

The “It” Girl Phenomenon: How Present Online News Media Depicts Famous Female Celebrities

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I. Significance of the Study

The central idea in the study revolves around how female celebrities are portrayed in online news media in the present day. A Washington Post article discusses how women celebrities, especially young women celebrities, during the early 2000’s American pop-culture were frequently ridiculed and sexualized in various news media platforms (Goldstein, 2021). From the article it was quoted as “a horrible time for young women in popular culture”. Furthermore, it was a norm for minor female celebrities to be hypersexualized in news media platforms once they had reached the legal age. This was just one of the problematic ways on how young women were written about during that time.

Analyzing how entertainment news media write articles on female celebrities should be studied as these articles do not only affect the subjects but also the audience consuming these written works. One can also observe the current ideologies regarding women and women’s role in society that are propagating in the minds of the masses. A study analyzing the linguistic of blame in popular newspapers gives emphasis on the message these articles engender in its reporting of crimes on women (Clark, 1998, p1). It reasons that these directly or indirectly affects women’s lives through either actual violence or by the fear of it (Clark, 1998, p1). As the feminist movement progressed over the years, verbal hygiene and language reform may have been observed in news entertainment media. The perverse writing on female celebrities may now be less tolerated by the public which might made modern news media companies more sensitive on women issues.

Unfortunately, the representation and participation of the non-binary and trans gender is not included in the scope of this study; however, it is an understudied research that must be further analyzed in future studies.

II. Research Questions

1. What different gender ideologies and perspectives regarding women celebrities are currently propagating on online news media platforms?
2. How are these gender ideologies on women celebrities usually incorporated in online articles? Is there a specific pattern emerging in these articles?

III. Review of Related Literature

Investigating the idea of a celebrity and the celebrity news media in the context of gender can provide enlightening results on the current ideologies projected into them. As celebrity culture shift occasionally, researchers gain various results that may only be applicable during the implementation of their studies. In a study conducted by Reilly (2006), reveals how these magazines portray women through the perspective of dominant ideologies of the time. The study made use of textual analysis based on the conceptual framework of cultural studies and feminist media. The author specifically chose this framework to understand the underlying message of the text and comprehend the indexicality process in these magazines. Reilly (2006) mainly aims to discover on what are the common themes these magazines cover on female celebrities and the dominant ideological ideas regarding women it reinforce or resist. According to Reilly (2006) findings, an observable pattern of regressive, stereotypical portrayal of women were

evident in these magazines. Frequent scrutiny and monitoring of females bodies through the topics of weight and pregnancy and the emphasis on gender norms and stereotypes on marriage and family were heavily placed onto female celebrities on that period.

Similarly, a study by Msughter et.al (2022) examines the portrayal of female celebrities in Nigerian newspapers. In the study framing theory was use in examining the coverage and portrayal for female celebrities. Findings of the study revealed that Nigerian newspapers should be more conscious of the detrimental impressions that can result from focusing on women's attributes instead of their professional success. Furthermore, female celebrities were still being categorized into specific stereotypes in negatively ways.

The scope of celebrity studies goes beyond pop culture and can also be observed onto prominent public figures in society. A particular study analyzed how Queen Sofia of Spain was framed by the Spanish gossip press as an embodiment of a traditionalist model of womanhood (Widlak & Lloveras, 2017, p. 1). The author implemented a qualitative technique, the content analysis framework to extract data from gossip press coverage on Queen Sofia from 2011 to 2014. Results of the study reveals that the image of Queen Sofia aligns to the ideal traditionalist Spanish woman. Queen Sofia was frequently portrayed in the role of a mother, grandmother, and wife instead of someone independent and professionally accomplished (Widlak & Lloveras, 2017, p. 1).

A study by Limatius (2020) discussed how online bloggers would construct celebrities as body positive role models. Furthermore, Limatius (2020) examines ways on how mainstream media discourse about female celebrity bodies is critiqued by bloggers. The study utilized a qualitative, thematic analysis on 54 blog entries and 189 comments to extract data for the study. The data extracted highlights the division that occurs in the plus-size fashion blogging community. It showed that bloggers would select certain celebrities as 'authentic' representatives of the community while rejecting others that do not fit in their ideal. Furthermore, positive aspects of the body positivity movement such as the diversity and acceptance of different bodies into media imagery were evident in the data extracted; however, the study also brings light to a problematic aspect of body positivity: the commercialization of the activism-driven social movement (Limatius, 2020, p. 1).

Simple and bold visuals in magazines can also reveal valuable data since images can also convey an impactful message to the audience. A study conducted by Dineshan et.al (2023) presents a comprehensive analysis of the representation of women on the cover pages of Vanitha. Content analysis methodology, descriptive statistics and visual analysis were utilized in gaining results from 66 cover pages. The study's findings reveal that a pervasive and stereotypical representation of women was evident on the magazine's cover pages. The cover pages also lacked in the aspects of diversity in age, color, class and social status. A pattern of normalisation of patriarchal ideology in regards to the "ideal" woman can also be observed from the study's results.

