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Girlboss Culture and its Potential Influence on Young Women's Priorities

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ABSTRACT

This literature review examines how the "girlboss" ideal might shape young women's priorities in three areas: career, romantic relationships, and well-being. Popularized by Sophia Amoruso's 2014 memoir #GIRLBOSS, the term developed into a broader cultural image of ambitious, independent, self-managing femininity that reflects postfeminist and neoliberal ideas about individual choice and responsibility. Few studies, however, look directly at young women's exposure to "girlboss" culture. This review examines the girlboss ideal itself alongside work on broader gendered expectations. Across all three domains, the literature reveals a recurring tension between empowerment and pressure. When it comes to career, ambition and self-improvement are presented as a path to independence, but also as something women are expected to keep working at on their own, even extending into personal time through things like the side hustle. In relationships, independence and self-sufficiency do not necessarily replace existing gender expectations, but instead intersect with them, changing what a "good" partner or relationship is supposed to look like. In well-being, self-care and balance are framed as protection from pressure, while simultaneously becoming yet another area women are expected to manage successfully. Taken together, these findings suggest that the "girlboss" ideal represents a contradictory model of contemporary femininity in which freedom and responsibility, ambition and pressure, and personal choice and social expectations coexist. Existing research rarely tests whether “girlboss” culture directly influences young women's priorities; this review therefore focuses primarily on the cultural expectations surrounding these priorities.

INTRODUCTION

The “girlboss” ideal has become a familiar representation of female ambition, bringing together ideas of professional success, independence, confidence, and personal responsibility (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). Although Sophia Amoruso popularised the term through her 2014 memoir *#GIRLBOSS*, it soon moved beyond her own experience of entrepreneurship and developed into a broader cultural image of the successful woman (Amoruso, 2014; Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). This development can be understood within a postfeminist and neoliberal context, where women are encouraged to shape their futures through individual choice, self-management, and ongoing self-development (Gill, 2007; Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). Postfeminism and neoliberal feminism refer to broader concepts that help contextualise and explain the values of “girlboss” culture, while this ideal represents a specific set of social expectations. These ideas can offer women a sense of

autonomy and opportunity, but they can also create pressure to continually improve themselves and manage different areas of their lives successfully.

These expectations are particularly relevant during young adulthood, when women may be making decisions about education, employment, financial independence, relationships, and personal well-being simultaneously. The “girlboss” ideal may therefore be relevant to how young women understand these different areas of their futures, rather than simply shaping attitudes towards work. Career success is central to this discussion, particularly in relation to ambition, employability, entrepreneurship, and professional development. Romantic relationships also matter, as young women may consider how partnership, financial independence, and family aspirations can fit alongside professional goals (Meeussen et al., 2016). Well-being adds a further dimension, since self-care, balance, and personal fulfilment can become connected to the same expectations surrounding achievement and effective self-management (Bolaki, 2024).

This paper looks at how the “girlboss” ideal could influence the ways young women manage their priorities for the future across three areas: career success, romantic relationships, and well-being. It first considers the origins and development of the concept before examining these three areas in turn. Rather than treating the ideal as either wholly empowering or entirely negative, the review considers the tensions within it. In particular, it explores how greater independence and personal choice can exist alongside increased expectations of individual responsibility, achievement, and continuous self-management. This topic is significant because it highlights how "girlboss" culture may shape young women's priorities towards a fulfilling life or leave them feeling overwhelmed by high social expectations.

To find sources for this paper, I used the search tool Google Scholar using the keywords: “girlboss culture”, “work-life balance”, “girlboss” AND “young women”, “girlboss ideal” AND “career”, “girlboss” AND “well-being”, “neoliberal feminism”. I looked at sources published between 2007 and 2025. I chose 24 sources for this paper out of roughly 35. I used a mix of both academic and non-academic sources, 21 journal articles, 2 books, and 1 web page. I chose these sources about “girlboss” culture itself and about the wider expectations around career, relationships and well-being because not many studies look directly at how girlboss culture affects young women's priorities for those three areas.

