

Other Women

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This artwork represents how society has convinced girls and women that their looks are excessively valuable, leading them to spend an extensive amount of time on their appearance and, seemingly, their identity.

This photographic installation features multiple teenage girls engaged in daily routines in intimate environments, such as their own bedroom or bathroom. These daily routines revolve around image and appearance, which require much time and upkeep.

The photographs are installed on hangers to emphasize the subject matter's connection to the obsession of looks and the stereotype of clothing-obsessed women. The subtle color-theme of red is meant to symbolize power, sexuality, and love; it echoes the subversive imagery of marketing campaigns.

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What influences the identity of a teenage girl? Many people don't understand how much goes into making a teenage girl, everything from telling her she is gorgeous, to her after school activities, many factors will affect the woman she will be one day. As a kid, girls grow up with this idea that they can be whatever they want from being a princess to being the president, but with all the possible influences in life this idea depreciates over the years. Peer pressure and judgment are major influencers on a teenage girl's identity. If one's friends are doing something there is an increased likelihood of her to do the same. The teenage girl and how she feels as she matures influence the woman she will become.

Science of the teenage brain

Many kids can't wait to be a teenager to be "old enough," but as soon as they are teens they wish they could go back to being a kid. Granville Stanley Hall describes the teenage years as "... the best decade of life. No age is so responsive to all the best and wisest adults endeavor." (Page 6). Being a teenager is a very awkward experience one wants to be treated like an adult, but also don't want the responsibilities. There is also so much confusion behind the agreed upon age of an adult. "In most of the United States a person must be between fifteen and seventeen to drive; eighteen to vote, buy cigarettes, and join the military; twenty-one to drink alcohol; and twenty-five to rent a car" (Page 18-19). On the other hand, there are things that do not have a minimum age limit such as going to rehab or be emancipated. The debate about whether the drinking age should be lowered or not affects the considered age of being an adult. I believe the legal drinking age should be lowered, in order for teenagers to truly understand when they are an adult. On top of that, making drinking taboo makes it more attractive to teens due to their reward seeking brains.

"Several studies have shown that children and adolescents generally have the same accuracy, but the reaction times, the speed at which a subject successfully inhibits a response, dramatically decrease with age in subjects age eight to twenty. In other words, it takes longer for adolescents to figure out when *not* to do something." (55) Along with teenager's slow reaction time, their brains are only four-fifths of the maturity it will achieve. The environment is a very determining factor for how stimulated an adolescent's brain is and its maturity. Not only does environment affect the teenage brain, so does experience.

"As it turns out, there are more areas of the brain that process positive information, whereas negative information is centered in the prefrontal cortex", which is not quite developed yet, therefore, teenagers are less susceptible to learning from negative behavior (Page 84). While many people believe experimentation has a very negative connotation and is terrible for teens, in fact quite the contrary is true. "Experimental behavior is actually important for adolescents to engage in because it helps them establish their autonomy" (104). I am not suggesting all experimentations are good such as smoking unknown substances because of peer pressure, but it is not all bad.

Teenagers are known for being impulsive and immature children, but there is a reason for teenager's behavior. "[G]ratification is at the heart of an adolescent's impulsivity, and adolescents who engage in risky behavior and who have never, or rarely, experienced negative consequences are more likely to keep repeating that reckless behavior in search of further gratification." (108) Many teenagers think consequences are very far away and they will only affect them in the long run, but not very seriously.

¹ Jensen, Frances E., and Amy Ellis Nutt. *The Teenage Brain: a Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*. London, 2016.

My Teenage Brain

How did the interplay between my environment and my genetics shape my identity? I was known in my family for being the jokester and would say the funniest things without even realizing it. In the car one day, my grandma asked if I took a cute pill that day, and I replied with “two, but they weren’t needed.” I also had been told from a young age that I had the most contagious laugh. When I wasn’t cracking jokes, I would make my family sit and watch me sing and dance in my pink tutu in our living room. Occasionally, I sang with my sister to the soundtrack of Annie. From these early formative years, one would have thought I would turn into the funny teenager, who joked all the time, and just wanted to perform. This is not how I developed into who I am, and this is why I am writing this paper.

