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Reese Witherspoon: A True Role Model

Laura Jeanne Reese Witherspoon, more commonly referred to as Reese Witherspoon, embodies everything that the American public desires and respects. She is strong and independent woman and a mother. She is an avid philanthropist who challenges herself personally and professionally. Throughout her career, she has maintained a positive influence in the public eye. She represents the woman all of us women strive to be.

Reese has grown up in the eyes of the public. Her first major role was in “Man on the Moon” when she was only thirteen years old. Growing up in the spotlight has the tendency to turn young stars into troubled kids who sometimes have problems with drugs and alcohol. Reese avoided becoming a stereotypical blonde young actress. She has maintained respect and admiration from audiences of all ages throughout her career.

Not only has Reese garnered respect from her fans, but also admiration for her willingness to never stray from difficult or controversial roles. She continues, to this day, to challenge herself in all aspects of her life. Through her divorce and breakups, Reese has become Hollywood’s perfect role model, role models for people of all ages, through her work on the screen and her role as a devoted and loving mother and a philanthropist. She handles all situations with grace, including her divorce. It is common today to see celebrities’ divorces unfolding. One aspect that always appears is the bashing of the other partner, the blame placed on the other person and a nasty battle for custody of children and possessions. Reese

and her first husband, Ryan Philippe, separated on amicable terms and ended things as clean as possible for the sake of their two children, Ava and Deacon. This gave Reese so much respect and credibility from her fans because, unlike many Hollywood stars, she remains humble and well-mannered like her southern upbringing would suggest. She has always remained true to her southern roots.

Reese grew up Nashville, Tennessee, where she started modeling and acting in local commercials until she auditioned for an extras' part in the movie "Man on the Moon" that was filming in her hometown. She was shocked to find out she had not only gotten a major role but the lead role! Her role in this film was praised by critics and put Reese on the map for future roles in movies like *Election*, *Rendition* and *Legally Blonde*. But without a doubt the role that garnered Reese's standing as a legitimate and dignified actress was her portrayal of June Carter Cash in *Walk the Line*, for which she received an Academy Award for Best Actress in 2005.

Reese has been nicknamed the "powerhouse high achiever" and "Little Meryl" in reference to choices on and off screen that have helped to propel her career forward, (Brown, 2007). Reese is the kind of woman who has an "old fashioned femininity with a fierce refusal to be anyone's victim", (Brown 2007). She establishes this persona in everything she does. She does not take roles in which the woman is weak and needs saving, instead she is the savior. Her roles tends to reflect who she is as a person (a high-achieving woman with high standards). Even her role as a seemingly ditsy girl in *Legally Blonde*, shows strength. Reese has said about her role in *Legally Blonde*, "I'm not afraid of a challenge", (Rowe, 2011). Reese faced that challenge head on and succeeded. Reese portrays Elle Woods in a way that people do not put her down for her "blondeness" and sense of style. Elle shows that women can be beautiful

and successful and even though she goes to Harvard to chase a boy, she doesn't show vulnerability and ultimately rejects him. Her roles show the "unruly woman on top, who brings a revitalizing energy and style to the bleak and repressed world of male dominated institutions" which is especially evident in *Legally Blonde*, (Rowe 2011).

The role of June Carter Cash allowed Reese to transform her toughness and show the "Good Woman Power", (Rowe, 2011) in her. The "Good Woman Power" is the ability to be a tough and dominating woman who can stand behind her man and support him through everything, which June Carter Cash did. Her role in this particular film has been said to show that she "pursues her desire freely and without apology, and accepts the consequences of her decisions", (Rowe, 2011). This quote about her performance as June Carter Cash also fits perfectly into her personal life. Reese stands out in Hollywood because she does what is best for her and her family, not what society expects of her. Reese credits much of her success and strength in this cutthroat business to her mother and grandmother. She has even said, "My grandmother was one of the biggest inspirations of my life. She taught me how to be a real woman, to have strength and respect, and to never give those things away", (Brown 2007). Reese stays humble in this business because she realized that she will never have the "most" of anything whether it be money or be the skinniest or funniest but she says, "I can work extremely hard to be the best person I can be", (Brown 2007). This is what makes all the difference in this type of insanely competitive business.

Reese also strives in this world of acting because she truly cares and is passionate about what she is doing and what example she is setting. Reese has mentioned several times during acceptance speeches and interviews that she want to do something in life that "matters". This

enhances her images as a serious and purpose driven woman. “I’m just trying to matter, I don’t think this is the end of what I’m supposed to accomplish. I think it’s just leading me to some path I haven’t found yet. All the attention actors get—it’s unmerited. It’s so insignificant, what I’ve done. My parents devoted their lives to taking care of people, and they couldn’t enumerate all the lives they’ve saved. I want to carry on the legacy of caring and compassion...”, (Brown, 2007). Her desire to make her life and career meaningful projects her ahead of other actors and actresses because she is doing this because she loves it and she can accomplish great things. “Creating a cultural icon out of someone who goes, ‘I’m stupid, isn’t it cute?’ makes me want to throw daggers. Saying that to young women, little girls....my daughter...is not OK,” She says “I want to say [to those stars], my grandma did not fight for what she fought for, my mother did not fight for what she fought for, just so you can start telling women it’s fun to be stupid”, (Brown 2007). Reese is not just a beauty on the screen or a pretty face, she is an educated woman raised in a household that respected and valued education. Her father is a doctor and her mother is a pediatric nurse. Both of her parents supported her decision to pursue a life in the show business but also encouraged her to try higher level education as well. After high school, Reese moved to California where she attended Stanford University as an English Major. Even though she excelled at school, her acting career was taking off and fast. Ultimately, Reese choose to continue acting and drop out of school. If Reese would not have taken that courageous risk, we wouldn’t have to masterpieces that Reese helped make possible like *Walk the Line*, *Legally Blonde*, or *Water for Elephants*.

Many woman consider motherhood the greatest accomplishment of theirs lives, likewise Reese values her role as a mother. Reese gave birth to her first child before her

marriage to first husband Ryan, in a time when it was not glamourized or glorified, a time in which it was not the norm, unlike today where we, as a society, have changed our thoughts about children outside of marriage as a normal occurrence. Reese is the proud mother of three children, two with ex-husband Ryan Philippe and one daughter Tennessee with her current husband, talent agent, Jim Toth. Reese does what is best for her children and herself, defying the norms of the business.

Defying the norms of the business also includes her avid philanthropy. What sets Reese apart from her competitors is her genuine passion for the charities and organizations in which she participates. One that is clearly important to her, is her work with the Avon Foundation. The Avon Foundation primarily focuses on breast cancer research and helping the victims of domestic violence. Reese was named the ambassador to Avon Foundation in 2007, (Reese 2013). She continuously makes the effort to be the best she can while helping others along the way. Reese is truly a woman to admire and has become my role model.

I chose Reese for this paper because I have grown up watching her films and have always loved her, but it wasn't until I started to research on Reese that I realized how amazing she is. She is the role model that every young girl should look up to, she represents the values the young women should want to portray. In my opinion it is a shame to see young women fall into the trap that society sets and stars perpetuate. Women need to be strong, confident, self-respecting, and intelligent and know that beauty does not define us. Reese has exemplified all of these traits and proves that you can be a successful beautiful woman inside and out. Reese shows that you can have it all.

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