fanzines, Matthew Smith argues that the producers of ezines establish themselves within a community by demonstrating their expertise on a shared community topic and by encouraging readers to actively participate in their texts.[105] He focuses on online fan communities dominated by male users, but his analysis also applies to girls' e-zines, as well as to the offline strategies employed by *New Moon*, as I discussed in the previous section. Girls often demonstrate their technical prowess in the creation of ezines, using image-manipulation, hypertext, and imbedded audio/visual effects to attract readers. Despite the expanded design possibilities offered by the web, the themes of girls' ezines are often similar to paper formats. Amelia Wilson, creator of e-zines *NrrdGrrl!* and *Grrowl!* , has commented, "There really isn't anything out there in the mass media that is making women feel good about themselves – nothing to make them happy to be smart and independent and free to speak … instead of being squelched by the fear of not being popular."[106] Wilson's ezines are

no longer in operation, but her underlying mission as a zine creator echoes the familiar refrain of girls' alternative magazine publishers. Communication between producers and users is more direct in ezines, however, and girls often build possibilities for interaction (including chat, bulletin boards, and email contact information) directly into their texts. As communities develop, ezines can serve to facilitate group discussions and to encourage online forms of activism. Krita Scott-Dixon's study of girls' e-zines, tellingly-titled "The All-Girl On-Line Revolution" notes how *Girlrights* started hosting weekly meetings in chat rooms and *Brillo* published a weekly list of offensive websites that its users can deluge with protest email.[107]

Ezines are productively engaged in girls' struggles to reclaim space, voice, and authority. Some girls use their ezines to discuss their feminism in defiant, and even aggressive terms, responding not just to patriarchal culture, but also to the masculine environment of the Internet itself. Scott-Dixon quotes a user's explanation of this function, "Ezines provide a space in which we can create our own meanings, for our own pleasure and amusement."[108] This assertion recalls Anita Harris' analysis of the Internet as a space for girls' community-building, in which she argues that underneath the veneer of girls "just having fun," important political work is taking place.[109] The "work" that Harris suggests is the development of feminist communities that are capable of articulating resistance to the discourses of patriarchal capitalism.[110] Ezines create spaces in which girls can meet and form common bonds that allow them to assert their own identities and challenge limiting definitions of girlhood and femininity.

The commodification of online girls' culture is an ongoing problem, and it provides another major reason that girls continue to produce traditional, paper-based zines. Scott-Dixon noted the emergence of this issue in the late 1990s and commented, "The mantra of female

empowerment through consumerism is a profitable one, and now when you search for girl zines online, you are likely to find a corporate site posing as a homemade DIY creation."[111] Marketers mimic the style and content of girls' ezines, the same signifiers of community that girls utilize to draw in new readers, to lead unsuspecting web-surfers to online shopping opportunities. This strategy attempts to reify the discourse of Girl Power as a consumer identity, and marketers position it in the same online territory that girls have claimed as space in which to create their own meanings. In Chapter One, I discussed how advertising agencies began employing teenagers as "market consultants" during the 1990s, paying young people to promote products directly to their peers. Online, marketers use the relative anonymity of the format to masquerade as members of girls' communities. These attempts to commodify girls' spaces mitigate the countercapitalist implications of ezines.

The Internet has yet to become an ideal space for communication among "net chicks," to use Sinclair's phrase, because it renders alternative communities and the development of countercultural politics more visible. Although an individual user may use the format to escape the material reality of their identity, to experiment with multiple identities, or to express identity more openly than is possible in face-to-face communication, online communities are readily accessible and vulnerable to tracking and surveillance. Over time, conceptions of the Internet as a utopian space for communication free from the bonds of identity have given way to more realistic conceptions of the medium's simultaneously liberatory and oppressive potential. Teenage girls, in particular, are warned by teachers, parents and authorities to be cautious in their use of the Internet.[112] Typical warnings advise girls not to post personal information on their websites, not to communicate with individuals who contact them online,

and to use firewalls to limit user-access to their ezines and web pages. While these warnings are certainly widely ignored,[113] they deny the possibility of the Internet as a safe space for girls' communication and unhindered development of networked, resistant communities.

While, as Garrison argues, the Internet and new technologies have played a vital role in shifting young women's conceptions of the possibilities of media production and media activism, third wave feminism is not an online movement. The term "cyberfeminism" is invoked in relationship to the third wave as a reference to the ways in which an oppositional consciousness of gender relations may be expressed in virtual communication. In 1995, Sinclair theorized an ideal cyberfeminism when she described the Internet as a space for new community-building. Examining conceptions like these more then a decade later, feminist author Stacy Gillis responds that "gender online operates in many of the same ways that it operates off-line."[114] Although girls' communication and networking has flourished online, many of the same gendered boundaries that they face in everyday life are recreated in the medium. Cyberfeminism is an unwieldy and inaccurate term, because it assumes that users are freed from their gendered bodies when they communicate in online space. In an analysis of girls' personal websites, Susannah Stern argues that young women use this mode of communication in order to express themselves outside of the typical boundaries of social control formed by school, peer group, and family relationships.[115] Girls' ezines and websites often focus on issues related to gender, particularly body image, suggesting that these cultural producers use the medium to legitimate their experiences and physical realities.