Female Influences

Many girls have female influences besides just their mother, including grandmas, sisters, friends and caregivers. I was born on May 30th, 2001 in Atlanta, Georgia, where I would live my life whole life up until now. My grandma, Mimi, a mother of two girls and an artist, who has taught me to be creative, bought me art supplies. She sends me links to artists on a weekly basis. When Mimi told my sister Sydney that she now had a baby sister, just like her mom, and they had to leave Starbucks in order to see me at the hospital, my 4-year-old sister’s response was “Not now, I’m drinking my Frappuccino.” This would be the start of our funny and up and down relationship. All I wanted to do as a kid was to be just like my older sister, Sydney. She was a very sassy kid who thought she knew all the answers to life’s questions. I remember watching her recitals and wanting to be as good a dancer as she was. When she quit ballet, I quit very soon after because I thought it was the right thing to do. Not only did I dance like her, but I played softball, even played the same position. While my sister has definitely had a positive influence on me from teaching me to tie my shoes to helping me learn how to park a car, there have been some downsides of having an older sister, that doesn’t involve her stealing my clothes. I have grown up comparing myself to her constantly, from the way I look to my intelligence. My parents have tried very hard for us to believe that we are entirely different people, and have never once compared me and my sister. With that effort from my parents, it has definitely helped me realize we are different, but growing up my goal was to be just like her in every way possible. Except I knew I wanted to enter a different profession. My sister has always wanted to an office job, where I would prefer to do something more creative. With the acknowledgment from my parents and myself about my differences from my sister, it was almost like I failed my childhood goal of being like her.

While my sister helped me learn different activities, my mother, Halli, is one of the most hardworking women I know. She worked for the same law firm for 23 years, but has recently left to lead the same department at another law firm and make it her own. She was working from 9 to 5 every week day and sometimes much longer and traveling, all while raising two kids. Despite her work schedule, I still felt like she supported every thing I did.

It also helped that I had a nanny, named Linda, who was my mother when my mother was working. Linda was with me since I was 3 months old; I don’t remember a time she wasn’t there. Linda was the one who took my pacifier away and helped me with my homework so when my mom got home I could spend time with her. Linda helped raise me like I was her own.

My other grandma, Hildy taught be to fight no matter what. She has gone through so much she had breast cancer, a major car accident, and is an esophageal cancer survivor. She has

been so strong and continues to show how much she love me. I also had a lot of friends who have helped me become who I am today. My friends have taught me how to handle many different situations and encouraged me to do things I would never have done without them. For example, when in Costa Rica I was so afraid of going zip-lining, my friends convinced me to do it. It was a great experience, and I would love to do it again. These women all taught me to be creative, to learn and try new things, be hardworking, caring, and strong. I can never repay these wonderful women.

Media influences

Teenagers spend a great deal of time on their phones because “[w]hen the new text message or post is opened, the discovery is like a digital gift; it releases a pleasurable rush of dopamine in the brain” (211) “According to one recent study, [a teenage girl] sends an average of 4,050 texts every month” (Page 97).² This huge amount of time that teenage girls spend on social media affects many things including their self-confidence, self-image, and even sleep schedule.

I remember liking shows because my sister watched them, but also not liking shows because she liked them. The shows of my childhood included iCarly, Suite Life of Zack and Cody, Rizzoli and Isles, and against what my mother said, Glee. I was and still am a huge movie fan, but I have noticed the portrayal of female characters are very often one dimensional. My mom wouldn't let me watch SpongeBob as a kid due to the dirty humor, but in my opinion, now I think it was all the girly movies she should have prevented me from watching. I grew up with this idea that I had to either be smart or pretty due to television and movies' portrayal of women. My favorite movie was Cinderella. Prince Charming would never have looked at Cinderella if she had not put on makeup and dressed up. This idea that men don't look at women unless they have “beautified” themselves, is shown in almost all Disney movies. Not only are the princess movies guilty of making women look bad so are the movies aimed at older girls. For example, in the movie Mean Girls, the popular girls are seen as gorgeous but dumb and mean to everyone. This portrayal shows girls that they can only be dumb and gorgeous, or focus on their work and have a hatred for love and family. These movies suggest success and popularity are based on the facade, and not the skills and intelligence girls process.



Women are used as advertisements for products where a woman is dressed in very little clothing in order to sell a fast food restaurant. The use of females in advertising in a demeaning way makes women viewed as just items. The usage of women to advertise also makes the idea of using women accepted and normalizes it. Pornography,

another issue in rape culture, objectifies women by portraying acts that are aggressive towards women which allow some men to believe this is the right way to treat a woman sexually. Women

²Ibid.

are also objectified in video games that young boys play. Women in video games are a lot of the time portrayed as needing to be saved, these portrayals led to a man's skewed view of women.