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLBOSS CULTURE

The term "girlboss" has become widely recognised in contemporary discussions about women's empowerment and professional success. It emerged alongside a growing emphasis on entrepreneurship and professional ambition as routes through which women could pursue success and greater independence (Amoruso, 2014; Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). At the same time, changing ideas about work and femininity contributed to new understandings of women's professional identities and achievements (Gill, 2007; Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). The popularity of the "girlboss" ideal can be understood within a wider postfeminist cultural context. Gill (2007) argues that postfeminism isn't one single idea, but a cultural sensibility made up of several recurring themes. It is against this backdrop that individual choice, empowerment, self-surveillance, and self-discipline have become important aspects of how

femininity is represented (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) identifies these characteristics as central features of postfeminist media culture, presenting women as active subjects who are expected to make choices and take responsibility for shaping their own lives. Two related concepts help sharpen this picture. Rottenberg describes neoliberal feminism as locating solutions to gender inequality in individual action and self-management, rather than in cultural or structural change (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2020). Banet-Weiser similarly argues that popular feminism has become corporate-friendly, framing empowerment through consumer choice and individual success rather than collective politics (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2020). Within this context, the "girlboss" image became associated with professional ambition, workplace success, and independence. Its meaning has not remained fixed, however.

The term is most closely associated with entrepreneur Sophia Amoruso, who popularised it through her 2014 memoir *#GIRLBOSS* (Amoruso, 2014). In the book, Amoruso reflects on her unconventional path into entrepreneurship and presents her experiences as encouragement for women to pursue their own ambitions (Amoruso, 2014). Rather than suggesting that professional success must follow a conventional career path, her account emphasises determination, self-reliance, and taking responsibility for one's own direction (Amoruso, 2014). The publication of *#GIRLBOSS* brought the term to a wider audience, after which it began to be used beyond Amoruso's individual experience (Amoruso, 2014; Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). "Girlboss" consequently developed from a description associated with one entrepreneur into a broader cultural label linked to female ambition, entrepreneurship, and professional success (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021).

Alexandersson and Kalonaityte (2021) provide a more detailed explanation of this development by understanding the "girlboss" identity as a form of enterprising femininity. Their argument goes beyond simply encouraging women to become entrepreneurs. Instead, they theorise girlhood itself as a distinct type of enterprising femininity, examining how characteristics associated with the enterprising self are combined with particular ideas about femininity. The enterprising self is active, individualistic, and competitive, with an emphasis on continuous development (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). Individuals are therefore encouraged to take an active role in developing themselves and shaping their futures, with dedication, striving, individualism, and ongoing growth becoming important to this way of understanding the self (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). Alexandersson and Kalonaityte show that these ideas extend beyond business creation and become part of wider professional and cultural practices. Their analysis of the women-only professional networks Girlboss and Her illustrates how professional and personal development are communicated through social media, networking, commercial culture, and particular forms of femininity (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). The "girlboss" identity can therefore be understood as more than a celebration of entrepreneurship. It presents a broader image of the successful woman as someone who is ambitious, driven, and continually involved in developing herself.

This understanding also reveals tensions within the ideal. Alexandersson and Kalonaityte (2021) show that enterprising femininity can appear to give women greater freedom to define themselves and pursue their ambitions. At the same time, it places considerable emphasis on individualised success. Their

analysis highlights a tension between market pressures to conform to ideals of individual achievement and feminist ambitions to challenge existing inequalities. Cavallo and Collins (2024) extend this critique. They argue that the girlboss archetype has predominantly reflected the experiences and interests of white women. Girlhood is therefore not presented as a straightforward or uniform model of empowerment. Instead, the enterprising self, characterised by individualism, dedication, and striving, is combined with qualities such as vulnerability, authenticity, excess, and cuteness. The Girlboss and her networks use these combinations to construct a particular image of professional womanhood, presenting professional and personal development as part of this cultural identity. The "girlboss" ideal, therefore, communicates more than the message that women should work hard. It suggests that a successful woman is expected to be ambitious and hard-working, while also appearing feminine, authentic, and constantly focused on improving herself. This also implies expectations about how success should be performed: what an ambitious woman can look like, how she might present herself, and which forms of femininity can be incorporated into professional culture At the same time, Alexandersson and Kalonaityte (2021) raise questions about which forms of femininity may be less easily accommodated when individualised success becomes the main expectation.

