

NOT THAT INNOCENT: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MILLENNIAL
POP MUSIC AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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List of Abbreviations

A&F: Abercrombie and Fitch
A&R: Artists and repertoire
AMA: American Music Awards
BSB: Backstreet Boys
BMG: Bertlesmann Music Group
CNN: Cable News Network
EW: Entertainment Weekly
MMC: The All-New Mickey Mouse Club
MTV: Music Television Network
NBA: National Basketball Association
NFL: National Football League
NKOTB: New Kids on the Block
NKOTBSB: Boy band supergroup consisting of the New Kids on the Block and the Backstreet Boys
R&B: Rhythm and blues
RIAA: Recording Industry Association of America
TRL: Total Request Live
VMA: Video Music Awards

Introduction

Applause is passe; the reaction most eagerly sought by pop culture right now, from music to television to movies, is a high-pitched squeal from a mob of young girls. When it's directed at males, that squeal signifies romantic fantasy while it tests out some newly active hormonal responses. Directed at females, it's a squeal of sisterly solidarity and fashion approval. And for the last few years, its volume has been steadily rising until it threatens to drown out anything with more mature audiences in mind. Kiddie-pop has always been available to those who wanted it, but in the late 1990s it's turning into the only game in town.¹

In July 1999, the *New York Times* published Jon Pareles' article, "When Pop Becomes The Toy of Teenyboppers," in response to the escalating presence of teenage-oriented music, films, and television shows in America at the turn of the twenty-first century. Pareles attributed the rise of teen-pop music to a reaction against grunge and "gangsta" music of the 1980s and early 1990s, to rock musicians facing a "creative slump," and most interestingly, to the rise of the Latin pop stars, namely Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez, for the growing population of Spanish-speaking audiences.² However complex the reasons for the rise of teenage pop music at the millennium were, this new wave of "bubblegum" music swelled into a significant cultural force that shaped the lives of the millennial generation, because millennials joined in the singing and dancing or purposefully distanced themselves from the music.

The millennial generation, also interchangeably termed the "millennials," echo boomers, generation Y, and generation me (or the me generation), is the largest demographic group to emerge in the United States since the postwar baby boomers born

¹ Jon Pareles, "When Pop Becomes The Toy of Teenyboppers," <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/11/movies/when-pop-becomes-the-toy-of-teenyboppers.html>>, 11 July 1999 [accessed 18 June 2013].

² Ibid.

between 1946 and 1964. A consensus for the exact date range has yet to be reached for the birth years of the millennials. Jean M. Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University, established the range from the 1970s through the 1990s in *Generation Me*, while Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of *Millennials Rising*, recognized the years 1982 and 2002 as the first and last years of birth for this generation.³ Whatever the temporal boundaries, millennials have grown up in an era vastly different from those of previous generations, and its members have come of age in a technological world where information and fads are exchanged easily and with alacrity, greatly influencing teenage popular culture. Generation Y has been bombarded with information and images quite divergent from materials available to the same age cohort in prior generation. These images helped to shape millennial culture, and these shaping sources were often exhibited on television.

Members of generation Y witnessed events on television during their upbringing that transformed their culture, one example being the Music Television network's (MTV) *The Real World*, a reality television show that filmed seven strangers living in a house, working, and playing together. In the 1992 premier episode, the housemates found a *Love and Sex* book, purposefully placed by the production team who had provided and furnished the loft, and "the sex discussion begins, focusing on innocent Julie [an eighteen-year-old woman from Alabama] and her virginity."⁴ Also televised nationally was the trial of former National Football League (NFL) player O.J. Simpson in 1994 and 1995, which echoed with the millennial generation and combined sex, violence, and

³ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 5; Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Press, 2000), 4-15.

⁴ "The Real World: New York > Ep. 01," <<http://www.mtv.com/shows/realworld-season1/episode.jhtml?episodeID=42254>>, 2012 [accessed 23 October 2012].

money in an event that polarized races. Simpson's acquittal on the first-degree murder charges produced joyous blacks and disbelieving, angry whites.⁵ Millennials were exposed to an open and casual discussion between young adults focusing on sex on a nationally aired television show and during the trial of a famous athlete, but another event in the 1990s proved even more seminal in generation Y's sentiments regarding sexual relations: President Bill Clinton and his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, from whom he received oral sex.

American political culture, including generation Y's, was saturated with President Clinton's sexual escapades and failings as American television dedicated "more airtime to Clinton's scandal in 1998 than all other news stories put together."⁶ Clinton was impeached after the Lewinsky trial under the charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, but was acquitted of both charges; he confessed to providing false testimony on his final day in office and was required to pay \$25,000 in fines to the Arkansas Bar Association.⁷ The President of the United States engaging in such casual sexual relations had a significant impact on high school graduates in 2000, who ranked Clinton's impeachment for sex at the number five spot, and the Lewinsky scandal at number eight, in the top ten "events that made the biggest impression on the high school class of 2000."⁸

The Columbine High School Massacre, ranked at the number one spot on that list, exemplified the theme of anger and aggression evident among millennial young men.

⁵ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 310-313.

⁶ Toby Miller, "The First Penis Impeached," in *Our Monica, Ourselves*, ed. Lauren Berlant and Lisa Duggan (New York, New York University Press, 2001), 123.

⁷ Patterson, 396-397.

⁸ Howe and Strauss, 19.

This is one of the themes of millennial boy culture under discussion in chapter two of this thesis, as are the issues of sexuality and narcissism. Generation Y's girl culture similarly involved sexuality and narcissism, amplified by a female empowerment that sparked a male backlash. Male anger and aggression can be linked to the increasing status of women in all sections of society and the empowerment achieved through this cultural visibility. Documenting this phenomenon in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Michael Kimmel, professor of sociology at Stony Brook University, demonstrates that the struggle of men having constantly to prove their masculinity against the rising influence of women in society has contributed to greater manifestations of men's anger since the 1990s.⁹ The changing dynamics of power, particularly as coalesced around gender and sexuality, proved central to understanding millennial culture. Young men and women, and boys and girls growing up around the turn of twenty-first century, were exposed to diverse and more promiscuous lifestyles and morals, and often to mixed messages about gender and identity, and those messages spread in a medium central to many millennials' lives: popular music. As Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman note in *American Popular Music*, "music is one important medium through which we formulate and express our identity," and this thesis documents this notion for the millennials.¹⁰ Most specifically, this thesis analyzes the boy culture and girl culture of generation Y and uses popular "boy bands" and "pop princesses" and their music as a lens to explore the relationship between bubblegum pop music and a historical understanding of modern American gender. While bubblegum pop has usually been

⁹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012), 238.

¹⁰ Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

associated with the late 1960s and early 1970s, recognizing the reemergence of this bubblegum music in the 1990s is essential to appreciating the scope and subject of this study, as this style of music is the focus of this thesis.

On 8 June 2001, *Entertainment Weekly (EW)* asserted that one cause for the rise of American teen pop at the turn of the twenty-first century was the economy, stating, “The giddy economic times of the late ‘90s helped spur the love of boppy tunes and frothy films, much in the way that the early-‘90s recession informed gloomy grunge.”¹¹ The bubblegum style and the teen-pop genre are interconnected, yet constraints on the categorizing of music genres make distinct genre definitions difficult, and the defining of these two genres proves no exception.¹² In 2001, music columnist and Syracuse radio show host, Carl Cafarelli, characterized bubblegum music as “blatantly commercial” music which “held no delusions of grandeur.”¹³ The music, Cafarelli said, combined “sing-a-long choruses,” “childlike themes and a contrived but beguiling innocence,” and an “undercurrent of sexual double entendre.” The commerciality and the carnal undertones were factors of both generations of bubblegum music. Just as millennial bubblegum pop was a reaction against the grunge and gangsta music from the 1980s and 1990s, the bubblegum pop of the 1960s had emerged as a response to the pop and rock acts of the British Invasion, such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, and as a reaction to a period when “most songs were about crime and war and depression.”¹⁴ Joey Levine,

¹¹ Josh Wolk, Ethan Alter, and Chris Willman, “Pop Goes the Teen Boom?” <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,256597,00.html>>, 8 June 2001 [accessed 17 November 2012].

¹² Carl Cafarelli, “An Informal History of Bubblegum Music,” in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears*, ed. Kim Cooper and David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 13.

¹³ Cafarelli, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-20; and Starr and Waterman, 254-255.

bubblegum singer and producer, offered insight on the intent of 1960s bubblegum music in his work with acclaimed producers Jerry Kasenetz and Jeff Katz:

We were looking to have hits and we were looking for upbeat, fun, danceable songs. They weren't really dance records in the sense that you have dance now . . . they were all happy-go-lucky type of things. Some of the lyrics, it was like a double-entendre type of thing. And if you really got into it—I mean, people overlooked some of the lyrics, thinking that, “Oh, it's just happy-go-lucky”—and some of them were nitty-gritty . . . I mean, “Yummy, Yummy, Yummy,” everybody said, ‘Oh, what a great bubblegum record, innocent.’ But if you listen to the lyrics, it wasn't so innocent.¹⁵

When asked for clarification on whether the double-entendres were intentional, Levine replied, “Of course, yeah.” The inclusion of not-so-innocent lyrics in the 1960s and 1970s transferred into the bubblegum music at the turn of the twenty-first century. The original wave of bubblegum music had a short timeframe of popularity, from February 1968, when the Lemon Pipers' “Green Tambourine” ascended to the number one spot on *Billboard*'s hot 100 singles list, to 1972, when the bubblegum music scene evolved as these faceless, fictional bands and their singles could not cope with the upsurge of teenage idols.¹⁶

The target audience of 1960s and 1970s bubblegum music was the teenage population, and the industry sold music through the marketing of faceless groups in which the true singers were not shown singing, such as the 1910 Fruitgum Company and Ohio Express, along with the fictional cartoon band the Archies.¹⁷ Mark Evanier, writer and animation historian, indicated that the motive for producing “faceless” groups was that there was a sense of controlling ownership, that “the Archies were anonymous, the

¹⁵ Cafarelli, 16.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15-20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

Archies were owned. The Archies couldn't hold out for more money."¹⁸ Another benefit provided by using nameless and faceless performers was interchangeability, the ability to rotate out or replace old members—if a member were to leave the group, a new singer could simply fill the vacancy, a problem that may have arisen if the band had specific faces associated with its voices.¹⁹

The anonymity of the bubblegum groups may also be attributed to the genre's demise. Bill Pitzonka, bubblegum music historian and author, explained that bubblegum pop evolved into a teen idol phenomenon because producers "realized that [the bands] did need faces, [the producers] couldn't have faceless bands. What do you attach to? Oh, attach to a cute guy who you can market to a magazine."²⁰ Teen idols, including groups such as the Monkees, the Osmonds, the "soul bubblegum" group the Jackson Five, the Partridge Family, and the Brady Bunch, continued to produce bubblegum tracks still geared toward preteens and teenagers in the form of "teen pop."²¹ Ron Dante, record producer and lead singer for the Archies, stated that bubblegum music is still currently thriving because it is "very memorable. The minute you hear it you wanna hear it again, and you remember it. So there are things out today that equate to bubblegum."²² Joey Levine added, "There's always songs that come out that are bubblegum songs," and he identified bubblegum as having a "*commercial* connotation," which sealed its association to teen pop.²³ In essence, bubblegum music in the 1960s and 1970s was manufactured

¹⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹ Ibid.; and Kim Cooper, "Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth," in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears*, ed. Kim Cooper and David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 23.

²⁰ Cafarelli, 20.

²¹ Ibid.; Starr and Waterman, 315; and "Teen Pop," <<http://www.allmusic.com/style/teen-pop-ma0000002895>>, 2012 [accessed 17 October 2012].

²² Cafarelli, 20.

²³ Ibid., 21.

with profit in mind and did not necessarily focus on artistic expression or eloquent lyrics, and tunes that embodied bubblegum's disposition continued to exist after the decline of the sugary, sweet stereotypical tunes in the early 1970s. The bubblegum teen pop that revitalized in the 1990s and continued into the new millennium was indeed manufactured to capitalize on the large millennial demographic, and continued the trend of featuring catchy, sticky choruses while incorporating "entendre so vague that adults can give it a sexual interpretation and children, theoretically, don't."²⁴

This thesis interrogates the historically richer and "not so innocent" nature of what has been dismissed as bubblegum music; it examines aspects of gender and sexuality for millennial men and women, and measures the extent to which the boy bands and the pop princesses at the turn of the twenty-first century reflected or deviated from the contemporary cultural attitudes about anger and aggression, sexuality, narcissism, and empowerment. The theme of millennial men's anger and aggression is inherently linked to generation Y women's empowerment. The increased cultural visibility of women correlated with the amplified anger and aggression of men. Consequently, men sought to embody the cultural ideals of masculinity, which resulted in a regression into the man-child, an adult man with youthful tendencies, and bolstered women's ability to achieve social and economic advancements. This combative correlation was visible in millennial bubblegum teen pop music through boy bands and pop princesses. The boy bands highlighted in this study include the Backstreet Boys (BSB), *NSYNC, and 98°, while Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears are the featured pop princesses. These artists and their music were usually dismissed as juvenile and simplistic, but their music was "not that innocent," as Britney Spears famously declared in "Oops!... I Did It Again" (2000),

²⁴ Pareles, "When Pop Becomes The Toy of Teenyboppers."

and it expressed the sexuality and narcissism of the millennial generation, challenging the notions of youthful innocence and naivety associated with the pop music of this genre.

This thesis' featured boy bands and pop princesses were targets for cultural criticism regarding changing conceptions of gender identity and sexuality. Aguilera and Spears were often dismissed as sexual icons, which allowed them to expand their audience to include men. As documented later in this study, these pop princesses transcended feminist scrutiny and the objectifying remarks of men to impart messages of empowerment to millennial women. The boy bands were not frequently associated with millennial boy culture because of male detractors who regarded them as feminine, but they exemplified a newfangled type of man who did not match previous masculine ideals. This thesis offers a serious historical study of the derided millennial bubblegum pop musical genre and its most recognizable performers, who provided remarkably deep insights into more widespread cultural transformations and trends, and who have maintained cultural power beyond the turn of the millennium.

To underscore the cultural significance of these boy bands and pop princesses, popular culture artifacts including MTV's Video Music Awards (VMAs), 2Gether, the satiric boy band created by MTV, Comedy Central's *South Park*, and FOX Broadcasting Company's (FOX) television shows *Glee* and *MADtv*, offer further social commentary on the culture of teenage popular music icons and the millennials. At issue, in part, is whether these millennial popular culture icons served as progressive or regressive forces for new understandings of gender ideals in the period of their popularity. The shift in popular values, beliefs, and notions of gender identity and power in recent American

history provide insight into a newly defined generation gap between the millennials and previous generations.

Since generation Y is situated in very recent history, documenting these changes in millennial cultural thinking opens up a trove of rich sources to explore, including but not limited to music and music videos, biographies, news and magazine articles, television, and film. Contemporary gender and cultural histories are largely observed through scholars such as feminist and cultural critic Susan J. Douglas, and sociology professor and leading scholar in men's cultural studies, Michael Kimmel, and Jean Twenge, a psychologist who focuses on the millennial generation. In this study of the cultural significance of music, the analysis and incorporation of songs are compulsory. Far more than producing a catalog of the popular bubblegum songs at the millennium, this study analyzes the lyrics and visual presentations of these tunes, contextualizing them within millennial discourse on gender and sexuality. A few research issues arise when working with such sources. One notable matter is the availability of academic materials concerning the boy bands and pop princesses. Many works have been published for the fans of these artists, and they have factual bits and pieces about Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, or the members of the BSB, *NSYNC, and 98°, but locating a substantial neutral or academic source has proven unsuccessfully challenging. Piecing together articles and other fragments of evidence from biographies to create a full informational story helps to rectify this complication. Another problem that this research faces stems from its proximity to the present day, providing a challenge in appraising the reliability, objectivity, and factuality of the sources. This appears to be a disadvantage, but it also creates research opportunities for an educated interpretation of contemporary

cultural history and the opportunity to incorporate the language of the millennial generation into historical analysis. There is no extant academic treatment of the 1990s and early 2000s pop music and its impact on generation Y's gendered culture, which speaks to the originality of this topic and its potential to contribute innovative scholarship to recent American cultural history research.

This study integrates analyses of various multimedia sources with interdisciplinary explorations of millennial culture and events in recent American cultural history to produce an original piece of work. Chapter one examines the boy bands and boy culture, and establishes the masculine gender dialectics of millennials. Determining the relationship between the bubblegum pop produced by contemporary boy bands and the recent culture of boys is an approach that yields surprising conclusions, especially given the generally female market for the music of boy bands. This both complicates and illuminates the historical understanding of the degree to which boy bands reflected millennial boy culture and masculinity at the turn of the twenty-first century. The chapter opens with a history of boy bands before contextualizing their music and music videos with contemporary cultural events and boy culture. The anger and aggression, sexuality, narcissism, and promotion of an alternate male archetype in millennial boy culture as witnessed in the boy bands' music and videos are investigated while bearing in mind their marketing to a female audience. Chapter two then provides a linking interlude between the masculine music of the boy bands and the feminized music of the pop princesses by exploring the solo career of Justin Timberlake and his relationship with prominent pop star Britney Spears. Timberlake and Spears' relationship and breakup provide a cultural bridge between boy culture and girl culture given the highly visible nature of their

relationship and its cultural resonance for gender dynamics among millennials. Chapter three explores millennial girl culture through two of the most popular pop princesses at the turn of the twenty-first century, Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears. The chapter opens with an overview of the narcissism, the sexuality, and the empowerment of millennial women. An analysis of Aguilera and Spears' lives and careers introduce the cultural visibility of these pop princesses, followed by a discussion of how their music and performances reflect the themes of sexuality, narcissism, and empowerment. The conclusion harnesses all the gendered musical and historical observations to reaffirm the cultural significance of millennial bubblegum pop music for teen culture at the turn of the twenty-first century. This final segment concludes the thesis by examining the new wave of teen entertainers and the influence that the boy bands and pop princesses of this study continue to exert on popular culture. The chapters of this thesis work together to belie the notion of bubblegum pop as historically and culturally inane or irrelevant, arguing instead that there is cultural significance to this often derided style of music in millennial culture, and that in fact this musical genre served as an important venue for understanding gender and sexuality ideals for the millennial generation at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Chapter One

Pop Masculinities: The Cultural Significance of the Backstreet Boys, *NSYNC, and 98°

Millennial Male Masculinities

Am I original? / Am I the only one? / Am I sexual? / Am I everything you need? /
You better rock your body now!²⁵
—Backstreet Boys, “Everybody (Backstreet’s Back),” 1998

The lyrics from “Everybody (Backstreet’s Back)” drew upon the themes of boy culture and masculinity under discussion in this study: anger and aggression, sexuality, and narcissism. Millennial boy culture revolved around the quality of being masculine and its accompanying cultural connotations. In 2012, Planned Parenthood provided the following list of frequently used words in American culture that have been used to label masculinity in contrast to femininity: independent, stoic, aggressive, tough-skinned, competitive, clumsy, experienced, strong, active, self-confident, hard, sexually aggressive, and rebellious.²⁶ Michael Kimmel argued that male millennials observed masculinity in “fathers, public figures, athletes, and other media-created heroes,” and consequently “evaluate—constantly, relentlessly—each other’s performance.”²⁷ Through their marketing techniques, the pop boy bands of the late 1990s were not typically

²⁵ Backstreet Boys, “Everybody (Backstreet’s Back),” *Backstreet Boys* (New York: Jive Records, 1998).

²⁶ “Gender Identity – Stereotypical Masculine & Feminine Traits,” <<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity-26530.htm>>, 2012 [accessed 21 October 2012].

²⁷ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 269.

regarded as masculine, as opposed to such rhythm and blues (R&B) male vocal groups as Boyz II Men and All-4-One of the same era. This thesis suggests that, contrary to popular perception, boy bands illustrated masculine ideals more than previously assumed.

Male anger and aggression materialized in the 1990s, according to Kimmel, from the changes in the economy, and from the pressures of boys and men having to prove their masculinity. For the previous century, industrialization had provided men with jobs and wages that supported their families while the outsourcing and downsizing of manufacturing jobs in the 1990s ebbed many men's sense of being a self-made man and the ability to provide for their family. Communities of immigrants with the goal to gain a foothold in the American economy posed potential threats to many laid-off men who were looking for replacement jobs. Anger ascended in the hearts of men from the increased struggle for jobs against an increasing population of migrants and from a perception that "women 'invaded' even those last all-male bastions like sports, the military, and military schools."²⁸ Men felt emasculated when women became more prevalent in the sphere of post-secondary education and then accordingly in the American workforce. The percentage of men with a college degree between the years of 1975 and 2006 rose from 26.8 to 27.9 percent, but that increase paled when compared to college-educated women.²⁹ The percentage of women with degrees swelled from 18.6 to 34.2 percent in that same timeframe *and* women comprised fifty-eight percent of all graduating collegians in 2011.³⁰ Clearly women rose in educational and social mobility during this period. This trend transferred into their rise in the labor force. The United

²⁸ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 238.

²⁹ Kay S. Hymowitz, *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 51.

³⁰ Ibid.

States Department of Labor documented that in 2008, women comprised fifty-one percent of the persons employed in management and professional occupations, and more than half of the workers in the financial, education and health, and leisure and hospitality industries.³¹ Hanna Rosin in “The End of Men” revealed that while males’ aggression and competitiveness defined their leadership styles, psychological research discovered that women incorporated the rights of others while maintaining an equal level of assertiveness and effectiveness.³² At Columbia Business School, Rosin continued, male and female students enrolled in courses on “sensitive leadership and social intelligence, including better reading of facial expressions and body language.” Jamie Ladge, Northeastern University business professor, acknowledged that these classes helped students, particularly male students, to “develop [their] feminine side.” The increase in women workers threatened, if not undermined, the power of men, for men were less likely to be the “primary breadwinners.” According to Kimmel, this shook “men’s identity to its foundation.”³³ Generation Y males watched as this movement affected their fathers and other men in society, which perhaps led to feelings of social impotence and helplessness. Since the turn-of-the-twentieth century, men had been resorting to fist-fighting, sports, and a disregard for order and rules when confronting emasculation, and in the twenty-first century, these behaviors and activities have turned into “marker[s] of authentic masculinity, a test of manhood.”³⁴ Anger and aggression have been staple

³¹ “Women in the Labor Force: A Databook,” <<http://www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-intro-2009.htm>>, 2009 [accessed 21 October 2012].

³² Hanna Rosin, “The End of Men.” <<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/308135/>> July 2010 [accessed 20 September 2012].

³³ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 288.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

characteristics in defining a masculine millennial, and these traits filtered into the sexual nature of generation Y males.

Sexuality has garnered large amounts of attention from earlier generations and from generation Y itself, and in this chapter the term “sexuality” refers more to the ideas of promiscuity and sexual freedom than to sexual preferences, which are discussed with millennial men’s narcissism. Boy culture is one of “homosociality,” as described by Kimmel, in which “so much of guys’ lives take place with and is judged by other guys,” and it commands constant affirmation of heterosexuality—and the traditional method for a man to prove he is an authentic man “is to score with a woman.”³⁵ “Guy Code,” a compilation of values, behaviors, and attitudes that defines how to be a man, demands that men “have sex with as many women as possible, as frequently as possible, no matter what.”³⁶ This code often leaves men feeling inadequate and with insatiable sexual appetites. Men have frequently turned to two outlets when sexually frustrated: another person and pornography. Generation Y boys and young men have been surrounded by attractive females throughout daily life, whether at a coffee house, on the sidewalk, or in class; and society and gender equality have condemned the men who leer at attractive females with charges of harassment.³⁷ Pornography has provided men with the entitlement to pleasure that they feel is a “biological imperative,” and, as Michael Kimmel asserted, “it makes few relationship demands; it asks little of men morally, intellectually, politically, and offers . . . the illusion of power and control.”³⁸ In *Generation Me*, Jean Twenge noted a shift in sexual behavior when “hooking up”

³⁵ Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper, 2008), 169.

³⁶ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 172.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 172-179.

replaced substantial relationships in the modern college setting. This observation was clarified in an interview between Twenge and twenty-four-year-old Gen Y-er Heather: “Once, sex was something you did with your husband, then it was what you did with the person you love, and now it is more for recreational purposes.”³⁹

Kimmel also documented the same phenomenon of casual sex from the millennial male perspective through Cornell student, Troy: “We go out in groups to local bars. We go to parties. And then after we’re good and drunk, we hook up. Everyone just hooks up.”⁴⁰ This casual attitude toward sex, and the tendency to aggression, blended together in the cases of rape and sexual assault, which have been surprisingly common. *Campus Safety*, a technology resource for university and hospital security, police, and administrators, published statistics in 2012 claiming that between one-fifth and one-fourth of women will be victimized by rape, or attempted rape, during their college career.⁴¹ Moreover, college men who participated in aggressive sports, or who exerted masculine rage in high school, were more sexually coercive and “scored higher on attitudinal measures . . . such as sexism, acceptance of violence, hostility toward women and rape myth acceptance.”⁴² Psychologist Neil Malamuth at the University of California, Los Angeles uncovered an alarming statistic: between sixteen and twenty percent of male respondents to his survey said they would commit rape “if they could be certain of getting away with it.”⁴³ When “rape” was replaced with “force a woman to have sex,” the percentage increased to include between thirty-six and forty-four percent;

³⁹ Twenge, 168.

⁴⁰ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 190.

⁴¹ Robin Hattersley Gray, “Sexual Assault Statistics,” <<http://www.campus-safety-magazine.com/Channel/Public-Safety/articles/2012/03/Sexual-Assault-Statistics-and-Myths.aspx>>, 6 March 2012 [accessed 22 October 2012].

⁴² Gray, “Sexual Assault Statistics.”

⁴³ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 224.

furthermore, another study found fifteen percent of men admitted to using force to obtain intercourse.⁴⁴ Young men have forced, virtually and physically, their sexuality on women as they strived to sate their coital cravings and established a hegemonic masculinity for their peers' approval.

Narcissism and masculinity are likewise interconnected in boy culture in the struggle for identity, and also blend into millennials' development of sexual preferences, homophobia, and gender identity. Michael Kimmel stated in *Manhood in America* that the most common putdown in middle schools and high schools in 2012 was, "that's so gay."⁴⁵ The terms gay, faggot, fag, and sissy were associated with homosexuality and are still occasionally used with that intended connotation, but millennials have transformed phrases including such vocabulary into generic insults as a form of "gender policing," enforcing masculine archetypes.⁴⁶ White-rapper Eminem, born Marshall Mathers and notorious for his frequent homophobic remarks, was quoted as saying in an MTV interview, "the lowest degrading thing you can say to a man . . . is to call him a faggot. . . . 'Faggot' to me doesn't mean gay people. 'Faggot' just means taking away your manhood."⁴⁷ Gender policing ensured that men acted like men, and those who dared to deviate from masculinity norms could encounter a barrage of hostility in the form of bullying. Generation Y boys had continually to monitor themselves to ensure they would not, and could not, be perceived as "gay."

Millennial males, who endeavored to establish maleness in all facets of their being, relied on physical and material means to ascertain their adherence to boy culture.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 270.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Well-endowed and chiseled male models were put on display and eroticized for empowered women to objectify, as illustrated by Olympic pole-vaulter Tom Hintinaus' 1983 Calvin Klein underwear advertisement that placed Hintinaus against a phallic-shaped spire.⁴⁸ Even childhood toys fostered generation Y boys' feelings of inadequacy as action figure G.I. Joe's proportions, converted into life-size, went from being five feet ten inches tall with a thirty-one inch waist, twelve-inch biceps and a forty-four inch chest in 1974 to having dimensions that "would make one a circus freak" in 2002, with no change in height, but having a twenty-eight inch waist, twenty-two inch biceps, and a fifty-inch chest.⁴⁹ The "Adonis Complex" had men believing that they needed to resemble Greek gods, resorting to such drastic measures as consuming anabolic steroids, comprising twenty percent of all cosmetic procedures, and being one of 15,000 men annually to pay \$6,000 to gain two inches in penile enhancement surgery.⁵⁰ The fight for the equality of homosexuals, bisexuals, and transsexuals in society raged through the first decade of the twenty-first century, but generation Y boys, regardless of sexual orientation, were exposed to and socially pressured to abide by the cultural expectations of exuding masculinity in all of its forms. Kimmel generalized American men's thoughts about the pressures placed on them through a sardonic and exaggerated rant:

We're pumping up and working out obsessively to make our bodies impervious masculine machines . . . while we adorn ourselves with signifiers of a bygone era of unchallenged masculinity, donning Stetson cologne, Chaps clothing, and Timberland boots as we drive in our Cherokees and Denalis to conquer the urban jungle. . . . We sought to block women's entry into the military and . . . some of the nation's elite country clubs . . . and spent our leisure time in upscale topless bars and watching Spike TV and *The Man Show*.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Idem, 245.

⁴⁹ Idem, 247.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Idem, *Manhood in America*, 238.

This chapter examines the three aforementioned themes and the extent to which boy bands and their music reflected or deviated from the contemporary cultural attitudes about anger and aggression, sexuality, and narcissism. At issue, in part, is whether boy bands served as progressive or regressive forces for changes in gender ideals in the period of their popularity. The shift in popular values, beliefs, and gender ideals in recent American history provide insight into the gap that exists between the millennials and previous generations.

Millennials came of age in a seemingly different world. White men were angry at the turn of the millennium, and it was evident. Millennial men, who looked to their fathers and other grown men as examples of masculinity, saw the anger escalating in white American men over the economy and their jobs while, as Kimmel documented in *Guyland* in 2008, “angry white men like Rush Limbaugh, Mike Savage, and a plethora of other radio hosts” blamed everyone else for their anguish.⁵² In 1990, twenty-five percent of the American population was comprised of ethnic and racial minorities, which rose to thirty percent in 2000. This social trend, initiated by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, abolished the preference for immigrants from Western Europe and focused on family reunification.⁵³ This change in racial and ethnic demographics strongly influenced the economic sector as immigration, legal and illegal, added to the numbers of workers.⁵⁴ Other ethnic migrants opened groceries, restaurants, auto shops, and other businesses; the most successful expanded their businesses to reach consumers outside of their

⁵² Kimmel, *Guyland*, 239.

⁵³ David Goldfield et al., *Twentieth-Century America: A Social and Political History* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2005), 410. The racial and ethnic minorities were, as cited in *Twentieth-Century America*, American Indians (0.9 percent of the American population in 2000), Asians and Pacific Islanders (3.7 percent), African Americans (12.3 percent), and Hispanics (12.5 percent).

⁵⁴ Goldfield et al., 411-412.

community, and contributed to the struggle for white men to achieve, or maintain, their jobs and financial status.⁵⁵ The rage that men felt during the 1990s breached the line from non-physical accusations to violent and lethal events such as the 1999 Columbine Massacre, which brought awareness of generation Y men's anger and aggression to America and the world.

The Columbine Massacre was quintessential in defining millennial boy culture, as students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had been constantly pelted with objects and taunted by jocks—the high school epitome of masculinity.⁵⁶ Taunts were aimed at them that criticized their masculinity, such as “nice dress,” and the school newspaper had published a rumor that linked the two as lovers.⁵⁷ On 20 April 1999, Harris and Klebold opened fire at their school, Columbine High, employing an arsenal of weapons, killing one teacher, twelve students, and themselves, while also injuring over twenty others.⁵⁸ The Columbine Massacre was recognized as the deadliest school shooting in American history until the Virginia Tech shooting on 16 April 2007, which claimed thirty-three lives, including the shooter's life. Since 1992, there have been over thirty cases of school violence involving one or more young boys using guns against classmates, including schools in Arkansas and Oregon; all happened in rural or suburban schools, and all but one of the perpetrators was white.⁵⁹ These events, ranging from sexuality on television to

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 89. In 2009, *USA Today* published an article stating that Harris and Klebold, based on police affidavits, videotapes, journal entries, emails, and interviews with witnesses, friends, and survivors, were bullies and had not been bullied, contradicting reports produced between 1999 and 2009. Despite this discovery, it is beyond dispute that Harris and Klebold illustrated extreme anger and aggression. *USA Today* article: Greg Toppo, “10 years later, the real story behind Columbine,” <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-04-13-columbine-myths_N.htm>, 14 April 2009 [accessed 13 November 2012].

⁵⁷ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 89.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Goldfield et al., 431; and Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 271.

celebrity murder cases and school shootings, defined millennial culture and refracted in boy culture, a trend that can be examined through millennial boy bands.

Boy bands have typically been associated with girl culture, as teen girls have formed the market demographic group, but they warrant more respect as icons of other cultural groups, particularly the white middle-class men of the millennial generation. While society pressured young men to exhibit masculine characteristics, masculinity was evolving; men were becoming



Figure 1 - The Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way" music video, featuring a mostly white female crowd of fans (Zomba).

angrier, more aggressive and sexual, and further polarized from girl culture and femininity, which had created an unattainable masculine standard. Upon further analysis of the boy bands, specifically their music and music videos, there is evidence that they reflected the themes of masculinity more than previously assumed. In order to analyze the full meaning of the music of these groups, it helps to take a deeper look at their albums, moving beyond their number one songs to tracks that were not even released as singles. The boy bands' singles and the accompanying music videos were tailored to grasp the attention of millennial girls, predominantly white, as illustrated in the Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way" music video (figure 1). Tunes not released as singles, but included on boy bands' albums, occasionally presented lyrics that transcended a targeted appeal to feminine characteristics by representing, to an extent, aspects of boy culture and masculinity. This thesis incorporates analyses of some of

these lesser-known album tracks in addition to the more familiar singles of these bands, and discusses both the obvious meaning of the songs' lyrics as well as the risqué or ironic double-entendres, as established in teen pop by 1960s bubblegum music. Music videos provide additional support to the contention that boy bands emulated, to a degree, aspects of millennial boy culture. Despite boy bands' reflection of male culture through audio and visual media, Amanda Hess, *Washington City Paper*'s "The Sexist" blog author, noted that boy bands, due in part to their frequent dissociation from masculinity, played a role in the pioneering of a new type of man who projected a new expression of masculinity.⁶⁰ This "new" breed of man was progressive in society's identification of masculinity; he challenged the ideas of traditional hegemonic machismo by infusing culturally feminine traits—passivity, and being emotionally expressive and finely groomed—into his male identity. Select collections of young men who encompassed this late-twentieth century progressivism were the boy bands.