While I personally see all the problems with social media, I still do spend a lot of my time using it. Many times, I have found myself stressing about the ratio of my followers to how many people I am following. Every time I post something I ask my friends to like and comment as if that will make or break the photo on Instagram. Lately, "fake" Instagrams or "spam" Instagram accounts are a huge trend, where teenagers are posting their feelings, thoughts, and everything they are doing for a smaller number of followers. With the same idea in mind, there are private snapchat stories one can choose a few people to view them, but most posts to the private story are inappropriate or irrelevant. These private accounts and stories are just a way for teens to gain attention and seem rebellious.

Another issue I see mainly in girl's today, that I am guilty of doing as well, is spending hours analyzing, zooming in on almost every inch of a picture before we post "just in case someone will notice it." I almost always send options of pictures to my friends in a group chat to see which one, I should post in order for my followers to like the post. Once, I get a consensus I ask for opinions on my caption and then I start to second guess the photo, which creates this never-ending cycle of doubt. Then once I post the picture, I text in the group chat again saying "show some love to the gram." I am always checking to see how many likes I'm getting and even how many comments. I even have an app that shows me who unfollows me and another app that tells me the best time to post pictures based on my past posts. While looking at my social media habits, is very embarrassing, it also feels so normal to me now because my friends do it as well. I now truly understand the effects of social media on my self-confidence and the anxiety that comes with it.

Education and Mentality

"Studies show teenage girls have a higher risk of anxiety disorders than boys due to outside experiences and surroundings" as shown through my own experience.³Anecdotally I can say that I have not seen my peers who are boys have not experienced the same magnitude of anxiety as my girlfriends have. Many psychologists believe "[s]elf-doubting is an underrated source of much needless misery and this misery is made worse when self-doubting co-occurs with anxiety." Unfortunately, I suffer from both.⁴

My teacher in pre-kindergarten at a parent-teacher conference said, "I think Carly is the smartest kid in the class, but she doesn't know her letters." My parents then decided to take me to get tested for learning differences, and this is when we found out I was dyslexic. I remember switching B's and D's, struggling with mad minutes, and freaking out about reading aloud in class. My dyslexia has been with me through everything. I also had many fears, from dogs, being by myself, failure, and trying new things. On top of my fears, I have been described as the definition of a perfectionist whether it's about an art piece or about coloring in the lines. All of these were manifestations of my anxiety. Sadly, insecurities, fears, anxiety, and doubts have followed me throughout life and have defined me as a teen.

These issues have not gone away, but I have learned to deal with them. From when we first found out about my dyslexia, I had special tutoring and also went to a special camp for

³Ibid.

⁴ Knaus, Bill. "Freedom From Self-Doubts, Anxiety, And Procrastination." *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, 1 June 2015, www.psychologytoday.com

dyslexic people to help me learn to cope. The special help I have gotten has made school much easier, but my anxiety was so bad at one point I did nothing besides school work. The diagram below the one with higher numbers were from the mindset I was in about a year and a half ago before I decided to take medication to help my anxiety. The other one with the lower numbers shows my progress over the past year and a half. My anxiety medication helped me become the little girl that was cracking joke and performing for her family again.

	Your Score	Severity Level
Depression	18	Moderate
Anxiety	22	Extremely Severe
Stress	26	Severe

	Your Score	Severity Level
Depression	9	Normal
Anxiety	14	Moderate
Stress	18	Mild

Personal Experience with Objectification

Susan Griffin states “[r]ape is a kind of terrorism which severely limits the freedom of women and makes women dependent on men.”⁵ Rape culture is a concept that describes rape as normalized due to society’s evolution.⁶ Unfortunately, rape culture has to do with the denial of acknowledging the true issues caused by harassment. Rape culture today is a big issue that is affecting many girls and women. Rape culture goes all the way back to biblical times, rape is mentioned in the Bible multiple times. For example in Isaiah 13:16 it is stated that “[t]heir home will be sacked, and their wives will be raped,” this quote shows that rape is seen as a thing of power.⁷ In history when women were raped it was a wrong on the male who was seen as owning her. Once the woman was raped, the only way to determine the crime was the monetary value of the woman.⁸ Research shows “6% of women who did not report rape said it was because of fear of not being believed by the police.”⁹ This percentage of women who don’t report rape illustrates how in America there is still a lack of understanding the magnitude of rape. Today, many people make jokes about women being raped such as “no means yes,” which is truly unnerving.

As a child, I was taught to not talk to strangers or truly go out alone. Living in a city like Atlanta, I have been exposed to a lot of different types of uncomfortable situations due to the fact that I am a female. I remember in seventh grade walking in my friend’s neighborhood when a man who appeared to be a construction worker asked if we needed a ride. I remember feeling very uncomfortable after we said no, he then preceded to ask us how old we were and our names. My friends having a lot of guts decided to say “Too young for you!” The man seemed very offended like we were the ones causing the problem, he then said “whatever whores” and sped off down the street. I remember seeing the bright red beat up car drive away causing leaves that had fallen to blow everywhere and feeling a weight lifted off my shoulders due to his absence.