Conclusion

Girls' DIY culture is not limited to the production of zines and ezines. These are two of the most accessible formats for young women because they require minimal materials and technological know-how (particularly paper zines), minimal financial investment, and they can be created independently (although they are sometimes produced by groups). While individual zines appear to be unique expressions of the creators' identities and political beliefs, they circulate through networks of communities who are committed to various forms of oppositional consciousness and the creation of alternatives to dominant social structures and ideologies. Riot Grrrl leaders encouraged the development of grrrlzines in the early 1990s as forms of individual artistic expression, but also as artistic production that would contribute to the growth of the movement. Grrrlzines articulated resistance to a patriarchal ideology that normalizes and enforces passive femininity. Girls' perzines don't circulate within a recognizable community like Riot Grrrl, but they do serve community functions and express shared ideals, particularly in terms of resisting the authority of the mainstream media and dominant cultural values to define the self.

While the circulation of individual zines is very limited, these artifacts of cultural resistance provide important evidence of girls' negotiations of social expectations and meanings. Independent magazines including *New Moon*, *HUES*, and *blue jean* attempted to invoke the oppositional consciousness of zines in more organized, polished formats that circulate more widely. Each of these magazines provided alternatives to the scripts of beauty and heterosexual femininity in mainstream teen girls' magazines, and they created alternative relationships that blurred the boundaries between media production and consumption. Teenage

girls controlled the content, at least to some degree, at both *New Moon* and *blue jean*; *HUES* promoted itself as a community publication for third wave feminism, expressing sisterhood and solidarity with readers in its mission and editorial address. Although only *New Moon* continues to publish, each of these magazines forwarded activist agendas that addressed readers as invested democratic citizens, rather than consumers. *New Moon* and *blue jean* in particular, positioned media literacy and media activism as potential liberation for young women, circulating notions of Girl Power that run counter to mass-mediated images of young women as beautiful ideal consumers.

The Internet has been a valuable tool in the development of girls' independent media. As a method of distribution, it has presented immeasurable new possibilities for independent media. The popularity of girls' ezines and personal websites reveals both the positive potential of the medium for community-building and the inherent dangers in fostering girls' communication in a public space that recreates the gendered power relations of society at large. Traditional paper zines continue to be popular and zine creators often express their motivations in terms of access. Zines circulate in "underground" communities and ezines are simultaneously more accessible to mainstream interests (including marketers interested in reaching the youth demographic) and less accessible to alternative interests (because they require a computer and Internet connection, at minimum). Michelle Downer, Director of the Midwest Zine Collective, has observed that the production of paper zines has been affected more significantly by increases in postal rates than by competition or lack of interest due to the available of ezines. She notes that the genre of perzines has "grown strongly since the 1990s" and if anything, girls' zines are becoming more elaborate handmade expressions.[116] In online

and offline formats, girls use zines as a format to express individual identity, and to receive support and affirmation from allies and counterparts who identify similarly.

Girls' DIY culture emphasizes the potential for liberation through media production, encouraging girls to empower themselves as subjects, rather than objects of mass media. Although I have focused on zine production in this chapter, teenage girls have created alternative representations using all forms of cultural production. *Shameless*, a Canadian feminist magazine for teen girl readers, has offered step-by-step instructions on everything from podcasting to book-binding, encouraging readers to see the potential for activism in wide variety of media formats.[117] In her extensive study of girls' media production, *Girls Make Media*, Mary Kearney documents the active participation of young women in forms of media including film, television, and music. These media have higher barriers to entry than zine production in terms of the equipment and technological expertise that they require, but advances in technology have made these kinds of production more accessible to young women now than ever before.[118] Teenage girls are using the Internet and public access cable channels as distribution methods for DIY film and television productions. Although these texts represent individual voices and visions to an extent, in the current media environment they have a greatly expanded reach, giving more potential authority to girls' resistant voices than ever before.

Zine authors, girls' magazine publishers, and web designers have argued that the act of media production is inherently empowering and constitutes a form of activism in and of itself. DIY production offers girls the opportunity to represent their own interests and to respond to mainstream media representations of young femininity. Claims such as these seem to advocate individual action in response to systemic inequalities, but as I have argued here, girls' DIY

culture can and should be examined in terms of how it fosters community and promotes the development of shared community ideals. Young women have struggled with definitions of Girl Power in DIY communities, and the media that they have produced serve as evidence of girls' articulation of resistance to dominant ideologies. This resistance it primarily cultural; it does not constitute an organized effort to lobby for social change. Instead, it takes place within the realm of representations, aiming to achieve a shift in consciousness. In my conclusion, I discuss the implications and limitations of feminist strategies for cultural resistance, and how these have been made visible in the discursive struggles over Girl Power.

Notes to Chapter Four

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[1] Quoted in Hilary Carlip, *Girl Power: Young Women Speak Out!* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1995), 343.

[2] Ibid., 1.