The history of American boy bands is one that could be traced back either a short period of time or to mid-nineteenth century America, depending on the given definition of "boy band" and the context in which it was being discussed. "Boy bands" could generally be characterized as a group of young men of any race and from any point in time who perform music marketed toward an especially young audience. The issue with this label was the term "boy," which has historically been associated with slaves or servants and thus has conjured images of racism and suppression. The all-encompassing "male vocal group" avoided any controversial terminology, but was imprecise, vague, and entailed no specific audience. The term "band" had its own connotation for groups

⁶⁰ Amanda Hess, "The Decade In Masculinity," <<http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/blogs/sexist/2009/12/29/the-decade-in-masculinity/>>, 29 December 2009 [accessed 27 October 2012].

who performed with musical instruments, such as guitars, piano, horns, or percussion, as in “big bands” and “rock bands,” but the classification “male *vocal* group,” which many boy band members preferred, helped to distinguish “boy bands” from other musical groups. Contemporary boy bands typically performed using their voices as instruments to create melodies and harmonies, an exception being the Jonas Brothers, who formed part of an even more recent wave of boy bands that emerged after the turn-of-the-millennium. The boy bands that were marketed toward white middle-class, often female, audiences, and that dominated the pop music charts in the late 1990s through the millennium, are the focus of this study in millennial culture, particularly the Backstreet Boys, *NSYNC, and 98°. A brief history of male vocal groups that led to the development of these boy bands is crucial to understanding their place in music and cultural history. Male vocal groups that have released a music track are far too numerous to cover when providing a brief history, and this treatment thus focuses on the most seminal groups that have influenced contemporary boy bands.

A Brief Background on Boy Bands

We’re more popular than Jesus now.⁶¹

—John Lennon, of the Beatles, on the band’s cultural influence, 1966

The boy bands of the late 1990s and early 2000s have musical roots linked to the barbershop quartets that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century from the African-American stream of tradition, as did blues, jazz, and gospel music.⁶² Contemporary boy

⁶¹ John Lennon, as cited in Eric Lefcowitz, *The Monkees Tale* (San Francisco: The Last Gasp, 1989), 5.

⁶² David Wright, “Barbershop Harmony,” <<http://www.acappellafoundation.org/essay/wright.html>>, [accessed 27 October 2012].

bands feature certain similarities traditional to barbershop quartets, particularly the combination of members with assorted voice types and ranges, such as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass, and group harmonization. The recognizable form of boy bands hailed from the 1960s with the British Invasion and American family pop groups.

As writer David Smay stated in “A Brief History of Boy Bands,” “the Boy Band as we know it first emerges with the Beatles.”⁶³ The Beatles were a commercially successful English rock band that incited “Beatlemania” in the United States in 1964 with the release of its album, *Meet the Beatles*, and the single, “I Want to Hold Your Hand.”⁶⁴ Though there were some arguments that the Beatles’ popularity can be attributed to a lack of “good” music in the early 1960s, such a case can be contended because those years were the “golden years” of Motown and artists including Ray Charles, James Brown, Tommy Roe and Del Shannon.⁶⁵ Many pop culture historians have marked the 22 November 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy as a cause of the Beatles’ American success, because it left young Americans “hungry for a change in the prevailing national mood of solemnity, and the Beatles provided just the tick in the form of something novel, ‘exotic,’ uplifting, and fun.”⁶⁶ The prosperity of the Beatles gave rise to the British Invasion, a torrential release of records from British bands and singers in the American market.⁶⁷ The Beatles did more than bring English recording acts into mainstream American popular music; it provided the prototype for future boy bands.⁶⁸

⁶³ David Smay, “A Brief History of Boy Bands,” in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears*, ed. Kim Cooper and David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 36.

⁶⁴ Starr and Waterman, 254.

⁶⁵ André Millard, *Beatlemania: Technology, Business, and Teen Culture in Cold War America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 40.

⁶⁶ Starr and Waterman, 254.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 255.

⁶⁸ Smay, 36.

The influence of the Beatles on American culture was demonstrated by the emergence of the Monkees in 1966.

Aspiring producers Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider, inspired by the Beatles' film *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), decided to create an American counterpart to the Beatles and produced a weekly television show, *The Monkees*, which followed the mishaps of four musicians.⁶⁹ David Smay noted that the Monkees were fabricated in the style of the Beatles, drawing on the parallel characterization of members: "Mike [Nesmith] equals John [Lennon] as The Smart One. Substitute Davy [Jones] for Paul [McCartney] as The Cute One. Micky [Dolenz] is their Ringo [Starr], The Funny One. Peter [Tork] stands in for George [Harrison] as . . . The Oddball."⁷⁰ Smay drew upon two significant characteristics of many contemporary boy bands: they are manufactured, assembled from auditions or through personal connections, and there is a typecasting of members, such as "The Funny One." The Monkees and Super K's bubblegum groups caught the eye of Berry Gordy, founder of the Motown record label, who signed the Jackson Five and marketed them as "soul bubblegum."⁷¹

The Jackson Five was a band comprised of five brothers, Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, Marlon, and Michael Jackson. In Gary, Indiana, Joe Jackson realized that his sons had musical talent and molded them into a band that would perform at talent shows and as opening acts.⁷² After the Jackson Five opened for Motown bandleader, singer, and producer Bobby Taylor in 1968, Taylor allegedly Gordy and dictated, "You sign those

⁶⁹ Lefcowitz, *The Monkees Tale*, 5-6; and Eric Lefcowitz, *Monkee Business: The Revolutionary Made-For-TV Band* (Port Washington: Retrofuture Products, 2011), 3.

⁷⁰ Smay, 36.

⁷¹ Starr and Waterman, *American Popular Music*, 315.

⁷² Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, "The Jackson 5 Biography," <<http://rockhall.com/inductees/the-jackson-five/bio/>>, 2010 [accessed 28 October 2012].

boys, and do it now.”⁷³ After watching a recording of their performance, Gordy agreed. There had been black teen groups on the market prior to the Jacksons’ debut in 1968, but what differentiated the Jackson Five from those groups was that they were the first African-American act advertised for a “predominantly white teenybopper market.”⁷⁴ Larry Schweikart, University of Dayton history professor, noted Gordy’s accomplishment of Motown’s transcendence of racial lines in music and attributed this crossover to his method of presenting black R&B music, “in a polished, sophisticated (and non-threatening) way . . . that white audiences were familiar, and comfortable, with.”⁷⁵ The Jackson Five’s legacy of crossing over between soul and mainstream teen pop music influenced music in the 1980s.

Boston R&B group New Edition consisted of members Ricky Bell, Michael Bivins, Bobby Brown, Ralph Tresvant, and Ronnie DeVoe. New Edition entered and won talent competitions until they were discovered at one of the events and were signed to Streetwise Records by producer Maurice Starr, born Larry Johnson, in 1982.⁷⁶ Starr developed the group’s name as a reference to this group being a “new edition” of the Jackson Five.⁷⁷ New Edition’s debut album, *Candy Girl*, produced three R&B hits, sparking interest from MCA records, which led to the firing of Starr as their manager in

⁷³ Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, “The Jackson 5 Biography.”

⁷⁴ James Porter, “Black Bubblegum,” in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears*, ed. Kim Cooper and David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 185.

⁷⁵ Larry Schweikart, “Berry Gordy Jr. And the Original ‘Black Label’,” <<http://www.thefreemanonline.org/features/berry-gordy-jr-and-the-original-quotblack-labelquot/>>, May 2003 [accessed 14 November 2012].

⁷⁶ “New Edition,” <<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/new-edition-mn0000865016>>, 2012 [accessed 28 October 2012]; and Nikki Van Noy, *New Kids on the Block: Five Brothers and a Million Sisters* (New York: Touchstone, 2012), 30.

⁷⁷ “New Edition.”

1984 over a dispute regarding an unbalanced contract.⁷⁸ Brown left the group after New Edition's sophomore release and was replaced by solo singer Johnny Gill, who later left the group to continue with his solo career, and his departure was followed by Tresvant. The three remaining members renamed the boy band and continued successfully as Bell Biv DeVoe.

At a 1989 Bell Biv DeVoe concert, a five-member R&B group named Unique Attraction snuck backstage and performed New Edition's "Can You Stand the Rain" a capella for Bivins, impressing him enough to enlist him as their manager.⁷⁹ Bivins had two conditions; the first was to cut ties with member Marc Nelson, becoming a four-member band, and the second was that the group needed a new name.⁸⁰ The group fulfilled both conditions, and Michael McCary, Nathan Morris, Wanya Morris, and Shawn Stockman were thenceforth known as "Boyz II Men," derived from a New Edition song. Boyz II Men played an influential role in the creation of a particular 1990s boy band—98°.

After Maurice Starr's separation from New Edition, he began looking for new projects, one being the creation of a new boy band similar to New Edition but with white members.⁸¹ Starr contacted talent agent Mary Alford to search for singers for this new group, "Nynuk," a nonsensical name made up aimlessly by Starr.⁸² After months of searching, the Nynuk's final member roster listed brothers Jon and Jordan Knight, Donnie Wahlberg, Danny Wood, and Joe McIntyre. After frequent rehearsals, performances, and recording sessions, Starr pitched Nynuk to CBS Records' black music

⁷⁸ Van Noy, 30.

⁷⁹ *Behind the Music*, "Boyz II Men," episode 180 [season 5, episode 21], 16 June 2002.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Van Noy, 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 30-32.

division.⁸³ In January 1986, Nynuk “inked a deal” with the black division of CBS Records and was advised to change its name from Nynuk to the title of one of their album tracks, “New Kids on the Block (NKOTB).”⁸⁴ Their self-titled debut album did not meet with commercial success and, with the band’s fate on the line, Cecil Holmes, the New Kids’ artists and repertoire (A&R) representative and founder of CBS Records’s black division, swayed the record company to allow a second album.⁸⁵ New Kids’ second album, *Hangin’ Tough*, also debuted discouragingly, but luckily their issue was discovered before they were dropped from the label: the New Kids on the Block’s singles were being sent to R&B radio stations due to their affiliation with CBS Records’s black division, but once New Kids were no longer marketed as an R&B group and as a pop group instead, mainstream radio began to air their records and NKOTB’s popularity skyrocketed.⁸⁶ In 1990, their first single from their third album of the same title, *Step by Step*, was the group’s highest-selling single, and the album itself debuted at the number one spot, spent forty-nine weeks on the charts, sold twenty-million copies worldwide, and the Recording Industry Association of American (RIAA) certified the album’s status as (each level of platinum denoting a million in national sales).⁸⁷

On 29 January 1992, Greg McPherson, former music director for NKOTB, claimed that the group had lip-synced at concerts and that Starr and his brother’s voices had produced eighty percent of the vocals on the *Hangin’ Tough* album.⁸⁸ NKOTB had previously performed live to a background track with vocals on their second appearance

⁸³ Ibid., 40-55.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 74-76.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 129.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 156.

on the *Arsenio Hall Show*, but in response to the allegations of complete lip-syncing they performed live on *Arsenio*, verifying their authenticity.⁸⁹ The band accordingly filed a defamation suit against McPherson, who rescinded his accusations. Also in 1992, NKOTB parted ways with Maurice Starr after they felt he was more of a liability than an asset to the group.⁹⁰ New Kids on the Block released a fourth album, *Face the Music*, in 1994, that peaked at thirty-seven on the album charts and marked the end of the band's popularity.⁹¹ The group disbanded quietly later that year. Even before their breakup, the New Kids on the Block had impacted the pop music scene far more than they could have expected at that time—they had already sown the seeds of greed in a man who entered the music business in 1992.

The New Kids On the Block have been credited with renting a \$250,000-a-month charter plane, in cash, from Lou Pearlman, a curious businessman in the aviation industry.⁹² A boy band that was able to expend that large sum of money for travel expenses alone piqued Pearlman's interest. His attention shifted away from aviation and swindling investors through his fraudulent company, Trans Continental Airlines (Trans Con), and toward the creation of a boy band to fill the void in the music market left by the decline of New Kids On the Block in the early 1990s. Julian Benscher, Pearlman's business associate at Trans Con, was noted to have agreed with Pearlman's pursuit of profit in the music industry because "the departure of New Kids . . . [left] a gap in the market for teen pop performed by clean-cut boys, pop icons that were safe enough to fly under dads' radars and cute enough to entertain the moms who chaperoned their

⁸⁹ Ibid., 117-157.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 155.

⁹¹ Ibid., 162-168.

⁹² Tyler Gray, *The Hit Charade: Lou Pearlman, Boy Bands, and the Biggest Ponzi Scheme in U.S. History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 83.

daughters to concerts.”⁹³ In the summer of 1992, Pearlman enlisted the help of Gloria Sicoli, a veteran singer at Universal Studios who had links to the local civic theatre and national music industry networks. Sicoli instantly posted fliers all over Orlando, and together she and Pearlman bought space in the *Orlando Sentinel* classifieds that advertised for members of a new boy band:

TEEN MALE VOCALISTS. PRODUCER SEEKS MALE SINGERS THAT MOVE WELL, BETWEEN 16-19 YEARS OF AGE. WANTED FOR NEW KIDS-TYPE SINGING/DANCE GROUP. SEND PHOTO OR BIO OF ANY KIND.⁹⁴

After a few weeks, they had received replies from about forty applicants and began auditions which produced two standouts: fourteen-year-old Alexander James (A.J.) McLean, and eighteen-year-old Howard (Howie) Dorough, who auditioned under his stage name, Tony Donetti.⁹⁵ Sicoli informed Denise McLean, A.J. McLean’s mother, who was waiting for signs of the group’s progress, that Pearlman had decided to form a seven-member group.⁹⁶ He was not confident that five was the “magic number,” and he desired six singers for better harmonies, along with an extra member in case of commitment conflicts from any of the lead members. Pearlman later shifted his plan for a seven-boy group to one consisting of six, with five central members and one alternate.⁹⁷

After a second round of auditions were held in the fall of 1992, at Pearlman’s blimp warehouse in Kissimmee, Florida, the boy band’s roster was complete: thirteen-year-old Nick Carter, A.J. McLean, Howie Dorough, and transient members Burk

⁹³ Ibid., 94.

⁹⁴ Ibid. There is dispute in the age range listed in the ad; most sources claim twelve to eighteen were the ages being sought. This quotation, taken from Lou Pearlman’s biography, corresponds with a visual copy of the original ad as seen in a documentary, where the ages were not visible in the frame.

⁹⁵ Denise I. McLean and Nicole P. Gotlin, *Backstreet Mom: A Mother’s Tale of Backstreet Boy AJ McLean’s Rise to Fame, Struggle With Addiction And Ultimate Triumph* (Dallas: Benbella, 2003), 45-48.

⁹⁶ McLean and Gotlin, 49.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 51.

Parsons, Sam Licata, and a mysterious sixth member. Lou Pearlman remembered the sixth member's name as "Jamie" while Denise McLean recalled his name as "Damon."⁹⁸ Parsons and the sixth boy did not solidify their fate with the band, and neither did subsequent six-month member Charles Edwards.⁹⁹ The devising of the group's name came at T.G.I.Friday's in Kissimmee, where across the street was the Backstreet Market, a teen joint.¹⁰⁰ This led Pearlman to suggest the name "Backstreet Boys," which incorporated their youth with the name of a teen hangout locale. Following the departure of Licata, Kevin Richardson, twenty-one, successfully auditioned and filled the fourth spot and introduced his sixteen-year-old cousin Brian Littrell to the group, who rounded out the Backstreet Boys (BSB) as the fifth permanent member.¹⁰¹ The group had survived rounds of challenging alterations and was ready for pop music domination.

The Backstreet Boys debuted in front of 3,000 people at SeaWorld on 8 May 1993, singing the Temptations' "Get Ready." Young girls screamed in excitement during their performance and a local pop radio station disc jockey took notice and played their records, giving the group a taste of fame at the local level. Lou Pearlman spent \$3 million bringing up the Backstreet Boys, buying a full stage sound system, hiring vocal coaches and choreographers, and anything else seen as necessary—but all these expenditures did not land a record deal for the group.¹⁰²

Johnny Wright, a former manager for New Kids on the Block, and his wife Donna Wright, were hired as managers for the Backstreet Boys, and they brought with them "major league connections" and an insider's view of a previous boy band. After placing

⁹⁸ Ibid., 51-52; and Gray, 99.

⁹⁹ McLean and Gotlin, 53-54; and Gray, 101.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 103-104.

¹⁰² Ibid., 104-106.

numerous phone calls and pitching the group to record labels, Mercury Records took an interest in the band, but Pearlman claimed the deal fell through after John Mellencamp, an established Mercury recording artist, threatened to leave the label if it began to produce boy bands. BSB caught a break when Dave McPherson, an advocate for the band, left Mercury Records and joined Jive Records. Donna Wright called McPherson during a BSB concert to furnish audio evidence of girls excitedly screaming for the boys, exhibiting the marketability of the group, which ultimately landed them a deal with Jive in 1994.¹⁰³

The Backstreet Boys flew to Sweden to record with Denniz PoP, who produced 1980s pop group Ace of Base, but when their first single, “We’ve Got it Goin’ On,” debuted in the United States in 1995, it peaked at the sixty-ninth spot on the *Billboard* charts before falling off. Pearlman financed their way to Europe under the Trans Con name to build hype and experience. This business strategy proved profitable as their 1996 single, “I’ll Never Break Your Heart,” reached gold status in Austria, having sold 500,000 copies nationally, and achieved platinum status in Germany. BSB went on to perform sold-out concerts in Asia and Canada, and had sold



Figure 2 – *Bop* magazine’s July 1997 cover asking, “Do you have what it takes to be a BACKSTREET BOYS girl?” (Bop).

¹⁰³ Ibid., 107-108.

8.5 million records before 1997.¹⁰⁴ After finding success and popularity overseas, BSB returned to the United States. “Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)” was released as a single on 10 June 1997, and it garnered enough attention that teenage-girl magazine, *Bop*, placed the Backstreet Boys on its July 1997 cover and posed the question, “Do you have what it takes to be a BACKSTREET BOYS girl?” (figure 2).¹⁰⁵ By the end of 1997, the Backstreet Boys had broken into the American market with dynamism as their American debut album, *Backstreet Boys*, topped off at number four on the *Billboard* 200, spending 133 weeks on that chart, and they embarked on a sixty-city, twenty-country tour.¹⁰⁶ As of 2008, the Backstreet Boys’ American debut album had sold 14 million records nationally and 28 million copies worldwide.

In September 1998, four of the Backstreet Boys sued Pearlman, accusing him of pocketing \$10 million while leaving the group to split \$300,000 between the five of them.¹⁰⁷ The young men asserted that they were deceived by Pearlman into signing contracts without knowing the fees Pearlman and Trans Con associates received, that Pearlman and his company had failed to register as a talent agent and as a talent agency, and that they sought to void all contracts between the group and Pearlman.¹⁰⁸ While still in the midst of the lawsuit, BSB began recording their sophomore album, *Millennium*.¹⁰⁹ In October 1998, the Backstreet Boys’ popularity and profitability escalated to the point

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 108-123.

¹⁰⁵ “Quit Playing Games (With My Heart),” <<http://www.allmusic.com/album/quit-playing-games-with-my-heart-mw0001885865>>, 2012 [accessed 15 November 2012]; and “Cover,” *Bop* magazine, July 1997.

¹⁰⁶ “Backstreet Boys – Backstreet Boys,” <<http://www.billboard.com/#/album/backstreet-boys/backstreet-boys/195410>>, 2012 [accessed 30 October 2012]; and Gray, 124.

¹⁰⁷ Gray, 152.

¹⁰⁸ Alex Finkelstein, “Backstreet Boys: Local manager milked millions,” <<http://www.bizjournals.com/orlando/stories/1998/09/14/story2.html?page=all>>, 14 September 1998 [accessed 30 October 2012].

¹⁰⁹ “Backstreet Boys Settle With Pearlman, Record New Album,” <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1425240/backstreet-boys-settle-with-pearlman-record-new-album.jhtml>>, 15 October 1998 [accessed 30 October 2012].

that *Tiger Beat*, a teenage girl magazine, released “The Official Backstreet Boys Summer Tour Mag,” which promised consumers intimate connections such as, “shopping snapshots,” “personal messages,” “pix from the early days,” and “21 giant BSB color posters, centerfolds & pin-ups” (figure 3).¹¹⁰ *Millennium* debuted on 18 May 1999, at the number one spot on the *Billboard* 200, and as of 2012 stood as the number four best-selling album since 1991, behind Metallica, Shania Twain, and Alanis



Figure 3 – The cover of “The Official Backstreet Boys Summer Tour Mag!” (Tiger Beat).

Morrisette, in the era of the SoundScan, a sales tracking system.¹¹¹ The Backstreet Boys and Pearlman reached an undisclosed settlement in court shortly after beginning work on *Millennium*, in favor of the band members, who portrayed Pearlman as a manipulator, as he was found to have contractually made himself the sixth Backstreet Boy.¹¹² With their recording contracts rendered null and void through a following suit between Zomba, the parent company of Jive, and Lou Pearlman and his company, Trans Con, Jive re-signed the Backstreet Boys to a \$60 million, five-record deal that promised them twenty-percent royalties.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ “The Official Backstreet Boys Summer Tour Mag!” *Tiger Beat* magazine, October 1998, cover.

¹¹¹ “Millennium – Backstreet Boys,” <<http://www.billboard.com/#/album/backstreet-boys/millennium/349294>>, 2012 [accessed 30 October 2012]; and “Metallica Still Have Top Selling Album of the Soundscan Era; Garth Brooks Top Selling Artist,” <<http://www.vintagevinylnews.com/2012/01/metallica-still-have-top-selling-album.html>>, 5 January 2012 [accessed 30 October 2012].

¹¹² Gray, 153.

¹¹³ Mark Lewis, “Backstreet Boys Pave Golden Road In New Deal With Jive Records,” <<http://www.soundspike.com/story2/421/backstreet-boys-pave-golden-road-in-new-deal-with-jive-records/>>, 11 November 1999 [accessed 30 October 2012].

Black & Blue, the Backstreet Boys' third United States album, was released in 2000 at the top spot on *Billboard*'s 200, and has sold more than five million copies.¹¹⁴ On 9 February 2001, The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published a review of a BSB concert that revealed the state of frenzy created by the group and their fans as earplugs were being sold for three dollars at the music event.¹¹⁵ Their compilation album, *The Hits: Chapter One*, debuted on 17 November 2001, landing at number four on the charts.¹¹⁶ In 2002, the Backstreet Boys sued Zomba Recording Corp. for \$75 million, claiming the company had promoted member Nick Carter's solo career at the expense of the group.¹¹⁷ In 2003, A.J. McLean addressed his entrance in 2001 into rehabilitation for cocaine use and alcoholism, which had led to the band's hiatus between those years.¹¹⁸ 2005's *Never Gone*, BSB's comeback album, debuted at number three, and was the last album to be recorded by all five members.¹¹⁹ Kevin Richardson announced in June 2006 that he would leave the boy band to pursue other interests, and the group decided not to replace him, but stated that, "the door will always be open for him to return to the Backstreet Boys."¹²⁰

The four-member Backstreet Boys released two more albums, *Unbreakable* (17 November 2007) and *This Is Us* (24 October 2009), peaking at the seventh and ninth

¹¹⁴ "Ask Billboard: Home Charts Edition" <<http://www.billboard.com/#/column/chartbeat/ask-billboard-home-charts-edition-1005173962.story?page=3>>, 6 May 2011 [accessed 30 October 2012]; and "Billboard 200: Week of December 09, 2000," <<http://www.billboard.com/album/backstreet-boys/black-blue/451266#/charts/billboard-200?chartDate=2000-12-09>>, 2000 [accessed 30 October 2012].

¹¹⁵ Monica L. Haynes, "Backstreet Boys, fans raise roof," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 9 February 2001, B-18.

¹¹⁶ "Backstreet Boys Album & Song Chart History," <<http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100#/artist/backstreet-boys/chart-history/171765?f=305&g=Albums>>, 2012 [accessed 30 October 2012].

¹¹⁷ "Backstreet Boys' Backs Are Up," <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/11/27/entertainment/main531121.shtml>>, 27 November 2002 [accessed 30 October 2012].

¹¹⁸ *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, "Addicted: Backstreet Boy A.J. McLean," Fox, 10 December 2003.

¹¹⁹ "Backstreet Boys Album & Song Chart History."

¹²⁰ Gil Kaufman, "Kevin Richardson Quits Backstreet Boys: Group has no plans to replace singer," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1535035/kevin-richardson-quits-backstreet-boys.jhtml>>, 26 June 2006 [accessed 30 October 2012].

spots on the charts respectively and experiencing a short-lived presence on *Billboard's* 200 for a mere five weeks.¹²¹ The Backstreet Boys had an extremely prosperous career despite their hardships, and their rise and descent are reflected in another boy band that was developed by their founder, Lou Pearlman.

After a supposed clash in 1995 with the Backstreet Boys over the group not wanting to record a song that he wrote himself, Lou Pearlman decided to create another boy band. Chris Kirkpatrick, twenty-three years old and a runner-up for a spot in the Backstreet Boys, conveniently approached Pearlman to discuss the idea of a second group. Eighteen-year-old Joey Fatone, who worked at Universal Studios with Kirkpatrick, became the second member. Johnny Wright was able to convince the parents of Justin Timberlake, who at just fourteen years of age had already had a singing career since the age of three and had previously been cast as a member on the *Mickey Mouse Club (MMC)*, to sign him into this new group. Timberlake recruited fellow *MMC* alumnus JC Chasez, nineteen, who filled the fourth spot in the group.¹²² The bass of the group, Jason Galasso, Fatone's classmate, did not work out with the band, and Timberlake's mother and Pearlman worked together to complete *NSYNC's line-up with the recruitment of Lance Bass.¹²³ Pearlman's manufacturing of *NSYNC backfired during his pitching of the group to labels as the group was considered too similar to the Backstreet Boys, which led to no record deals.¹²⁴

Pearlman decided that since his original plan worked for the Backstreet Boys first gaining overseas popularity, the same path should be followed for *NSYNC, also stylized

¹²¹ "Backstreet Boys Album & Song Chart History."

¹²² Gray, 128-129.

¹²³ Lance Bass, *Out of Sync: A Memoir* (New York: Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2007), 21-29.

¹²⁴ Gray, 131.

as ‘N Sync, and he flew the group to Europe to record and gain exposure.¹²⁵ The band signed with Bertlesmann Music Group (BMG) Ariola Munich, and again the boy band formula proved a hit in Europe, particularly in Germany, and in Asia.¹²⁶ While in Europe, the two bands were frequently compared, with *NSYNC being perceived as “Backstreet Boys wannabes,” recalled Lance Bass. The two groups were generally kept separate, and Bass speculated in hindsight that it was intentional. He remembered that when they would run into each other it would be “very cordial but always cold,” because of rumors regarding what a member from one group had supposedly said about one from the other group. This also hindered both groups’ ability to, as Bass put it, “talk about the money we were making—or, more accurately, weren’t making.” After a show in Budapest, Vince DeGiorgio, A&R representative for Radio Corporation of America (RCA) Records, an American affiliate of BMG, informed the group that he wanted to release the band on RCA Records.¹²⁷

After *NSYNC’s American release of its eponymous debut album in March 1998, the group received airplay on radio stations during a slow period for the Backstreet Boys, and not long after that the Disney Channel offered *NSYNC a one-hour television special dedicated solely to the band after BSB backed out of the gig two weeks prior to its filming. It was popular with viewers and was frequently aired for six months. Despite their popularity and selling fifteen million albums worldwide, the members of *NSYNC were “still dirt poor,” living on a thirty-five dollar per diem and not receiving any royalties even though merchandise was “selling like crazy.” They were told by Pearlman that their half of the money was “subject to commission, and all of it was subject to the

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.; and Bass, 42-43.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 58-59.

seemingly bottomless [claims of] ‘recoupment.’”¹²⁸ In November 1998, the same month their seasonal album *Home for Christmas* was released, the band members were handed their first check since becoming *NSYNC three years earlier.¹²⁹ Each check was made out in the amount of twenty-five-thousand dollars and with that Pearlman’s second boy band had lost all confidence in him.¹³⁰ An identical issue that the Backstreet Boys had faced arose when *NSYNC tried to renegotiate their contract, which Pearlman snubbed—Lou Pearlman was the sixth member of the group.¹³¹

*NSYNC’s failed attempts to negotiate a better contract left the members with only one route: sue Pearlman and void their contract. The boy band’s freedom depended on a loophole that the band’s lawyer found—Pearlman had contracted to find a record label, which he had accomplished by means of BMG, and then release the album in the United States within a year of finishing their album, which he did not fulfill.¹³² *NSYNC signed a new deal with Jive and Pearlman sued them for \$150 million on 11 September 1999 on the grounds of breach of contract. *NSYNC countersued, “claiming fraud, breach of contract, and breach of fiduciary duty,” and in December 1999 the group settled with Pearlman with undisclosed details.¹³³

*NSYNC released its third album, aptly named *No Strings Attached*, on 21 March 2000, breaking music history by selling 1.2 million copies on the day of its release, and 2.5 million by the end of the week. It became the first “album of the year” of the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 61-64.

¹²⁹ “Home for Christmas,” <<http://www.allmusic.com/album/home-for-christmas-mw0000044342>>, 2012 [accessed 30 October 2012].

¹³⁰ Bass, 66-67.

¹³¹ Gray, 156.

¹³² Ibid.; and Bass, 74.

¹³³ Idem, 156-158.

millennium.¹³⁴ *No Strings Attached* went on to sell eleven million copies and achieved the rare diamond level sales mark, attained by selling more than ten million albums, a feat accomplished by only 109 records as of 14 November 2012, including *NSYNC's debut album, fellow boy band Backstreet Boys' first two albums, and pop princess Britney Spears' debut and follow-up albums.¹³⁵ In July 2000, *Tiger Beat* featured *NSYNC on its cover and claimed, "'N Sync Rule!' *TB* Counts The Reasons Why" (figure 4).¹³⁶



Figure 4 - *NSYNC on *Tiger Beat*'s July 2000 cover, with BSB's Nick Carter, Britney Spears, and Hanson, another boy band comprised of three brothers (*Tiger Beat*).

Bop magazine also featured the group on its December 2000 cover and promised its teenage girl readers that, with the purchase of this specific issue, they would "spend 96 hours with 'N Sync" (figure 5).¹³⁷ This magazine cover, as well as many others that focused on boy bands used marketing strategies that Beatles magazines in the 1960s employed. They promised intimate yet trivial information

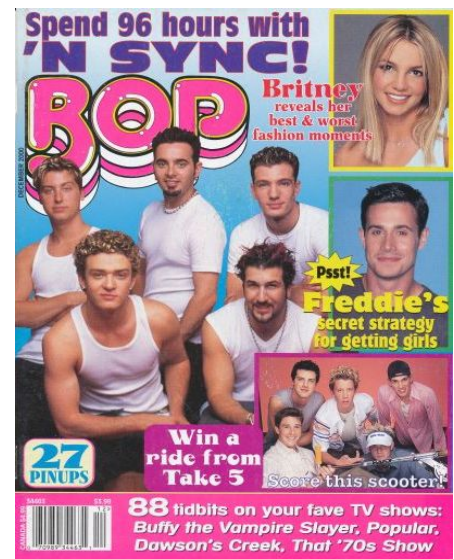


Figure 5 - *NSYNC on *Bop*'s December 2000 cover (*Bop*).

about the band and its members, such as their favorite color or food, to build the rapport between the bands and their fans. *NSYNC's fourth album, *Celebrity*, released on 24

¹³⁴ Bass, 81.

¹³⁵ Gray, 158; and "Diamond Awards," <http://riaa.com/goldandplatinum.php?content_selector=top-diamond-awards>, 14 November 2012 [accessed 14 November 2012].

¹³⁶ "Cover," *Tiger Beat* magazine, July 2000.

¹³⁷ "Cover," *Bop* magazine, December 2000.

July 2001, debuted at number one on the *Billboard* 200, went five-times platinum, selling over five million copies, and its recording process foreshadowed the future of the band. Bass recollected, “We each knew our place in the band . . . any changes from the so-called norm immediately stood out to us. The biggest had to do with Justin. On *No Strings Attached* JC shared most of the leads. . . . On *Celebrity* Justin took the lead.”¹³⁸ When *NSYNC sang “The Star-Spangled Banner” in the summer of 2004 for a celebrity basketball game, “Challenge for the Children,” the spectators did not know that this was their last performance as *NSYNC. After the game, Justin Timberlake announced he was going to pursue a solo career and the group disbanded shortly thereafter.¹³⁹

The Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC had garnered crowds of female fans, and a twenty-two-year-old college student named Jeffrey (Jeff) Timmons yearned for that form of attention.¹⁴⁰ “We [Timmons’ original group of singers] thought it would be awesome if we could sing for some girls at a party,” Timmons explained in E!’s “15 Awesomest Boy Bands” television special.¹⁴¹ Timmons moved to Hollywood, and after his band mates got “cold feet,” he recruited fellow twenty-two-year-olds Nicholas (Nick) Lachey and Justin Jeffre, both alumni of Cincinnati, Ohio’s School for Creative and Performing Arts (SCPA), who dropped out of college and joined Timmons in California.¹⁴² Lachey, without much effort, had his nineteen-year-old brother Andrew (Drew) Lachey, also an alumnus of SCPA, join the group in Hollywood, leaving behind his emergency medical technician job in Brooklyn.¹⁴³ These four members formed the R&B pop boy band 98°.

¹³⁸ Bass, 90.

¹³⁹ Idem, 149-155.

¹⁴⁰ “15 Awesomest Boy Bands.”

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.; and Lyndsey Parker, “98 Degrees Biography,” <<http://music.yahoo.com/98-degrees/biography/>>, 2012 [accessed 1 November 2012].

¹⁴³ Ibid.

