


# ~~CHILD STARS~~ ~~GONE WILD!~~

You would do it, too

Lauren Rousseau



At some point in our childhood, we've all wanted fame — the glittering promise of money, freedom and unlimited candy. It's why so many of us traced Mickey ears into thin air, announcing to our mirrors (and thereby the world) who we are and that you are in fact watching Disney Channel.

We've all wanted it. But no one wants the lingering eyes creeping over your shoulders. The menacing headlines, critical comments or toxic Twitter threads. The badgering voices that prick up your spine and patter against your neck.

"Be a good girl! Perk up that smile! Don't you think that's a little too mature for your age? Cover your shoulders, you're supposed to be a role model!"

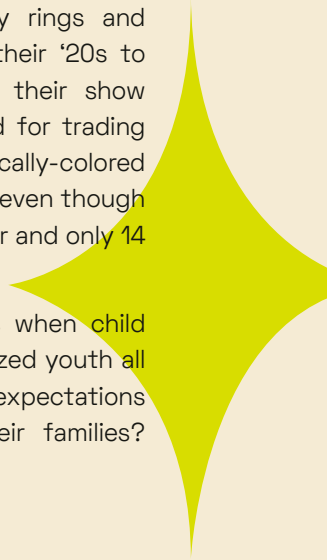
With pressure from producers and parents (and let's not forget — the whole world literally watching them), child stars have little room to be themselves and even less room to mature privately. Only Hollywood gets to decide when it's time for

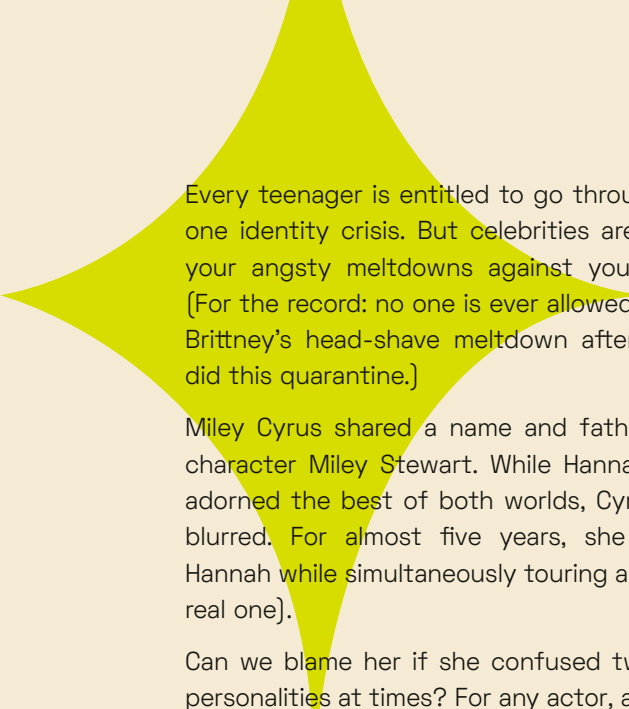
sex to sell — there are bills to pay and brands to maintain. And the same people who were raised under film sets' harsh lights are left with little say in deciding who they want to be.

Those who grew up in Disney's dream realm perhaps understand the identity struggle best.

The Jonas Brothers dangled purity rings and maintained shaved faces well into their '20s to maintain youthful appearances for their show Jonas. Bella Thorne was almost fired for trading her Shake it Up character's chaotically-colored leggings and cardigans for a bikini — even though she was at the beach with her mother and only 14 years old.

Shouldn't we expect melodramatics when child stars are expected to preserve idealized youth all the while balancing the professional expectations of a 30-year-old providing for their families? Wouldn't that only be fair?





Every teenager is entitled to go through at least one identity crisis. But celebrities aren't holding your angsty meltdowns against you are they? (For the record: no one is ever allowed to hate on Britney's head-shave meltdown after what y'all did this quarantine.)

Miley Cyrus shared a name and father with her character Miley Stewart. While Hannah Montana adorned the best of both worlds, Cyrus's worlds blurred. For almost five years, she toured as Hannah while simultaneously touring as Miley (the real one).

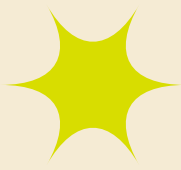
Can we blame her if she confused two (three?) personalities at times? For any actor, and certainly any teen going through an identity crisis, it would make sense for her to draw deeper divides between herself and her character, thereby distinguishing the role from the actor.

But headlines thought otherwise.

"DISNEY STAR GONE WILD." That was the title Miley earned for essentially standing next to (not dancing on) a stripper pole at the 2009 Kids Choice Awards and starting her twerk-filled We Can't Stop era.

In reality, she, and the other child stars, were only kids trying to have fun and figure out their lives. Anything as bold as asses in the air or as subdued as swim attire is often hypersexualized, much to stars' demise.

Even when slivers of skin aren't exactly a Disney star's first choice in how to sidestep their childhood roles, they may be pushed into it anyway. After Selena Gomez wrapped up Wizards of Waverly Place in 2012, she told Allure she was pressured to amplify the sexiness for her album



Revival. In 2020, TikTok star Charli D'Amelio is constantly berated with comments requesting sexual dances, particularly the twerk-anthem of the year WAP.

Unlike her child star predecessors, D'Amelio and the new generation face a new challenge: social media. On a phone screen, child stars are no longer just entertainers for 30-minute episodes; they're stars around the clock for every child to comment on and for every adult to try to parent.

Stranger Things stars and two of Hollywood's highest-paid child stars Millie Bobby Brown and Finn Wolfhard have been hypersexualized since they were both 14. While Brown's often critiqued for dressing too mature (What does that even mean?), Wolfhard's faced thirst-comments from older celebrities who wanted to hit him up in a few years. (If you didn't know, this is called grooming.)

For the average child, these sorts of comments would result in trauma as a best-case scenario and a restraining order as the worst.

Hollywood should not have agency to determine when sex should sell, or if it ever should. Frankly, the only people who do have these permissions are stars themselves.

Child stars may be on a pedestal, but they're not your servants; They are children stepping into the murky waters of adulthood with lots of stiff stones and slime at their feet.

They're just trying to figure it out like the rest of us. So next time you're thinking about critiquing a young celebrity's brand change, why don't you reflect on your cringey rawr girl 2008 Tumblr phase and tell me whether or not brand changes can be for the best.