[3] Meenakshi Gigi Durham, "Articulating Adolescent Girls' Resistance to Patriarchal Discourse in Popular Media," *Women's Studies in Communication* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 210-229, accessed online: Feb. 18, 2008.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Durham argues that a feminist perspective on articulation must take into account how community ideals are fostered within the development of alternative subjectivities that articulate critiques of dominant ideologies. Her theorization of adolescent articulation includes issues of connection and interrelationships, and she argues that these aspects play strong roles in how girls establish their individual conceptions of identity. Participation in a community plays a vital role in the articulation of a critique of popular culture, and of the exercise of patriarchal authority within it. Durham stops short of claiming that adolescent girls' activism provides clear examples of resistance to patriarchal discourse, but she does give several examples of girls' media groups that seem to make alternative articulations possible.

[6] Linda Steiner offers a history of women's alternative media production that points to a long tradition of women creating their own meanings through alternative publications. See "The History and Structure of Women's Alternative Media," *Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication*, ed. Lana F. Rakow (NY: Routledge, 1992), 121-143.

[7] See Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 136.

[8] Jim Romanesko, "Zoning in on Zines," Poynter.org, posted 7 June 2000, accessed: May 31, 2008.

[9] See bell hooks, *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press 2000), 7-12.

[10] See bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989), 105-111.

[11] Stephen Duncombe, "Let's All Be Alienated Together: Zines and the Making of Underground Community," *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Joe Austin and Michael Willard (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 428.

[12] Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 160.

[13] Jennifer Wolfe and Elke Zobl, "Zines," *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia Vol. 2*, eds. Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 623.

[14] Karen Green and Tristan Taormino, eds., *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings From the Girl Zine Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), xi.

[15] See Mary Celeste Kearney, "Producing Girls: Rethinking the Study of Female Youth Culture," *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 285-310.

[16] See Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, 51-90 and 135-188.

[17] Kathy Bail, ed., *DIY Feminism* (Allen and Unwin: St. Leonards, Australia, 1996), 3.

[18] See Bail, *DIY Feminism*, 15.

[19] Laurel A. Sutton, "All Media Are Created Equal. D-I-Y Identity in Alternative Publishing," *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*, eds. Mary Bucholtz, A.C. Liang and Laurel A. Sutton (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 165.

[20] Cherie Turner, *Everything You Need to Know About The Riot Grrrl Movement* (NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 2001), 29.

[21] Turner, *Everything You Need,* 31.

[22] Ann Japenga, "Riot Acts," *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 1992, 30.

[23] Marnina Gonick cites Wendy Hesford's research on this in "Girl Power," *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia Vol.1*, eds. Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 311.

[24] Jen Smith, "Doin' it for the Ladies – Youth Feminism," *Third Wave Agenda*, eds. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 228.

[25] V. Vale, "Interview with Mimi Nguyen," *Zines Vol.II*, ed. V. Vale (San Francisco: V/Search, 1997), 61.

[26] Harris, *Future Girl*, 160.

[27] Michelle Comstock has argued that grrrlzines performed multiple community functions in Riot Grrrl networking. See "Grrrl Zine Networks: Re-Composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture," *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Spring) 2001, 383-409.

[28] Smith, "Doin' It for the Ladies," 238.

[29] Anna Feigenbaum, "Remapping the Resonances of Riot Grrrl: Feminism, Postfeminisms, and 'Processes' of Punk," *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 132-152.

[30] *Rebel Grrrl* zine, 2001 (Approximate), archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[31] *Riot Grrrl* zine, 199? (unnumbered/undated issue), archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[32] *Suki Girl* zine, 1996 (Approximate), North Freedom, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[33] See "History" and "Mission" at www.girlsrockcamp.org. Accessed online: 13 May 2008.

[34] Turner, *Everything You Need*, 48.

[35] Although zine writers do not always include or discuss their age, I focused my research on zines from authors who clearly identified themselves as teenagers or focused their writing primarily on subject matter related to adolescence.

[36] Tristan Taormino, "An Interview with *Action Girl*'s Sarah Dyer," *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings From the Girl Zine Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 170.

[37] Harris, *Future Girl*, 161.

[38] Pagan Kennedy, *Zine: How I Spent Six Years of My Life in the Underground and Finally ... Found Myself ... I Think* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 183.

[39] *Suki Girl* zine, Issue #18, North Freedom, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[40] *The Last Girlscout* zine, 1994, Milwaukee, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[41] Other zines devoted to Midwestern rave culture include *Anonymous: An Anonymous Girlz' Zine*, 199? (Date Approximate), Milwaukee, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[42] *Hurricane Girl* zine, Issue 1/Volume 1, 1998, Milwaukee, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[43] *Balance Beam* zine, Oct. 23, 2000, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[44] *Safety Pin Girl* zine, issues 11-13, 2001, Kenosha, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[45] *Mine* zine, 2003 (second printing), archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[46] *Insisterhood* zine, issues 1-4, 200? (Date Approximate), archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[47] V. Vale, "Revolutionary Knitting Circle," *Zines Vol.II*, ed. V. Vale. (San Francisco: V/Search, 1997), 44.