98°'s attempt to sneak backstage at a Boyz II Men concert caught the attention of a local radio station covering the event, and the station asked them to sing on-air.¹⁴⁴ Paris D'Jon, R&B singer Montell Jordan's co-manager, witnessed the group sing live for the radio station, enjoyed it, and offered them the opportunity to open for Montell Jordan on his national tour, which they accepted.¹⁴⁵ R&B pioneer Motown signed 98°, which fostered the band's R&B sound. The label's president, Andre Harrell, deemed the group not "flavorful enough," and while 98° recorded its album, Harrell asked the members to move to New York "to understand [black] culture and not just mimic it."¹⁴⁶

98° released their self-titled debut album in July 1997 to an uninspiring performance on the album charts. Jeff Timmons recalled breaking down in November 1997 during a discussion with George Jackson, Harrell's replacement as president of Motown, stating he was having an identity crisis "because of the things [Motown] wanted [98°] to become that we weren't."¹⁴⁷ Jackson responded to Timmons' distress by promising the band members that they would have more control in the development of their second album. Before recording their second album, the group members took to Europe and Asia, as BSB and *NSYNC had, to market themselves, and the band also recorded "True to Your Heart" with fellow Motown artist Stevie Wonder for Disney's *Mulan* soundtrack.¹⁴⁸ In early 1998, the band began working on its sophomore album, *98° and Rising*, which was released on 20 October 1998.¹⁴⁹ It peaked at number fourteen

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.; and John Bush, "98°," <<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/98°-mn0000474787>>, 1 January 1996 [accessed 1 November 2012].

¹⁴⁶ Rebecca Ascher-Walsh, "98[Degrees], rising," <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,272684,00.html>>, 13 August 1999 [accessed 1 November 2012].

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ "98° and Rising," <<http://www.allmusic.com/album/98°-and-rising-mw0000043789>>, 2012 [accessed 1 November 2012].

on *Billboard*'s 200, and achieved quadruple platinum status. On 1 January 1999, named "Black Thursday" in the record industry, Universal Music Group (UMG) purchased PolyGram Records, the parent company of the Motown label, which led to the dropping of approximately 250 Polygram acts across the labels as a consequence of the merge.¹⁵⁰ Luckily *98° and Rising*'s success ensured *98°* a transference from Motown to Universal Records.¹⁵¹



Figure 6 - *98°* on the cover of *Young and Modern*'s August 1999 issue (*Young and Modern*).

Young & Modern (YM), a teenage girl magazine, featured *98°*, with a shirtless Jeff Timmons and Nick Lachey, on its August 1999 cover, and labeled the group as "summer's sizzlin' boy band," following *98° and Rising*'s popularity (figure 6).¹⁵² In September 1999, *98°* collaborated with pop diva Mariah Carey and R&B singer Joe to record "Thank God I Found You" for Carey's album, and the single hit the top of *Billboard*'s "Hot 100 Singles" chart the week of 19 February 2000.¹⁵³ *98°* released its holiday album, *This Christmas*, on 19 October 1999, which was certified platinum a

¹⁵⁰ Fred Goodman, "Black Thursday: Massive layoffs in PolyGram-Universal merger," *Rolling Stone*, 4 March 1999, 27-37.

¹⁵¹ Ascher-Walsh, "98[Degrees], rising."

¹⁵² "Cover," *Young & Modern* magazine, August 1999.

¹⁵³ Robert Mancini, "98 Degrees Records With Mariah, Preps Christmas Album, Gets Tour Rolling," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1426925/98-degrees-records-with-mariah-preps-christmas-album-gets-tour-rolling.jhtml>>, 13 September 1999 [accessed 2 November 2012]; and "The Billboard 200," *Billboard* 112, no. 8 (19 February 2000): 91.

month after its release and peaked at twenty-seven on the *Billboard* 200.¹⁵⁴ The band released its fourth album, *Revelation*, on 26 September 2000, and it debuted at number two on *Billboard*'s album chart, which made it 98°'s highest ranking album on the charts.¹⁵⁵ It was certified double-platinum on 1 November 2000.¹⁵⁶ The quartet released a compilation album in 2002 and subsequently entered an "extended hiatus" as members pursued other endeavors.¹⁵⁷

EW published its 475th issue on 5 March 1999, with its cover reading, "*NSYNC and Britney Spears! Inside the New Teen Pop: The Money, Music & Madness." In the featured article, "Bubblegum Blows Up!" an Elektra Records executive said, "This teen stuff isn't just driving the music business, it *is* the music business."¹⁵⁸ Though the 1990s teen pop boy bands were often referred to as a single entity, it is worth noting the differences between 98°, the Backstreet Boys, and *NSYNC. Lou Pearlman had no connection to 98°, therefore the band's image and style of music looked and sounded different from the androgynous fashioning and heavily synthesized tracks of the Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC. 98° was also not manufactured to be sold to a record company, as the group had assembled itself prior to any attempts to become famous. *NSYNC and BSB were manufactured boy bands, groups that were created with commercial appeal as a driving component. Thus, their contributions to an emerging avant-garde masculinity among millennials at the turn of the twenty-first century was all

¹⁵⁴ "This Christmas," <<http://www.allmusic.com/album/this-christmas-mw0000669410/awards>>, 2012 [1 November 2012].

¹⁵⁵ "The Billboard 200," *Billboard* 112, no. 42 (14 October 2000): 118.

¹⁵⁶ "RIAA – Gold & Platinum Searchable Database," <http://riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?content_selector=gold-platinum-searchable-database>, [accessed 02 November 2012]. Author searched for the term "Revelation," then clicked on "98°" below search bar.

¹⁵⁷ Hillary Busis, "It's 'The Hardest Thing' not to swoon at 98 Degrees' 'Today' show reunion," <<http://popwatch.ew.com/2012/08/17/98-degrees-today/>>, 17 August 2012 [accessed 2 November 2012].

¹⁵⁸ Andrew Essex and Dave Karger, "Bubblegum Blows Up!" *Entertainment Weekly* no. 475 (5 March 1999): 22.

the more compelling, as it contrasted against their superficial and safe constructs. On 8 October 1999, *EW* reader Blake Smith submitted the following response to BSB being on the cover of a previous issue, illustrating the typical perspective of boy bands being strictly “created” entities that offered no incisive social commentary on gender:

Thank you so much for giving the Backstreet Boys another cover. Please be so kind as to print my letter immediately after one from a 12-year-old girl who thinks they are the best group on the planet, so I can offer the counterpoint that they are still just product, capitalizing on a demographic until said demographic finds them no longer appealing.¹⁵⁹

A second difference was the number of the members in the Backstreet Boys, *NSYNC, and 98°. *NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys were quintets while 98° was a quartet, contributing to a different blend of harmonies as 98° adopted more soulful, barbershop harmonies. Despite the differences between this trinity of boy bands, they were seminal icons of millennial teen culture. The boy band brand’s legacy continued to be visible in American popular culture as *Rolling Stone*, *E!*, and *Billboard* all created lists in 2012 of the “best,” “awesomest,” and “biggest” boy bands (see table 1).

This chapter intends to document how millennial boy bands reflected generation Y’s male culture to a greater extent than is usually acknowledged in American culture. Generally dismissed given the presumed superficiality of bubblegum pop music, these bands—as evidenced in analyses of their songs’ lyrics and music videos—had a deeper connection to millennial male culture. The boy bands mirrored the narcissism, the sexuality, and the anger and aggression symptomatic of millennial men.

¹⁵⁹ Blake A. Smith in “Mail: Backstreet Boys,” <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,271012,00.html>>, 8 October 1999 [accessed 16 November 2012].

<i>Rolling Stone's "The Best Boy Bands of All Time"</i> [*]		<i>E!'s "Top 15 Awesomest Boy Bands"</i> [†]		<i>Billboard's "10 Biggest Boy Bands (1987-2012)"</i> [^]	
1	Backstreet Boys	1	Backstreet Boys	1	Boyz II Men
2	The Beatles	2	*NSYNC	2	Backstreet Boys
3	New Kids on the Block	3	New Kids on the Block	3	New Kids on the Block
4	The Jackson 5	4	New Edition	4	*NSYNC
5	*NSYNC	5	Boyz II Men	5	All-4-One
6	The Monkees	6	One Direction	6	112
7	Jonas Brothers	7	Jonas Brothers	7	98°
8	The Beach Boys	8	98°	8	Jonas Brothers
9	Take That	9	Hanson	9	Hanson
10	New Edition	10	Take That	10	New Edition
		11	LFO		
		12	Menudo		
		13	O-Town		
		14	Color Me Badd		
		15	The Wanted		

Table 1 – A compilation of three lists produced in 2012 that ranked the most popular boy bands.
^{*}“Readers’ Poll: The Best Boy Bands of All Time,”
<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/pictures/readers-poll-the-best-boy-bands-of-all-time-20120328>>,
 28 March 2012 [accessed 3 November 2012].
[†]*E! Entertainment Special*, “E! Entertainment Special: 15 Awesomest Boy Bands,” 24 July 2012.
[^] Jeff Benjamin, Jillian Mapes, and Sarah Maloy, “10 Biggest Boy Bands (1987-2012),”
<http://www.billboard.com/column/billboard-lists/10-biggest-boy-bands-1987-2012-1006396752.story>>, 27 March 2012 [accessed 3 November 2012].

Anger and Aggression in Millennial Men

I really miss the feel of your kiss / But can I have back my things before I get really pissed? / You had my heart, my soul, my attention / But you walked out my life with my CD collection / Breaking up is hard enough / Say you had nothing but I called your bluff / You got my sweaters, my hat, I can't find my cat / The hardest part of breaking up is getting back your stuff.¹⁶⁰

—2Gether, “The Hardest Part About Breaking Up (Is Getting Back Your Stuff,” 2000

2Gether, also typographically stylized as 2GE+HER on its logo on albums and film releases, has a curious history. 2Gether began as a fictional boy band assembled for an MTV original film that then went on to become a legitimate music group, owing to the 1990s pop music craze. The 2000 made-for-television film, *2Gether*, was a mock-

¹⁶⁰ 2Gether, “The Hardest Part About Breaking Up (Is Getting Back Your Stuff),” *2gether Again* (New York: TVT Records, 2000).

documentary that chronicled Bob Buss' journey to create a five-member boy band, each member fitting a designated prototype, to rival another boy band he had built, named Whoa!, which had fired him—an obvious depiction of Lou Pearlman.¹⁶¹ A soundtrack album was released with tracks of songs performed by the boy bands in the film and it peaked at number thirty-five on the *Billboard* 200, spending eleven weeks on the chart. 2Gether opened for Britney Spears on her summer tour, and was given a weekly MTV television series that was short lived due to the death of Michael Cuccione, who played the youngest member, Jason “Q.T.” Knight.¹⁶² Before Cuccione passed away, the group had released *2Gether Again*, a follow-up album in 2000 with songs from the television show, which peaked at number fifteen on *Billboard*'s top 200 albums chart.¹⁶³ “The Hardest Part About Breaking Up (Is Getting Back Your Stuff)” was a single from 2Gether's second album, and millennial boy culture's theme of anger and aggression is evident, but upon further scrutiny the song illustrated one particular aspect of men's fury and its connection to women.

The members of 2Gether sang about their loss of personal items following the termination of a relationship in “The Hardest Part About Breaking Up (Is Getting Back Your Stuff),” but a more profound significance of this song relied on the connection between the lost items and the means for their accumulation—money. The female antagonist in this song “took” the protagonist's belongings seized trivial items that could have been easily repurchased, unless the man could not afford to replace them given his weakened earning power because of women's amplified influence in the workplace.

¹⁶¹ *2Gether*, dir. Nigel Dick (2000; New York, NY: MTV, 2001 DVD).

¹⁶² MacKenzie Wilson, “2gether,” <<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/2gether-mn0000578133>>, 2012 [accessed 2 November 2012].

¹⁶³ “The Billboard 200,” *Billboard* 112, no. 42 (14 October 2000): 118.

Young generation Y men witnessed women's rise in the workplace and their increasing salaries, no doubt troubling many young men who felt emasculated and devalued because men had historically been the sole or majority income providers for families. In 2003, when the eldest millennials were graduating from college, the news website for Cable News Network (CNN) posted an article which noted that twenty-four percent of wives in a two-income relationship earned more than their husbands, and when working wives who were married to unemployed men were included in the count, that percentage rose to thirty percent.¹⁶⁴

As millennial young men began to enter the workforce, they not only faced the same frustrations their fathers had endured with their mothers, but also the vexations of their female peers' ascension in economic power. *USA Today* published an online article in 2010 that elucidated young women's rise in income levels, particularly in the nation's largest cities. Single, childless women between the ages of twenty-two and thirty earned more, on average, than their male counterparts in thirty-nine out of fifty of the prevalent American areas, the biggest gap occurring in Atlanta, Georgia, where those women earned twenty-one percent more than men in the same demographic cohort.¹⁶⁵ In "The Hardest Part About Breaking Up (Is Getting Back Your Stuff)," 2Gether, as a single entity, went on stating that "I can't believe I went out with a kleptomaniac."¹⁶⁶ In actuality, there was a possibility that the singer's previous lover may have purchased the items in question with the money she earned that exceeded his wages. 2Gether's song

¹⁶⁴ Jeanne Sahadi, "When she makes more than he," <<http://money.cnn.com/2003/02/28/commentary/everyday/sahadi/index.htm>>, 3 March 2003 [accessed 3 November 2012].

¹⁶⁵ Paul Wiseman, "Young, single, childless women out-earn male counterparts," <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2010-09-01-single-women_N.htm>, 2 September 2010 [accessed 3 November 2012].

¹⁶⁶ 2Gether, "The Hardest Part About Breaking Up (Is Getting Back Your Stuff)."

exuded anger toward females, but the band's name itself was an illustration of aggression.

2Gether's logo depicted the band name's stylized as 2GE+HER (figure 7). The presentation of the band's name in this manner emphasized the latter half of the 2GE+HER, visually splitting "HER" from the rest of the name, leaving their name to be interpreted as "to get her." This phrase implied an aggressive acquisition of a female and is quite sexual in nature—and also could imply revenge (out to get her). 2Gether was actualized

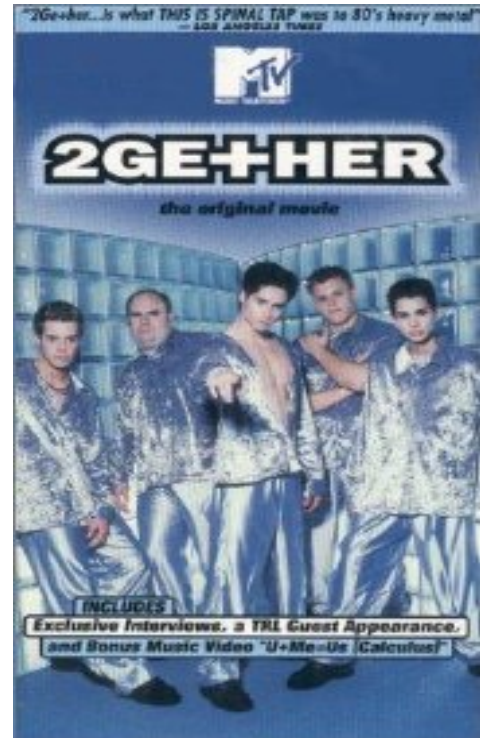


Figure 7 – DVD cover for 2Gether

through the careers of *NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys, boy bands which also echoed these qualities of anger and aggression.

*NSYNC's "It Makes Me Ill" revealed aggressive nuances similar to 2Gether's alternative reading of its name. JC Chasez sang, "I can tell that you don't really love that guy / So there's no need for you to go and waste your time / I think you know I love you more / Girl you gotta let him go / I want you so just give him the boot."¹⁶⁷ Projecting a sense of entitlement in a relationship with an already unavailable female, the group members sang about how seeing her in a relationship with another male made them "ill," and both lead singers, Chasez and Justin Timberlake, added an aggressive, gravelly tone to their singing voices not present in other songs. Anger stemming from jealousy has had grave consequences in recent American history, an example being the 2012 case of nineteen-year-old Brian Douglas White. On 4 April 2012, Brian Douglas White broke

¹⁶⁷ *NSYNC, "It Makes Me Ill," *No Strings Attached* (New York: Jive Records, 2000).

into his seventeen-year-old ex-girlfriend's home in Detroit and murdered her current boyfriend and her mother with an axe before shooting himself, but she escaped with "non-life-threatening injuries."¹⁶⁸ *NSYNC's expression of young men's anger and aggression extended past lyrics and into visual representations in their music video for "Bye Bye Bye" (2000).

As the first single from the second album, *No Strings Attached*, which was also the first album after separating from Lou Pearlman, *NSYNC's music video for "Bye Bye Bye" was a palpable retort to a nasty relationship and an angry end to that relationship. The music video opened with the panning of a stage with *Libertas*, Latin for "freedom," painted on its bottom border as *NSYNC's five members descended onto the stage as marionettes dangling from the hands of a young female manipulator, who metaphorically represented Pearlman while the strings controlling the band members



Figure 8 – *Libertas* in "Bye Bye Bye" (Zomba).



Figure 9 – *NSYNC as marionettes in "Bye Bye Bye" (Zomba).

signified the lies and mishandling of the group in his hands (figures 8 and 9). Treating them as toys, the young woman cuts the band members off their strings to chase them down in a game of cat and mouse, with the young men escaping and finding their freedom. The video contained very aggressive choreography that featured strong, sharp

¹⁶⁸ David Boroff, "Teen uses axe in double murder-suicide," <http://articles.nydailynews.com/2012-04-06/news/31296385_1_double-murder-suicide-axe-detroit-free-press>, 6 April 2012 [accessed 4 November 2012].

movements and consecutive jumps which landed with force. The music video for “Bye Bye Bye” was a response to Pearlman’s underhanded business tactics that displayed rage and hostility while *NSYNC, in what could be interpreted as mocking, stated, “I don’t want to be a fool in this game for two / So I’m leaving you behind / Bye bye bye.”¹⁶⁹ The music video, with its female antagonist, also illustrated the anxiety over women gaining power. The young woman in the music video looked down upon the boys in the band as they dangled helplessly from their strings, and the members of *NSYNC ran from her when they were released from her control. The music video for “Bye Bye Bye” expressed *NSYNC’s overt anger with Lou Pearlman and covert anger at women, but the Backstreet Boys’ “Don’t Want You Back” clearly articulated animosity toward women.

“Don’t Want You Back” was an album track, not released as a single, from the Backstreet Boys’ *Millennium* album. It described a relationship that started from a love-at-first-sight scenario from the group’s perspective, with a presumably female significant other—although the lyrics did not provide any indication of the gender—who pursued the group most likely for its fame. As the lyrics explained, “You hit me faster than a shark attack / You saw my picture on the Backstreet’s Back, alright.”¹⁷⁰ The enmity manifested when the group admitted to its anger at being a victim of lust, “I should have known that I would be / Another victim of your sexuality / But now we’re done and over with / Don’t want you back / ‘Cause you’re no good for me.” Backstreet Boys’ “Don’t Want You Back” and *NSYNC’s “Bye Bye Bye” music video both reflected young men’s anger and anxiety about young women who were becoming more empowered and independent at the turn of the twenty-first century.

¹⁶⁹ *NSYNC, “It Makes Me Ill,” *No Strings Attached* (New York: Jive Records, 2000).

¹⁷⁰ Backstreet Boys, “Don’t Want You Back,” *Millennium* (New York: Jive Records, 1999).

Like “Bye, Bye Bye,” 98°’s “The Way You Want Me To” music video in 2000 also featured young women who controlled men. In this music video, a group of teen girls began playing a video game that featured four separate activities, each focusing on



Figure 10 – Jeff Timmons fighting a Britney Spears lookalike, female on left, in “The Way You Want Me To” (Universal).

one of the members of 98° in male-dominated activities.

Nick Lachey appeared in an arcade-shooter video game,

Drew Lachey participated in a skydiving race, Justin

Jeffre was in a *Daytona*-like racing game, and Jeff

Timmons posed as a combat fighter. The girls playing the games had expert control over the boys. The most interesting visual of this video involved Timmons’ fighting sequence. The first bout featured Timmons fighting two female characters, one in a Chinese silk dress and the other exhibiting a striking resemblance to Britney Spears in her 1998 “...Baby One More Time” music video (figure 10). Britney Spears was a popular entertainer at the time of this music video’s release. This music video promoted the idea of a boy band member defeating an empowered “pop princess,” or at the very least, the *idea* of her, through a virtual clone.

Anger and aggression were not necessarily only demonstrated in video acts and lyrics of hostility and opposition, but also in terms of boy band sexuality. The Backstreet Boys’ international debut album contained a song titled “Boys Will Be Boys,” never released on any Backstreet Boys American album but featured in the 1996 American film

Kazaam, which starred basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, and in the motion picture soundtrack.¹⁷¹ This song provided evidence of heavy New Kids on the Block-influence, from its 1980s pop feel and the frequent use of layering of voices on the chorus. "Boys Will Be Boys" featured sexually aggressive lines such as, "I try to get closer / And you always push me away / You tell me it's much too soon / But I just can't help it / I always gotta make a play. . . . Boys will be boys," and "I hear you saying / That you think that we should wait / And I can't hold on anymore / My body's calling for you / So please don't hesitate."¹⁷² This song may not have been released in the United States or as a single in the international realm because its lyrics dropped hints of peer pressure and forcible sexual assault, and it contravened Julian Benscher's idea of a boy band that was "safe enough to fly under dads' radars."¹⁷³ "Boys Will Be Boys" delivered a strong message that the pop boys bands of the 1990s reflected generation Y's young men's aggression and anger, and blended together those two themes with sexuality, another subject in the discourse of millennial boy culture.

Sexuality in Millennial Men

I'm gonna fingerbang-bang you into my life / Girl, you like to fingerbang and it's alright / 'Cause I'm the king of fingerbang, let's not fight / I'll just fingerbang-bang you every night.¹⁷⁴

—"Fingerbang," from Comedy Central's *South Park*, 2000

¹⁷¹ "Kazaam [Original Soundtrack]," <<http://www.allmusic.com/album/kazaam-original-soundtrack-mw0000184144>>, 2012 [accessed 4 November 2012].

¹⁷² Backstreet Boys, "Boys Will Be Boys," *Backstreet Boys* [International] (New York: Jive Records, 1996).

¹⁷³ Gray, 94.

¹⁷⁴ *South Park*, "Things You Can Do With Your Finger," episode 56 [season 4, episode 8], 12 July 2000.

On 12 July 2000, Comedy Central's controversial animated comedy *South Park* aired its fifty-sixth episode titled "Things You Can Do With Your Finger," in which character Cartman dreamt of becoming part of a famous boy band, Fingerbang. He thus set out to create a five-member boy band of the same name (figure 11). When Stan asked Cartman what "fingerbang" meant, Cartman responded, "I heard it on HBO. It means, like, you know, when you pretend to use your finger like a gun or something," remaining oblivious to the slang term's definition of inserting one or more fingers into another person's vagina or anus.¹⁷⁵



Figure 11: *South Park*'s Kyle, Stan, Cartman, and Kenny performing as the boy band "Fingerbang" (Comedy Central).

South Park recognized and exaggerated the sexual

undertones that existed in various boy band songs and music videos. Though the boy bands relied on lyrics that were more implicit than explicit in sexual references, their music videos broadcast sensual material far more frequently than their music.

*NSYNC's *No Strings Attached* album included a track titled, "Digital Get Down," which alluded to sexual interactions through the technological means of cellular mobile phones and the internet. In the first verse, Justin Timberlake sings, "Every time I'm sitting home alone, girl / I can't wait to get you on the phone, girl . . . Bouncin' me from satellite to satellite / I love the things you do for me so late at night, so turn me on yeah / It's like I'm right there next to you."¹⁷⁶ "I lose my mind just when you're speaking / I see you on the screen I get to freaking" continued JC Chasez in the second

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ *NSYNC, "Digital Get Down," *No Strings Attached* (New York: Jive Records, 2000).

verse, “I get so excited when I’m watching, girl / I can’t wait to see you touch your body, girl, it’s just me and you / So we can do what we gotta do.” Chasez’s lines described his surveillance of a woman on his computer screen and referenced the consumption of pornography that allowed him to sate his “biological imperatives” autonomously. “Digital Get Down” heavily referenced the technological trends that millennials faced: “cybersex,” sexual fantasies and pictures exchanged between couples and singles over the internet; and, more recently, “sexting,” defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary as “the informal sending of sexually explicit photographs or messages via mobile phone.”¹⁷⁷ In 2007, the *American Journal of Health Education* published a study on cybersex use and abuse and reported that one study found the most frequently stated occupation for cybersex addicts was “college student,” at seventeen percent of the participants.¹⁷⁸ A second study cited in the same article found that men preferred “surfing the web for their cybersexual activities,” while women were more likely to enter online chatrooms to initiate relationships, leading to an increased susceptibility to sexual violence as eighty percent of women reported in another survey that they had a physical meeting with an online sex partner.¹⁷⁹

More recently there had been a surge in “sexting.” This modern form of sexual freedom evinced an evolving change in youth culture, particularly for young men. In a 2012 interactive poll of more than 2,000 Americans, nearly one out of five participants had sexted, and forty percent of those that had acknowledged their delivery or receipt of

¹⁷⁷ Chenda Ngak, “Retweet, sexting and cyberbullying added to Oxford English Dictionary,” <http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501465_162-20094722-501465.html>, 19 August 2011 [accessed 4 November 2012].

¹⁷⁸ Delores Dorton Rimington and Julie Gast, “Cybersex Use and Abuse: Implications for Health Education,” *American Journal of Health Education* 38, no. 1 (January/February 2007): 38.

¹⁷⁹ Rimington and Gast, 36.

explicit self-portraits were between eighteen- to thirty-four-years of age.¹⁸⁰ The largest demographic group for sexting were men between eighteen and thirty-four years of age, comprising thirty-two percent of those who were sexting.¹⁸¹

Celebrities and politicians have also been subjects of sexting scandals, which underscores how cultural practices reverberate between and among millennials and their role models. In June 2011, United States House Representative from New York, Anthony Weiner, resigned from his position in Congress after a scandal emerged over Weiner uploading a lewd photograph of his penis his twitter account.¹⁸² A number of male celebrities have also made headlines after being caught sexting, including retired National Football League (NFL) player Brett Favre, golf player Tiger Woods, National Basketball Association (NBA) player Greg Oden, and pop-R&B singer Chris Brown.¹⁸³ Two male teachers who were part of the millennial generation were also arrested in unrelated cases in 2012 for sexting with students.¹⁸⁴ A study at the University of Michigan of 3,447 men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four found that sexting was very common, and that participants did not exhibit any higher risk for

¹⁸⁰ Suzanne Choney, "Nearly 1 in 5 smartphone users are sexting," <http://digitallife.today.com/_news/2012/06/06/12090540-nearly-1-in-5-smartphone-users-are-sexting?lite>, 6 June 2012 [accessed 4 November 2012].

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Luke Fuszard, "Anthony Weiner, The Millennial Generation, And Why America Needs More Career Politicians," <<http://www.businessinsider.com/anthony-weiner-the-millennial-generation-and-why-america-needs-more-career-politicians-2011-6>>, 24 July 2012 [accessed 4 November 2012].

¹⁸³ Jason Weintraub, "Always Delete Your Sent Box: Celebrities Who've Been Caught Sexting," <<http://hiphopwired.com/2011/03/31/always-delete-your-sent-box-celebrities-whove-been-caught-sexting-30097/>>, 31 March 2011 [accessed 4 November 2012].

¹⁸⁴ "Leeds coach arrested over sexually explicit texts to student," <<http://www.cbs42.com/content/localnews/story/Leeds-coach-arrested-over-sexually-explicit-texts/WnTSvso-VUO9VylZVA1Y-Q.csp>>, 20 August 2012 [accessed 5 November 2012]; and "Texas teacher of the year accused of 'sexting' with teenage student," <<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2012/06/01/texas-teacher-year-accused-exting-with-teenage-student/>>, 1 June 2012 [accessed 5 November 2012]. These cases involved elementary school physical education teacher and high school wrestling coach Curtis Lee, and Texas' Colleyville Middle School's teacher of the year John McDaniel.

unprotected sex or psychological trouble.¹⁸⁵ As this study showed, technology had shaped the sexual landscape at the turn of the twenty-first century. *NSYNC's raunchy "Digital Get Down" further exemplified this change. *NSYNC's "Digital Get Down" shared its sexual message through its lyrics, while their music video for "Pop" similarly provided plenty of sexual imagery.

*NSYNC's "Pop" music video displayed imagery that flaunted explicit sexuality. The video opened with Justin Timberlake calling out to a seemingly weary young woman eating a bowl of cereal. He offers her "pop," which is presented in a phallic shaped Florence flask, a glass flask with a bulbous bottom and slender neck, that would "make [her] feel kinda funny," and as he announced that there would be a "jumbo pop," bubbles spewed forth from the television towards the young woman, causing her to drop her bowl as cereal and milk splashed all over her bare room (figure 12). Evidently "pop" is



Figure 12 – Justin Timberlake advertising "pop" in a Florence flask in *NSYNC's "Pop" (Zomba).

symbolic of Timberlake's sexual organ, and the mention of his future, enlarged "pop" caused the woman to lose control of her body. The music video itself took place in a dance hall setting with young women running their hands all over Chasez and Timberlake's bodies. The choreography also displayed sexual movements involving the band members continuously stripping off their jackets and shirts and thrusting their

¹⁸⁵ Laura Bailey, "'Sexting' may be just a normal part of dating for Internet generation," <<http://www.ns.umich.edu/new/releases/20649-sexting-may-be-just-a-normal-part-of-dating-for-internet-generation>>, 24 July 2012 [5 November 2012].

pelvises toward the floor, simulating intercourse. The sexual nature of this music video showed how *NSYNC visually marketed sexuality without explicitly stating sexual messages.

The Backstreet Boys also portrayed sexuality in music videos through their location settings and the exposure of their bodies. “I’ll Never Break Your Heart” was a ballad about consoling a young woman who was emotionally reserved because of a previous failed relationship. The music video showed how these boy band members could comfort a woman through physical actions. Nick Carter blew bubbles with his female partner; Brian Littrell sat on his bed with his partner while he played with a puppy; A.J. McLean chivalrously allowed his love interest to sit in a chair while she tickled him innocently with a feather; Howie Dorough gently held his young woman in his arms; and Kevin Richardson, in the least innocent of the scenarios, bathed his female partner in his bathtub. The most significant aspect of this video involved the location of the members; as a group, they sang on a small stage, but when they pled individually to their female audiences they were all in their intimate, immaculate, and cozy bedrooms. This imagery suggested to young impressionable women that one place of possible comfort was a young man’s room, where young men promise seemingly innocent activities similar to those the Backstreet Boys used to soothe their love interests.

The music video for “Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)” had no story line or message whatsoever; it was created strictly to titillate fans. The first half of the music video featured the group singing on a basketball court and in its immediate perimeter at night while outfitted in sweaters and collared t-shirts. The second half featured the group singing in the rain and sporting light colored shirts that became translucent and fully

unbuttoned. In Dorrough's case, he appeared fully shirtless as the music video continued (figure 13). The purpose of the music video seemed indisputable when scenes featuring only Dorrough's headless, chiseled chest began to flash across the screen. The



Figure 13 – The Backstreet Boys singing in the rain while exposing their bodies in “Quit Playing Games (With My Heart),” with Dorrough in the background removing his shirt completely (Zomba).

Backstreet Boys' strategy to focus on sexuality through the promotion of their bodies did not remain exclusive to the group in the late 1990s, as 98° also displayed some members' physiques.

98°'s “I Do (Cherish You)” drew upon aspects of both of the Backstreet Boys' music videos previously discussed. “I Do (Cherish You)” in both its vocal and music video presentation was about the members of the band proposing to their significant others. In the music video, each member provided a flashback to when he had proposed to his girlfriend, which

happened to be the same young woman for all four members: Drew Lachey on a convertible ride with the top down, Justin Jeffre while he helped his girlfriend in the bathtub, Jeff



Figure 14 – The four members of 98° proposing to the same young woman in “I Do (Cherish You)” (Universal).

Timmons during a stroll along the beach, and Nick Lachey right before partaking in physical intimacy (figure 14). As had the Backstreet Boys in “I’ll Never Break Your Heart,” 98° engaged in romantic activities, but 98°’s were less playful and more sensual in nature. The differences between the artistic approaches could likely be attributed to their marketing through Motown, which specialized in R&B, a genre more associated with overt masculinity and sexuality through acts such as Boyz II Men and Brian McKnight. This music video also featured more normalized activities for young men than those in “I’ll Never Break Your Heart.” Jeff Timmons and Nick Lachey were discernibly more muscular than the members of the Backstreet Boys and flaunted their bodies during their individual segments in “I Do (Cherish You).”

Marketing companies inundated generation Y with sexuality during the 1990s and early 2000s. American clothing chain Abercrombie and Fitch (A&F) also successfully relied on sexuality for marketing purposes in 1995, hiring shirtless models to catch the attention of shopping millennials.¹⁸⁶ Between 1995 and 2008, the company was able to increase annual sales “more than 20-fold and net income more than 56-fold.”¹⁸⁷ In 2012, *Business Week* announced that A&F’s sales slipped 2.5 percent in the first half of the 2012 fiscal year, and the company placed blame on the economy, but marketing firms pointed out that it was A&F’s inability to adapt its product as well as its marketing strategy, stating “Today’s teens are underwhelmed by the half-naked models.”¹⁸⁸ The boy band music videos of the 1990s and early 2000s offered sexual imagery that not only influenced girl culture’s expectations for men, but also boy culture’s expectations for

¹⁸⁶ Sapna Maheshwari, “At Abercrombie & Fitch, Sex No Longer Sells,” <http://www.businessweek.com/printer/articles/69032-at-abcrombie-and-fitch-sex-no-longer-sells>, 30 August 2012 [accessed 5 November 2012].

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

young men and the culturally derived notions of what they should look like and how they should, and should not, behave.

Narcissism and Machismo in Millennials

We've been sanitized / We've been sterilized / Our farts smell like bubblegum.¹⁸⁹
—*MADtv*, “This We Promise You” (2000)



Figure 15 – Top, *MADtv* cast performing “This We Promise You,” a parody of *NSYNC’s “This I Promise You” (FOX). Bottom, *NSYNC’s “This I Promise You” music video (Zomba). From left to right, with *MADtv* cast members above the *NSYNC member they portrayed, Nicole Sullivan as Justin Timberlake, Michael McDonald as JC Chasez, Will Sasso as Lance Bass, Nelson Ascencio as Chris Kirkpatrick, and Christian Duguay as Joey Fatone.