IV. Methodology

a. Data Source

To gain the whole picture of the current ideologies and perspectives on women, the study will utilize 10 online news media articles on present female celebrities from various magazine brands such as The Hollywood Life, The Things, E!News, US Weekly, and The Vulture. These online news media articles are from American digital brands and must be published from 2015 and onwards.

b. Research Framework

The research will be implementing the naming analysis method to gain an in-depth analysis of the online news articles extracted. The naming analysis framework suits best in deriving various ideologies and beliefs of different authors in online news media. This analytical framework considers the multiplicity of ways an author can bring meaning to written text based on one's theoretical, cultural, and ideological perspectives (Fairclough, 1992, p. 190-191). Naming analysis frameworks are often used to analyze written works such as news articles, literature, and others. In Clark (1998) study on The Sun's reporting of crimes of sexual violence, the naming analysis was utilized to study the patterns of blame in news articles headlines.

In conducting this framework to this study, one must first identify the different nouns and subjects being described in a text. Afterwards, any identifiers, adjectives, labels, and descriptors regarding the identified nouns will be used in deriving the author's gender ideologies, specifically on female celebrities.

V. Partial Results

Table 1.

Subjects with Negative Themes		
Data Set	Nouns	Labels/ descriptors
1 (2017)	Kylie Jenner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gone under the knife Only 17 Begged her mother Had too much surgery?
	Kim Kardashian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Had her own surgeries Flaunting her body all over Paris Wearing plunging tops Constantly posting selfies
	Boobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On full display in Paris
3 (2023)	Millie Bobby Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stranger things star and future wife of the heir apparent to the News Jersey Throne
	Psychic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell you when a strong, handsome man is coming into your life
4 – 5 (2023)	Margot Robbie/ Female Superheroes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexy (2) Fierce conqueror
6 (2020)	Britney Spears, Beyonce, Pink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ladies Sexy gladiators Bikini tops
7 (2023)	Nicole Phelps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pregnant

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wife (3) • Former Miss California • The model
8-9 (2023)	Vanessa Hudgens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “T as in Troy” for “T as in Tucker” • Break free from her single life and fully embrace marriage

Table 2

Subjects with Positive Themes		
Data Set	Nouns	Labels/descriptors
2 (2023)	Millie Bobby Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is getting real • Stranger Things star • Nod to her beauty and skincare brand • Gotten candid • Praised • Enola Holmes Actress
10 (2023)	Selena Gomez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks downright hot • Marvelous • Stunning • Very famous for her lovely smile • confident
	Front teeth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretty characteristic • Reshaped them a little for the first time
8-9 (2023)	Vanessa Hudgens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Princess Switch 3 actress • The High School Musical Star

Table 3

Subjects with Neutral Themes		
Data Set	Nouns	Labels/descriptors
1 (2017)	Kylie Jenner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six or more plastic surgeries revealed • Has undergone six or more plastic surgeries over the past two years, including a chin implant and nose job • Breast augmentation, an eyebrow lift, upper eyelid surgery, a chin implant, jaw reshaping and a nose job
10 (2023)	Selena Gomez (her breast)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlarged

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeared to be much bigger than they had been before
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Table 1, 2, and 3 shows the data retrieved from the data set. It can be observed that there are common negative themes on women's bodies. When it comes to plastic surgery, women are often shamed or criticized for their decisions. In reference to data set 1 (from 2017), details on Kylie Jenner's body parts were scrutinized by the article through detailing all of the possible surgeries she had. Furthermore, the word choices that the author used in discussing plastic surgery framed Kylie Jenner as a bratty, shallow teenager going through an awkward stage. On the other hand, the data set from 2023 on Selena Gomez praises her physical features while discussing possibility plastic surgery on her. From this it can be seen that there has been a shift on society's perspective on plastic surgery.

Another negative theme on women's bodies that can be extracted from data set 1 is slut shaming women based on their physical appearance. Descriptions on Kim Kardashian's body seemed slightly perverse to highlight certain aspects of her body. Additionally, the author used the phrase "plunging tops" which derives from the ideology of women being conservative and ladylike. The author seemed to criticize Kim Kardashian as they used phrases such as "flaunting her body all over Paris" and "Constantly posting selfies". Similarly to Kylie Jenner, she was framed as a shallow and vain person which reinforces the notion that women should be meek and keep their bodies to themselves.

In data set 4 & 5, Margot Robbie's role as a superhero is usually linked to the word "sexy". This seems like that being "sexy" is an important trait in roles for strong women. Additionally, it normalizes the sexualization of female superheroes. Data set 6 seems to have the same pattern as data set 4 and 5. The word "ladies" was used to refer to powerful and famous popstars at the time, Britney Spears, Beyonce, and Pink. The term "ladies" weakened the impact or strength of their famous Pepsi advertisement that depicts them as gladiators. "Sexy" was once again used to describe gladiators which reinforces the idea that women warriors or heroes have to be physically attractive to appeal to the male gaze.