⁵ Herman, Dianne F. "The Rape Culture". Printed in *Women: A Feminist Perspective* (ed. Jo Freeman). McGraw Hill, 1994.

⁶ Olfman, Sharna (2009). *The Sexualization of Childhood*. ABC-CLIO. p. 9.

⁷ Isaiah 13:16

⁸ Herman, Dianne F.

⁹ "The factors related to rape reporting behavior and arrest: new evidence from the National Crime Victimization Survey". *Criminal Justice and Behavior*.

Unfortunately, I have been catcalled, even followed around a shopping center, and so much more just in sixteen years of my life. I just have accepted that these issues are normal situations when one is a female. I hope societal norms will change given the new focus on sexual harassment in the past few months, but I do not think it will change in a teenagers' life because there is no pressure to change like there is in the business world.

Jewish Identity

The same year, I encountered my first uncomfortable situation with men, I had my bat-mitzvah, a Jewish ceremony welcoming me into womanhood/adulthood. I spent so many years learning Hebrew for this one day of my life when I stand in front of friends and family and read from the Torah. Yes, that may not sound that exciting, but it was, especially because afterward, I had a huge party. The actual planning of my bat mitzvah took about a year, to pick the location, the DJ, the caterer, the invitations and to send them out. It felt like such a big and important thing for me, I was almost hardwired to work for this moment since my first day of preschool at my temple.

This past summer, I had the amazing opportunity to travel with teens from The Temple in Atlanta to Israel. We saw mountains, huge natural craters, and the many seas surrounding Israel, whenever someone thinks of Israel they think of dry desert that has tons of conflict with its neighboring countries. Yes, it is mostly desert, but it also has beautiful landscapes, including the desert. On this trip, I hiked Masada, a 2,000-year-old desert fortress overlooking the Dead Sea, which served as a refuge for rebelling Jews in 66-73 C.E. From the top one can see the Dead Sea, ruins from where the Romans once lived, and what seems like the whole Judean Desert. The fact that standing on the same soil in the same place as someone you have only heard stories about is a very eye-opening and meaningful experience.

The activity on this trip that had the most impact on me was when as a group we went on a night hike through the Negev Desert with no flashlights just the moon illuminating the ground on which we walked. The walk was very rocky but we all led each other into the unknown of the desert. When we came to a stop, we were instructed to find a place where we could lay down and not touch anyone else. Little did I know once my eyes got adjusted to the moonlight, I would see the most beautiful sky full of stars. Coming from living in a big city like Atlanta, I had never truly seen a starry night. In that moment, it was like the world had stopped moving. I saw my first shooting star and began to cry. I know that sounds very cheesy, but it was then that I truly realized how beautiful the earth really is. In this moment, I realized the connection I had created with the land of Israel. It was if in that desert was the safest place for me, surrounded by friends, and nature. I had always had a fascination with the sky, but it grew with each minute I looked at the atmosphere around me that night. Through this trip, Israel had taught me so much about myself and my people, that I felt like I needed to give something back, therefore I planted a tree.

The spot I picked in Neot Kedumim, a Biblical Landscape Reserve, was right on the edge of a cliff looking out over other fruitful gardens. The action of physically planting a tree and having it be in Israel for many years to come, made me feel like I somehow contributed to the land and future generations. The idea of being connected to a land or a country seemed so odd to me before I actually went to Israel. Being able to see such a wide range of landscapes in such a small country on one trip, made me realize how amazing this earth actually is.

Conclusion

So what does this all mean? What a girl experiences in her youth informs her present self. My personal influences and experiences are not exactly like every other girls', but these influences illustrate a typical lifestyle of a teenage girl. I have to agree being a teenager can be very weird and confusing at times, and I can only imagine what it is like to raise one, especially a teenage girl. I don't think a parent truly understands how the little things they do, and how the TV shows they watch affect their children. I believe that it is part of a parent's job to decide what should influence their daughters, while one can't control what their daughter sees outside of the home, it should be a priority to have decisions in the home about femininity. Not only is it a parent's duty to filter influences for their daughters it also the media's. The media needs to acknowledge the influence they have on girls and modify the portrayal of women so future generations don't view themselves as objects or lesser than men. Is it truly possible to only have positive influences in a girl's life?