On 16 December 2000, FOX network’s *MADtv*, a popular comedy television show nominated for forty-one Emmy awards between 1999 and 2009, with wins for five of the nominations. first aired its tenth episode from its sixth season and it featured a parody of *NSYNC’s “This I Promise You.”¹⁹⁰ *MADtv* included sardonic credits usually shown at the introduction and conclusion of music videos, which listed the group as *NSYNC singing “This We Promise You” from their album *No Balls Attached*, a modification of *No Strings Attached*. The mock album title ridiculed *NSYNC’s masculinity with a sarcastic claim that the boy band did not have a full set of male

¹⁸⁹ *MADtv*, “This We Promise You,” episode 610 [season 6, episode 10], 16 December 2000.

¹⁹⁰ “*MADtv*,” <<http://www.emmys.com/shows/madtv>>, [accessed 6 November 2012].

genitalia, further evidenced in the song with the lines, “We’ve been sanitized / We’ve been sterilized.”¹⁹¹ *NSYNC’s cultural power and promise were illuminated when it became the focus of a skit on *MADtv*. *MADtv* further humorously emasculated *NSYNC by having female cast member Nicole Sullivan play the role of Justin Timberlake. Sullivan expressed emotion with arm gestures as she sang, which prompted laughter from the studio audience, and displayed feminine characteristics, such as covering her mouth as she giggled after admitting that the group members’ “farts smell like bubblegum.” The group homogenously portrayed *NSYNC as girlish and homosexual as they smiled and blew bubbles that filled the forest, and communicated with the forest creatures in a fashion analogous to Disney’s princess Snow White. The skit included an on-air film clip from an excited male who delivered a “shout out to *NSYNC from everyone down at the ‘Man Hole.’”¹⁹² To the careful observer, all of this represented an attack on masculinity and was a cultural critique millennial males strove to combat.

*NSYNC’s music video for “Girlfriend” promoted the masculinity of the group as it sang to crowds of females and danced a hip-hop styled choreography routine on the tops of cars. Justin Timberlake participated in a drag race against a gang of young men wearing leather jackets embroidered with the name Kingsmen, drawing parallels with the 1978 film *Grease*. In *Grease*, Danny Zuko (John Travolta), leader of the T-Birds, took the wheel in a drag race against a rival gang, the Scorpions, to establish his masculinity and gain back the affection of his summer love, Sandy Olsen (Olivia Newton-John), while gaining the rights to the Scorpions’ leader’s car, a symbol of masculinity.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² *MADtv*, “This We Promise You.”

¹⁹³ *Grease*, dir. Randal Keliser, prods. Robert Stigwood and Allan Carr (Paramount, 1978).

A noteworthy scene in “Girlfriend” involves *NSYNC member Lance Bass. Lance Bass was shown in the backseat of a car, playfully seducing a young woman. The backseat of a car has long been identified as a location of sexual experience, especially in youth culture, which led viewers to assume that Bass would have sex with the woman. He is the only member of the group who is shown in that location, and he is the only one who has come out as a gay. Bass publicly revealed his sexual preference in *People* magazine on 26 July 2006, after rumors flew from sightings of him with openly gay, reality television show *Amazing Race* winner Reichen Lehmkuhl, who was Bass’ undercover boyfriend at the time.¹⁹⁴

In *NSYNC’s “If I’m Not the One,” the group sang about unrequited love from a female and returned to upholding more traditionally masculine millennial ideals. The singers responded to this rejected love, claiming “If I’m not the one you want, then who’s he / Take your time to figure out, you’ll see / If I’m not the one you want, then maybe / I’ll be the one you need.”¹⁹⁵ Young male entitlement appeared to be an extension of male anger in response to the rise of women’s status in society, as millennial men felt compelled to reassure themselves in an evolving American culture. In refining their sense of entitlement, young men’s narcissism assisted in a reaffirmation of their masculinity, as they would feel desired by woman. “If I’m Not the One” was another track only released on the *No Strings Attached* album, not as a single, and this can be attributed to the presentation of the lyrics. *NSYNC sang about being the man that their

¹⁹⁴ “Lance Bass: I’m Gay,” <<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,26334,1219142,00.html>>, 26 July 2006 [accessed 6 November 2012]; and Bass, 168-176. Bass had not revealed the details of his sexual orientation publicly while in *NSYNC because he grew up Christian and was taught that homosexuality was wrong, and because of female fans’ fantasies about the members of the band. Bass recognized that “being gay doesn’t mean you lose your masculinity!” Although Bass felt that way about acknowledged homosexuality, many other generation Y males feared the homosexual label’s contrary connotation of not being viewed as an authentic male.

¹⁹⁵ *NSYNC, “If I’m Not the One,” *No Strings Attached* (New York: Jive Records, 2000).

female audiences needed, but the delivery of the lyrics alluded to women's hesitation about them as women's foolishness, given their inability instantly to recognize their need for the man in front of them.

The Backstreet Boys' "The One" delivered a message similar to *NSYNC's "If I'm Not the One," about the men in the group being "the one," though its approach was more tender than *NSYNC's tune. "The One" was about the Backstreet Boys saving a despondent female: "There you were, wild and free / Reaching out like you needed me / A helping hand to make it right / I am holding you all through the night."¹⁹⁶ The song continued, "I'll be the one / I'll be the one / Who will make all your sorrows undone." This song validated the trend of young men and their narcissism, with their self-esteem allowing them to claim themselves as "the one," that is, the one having superiority over others, including their male peers, as the alpha male. Young men who asserted themselves in such a masculine manner did so in order to uphold their "reputation," a facet of guy code, and in turn, to demand the affection of young women.¹⁹⁷

The Backstreet Boys' "As Long As You Love" music video aligned itself with narcissism in terms of the members' treatment of women. The first half of the music video showed the members of the Backstreet Boys auditioning in front of a panel of six young women, presenting a solo vocal performance, a screen test, and a solo and a group dance number. The group approached the panel of women with looks of apathy about having to perform for these six women, and seized a remote control that they employed to switch between the young women as if they were changing television channels. The women were professional and did not show any emotion as they observed the auditions,

¹⁹⁶ Backstreet Boys, "The One," *Millennium* (New York: Jive Records, 1999).

¹⁹⁷ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 57.

while the band members found enjoyment in the role reversal and constantly smiled as the women were then objectified. Through the remote control, the Backstreet Boys exerted their power over the young women and their ability to find a new woman when they had the urge to do so, channeling another aspect of guy code that mandated men sleep with “as many women as possible”—although in this case they previewed their selection of females.¹⁹⁸

98°’s music video and lyrics for “The Hardest Thing” diverged from the previous three examples of 1990s boy band music and music videos by focusing on the band itself to project its members’ masculinity instead of subjecting women to the actions and thoughts presented in the earlier instances. In the video, Nick Lachey was a boxer who entered a fight that his lover opposed. Instead of forcing his girlfriend, a Las Vegas show girl, to stay with him, he separated from her singing “She’s been good to me / And she deserves better than me.”¹⁹⁹ Visually, 98° also displayed the muscular physique typically associated with masculinity and narcissism as they worked out in the gym together and as Nick Lachey sparred and fought in the boxing ring. The portrayal of a boy band member engaged in a bellicose sport also reflected masculine ideals of aggression. The boxing and the exposure of muscle-formed bodies may have aligned this music video with boy culture’s narcissism, but “The Hardest Thing” also transcended these obsessions and became one example of the progressivism boy bands demonstrated in their presentation of respect for women and their emotions.

¹⁹⁸ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 172.

¹⁹⁹ 98°, “The Hardest Thing,” *98° and Rising* (New York: Motown, 1998).

A New Breed of Millennial Men

By the 2000s, young men were tuning in to such cable channels as Comedy Central, the Cartoon Network, and Spike, whose shows reflected the adolescent male preferences of its targeted male audiences. They watched movies with such overgrown boy actors as Steve Carrell, Luke and Owen Wilson, Jim Carrey, Adam Sandler, Will Ferrell, and Seth Rogen . . . and cheered their awesome car crashes, fart jokes, breast and crotch shots, explosions, beer pong competitions, and other frat-boy pranks. Americans had always struck foreigners as youthful, even childlike. . . . But this? This was something different—not just youthful, but, quite literally, retarded.²⁰⁰

Kay Hymowitz in *Manning Up* documented that young men at the turn of the twenty-first century were regressing and becoming child-men, grown men with juvenile tendencies. Hymowitz noted that it came as a backlash against feminism and that these pre-adult men were self-aware about their “ridiculousness.”²⁰¹ Michael Kimmel noted in *Guyland* that any sort of academic success was viewed as feminine to males, which translated into education being perceived as unmanly.²⁰² This theory became evident in many popular television shows, such as National Broadcasting Company’s (NBC) sitcom *Will and Grace* (1998-2006), in which the main character, Will Truman (Eric McCormack), is a gay lawyer, and American Broadcasting Company’s (ABC) *Modern Family* (2009-present), where homosexual partners Mitchell Pritchett (Jesse Tyler Ferguson) and Cameron Tucker (Eric Stonestreet) are markedly intelligent, though comically awkward, compared to Pritchett’s straight brother-in-law, Phil Dunphy (Ty Burrell). Although this chapter has documented how the Backstreet Boys, *NSYNC, and 98° reflected millennial boy culture, it is also imperative to address their progressivism against the streams of immaturity associated with boy culture and millennial masculinity.

²⁰⁰ Hymowitz, 15.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 15-16.

²⁰² Kimmel, *Guyland*, 74.

*NSYNC's "This I Promise You," parodied by *MADtv* as previously discussed, and "That's When I'll Stop Loving You," were two songs from this particular boy band that offered heartfelt assurances to listeners. "This I Promise You" described unconditional support and love for one's significant other, along with professions of equal and mutual yearning for one another. The lines, "And with this vow / Forever has now begun," opposed the immaturity of boy culture and guy code and symbolized marriage, an optional milestone in one's life.²⁰³ Before marriage came the engagement, which was the subject in "This Gift," recorded by 98°. Taking this initial step toward marriage has often been postponed by the millennial generation. Millennials get married approximately eight years later in life than had their parents' generation, according to Michael Kimmel.²⁰⁴ The institution of marriage symbolically launched men into adulthood, and Kimmel theorized that peers and the media influenced young men to perceive weddings as representing the death of fun, which led millennial males to prefer "hooking up" over a lifelong commitment.²⁰⁵

"That's When I'll Stop Loving You" was a song about eternal love and an understanding of emotions, a trait often suppressed by men because caring about emotions and sharing feelings were culturally defined as female characteristics. A cardinal rule of masculinity had been "do not cry," so men have turned to sports, for example, to evade and express their emotions.²⁰⁶ Sports allowed men to cheer along with their favorite teams, agonize with their defeat, express anger at judgment calls, and cry at a lost championship game, all without feeling emasculated in their own or in their peers'

²⁰³ *NSYNC, "This I Promise You," *No Strings Attached* (New York: Jive, 2000).

²⁰⁴ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 213-214.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 258-259.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

judgment. These two *NSYNC songs and 98°'s "This Gift" featured the concepts of emotion and commitment, which paved an alternate and more progressive path for young men to follow.

The Backstreet Boys also produced songs that could have been linked to commitment and to expressions of love and yearning, but they crafted other songs that involved select liberal aspects of boy bands coinciding with "boy code." Kimmel described Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex as the origin of this code, suggesting separation is central to a boy's social development. Boys realized that a connection to their mothers led to their emasculation, and as they withdrew from their mothers, they dissociated themselves from all maternal attributes—"compassion, nurturance, vulnerability, dependency"—transforming "happy, energetic, playful, and emotionally expressive 5-year-olds into sullen, withdrawn, and despondent 9-year-olds."²⁰⁷

In "Shape of My Heart," the Backstreet Boys belted out an apology for suppressing aspects of their lives from their beloved and pleaded for her help in being more forthcoming with the truth and emotions. The band acknowledged their mistreatment of their significant other, "Looking back on the things I've done / I was trying to be someone / I played my part, kept you in the dark," and their desire to repair the relationship, "Now let me show you the shape of my heart."²⁰⁸ The song appeared as progressive in comparison to generation Y's boy culture, eliding the violent machismo often linked to millennial masculinity. The song's lyrics conveyed vulnerability on the Backstreet Boys' behalf, which allowed a closer emotional connection between both parties in the relationship.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 52.

²⁰⁸ Backstreet Boys, "Shape of My Heart," *Black & Blue* (New York: Jive, 2000).

In the Backstreet Boys' heartfelt ballad, "The Perfect Fan," the band rejected Freud's Oedipal complex theory and dedicated a song to their mothers. "You showed me how to love / You showed me how to care / You showed me that you would always be there / I want to thank you for that time / And I'm proud to call you mine," voiced the band during the song's bridge, throwing away all concern about being viewed as a "mama's boy," which Kimmel had pointed to as an example why boys had distanced themselves from their mothers early in life.²⁰⁹ These instances of sensitivity and sentimentality, in addition to the willingness to marry, did not reflect the angrier mandates of boy culture, boy code, or guy code; but, in comparison to the anger and aggression, sexuality, and narcissism of young men who tried to prove their masculinity daily, those antithetical examples suggest a kinder progressivism of the 1990s and early 2000s boy bands.

A New Wave of Boy Bands



Figure 16 – *South Park*'s caricature, left, of the Jonas Brothers' spraying of foam on their audience in their concert film, *Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert Experience*, right (Comedy Central; Disney).

You three faggots are going on stage. . . . Where would you be without me, Jonas Brothers? Your music sucks and you know it! It's because you make little girls' 'ginies tickle! And when little girls' 'ginies tickle, I make money! And that's

²⁰⁹ Backstreet Boys, "The Perfect Fan," *Millennium* (New York: Jive, 1999); and Kimmel, *Guyland*, 52.

because little girls are fucking stupid! And the purity rings make it okay to do whatever I want.²¹⁰

—*South Park*'s version of Disney's Mickey Mouse controlling the Jonas Brothers in the episode, "The Ring" (2009)

The decline of the late-1990s boy bands in the early 2000s left an opening in the music scene. A new wave of boy bands arrived to fill the void. A new theme of conservatism emerged on the pop music scene shortly after the Backstreet Boys' popularity declined, 98° went on hiatus, and *NSYNC disbanded. The Jonas Brothers, Joe, Kevin, and Nick Jonas, were signed to Columbia, the same label as the 1990s three-brother-boy band Hanson, but the label dropped them after the release of one album.²¹¹ In 2007, their career exploded after being picked up by Disney's Hollywood Record label. Their records were in constant rotation on Radio Disney, Disney's amplitude modification (AM) radio station, they guest-starred on Disney's *Hannah Montana* television series, and eventually starred in their own made-for-television film, *Camp Rock*. Known for their Christian religious background, the boy band began wearing "purity rings," vowing celibacy until marriage, which became the focus of *South Park*'s 2009 season-thirteen premier episode, "The Ring."

Just as the 1990s boy bands had previously endured such satire, the Jonas Brothers now found their sexuality and masculinity—and their promotion of a religious symbol—being dissected and questioned by boy band dissidents. In the Jonas Brothers' 2009 3D film, *Jonas Brothers: The 3D Concert* the brothers pumped out white foam from phallic hoses into the audience, offering an image of the group ejaculating onto their

²¹⁰ *South Park*, "The Ring," episode 182 [season 13, episode 1], 11 March 2009.

²¹¹ Jac Chebatoris, "The Boy Band Next Door," <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/01/26/the-boy-band-next-door.html>>, 26 January 2008 [accessed 7 November 2012].

screaming fans, and that scene was satirized in the *South Park* episode (figure 16). It also prompted this concise post on *The Vulture*, a New York-based entertainment blog, likening the Jonas Brothers' actions to R&B singer R. Kelly's 2002 scandal that claimed the singer had sex with, and urinated on, a minor: "And you thought there was a lot of crass sexuality in Britney Spears concerts? This is some real R. Kelly-type shit up in here."²¹² In comparison to the 1990s boy bands, two features were different with the Jonas Brothers: they played their own instruments and promoted their religion.

In the 2010s, however, American popular music began exhibiting interesting similarities with of past teen-pop music. Pop acts such as Adele, Leona Lewis, Ellie Goulding, The Wanted, and One Direction were all from the United Kingdom, which indicated a second-wave British Invasion most likely brought about through globalization and the internet's widening of the accessibility to global music markets. The trend of having solo female pop singers, such as the first three previously listed artists, paralleled the 1990s solo pop princesses, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Mandy Moore, and Jessica Simpson. Another fascinating development was the importation of the European boy bands The Wanted and One Direction into the American music scene, whose target audience was young women. Noting these and related developments, James McKinley then wrote in *The New York Times*, "Boy bands are back."²¹³

The Wanted formed in 2009 after public auditions that discovered three members from across the United Kingdom.²¹⁴ The last two members joined the band shortly

²¹² Mark Graham, "The Jonas Brothers and Their Overtly Sexual Foam Cannon," <http://www.vulture.com/2009/03/jonas_brothers_get_foamy.html>, 23 March 2009 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²¹³ James C. McKinley Jr., "Boy Bands Are Back, Wholesome or Sexy," <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/arts/music/one-direction-and-the-wanted-boy-bands-return.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>, 23 March 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²¹⁴ "The Wanted," <<http://www.mtv.co.uk/artists/the-wanted>>, 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012].

thereafter. For their American release, the band signed with Mercury Records and released their debut single, “Glad You Came” in October 2011.²¹⁵ In January 2012, the band’s fame began to grow after appearing on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. The band’s American tour following the appearance included many sold-out venues.²¹⁶

FOX Broadcasting Company’s award-winning musical-comedy television series, *Glee*, featured “Glad You Came” on 21 February 2012, in the fourteenth episode of its third season titled, “On My Way,” sung by New Directions’ rival glee club, the Dalton Academy Warblers.²¹⁷ After the performance on *Glee*, “Glad You Came” shot up the *Billboard* charts and peaked at the number three spot, gaining the band a larger audience just before the release of its American album on 24 April 2012.²¹⁸ The song itself promised an interesting direction for The Wanted by catering to an older audience through lyrics featuring slightly more explicit themes than the 1990s pop music boy bands. “Glad You Came” was a double-entendre, with its younger, innocent listeners accepting the literal understanding of the lyrics, while its older listeners interpreted “came” as the slang term for “orgasmed.”

Another group that emerged on the American pop music scene from the United Kingdom after the turn of the twenty-first century was One Direction. An offshoot from the United Kingdom 2010 season of the reality television show *The X Factor*, the five members of One Direction auditioned as solo acts, and instead of being eliminated as

²¹⁵ McKinley Jr., “Boy Bands Are Back.”

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ “On My Way,” *Glee*, episode 58 [season 3, episode 14], 21 February 2012.

²¹⁸ “Glad You Came,” <<http://www.billboard.com/song/the-wanted/glad-you-came/26019595#/song/the-wanted/glad-you-came/26019595>>, 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012]; and Keith Caulfield, “The Wanted’s U.S. Debut Album Due April 24,” <<http://www.billboard.com/news/the-wanted-s-u-s-debut-album-due-april-24-1006371152.story>>, 5 March 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012].

soloists, they were combined, creating a new act in the competition.²¹⁹ After topping the pop charts in the United Kingdom, Columbia Records signed the group and released its debut album, *Up All Night*, on 13 March 2012.²²⁰ The release of the album launched the band into the *Guinness World Records 2013* as the first British band to debut at the number one *Billboard* spot, as the album sold 176,000 copies. This achievement topped the Spice Girls' 1997 accomplishment of having the highest debut album by a British band when *Spice* entered the charts at number six.²²¹ FOX's *Glee* featured One Direction's "What Makes You Beautiful," on its third-season "Prom-asaurus" episode on



Figure 17 – One Direction's young female fans, top, contrasted against Drew Brees' NFL hypermasculine fans, bottom, in PepsiCo's "Showdown" advertisement (PepsiCo).

8 May 2012, in which five male members of McKinley High School's glee club, the New Directions, sang the song at the school's prom, creating a frenzy.²²²

On 10 October 2012, PepsiCo debuted a line of commercials titled "Showdown," that illustrated the continuing struggle between

²¹⁹ "One Direction," <http://www.onedirectionmusic.com/us/biography/entry/the_making_of_one_direction1/>, 2011 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²²⁰ "One Direction's US Release of 'Up All Night' Moved Up!" <<http://www.shineonmedia.com/2012/02/02/one-directions-us-release-of-up-all-night-moved-up/>>, 2 February 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²²¹ McKinley Jr., "Boy Bands Are Back"; and "One Direction: Getting in Guinness World Records book is a dream," <<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2012/9/one-direction-getting-in-guinness-world-records-book-is-a-dream-44682/>>, 7 September 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²²² "Prom-asaurus," *Glee*, episode 63 [season 3, episode 19], 8 May 2012.

traditional perspectives on masculinity and more progressive perceptions of manliness.²²³ The commercials featured NFL quarterback Drew Brees and One Direction's Harry Styles trying to convince one another to forfeit the last can of Pepsi for consumption. They took turns comparing their accomplishments—Brees' NFL Super Bowl ring against One Direction's platinum album award and Brees' Most Valuable Player (MVP) award versus One Direction's *Billboard* magazine cover—which contrasted One Direction's awards for their musical achievements against Brees' athletic accomplishments. The advertisement then presented the struggle between the fans of each type of masculinity as One Direction roused their hordes of teenage girls while Drew Brees summoned his gang of NFL fans who wore gear from all of the league's various teams, putting aside their differences to cheer for one traditional masculine figure, the athlete (figure 17). "Showdown" featured two different endings that provided commentary on which figure was worthier of masculine adulation: the first had One Direction convincing Brees that he could join the band if he gave Styles the Pepsi, a challenge Brees accepted and then sang with the group; the second debuted on 8 November 2012 and held up Brees as the winner after Brees promised the group a football tryout, and One Direction is displayed wearing nonspecific football jerseys. The two endings portrayed an acceptance, or perhaps a coveting and reconciling, of the other's differing form of masculinity, as Brees expressed himself through singing on stage with One Direction and as One Direction wore football jerseys and caught a powerfully thrown football from Brees.

²²³ "Pepsi debuts new 'Live For Now' commercial featuring pop stars One Direction and NFL quarterback Drew Brees," <<http://www.pepsico.com/Story/Pepsi-debuts-new-Live-For-Now-commercial-featuring-pop-stars-One-Direction-and-N10102012.html>>, 10 October 2012 [accessed 11 November 2012].

The post-2000 wave of boy bands all lacked one feature that their 1990s predecessors had: choreography. The Jonas Brothers, The Wanted, and One Direction frantically ran around stages during performances looking like five separate young men performing on stage together as opposed to the synchronized movements displayed by the Backstreet Boys, *NSYNC, and 98°. Though not as in sync as the 1990s boy bands, the groups that emerged after the twentieth century gave off a more youthful and upbeat vibe, lifting the spirits of young Americans during the recession as the Beatles had done in the 1960s.

The successes of the Jonas Brothers, One Direction, and The Wanted in the American popular music realm signified the revival of boy bands. James McKinley acknowledged the absence of American boy bands since the Backstreet Boys and *NSYNC, and recognized the Jonas Brothers as the “only boy band of consequence in the last decade.”²²⁴ He attributed this drought to the costliness of forming of boy bands, but Johnny Wright, who managed the boy bands New Kids on the Block, the Backstreet Boys, and *NSYNC, reportedly stated: “You will see more bands coming from America, I suspect, in the next six months because now that the labels are feeling like it is popular again, and there is a way to make money, they cannot sit on the sidelines.”²²⁵

The Legacy of Millennial Boy Bands

I’m a regular guy who stays out of trouble / A regular guy, says ‘Ma’am’ on the double / I’m a regular guy just like *Dawson’s Creek* / A regular guy, just don’t call me a geek, a geek / Don’t push me! / Damn it sometimes I wanna / Smash things up / Get jacked up / And whacked up / And have to pee in a cup!²²⁶
—2Gether, “Regular Guy” 2000

²²⁴ McKinley Jr., “Boy Bands Are Back.”

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ 2Gether, “Regular Guy,” *2gether Again* (New York: TVT Records, 2000).

The music, specifically the lyrics, of the late 1990s and early 2000s boy bands did reflect themes of boy culture. Aggression and anger were recognizable in the forms of jealousy, mockery, physical action, and sexual coercion. Aspects of sexuality could be identified in lyrics, but were better expressed visually through music videos. The themes of sexual identity expressed through masculinity and narcissism were detectable in both lyrical and music video forms as the boy bands asserted themselves as “the one,” exerted their ability to cycle through females as frequently as desired, displayed their physiques, and participated in masculine activities such as drag racing, boxing, and watching pornography.

This revelation of boy bands’ conformity to boy culture required a deeper probing of their catalogs of music and music videos. It was essential not only to conduct close viewings and deep readings of the popular singles of the boy bands, but also of their lesser known, album-only tracks. Their singles had been chosen to cater to their intended audience, teenaged girls, leaving a trove of songs that occasionally contained explicit nuggets of boy culture. The less recognizable tracks on albums were not considered “radio friendly,” either because the song lacked simple repetitious phrases or included themes and messages that the record labels did not feel were especially suitable for mainstream teen-pop music.

Music videos had the ability to play around with imagery, and the boy bands marketed videos to disperse their sex appeal through television sets in top music video countdowns, such as MTV’s *Total Request Live* (TRL). Female empowerment was on the rise, especially in the millennial generation, and the boy bands used this evolving social trend to their advantage by allowing themselves to be objectified by female

viewers. This marketing strategy adversely affected young men at the turn of the twenty-first century by making them more self-conscious, causing them to set impossible standards for masculinity and body image. Millennial males developed a distaste for boy bands given their redefinition of boy culture, and boy bands had their “man cards” revoked for their divergence from the traditional form of masculinity.

Young women fantasized relationships with members of the boy bands. In their minds, they became lovers or wives of Justin Timberlake, Kevin Richardson, or other boy band members. This imaginary world reflected their yearning for men fashioned like the boy bands, who could be considered androgynous. The boy band members might be described as metrosexuals, men who were immaculately dressed and who cared for their appearance (including their physiques).²²⁷ Their style was previously deemed homosexual or feminine, but now considered heterosexual as well. The boy bands indulged their female fans through expressions of sensitivity and romance, once considered “gay,” or at least less than masculine.

Though boy bands reflected millennial boy culture, including its pernicious aspects, they also suggested how men should maintain their appearance and how to behave around women. They respected all females and acknowledged their power, particularly their consumer power. This was no mere thing. Women had made major strides in the spheres of education, work, and consumerism—and they were the boy bands’ target audience. In these and no doubt many other ways, the 1990s boy bands reflected a cultural significance that deserves more scholarly attention.

²²⁷ Jake Brennan, “Are You A Metrosexual?” <http://www.askmen.com/daily/austin_100/102_fashion_style.html>, 20 November 2011 [accessed 7 November 2012].

Revival of the Millennial Boy Bands

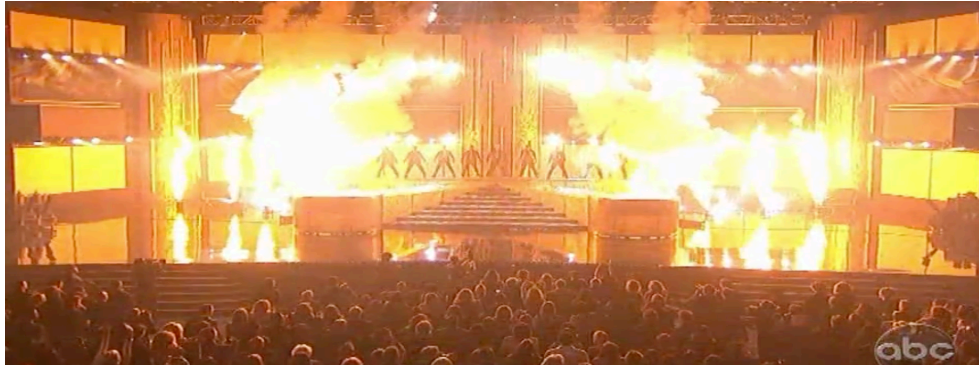


Figure 18 – NKOTB and BSB debuting as super-boy-band “NKOTBSB” at the 38th Annual American Music Awards (ABC).

Listen up everybody if you wanna take a chance / Oh my god we’re back again /
Don’t worry ‘bout you ‘cause it won’t take long / Got a question for ya, better
answer now / Am I original? / Am I the only one? / Am I sexual? / Am I
everything you need? / You better rock your body right!²²⁸

—NKOTBSB, performing a collection of songs at the American Music Awards,
2010

On 21 November 2010, the Backstreet Boys and the New Kids on the Block joined together to create the supergroup “NKOTBSB,” which performed at the end of the 38th Annual American Music Awards (AMA). Fans, in addition to the music artists in attendance, sang along to the medley incorporating songs from both groups. On 29 April 2012, the Backstreet Boys announced during a concert in London that the group would return to London to record a new album and that Kevin Richardson, who had occasionally performed with the group since his departure, would rejoin it.²²⁹ Together, NKOTBSB released a collaboration album in May 2011 (without Richardson) that sold 40,000 copies and debuted at the number seven spot on *Billboard*’s 200. The album

²²⁸ “38th Annual American Music Awards,” 21 November 2010.

²²⁹ “Special Announcement from London” <<http://www.backstreetboys.com/news/75311>>, 29 April 2012 [accessed 11 November 2012]; and Ariana Finlayson, “Kevin Richardson to Re-Join the Backstreet Boys,” <<http://www.usmagazine.com/entertainment/news/kevin-richardson-to-re-join-the-backstreet-boys-2012304>>, 30 April 2012 [accessed 11 November 2012].

contained popular hits from both groups as well as “Don’t Turn Out the Lights,” an original song.²³⁰ NKOTBSB toured in 2011, performing to 609,426 fans throughout their fifty-one shows, twenty-two of which sold-out, and grossed \$40.4 million, landing the number seventeen spot on *Billboard*’s “Top 25 Tours of 2011.”²³¹ To commemorate their twentieth anniversary, the Backstreet Boys promoted a boat cruise, titled “Backstreet Boys Cruise 2013,” and celebrated with their fans for three days between 25 October and 28 October 2013.²³²

In June 2012, 98° brothers Nick and Drew Lachey announced through a call-in to the radio program “On Air With Ryan Seacrest,” that after eleven years of not performing together, the group would reunite for one performance at Hershey, Pennsylvania’s “Summer MixTape Festival,” alongside The Wanted and NKOTBSB on 18 August 2012.²³³ On 12 July 2012, 98° announced that it would also perform on television for the first time in ten years during the *Today* show’s “Summer Concert Series” on 17 August 2012, a day before the “Summer MixTape Festival.”²³⁴ On 11 September 2012, Cincinnati media writer John Kiesewetter reported that Drew Lachey announced the

²³⁰ Keith Caulfield, “Lady Gaga Roars to Top of Billboard 200, Brad Paisley at No. 2,” <<http://www.billboard.biz/bbbiz/charts-articles/chart-alert/lady-gaga-roars-to-top-of-billboard-200-1005208602.story>>, 1 June 2011 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²³¹ “Top 25 Tours of 2011,” <<http://www.billboard.com/features/top-25-tours-of-2011-1005641362.story#/features/top-25-tours-of-2011-1005641362.story>>, 9 December 2011 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²³² “RoseTours: Backstreet Boys Cruise,” <<http://www.backstreetboyscruise.com>>, 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012].

²³³ Kelly Ballhorn, “EXCLUSIVE: Nick & Drew Lachey Announce 98 Degrees Will Reunite For One Performance!” <<http://ryanseacrest.com/2012/06/20/exclusive-nick-drew-lachey-announce-98-degrees-will-reunite-for-one-performance-audio/>>, 20 June 2012 [accessed 7 November 2012]; and Garibaldi, Christina and Cory Midgarden, “The Wanted, 98 Degrees Join NKOTBSB Onstage At MixTape Festival,” <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1692045/mixtape-festival-98-degrees-the-wanted-nkotbsb.jhtml>>, 19 August 2012 [accessed 11 November 2012].

²³⁴ Erin Carlson, “98 Degrees Reunion: Nick Lachey and Bandmates to Perform on ‘Today’ After 10-Year TV Hiatus,” <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/98-degrees-reunion-nick-lachey-353536>>, 24 July 2012 [accessed 8 November 2012].

group would return to the recording studio in October 2012.²³⁵ Drew Lachey had earlier become the winner of ABC's *Dancing with the Stars*' second season (2006), and was included in the fifteenth season in 2012, comprised of the show's former contestants, where he was eliminated on the third week, outlasting *NSYNC member Joey Fatone, who was eliminated the week prior.

Satirical boy band 2Gether also joined the 1990s boy band revival. On 4 May 2012, three members of the band performed at the Jon Lovitz Comedy Club and the reunion also aired live over Farley Bros. Radio.²³⁶ In December 2012, following the hype of these boy band reunions, Lance Bass commented that he "would love [an *NSYNC reunion] anytime."²³⁷ On 25 August 2013, Bass' wish came true as he, J.C. Chasez, Joey Fatone, and Chris Kirkpatrick performed with Justin Timberlake during Timberlake's epic fifteen-minute performance at the 2013 MTV VMAs, at which he received the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award.²³⁸ The popular boy bands from the late 1990s reunited in some form in the early 2010s, and the mingling of the new and old groups sent a strong statement to the music industry, to American society, and to boy band malcontents: the boys are back in town. The boy bands left a lasting impression on the American cultural landscape, and a particular member from one of these groups—Justin Timberlake—ventured off into a successful solo career that made him a popular

²³⁵ John Kiesewetter, "98 Degrees to record again in October," <<http://cincinnati.com/blogs/tv/2012/09/11/98-degrees-to-record-again-in-october/>>, 11 September 2012 [accessed 8 November 2012].

²³⁶ "Farley Bros. Live with Special Guests: 2ge+her," <<http://thejonlovitzcomedyclub.com/show.cfm?id=148009>>, 2012 [accessed 8 November 2012].

²³⁷ Lisa Respers France, "Lance Bass: I Would love for an 'N Sync reunion to happen," <<http://marquee.blogs.cnn.com/2012/09/19/lance-bass-i-would-love-for-an-n-sync-reunion-to-happen/>>, 19 September 2012 [accessed 20 September 2012].