[48] Ibid., 42.

[49] *Women's Army* zine, 2001, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[50] Qtd. in Harris, *Future Girl*, 173.

[51] *Talking Back* zine, 2001, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[52] Qtd. in Sutton, "All Media Are Created Equal," 164.

[53] *Candles for Girls*, issue #3, 199? (Date Approximate), Madison, WI, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[54] *Too Far* zine, issue #7 (undated), Emeryville, CA, archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[55] *Abort! The Zine*, 2001 (Date Approximate), archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[56] *Spikey Strikes*, issue 1/vol.1 (1993), archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

[57] Diana Morrow, "Princess Visions," *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings From the Girl Zine Revolution*, eds. Karen Green and Tristan Taormino (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 139.

[58] See Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta.*

[59] "New Mail from New Moon," *Circulation Management*, Jul.1, 2003, 7.

[60] "Dear Luna," *New Moon*, May/June 2003 (Vol. 10/Issue 5), 2-5.

[61] "Dear Luna," *New Moon*, September/October 2002 (Vol. 10/Issue 1), 4.

[62] Jessica Lind-Diamond, "Media Madness," *New Moon*, Feb. 28, 1999 (vol.6/issue 3), 40.

[63] Jessica Norling, "Picture Perfect," *New Moon,* July/August 2001 (Vol. 8/Issue 6), 44.

[64] Lakeysia Allen, Leah Silson, and Courtney Willegal, "Making Choices: Girls Say No to Bad Ads," *New Moon*, Apr. 30, 1995 (vol.11/issue 4), 12.

[65] Emily Hume, "Boy Toys," *New Moon*, 30 June 1994 (Vol.1/Issue 5), 13.

[66] Duranya Freeman, "Girls Take Back TV," *New Moon* November/December 2007 (Vol.15/Issue 2), 26.

[67] Jesse Cordes Selbin, "Reading Between the Lines: Why are so Many Books Still Sexist?," *New Moon*, April 2001.

[68] "Howling at the Moon," *New Moon*, November/December 2001 (Vol.9/Issue 2), 41.

[69] Monisha Randolph and Folashade Oni, "Girl Talk T.V.," *New Moon*, Jun. 30 1996 (Vol. 3/Issue 5), 44.

[70] "Howling at the Moon," *New Moon*, September/October 2002 (Vol.10/Issue 1), 33.

[71] Leah Larson, "Teen 'Zine Queen," *New Moon*, November/December 2005 (Vol. 13/Issue 2), 38-39.

[72] Corrie Whitmer, "Go Girl!," *New Moon,* January/February 2008 (Vol.15/Issue 3), 12.

[73] Tashala Lowe, "Making Superheroes," *New Moon*, Feb. 28 1997 (Vol.4/Issue 3), 26.

[74] "Howling at the Moon," *New Moon,* September/October 2003 (Vol. 11/Issue 1), 33.

[75] "Voice Box," *New Moon*, March/April 2005 (Vol. 12/Issue 4), 31.

[76] Jean Farrell, "Della Ljungkull," *New Moon*, May/June 2004 (Vol.11/Issue 5), 23.

[77] "Howling at the Moon," *New Moon,* March/April 2002 (Vol. 9, Issue 4), 15.

[78] "Dear Luna," *New Moon* September/October 2002 (Vol.10/Issue1): 4+.

[79] Ibid.

[80] "Dear Luna," *New Moon* May/June 2003 (Vol.10/Issue 5): 2.

[81] Natalia Thompson, "5 Ways to Create Your Own Revolution," *New Moon*, January/February 2005 (Vol.12/Issue 3): 24-25.

[82] See Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta,* 187-190.

[83] The New Moon collective purchased *HUES* in 1997 and published the magazine until 1999.

[84] Logwood and the Eduts have written their own history of HUES magazine, discussing their project goals and experiences. See "*HUES* Magazine: The Making of a Movement," *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, eds. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 83-98.

[85] Elizabeth Latty, "Interview with Dyann Logwood," *The F-Word Ezine*, www.thef-wordzine.com, accessed April 20, 2008.

[86] This statement appears in many issues of *HUES*. See Spring 1998 as an example.

[87] See for example: Dyann Logwood, "Ghetto Feminism," *HUES,* 31 July 1997 (Vol.3/Issue 1), 36; Jennifer Baumgardner, "Third Wave: A Multicultural Feminist Groups gets Organized, Modernized and Mobilized," *HUES,* Jul. 31, 1998 (Vol. 4/Issue 3), 20.

[88] Pia Guerrero, "Loveless in the Media," *HUES,* January/February 1999, 24.

[89] Ophira Edut, "Filling Out Fashion," *HUES,* Dec. 31, 1998, 18.

[90] Ophira Edut, Tali Edut, and Dyann Logwood, "Power: You Know You Want Some," *HUES,* Jul. 31, 1998 (Vol.4/Issue 3), 2.

[91] "Girl Power: What's the Real Deal?," *HUES,* Jul. 31, 1998 (Vol.4/Issue 3), 5.

