

British girls and women of the 90s

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



British Girls and Women of the 90s – The Spice Girls, Girl Bands and their Influence on British Culture

The twentieth century will, without doubt, be viewed by historians as the Woman's Hour. The status of women in Britain changed. More and more women started to leave their homes and join the labour market. They started to fight for their independence and political, economic and social rights. Women got more recognition from the society and they started to pursue equality with men.

They progressed from being (almost) possessions of men, with no legal status of their own, to being considered legal citizens in their own right. As far as the political background is concerned, it is worth saying a few words about Margaret Thatcher. Following the defeat of the Conservatives in 1974 election, Margaret Hilda Thatcher was elected as the new leader. She went on to lead the Conservatives to the victory in the election of 1979 and the party remained in power until 1997. Christopher states that, " She was developing economic ideas which were guided by the fashionable theories of monetarism" (Christopher, 12).

These involved reducing inflation with high interest rates and submitting all aspects of the economy to free-market theories and the laws of supply and demand. Her economic and political ideas, which came to be known as ' Thatcherism' began to be fully expressed and implemented. But in Britain, there were high rates of unemployment during the periods of the 1980s and early 90s. The jobs people lost were mostly skilled jobs in manufacturing industry, which were regarded as 'men's jobs'. Massive cuts in state spending led to job losses in the public sector, which affected women equally.

According to Christopher's study: Because these jobs were usually semi-skilled or unskilled and low paid, the women were more interchangeable as employees and could find part-time office work or cleaning work, similarly low paid, elsewhere. (Christopher, 13) Women were beginning to occupy posts in traditional male-dominated areas such as business, law and banks. Many of them could enjoy the benefits of increasing financial and sexual freedom, and were postponing marriage and children. By 1986 the economy was strong. There was an air of enterprise and optimism as a new society emerged. Britain became affluent, competitive and more interested in cash. There was a new generation of stylish and image-conscious consumers, and spending on restaurants, clothes, cars, homes and holidays reached record levels. Many various feminist groups appeared and the third-wave feminism in the USA began. In the early 1990s, an underground feminist movement called Riot Grrrl jumpstarted the idea of female empowerment. Riot Grrrl was an underground feminist punk rock movement that originally started in Washington, in the early to mid-1990s - it was often associated with third-wave feminism. According to some, "Riot Grrrls often addressed issues, such as: domestic abuse, rape, sexuality, patriarchy, racism and female empowerment. Riot Grrrls were known to start chapters, hold meetings, and support and organize women in music." (Schilt, 6). The movement allowed women their own space to create music and make political statements about the issues they were facing in the punk rock community as well as in society. Those ideas soon entered Great Britain. Shortly after that, British marketers began latching onto the

catchphrase ' girl power' - which expressed a cultural phenomenon of the 1990s and early 2000s. It is also linked to third-wave feminism.

The most memorable example of ' girl power' is the Spice Girls. The Spice Girls were a British pop girl group formed in 1994 and the biggest popular cultural icons of the 1990s. As McGibbon mentions, " performing pop music, Spice Girls achieved a worldwide success, selling over 55 million albums all over the world, the most from among all female singing groups in the twentieth century. "(McGibbon, 23). Wherever they appeared, they could count on the support of the army of fans from all over the world, as well as the hysterical reaction of the media. The pop phenomenon - the Spice Girls changed the course of popular music and popular culture.

Both albums and eight of their singles releases achieved number one chart position in the UK. No pop group since the Beatles attracted as much media attention as the Spice Girls. Ginger, a Baby, Posh, a Sporty and a Scary were international stars, adored and ridiculed in equal measures which was the ultimate expression of media fame in the Nineties. The girls have made many achievements such as Wannabe - the Spice Girls' first single - and the most successful song in their career. It plays a crucial role in their fame. The single Wannabe topped the UK Singles Chart for seven weeks and acquired a platinum certification by the British Phonographic Industry. Sinclair concludes, " It became the best-selling single by a female group, selling over six million copies worldwide. " (Sinclair, 78). In June 1997 the Girls undertook to make a feature-length film called Spiceworld - The Movie. The film was directed by Bob Spiers (director of Absolutely Fabulous, Fawlty Towers, and Are You Being Served?) and was a comical narrative from the

Spice Girls' real life adventures. According to some, " the film was a runaway success, becoming the second highest-grossing British film of 1997 (after *Bean*). (McGibbon, 45). The year 1997 saw the Spice Girls capitalising on their fame through a multimillion dollar phenomenon of merchandise, with hundreds of official products. They may have made a great pop music, but if ever a group regarded their creative endeavours as a means to achieving a commercial end it was the Spice Girls. While pop stars through the decades have generally tried to a greater or lesser extent to protect their artistic integrity by not appearing to endorse unrelated or unsuitable products, the Spice Girls did the exact opposite.

They were up for anything. According to Sinclair, " When it came to endorsements, it seemed that Spice Girls didn't know the meaning of the word ' No'. "(Sinclair, 50) There was apparently no product of consumer interest, however mundane or embarrassing, that it was beyond their ingenuity to adapt to the girl power credo. By the middle of 1997, the Spice Girls had signed up for product tie-in deals with Pepsi, Benetton, Feberge, Sony PlayStations, Polaroid cameras and Walker's crisps. By the September 1997, the group were estimated to have earned \$47 million by Forbes magazine, which ranked them at number 32 in their list of highest paid entertainers". (<http://www.sociology.org.uk/fchan1.pdf>). This was a staggering achievement considering how little time they had been operating in the marketplace. All these achievements of the Spice Girls corroborate a huge potential of the band. The arrival of the Spice Girls added to the new image and re-branding of Britain, and underlined the growing world popularity of British, rather than U.

S. , pop music. This fact was visible at the BRIT Awards ceremony in 1997. The group won two awards but it was Halliwell's Union Jack mini-dress which she designed herself that appeared in media coverage all over the world and eventually became a symbol of 'Cool Britannia'. They were the first pop phenomenon truly to understand the demands of the modern multi-media age, and to tailor their efforts accordingly. To their credit, the Spice Girls had an immensely powerful influence on children and teenagers. The girls were crazy about them.

The kids of a generation whose musical horizons had previously been restricted to Mr Blobby, a character from a television show Noel's House Party, and Sesame Street singalongs, became sensitised to pop music thanks to the Spice Girls. Teenagers modelled on the girls dyeing hair red, performing dances and dressing up as their favourite Spice Girls. There were many all-girl bands which appeared during the existence of the Spice Girls such as: Atomic Kitten, Sugababes or Girls Aloud and many of which were created after the collapse of the group. All or most of them modelled themselves on those five wonderful girls.

Despite the fact that there were, and still there are, many girl bands, none of them – also the aforementioned ones – has left such a big impression on pop music as the Spice Girls. As Sinclair states, 'They became, almost overnight, a fondly regarded and instantly recognisable part of British pop's royal family.' (Sinclair, 89). In summaries of their achievements ranging from the most informed biographies to the most aimless of pub conversations it was a generally held and often stated belief that, „ the group put British music

back on the world stage and ushered in a global renaissance in pop. ”
(Sinclair, 90).