²³⁸ Brenna Ehrlich, "Justin Timberlake's Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award: What is It? Timberlake joins the ranks of Michael Jackson, Madonna and Britney Spears with this VMA honor," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1712412/justin-timberlake-vma-michael-jackson-video-vanguard-award.jhtml>>, 15 August 2013 [accessed 21 January 2014].

icon outside of his time spent in a boy band. He also shared links with the women of millennial bubblegum pop music, and thus provides a symbolic bridge in the gendered dialectics of the millennial generation.

Chapter Two

An Interlude in Millennial Gender Dialectics: Justin Timberlake (and Britney Spears)

Just Justin: Justin Timberlake's Solo Venture

Sick and tired of hearing all these people talk about / What's the deal with this
pop life and when is it gonna fade out? / The thing you got to realize / What we
doing is not a trend / We got the gift of melody / We gonna bring it 'til the end.²³⁹
—*NSYNC, "Pop," 2001.

I think that whole time [with 'N Sync], I was living in some small shape of
oblivion. I thought, 'They're just putting that teen-pop label on us because they
don't understand.' I look back now and realize that that's exactly what it was.
Like, why did I think it was something else? When I realized that, I [said] two
things... 'I don't want to do teen pop again.' And two, 'I don't want to ever not
realize something for what it is....' I've had some of the greatest experiences with
[the members of 'N Sync], but do I think that what I've done with [Justified] is
ten times better than anything 'N Sync has ever done? Yes, I do. But I'm a cocky
bastard.²⁴⁰

—Justin Timberlake in *Rolling Stone* on starting his solo career, 2003.

Justin Randall Timberlake, born 31 January 1981, in Memphis, Tennessee,
recognized that his fame in the boy band *NSYNC was rooted in the teen-pop genre.
Before his rise to superstardom as a solo singer-songwriter, actor, record producer, and
businessman, Timberlake believed that his work in a boy band had contributed nothing
more than mere musical fluff to the music industry, a belief which has been controverted
in this study of millennial pop music. The industry's minds knew what to produce to

²³⁹ *NSYNC, "Pop," *Celebrity* (New York: Jive Records, 2001).

²⁴⁰ Jenny Eliscu, "Justin Timberlake: The New King of Pop -- This year, Justin Timberlake rocked your
body, and Cameron Diaz's, too. And he earned some cred, trading in teen beats for R&B swagger,"
<<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/justin-timberlake-the-new-king-of-pop-20031225>>, 25
December 2003 [accessed 27 January 2014].

cater to their targeted teen audiences and manufactured tunes and imagery that ranged from sexual to aggressive and sensitive. Timberlake's statements in *Rolling Stone* suggested that he did not like the synthetic teen-pop genre, which probably explains why he began his solo music career. His next journey in the entertainment industry crossed paths with others who had shaped generation Y's culture—fellow-'N Sync-er J.C. Chasez, and the pop princesses Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. Collectively, these individuals formed a cohort that both influenced and reflected millennial culture. Recognition of Timberlake's significance helps to see connections between boy bands and pop princesses as well millennial culture as well as between millennial boy and girl culture through his personal and professional lives, and by his continued power in contemporary culture.

It is worth remembering that Timberlake was a contestant on the talent show *Star Search* when he was only eleven years old. Even though he did not win the contest, the experience proved useful in his career.²⁴¹ It is also useful to know that he came from the South and that his first musical styles were country and gospel. Timberlake told *Rolling Stone*, "I grew up listening to country music. . . . My grandfather taught me about Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson and the importance that they had and how they were the ambassadors of country music."²⁴²

At twelve years of age, Timberlake joined the cast of the *The All-New Mickey Mouse Club*, a show which ultimately cast an entire group of future millennial personalities. Timberlake met future *NSYNC member J.C. Chasez, during his time on

²⁴¹ Ben Crandell, "Justin Timberlake: From Star Search to Sun Life Stadium," <<http://www.southflorida.com/events/south-florida-events-go-guide-blog/sf-justin-timberlake-from-star-search-to-sun-life-stadium-20130814,0,1043721.story>>, 14 August 2013 [accessed 31 January 2014]; Tyler Gray, *The Hit Charade* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 128.

²⁴² Ellison, "Justin Timberlake: The New King of Pop."

MMC, as well as Christina Aguilera, with whom Timberlake would co-headline a tour when he launched his solo music career, and Britney Spears. Timberlake caught the eye of Chris Kirkpatrick who, with infamous mogul Lou Pearlman, recruited Timberlake for the boy band *NSYNC.²⁴³ As noted previously, Timberlake took on more songwriting and more lead vocals in *NSYNC as time progressed, until the group disbanded. During his time in *NSYNC, rumors flared about a possible relationship between Timberlake and pop princess Britney Spears.²⁴⁴ Their much talked about relationship illustrated the extent to which these millennial icons' lives shaped and reflected their generation's culture. Following their separation, both wrote deeply personal songs—Timberlake's "Cry Me A River" and Spears' "Everytime"—which are examined below.

The Justin Timberlake-Britney Spears relationship only lasted from 1999 to 2002, but separately they continued to grow into significant millennial icons.²⁴⁵ Since his boy band days, Timberlake has branched out into a successful solo artist career, entered the film industry, embarked on business ventures, and appeared on television.²⁴⁶ He has released four albums in the decade following his breakup with Spears: *Justified* (2002), certified triple platinum by the RIAA; the quadruple-platinum album, *FutureSex/LoveSounds* (2006); *The 20/20 Experience* (2013), certified double-platinum; and *The 20/20 Experience – 2 of 2* (2013), awarded platinum status.²⁴⁷ Timberlake's record sales showed the legacy of millennial music and icons continued to have on American culture even after fifteen years since bubblegum pop music exploded at the end

²⁴³ Essex and Karger, "Bubble Gum Blows Up!," 22.

²⁴⁴ Zach Johnson, "Britney Spears Reveals Her First Kiss Was Justin Timberlake, Says Jason Trawick Breakup Sucked," <<http://www.eonline.com/news/459658/britney-spears-reveals-her-first-kiss-was-justin-timberlake-says-jason-trawick-breakup-sucked>>, 17 September 2013 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Andrea Mandell, "Justin Timberlake, Jessica Biel marry," <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2012/10/19/timberlake-biel-marry/1642163/>>, 19 October 2012 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁴⁷ "RIAA – Gold & Platinum Seachable Database."

of the twentieth-century. Timberlake was not only known to millennials for his time with *NSYNC and for being a solo pop star, he also pursued a career in acting and was featured in many films that were tailored to millennial audiences.

Timberlake starred in films including *Alpha Dog* (2006), *Black Snake Moan* (2006), *The Love Guru* (2008), *The Social Network* (2010), *Bad Teacher* (2011), *Friends with Benefits* (2011), *In Time* (2011), *Trouble with the Curve* (2013), and *Runner, Runner* (2013), displaying an acting range inclusive of comedy, drama, and action and adventure. He also tested his ability to be a businessman. In 2007, Timberlake opened “Southern Hospitality,” a restaurant in New York City that serves “homemade comfort food,” which was inspired by his Granny Sadie and her pecan pie.²⁴⁸ He even ventured into reinvigorating the 2003 social networking website Myspace in 2013, though it was unsuccessful as layoffs remained imminent five months later.²⁴⁹ Though he is known for his film ventures over his business ventures, Timberlake, aside from his music career, also gained a great deal of visibility and acclaim from his television appearances.

By March 2013, Timberlake had hosted *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) five times, a feat only fourteen other performers had achieved.²⁵⁰ The performance that launched Justin Timberlake’s popularity on SNL was his collaboration with the comedy group The Lonely Island on “Dick In A Box,” a humorous song about presenting one’s penis as a gift on all occasions. There are, however, many performances that are memorable and

²⁴⁸ “Pecan Pie Recipe From Justin Timberlake’s Granny Sadie,” <<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Recipes/story?id=3393149>>, 29 July 2007 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁴⁹ Rebecca Macatee, “Justin Timberlake Launches New Myspace at Star-Studded Party,” <<http://www.eonline.com/news/429495/justin-timberlake-launches-new-myspace-at-star-studded-party>>, 13 June 2013 [accessed 1 February 2014]; Alex Dalenberg, “Justin Timberlake hasn’t brought sexy back for rebooted Myspace, now hit with layoffs,” <<http://upstart.bizjournals.com/companies/media/2013/11/11/myspace-hit-with-layoffs.html>>, 11 November 2013 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁵⁰ Claire Zulkey, “Justin Timberlake joins ‘SNL’ 5-time club; veteran hosts pitch in,” <<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/10/entertainment/la-et-st-snl-justin-timberlake-jay-z-andy-samberg-wild-and-crazy-guys>>, 10 March 2013 [accessed 1 February 2014].

ranked by fans of *SNL* and Timberlake. *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* also featured Timberlake frequently as Timberlake and talk show host Jimmy Fallon collaborated on several memorable performances, such as their “History of Rap” routines. Fallon featured Timberlake for the entire week leading up to the release of *20/20 Experience Part 1* and even named the week of 11 March 2013, “Justin Timberweek.”²⁵¹ On 25 August 2013, Fallon presented Timberlake with the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award at the MTV VMAs, an award that honored performers who had made a significant impact in the art of music videos. This award show featured a fifteen-minute live performance by Timberlake, highlighting his own songs and a brief reunion with *NSYNC.²⁵² The previous winner of the award was Britney Spears in 2011—the award was not handed out in 2012. This award was not the only award show connection shared by Timberlake and Spears. In 2014, fifteen years after their careers launched, the two were nominated for the same award at the People’s Choice Awards.

At the 2014 People’s Choice Awards, an awards presentation that distinguishes popular people and works in the realms of music, film, and television, as voted upon by the American general public, Timberlake and Spears were both in attendance, which sent the social media-sphere into a craze as the former couple appeared in the same location at the same time. These icons were nominated for awards, with Timberlake nominated in five categories: Favorite Album for *The 20/20 Experience*, Favorite Male Artist, Favorite R&B Artist, Favorite Song for “Mirrors,” and Favorite Pop Artist. He won Favorite

²⁵¹ Hillary Busis, “Jimmy Fallon’s ‘Justin Timberweek’ kicks off,” <<http://popwatch.ew.com/2013/03/12/justin-timberlake-jimmy-fallon/>>, 12 March 2013 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁵² Ehrlich, “Justin Timberlake’s Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award.”

Male Artist, Favorite R&B Artist, and Favorite Album.²⁵³ Spears, who was nominated in three categories, won one award: Favorite Pop Artist, beating out Timberlake for her sole accolade. Being recognized by the public as still relevant to popular culture fifteen years after their careers kicked off showed how significant these icons remained not just to generation Y but to the entire American cultural landscape. The continued focus on these two popular millennial personalities' previous relationship, one that had ended twelve years before the 2014 People's Choice Awards, accentuated the argument that Timberlake and Spears have proven significant to American popular culture. The 2013 coverage paled in comparison, however, to the attention given to the power couple while they were dating and after their breakup.

Discourse on Millennial Gender Dialectics through Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears

Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears' relationship was highly publicized given their sudden and extreme popularity in American culture. Curiosity about the sexual details of their relationship ran rampant partly because Spears claimed in 2000 that she had "very high morals." "I don't believe in sex before marriage. I don't believe in drugs or ever smoking. I believe in God," she told the United Kingdom's *Sunday Express* that year.²⁵⁴ The lyrics from her music, and her images in her music videos and performances, however, offered a contrary impression. In 2001, Timberlake expressed his elation in obtaining such a "catch" to *Rolling Stone*:

²⁵³ "People's Choice Awards 2014 Nominees," <<http://www.peopleschoice.com/pca/awards/nominees/>>, 2014 [accessed 31 January 2014].

²⁵⁴ "Britney baffled by sexy image," <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/850220.stm>>, 25 July 2000 [accessed 1 February 2014].

I think my girl is fine. What can I say? The thing is, so many girls you meet in this business are so into themselves, and Britney is not. She's as down-home as she was before she got into this. That's the best thing about her. I got the cream of the crop, man!²⁵⁵

These sentiments of Timberlake and Spears exuded narcissism, whereby they emphasized themselves, and Timberlake further radiated a sense of masculine aggression as he sought to ensure that everyone, particularly other males, knew that he “got the cream of the crop, *man!*” Despite this early rather blissful portrayal of the relationship, it took a sexual and tempestuous turn the following year.

The couple split after three years in 2002, and Justin Timberlake invalidated Britney Spears' public stance on pre-marital celibacy in a 4 November 2002 interview with Barbara Walters on the television news show *20/20*.²⁵⁶ Walters quoted Spears as saying, “Good morals mean waiting to have sex until after you’ve been married.”²⁵⁷ Timberlake responded, “I will definitely agree with her on that.” Walters then asked him, “Did you and she live up to this during your relationship?” Timberlake hesitated and gulped down some of his beverage before he answered, “Sure,” followed by an uncomfortable chuckle and then another “Sure” directed toward the camera with a giant grin and nervous glances downward. To further undermine Spears' claims of innocent charisma, and in a self-promotional move to gain more airplay of his first solo single, “Like I Love You,” Timberlake disclosed in September 2002 to New York radio Station

²⁵⁵ Toure, “‘N Sync: True Tales of the Pop Life – The heavyweight champions of pop experiment with ‘Celebrity,’ on which they take their destiny into their own hands,” <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/n-sync-true-theses-of-the-pop-life-20010816>> 16 August 2001 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁵⁶ “‘20/20’ Specials Feature Celebrity Interviews,” <<http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=123812&page=1>>, 31 October 2002 [accessed 7 February 2014].

²⁵⁷ *Justin Timberlake and Barbara Walters* [YouTube Video], <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlJgCn6JkXU>> [accessed 7 February 2014].

Hot 97 that he had performed cunnilingus on Spears.²⁵⁸ In November 2002, Timberlake released his second single, “Cry Me A River,” which fueled speculation about the reason for the Timberlake-Spears split. In the rage-fueled song, Timberlake sang:

You don’t have to say what you did / I already know, I found out from him /
Now there’s just no chance for you and me, there’ll never be . . . It wasn’t like
you only talked to him and you know it . . . Now you tell me you need me /
When you call me on the phone / Girl I refuse, you must have me confused /
With some other guy / Your bridges were burned and now it’s your turn / To
cry, cry me a river.²⁵⁹

In explaining the trigger for the song, Timberlake told *E!*, “I was on a phone call that was not the most enjoyable phone call.” He worked on “Cry Me A River” with music producer Timbaland, who pointed to that incident as the impetus for the song as he recalled that the lyrics for the song flooded from Timberlake’s mouth.²⁶⁰

The music video for “Cry Me A River” featured Timberlake breaking into an ex-girlfriend’s home through glass shattered by a bullet. He then recorded a video of himself and another woman getting intimate in his ex’s bedroom. His ex-girlfriend returned home and Timberlake watched her disrobe and shower. She emerged from the shower startled and as she entered her bedroom searching for the person who was in her home, her eyes landed on a television playing the video he had just recorded. The purpose for breaking in and showing the video to his former lover is unclear based solely on the video, but based on the lyrics of the song, it was to seek emotional revenge on a woman who had cheated on him. The dark video portrayed Timberlake as an angry, vengeful male, with voyeuristic tendencies, as he peeked through a crack behind a door

²⁵⁸ “Timberlake spills the beans about private time with Spears,” <<http://www.chron.com/entertainment/article/Timberlake-spills-the-beans-about-private-time-2085187.php>>, 26 September 2002 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁵⁹ Justin Timberlake, “Cry Me A River,” *Justified* (New York: Jive Records, 2002).

²⁶⁰ *E! True Hollywood Story*, “Timbaland,” 20 December 2011.

and inhaled a whiff of his ex's hair as she walked through her house. With this image, Timberlake broke completely from the fun, teen pop image that *NSYNC had promoted. The most controversial aspect of this video was the portrayal of his ex-girlfriend, who bore a striking resemblance to real-life ex Britney Spears (figure 19). From his merciless sexual escapade, to the message of the lyrics and music video, "Cry Me A River" bristled with the anger, aggression, sexuality, and machismo associated with millennial boy culture.

In 2003, in response to all of the derogatory allegations and rumors spiraling around her breakup with Timberlake, Spears admitted that she had only engaged in coitus with one person. She admitted that, "It was two years into my relationship with Justin. And I thought he was the one. But I was wrong. I didn't think he was gonna go on Barbara Walters and sell me out."²⁶¹ In 2004, Spears released "Everytime" as a single from her 2003 album, *In The*



Figure 19: Timberlake kicking a photo frame at the camera to show a Britney Spears lookalike in "Cry Me A River" (Jive).

Zone, in which she addressed the entire spectacle surrounding the failed relationship. Spears sang in an angelic and breathy tone on a track featuring a piano, strings, and a music box:

²⁶¹ Jennifer Vineyard, "Britney Talks Sex; Turns Out She Really Wasn't That Innocent: Interview with *W* magazine also reveals details about singer's upcoming album," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1473676/britney-opens-up-about-sex-life.jhtml>>, 8 July 2003 [accessed 1 February 2014].

Why are we strangers when / Our love is strong . . . Everytime I try to fly I fall / Without my wings I feel so small . . . And everytime I see you in my dreams / I see your face, you're haunting me / I guess I need you baby . . . I may have made it rain / Please forgive me / My weakness caused you pain / And this song is my sorry.²⁶²

Spears' backup singer, Annet Artani, claimed that the songwriting process behind "Everytime" "was a very organic, sad experience, but I think that's where the truth comes out."²⁶³ The song came in response to the hurtful comments made by Timberlake, as Artani recalled:

He was talking shit about her at that time on the radio. He was getting personal. Here, she had a different type of image, and he was really exposing some stuff that she probably didn't want out there, and in front of her little sister. . . . I remember her sister being mortified.²⁶⁴

The song's music video featured Spears being rushed and injured by paparazzi, while her boyfriend flung magazines with her face and headlines reading, "Britney's Shocking Secrets Revealed" and "Still in love?" These epitomized Timberlake's public remarks about her. Spears then fights with her boyfriend before entering a bathtub where she realizes she is bleeding from the back of her head and slides underwater. Scenes from a hospital hallway are interspersed. Spears then re-emerges from the bathtub without a trace of blood in the water. She smiles, alluding to her ability to move past this dark period, which also suggests that the death in the video was representative of suicidal thoughts. Spears' ability to smile after such a degrading and distressing incident indicated a sense of empowerment, as she survived the character attacks launched by a man, while also highlighting the overload of attention the paparazzi and the tabloids were giving her during this period.

²⁶² Britney Spears, "Everytime," *In The Zone* (New York: Jive, 2003).

²⁶³ Bradley Stern, "Annet Artani: From 'Everytime' to 'Alive,'" <<http://www.muumuse.com/2010/02/annet-artani-from-everytime-to-alive.html>>, 8 February 2010 [accessed 1 February 2014].

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

The manner in which the media portrayed Timberlake and Spears' separation exemplified the double-standard that existed in American culture, and these celebrities, particularly Spears, had to endure the impact of the fallout. Though neither Timberlake nor Spears had confirmed the reason for the breakup, Timberlake's "Cry Me a River," many other sources, and fans certainly came to the conclusion that Spears had had an affair. Wade Robson, *NSYNC and Spears' choreographer, was rumored to be the dividing force, which Robson and Spears publicly denied.²⁶⁵ Media sources circulated the story that peddled Spears as unfaithful and promoted Timberlake's heart-wrenching stories, including his crying himself to sleep following the breakup.²⁶⁶ In November 2003, news reporter Diane Sawyer interviewed Spears and reaffirmed that Timberlake "made a kind of sport out of public retaliation" about the failed relationship and that "*you* broke his heart, *you* did something that caused him so much pain, so much suffering."²⁶⁷ Sawyer continued to try to get the reason for their breakup by asking Spears, "What did you do? . . . He left the impression that you weren't faithful, that you betrayed the relationship." Spears replied, "I think everyone has a side to their story. . . . I'm not technically saying he's wrong, but I'm not technically saying he's right either." Sawyer highlighted the retribution Timberlake publicly took and the media's critical reception of Spears. Actress Cameron Diaz, who also dated Justin Timberlake from 2003 to 2006, spoke about the double-standard from a famed woman's perspective to *Self* magazine in February 2014. Though Diaz admitted she still maintained friendships with ex-

²⁶⁵ "Britney Spears: A Life in Photos," <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/pictures/britney-spears-life-in-photos-20100301/0801393>>, 1 March 2010 [accessed 11 February 2014]; Vineyard, "Britney Talks Sex."

²⁶⁶ *Justin Timberlake and Barbara Walters* [YouTube Video].

²⁶⁷ *Britney Spears on Primetime with Diane Sawyer (Sub Esp) Entrevista – Interview* [YouTube video]. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tj5wqYzknuc>> [accessed 11 February 2014].

boyfriends, she was less accepting of women's portrayals in the media following breakups:

I get a little mad sometimes about the chauvinism and misogyny in media. That upsets me. If a relationship fails, it's because the woman couldn't hold on to her man, not that the man cheated [*Laughs*]. It's terrifying for a woman to get out of a relationship because it's always going to be her fault.²⁶⁸

Spears was villainized following the relationship while media outlets were less critical of Timberlake. The treatment of the millennial pop acts also reflected this trend, as the boy bands were far less criticized for their narcissism and sexuality than their solo female peers. The repercussions from Timberlake and Spears' breakup epitomized facets of the gender dialectics in millennial culture that generation Y men and women consumed daily.

Timberlake, who has gained a strong following since the days of his boy band and his relationship with pop princess Britney Spears, helped to illuminate a gendered dichotomy in millennial culture. The Spears-Timberlake relationship and breakup offered examples of the millennial gendered culture discussed throughout this study. While Timberlake exhibited characteristics of millennial boy culture through his anger, aggression, sexuality, and masculine narcissism, Spears had demonstrated the narcissism, the sexuality, and the empowerment of female generation Y culture.

²⁶⁸ Erin Bried, "Candid Cameron," *Self* (February 2014), iPad Newsstand Edition.

Chapter Three

Pop Princesses: Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears

Contemporary American Girl Culture

Crystal is a shy, single 24-year-old Britney Spears lookalike who lives a normal life. She has a comfy office job but secretly desires a different lifestyle. Crystal thinks bigger breasts and a nose job will give her the confidence needed to become a stripper. Because of her similarities to Britney, Crystal is planning on impersonating Britney on stage when she becomes a stripper. After surgery, she can honestly say, she's "Not that innocent!"²⁶⁹

This is the summary of an episode from the MTV program "I Want a Famous Face," a documentary series in 2005 that followed the journeys of different young Americans who received cosmetic surgery in hopes that they would resemble a celebrity. Crystal provides the perfect example of what the generations preceding hers have deemed characteristic of the female millennials in today's society—they are fantastically narcissistic and overtly sexual.²⁷⁰

From the time of the 1970s, when American culture began focusing more intently on the individual, narcissism intensified, portrayed through excessive self-admiration, and those born during the 1980s and thereafter knew only this new affluent, self-indulgent society.²⁷¹ In 1985, celebrity Madonna assured women that they were "living

²⁶⁹ "I Want a Famous Face | Episode: Crystal U," <http://www.mtv.com/shows/i_want_a_famous_face-2/episode.jhtml?episodeID=81697>, 2005 [accessed 17 November 2010].

²⁷⁰ Kupelian, David, "Selling sex and corruption to your kids," <http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=36598>, 15 January 2004 [accessed 4 December 2010].

²⁷¹ Keith W. Campbell and Jean M. Twenge, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (New York: Free Press, 2009), Amazon Kindle location 120-142.

in a material world,” while women’s magazines, such as *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*, featured advertisements that promoted women striving to achieve their ideal confident and flawless selves in this luxury-absorbed culture.²⁷² Feminist academic and cultural reviewer Susan J. Douglas described these ads as surreal distortions of reality that narcissistic world “in which women focused on themselves and their appearance.”²⁷³ The rise in open sexual relationships and promiscuity began in the 1960s through the “free love” crusades that were bolstered by “a desire to break out of the old fashioned strictures” and that fundamentally turned “sexual freedom [into] a new kind of religion.”²⁷⁴ Over the decades, the sexual activity of the young in society has increased, and *Time* magazine in 1998 placed blame upon an “information age” that entertained and promoted products through titillation, a desensitization to the subject of sex among the youth through a constant preaching of sexual responsibility, and the rise of single-parent households which allotted more unsupervised time for adolescents.²⁷⁵ Dr. Richard Ratner, president of the American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry, in 1993 described American popular culture, inundated with sexual images, themes, and messages, as “a world in which everything is sensual and physical” where “everything is more explicit.”²⁷⁶ This was the nature of the world in which generation Y lived and its members needed to find, or create, a way to establish themselves in society.

Crystal’s transformation from a shy office worker into a confident stripper showed yet another change in recent American girl culture. It illustrated one example of

²⁷² Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994), 250-251.

²⁷³ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 250.

²⁷⁴ Ron Stodghill II, “Where’d You Learn That?” <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,988535,00.html>>, 15 June 1998 [accessed 20 November 2010].

²⁷⁵ Idem.

²⁷⁶ Nancy Gibbs, “How Should We Teach Our Kids about SEX?” <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978565,00.html>>, 24 May 1993 [accessed 20 November 2010].

how generation Y females sought empowerment over their lives, and over the males in society, through a New Age feminism being pitched to adolescent females as “girl power.” The all-female popular music group the Spice Girls, “girl power” advocates, promulgated the ideas to young women in the early 1990s that they “have a brain, a voice and an opinion” and that “boys treat them with respect or take a hike.”²⁷⁷ Why did Crystal, along with many other young women, yearn to resemble popular female figures such as Britney Spears? Contemporary culture has revolved heavily around gossip and the most famous (and infamous) celebrities and their lives, as seen through celebrity news magazines such as *OK!*, *People*, *Star*, and the celebrity website *TMZ.com*. No strangers to this spotlight and attention were popular music princesses Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears, who, from the beginning of their careers as entertainers, made headlines and became icons in the American popular culture. Aguilera and Spears not only gained the attention of older millennials, but even younger Americans, as documented by Kim Cooper, a contributor to the popular culture magazine *Scram*. She reported an interview in 2000 with her brother, Morgan (ten years old), and sister, Chinta (eleven years old):

Kim: Now I want you to tell me about some contemporary [music] groups, since you know so much about them. . . . Who is the biggest star right now? Is it Britney Spears?

Chinta: Yeah.

Morgan: No. Well, to *girls*!

Chinta: Christina [Aguilera] and Britney are kind of at the top, but Britney has been—well, everyone likes her. . . *Everybody* likes Britney Spears! This boy in my class is obsessed with her!²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Susan J. Douglas, *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message That Feminism's Work is Done* (New York: Times Books, 2010), Amazon Kindle location 96-121.

²⁷⁸ Kim Cooper, “Up Close and Personal: ‘We don’t even know any songs from the Beatles!’” in *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears*, ed. Kim Cooper and David Smay (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2001), 276.

Though Cooper may have created a bias by mentioning Britney Spears in her questioning, Chinta agreed and brought in a comparison between Spears and Aguilera, confirming that in her opinion Spears was the bigger celebrity, with Morgan agreeing in terms of popularity with prepubescent girls. Throughout their careers as performers, Aguilera and Spears have been in the spotlight, gaining the attention of millennials and becoming targets of the older generations' repugnance based on their music and videos, their personal actions, and the effect that they have had on society's youth. Popular music is one of the leading mediums through which listeners learn about societal and cultural norms.²⁷⁹ Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears both arrived on the popular music scene in 1998; they have been proclaimed as heavily influential in contemporary girl culture and have thus been fashioned as toxic factors in the increase of narcissism and adolescent sexual behavior—all the while being praised for bringing a sense of empowerment to females. At issue is whether Aguilera and Spears and their careers are shaping forces in the evolving culture or merely reflections of those changes.

Culture is a developed sense of social norms, and for a few individuals to be the sole causes of change within a culture is highly improbable. Aguilera and Spears are recognizable cultural celebrities of a generation. Their status allowed them to shape the changing youth culture. They can also be recognized as a reflection of generation Y's shifting girl culture through their professional careers. It is essential to note that there were other blonde female teenagers who also appeared shortly after the rise of Spears and Aguilera and that competed in the same bubblegum pop market. A few notable examples included Mandy Moore, Jessica Simpson, and Hoku Ho. Their fates in the music

²⁷⁹ Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman, *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MP3*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 469.

industry illuminated the power of pop princesses and the comparative success of Aguilera and Spears.

Mandy Moore arrived on the music scene in 1999 and was known for her hits “Candy,” “Walk Me Home,” “So Real,” “I Wanna Be With You,” a cover of Carole King’s “I Feel the Earth Move,” and “Only Hope,” which was featured in the film *A Walk To Remember* (2002), based on Nicholas Sparks’ novel, in which Moore also starred. Moore’s airy timbre gave a distinctly playful, yet innocent, tone to her songs, which she put to use as the talking and singing voices of Rapunzel in Disney’s *Tangled* (2010). She has appeared in more films and television series and done more voice overs than any of the other blonde pop princesses. *Forbes*, an influential business magazine and business news source, reported that Moore, even after her withdrawal from the teen-pop scene, earned \$3.5 million in 2007 and placed nineteenth on its “The 20 Top-Earning Young Superstars” list.²⁸⁰ *Forbes* stated that Moore grossed that income in 2007 by co-starring in five films that year, appearing on magazine covers, releasing her album *Wild Hope*, and unveiling Mblem, her own fashion line. Mandy Moore was not the only pop princess from her cohort to find success in the fashion industry, as ballad-belter Jessica Simpson’s entry into fashion likewise proved lucrative.

Jessica Simpson also emerged onto the pop-music scene in 1999. She, like the Jonas Brothers who came later, wrapped herself in a religious aura as the daughter of a minister. She was known for her performances of the songs “I Wanna Love You Forever,” “In This Skin,” “I Think I’m in Love with You,” “With You,” “Sweetest Sin,” “Angels,” “These Boots Are Made for Walkin’,” and “Where You Are,” a duet with her

²⁸⁰ “20 Under 25: The Top-Earning Young Superstars,” <http://www.forbes.com/2007/12/01/celebrity-hollywood-media-cz_lg_1204kidstars.html>, 4 December 2007 [accessed 12 February 2014].

former husband Nick Lachey, member of the boy band 98°. ²⁸¹ The couple starred in a reality television series, *Newlyweds*, on MTV, where her infamous question, “Is this fish or chicken?” about the tuna product Chicken of the Sea, made her a household name. Jessica Simpson left the pop music genre and entered the country music scene, but also had considerable financial success in the fashion industry. ²⁸² In 2011, she had earned about \$750 from her fashion empire, establishing herself as a prosperous businesswoman. Jessica Simpson was not the only blonde pop princess that shared ties with boy band 98°.

98° went on tour with another blonde female teenager, Hoku Ho, who was born and raised in Hawai‘i, and who was the daughter of Hawaiian singer and entertainer, Don Ho, famously known for his musical anthem “Tiny Bubbles.” Hoku Ho illustrated how universal the blonde pop princess trend was at the turn of the twenty-first century, providing talent from across the Pacific to the American teen-pop music genre. Ho gained popularity in 2000 with her songs “Another Dumb Blonde,” “How Do I Feel,” and “Perfect Day.” “Perfect Day” was featured in the millennial film *Legally Blonde* (2001), which starred Reese Witherspoon, that told the empowering story of a seemingly vapid sorority girl who went to Harvard Law School to be with her boyfriend, and despite her personal and academic struggles, she ultimately finds a better man and graduates at the top of her class. Ho’s teen-pop fame was short lived, but it was steered by her personal beliefs. *The Honolulu Advertiser* published an interview with Ho on 1 February 2001 that commented,

²⁸¹ “Angels” was performed by Robbie Williams, and “This Boots Are Made For Walkin’” was performed by Nancy Sinatra.

²⁸² In February 2011, *New York Magazine* reported that she had earned about \$750 million from her fashion empire, establishing herself as a prosperous businesswoman. See: Amy Laroocca, “The \$1 Billion Girl: Jessica Simpson is laughing all the way to the fashion bank,” <<http://nymag.com/fashion/11/spring/71664/>>, 13 February 2011 [accessed 8 April 2014].

Hoku Ho has been compared to such girl-star icons as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. But the born-again Christian has sidestepped the comparisons, refusing to criticize her saucy peers while attempting to dress and act in ways consistent with her values, a tough tightrope to walk given the sexuality inherent in pop stardom today.²⁸³

Ho's unwillingness to be a manufactured pop act may have hindered her potential to reach the apex of stardom as her blonde peers had, but it nonetheless revealed the marketing strategies of record companies in their pursuit to present pop princesses to consumers. The pop princess of the 1990s sang bubblegum tunes before they matured and reshaped their own musical careers. Hoku Ho had managed to release an eponymous debut album with tracks that were recognized nationally before she disappeared from the teen pop scene.

Mandy Moore, Jessica Simpson, and Hoku Ho demonstrated how popular and lucrative the blonde pop princess image was for record companies targeting the millennial generation. Spears and Aguilera reached the pinnacle of visibility and success in this millennial market, and thus are the focus of this study, but it is worth acknowledging the marketability of pop princesses in the music and entertainment industries at the turn of the millennium. The pop princesses' ambition, visibility, and economic power in industries even outside of music were contributing factors in male ambivalence about millennial women. This type of disdain for women was seen in the boy bands' lyrics and music videos as well as in Timberlake and Spears' relationship, and reflected the rise of women's presence in American society and the aggravation this trend fueled in millennial men. Aguilera and Spears' record and singles sales paralleled and even surpassed those of the boy bands, which suggested that the pop princesses'

²⁸³ Wayne Harada, "Hoku Ho secretly married to manager," <<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/2001/Feb/01/21islandlife17.html>>, 1 February 2001 [accessed 12 February 2014].

contributions to the music industry and culture were recognized as equal, if not superior, to their male group counterparts. The success of the pop princesses in millennial bubblegum music had lasting effects on American culture and popular music, but their target audience was more limited in scope.