[92] Samanta Anamika and Erin Franzman, "Women in Action," *HUES*, Jul. 31, 1998 (Vol.4/Issue 3), 28.

[93] Susan Jane Gilman, "Power Tools," *HUES,* Jul. 31, 1998 (Vol.4/Issue 3), 10.

[94] Ibid.

[95] See Grrrl Zine Network. www.grrrlzines.net. Accessed online on 20 April 2008.

[96] "A Conversation with Mollie Goldstein," The InSite.org, June 1998, http://www.theinsite.org/solutions/bluejean_text.html, accessed: 17 May 2008.

[97] Ibid.

[98] "What Does Feminism Mean to You?," *blue jean: What Young Women Are Thinking, Saying, Doing*, ed. Sherry Handel (Rochester, NY: blue jean press, 2001), 78-82. (Originally published in *blue jean magazine*, July/August 1996).

[99] See Constance Tse, "We are Grrrls, Hear Us Grrrowl!" (89-92); Erica Bryant, "Black Feminists, Talkin' Back." (93-98); and Dina Rabadi, "No Boys Allowed." (99-103), *blue jean: What Young Women Are Thinking, Saying, Doing*, ed. Sherry Handel (Rochester, NY: blue jean press, 2001).

[100] Vickie Nam, "Why We Love and Fear the F-Word," *blue jean: What Young Women Are Thinking, Saying, Doing*, ed. Sherry Handel (Rochester, NY: blue jean press, 2001), 86-87.

[101] *Teen Voices*, a magazine based in Boston, produced by and for urban teens, started in 1990 and continues as of this writing. Mary Kearney also cites the publication *Empowered* in *Girls Make Media.*

[102] Kristin Spence, Introduction, *Net Chick: A Smart Girl's Guide to the Wired World*, by Carla Sinclair (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), xi.

[103] Laurel Gilbert and Crystal Kile, *Surfer Grrrls: Look, Ethel! An Internet Guide for Us!* (Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1996).

[104] Stacy Gillis questions whether being a "cyberfeminist" requires having access to technology, whether this creates built-in exclusionary class-based associations. See "Neither Cyborg Nor Goddess: The (Im)Possibilities of Cyberfeminism," eds. Rebecca Munford et al, *Third Wave Feminism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 185-196.

[105] Matthew Smith, "Strands in the Web: Community-Building Strategies in Online Fanzines," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Fall 1999 (Vol. 33/Issue 2), 87-99.

[106] Qtd. in Krita Scott-Dixon, "The All-Girl On-Line Revolution," *Herizons*, Summer 2001 (Vol.15/Issue 1), 24.

[107] Ibid., 24.

[108] Ibid., 24.

[109] See Sinikka Aapola et al., *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) 213.

[110] Aapola et al. note that "cybergurlzines" often critique sexist representations of young women in the mass media. See *Young Femininity*, 151.

[111] Scott-Dixon, "The All-Girl On-Line," 24.

[112] Even in the early years of the World Wide Web, zine writers acknowledged gender inequalities in the development of Internet communication. In her zine *Kusp*, Sara Marcus wrote about receiving anonymous offensive email messages, possibly from her high school classmates, that she felt were designed to intimidate her because she identified as a feminist. See "Sexists on the Net," *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World*, eds. Karen Green and Tristan Taormino (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 158-159.

[113] See Susannah Stern, "Virtually Speaking: Girls' Self-Disclosure on the WWW," *Women's Studies in Communication*, September 2002 (Vol.25/Issue 2), 223-231.

[114] Gillis, "Neither Cyborg," 190.

[115] See Stern, "Virtually Speaking," 223-231.

[116] Personal interview with Michelle Downer, Director of the Midwest Zine Collective. Interview conducted via email between May 14 and May 17, 2008.

[117] See "Radio-Free Revolution," *Shameless*, Summer 2006 (Issue 7).

[118] Kearney, *Girls Make Media*, 3.

Conclusion

In May of 2008, *Entertainment Weekly* heralded the arrival of a "new teen age" in popular culture fueled by the success of television series with teen protagonists such as *Gossip Girl* and *Hannah Montana*, in addition to successful teen musical touring acts such as Miley Cyrus and the Jonas Brothers.[1] Journalist Jennifer Armstrong argues that this "emerging" teen boom is different from those previous decades because it is taking place on multiple platforms; teen-oriented content is being marketed successfully in film, television, radio, and on the Internet. Her stance presumes that teen culture in the 1990s primarily revolved around a boom in popular music. As I have demonstrated in the preceding pages, these claims about a new teen age display an incredibly limited popular culture memory.

The "Teen Nation" described in *Entertainment Weekly* is not framed in terms of Girl Power, even though a number of the series and performers discussed are successful due to their pre-teen and teen girl audiences. Instead, gender-neutral youth empowerment is discussed in terms of consumer capital and media savvy. Armstrong quotes a consumer strategist from Iconoculture, a firm that pursues major trends, who states, "You're talking about a generation of kids who basically live in a choice environment. They really feel empowered, and that kind of excitement keeps everybody interested."[2] Here, "empowered" refers to the ability to watch a television show when it airs, via digital video recording, streamed online, or via download to an individual media player. In other words, young people are privileged with the ability to consume more media, more efficiently than ever before. These abilities, according to Armstrong, have made Generation Y the focal point of popular culture in a way that may have lasting effects.

