Subject: Summary of Selfies Are Good For Girls

Dear Riley,

I hope this message finds you well. I read Selfies Are Good For Girls by Rachel Simmons and I think this article would support you enough.

In her article “Selfies Are Good For Girls “, she says taking selfies is “a tiny pulse of girl pride—a shout-out to the self.” (Simmons, para. 5) for girls. As getting older, girls try not to be confident to avoid being conceited. They learn that by making many awkward situations. They change their strong opinions to questions so that they can earn a compliment. However, girls post their selfies even though they are avoiding showing that they are too confident. Taking selfies is self-promotion for girls. Josie Howard said selfies “may reset the industry standard of beauty to something more realistic.” (Howard, para. 8). Many professionals warn that taking selfies is “approval seeking” (Simmons, para. 9) and they feel “so desperate,” (Simmons, para. 9). Girls want someone to affirm their beauty by uploading their selfies. Simmons worry about the girls who change their look on selfies by using editor and filters. They are trying to look nice on the internet to have influence and disregard their intelligence or kindness. Simmons also worry that parents and educators are seeing all social media as a problem, not the agent of their own lives.

I found this article interesting. Simmons wrote how brave young girls are to post their selfies by bringing her example to compare. What I learned from this article is that girls are being proud of themselves when they are kids, but as they get older, they turn to be a shame. Taking selfies is not being conceited, not the act of “approval seeking,” (Simmons, para. 9) but it is “a tiny pulse of girl pride” (Simmons, para. 5).

There is a point that you can use this article as a reference. Girls being proud turns to being shame is a good example when you talk about self-esteem issues. Regarding social media use among teens, I think this article is feeble as a reference. She mentioned that parents and educators are “seeing all social media as problematic, and positioning girls as passive targets instead of agents of their own lives” (Simmons, para. 13) This would be a great example when you talk about how parents and educators think about social media compared to how actually social media works among girls. However, there is no evidence of what she mentioned.

I would be willing to help with your preparation if you need more. I hope this summary and my thought will help you a bit.

Best regards,

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An elementary school principal I once worked with said that if you ask a group of first grade girls who the best runner in the class is, they all point to themselves: I’m the best runner, they’ll say. Ask a group of sixth grade girls, she went on, and they’ll point to the best runner.

Ask a group of ninth grade girls, I thought to myself, and when they point out the fast girl, she’ll flinch and demur, saying, “No, I’m awful!” Pride, after all, is a cardinal sin in girls’ social culture. It’s a lesson they learn early and with ugly consequences. Act too confident and you’ll be isolated, called “conceited,” a “bitch,” a girl who “thinks she’s all that,” who’s “full of herself.”

Girls adapt by learning the language of the humble. They raise their hands tentatively at the elbow, beginning classroom comments with apologies (“I’m not sure if this is right, but …”). They turn strong opinions into questions with “upspeak.” As Amy Schumer lampooned in her viral sketch, young women deflect compliments with frenetic intensity—or, as I’ve found in my own research, perform an inverse maneuver, earning a compliment by putting themselves down (“I look so awful today.” “No you don’t, you look amaze!”).

Enter the selfie, which Oxford Dictionaries just picked as its word of the year. As the Pew Center for Internet Research reported earlier this year, 91 percent of teens have posted one. Last week, the first selfie app went live: Shots of Me, backed by Justin Bieber, is a camera app that opens with the lens already facing its user.

These days, the selfie and its main outlet, Instagram, generally come in for much adult loathing. But consider this: The selfie is a tiny pulse of girl pride—a shout-out to the self.

Earlier this week, the first three women to complete Marine infantry combat training, along with a fourth who completed most of the hurdles but was injured before her final physical fitness test, posted a jubilant selfie. (Nancy Pelosi tweeted it as “selfie of the year.”) If you write off the endless stream of posts as image-conscious narcissism, you’ll miss the chance to watch girls practice promoting themselves—a skill that boys are otherwise given more permission to develop, and which serves them later on when they negotiate for raises and promotions.

When I posted my first selfie a few months ago after getting a haircut I loved, my thumb hovered, ambivalent, over the post button. I felt a wave of discomfort. How obnoxious, I thought to (and of) myself—are people going to think that I think I look good? And that I want others to know it? That this kind of casual self-promotion comes so easily to girls points to a yawning—and promising—generational divide. Maybe we adult women, of the Lean In generation, have something to learn here.

The selfie suggests something in picture form—I think I look [beautiful] [happy] [funny] [sexy]. Do you?—that a girl could never get away with saying. It puts the gaze of the camera squarely in a girl’s hands, and along with it, the power to influence the photo’s interpretation.

As psychiatrist Josie Howard recently told Refinery29’s Kristin Booker, selfies “may reset the industry standard of beauty to something more realistic.” On #selfiesunday, an often giddy end-of-weekend selfie-fest, the middle school girls on my feed run the gamut from serious to silly. Some girls are working it, sure, but others have their tongues half out as if to say, I know I look stupid. But I choose to, and I’m beating you to the judgment punch.

When I recently suggested to my Facebook community that selfies might occasionally be a good thing for girls, I was swiftly checked by a chorus of horrified grown-ups. Selfies are a form of “approval seeking,” said one. They feel “so desperate,” tsked another. Many professionals echo their alarm.

But of course: Pity the teenage girl. As with sex and hooking up, we assume there is only one motivation, and it’s a bad one. Girls are perennial victims and the culture always perpetuates this. All girls hook up because they know they’ll have to settle to get the intimacy they so desperately crave, even on someone else’s terms—not because they might just be drunk and want to make out with someone. All girls sext because they’re clueless and stupid—not because some have figured out how to leverage the tools of social media to play at sex without having it. And all girls post selfies because they’re desperate for others to fill the beauty-affirmation void left by a ruthless media. Wash, rinse, and repeat.

I’ve been an educator for the last 15 years. I do worry that for every girl who posts a selfie with pride, others use it to cobble together the validation they cannot give themselves. I worry also about the girls who spend hours editing out their blemishes and adding filters.

A 16-year-old from Texas told me that she longs for the days of their grandmothers’ brave, set-in-stone Polaroids. And there is plenty that’s troubling about girls’ tendency to use Instagram to celebrate their physical appearance over their accomplishments. A survey by the Girl Scouts in 2010 found that girls downplayed their intelligence, kindness, and efforts to be a positive influence online in favor of presenting an image that is fun, funny, and social.

But I worry more about a world of parents and educators that are overly invested in seeing all social media as problematic, and positioning girls as passive targets instead of agents of their own lives.

Every girl is different, and context matters.

The selfie flaunts the restrictions of “good girl” culture like a badass teenager sitting in the back of the classroom, refusing to apologize for what she says. I, for one, want to sit next to her in detention.

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