Record companies targeting the younger audiences in the 2000s produced acts that appealed to two age ranges through different genres: “teeny bopper acts” for those aged twelve to sixteen, the category in which these pop princesses and boy bands were included, and “rock, rap, and alternative” music for young adults aged seventeen to twenty-five.²⁸⁴ Marketing officials chose Aguilera and Spears’ music and music videos with adolescent females in mind, and fashioned them in ways that would appeal to that specific audience while still generating visibility and demand in the general American and global music markets. Their sexual presentations influenced young women’s ideas about body image while simultaneously titillating men of all ages. Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears, through their personal and professional lives, are therefore both causes and reflections of generation Y’s changing girl culture, as they were fashioned for success in the millennial marketplace while personally becoming cultural icons of generation Y. Through an exploration of Aguilera and Spears’ lives and careers, their music and performances, this thesis details how they became evident symbols of the narcissism and sexuality central to generation Y’s female identity—and central to the critiques of their alleged toxicity. This chapter documents the empowerment Aguilera and Spears achieved through that narcissism and sexuality, as well as through their personal lives, their economic success, and their status as cultural celebrities. The pop princesses experienced confrontations with men in the entertainment industry, but they

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

used their narcissism and sexuality as tools of empowerment and rose above the scorned men to help embolden millennial women. They became heroines for generation Y. Neither Aguilera nor Spears was born into a lifestyle of wealth or fame; they both had humble upbringings before they became powerful cultural icons of a generation, and it is necessary to understand those journeys before examining their influence as celebrities.

She's a Genie in a Bottle: Christina Aguilera

It's important to me to be a positive role model. Parading around in my bra and a pair of hot pants will not inspire confidence in other girls.²⁸⁵
—Christina Aguilera, 1999.

Christina María Aguilera was born in Staten Island, New York, on 18 December 1980. Aguilera's father was a sergeant in the United States army and the family moved wherever the job was, including Texas, New Jersey, and overseas in Japan.²⁸⁶ Aguilera professed to *Rolling Stone* that she always longed to be in the spotlight from a young age: "When my family lived in Japan, my mother taught English to this one guy who brought over his paintings. He spread them on the floor and, just to steal the attention away, I started playing hopscotch all over them. I'm just like that."²⁸⁷ Her father was abusive and she, along with her mother and sister, separated from him when she was young, after her parents divorced.²⁸⁸ Her sentiments regarding the emotional and physical abuse her mother had endured can be heard in her song, "I'm OK," from her 2002 *Stripped* album,

²⁸⁵ Christina Aguilera, as cited in Larry Flick, "Christina Aguilera: Mind over body," *Vibe* (September 2009): 158.

²⁸⁶ Anthony Bozza, "The Christina Aguilera story (so far)," *Rolling Stone* (28 October 1999): 53.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ "Christina María Aguilera," <<http://www.biography.com/print/profile/christina-aguilera-9542394>>, [accessed 27 September 2013].

“Hurt me to see the pain across my mother’s face / Every time my father’s fist would put her in her place.”²⁸⁹

Aguilera’s journey to stardom began on 15 March 1990, when she competed and placed second on the televised talent show *Star Search*.²⁹⁰ In 1993, Christina Aguilera joined the *The All-New Mickey Mouse Club (MMC)*, a reboot of the previous incarnations of the *Mickey Mouse Club*, where she would perform alongside other future millennial popular culture figures, including Britney Spears, future *NSYNC-ers J.C. Chasez and Justin Timberlake, actor Ryan Gosling, and actress Keri Russell. The show was cancelled in 1995.²⁹¹

After *MMC* concluded, Aguilera, with her mother, moved to Japan, where she collaborated with Japanese pop singer Keizo Nakanishi on the duet, “All I Wanna Do.”²⁹² Her American success began in 1998, when she auditioned for and received the invitation to record the track “Reflection” for Disney’s *Mulan* (1998) soundtrack. A week after she recorded “Reflection,” RCA Records signed Aguilera to its label, which led to her self-titled debut album release on 24 August 1999.²⁹³ *Christina Aguilera* debuted at the number one spot on *Billboard*’s Top 200, a national list of the two-hundred top-selling albums, topping R&B and rap artist Puff Daddy’s (Sean Combs) *Forever* album, which debuted the same week. Her album also pushed the Backstreet Boys’ *Millennium* album from the first spot to the third, and moved Britney Spears’ *...Baby One More Time* down

²⁸⁹ Christina Aguilera, “I’m OK,” *Stripped* (New York: RCA Records, 2002).

²⁹⁰ “Christina Aguilera Biography: People.com”, <http://www.people.com/people/christina_aguilera/biography/>, 2014 [accessed 3 January 2014].

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Stephen Thomas Erlewine, “Christina Aguilera | Biography | AllMusic”, <<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/christina-aguilera-mn0000780258/biography>>, 2014 [accessed 14 January 2014].

²⁹³ “Christina Aguilera Biography: People.com.”

one place to sixth on the Top 200.²⁹⁴ On 24 September 1999, a month after its release, *Christina Aguilera* was certified double-platinum, and ultimately reached eight-times platinum status.²⁹⁵ On 23 February 2000 at the 42nd Annual Grammys, a convocation held to present awards for achievement in the music industry, Christina Aguilera won the award for “Best New Artist” over fellow millennial pop star Britney Spears.²⁹⁶

At the turn of the millennium, there was a rise in the Latin-pop music genre through the increase in the popularity of artists such as Jennifer Lopez, Enrique Iglesias, and Ricky Martin. Christina Aguilera participated in this growing pop sub-genre and recorded a Spanish album, *Mi Reflejo*, which was released on 12 September 2000, and became a six-time platinum album that contained songs sung in Spanish, including some re-recorded songs from *Christina Aguilera*.²⁹⁷ 2001 was a year of collaborative projects for Christina Aguilera. She recorded “Nobody Wants to be Lonely,” a duet with Latin-pop star Ricky Martin for his second English album, *Sound Loaded*, and she participated in a cover version of singer Patti Labelle’s “Lady Marmalade” with fellow music artists Mýa Marie Harrison (Mýa), Alecia Beth Moore (Pink), and Kimberly Denise Jones (Lil’ Kim) for the *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) soundtrack.²⁹⁸

In September 2002, Aguilera released her controversial hip-hop track, “Dirrty,” from her album *Stripped*, which debuted a month later. “Dirrty” is analyzed in more depth later, but Jancee Dunn from *Rolling Stone* claimed, “It’s hard to hear the song without conjuring up that *Girls Gone Wild: Beyond Thunderdome* video. The song also

²⁹⁴ “The Billboard 200,” *Billboard*, 11 September 1999, 104.

²⁹⁵ “RIAA – Gold & Platinum Searchable Database – January 15, 2014,” <http://www.riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?content_selector=gold-platinum-searchable-database>, 15 January 2014 [accessed 15 January 2014].

²⁹⁶ “Past Winners Search,” <<http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&title=&year=1999&genre=All>>, 2014 [accessed 14 January 2014].

²⁹⁷ “RIAA – Gold & Platinum Searchable Database – January 15, 2014,” [accessed 15 January 2014].

²⁹⁸ “Christina Aguilera Biography: People.com.”

completely misrepresents the rest of [*Stripped*].”²⁹⁹ Her comparison related the music video and lyrics of “Dirrty” to the Girls Gone Wild franchise that produces adult entertainment videos of young college females. Aguilera co-wrote many of the songs on *Stripped*, and this album reflected a branching out from her teenybopper tunes and marked her personal growth as she had experienced her “first big breakup, with a boyfriend who [she] had been with for more than two years.”³⁰⁰ It also denoted a change in management that stemmed from trickery and being taken advantage of professionally. Aguilera expounded on her new musical approach and album title to *USA Today*: “At the time things started happening for me, it was popular to be the squeaky-clean, cookie-cutter pop singer. But that role didn't speak to me, because it's so boring and superficial.”³⁰¹ She continued, “I just want to be real, to be myself. . . . It's about being emotionally stripped down for the first time.”

In 2003, Aguilera opened the 2003 MTV VMAs with fellow pop-princess Britney Spears and Madonna, singing a medley of Madonna's songs “Like a Virgin” and “Hollywood.” Opening the awards show was in itself an honor, but what caught the headlines the following day was what happened during the performance: Madonna sensually kissed both pop princesses. *MTV.com*'s Corey Moss blogged that “the actual awards were overshadowed by the steamy sight of Madonna kissing Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera.”³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Jancee Dunn, “Stripped | Album Reviews | Rolling Stone,” <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/stripped-20021105>>, 5 November 2002 [accessed 18 January 2014].

³⁰⁰ Elysa Gardner, “Aguilera's Image is ‘Stripped’,” <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/music/news/2002-10-23-christina-aguilera_x.htm>, 24 October 2002 [accessed 20 January 2014].

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Corey Moss, “Madonna Smooches With Britney And Christina; Justin, Coldplay Win Big At VMAs | MTV Video Music Awards,” <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1477729/justin-coldplay-win-big-at-vmas.jhtml>>, 28 August 2003 [accessed 17 September 2013].

In February 2005, twenty-three-year-old Aguilera got engaged to boyfriend and music executive Jason Bratman, and they married on 19 November 2005 in a wedding estimated to have cost two million dollars.³⁰³ *Back to Basics*, a double-disc album, was released on 10 August 2006, and debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 chart. Even though her previous album, *Stripped*, was a provocative, sexual album, Aguilera assured listeners that marriage would not tone down her music: “just because I have this newfound love in my life, that doesn’t mean I’m going to play it any softer, or that I’m going to change my point of view on sexuality. . . . I still got the nasty in me.”³⁰⁴ *Back to Basics* was a cornucopia of music styles that featured heavy, belting ballads, horny jazz tunes that were throwbacks to the harmonies of the Andrews Sisters, and beat-driven R&B songs, a clear step toward Aguilera further distancing herself from her bubblegum-pop roots and younger audiences. Aguilera’s 2002 *Stripped* was recognized as double-platinum, while her 2006 *Back to Basics* was certified platinum—a sign of a possible dwindling in her popularity.³⁰⁵

Despite a decrease in album sales, at the 2007 49th Grammy Awards Aguilera won “Best Female Pop Vocal Performance” for “Ain’t No Other Man,” from her *Back to Basics* album.³⁰⁶ She was also ranked nineteenth on *Forbes*’ “The Richest 20 Women In Entertainment” in 2007, with a net worth of \$60 million.³⁰⁷ At the end of 2007, Christina

³⁰³ “Christina Aguilera Gets Engaged,” <<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,26334,1027451,00.html>>, 12 February 2005 [accessed 18 January 2014]; “Christina Aguilera Biography: People.com.”

³⁰⁴ Lola Ogunnaike, “Christina Aguilera, That Dirty Girl, Cleans Up Real Nice,” <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/30/arts/30ogun.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1390179194-C+sbW/wILACk8Y060kyTw>>, 30 July 2006 [accessed 19 January 2014].

³⁰⁵ “RIAA – Gold & Platinum Searchable Database – January 15, 2014,” [accessed 15 January 2014].

³⁰⁶ “Past Winners Search,” <http://www.grammy.com/nominees/search?artist=&field_nominee_work_value=&year=2006&genre=All>, 2014 [accessed 19 January 2014].

³⁰⁷ Kiri Blakeley and Lea Goldman, “The 20 Richest Women In Entertainment,” <http://www.forbes.com/2007/01/17/richest-women-entertainment-tech-media-cz_lg_richwomen07_0118womenstars_lander.html>, 18 January 2007 [accessed 12 February 2014].

Aguilera announced publicly that she and Bratman were expecting a child.³⁰⁸ When questioned about her sexual image and the domestication that would follow the birth of her child, Aguilera presented an answer to *Marie Claire*, a monthly women's magazine, that was illustrative of the openness of the millennial generation:

We're so labeled. If you're too sexual, you're slutty. If you're not sexual enough, you're a prude. I like to put it out there as a topic of conversation. Why does it bother you? What's your problem with it? Am I really hurting you? Let's get to the root of it. I have more than one side of me that likes to get out on a stage and sing. Sometimes I want to be aggressive, sometimes I want to feel empowered in my sexuality and my vulnerability. I want to put all that out there.³⁰⁹

Christina Aguilera gave birth to Max Liron Bratman on 12 January 2008, and she announced his arrival on her official webpage.³¹⁰ Aguilera released a compilation album, *Keeps Gettin' Better – A Decade of Hits*, on 11 November 2008, and it featured her most popular tracks as well as updated songs such as “Genie 2.0,” an electronic-pop version of her hit “Genie In a Bottle” (1999).

Although 2009 was a quiet year for Aguilera in terms of releasing new products, she suffered repercussions from working on a new album and acting in a feature film in the coming year. In 2010, Aguilera released a new album, *Bionic*, and her foray into film involved co-starring alongside singer and actress Cherilyn Sarkisian, popularly known as Cher, in *Burlesque*. *Bionic* was released on 4 June 2010, and *Billboard* reported that the album “is an expression of her femininity in all its forms: wife, mother, singer, actress,” and Aguilera told *Billboard*, “‘Bionic’ to me is the definition of the superhuman abilities

³⁰⁸ “Countdown to Christina...” <<http://www.marieclaire.com/celebrity-lifestyle/celebrities/Christina-Aguilera-countdown-2>>, 30 November 2007 [accessed 19 January 2014].

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Julie Dam and Gerri Miller, “Christina Aguilera & Jordan Bratman Have a Boy,” <<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20169552,00.html>>, 13 January 2008 [accessed 19 January 2014].

we as women have in everyday life. . . . I've never felt more confident, more secure, more sexy in my life than I do now."³¹¹

Aguilera filed for divorce from Bratman on 14 October 2010, telling *People* that their arguments were not wholesome for their son and that while filming *Burlesque*, "I had an independence I'd never felt before."³¹² Aguilera associated the tremendous change to the evolving of "a girl to a woman. When I finished filming, I didn't feel right in my own shoes [at home]." *Burlesque*, a film about a waitress who struggles in her pursuit of a stage career and ultimately becomes the heroine singer who saves the burlesque bar where she works, was released on 24 November 2010 and debuted at the number four spot.³¹³ Sony Entertainment reported a sixty-nine percent female audience, with fifty-four percent of its audience aged twenty-five and older, which illustrated a shift away from Aguilera's initial fanbase, who would have been in their early twenties at the time of the film's debut.³¹⁴

At Superbowl XLV, played on 6 February 2011, Aguilera performed the National Anthem and bungled the lyrics, singing "What so proudly we watched at the twilight's last gleaming," rather than "O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming." Critics quickly jumped on her and Aguilera responded by releasing the statement: "I can only hope that everyone could feel my love for this country and that the true spirit of its

³¹¹ Mikael Wood, "Christina Aguilera: 'Bionic' Billboard Cover Story and Video," <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/958267/christina-aguilera-bionic-billboard-cover-story-and-video?page=0%2C1>>, 14 May 2010 [accessed 20 January 2014].

³¹² Ulrica Wihlborg, "Christina Aguilera: 'I Knew I Had to End It,'" *People* Vol. 74, No. 22 (13 December 2010): 68.

³¹³ Brandon Gray, "Weekend Report: 'Harry Potter,' 'Tangled' Tower Over Thanksgiving Weekend," <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/news/?id=2996&p=.htm>>, 29 November 2010 [accessed 20 January 2014].

³¹⁴ Ibid.

anthem still came through.”³¹⁵ Less than a month later, on 1 March 2011, she and her new boyfriend Matthew Rutler, who she had met on the set of *Burlesque*, were arrested, Rutler for driving under the influence and Aguilera for public intoxication, although she was not prosecuted as she was in the passenger’s seat; she was detained until she sobered up.³¹⁶

Although Christina Aguilera had made headlines for undesirable reasons at the start of 2011, her vocal abilities and experience in the music industry led to her place on *The Voice*, a nationally televised singing competition, as the sole female coach, alongside Adam Levine, CeeLo Green, and Blake Shelton. Aguilera said of becoming a coach, “To be given the opportunity to help shape new artists' careers and mentor them to see their dreams come to fruition is a task I welcome with open arms.”³¹⁷ Aguilera took a hiatus from coaching on the show after three seasons to promote her newest album, *Lotus*, which featured duets with judges Green and Shelton from *The Voice* and was released on 9 November 2012. Both of Aguilera’s most recent albums, *Bionic* and *Lotus*, failed to reach Gold certification based on RIAA’s criteria, which meant that neither album shipped 500,000 units domestically. Aguilera returned to *The Voice* for its fourth season in 2013 and took another hiatus during the show’s fifth season.

With over fifteen years in the entertainment industry, Aguilera’s continued presence in entertainment safeguards her ability to remain relevant in the dynamic world of popular culture and music. From her childhood of dreaming of stardom and being on *Star Search* and the landing a gig on *MMC*, to her journey as a pop star at the end of

³¹⁵ Glen Levy, “Christina Aguilera Flubs National Anthem,” <<http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/02/07/christina-aguilera-flubs-national-anthem/>>, 7 February 2011 [accessed 19 January 2014].

³¹⁶ “Christina Aguilera taken into custody after companion’s arrest,” <<http://www.cnn.com/2011/SHOWBIZ/03/01/california.aguilera.arrest/>>, 1 March 2011 [accessed 20 January 2014].

³¹⁷ “Christina Aguilera Biography: People.com.”

twentieth century and becoming a mentor to up-and-coming artists on a popular television singing competition, Christina Aguilera's career shares similar highlights with another pop princess who was born a year after her, who arrived on the teen-pop music scene with the single "...Baby One More Time" a few months behind "Reflection," and who is often compared to and contrasted with Aguilera—Britney Spears.

It's Britney, Bitch

I want to be an artist that everyone can relate to, that's young, happy and fun.³¹⁸
—Britney Spears, 2001.

Britney Jean Spears was born on 2 December 1981 in McComb, Mississippi, and she was raised in Kentwood, Louisiana. She was a typical girl who sang in front of her mirror, pretending to be Madonna and performing songs and dances for her dolls and stuffed animals.³¹⁹ In addition to singing lessons, Spears also took dance classes, which would help with her future career as a performer. She likewise enrolled in gymnastics, but she chose to abandon gymnastics after encountering a strict and very demanding coach.³²⁰

Britney Spears knew what she wanted to do with her life at a young age, and it had nothing to do with gymnastics. Spears, when reflecting on her decision to stop gymnastics, said in her autobiography: "Kids can be fickle and a little flaky like that sometimes. Not me. I always knew exactly what I wanted, even when I was little. I

³¹⁸ Britney Spears, as cited in Lisa Appignanesi, "Out of control," <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2008/mar/10/popandrock.women>>, 10 March 2008 [accessed 1 October 2010].

³¹⁹ Christopher Heard, *Britney Spears: Little Girl Lost* (Montreal: Transit Publishing Inc., 2010), Amazon Kindle location 206 – 227.

³²⁰ Britney Spears and Lynne Spears, *Britney Spears' Heart to Heart* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 29-32.

knew gymnastics wasn't for me because it wasn't fun anymore.”³²¹ Being aware of what she wanted to do with her life, and having the support of her family and neighborhood, she auditioned for *MMC* in Atlanta at the age of eight. Although she was turned down because of her age, Matt Cassella, the casting director, recommended Spears to Nancy Carson, a well-known talent agent. With the help of Carson, Spears competed on the national talent show *Star Search*, where she made it to the final stage and ultimately came in second place.³²²

Four years after the *MMC* launched, Cassella was looking for younger talent to replace the older teens and, after seeing Spears on *Star Search* and remembering her original try-out, he set her up with an audition.³²³ She made it through the process and became a new cast member. The *MMC* ended in the autumn of 1995 and, with the help of her manager, Larry Rudolph, Spears and her mother decided that the next step in her career was to become a solo act.³²⁴ After getting turned down by two record labels, JIVE Records took a chance on Spears and she began her journey to Stockholm, Sweden, to begin recording tracks for her debut album.³²⁵

Spears' debut album, ...*Baby One More Time*, was released in January 1999, and both the single and the album were number one on the *Billboard* charts. In 2000, Spears released her sophomore album, *Oops!... I Did It Again*, which debuted at the number one spot on the *Billboard* chart, with the single reaching its peak at number nine on the *Billboard* Hot 100.³²⁶ Britney Spears then dabbled in the film industry by starring in

³²¹ Spears and Spears, 33.

³²² Ibid., Amazon Kindle location 379 – 598.

³²³ Ibid., Amazon Kindle location 702 – 726.

³²⁴ Ibid., Amazon Kindle location 1181-1222.

³²⁵ Spears and Spears, 98.

³²⁶ “Britney Spears | AllMusic,” <<http://allmusic.com/artist/britney-spears-p320976/charts-awards/billboard-singles>>, 2006 [accessed 17 October 2010].

Crossroads, a 2002 film about a Southern girl and her journey to Los Angeles to an audition at a record company.³²⁷ Although *Crossroads* achieved its goal of generating revenue, it was named “Worst Film of the Year” at the 2003 Razzies, an award ceremony that salutes the worst Hollywood film achievements each year.³²⁸ At the age of nineteen, Spears began to suffer from insomnia and anxiety attacks because of the stress of her parents’ divorce and the pressure of constantly touring and recording.³²⁹ She kept herself busy by getting ready for another tour, the *Dream within a Dream* tour, and by preparing for the release of her self-titled third album, *Britney*.³³⁰ *Britney* debuted at number one in 2001, making Spears the first female artist to have three albums debut at number one on the *Billboard* 200 chart.³³¹ *Forbes* named Spears the world’s most powerful celebrity in 2002, and estimated her earnings at \$39.2 million.³³²

In 2003, Spears made headlines after opening the 2003 MTV VMAs with a Madonna medley number alongside Christina Aguilera and Madonna herself. As noted, what made headlines was the open-mouthed kiss Madonna shared with Spears, even though Madonna had locked lips with Aguilera as well. Aguilera had, by that time, already established herself in a sexual manner through her songs and performances, while, as biographer Christopher Heard contended, “the kiss with Britney was shocking because it seemed like the worldly, crafty temptress was corrupting the sweet, innocent

³²⁷ *Crossroads*, dir. Tamra Davis (Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2002).

³²⁸ Steve Dennis, *Britney* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), Amazon Kindle location 2902 – 2926.

³²⁹ Heard, Amazon Kindle location 2013 – 2037.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ “Britney Spears Through the Years – Timeline,” <<http://www.life.com/timeline/322#index/>>, 2010 [accessed 16 October 2010].

³³² “Forbes Celebrity 100,” <<http://www.forbes.com/lists/home.jhtml?passListId=53&passYear=2002&passListType=Person>>, 2002 [accessed 15 November 2010].

child.”³³³ *In The Zone*, Spears’ fourth album, debuted at number one, but after suffering emotionally from her failed relationship with Timberlake, from the legal battles between her parents, and from her aunt’s cancer diagnosis, Spears was mentally and emotionally fragile.³³⁴

On 3 January 2004, Spears again made headlines after she married her childhood friend, Jason Alexander, in Las Vegas, Nevada. The marriage lasted fifty-five hours before being annulled. The paparazzi got a surprise on 23 April 2004, when Spears emerged from the Beverly Hills Hotel with a new young man, Kevin Federline, who would become a seminal individual in her life. The new couple had their wedding ceremony on 18 September 2004, and filed their official marriage papers on 6 October. The couple’s first son, Sean Preston Federline, was born in 2005, and their second son, Jayden James Federline, was born the next year. Soon after the birth of their second son, Spears, to the surprise of her husband, filed for divorce on 7 November 2006, citing “irreconcilable differences,” and the battle for custody of their children began. As a biographer noted, Britney Spears was spotted partying with Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton, heralded as “two of the most spoiled, vapid, irresponsible, and reckless young women.” It was during this time of turmoil that Spears’ genitalia were infamously photographed, on multiple occasions, as she exited vehicles. Spears’ partying ways and casual drug use alarmed her family and management team enough to attempt an intervention to guide her into a rehabilitation facility, farcically called Crossroads, which she reluctantly entered and then left within one day. On 18 February 2007, two days after leaving Crossroads, Spears, in plain view of the paparazzi, shaved her head, and attacked

³³³ Heard, Amazon Kindle location 2503 – 2520.

³³⁴ Dennis, Amazon Kindle location 3262 – 3285.

surrounding paparazzi and automobiles with a green umbrella. Her manager, Larry Rudolph, in an attempt to get Spears back on track, informed her that her image was crucial and that her career was done unless she changed her direction in life.³³⁵

Despite her reckless lifestyle at the end of 2006, *Forbes* estimated Spears' 2007 net worth at a \$100 million, earning her the twelfth-spot in their "The Richest 20 Women In Entertainment" list.³³⁶ For the sake of her public relations following her unsavory stints in public, Spears' management team worked to build her comeback. Jive Records' representatives and MTV producers worked out a deal to have Spears open the 2007 VMAs with "Gimme More" from her upcoming *Blackout* album. She was bound under the conditions for the appearance to rehearse during the five weeks leading up to the performance, to have an experienced management team, and to be paid throughout the rehearsal process instead of upfront. A choreographer said this regarding Spears in her rehearsals:

You should have seen how excited she got! She started to feel it again and said, 'I can do it! I can do it!' The biggest challenge was harnessing that excitement and keeping her going, but her commitment was definitely there.³³⁷

All looked well for Spears' performance until the eve of the VMAs, when she graced the Las Vegas nightclub scene until 3:00 a.m. and continued partying in a hotel suite beyond 4:00 a.m.³³⁸ With under an hour before Spears was to open the VMAs the next day, she had a breakdown and locked herself in her dressing room.³³⁹ She finally emerged with less than ten minutes to show time, not wearing her planned outfit, instead costumed in "a black bra, black fishnet stockings, and black shorts that were too tight and accentuated

³³⁵ Ibid., Amazon Kindle location 2955 – 3442.

³³⁶ Blakeley and Goldman, "The 20 Richest Women In Entertainment."

³³⁷ Dennis., Amazon Kindle location 4354 – 4411.

³³⁸ Ibid., Amazon Kindle location 4435 – 4460.

³³⁹ Heard, Amazon Kindle location 3670 – 3690.

her soft midriff.”³⁴⁰ Her appearance prompted a “what the fuck?” comment from a bystander. Spears’ performance that night of “Gimme More” was lamentable – she stumbled multiple times, her lip-synching was asynchronous, and she did not look like she was physically or mentally ready for a comeback. The celebrities in the audience had dumbfounded expressions upon their faces, and even at the conclusion of the performance there were looks of “what did I just witness?” as the audience members applauded her effort.³⁴¹ Although it was not the comeback Spears and her team wanted, she made headlines and the performance had spawned a “viral” video on YouTube that made Spears a household name again: Chris Crocker’s “LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!” rant. Crocker harangued society’s reception of the VMA blunder with choleric words:

How fucking dare anyone out there make fun of Britney . . . she’s a human! . . . Leave Britney alone! . . . When is it professional to publicly bash someone who’s going through a hard time? . . . Leave Britney Spears alone right now. I mean it! Anyone who has a problem with her, you deal with me because she’s not well right now!³⁴²

“LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!” was so popular that it was integrated into the 2008 parody film, *Meet the Spartans*. The events during the following months created a dark time for Spears. She fought more custody battles and was taken to a hospital for an evaluation when she held one of her sons captive after her sons had visited her and they were due to be returned to Federline. Still, Spears’ *Blackout* album was released and received solid reviews, giving her something to hold onto during this rough period: music.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ *Britney Spears – Gimme More (VMA 2007)(HD) Live* [YouTube video], <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrGO-RRjxe8>> [accessed 3 October 2010].

³⁴² “LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!” [YouTube video], <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHmVkJRoEowc>> [accessed 3 October 2010].

³⁴³ Heard, Amazon Kindle location 3826 – 3920.

2008 was the year that marked Spears' revival. The 2008 MTV VMAs was called "the official beginning of the comeback [of Britney Spears]" by Larry Rudolph, as Spears' "Piece of Me" music video topped the award categories of Best Female Video, Best Pop Video, and Video of the Year.³⁴⁴ On 26 September 2008, "Womanizer" from Spears' next album *Circus* was released, and it landed the number one spot on *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart, the first single to achieve that feat since "...Baby One More Time."³⁴⁵ Spears' fifth record album, *Circus*, was released on 2 December 2008 and, after it debuted at the number one spot on the *Billboard* Top 200 list, it placed Spears in the "*Guinness Book of World Records* as the youngest female artist in history to have five albums debut at number 1."³⁴⁶ Her world tour, *The Circus Starring Britney Spears*, earned nearly one hundred million dollars, and at the end of 2009 Jive released *The Singles Collection*, a compilation album of Spears' most popular songs, along with a new single "3." *Forbes*, in 2009, ranked Spears as the thirteenth most powerful celebrity in the world, approximating her earnings at \$35 million, and she climbed her way up to the number six spot in 2010, with estimated earnings of \$64 million.³⁴⁷

In 2009, the FOX Broadcasting Company debuted *Glee*, a hit musical-comedy series that revolved around a high school glee club's journey to become national champions. *Glee* was immersed in the music of popular culture, and it paid tribute to cultural icons such as Madonna, Lady Gaga, Kiss, Journey, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and on the second episode of its second season, Britney Spears. "Britney/Brittany"

³⁴⁴ Dennis, Amazon Kindle location 5755 – 5778.

³⁴⁵ Heard, Amazon Kindle location 4004 – 4064.

³⁴⁶ Idem, Amazon Kindle location 4064 – 4087.

³⁴⁷ Dorothy Pomerantz and Lacey Rose, "The World's Most Powerful Celebrities," <http://www.forbes.com/2010/06/22/lady-gaga-oprah-winfrey-business-entertainment-celeb-100-10_land.html>, 28 June 2010 [accessed 17 November 2010].

aired on 28 September 2010 on FOX and drew the show's second highest rating to date, only behind the episode that followed immediately after Superbowl XLV.³⁴⁸ Britney Spears made cameo appearances throughout the episode, while the *Glee* cast sang five of her tunes: "I'm a Slave 4 U," "...Baby One More Time," "Me Against the Music," "Stronger," and "Toxic." Having a ratings juggernaut pay homage to Spears' career demonstrated quite clearly how much of an impact she has had on American culture. The female glee members, and the featured gay young man, expressed how important she was to them: Brittany S. Pierce (Heather Morris), the female who had previously despised Spears because of the similarity of their names, said, "I had the most amazing Britney Spears fantasy, I sang and danced better than her. Now I realize what a powerful woman I truly am." Tina Cohen-Chang (Jenna Ushkowitz), the shy Asian, claimed, "She's literally why I wanted to become a performer," and Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer), the gay male, defensively asserted, "This club regularly pays tribute to pop culture and Britney Spears *is* pop culture." The glee club advisor, Will Schuester (Matthew Morrison), and the cheerleading coach, Sue Sylvester (Jane Lynch), with attitudes that reflected those of older generations, were both against the idea of Spears' numbers being performed by the glee club because they considered her to be a contentious role model: Sylvester advised Schuester, "Don't let your own recklessness blind you to the fact that Britney Spears is a genius pop culture provocateur, and a gateway drug to every out of control impulse ever created."³⁴⁹ *Glee* provided the counter argument to that perception of Spears through

³⁴⁸ James Hibberd, "Britney Spears' '*Glee*' Episode Hits Series High," <<http://www.billboard.com/#/news/britney-spears-gee-episode-hits-series-1004117412.story>>, 29 September 2010 [accessed 17 October 2010]; James Hibberd, "'Glee' Super Bowl ratings are in! Biggest scripted TV telecast in three years, but..," <<http://insidetv.ew.com/2011/02/07/glee-super-bowl-ratings-are-in/>>, 7 February 2011 [accessed 17 January 2014].

³⁴⁹ *Glee*, "Britney/Brittany," episode 24 [season 2, episode 2], 28 September 2010.

Emma Pillsbury (Jayma Mays), the school counselor, as she reasoned, “Britney has had some issues in the past, but I actually think it is quite admirable the way she’s gotten her life back together. . . . I think she’s the perfect symbol for the possibility of rebirth.”

Spears released her seventh studio album, *Femme Fatale*, on 25 March 2011, and it was certified platinum within a month.³⁵⁰ *Femme Fatale* marked Spears’ sixth number-one album, the same number as Mariah Carey and Janet Jackson; the only other female singers that have garnered more number-one albums are Madonna and Barbra Streisand.³⁵¹ To celebrate Spears’ professional achievements further, at the 2011 MTV VMAs Britney Spears was awarded the “Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award” that recognizes performers’ impact on MTV culture as “forerunners in the music video sphere.”³⁵² She joined the ranks of twenty-four previous winners, including David Bowie (awarded in 1981), The Beatles (1984), Madonna (1986), and Michael Jackson (1988). Pop star Lady Gaga, acting as her male alter-ego Joe Calderone, presented Spears’ with her award while she claimed that Spears “taught us all how to be fearless, and the industry would not be the same without her.” Spears gave Lady Gaga a quick kiss on the cheek, and after an awkward stare down between the two, Spears leaned in for a more sensual kiss but pulled away and laughingly said, “I’ve done that already,” referring to the kiss she shared with Madonna in 2003. Dancers then performed a tribute to a medley of tracks from Spears’ most popular music videos.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ “RIAA – Gold & Platinum Searchable Database – January 15, 2014,” [accessed 15 January 2014].

³⁵¹ Keith Caulfield, “Britney Spears Snares Sixth No. 1 on Billboard 200 with ‘Femme Fatale,’” <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/472190/britney-spears-snares-sixth-no-1-on-billboard-200-with-femme-fatale>>, 6 April 2011 [accessed 20 January 2014].

³⁵² Brenna Ehrlich, “Justin Timberlake’s Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award.”

³⁵³ John Mitchell, “Britney Spears Accepts Video Vanguard VMA – And A Kiss From Lady Gaga: Gaga’s Jo Calderone alter ego introduced a dance tribute to Brit’s best videos,” <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1669862/britney-spears-lady-gaga-kiss-vmas.jhtml>>, 28 August 2011 [accessed 21 January 2014].

In May 2012, rumors regarding Spears becoming a judge and mentor on the second season of *X Factor*, FOX's singing competition, were confirmed and her pay was announced at \$15 million for the season.³⁵⁴ The television show premiered on 12 September 2012, and in later rounds Spears mentored the teenagers, and one of her mentees, Carly Rose Sonenclar, placed second overall. Despite that feat, Spears did not return for the show's third season. Fellow *X Factor* judge and the show's creator, Simon Cowell, explained on Ellen Degeneres' talk show that he did not realize that Spears was quiet, which made judging difficult, and that she was uncomfortable handing out negative critiques and handling contestants who spoke back to her.³⁵⁵

On 20 September 2012, *Glee* again featured Spears' career in another tribute episode, "Britney 2.0," in an approach that proved more critical of her professional and personal life. In the *Glee* episode, Brittany S. Pierce suffered from an identity crisis and a bout of depression, having lost her role as head cheerleader. This prompted the glee club to agree to have another Britney Spears assignment to help Pierce find herself. After the first performance Pierce announced, "I am once again inspired by the awesomeness of Britney. Thanks Mr. Schue."³⁵⁶ Following this epiphany, Pierce attempted to shave her head in depression before going on a rampage in the school's halls and attacking the school's gossip blogger with a green umbrella, unambiguously referencing Spears' February 2007 meltdown.