Although this feature story disregards the emergence of Generation Y as a market force more than a decade ago in order to claim that teen-oriented popular culture is "new," the most significant question is raises for me is: What happened to Girl Power? The Disney Channel series *Hannah Montana* stars Miley Cyrus as an average teen girl (Miley Stewart) who maintains an alter ego, the pop singing sensation of the title. Cyrus has parlayed the success of her show, which debuted in 2006, into a singing career; at fifteen years old, she recently ranked 17th on *Forbes* magazine's list of the twenty highest-paid celebrities under twenty-five.[3] With lyrics like, "Don't let anyone tell you that you're not strong enough,"[4] her songs echo Girl Power themes that were popular less than a decade ago in the work of Britney, Beyonce, and the Spice Girls. Even though teen girls are still "powering" media trends and perfomers still flatter the teen girl audience with messages about their importance, postfeminist assumptions about Generation Y have become commonly accepted. Gender politics are not given much weight in recent conceptions of this generation of youth; racial inequalities and class stratifications are also subsumed by the overwhelming tendency to represent Generation Y as privileged consumers whose access to media have effectively liberated them.

Girl Power has been invoked far less frequently in news and media coverage about this generation in recent years. The phrase still appears regularly in reviews of popular music and film, but is no longer tied as directly to generational identity as it was during the 1990s. The concept of Girl Power continues to be relevant, however, in recent media representations. *Juno*, a 2007 independent film about a precocious teen girl and her unplanned pregnancy, became a mainstream hit in early 2008. The film was nominated for a Best Picture Oscar and its young female screenwriter won an Academy Award.[5] It's unusual for a film about a

pregnant teen girl protagonist to be produced, much less received positively by audiences and critics. The attendant publicity has not resulted in a rediscovery of Girl Power, however, and if anything, the film seems to have generated genuine confusion as to its position on reproductive rights.[6]

On a smaller scale, the documentary *Girls Rock!*, focusing on Portland's Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls, was released in 2008. The film has shown at festivals and in limited release in theaters across the country. Filmmakers Arne Johnson and Shane King document the efforts of female musicians, including some affiliated with the Riot Grrrl movement, to encourage girls' development of healthy self-esteem through media production, including rock, hip hop, punk, and heavy metal music, as well as through zine-making. The documentary incorporates informational segments on girls' self-esteem in order to establish the relevance of the camp's project; multiple critics have taken issue with this strategy, calling it "preachy,"[7] "reductive,"[8] and "a haphazard case for the essential trauma of experiencing girlhood in the United States."[9] After Girl Power, the problem of adolescents girls' loss of self-esteem has simultaneously become common knowledge and more difficult to represent.

On cable television, MTV debuted *The Paper*, a reality series following the inner workings of a high school newspaper in March 2008. The initial episode finds Amanda Lorber, a hardworking and assertive high school junior, beating out her male competitors for the coveted position of Editor-in-Chief. All eight episodes of the season ruminate on the nature of youth, gender, and power as Amanda works to earn the respect and friendship of a staff who seem to resent her self-confident attitude. Similarly, career journalists (who Amanda aspires to emulate) have openly mocked her in their reviews of the series; *Newsday* referred to her as a "pushy suck-up" and *Slate* termed her behavior "unyieldingly superior."[10]

Although the "reality" of the series is undoubtedly constructed by its producers at many levels, all of its tensions revolve around gendered struggles for power; its critical reception, in which male journalists weigh in on a teenage girl's professional acumen, add an additional layer to the series' commentary on current gender relations.

Juno, *Girls Rock!*, and *The Paper* clearly speak to the issues of youth, femininity, and agency that have been negotiated within the discourse of Girl Power, but they have not been framed in this way by the media. Girl Power fostered discussions of gender in the popular media that have since ceded to characterizations of Generation Y as postfeminist conspicuous consumers.

Media Conglomeration

Neoliberal approaches to regulation have resulted in industrial trends towards conglomeration in the media industries. In the 1990s, these trends spurred a focus on teenage girls as a profitable demographic target. As major media corporations became vertically integrated within media industries and horizontally integrated across industries, it became economically efficient to develop content that could be marketed through multiple outlets to specific niche markets. By the late 1990s, Time Warner's broadcast network, the WB, targeted teen girl viewers with Girl Power series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed*, and *Gilmore Girls*. The series' audiences were sold to advertisers as a desirable demographic, but the series themselves were also used to market Time Warner music and to brand teen stars, who then used network to promote their upcoming Warner Bros. films.

The WB network never became profitable, but it did not fail either. The network's strategy of promoting the interests of its parent company to a specific demographic group was mirrored by UPN's efforts as part of Viacom. By 2006, when both the WB and UPN

announced their intent to cease operations, they were similarly targeting young female viewers. In its first two years of operation, the CW network, a joint venture between Time Warner and CBS Corporation, has also branded itself as a broadcast network aimed at young female viewers, first by programming series that were popular on the former networks, and then through breakout hits including *Gossip Girl* and *The Pussycat Dolls* reality series. The CW represents a tendency towards cooperation rather than competition between media industries in late capitalism,[11] and its series work to brand stars and promote products for both of its parent companies.

