



# Girls: Girl Power or Marketing Scheme?

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## “Girl Power”

“ ‘Girl Power’ is a female’s right to display her sexuality, to be autonomous and free from dependence on a man, and instead to find empowerment in girl-friendships and group solidarity “ (Dibben 343)

- “inspired confidence” (Taylor, BBC.com)
- teaching younger girls the meaning of feminism  
→ made feminism accessible to the mainstream scene (cf. Taylor, BBC.com)

### Critics:

- “Sloppy feminist message” (Whitely 223)
- message used as way to promote and sell their music and merchandise

*Was it really meant to be a feminist statement or was it just a marketing scheme?*

- Concept undeniably helped to achieve their success (cf. Davies 218)
- Merchandise was sold everywhere, from deodorant to clothing in order to smell and look like them (cf. McLevy 2016)  
→ *Idols*: Everyone wanted to be like them → Strong, feminist women

## The Spice Girls in Cultural Studies

*Development of feminism in the late 90s and 00s in popular culture*

- Introduction of the term “Girl Power” as step towards feminism
- BUT: Feminism as marketing strategy could distance the girl group from the intention of empowerment

Theoretical background: (cf. Householder 18 ff.)

- popular media objectified/ objectifies women to please the male gaze
- many popular artists such as riot grrrls fought against this male oriented ideology, the Spice Girls made an effort to introduce this thinking into the mainstream (cf. Taylor, BBC.com)
- Spice girls: stepped into the concept of **popular feminism** (cf. Whitely 216)  
→ They wanted to teach their fans that feminism is fun and does not have to be aggressive like post-feminism appeared to be (cf. Whitely 216)



# GIRL POWER



## “Wannabe” Music Video

Assumption: Their hit single “Wannabe” (1996) used feminism as a marketing tool. To appeal to more people outside of their normal audience (teenagers, young girls...) they also catered for the male gaze through their outfits and actions.

Video: very simple, tells a non-complex story

- Spice Girls crash a party with seemingly posh and snobbish members
- The Girls are all dressed according to their *personality* (Sweet, Sporty, Wild, Elegant, Sexy)
- “Free the Nipples”: The Girls actively show off their Nipples through their shirt  
→ Can be associated with the 90s “feminist” trend of burning the bra
- Various changes in movement as well as the special effects, making the video more dynamic and more exciting for the viewer (cf. Whitely 221)

### Analysis

- Calls attention to the importance of *friendship* and *sexual freedom* (cf. Whitely 215)
- Lyrics as well as music video try to appeal to the mainstream/ordinary people (cf. Whitely 220 ff.)  
→ Just as every girl could, they are out in order to look for sexual innuendos masked as seeming “girl banter/girl talk”  
→ Unruly behavior hints at natural and “caught in the act” (Whitely 221) actions which make the Girls seem more approachable and relatable
- Ridicule posh parties, but attended similar parties later in their career (cf. Leach 156)
- Their whole image and outfits “catered to a gaze that viewed them through a continual lens of sexualized fantasy” (McLevy, AV Club.com)  
→ hard to tell if they are catering to the male gaze or try to empower through their carefree image

## Conclusion/ Final Verdict

“For their prime target audience, instead of being consumed as objects of desire, the Spice Girls were to be consumed in terms of identification, emulation and female collectivity.” (Davies 218)

Music Video “Wannabe”: Sexual openness and everlasting friendship as well as the girl group seeming approachable/relatable

- Being more likeable = more costumers for their merchandise and their music
- Music Video as subtle method to gain sympathy and therefore fans

Outfits: Some argue that their outfits cater to a fetish (cf. McLevy, AV Club.com) but freedom of clothing choice can also be associated with their (seemingly) feminist mindset

Targeted audience: not only teenagers and young women, but also “hard-to get pre-teens who the music industry had previously considered as a small market” (McKie, BBC News.com)

- *Positive*: introducing the simplified concept of feminism to a young generation
- *Negative*: Exploiting their idol status in order to make profit

Final Verdict: The Spice Girls undoubtedly had a positive impact on numerous people in the 90s, especially young girls, through their feminist “Girl Power” image. They made feminism more popular and approachable to the mainstream scene, presenting feminism not as aggressive but fun. Due to this fact, it is hard to distinguish between genuine belief in empowerment and using the concept to profit on merch/music sales. Nevertheless, the usage of relatable behavior in their music video of ‘Wannabe’ seems forced in order to appear more likeable and therefore make more profit. If the girls themselves really believed in their concept is questionable but they did “fill a market niche” (Shuker 131), leading to the assumption that this could have been a marketing scheme all along.

## List of Works Cited

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