³⁵⁴ Melanie Bromley, "It's Official: Britney Spears Signs *X Factor* Deal!" <<http://www.eonline.com/news/312961/it-s-official-britney-spears-signs-x-factor-deal>>, 9 May 2012 [accessed 21 January 2014].

³⁵⁵ Gal Kaufman, "Simon Cowell Says Britney Spears 'Couldn't Talk' On 'X Factor:' 'She was just uncomfortable,' Cowell said of Spears' failed 'Factor' tenure during an 'Ellen' appearance on Tuesday (September 10)," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1713830/simon-cowell-britney-spears-x-factor-interview.jhtml>>, 10 September 2013 [accessed 21 January 2014].

³⁵⁶ *Glee*, "Britney 2.0," episode 68 [season 4, episode 2], 20 September 2012.

Her next act was having the glee club lip-synch to Spears' "Gimme More," during which she ate Cheetos and imitated Spears' infamous 2007 MTV VMA performance of the same song. Despite these references to Britney Spears' troubled times, there was a deeper meaning behind the seemingly simple-minded Pierce's emulation of Spears. Her intent was uncovered during a discussion with fellow glee club member Sam Evans (Chord Overstreet). Evans pointed out, "I know what you're up to. . . . You're intentionally hitting rock-bottom." Pierce affirmed this and explained it was "So I can make a glorious comeback. Just like Britney. I mean, look at her, she got paid \$14 million to be on *X Factor*, she looks great, she has an amazing perfume you can smell from miles away. No matter what happened to her, she just came back stronger."³⁵⁷ Multiple perspectives on the status and meaning of Britney Spears' personal and professional lives were presented throughout the two *Glee* episodes, and those episodes allowed an even younger generation, possibly termed generation Z, a fresh introduction to Britney Spears and her most iconic songs.

On 17 September 2013, Spears ended months of rumors and speculation about a possible Las Vegas residency by announcing on *Good Morning America* the sealing of a two-year deal to perform at Planet Hollywood on the Las Vegas Strip in her *Britney: Piece of Me* show.³⁵⁸ In extravagant fashion, there were over 1,000 look-alikes dressed in Spears' "...Baby One More Time" schoolgirl outfit arranged in the Las Vegas desert to reveal the show's official poster to overhead cameras. Spears was also in a helicopter that descended and allowed Spears to give her formal announcement. Twenty-four songs

³⁵⁷ Brittany S. Pierce said that Spears earned \$14 million from *X Factor*, but her contract was for \$15 million.

³⁵⁸ Katie Kindelan, "Britney Spears Announces Las Vegas Show Live on 'GMA,'" <<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/entertainment/2013/09/britney-spears/>>, 17 September 2013 [accessed 19 January 2014].

spanning albums from ...*Baby One More Time* through *Britney Jean* have been featured in the show, which opened to rave and critical reviews on 27 December 2013. The effort to bring Spears to Sin City, according to *New York Times*' music critic Jon Caramanica,

“is a transitional moment for Las Vegas, a town becoming less reliant on older-audience-skewing musical revues and leaning more heavily on nightclubs. Spears' show is a midpoint between the then and now, a legacy act with cross-generational appeal offering a show that might as well have been run by a DJ.”³⁵⁹

Spears earned more than \$300,000 per show, which led cynics to cry out that she was overpaid. *Forbes*, which ranked Spears as the highest-paid woman in music in 2012, pulling in \$58 million that year, also focused on the changing entertainment environment, saying

Casinos and their associated clubs have been shelling out \$200,000-\$300,000 per night to DJs like Calvin Harris and Deadmau5. . . . What casinos care about is whether the presence of the star will increase their nightly gambling profits, known as the ‘drop.’ If the star significantly increases the drop, the casino is justified in sparing no expense to stage a spectacular event.³⁶⁰

After fifteen years of making headlines and being under the constant watch of society, Spears had thoughts about leaving this life of fame behind. She considered the preparations and schedule for *Britney: Piece of Me* while still raising her two sons, and “Right now is my time to perform and do what I’m doing,” was her response to those contemplations.³⁶¹

The successes and popularity of Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears in popular culture marked them as millennial icons. To cater to their target audiences, Spears and

³⁵⁹ Jon Caramanica, as cited in “Britney fades into background of new show,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, 2 January 2014: D2.

³⁶⁰ “The 10 Highest-Paid Women in Music 2012,” <<http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eeel45efhgh/1-britney-spears-58-million-5/>>, 2014 [accessed 19 January 2014]; Zack O'Malley Greenburg, “The Value Of Overpaying Britney Spears in Las Vegas,” <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2013/10/04/the-value-of-overpaying-britney-spears-in-las-vegas/>>, 4 October 2013 [accessed 19 January 2014].

³⁶¹ Breeanna Hare, “Britney Spears thinks about retiring,” <<http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/23/showbiz/music/britney-spears-i-am-britney-jean/>>, 23 December 2013 [accessed 26 December 2013].

Aguilera had disseminated music, images, and messages that were reflective of three significant facets of millennial girl culture: narcissism, sexuality, and female empowerment.

Millennial Women's Narcissism

There's only two types of people in the world / The ones that entertain and the ones that observe / Well baby, I'm a put-on-a-show kind of girl / Don't like the backseat, gotta be first.³⁶²
—Britney Spears, “Circus,” 2008.

The opening verse from Britney Spears' single “Circus” presents two positions into which people fall: the attention getters and the spectators. Generation Y-ers are saturated by messages that inform them of how important they are as individuals and this had fueled their desire to be the center of attention. Christina Aguilera's “What a Girl Wants” (1999) presented that message of self-importance as Aguilera lets her listener know that “whatever makes me happy sets you free,” and that “whatever keeps me in your arms is what I need.”³⁶³ The focus is on Aguilera the entire song, although she does express her appreciation for her significant other, “thank you for giving me time to breathe,” but the song revolves around Aguilera, her wants and needs.³⁶⁴ The song gave a sense of empowerment, as listeners were forced repeatedly to hear “what a girl needs,” but it was a narcissistic liberation as it lyrically only revolved around an individual's needs, using “me” sixteen times and “I” and “I'm” a total of nineteen times. It also does not convey the idea that a “girl” should do anything to keep her significant other from abandoning the relationship. It is strictly about her, and what she needs her partner to

³⁶² Britney Spears, “Circus,” *Circus* (New York: Jive Records, 2008).

³⁶³ Christina Aguilera, “What A Girl Wants,” *Christina Aguilera* (New York: RCA Records, 1999).

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

do—hence another name for the millennials is “generation me,” as the universe is expected to cater to them.

Social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter provide an outlet for generation Y-ers’ conspicuous self-promotion by allowing them to share their photographs, to connect with acquaintances (and even strangers), and to let the world know where they are or what they are doing at any given time. Narcissism breeds in a society that is all about the instant gratification for individuals receiving a “comment” on their newest picture, tweet, or status update because “narcissist[s] crave approval and fantasize about adulation” and are “always measuring themselves against others.”³⁶⁵ Many young women therefore feel the need to have the best-looking body and to pamper themselves with material items.

The pressure young women have felt to have the perfect body can be discerned in a close-viewing of Britney Spears’ music video for “Oops!... I Did It Again” (2000). “Mmm yeah,” moans Spears, clad in a red skin-tight catsuit as the music in the video begins. She displays this provocative costume for the majority of the music video, and though it covers her entire body below the neck, it clings to her form in a way that allows viewers mentally to render the image of Spears’ nude body—as if the catsuit is just a red layer of skin. In the music video, Britney Spears is portrayed as an otherworldly goddess-like specimen who captivates the attention of a male astronaut, as well as the interest of the men and women in the command center. The men gaze at Spears through their monitors while the female scientists examine her through those same monitors and take notes on what they observe (figure 20). Young women felt the pressure to achieve a body similar to Britney Spears’ because she was titillating the men and women

³⁶⁵ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*, 248.

throughout society with her envy-evoking figure. The fixation on body image can be seen in the rise of breast implant surgeries: 32,000 women received implants in 1992, but



Figure 20: A Female scientist taking observational notes in "Oops!... I Did It Again" (Zomba).

an estimated
247,000 women
received them in
2004.³⁶⁶
Cosmetic
procedures
provide just one

example of the compulsion women feel regarding self-image, along with their drive for recognition and acquisitiveness.

In a generation where narcissism is increasing, having stature and material possessions proves just as important as having the perfect body. When trying to identify a cause for the rise in female unhappiness in worldwide studies, *Guardian* reporter Madeleine Bunting in 2009 blamed women's conceitedness: "They seek fame and status, and the achievement of the latter leads to materialism – money enables the brand labels and lavish lifestyle that are status symbols."³⁶⁷ Spears' 2000 single "Lucky," as well as the music video for it, vindicated Bunting's claim as the female subject, Lucky, "cry, cry, cries in her lonely heart, thinking / If there's nothing missing in my life / Then why do these tears come at night?"³⁶⁸ Lucky is a best actress award winner who has the affection

³⁶⁶ Sandra G. Boodman, "For More Teenage Girls, Adult Plastic Surgery," <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A62540-2004Oct25.html>>, 26 October 2004 [accessed 15 November 2010].

³⁶⁷ Madeleine Bunting, as cited in Judy Berman, "The Culture of (Female) Narcissism," <http://www.salon.com/life/broadsheet/feature/2009/07/27/narcissism_women>, 2009 [accessed 16 October 2010].

³⁶⁸ Britney Spears, "Lucky," *Oops!... I Did It Again* (New York: Jive Records, 2000).

of her fans, who considered her “lovely” and “lucky” to be a Hollywood star with her wealth and fame. But the fans do not see how miserable Lucky is with her material lifestyle. Even after Lucky’s mascara runs down her face, she still looks fabulous, and this may have helped lead impressionable young women to prefer still the glamorous lifestyle to the role of the observer (figure 21). Lucky continued to live a gaudy, attention-filled life despite her unhappiness and feelings of unfulfillment, which may have contributed to the



Figure 21: Lucky looking beautiful despite her crying in “Lucky” (Zomba).

narcissism of millennial women, as physical aspects of worth took priority over emotional health. Brigham Young University Research Assistant Katie Hawkes wrote that young women look to females that they idolize for lifestyles to imitate, and these role models tend to be popular cultural figures.³⁶⁹ *Time* published an article in 2001 that discussed the extent of the impact Spears was having on girl culture as children and teenagers sported racy clothes, which schools tried to combat through enacting stricter dress codes. *Time* featured the story of an eighth-grader who was cited eight times for dress code violations, and noted her response: “I like wearing shorts and skirts that show my stomach. . . . I have a really flat stomach, and I like it.”³⁷⁰ In 2003, talk show host

³⁶⁹ Katie Hawkes, “Media and Clothing Market Influence on Adolescent Girls: Warnings for Parents,” <<http://foreverfamilies.byu.edu/Article.aspx?a=159>>, [accessed 18 November 2010].

³⁷⁰ Nadya Labi, “Britney Brigade,” <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,999156,00.html>>, 5 February 2001 [accessed 2 October 2010].

Oprah Winfrey presented a segment on daughters from the middle class turning to a life of prostitution, and the responses from the girls suggested that they felt they needed the money for material items to emulate the material lifestyles of the most popular celebrities.³⁷¹ This suggested the heavy influence popular culture has had on the millennial generation. The lifestyles of the rich and the famous do not only play a role in the arousal of narcissism in adolescent girls, but also in the escalation of generation Y's sexuality.

Christina Aguilera's carnal and egotistic song "Vanity" (2010) demonstrated the type of language millennial females used when describing themselves, and justified their conceit as self-love, "I'm not cocky / I just love myself, bitch / Mirror, mirror on the wall / Who's the flyest bitch of them all? / Nevermind, I am / That bitch is so fucking pretty / Yeah I am, If I were her I would kiss me."³⁷² The song blurred the lines between having love for oneself and making love to oneself as Aguilera continued, "Hit up Prince Charming tell him give me a call. . . Nevermind screw him / I make myself so much wetter."³⁷³ Aguilera blended extreme narcissism and sexuality into a pop song, and it was generally well received by critics, showing the desensitization of American society to such language and messages. The relationship between narcissism and sexuality was the focus of a University of Florida psychology study that found "narcissists are more likely to philander. . . . They see sexuality more in terms of power, influence and as something daring, in contrast to people with low narcissistic qualities who associated sex

³⁷¹ Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Class-Passing: Social Mobility in Film and Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 72-73.

³⁷² Christina Aguilera, "Vanity," *Bionic (Deluxe Edition)* (New York: RCA Records, 2010).

³⁷³ Ibid.

more with caring and love.”³⁷⁴ millennials’ obsession with and desensitization to narcissistic traits appeared in relationship to their sexuality, and as a result many older Americans saw Aguilera and Spears as corruptors of generation Y.

Sexuality of Millennial Women



Figure 22: Britney Spears in her famous Catholic school girl uniform in the music video for "...Baby One More Time" (Zomba).

People make such a big deal out of it. I honestly don't get it. It's weird. To me, the human body is beautiful.³⁷⁵
—Britney Spears, 2003.

At sixteen years of age, Britney Spears' first music video, "...Baby One More Time" (1998), caught the attention of the nation. *Good Housekeeping* magazine published the article, "Surviving Britney Spears" in October 2001, which, based on this debut music video, labeled Spears as "a risqué role model for young girls—and a

³⁷⁴ Cathy Keen, "Sexual attitudes help explain narcissists' relationship problems," <<http://news.ufl.edu/2006/10/04/narcissism/>>, 4 October 2006 [accessed 21 January 2014].

³⁷⁵ Britney Spears, as cited in Benjamin Svetkey. "All Eyes on Britney," <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,540763,00.html>>, 13 November 2003 [accessed 2 October 2010].

headache for millions of moms.”³⁷⁶ The song’s lyrics were considered masochistic by some because of the lyrics pleading, “hit me baby one more time,” but there are multiple ways that millennial terms could define “hit me” in addition to a physical strike, such as requesting communication, as in “hit me with a text message,” or “hit me up tomorrow about the party,” or indicating rough sexual behavior. Spears’ music video aroused more controversy because of the erotic wardrobe that exposed more skin than adults would prefer their children to see (figure 22).³⁷⁷ In the video, Spears danced in the hallways after school with teen girls while wearing a short skirt and an unbuttoned, tied-up blouse that revealed her navel, cleavage, and brassiere. In the latter half of the music video, Spears wore track pants and a sports bra, bringing more attention to her sporty, toned body rather than to her athletic costume. Both clothing styles exposed Spears’ midriff as well as her chest, enticing her viewers to pay attention to those regions of her body. In 2009, Nigel Dick, video director for “...Baby One More Time,” said that Spears decided she wanted to wear a school uniform and that the entire wardrobe was acquired at Kmart, with no single article of clothing costing more than seventeen dollars, which made the wardrobe affordable and readily available to her fans.³⁷⁸ This video unleashed a sexualized image of teenaged girls that infatuated men of all ages, and one that girls wanted to emulate. Spears, throughout the music video, looked into the camera with young and innocent yet extremely flirty eyes, which suggested she was a forbidden fruit to male viewers. The entire music video was highly sexualized, from Spears’ teasing

³⁷⁶ Beth Ritchie, “Surviving Britney Spears,” *Good Housekeeping* 233, iss. 4, <<https://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu/ezproxy/patsearch.php>>, October 2001 [accessed 2 October 2010].

³⁷⁷ Britney Spears, “...Baby One More Time,” ...*Baby One More Time* (New York: Jive Records, 1998).

³⁷⁸ Jocelyn Vena, “Britney Spears ‘...Baby One More Time’ Video Director Looks Back,” <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1626312/20091113/spears_britney.jhtml>, 16 November 2009 [accessed 23 November 2010].

looks into the camera to the amount of skin this southern sixteen-year-old juvenile brandished.

Aguilera jumped into this flirty-sexual market quickly after Spears' hit. Following Spears' "...Baby One More Time" success, Aguilera made her debut with "Genie In A Bottle" (1999), a song with lyrics more suggestive than the content of its music video. In the video, Aguilera is at a girls-only sleep over at a beach house until a car full of teenage boys approaches the location and a seemingly platonic co-ed party ensues on the beach. Aguilera danced to a genie-inspired choreography while she flaunted her midriff with pelvic moves. Her solo shots featured her in various submissive positions, laying down on the sand or sitting on the beach house's patio, much as a genie entrapped in a bottle would be helpless. The lyrics, on the other hand, were much more suggestive, informing listeners that her hormones were "racing at the speed of light / But that don't mean it gotta be tonight" because, "Ooh, my body's saying let's go / But my heart is saying no."³⁷⁹ Aguilera's solution to appeasing both parties is suggested by the chorus lyrics, "I'm a genie in a bottle / You gotta rub me the right way," and if she is rubbed the right way, "I can make your wish come true / Just come and set me free, baby / And I'll be with you." The message hinted at foreplay, and if the other partner was able to please her she would obey the desire, which would very likely be sexual intercourse. This song's lyrics were a clear indicator of the double-entendre present in bubblegum pop music, often sung mindlessly by consumers while a focus on the actual lyrics provides a much less innocent message.

Aguilera's "Come On Over (All I Want Is You)" (1999), a later single also from Aguilera's eponymous debut album, took the sexuality a step up with the song's lyrics

³⁷⁹ Christina Aguilera, "Genie In a Bottle," *Christina Aguilera* (New York: RCA Records, 1999).



Figure 23: Viewers entered a boombox to peer at Aguilera through a lens like scene in “Come On Over (All I Want is You)” (BMG).

and its accompanying more sexually redolent music video. During the song, Aguilera pleaded with her listener, “All I want is you, now baby don’t be shy / You better cross that line / I’m gonna love you right / ‘Cause all I want is you.”³⁸⁰ If there was any question about what would

happen after that “line” was crossed, the lyrics clarified it by disclosing, “It’s paradise / When you and I get close, get tight / One on one I wanna go all, all night.” The video introduced a new rap verse done by Aguilera that was not included on the original album version of “Come On Over,” in which she carnally says in an almost whisper-like tone, “Don’t you wanna be the one tonight? / We could do exactly what you like / Don’t you wanna be just you and me? / We could do what comes so naturally,” which enhanced the message of yearning for sexual intimacy in the already sensual song. The music video for the song was a voyeuristic ride through a brightly colored music video set. When

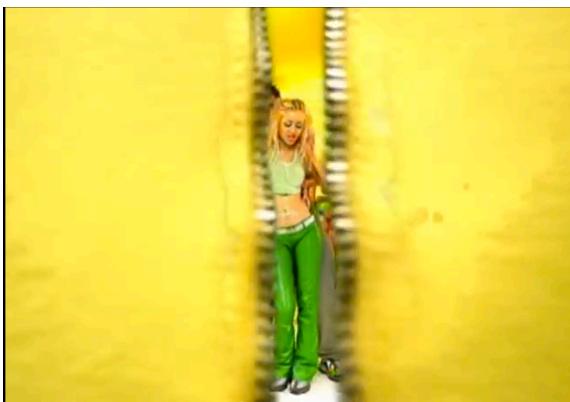


Figure 24: A midriff-bearing Aguilera appeared from a zipper being opened by a male dancer in “Come On Over (All I Want is You)” (BMG).

changing between the vividly colored rooms, the camera moved through an opening, as if penetrating through a wall orifice, multiple times, swooping in between two pieces of walls opening like a sliding door, and moving past a couple of metallic curtains—all evocative of a

³⁸⁰ Christina Aguilera, “Come On Over (All I Want is You),” *Christina Aguilera* (New York: RCA Records, 1999).

voyeuristic nature (figure 23). The most sexual transition in the video came after Aguilera guided a male dancer's hand over her breasts and toward her crotch, as a zipper in the same pigment as Aguilera's attire took over the screen and opened to reveal Aguilera dancing with a bare midriff (figure 24). A scene that featured Aguilera and nine other dancers as silhouettes behind a backlight white curtain, in small cubicles that each had a chair, contributed to a heightened sense of voyeurism for viewers. The bright colors of the set and wardrobe and the fast-paced choreography still gave the video a fun and somewhat innocent vibe, but the peeping-Tom nature of the video was also highlighted in the 2001 rendition of "Lady Marmalade," a group song that included Aguilera, in which all of the performers were burlesque performers engaged in hypersexual choreography in different intimate settings, such as Mýa on an empty stage, Pink and Lil' Kim in boudoirs, and Aguilera backstage preparing to headline the show. This collaborative song foreshadowed the movement that Aguilera's solo music career would take in 2002, but Spears pounced on a more mature image before Aguilera could establish herself as more authentic and sexual than a pop princess.

"I'm a Slave 4 U" (2001) presented Spears in an even more mature and sexual fashion than her previous images. *Rolling Stone's* Barry Walters said of the entire *Britney* album that "Spears is one month away from entering her twenties and clearly needs to grow up if she's going to bring her fans along. . . . Time will tell whether any of her incarnations remain relevant in an era that's suddenly not that innocent."³⁸¹ Spears echoed that sentiment in the opening lines of "I'm a Slave 4 U." She first speaks, "I know I may be young, but I've got feelings too / and I need to do what I feel like doing / So let

³⁸¹ Barry Walters, "Britney | Album Reviews | Rolling Stone" <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/britney-20011030>>, 30 October 2001 [accessed 21 January 2014].

me go and just listen,” and then sings, “All you people look at me like I’m a little girl / Well did you ever think it’d be okay for me to step into this world?”³⁸² Spears sang about being entranced by the music and giving up all inhibitions, incorporating much sensual dialogue behind the song’s melody, including “here we go now,” “it just feels good,” “I just can’t help myself, I just feel I let myself go,” and a plethora of moans. The choreography-laden music video featured a perspiration-drenched Spears in skintight metallic jeans with a pink thong overlaid and a pink top that exhibited a navel piercing, dancing from



Figure 25: Spears dancing to “I’m a Slave 4 U” while carrying an albino python at the 2001 MTV VMAs (MTV).

the night through the morning. The video resembled a sexual orgy as dancers, with an abundance of skin showing, writhed in close proximity to one another, grinding and inundated by sweat. The pop culture website, PopCrush, listed “I’m a Slave 4 U” as number ten on its “Top 10 Sex Songs” list, documenting Spears’ sexual revolution:

Britney Spears, our Queen, brought sexy back before her ex Justin Timberlake ever did. . . . Critics said this sex song was Brit’s most mature sound at the time — for fans, it was her first foray into the more seductive Britney we know today. . . it was the first time we as an audience were treated to Britney’s KILLER body thanks to her barely there top and uber low-rise jeans.³⁸³

The most iconic image associated with Spears’ “I’m a Slave 4 U” was the albino python from her 2001 MTV VMA performance, in which she draped the serpent across

³⁸² Britney Spears, “I’m a Slave 4 U,” *Britney* (New York: Jive Records, 2001).

³⁸³ Alexandra Capotorto, “Top 10 Sex Songs,” <<http://popcrush.com/sex-songs/>>, 26 July 2012 [accessed 21 January 2014].

her shoulders while she danced (figure 25). The haunting image was incorporated into *Glee*'s "Britney/Brittany" episode during the show's rendition of the song. The elongated snake, coincidentally named Banana, served as a phallic symbol, and made the performance unforgettable—so memorable that in 2012, other artists still recognized the 2001 event as their favorite, including 98° member Jeff Timmons who told MTV, "When Britney did 'Slave,' I think that was the first time she did 'Slave' with the snake and she looked super sexy, that was pretty cool."³⁸⁴ This transition from flirty and playful to sexual and titillating resounded with millennials to the extent that the performance is still hailed as one of the best. And, as Spears escalated her sexuality to new heights, Aguilera soon did the same.

"Dirty. Filthy. Nasty. Too dirty to clean my act up. If you ain't dirty, you ain't here to party," opened Aguilera's 2002 "Dirrty," the first single from her *Stripped* album. Drawing comparisons to Spears' "I'm a Slave 4 U," "Dirrty" is about dancing and being engulfed in the music and it also featured suggestive lyrics about "dirty dancing," in which dancing takes on sexual connotations, including acts such as groping, rubbing, and thrusting. Innuendos such as "Sweating until my clothes come off," and "Temperature's up, about to erupt / Gonna get my girls, get your boys / Gonna make some noise," could be taken as double entendres: Aguilera's full immersion in music and dance, or disrobing and partaking in loud, carnal coitus. The music video for "Dirrty" left less to misunderstand as Aguilera danced in a pair of chaps that fully exhibited her crotch and derriere in a bright red undergarment, and she later danced in a short plaid skirt, which

³⁸⁴ Christina Garibaldi, "Britney Spears' Slithering 'Slave 4 U' Tops Artists' Most Epic VMA Moment: Spears' 2001 VMA performance, featuring Banana the python, resonates with pop stars old and new," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1692836/britney-spears-vmas-moments.jhtml>>, 29 August 2012 [accessed 21 January 2014].

rendered a schoolgirl, Lolita ambience, uncannily similar to the image associated with Spears' "...Baby One More Time" outfit. That underage, forbidden tone of the music video seemed indisputable when Thailand prohibited the broadcast of the "Dirrty" music video, because in multiple shots Aguilera can be seen dancing in front of Thai-written signs that translated into English as "Thailand's Sex Tourism" and "Young Underage Girls," which *MTV.com*'s Jon D'Angelo said "references to Thailand's much-criticized, tourist-driven sex industry."³⁸⁵ "I think she's dirty, she needs to go to church," and, "My goodness, she's changed," were some statements from women who were given a sneak preview of the "Dirrty" music video, while the men were more enthusiastic about Aguilera's change, observing that "She seems cooler, more of a party girl now. That's hot," and, "Wow, that's my baby's mama right there. Boo, I'll eat your toes, officially."³⁸⁶ Though the racy song and music video shook some Americans' views on Aguilera, making them uncomfortable while leaving others titillated, "Dirrty" was not banned from national airplay, unlike a later Britney Spears song.

In 2008, Britney Spears released "If U Seek Amy," a song that gained notoriety from its phonetically interpretational lyrics. The title is repeated throughout the song, and when "if you seek Amy" is sounded out, it is saying "F-U-C-K me," which caused outrage among parents as well as with the Parents Television Council (PTC). The PTC demanded a complete airplay ban of "If U Seek Amy" between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., claiming that the song violated the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC)

³⁸⁵ Jon D'Angelo, "'Dirrty' Christina Aguilera Video Thai-ed To Sex Industry: Unsavory content in clip got lost in translation," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1458223/x-tina-dirrty-vid-under-fire.jhtml>>, 18 October 2002 [accessed 21 January 2014].

³⁸⁶ "Christina's 'Dirrty' Makes Some Fans Ill, Others Hot To Eat Her Toes: Aguilera's latest video seems to be turning off as many viewers as it's turning on," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1457893/christinas-dirrty-hot-disgusting.jhtml>>, 2 October 2002 [accessed 17 January 2014].

regulations on the broadcasting of obscene, indecent, and profane programming. Radio stations still played a Jive Records-edited version of the song, which dropped the phoneme /k/ from the title



Figure 26: Britney Spears and Madonna's famous lip lock during the 2003 MTV VMAs (MTV).

phrase, leaving listeners with “if you see Amy.”³⁸⁷ In a society that has bombarded youth and young adults with sexual images and messages, the release of a catchy song that prompted its listeners to sing along lyrics like “all of the boys and all of the girls are begging to ‘if you seek Amy,’” only provided more evidence of how generation Y had become desensitized to and tolerant of overt sexuality.³⁸⁸

As females sang about other females, in addition to males, imploring them to engage in sexual relations, the culture’s attention shifted toward lesbianism. 2008’s “If U Seek Amy” was not the first non-heterosexual expression in Spears’ career—her open-mouthed kiss with Madonna during MTV’s 2003 VMAs shocked all those in attendance as well as the viewers (figure 26). Madonna danced with both Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, and even wrapped her arm around Aguilera’s thigh and removed a garter belt before pulling Spears up to her face and kissing her, and then turning to kiss Aguilera. The dance was erotic and hinted at a lesbian-themed choreography, but the kisses made the motive irrefutable. One person who was not amused by this performance was conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who thought that this event could

³⁸⁷ Daniel Kreps, “Britney Spears’ Racy ‘If U Seek Amy’ Hits the Radio, Angers Parents,” <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/15765/91079>>, 22 January 2009 [accessed 24 November 2010].

³⁸⁸ Britney Spears, “If U Seek Amy,” *Circus* (New York: Jive Records, 2008).

lead to another Al Qaeda attack because “these terrorists hate our amoral culture. Isn’t it possible, some might ask, that some Al-Qaeda thug could see this kissing . . . and decide to punish us? Who knows what they might do!”³⁸⁹ On the other end of the spectrum was Sarah Warn, editor-in-chief of AfterEllen.com, a lesbian and bisexual women’s pop culture website, who wrote that the Britney-Madonna-Christina kiss helped to “desensitize Americans to the image of two women kissing” and brought attention to lesbian sexuality “in a way that may ultimately benefit those of us for whom lesbian sexuality is not just a performance.”³⁹⁰ Regardless of the positive and negative reactions, the kiss was so iconic that it was reenacted in 2010 during a performance on MTV’s show, “America’s Best Dance Crew.” The competing dance troupe from Hawai‘i, Hype 5-0, was given the Britney Spears’ song “3” to perform.



Figure 27: Hype 5-0’s performance of “3” with a throwback to Spears and Madonna’s 2003 kiss (MTV).

At the end of their performance, Hype 5-0 had the two female dancers kiss (figure 27). Casey Kalahiki, one of the female members of Hype 5-0, said that:

The kiss thing was last minute, like literally as we wer[e] waiting to go onto the stage our leader (Josh Ulep) was like, “you guys should just kiss.” Brittnie [the second female group member] and I had disagreed with it before, but at that moment we just felt like we should “go hard or go home.” It was all for the purpose of entertainment and we got a great response out of it.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Rush Limbaugh, as cited in Sarah Warn, “VMA’s Madonna-Britney-Christina Kiss: Progress of Publicity Stunt?” < <http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/vmakiss.html>>, September 2003 [accessed 27 November 2010].

³⁹⁰ Warn, “VMA’s Madonna-Britney-Christina Kiss: Progress or Publicity Stunt?”

³⁹¹ Casey Kalahiki, Facebook message to performer, 26 November 2010.

Though not as extensive as the Britney-Madonna kiss' coverage, this girl-on-girl kiss received attention as well. The lyrics of the song to which Hype 5-0 performed were just as sexual as a kiss between two females, if not more so.

Britney Spears advocated in highly lascivious lyrics a three-way sexual experience in her 2009 song, "3." The song is extremely catchy and was Spears' third single to reach the number one spot on the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart. Including lyrics such as "Merrier the more / Triple fun that way / Twister on the floor / What do you say?" the song compares the pleasure of group sex to the fun that is experienced while playing a

popular physical game many Americans have enjoyed.³⁹² Other lyrics suggested that sexual relations did not need to be meaningful, such as, "Three is a



Figure 28: Horizontal stripper pole utilized in the music video "3" (RCA/Jive Records).

charm / Two is not the same / I don't see the harm / So are you game?" and "What we do is innocent / Just for fun and nothing meant."³⁹³ Millennials were presented with the idea that engaging in coitus is enjoyable and innocuous, even with multiple simultaneous partners, suggesting a new rise in promiscuity among members of the generation, or at least a new level of tolerance for such sexualized scenarios. "3" even attempted to appeal to the detractors of this racy lifestyle through enlightenment, asking: "Livin' in sin is the

³⁹² Britney Spears, "3," *Britney: The Singles Collection* (New York: Jive Records, 2009).

³⁹³ Spears, "3."

new thing / Are you in?” The music video for “3” does not try to add any messages or instill a story into its production; rather, it was a sexually charged piece featuring dancing in a steamy room and a horizontal stripper pole being utilized by Spears and four other dancers (figure 28). There was an alteration to the lyrics in the music video, as “sin” was replaced with “this,” perhaps to prevent Spears from labeling herself as a sinner since she was raised in the South and attended church, but besides that censorship the video does not hold back its blatant lewdness, which ultimately reached the consciousness of generation Y-ers. After fifteen years of Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears performing as recording artists, the United States, as well as the rest of the world, witnessed these women shape American girl culture into one that promoted the worshipping of material items and sexualized body images, as well as an eagerness among millennials to express themselves sexually. These aspects of Aguilera and Spears’ careers have been described as undesirable by older generations and accordingly have gained more notice from all media sources since the United States is a nation infatuated with troubling information. With all the attention focusing on the millennial pop princess’ tainting of girl culture, it was easy to overlook the messages about female strength that they have also shared with American girls and women.

Millennial Female Empowerment

So what am I not supposed to have an opinion / Should I be quiet just because I’m a woman? / Call me a bitch ‘cause I speak what’s on my mind . . . This is for my girls all around the world / Who’ve come across a man who don’t respect your worth / Thinking all women should be seen, not heard / What do we do girls? / Shout out loud!³⁹⁴

—Christina Aguilera featuring Lil’ Kim, “Can’t Hold Us Down,” 2002.

³⁹⁴ Christina Aguilera featuring Lil’ Kim, “Can’t Hold Us Down,” *Stripped* (New York: RCA Records, 2002).

Christina Aguilera teamed up with one of the women with whom she recorded 2001's "Lady Marmalade," female rapper Lil' Kim, to produce this female empowerment anthem. Aguilera told *MTV.com*, "This [song] is directed to any male who puts down a female for stating her mind. This is definitely to make women feel empowered to do and say what they want to."³⁹⁵ This bold statement came after she had become the target of male detractors in the industry, the most notable feud being between Aguilera and rapper Eminem (Marshall Mathers), after she had complimented his looks but warned women to avoid abusive men. Eminem responded to Aguilera's claim that he was violent in his track "Off the Wall" (2000) in which he viciously asserted that he would cause "Terror to Christina Aguilera / When I grab her by the hair / And drag her across the Sahara."³⁹⁶ Aguilera took a stand for women against misogyny not only in the music industry, but in all parts of society. Although "Can't Hold Us Down" was released in 2002, Aguilera's first popular song, "Reflection" (1998), has expressed an even earlier message about female empowerment.