The CW's programming has demonstrated an engagement with issues related to young women's empowerment. In fact, when *The Pussycat Dolls Present: The Search for the Next Doll* was screened for television critics in early 2007, (male) series producer McG told the assembled group that it could be viewed as an example of third wave feminism.[12] The reality series follows a competition among young women to earn a place in a burlesque pop music dance troupe, and critics and feminist bloggers alike responded to the producer's assertion with skepticism. This incident resulted in national news coverage, and some of the first coverage of third wave feminism in local media such as daily newspapers. It raised new questions about who has the power to define the parameters of third wave feminism, and it reintroduced some of the same old questions about Girl Power.

Girl Power

Media conglomerates continue to target teenage girls as a desirable demographic group without explicitly invoking the concept of Girl Power. What then, did Girl Power signify in terms of the appeal it held for audiences and media producers in the 1990s? Girl Power gave voice to social and cultural concerns about the status of young women and it

packaged teen girls' empowerment as an accessible and appealing notion. While this included positioning consumerism as liberation for young women, the discourse itself opened up a space for feminist discussions and concerns in mainstream popular culture.

Girl Power has been understood in some narratives as a straightforward co-optation, in which the organic and revolutionary ideas of the counterhegemonic Riot Grrrl movement were exploited and commodified by mainstream interests to the point where they became meaningless. My examination of the discourse of Girl Power recuperates its feminist implications, demonstrating that even though it has been used to market products, statements made within the discourse have productively acknowledged gender inequalities. Although various meanings of Girl Power support a dominant ideology of consumer capitalism, the discourse does create a space in which young women can voice resistance to patriarchal authority and associate young femininity with strength, intelligence, and confidence.

I argue for a meaning of Girl Power as third wave feminism in order to illustrate the extent to which the discourse gives voice to feminist ideology. Girl Power and third wave feminism are both shaped by the practical effects of neoliberalism, in which social problems and methods for social change are increasingly framed in terms of the individual. Girl Power has frequently been critiqued on the basis of the vague notion of individual empowerment that it espouses, and the experiences of difference, including race, class, and sexuality that it so often ignores. From the perspective of adult scholars and commentators, the emphasis on individual authority prevents real, lasting social change from taking shape. From the perspective of young women however, Girl Power has helped to create a social space in which it is acceptable, even laudable, for them to be assertive, ambitious, intelligent, and athletic.

Third wave feminism conceptualizes social change through individual efforts that take identity politics into account in order to foreground the ways that experiences of gender are inextricably linked to experiences of age, race, ethnicity, class, and ability. Third wave feminist activism has thus far been preoccupied with cultural change, foregrounding attempts to create cultural associations between femininity, strength, and agency. Girl Power, as a mainstream discourse about adolescent femininity, is an example of this cultural project. Although their primary goal has been to address teen girls as consumers, mainstream media interests have acknowledged and contested limiting stereotypes of femininity in order to accomplish this, and have thus created a space for articulations of femininism in popular representations.

Postfeminism

In April 2007, a front-page article in the *New York Times* declared that teenage girls are burned out from exhaustion due to unrealistic expectations about their capabilities.[13] The article profiles young women who excel in academics, extra-curricular activities, volunteer work, and athletics. The over-stressed and over-scheduled young women in the article are quoted regarding their desire to live up to expectations that they should be confident, capable, high-achievers. Journalist Sara Rimer wonders about the long-term implications of this trend and the new, unrealistic expectations of gender that it seems to demonstrate. In other words, the article poses the question of how Girl Power became so bad for girls.

Over time, statements about Girl Power have been replaced by postfeminist responses to the discourse. Statements about girls' assertive femininity and social authority have been overtaken by the circulation of cultural fears regarding girls' empowerment. Postfeminist responses to Girl Power reveal these cultural preoccupations, particularly concerns about what

girls' empowerment means for the social authority of boys. My analysis demonstrates that multiple forms of postfeminist responses have attempted to negate the validity of Girl Power. Girls' academic achievements have been reframed as a threat to boys' educational progress. Girls' self-confidence has been depicted in film and television as either dangerously antisocial or cripplingly isolating. Girls' sexual empowerment and development of healthy body image has increasingly been represented as a hypersexualized performance that emphasizes pleasure through objectification. Postfeminism creates a hegemonic response to the legitimate feminism to which Girl Power has given voice.

My analysis of responses to Girl Power is intended to intervene productively into academic debates over the utility and meaning of the term "postfeminism." Over the past two decades, the term has increasingly been employed to refer to post-structuralist feminist analysis and academic work that foregrounds experiences of difference over experiences of gender. In Chapter Three, I reformulated Sarah Projansky's five categories of postfeminist statements an applied them to representations of teenage girls. This line of inquiry demonstrates the continuing utility of "postfeminism" as a category of analysis that examines how feminism is rejected as unnecessary, irrelevant, or outdated by the mainstream media. Projansky developed these categories of analysis to illustrate the complexity and variety present in hegemonic responses to liberal feminism. I have employed her basic outline in this dissertation in order to exhibit how it might serve as an applicable model of analysis that reveals the workings of power behind representations of gender.