Heteronormative ideas were also apparent in the data extracted. In highlighting Millie Bobby Brown's achievements in her professional career, the term "future wife" was also linked to her name. This grows into the notion that one of the greatest achievements women have in in their life was being married to a man. To further support that idea, it can be seen in data set 7 that in describing Michael and Nicole Phelps' pregnancy, Nicole is often linked to the words "pregnant" and "wife". While this is also related to the ideology of women being defined by marital status, this also shows that once women are married, they are defined by their spouse—usually making the man the center of the relationship. The author could have included "husband" to Michael Phelps' name to not highlight Nicole's marital status. Furthermore, the author of the article on data set 3 also described psychics as having the ability to predict when a "strong, handsome man" comes into your life. The phrase had strong heteronormative ideologies that women should be supported by strong and powerful men.

Meanwhile, positive, and empowering themes regarding female celebrities were also found. Another article used descriptors to highlight Millie Bobby Brown's achievements and utilized descriptors to show strength and courage. These can be seen in Table 1 under data set 12.

In reference to existing research on gender and celebrity studies, the current data set in the study supports the similar themes observed in previous studies. The patterns observed in the data set extracted are more aligned to the patterns found in Rielly (2006) findings which is a pattern of regressive, stereotypical portrayal of women. The study noted frequent scrutiny and monitoring of females bodies through the topics of weight and pregnancy and the emphasis on gender norms and stereotypes on marriage and family were heavily placed onto female celebrities on that period. Women are still subjected to negative stereotypes in regard to their physical appearances and personal successes. Although, it can also be noted that female celebrities' professional achievements are still acclaimed by the public; however, they are still bounded in some way by their marital status.

Furthermore, in Widlak & Lloveras' (2017) study showed that Queen Sofia was frequently portrayed in the domestic, familial roles instead of someone independent and professionally accomplished. In comparison to the current data extracted, it can be observed that accomplishments of female celebrities are more praised and recognized by the public. Famous roles portrayed by these actresses are often linked to their name despite it having no relations to the topic of article.

A fixation on "authenticity" can also be derived in the current data set and previous research. Limatius' (2020) study on body positivity showed that bloggers would choose celebrities as 'authentic' representatives of the community while rejecting others that do not fit in their ideal. Meanwhile, patterns on authenticity on current data set can be seen on the article on Kylie Jenner and Millie Bobby Brown. Teenage Kylie Jenner was shamed and bullied for the possible plastic surgeries she had while teenage Millie Bobby Brown was adored for "getting real" by posting bare faced pictures while simultaneously promoting her own make-up brand.

VI. Impact of Data Results

The entertainment industry has been known for being an unsafe environment of women, especially minors, to be working in (Goldstein, 2021). Female celebrities are more vulnerable to being sexualized and discriminated by various media outlets for the public's own entertainment. Having real data and studies on how the public views female celebrities can contribute to building a safer working space for female celebrities. Furthermore, news media holds a huge responsibility in sharing ideologies and perspectives that may alter the minds of the masses. If misogynistic ideologies continue to propagate in text, it would be more difficult for women to defend themselves in social injustices.

VII. Beneficiaries

News media companies can utilize the data extracted in developing more inclusive and empowering articles on women. Marketing brands and other promotions in the entertainment industry can produce more gender inclusive content in marketing their brands and others.

Scholars and researchers may also utilize the findings found in this research to further expand this area of study. Celebrity culture shifts more frequently due to the popular use of social media and the internet. Thus, data on this field should be updated regularly to monitor the ideologies propagating in the society.

Parents, guardians, and school officials may also find this study useful in communicating to children and teenagers in this generation. Celebrities and icons have a powerful influence on molding the thoughts and

minds of people—especially the younger generation since they are more prone in keeping up with today's trends.

VIII. Limitations and Future Work

Due to the time-boundness of this research, there are some limitations that can be noted. A more thorough search of data sets with more varied published dates can provide more insight into the study. There are still a lot of discourse regarding women and gender that the data set missed such as women subjected in divorce, crimes, motherhood and more. Increasing the data may also further strengthen the claims made in this study. Cultural disparities should also be taken into account in understanding this study. Data extracted mainly came from the United States. Perspectives and views on female celebrities may vary per country.

Researchers inspired by this topic can provide additional insights on this study. With the rise in popularity of K-Pop, it would be interesting on how female K-Pop idols are treated by their local and international fans. Observing the behavior of female K-pop idols in Korea versus in international countries can also reveal knowledge on the diverse and varied perspectives on women.

IX. Conclusion

Going over the analysis of the data extracts can bring confusion to some. For example, sexualizing women is harmful but so is imposing women to be conservative. Juxtaposing perspectives and ideologies regarding women might bring others into a dilemma; however, this creates a false dichotomy in gender. One must recall that the topic of gender goes beyond the surface level of understanding. It is fluid and placing it into one rigid construct limits the other factors in the situation to spill over into over-arching topics. Thus, female celebrities are not simply defined by the restricting stereotypes that the media curated. There is more depth into their lives that goes beyond their romantic relationships and appearances. In essence, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of gender allows us to appreciate the complexity of individuals, transcending the limiting portrayals often associated with the "it" girl.

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