From the day that she emerged on the music scene in 1998, Britney Spears captured the hearts of millions of young girls and teenagers. Because of her age and the young demographic that she appealed to, the media as well as the public immediately branded her as someone young girls could look up to. However, even from the onset of her budding career, Spears played with the duality of having an innocent, yet sexualized persona. Her first music video for the song “…Baby One More Time” fit perfectly into this seemingly contradictory image. The video featured Spears as a bored student. However, she was wearing a midriff bearing Catholic schoolgirl uniform. This drew furor from some parents who argued that this image was too provocative for an artist targeted at young girls and teenagers. In a 1999 issue of Rolling Stone Magazine, Spears defended her music video wardrobe, “All I did was tie up my shirt! I'm wearing a sports bra under it. Sure, I'm wearing thigh-highs, but kids wear those — it's the style.” Through this, Spears rejected the media’s ideals that she had an obligation to portray herself in a certain light despite the pressure to do so. Instead, she downplayed her influence, arguing that she was merely a reflection of an average teenager rather than a trendsetter. To add to this fine line though, the cover of the magazine featured a then seventeen year old Spears clad in a bra and hot pants cradling a Teletubby. To Spears, the controversial photo shoot was no different than an actress playing a role, “it was about being in a magazine and playing a part for that magazine. It's like on TV, if you see Jennifer Love Hewitt or Sarah Michelle Gellar kill someone, do you think that means they go out and do that? Of course not." Once again, Spears shied away from the role model title that parents as well as the media pressured her to be. Her belief was that she was merely an entertainer and that any subsequent influence that she created was not her duty to control. Even her song lyrics reflected her discomfort of the pressures of being looked up to. In a cover she did of the Rolling Stone’s “I
Can’t get no Satisfaction”, Spears sings, “When I'm watchin' my TV and that girl comes on to tell me how tight my skirt should be well she can't tell me who to because I've got my own identity.”

But at the same time in which Spears seemed to resent her image as a role model, there were parts of her persona that embraced it. In the same Rolling Stone Magazine in which she wore a bra and underwear on the cover, Spears told the magazine, “you want to be a good example for kids out there and not do something stupid,”. Therefore, Spears did acknowledge the fact that she does feel some sort of responsibility to relate to her fans. Also, in the interview Spears touted her strong Baptist upbringing in which she declared she would remain a virgin until marriage. This image is in stark contrast to the unapologetic Spears portrayed above. This inconsistency made deciphering the “real” Britney Spears much more complex. Was she this virgin pop princess that could be admired by her adoring fans, or a sexy siren that was too provocative to be looked up to? This paradoxical duality made it very challenging to pinpoint the exact effect that Spears was having on her young, impressionable audience.

What exactly is a role model, what qualities do they possess? Is there such thing as a good one, or is a role model a fallible person that is placed on a pedestal being unrealistically criticized when it falters? In hindsight of the past few years, do you believe that the intense scrutiny and deconstruction that Britney Spears’ image had early in her career regarding the pressure she felt to take on the responsibility of role model, led in part to her recent erratic behavior?
What do these magazine images say about Britney Spears in terms of her status as a role model? Who is responsible for creating these messages? What affect do these messages have on Britney’s fans? On the parents of Spears’ fans?

1. Rolling Stone Magazine, April 1999
3. Teen People Magazine, February 2000
5. People Magazine, September 2000
7. Teen People Magazine, March 2002
**Exercise: Role Play**

A current, ongoing example of a young female struggling with the dichotomy of her celebrity role model status is Miley Cyrus. Like Britney Spears before her, Cyrus has straddled the line between role model for young girls and rebellious, beyond her year’s teenager. As an actress on the hit Disney Channel show Hannah Montana, her show’s target audience is girls ages 6- 11. However, Cyrus has drawn criticism as her personal life is not as squeaky clean as her television alter ego. She has done a few controversial professional photo shoots in which she appeared in a sheet as well as taken her own suggestive photos in which she posed in her underwear and made seemingly derogatory facial expressions.
Imagine you are a parent of a ten-year old girl who is an avid Hannah Montana watcher and Miley Cyrus fan. Read these two articles and then consider the following:

**Defending Miley Cyrus She's No Role Model**

- As a parent, how do you reconcile with the duality of Hannah Montana, the television character, and Miley Cyrus, the teenage actress?
- How, if at all, do you address Miley’s seemingly questionable behavior to your daughter?
- How concerned are you of Cyrus’ influence on your daughter as opposed to your influence? How do you reconcile this issue?
- How do you explain to your daughter the difference between reality and fiction in relation to this issue?

**Analysis Criteria:**

1. Why is it important to understand who utilizes the media? Is a young child going to perceive an image of their favorite celebrity differently from a teenager, or adult? If so, how? Based on this ACCESS and perception of celebrities, should this in the public eye, especially young stars, be expected to behave in a certain way due to their celebrity status?

2. With the advent of paparazzi as well as the internet, celebrities have little privacy as everything they say and do gets publicly broadcast. How does the media’s constant spotlight on celebrities’ actions affect our AWARENESS and perception of them? What messages are the media trying to send out about young celebrities? Are these messages biased, if so, how? Is the media’s expectation for a celebrity to be a role model fair?

3. Why is it important to ASSESS the influence that celebrities have on us, our peers, and our families? How is the media involved in this portrayal? Does the media have a responsibility to allow young stars to grow up and develop into adults without the fear being constantly analyzed and criticized by the images of them that the
public sees? Or, is this scrutiny part of the territory of being famous in a couture that is obsessed with celebrities? Is it fair to analyze a young star’s actions in the same manner of that of an older celebrity?

4. What are the positive and negative sides of APPRECIATING and understanding the media’s impact on their portrayal of young celebrities? How does this effect as celebrity’s ability to be perceived as a role model?

5. Who has the greatest impact on your beliefs, values, and decisions: your parents, friends, or favorite celebrity? Why? What ACTION can you take to better understand and analyze the impact of this phenomenon on your life and the lives of others?

Resources:

“Today’s Televised Circus”: Compares our cultural obsession with celebrity behavior with an audience going to watch a performance at the circus
http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/117961281/PDFSTART?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0

“Britney, the Body, and the Blurring of Popular Cultures”: Case study of how celebrity images affect the values and beliefs of teenagers
http://66.102.1.104/scholar?hl=en&lr=&q=cache:s4FX7GiMOpAJ:hbe.mcgill.ca/docs/sabiston_wilson_chapter.doc+celebrities+as+behavior+role+models+britney+spears

“Adolescents’ Musical Role Models: Whom They Admire”: Psychological study conducted on the influence of today’s pop music stars on teenagers
http://pom.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/0305735607086045v1.pdf

“Adolescents Admire Famous Musical Role Models: Implications for Aspirations, Expectations, and Identity”: Psychological study conducted on the influence of today’s pop music stars on teenagers
http://www.icmpe8.umn.edu/proceedings/ICMPC8/PDF/AUTHOR/MP040069.PDF

“Girls in the New Media Landscape”: Analyzes the impact on the new media on young girls and teenagers
http://www.nordicom.gu.se/common/publ_pdf/26_071-078.pdf
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Credits:
Britney Spears song lyrics: http://lyrics.astraweb.com/display/257/britney_spears_oopsi_did_it_again_i_cant_get_no_satisfaction.html
Image innocent Britney Spears: http://s.bebo.com/appimage/7925723099/5411656627/PROFILE/i.quizzaz.com/img/q/u/08/04/19/78525097-1.jpg
Image sexy Britney Spears: http://206.47.170.43/music_v1_1/images/britney12.jpg
Image Miley Cyrus Vanity Fair: http://upload.moldova.org/movie/actors/m/miley_cyrus/miley-cyrus-vanity-fair.jpg
Image Hannah Montana singing: http://images.eonline.com/eol_images/Entire_Site/20071206/293.hannah.montana.120607.jpg