Resistance

Discursive struggle over Girl Power is visible in postfeminist representations, but it has also been meaningfully engaged by teen girls' own media production. In DIY media,

girls have claimed the authority to resist consumerist implications of mainstream representations, and to define Girl Power for themselves as both productive and empowering. Girls' zines and alternative magazines provide some evidence of how young women have negotiated mainstream media representations of youth, femininity, and empowerment. These DIY texts do not constitute a representative sample of how young women have negotiated meanings of Girl Power, but they do indicate that negotiations are possible.

Girls' articulations of resistance are strengthened in DIY media through the development of communities. While zines can be and have often been examined as artifacts of individual identity, they also function significantly to create dialogue and build common ground in alternative communities. These communities, whether established by design like the Riot Grrrl movement or by chance like the associations developed through the circulation of perzines, foster discussions of counterhegemonic ideologies. They encourage information-sharing, networking, and in some cases, social activism that resists the authority of dominant interest to define ideals of youth, femininity, and generational identity.

A significant theme that develops in girls' DIY media communities is that media production is inherently empowering. This theme reflects third wave feminist values that emphasize creating a shift in consciousness through cultural representations. It also embodies the practical effects of neoliberalism, in which the role of the individual as an agent of change is overstated. I analyze girls' DIY media in terms of community ideals, in part to combat this theme and to frame the articulation of resistance in more realistic terms. Alternative media produced by teen girls provide clear evidence of negotiation and resistance, but mainstream media circulate widely and forcefully.

Girls' DIY media do not take the place of popular culture representations of teenage girls. They attempt to mitigate the authority of media industries to define young femininity, and it is possible that the existence of these media indicate that resistant reading practices are widespread, including among young women who do not create their own media. However, alternative media production, in and of itself, remains a minor expression of political activism. In her analysis of the relationship between zines and third wave feminism, Brandi Leigh-Ann Bell provides a useful caveat when she states, "Critiquing mainstream cultural images and creating alternatives cannot substitute for political activism that is directly aimed at changing social structures and inequalities on a broader level."[14] The New Moon collective, discussed at length in Chapter Four, has recognized the limits of a movement of change that is purely cultural. As a result, the collective developed the Girls' International Forum (GIF) to organize girls' participation in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. GIF is now involved in aspects of social activism outside of media production; they work for change in public policies related to girls' rights.

The struggle to define Generation Y as a category of identity continues to unfold, as the recent "Teen Nation" article in *Entertainment Weekly* demonstrates. Since the mid-1990s, a generation of empowered young women with worldviews shaped by the advances of second wave feminism have become a generation of empowered consumers, particularly consumers of media. Discussions of Girl Power and feminism are currently downplayed, or possibly played out in popular analyses of this generation, but assertive and multifaceted female protagonists like Juno and Amanda Lorber remain at the forefront of teen popular culture. Whether this shift in cultural representations will result in a corresponding shift in consciousness remains to be seen.

Notes to Conclusion

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[1] Jennifer Armstrong, "Teen Nation," *Entertainment Weekly*, May 16, 2006, 31-33.

[2] Qtd. in ibid., 32.

[3] Joe Burris, "Miley Cyrus Pulls in the Big Bucks," *Baltimore Sun* Jan. 8, 2008.

[4] Lyrics from the song "Make Some Noise," which appears on the *Hannah Montana* soundtrack.

[5] Diablo Cody, the film's screenwriter, openly identifies as feminist.

[6] See John Lantos, "The Liberal Backlash Against *Juno*," *Bioethics Forum*, Mar. 27, 2008, www.bioethicsforum.org, accessed: June 2, 2008.

[7] See Kenneth Turan, "Girls Rock!" *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 7, 2008.

[8] Nick Schager, "Girls Rock!" *Slant Magazine*, Mar. 4, 2008.

[9] See Ruth Graham, "No Boys Allowed," *New York Sun* Mar. 7, 2008.

[10] See Dave Itzkoff, "Teenage Newshounds, It's a Dog-Eat-Dog World, " *New York Times*, May 26, 2008.

[11] Robert McChesney writes about joint ventures as a strategy. See *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 27-28.

[12] See Lisa De Moraes, "Guise and 'Dolls': Pussycat Execs Clawed by Critics," *Washington Post*, Jan. 20, 2007, C1.

[13] See Sara Rimer, "For Girls, It's Be Yourself, and Be Perfect, Too," *New York Times* Apr. 1, 2007.

[14] Bell further notes, "While the failure of many zines to reach the level of broad political activity is an important limitation to acknowledge, it is unwise to assume that zines and zine production cannot lead to, and influence, political activity." See "Riding the Third Wave: Women-Produced Zines and Feminisms," *Resources for Feminist Research*, Vol. 29, No. 3/4, 2002, 187-198.

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