

GIRL POWER

The interests of teenage girls are often viewed as immature and superficial, especially when it comes to their choice of music. They can become obsessed with pop stars who are deemed “flash in the pan” with no scholarly longevity. They mimic their music idols through dress and actions, fall in love with the cute ones and become almost hysterical when seeing them in concert.

To some, it would be a stretch to consider popular music a meaningful, positive experience for adolescent girls. Dr. Jacqueline Warwick does it masterfully. In fact, she stresses that the “music of the day” shapes the adult that the teenager becomes.

“Influential music doesn’t just come from renowned male musicians such as Beethoven or Bach,” says Warwick, a musicologist and associate professor in Dalhousie’s Department of Music. “Popular music impacts even the very serious performance students, and hence makes its mark in history, even though the artists are long forgotten or even mocked in later years.”

Warwick believes pop music provides a safe way for girls to explore adulthood and to bond with their peers. It allows them to experience harmless, “virtual” crushes, while offering positive images and real role models.

“Boy bands like the Back Street Boys or the Jonas Brothers allow girls to experiment safely with desire. They provide a rare opportunity to feel and explore love and lust,” explains Warwick.

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“The Spice Girls, Jessica Simpson and Mandy Moore have proven that girls have power and authority, discounting the stereotype that teenaged girls are inconsequential or simplistic.”

Much of Warwick’s research focuses on the 1960s, when male bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were idolized and captured in music history. This era of rock and roll also saw a number of young female groups gain similar popularity, yet they acquired no place in the record books.

As she writes in her book *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s*, groups like the Ronettes, the Crystals and the Shirelles, who were tremendously popular from 1960-63, didn’t last long. “The only female 1960s idol that had true longevity was Diana Ross. Unlike the male groups, popular female (especially girl) careers seemed to come to an abrupt end,” muses Warwick.

Even so, many in the generation that grew up with this music became avid feminists who objected to the repressive views of teenage girls. “This shows that the music culture had a significant impact as they transitioned into adulthood,” says Warwick. ■

○ Dr. Jacqueline Warwick