Aguilera's "Reflection" was a song from Disney's animated film, *Mulan*, which itself was significant in the millennial consumption of female empowerment, as the protagonist, Fa Mulan, based on Hua Mulan from Chinese poetry, secretly took her venerable father's place in the Chinese army to fight off the invading Huns, and in doing so proved that a woman has the skill and ability to achieve, and surpass, the success of men. Mulan sings "Reflection" during the film when she feels as though she has

³⁹⁵ Jessica Vineyard, "Christina Stands Up For The Ladies, Discusses Father's Abuse: Singer worked with Lil' Kim, Alicia Keys on upcoming album," <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1458433/christina-talks-stripped.jhtml>>, 31 October 2002 [accessed 21 January 2014].

³⁹⁶ Eminem and Redman, "Off the Wall," *Nutty Professor II: The Klumps Soundtrack* (New York: Def Jam Recordings, 2000).

dishonored her family by leaving a bad impression on the town's matchmaker, but Aguilera recorded the pop version of the track for the film's soundtrack, and it played during *Mulan*'s end credits after boy band 98°'s "True to Your Heart," which featured musician Stevie Wonder. Aguilera belts out "I am now / In a world where I have to hide my heart / And what I believe in / But somehow / I will show the world what's inside my heart / And be loved for who I am," which expressed the personal necessity to be honest with one's own identity, a message aimed at all of society but especially at the millennial generation given the film's target audience.³⁹⁷ The chorus twice repeated, "Who is that girl I see / Staring straight back at me? / When will my reflection show / Who I am inside?" and then changed in its final reprise to say "I won't pretend that I'm / Someone else for all time." This voiced an influential message, that instead of wondering what a girl must do in order to be herself, she should just be herself rather than pretending. Being oneself is a simple yet necessary step on the spectrum of empowerment, which millennials have either taken or not taken, as evident in social networking where they are either presenting their authentic self or one fashioned in order to gain popularity or "likes." Whether they are following "Reflection"'s message or not, the dictum was shared by Aguilera on her first song. Spears' debut album did not contain an empowering song along the lines of "Reflection," but it nonetheless presented a confident and inspiring message.

Britney Spears belted out "Stronger" (2002), a song about overcoming the heartbreak stemming from a broken relationship by finding the strength within her to take control of her life as an independent woman—she was gaining empowerment in her own

³⁹⁷ Christina Aguilera, "Reflection," *Christina Aguilera* (New York: RCA Records, 1999).

life. She sang, “You might think that I won’t make it on my own / But now I’m / Stronger than yesterday / Now it’s nothing but my way / My loneliness ain’t killing me no more / I, I’m stronger.”³⁹⁸ Empowerment entails the gaining of control over one’s life by means of self-realization, the building of self-esteem and confidence, and the exercising of human agency.³⁹⁹ Generation Y men often believed they had control over women in a society based on male dominance in popular culture. Young men listened to rappers who objectified women and boy bands that made their fans’ knees weak with a flash of their smile or the utterance of a syllable. Even women in pop music contributed to men’s hegemonic masculinity when they expressed their dependence on men, such as Spears in “Born To Make You Happy,” in which she confessed that “I’d do anything, I’d give you my world / I’d wait forever, to be your girl / Just call out my name and I will be there / Just to show you, how much I care.”⁴⁰⁰ “Stronger” was a female anthem that dispelled that notion and let men know that they no longer had control over women physically, mentally, or emotionally. “Stronger” was the first single from Spears that focused on the message of gaining power over one’s own life. “My loneliness ain’t killing me no more,” upon a close listening, seemed to be an allusion to the lyrics “my loneliness is killing me” from Spears’ “...Baby One More Time,” which provided an example of female submissiveness through its presentation of pining over a man, while “Stronger” appeared to suggest that women can assume complete responsibility over their

³⁹⁸ Britney Spears, “Stronger,” *Oops!...I Did It Again* (New York: Jive Records, 2000).

³⁹⁹ Rachel Young, “Actualization: How Thoroughly Impossible Is It?” http://breakthroughgen.org/blog/2010/06/actualization_how_thoroughly_impossible_is_it.shtml [accessed 2 December 2010].

⁴⁰⁰ Britney Spears, “Born To Make You Happy,” *...Baby One More Time* (New York: Jive Records, 1998).

own lives by rejecting the necessity of male companionship. This awareness or self-belief was also the topic of Aguilera's song, "The Voice Within" (2002).

Pleading to a young girl, Aguilera advised, "You'll never change if you just run away . . . Don't go forsaking yourself / No one can stop you . . . When there's no one else / Look inside yourself / Like your oldest friend / Just trust the voice within."⁴⁰¹ The soaring ballad let every listener know that "Life is a journey / It can take you anywhere you choose to go / As long as you're learning / You'll find out all you'll ever need to know." There appeared to be nothing more empowering than being independent, and "The Voice Within" emphasized that self-confidence and trusting oneself were crucial to making it through life. *Stripped* also contained another ballad with a similar message, "Beautiful," and an inspirational accompanying music video. The lyrics, "You are beautiful no matter what they say / Words can't bring you down," reflected the core meaning of the song. The music video featured a cast of actors who were looked down upon, including three young girls, one with an eating disorder, another frustrated with popular culture's definition of beauty, and one being bullied.

The young woman with the eating disorder spent her time in the music video in front of a mirror. She looked at herself from a side-angle to look at her body fat, which was absent, and in frustration she punched the mirror, shattering the unhealthy image, toward the conclusion of the video. A second woman looked cautiously through various fashion and beauty periodicals. Again focused on body image, this young woman began to tear out these unrealistic expectations, throwing the pages and entire magazines into the nearby fireplace. After burning all of society's expectations for beauty, she lays back on her sofa with a satisfied smile upon her face. The third young woman has braces and

⁴⁰¹ Christina Aguilera, "The Voice Within," *Stripped* (New York: RCA Records, 2002).

is beaten to the ground by three female bullies. The video showed her looking up with tears in her eyes, then she was seen sitting at a kitchen table, fists clenched in anger, until viewers are treated to her smile—a smile that indicated that the bullies would not defeat her. These three women featured in Aguilera’s “Beautiful” embodied aspects of empowerment portrayed in the ballad, but Aguilera’s repertoire of inspirational songs did not always include soothing tunes.

“Fighter” (2002), was an aggressive song that used antagonists’ attempts to devastate Aguilera as stepping-stones to becoming a stronger woman. “After all that you put me through / You think I’d despise you / But in the end I wanna thank you / ‘Cause you’ve made me that much stronger,” said Christina Aguilera, in the opening spoken lines of “Fighter.”⁴⁰² Aguilera sang this guitar-heavy track to let society know that she would not be broken by anyone and that she would use each hindrance to her happiness as an example that any hardship “Makes me that much stronger / Makes me work a little bit harder / It makes me that much wiser . . . Made me learn a little bit faster / Made my skin a little bit thicker / Makes me that much smarter / So thanks for making me a fighter.” To exasperate her detractors, Aguilera informed them that they were not achieving their goal of breaking her, but they were instead making her stronger, a message that she broadcast to all millennials, but especially young women who had encountered a man who is “Going ‘round playing the victim now,” because “After all of the fights and the lies ‘cause you’re wanting to haunt me . . . That won’t work anymore.” The message to use each and every hurdle as a learning experience to gain personal strength had been released and heeded. Aguilera was not the only pop princess that

⁴⁰² Christina Aguilera, “Fighter,” *Stripped* (New York: RCA Records, 2002).

addressed attacks on her life and career—Spears also confronted her detractors through song.

Spears, much like Aguilera, had also faced a good deal of condemnation regarding her music, her music videos, her choices in wardrobe, or lack thereof, and her personal lifestyle decisions during her career. In the cutthroat music industry, it was necessary to handle brutal reviews, accusations, and gossip, and Spears recorded a cover of Bobby Brown's "My Prerogative" in 2004 to send a response message to her detractors and critics. She was aware of their claims, but the critics were not going to change her. The lyrics, "Why can't I live my life / Without all of the things people say? ... Oh, everybody's talkin' all this stuff about me / Why don't they just let me live? / I don't need permission / Make my own decisions / That's my prerogative," propel an empowering message to her supporters that if they are in a position where others are criticizing or belittling them, they should take the power away from their detractors by seizing absolute control over their own lives.⁴⁰³ In doing this, women challenged male dominance and built enough self-esteem and confidence to liberate themselves from mental and emotional bonds. The message of the song was to live life the way it should be lived, and Spears added in the introduction lines, "Evil can take everything away from you / But they can never take away your truth / But the question is, can you handle mine?" to personalize it and seemingly to flaunt the message of the song to her hecklers. The line using the word "truth" inspired the publicity material for her reality show with Federline, *Britney & Kevin: Chaotic*, which depicted the daily life of this high profile couple.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ Britney Spears, "My Prerogative," *Greatest Hits: My Prerogative* (New York: Jive Records, 2004).

⁴⁰⁴ Heard, Amazon Kindle location 3027-3050.

Britney & Kevin: Chaotic ended with the premier of Spears' self-written song, "Someday (I Will Understand)," which she wrote shortly before finding out she was pregnant with her first child. Spears wrote the song based on where she felt she was in life and she, based on the lyrics, was returning to the God of her childhood years to seek guidance and to learn about God's plan for her.⁴⁰⁵ The ballad is solemn, as Spears opens the song singing, "Nothing seems to be the way, that it used to / Everything seems shallow, God give me truth."⁴⁰⁶ Exposing the questions she has about what has happened in her life before, she is "praying, that / Someday, I will understand / In God's whole plan and what He's done to me / Oh, but maybe someday I will breathe and I'll finally see / I see it all in my baby."⁴⁰⁷ The birth of her children, and becoming a mother, helped Spears' self-realization, and she believed that her sons were God's response and her salvation.⁴⁰⁸ Even though Spears returned to God upon the birth of her sons Sean Preston and Jayden James, she decided that they were her new religion. Understanding that Spears' perceived her sons as God's plans for her provided some explanation for her breakdown after Kevin Federline received custody of Sean Preston and Jayden James—her hopes and faith were being torn away from her legally. Spears, during her first pregnancy, had said, "I find being pregnant empowering. I think it brings out a pure side of you, and I think that's cool."⁴⁰⁹ She did not advocate pregnancy in this song, but instead she sang about finding an identity and a purpose in life. Spears discovered that once she found her purpose, she was empowered with the energy to strive to reach her

⁴⁰⁵ Dennis, Amazon Kindle location 3650-3673.

⁴⁰⁶ Britney Spears, "Someday (I Will Understand)," *Britney & Kevin: Chaotic* (New York: Jive Records, 2008).

⁴⁰⁷ Spears, "Someday (I Will Understand)."

⁴⁰⁸ Dennis, Amazon Kindle location 3650-3673.

⁴⁰⁹ Britney Spears, as cited in "'It's the best feeling in the world': Due this fall, Britney Spears talks about motherhood, morning sickness and taking a break from show business," *People* 63, no. 23 (13 June 2005): 63-64.

full potential—which she believed was becoming a mother. Another resolution of empowerment was declared through Britney Spears’ “Toxic” (2003), in which she



Figure 29: Heroine Britney Spears poisoning her philandering boyfriend in "Toxic" (Zomba).

delivered the message that women can, and should, be the heroines in their own lives.

Spears’ “Toxic” provided her fans with two different messages—one from her song and one from her music video. Spears sang about an encounter with a libertine from whom she knows she should stay away, but he succeeds in obtaining her and the lyrics lead listeners to believe she is singing about getting inebriated and heading off for a sexual fling, the message that cynical adults have pessimistically come to expect from her. The music video was completely different—she was not being submissive to a male, but instead she was depicted as a heroine. As an airline stewardess, she displayed intelligence as she accurately identified her incognito target, isolated him, and distracted him long enough to steal a pass from his pocket. She then became a woman in power as she rode on the back of her muscular male assistant’s motorcycle to Toxic Industries, where she uses the pass to obtain a vial of poison. Spears demonstrated her physical abilities as she wove through lasers on her way out and as she scaled a building to enter her philandering boyfriend’s residence. She threw him to the bed and onto the ground with superhuman strength. After kissing him, she poured the poison into his mouth and

leapt like a superhero out of the window (figure 29). And why should she not? She just rid the world of a womanizer, a villain to all women. She then returned to her position as an ordinary stewardess, which illustrated to millennial girls and young women that they all had the power to become heroines in their own lives.

Through their song lyrics about becoming mentally and emotionally stronger, and taking control of their lives, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera gave generation Y girls and young women voices to follow in becoming confident and independent women in society. They also provided an example of how empowerment could be achieved spiritually by reflecting on their lives to find personal meaning and to channel that meaning to attain a degree of self-realization. Nonetheless, the critical reception of Christina Aguilera's and Britney Spears' careers and personal lives have frequently overshadowed the empowering contributions they have provided for contemporary girl culture.

Toxic? The Cultural Significance of Aguilera and Spears for Millennials

I used to be a cool chick, y'know? And I feel like the paparazzi have taken my whole cool swag away. . . . The way I used to live, I was a pretty cool chick y'know? But I'm not really that way anymore.⁴¹⁰
—Britney Spears, on how her life had changed by becoming famous, 2009

Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera were female cultural icons of generation Y, whose members witnessed their rise to superstardom while also being challenged by it. Both women's personal and professional lives captured headlines, many of which were critical of the two stars. Parents questioned the influence these women had on their

⁴¹⁰ *Britney: For the Record*, DVD, Dir. by Phil Griffin, 2009.

children, especially their daughters. Millennial young women glorified the women for their catchy pop songs that became anthems of their generation, for their cute, fading ensembles, and no doubt enjoyed the narcissistic and sexual innuendos that concerned parents. Yet Spears and Aguilera were not the first corruptors of teenage girls' innocence. Commercial marketing approaches had long used sexuality and instant gratification techniques to appeal to young Americans. But the stars used old marketing strategies in new ways. They played on notions of innocence, playfulness, and sexuality to become being princesses of pop music. The main identifier of Aguilera and Spears that most observers overlook, probably because of their iconic status, is that they themselves are part of generation Y. Neither were probably as "toxic" to contemporary girl culture as many of their critics believed. A 1996 study reported that up to eighty-one percent of music videos included sexual imagery, but Spears' 1999 "...Baby One More Time," and Aguilera's "Dirrty" music videos shocked older generations with their raciness.⁴¹¹ These women were merely contributors to the social changes occurring in girl culture, not abominations of contemporary popular culture. When criticizing elements of popular culture, academics and therapists have urged parents to assess their own prejudices first. When pop star Miley Cyrus appeared on a 2009 *Vanity Fair* cover wrapped in a bed sheet with her shoulders and back visible, parents were outraged. *Time*'s Belinda Luscombe, in explaining myths associated with teenage girls, referred to this incident by saying "when tweens see a picture of Cyrus with her back bare and her hair tousled, they don't see her as postcoital. That's an adult interpretation."⁴¹² Both Aguilera and Spears were essentially causes and reflections of the changes in generation

⁴¹¹ Hawkes, "Media and Clothing Market Influence"

⁴¹² Belinda Luscombe, "The Truth About Teen Girls," <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1840556,00.html>>, 11 September 2008 [accessed 20 September 2010].

Y's girl culture—from the continued rise in materialism and body image concerns to the excessive sexuality and the new wave of feminism revolving around empowerment—just as the stars of older generations had also reflected similar patterns in American popular culture.

The legacies of Aguilera and Spears are evident as both are still making headlines after fifteen years in the entertainment industry. Their iconic status has led them both to mentor upcoming musicians, offering advice from their perspective based on their experiences. Spears and Aguilera illustrated through their careers the narcissism and hypersexuality of female millennials, but they also offered messages of empowerment that reverberated with generation Y and that demonstrated how these pop princesses became much more than “dirty” and “toxic” to young women.

Conclusion

It is fabulous to see girls and young women poised for success in the coming years. But allowing generations of boys to grow up feeling rootless and obsolete is not a recipe for a peaceful future. Men have few natural support groups and little access to social welfare; the men's-rights groups that do exist in the U.S. are taking on an angry, antiwoman edge. . . . Far from being celebrated, women's rising power is perceived as a threat.⁴¹³

In "The End of Men," Hannah Rosin brought to the foreground one issue regarding millennial gender also addressed in this thesis: that the upsurge of women's presence in all spheres of American life since the end of the twentieth century has had a direct correlation to the intensified disparagement directed against women by men. A common backlash women faced was men blaming them for their troubles: women were taking all of the jobs, women were doing better in education and making up a larger portion of university students, and Madonna's kiss with Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera could have undermined the United States' security, as claimed by Rush Limbaugh, by spurring an al Qaeda terrorist attack. The millennial generation witnessed men—fathers, athletes, and entertainers—display disdain for women in the public and private spheres. This masculine sentiment was evinced in Justin Timberlake and Britney Spears' relationship. Timberlake publicly besmirched Spears, intentionally or otherwise, following their breakup, leaving Spears to question his intention. Their attempts to achieve personal closure also revealed layers of generation Y's gender consciousness as discussed in this thesis. Spears offered an apologetic tune for any pain she had caused Timberlake, seeking an empowered inner peace, while Timberlake shared a pugnacious

⁴¹³ Rosin, "The End of Men."

song that was exemplary of millennial anger and aggression in men. Spears, who was a teenage pop princess, and Timberlake, whose roots trace back to one of the 1990s boy bands, shared more in common than the inverse relationship between men's anger and aggression and women's empowerment. During and after their relationship, they exuded narcissism, which was characteristic of the millennial generation. In a riveting rant on her generation, Madison Montgomery (Emma Roberts), a character posing as a media superstar and witch on *American Horror Story*, a horror television series catering to a largely millennial audience, provided commentary on this narcissism:

I am a millennial, generation Y, born between the birth of AIDS and 9/11, give or take. They call us the global generation. We are known for our entitlement and narcissism. Some say it's because we're the first generation where every kid gets a trophy just for showing up. Others think it's because social media allows us to post whenever we fart or have a sandwich for all the world to see. But it seems that our one defining trait is a numbness to the world, an indifference to suffering. I know that I did anything I could to not feel—sex, drugs, booze. Just take away the pain. Take away my mother and my asshole father and the press. Take away the boys I loved who wouldn't love me back. Hell, I was gang-raped, two days later I was back in class like nothing happened. I mean that must have hurt like hell, right? Most people never get over stuff like that, and I was like, "Let's go for Jamba Juice." I would give everything I have or have ever had just to feel pain again. To feel hurt.⁴¹⁴

In the series' "The Dead" episode that aired on 20 November 2013, Montgomery equated her resurrected, zombie-like existence to the numbness of a millennial.

Montgomery's monologue addressed the self-indulgence widely accepted as characteristic of generation Y, questioning notions that millennials were egotistical due to overbearing parents and a reliance on social media and asserting instead that they are deadened to their surroundings and to suffering. Though her statement was critical of millennial narcissism and did paint generation Y-ers accurately, the claim of "numbness" has been disputed in this thesis.

⁴¹⁴ *American Horror Story: Coven*, "The Dead," episode 32 [season 3, episode 7], 20 November 2013.

The narcissism of millennial men and women stemmed from an abundance of feelings. Men strove to flaunt their masculinity to evade all forms of emasculation, displaying their gym-hardened bodies. In *Guyland*, Michael Kimmel noted the rise in child-men, grown men who acted immaturely in popular culture and related the trend to the masculine idea that academic success was feminine, which may be a factor in the imbalanced gender percentages in higher education.⁴¹⁵ The growth of hypermasculine men also gave birth to the polar opposite male prototype, the progressive men. These men defied the stoic, brutish image associated with masculinity and instead promoted a more sensitive aura. This “new” man may have dissociated himself from the brutish man through nonchalance about cultural expectations, but his increased willingness to commit to and convey emotions represented the very feelings that challenged the lifelessness of millennials as rendered by *American Horror Story*’s presentation.

Millennial women also felt pressure to achieve certain physical and beauty standards. They relied on cosmetic surgeries to solve solutions for perceived physical shortcomings that makeup or clothing could not address. If a woman or girl felt that she was physically adequate, she would brandish her body to gain the awe and attention of spectators because millennial girl culture was also one of homosociality. Advertisements and marketing techniques that preyed on self-image was not a new concept. As an example, personal hygiene marketing strategies had long catered to viewers’ fears and reasons of insecurity, such as discolored teeth, body odor, halitosis, and skin flaws. Millennials took actions to a higher level to overcome their anxieties. Women, and men, partook in cosmetic surgeries in striking numbers. Millennials became more than manipulated consumers, they were their generation’s own walking advertisements. The

⁴¹⁵ Kimmel, *Guyland*, 74.

constant public presence in person and digitally through social media created pressure on millennials to have the perfect body, to own the most popular material items, and to be associated with other desirable individuals, all out of fear of feeling isolated, inadequate, or socially dead. As examined in this thesis, millennial pop music provided lyrics and imagery that expressed this narcissistic phenomenon of generation Y. *American Horror Story*'s monologue illuminated points of discussion that further enhanced the narcissism of the millennials. Yet narcissism was not the only shared mannerism in millennial boy and girl culture since overt sexuality also became mutually highlighted. The prevalence of explicit sexuality in millennial culture was expounded upon in this dialogue between the two lead female characters in the 2009 film *Jennifer's Body*. They were discussing whether Jennifer Check (Megan Fox) should pursue a sexual fling with a member from Low Shoulder, an all-male fictional rock band:

Jennifer Check: I think the singer wants me.

Needy Lesnicky: Only because he thinks you're a virgin. I heard them talking.

Jennifer Check: Yeah right. I'm not even a backdoor-virgin anymore, thanks to Roman. By the way, that hurts. I couldn't even go to [Six] Flags the next day. I had to stay home and sit on a bag of frozen peas.⁴¹⁶

The black comedy-horror film *Jennifer's Body* featured strong female characters, namely Jennifer Check and Needy Lesnicky (Amanda Seyfried), who embodied the empowerment of millennial women. These two childhood best friends entered into a strange and complex relationship after Low Shoulder sacrificed Check, who they thought was a virgin, in a ritual to Satan to gain the band fame and fortune. Check was not a virgin and the ceremony instead transformed her into a bloodthirsty, hypersexual demon that fed on human flesh, which led to the film's climax that featured a fatal confrontation between the two empowered women. Check bit Lesnicky, transferring her super-strength

⁴¹⁶ *Jennifer's Body*, dir. Karyn Kusama (Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2009).

and levitation capabilities to Lesnicky, before Lesnicky plunged a box-cutter into Check's chest. Check's mother found Lesnicky at the blood-drenched scene, landing Lesnicky in an asylum from which she escapes. She then tracked down the four men from Low Shoulder and murdered them in revenge for the pain and hardships they caused these two empowered women. In addition to the female empowerment undercurrents in *Jennifer's Body*, the film was peppered with comedic sexual dialogue, including the above conversation between Check and Lesnicky that reflected the sexual nature of the millennial generation.

Growing up in a technologically connected world may have contributed to the heightened sexuality of millennials compared to the sexuality of previous generations. The connectedness of American culture since the 1990s helped foster generation Y's yearning for instant gratification as social media exploded with the growth of the internet's availability throughout all areas of life: at home, at work, at school—everywhere. Cellular and smart phones increased society's webs of communication, which in turn paved a path for the swelling of millennial hookup culture cultivated by the rapid exchange of information and conversations between individuals. "Sexting" evolved from words exchanged through texting to include pictures when the technology became available. This enabling of revealing self-promotional photographs took flight as new social media platforms emerged, including Twitter and Instagram; relationship websites that promoted casual sex grew in popularity, and prominent celebrities and politicians fell prey to these technological temptations of millennials.

As with narcissism, men and women paraded bodies that exemplified American culture's increasing standards for the physically appealing while Americans leered at

their physiques. As popular figures, pop princesses and boy bands participated in this exhibitionism through their music videos and tabloid images, contributing to this cultural sensation. millennial bubblegum pop music followed the formula of the 1960s bubblegum tunes by employing double entendres in their catchy melodies, but only for their single tracks. Lyrics for these singles, at least at the start of these millennial teen-pop stars' careers, relied on implication, though more explicit lyrics were found on album tracks and were more prevalent as these musicians' careers matured alongside their maturing audience. As evinced in this thesis, Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears were subjected to more scrutiny for their sexuality than were their male peers. Aguilera and Spears used their popularity to demonstrate that female sexuality could also be used as an instrument of empowerment, the final characteristic of millennial girl culture documented in this study. This trend of millennial women's empowerment was evident in the 2013 film *Spring Breakers*, which Abbey Stone from Hollywood.com interpreted as a metaphor for Spears' life and career, from her innocent, Christian upbringing, through her corruption and breakdown, to her ability to transcend those challenges.⁴¹⁷ *Spring Breakers* featured two songs from the millennial icon, "...Baby One More Time" and "Everytime." The film is a coming-of-age story of four young millennial women, and one of the characters, Faith (Selena Gomez), who Stone compared to Spears' innocent beginnings, alluded to this inclination toward liberation while justifying the group's need to attend Spring Break festivities in Florida:

I'm tired of seeing the same thing. Everybody's so miserable here because they see the same things everyday: they wake up in the same bed, same houses, same depressing streetlights, one gas station, grass—it's not even green, it's brown.

⁴¹⁷ Abbey Stone, "'Spring Breakers' Is a Metaphor for the Corruption and Breakdown of Britney Spears," <<http://www.hollywood.com/news/movies/55004531/spring-breakers-britney-spears-metaphor-everytime?page=all>>, 18 March 2013 [accessed 27 February 2014].

Everything is the same and everyone is just sad. I really don't want to end up like them. I just want to get out of here. There's more than just Spring Break. This is our chance to see something different.⁴¹⁸

Faith's monologue gave voice to the restlessness women felt in millennial culture. They grew up seeing older women in the workforce and gaining a higher education, many of them the daughters of women who fought for women's liberation and gender equality. The women of generation Y were part of a trend that continued to challenge gender dialectics established by previous generations. They were proactive in guiding their own lives. *Spring Breakers* featured four college-aged women, three of whom were part of The Walt Disney Company's stable of actresses (Selena Gomez, Vanessa Hudgens, and Ashley Benson). After drunkenly singing Britney Spears' "...Baby One More Time," the young women's vacation deteriorated into one full of violence, crime, and drugs. Faith, who sought a break from her Sunday school lifestyle, was unable to cope with the debauchery her friends embraced with Alien (James Franco), a local rapper and gangster. She returned home, presumably to follow a more traditional lifestyle.

The other three women continued their Spring Break as antiheroes, performing armed robberies with Alien. Alien sang and played Spears' "Everytime" on a white baby grand piano that transitioned into Spears' vocals during the violent and dramatic montage of assaults and robberies that was interspersed with scenes of the young women dancing freely with guns to the ballad. Following the "Everytime" scene, Cotty (Rachel Korine) was shot in the arm in a drive-by shooting by Alien's rival, leading to her return home as she had been injured by a man during her empowering excursion. Brittany (Benson) calls her mother and informs her that, "I've actually been thinking a lot lately. . . . I just want to do better. Better at school, better at life. . . . I feel changed . . . I think that's the secret

⁴¹⁸ *Spring Breakers*, dir. Harmony Korine (New York, NY: A24 Films, 2012).

to life: being a better person.” To start her journey to being better person, Brittany sought revenge on the man who had injured her friend. Alien, Brittany, and Candy (Hudgens) stormed the rival gang’s mansion. Alien died at the outset, but Brittany and Candy successfully continued until they killed the entire opposing gang. During the montage of the women’s murderous rampage, Candy, in a voice-over telephone message to her mother, asserted that, “I think we found ourselves here. . . . Everyone was just trying to find themselves. It was way more than just having a good time. We’re different people now. We see things different.” These two women liberated themselves from the standards American culture pushed upon them; they proved that they flourished in a man’s world undeterred, and they survived Alien and vanquished a gang comprised solely of men without harming the women who entertained those men. Brittany and Candy epitomized the strong women rendered in Britney Spears’ and Christina Aguilera’s songs and music videos and visible in the pop princesses themselves. The slaughter of the opposing gang channeled the heroine persona portrayed in Spears’ “Toxic” music video, in addition to the explicit channeling of the pop star through the inclusion of “...Baby One More Time” and “Everytime.”

The female stars of *Spring Breakers* personified the new woman who was different from the woman who was contained to the domestic sphere; the new woman saw the world as a place of opportunity to find herself and surpass men academically, socially, culturally, and economically. They symbolized the empowered millennial women who changed American culture and roused anger and aggression in millennial men. In his memoir published by *New York Magazine*, boy band member Joe Jonas

provided this magnificent tirade that offered an example of the correlation between women's empowerment and millennial men's anger and aggression:

One relationship that meant a lot to fans was the one I had with Demi Lovato, who I've known for years. . . . I really got to know her and got to see the ins and outs of what she was struggling with, like drug abuse. I felt like I needed to take care of her, but at the same time I was living a lie, because I wasn't happy but felt like I had to stay in it for her, because she needed help. . . . It was an insane situation to be in. . . . Being part of the Disney thing for so long will make you not want to be this perfect little puppet forever. Eventually, I hit a limit and thought, Screw all this, I'm just going to show people who I am. . . . The first time I smoked weed was with Demi and Miley [Cyrus]. I must have been 17 or 18. They kept saying, "Try it! Try it!" so I gave it a shot, and it was all right.⁴¹⁹ Joe Jonas, of the familial boy band the Jonas Brothers, opened up to *New York*

Magazine in December 2013 about his life as a pop star and the hardships he faced in the industry and in his struggles with fame. Two months before the publication of the memoir, in October 2013, the Jonas Brothers cancelled their tour and upcoming album, and announced that the Jonas Brothers had broken up. Simultaneously, rumors flared about Joe Jonas entering rehab for drug abuse, claims that Joe Jonas had denied since their inception. Throughout the autobiographical article, Jonas demonstrated the anger and aggression associated with men in millennial culture. He put blame on everyone else, while identifying Demi Lovato and Miley Cyrus, who were part of a new wave of pop princesses, by name.

Jonas blamed Disney for being too coercive and authoritarian in all realms of its stars' lives, forcing young stars to take training courses on what they could and could not say and do. Autocracy commonly incurs rebellion, as seen throughout history and culture, and Jonas asserted that the company's overbearing intrusion forced many of its stars to act out, himself included. His method of pointing fingers at others, particularly

⁴¹⁹Joe Jonas, "My Life As a Jonas Brother: The Real PG-13ish Version," *New York Magazine* (9 December 2013), iPad Newsstand Edition.

naming Lovato and Cyrus for providing his first experience with marijuana in the wake of drug use rumors, was characteristic of the trend of men blaming women, particularly successful women, for their lives' hardships. *New York Times*'s Jon Caramanica asked Cyrus for her response to Jonas' revelation that she had introduced him to pot. Cyrus replied, "If you want to smoke weed, you're going to smoke weed. There's nothing that two little girls are going to get you to do that you don't want to do. I thought maybe he was saying that like it was going to make him a badass."⁴²⁰ Caramanica commented, "It's the opposite," and Cyrus opined, "We were so young that it's actually like, 'How did you get peer pressured by me?'" Cyrus made headlines in 2013 for her edgy, sexually powered appearances in her live and music video performances, and Demi Lovato found a recharged popularity from being the youngest judge on *The X-Factor* and being a special guest star on *Glee*.

The pop princesses that arose after the millennial cohort of teen-pop idols were full of ambition, from which they gained economic success and cultural visibility and power, as had Aguilera and Spears. These pop princesses also faced public scrutiny for their personal and professional lives: Lovato had entered rehabilitation for treatment of an eating disorder, a rehab stint that Joe Jonas made sure to mention in his *New York Magazine* memoir, and Cyrus' sudden transformation into a tongue-wielding "twerker" polarized American society.⁴²¹ Critics shunned her disgraceful actions and images while supporters applauded her artistry and originality.

⁴²⁰ Jon Caramanica, "Miley Cyrus, 21 The Provocateur," *New York Times*, 29 December 2013, AR20.

⁴²¹ "Twerking" was a sexually provocative dancing style frequently associated with hip-hop music that involved rapidly thrusting the hip and buttocks. In many of her performances in the early 2010s, Cyrus would hang her tongue out of the side her mouth.

In cyclical fashion, this post-Millennium group of pop princesses, including *Spring Breakers*' Selena Gomez and Vanessa Hudgens, and Joe Jonas' marijuana seductresses Miley Cyrus and Demi Lovato, encountered male disdain as they became prominent popular culture icons. All four of these young women gained a fanbase while being Disney stars, the same company that launched the careers of Spears, Aguilera, and *NSYNC-ers Timberlake and Chaz. Their musical catalogs included catchy, narcissistic dance tracks, songs that featured sexual innuendo, and even tunes that sought to empower their listeners. The second wave of millennial boy bands, including The Wanted and One Direction, featured songs and visual presentations impregnated with sexuality and machismo, jealously-driven tracks that mirrored young men's aggression, and swoon-worthy ballads that presented the groups' members as sensitive, progressive men. The recurrent themes of generation Y's gender and gender dialectics swirled between these two cohorts of millennial teen pop icons, the group from the late 1990s and those after the turn of the millennium, and belied the perception that the bubblegum teen-pop genre was historically and culturally insignificant—it reflected and helped shape the narcissism, sexuality, male anger and aggression and female empowerment of the millennials, one of the largest generations in American history.

The legacy of the late 1990s pop princesses and boy bands can be seen in the rearing of a younger wave of analogous musicians. Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, and most members of the boy bands analyzed in this thesis have continued to maintain a presence in the entertainment industry—hosting and participating in television series, acting in films, mentoring and judging upcoming talent long after their debut. Their importance to American culture has often been overlooked or misjudged by members of

the older generations. A historical analysis of the trends and seminal events of the millennial generation's lives has revealed aspects of contemporary American culture forwarded by these teen-pop personalities. The empowering and progressive messages broadcast to generation Y by the pop princesses and boy bands, though absorbed by listeners, were often shaped by the sexuality, the narcissism, and the anger and aggression noteworthy of the millennials. Contextualizing 1990s bubblegum pop within millennial culture has demonstrated that rather than being inconsequential to American culture and history, this often academically neglected musical genre brimmed with valuable insights into a significant American demographic group that, like the music to which they listened, was "not that innocent."

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