These same tensions did not stay limited to books and professional networks. Social media further extended the "girlboss" identity beyond its original entrepreneurial context (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). Instagram, in particular, created a space where professional women, entrepreneurs, influencers, and content creators could make aspects of their working and personal lives visible to wider audiences (Abidin, 2016). Abidin (2016) describes influencer culture through the concept of "visibility labour", showing how influencers build audiences through textual and visual representations of everyday life, so that personal experiences, routines, and activities can become part of an online identity that is both social and commercial. This helps explain how an image such as the "girlboss" could circulate beyond traditional business environments. Alexandersson and Kalonaityte (2021) show that the Girlboss and her networks communicated their ideas through websites, social media, mainstream media, and other public forms of communication. Through these forms of circulation, the "girlboss" image became associated with ambition, entrepreneurship, professional development, and the expectation that women should actively invest in themselves.

The meaning attached to the "girlboss" image has also changed as the term has come under increasing criticism. The Women's Organisation (2023), for example, places the "girlboss" within a period characterised by hustle culture, competitive busyness, and expectations that women should remain determined to progress within the workplace. Its discussion of the later "lazy girl job" trend (The Women's Organisation, 2023) points towards a shift away from the idea that constant professional striving should define women's relationship with work. Byrne and Giuliani (2025) provide further evidence of this changing cultural meaning through their analysis of 2,671 media articles concerning the "girlboss" phenomenon. Their findings show that media framing played an important role in constructing expectations around women entrepreneurs. Coverage changed as the phenomenon moved from heightened excitement and aspiration towards increasing criticism and decline (Byrne & Giuliani, 2025). This suggests that the "girlboss" image did not simply reflect existing ideas about female

entrepreneurship. Media representations also contributed to how entrepreneurial success and the expectations surrounding it were understood.

Overall, the development of the "girlboss" movement shows how an idea associated initially with one entrepreneur developed into a much broader cultural image of female ambition. What began with Sophia Amoruso's account of her unconventional path into business came to circulate through books, professional networks, social media, and wider media culture (Amoruso, 2014; Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021; Byrne & Giuliani, 2025). The literature therefore suggests that "girlboss" cannot be understood simply as a form of empowerment or entrepreneurship, since it also carries pressures and exclusions that accompany its promise of success. This is important for understanding how young women may think about their futures, since the ideal presents a particular image of what a successful woman should be and how she should pursue that success. In this sense, "girlboss" culture acts as a script for what a successful life should look like, one this paper uses to think about how career success, romantic relationships, and well-being may be shaped and judged by it.

PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS

Career is a central part of the "girlboss" ideal, with professional ambition and achievement often presented as important markers of success (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2021). This significance goes beyond employment itself: professional achievement may become connected to independence, personal identity, and a broader sense of progress in life. This reflects wider social pressures that encourage young women to see themselves as capable and ambitious while also taking responsibility for directing their own careers. Lamberg (2021) explores these expectations through the experiences of young women pursuing careers in the media and creative industries. Her findings suggest that they are encouraged to invest in their employability and to continually develop themselves as aspirational subjects. These expectations, however, are not simply accepted without question. Lamberg shows that young women may respond to them through both compliance and criticism, indicating that ambition can be desirable while also bringing pressure to keep improving and proving oneself. Allen (2014) similarly draws attention to the role of social and class-related factors in shaping young women's aspirations, challenging the assumption that such ambitions are entirely the result of individual choice. The career-oriented focus of the "girlboss" identity can therefore be situated within a culture that values professional success while placing considerable responsibility for attaining it on the individual.

Across this literature, professional success emerges as something young women are expected to actively pursue and take individual responsibility for. Lewis (2014) discusses how entrepreneurial femininity is shaped by postfeminist ideas of individualism, choice, and empowerment, positioning women as active subjects in the contemporary workplace. From this perspective, advancement can appear to depend on an individual's ability to recognise opportunities, create them, and actively pursue them. McRobbie (2009) places these expectations within a wider postfeminist culture in which education, employment, and greater independence are encouraged as expressions of individual choice and progress. The "girlboss" model reflects this mixture of opportunity and pressure. Ambition can provide a route towards

independence, yet women may simultaneously be expected to keep seeking out new opportunities to improve their position. Career therefore becomes about more than employment itself; it is connected to wider ideas of choice, independence, and personal achievement.

This individual responsibility is closely tied to the specific qualities women are expected to demonstrate in order to be seen as professionally successful. Van Veelen and Derks (2022) examine female academics' experiences of the agentic stereotype of success and find that characteristics associated with agency can create a lack of fit for women, limiting their career advancement. Their study highlights how ideas about success are not necessarily gender-neutral, since women may be expected to demonstrate qualities associated with agency while also encountering gendered expectations about how they should behave. Since Van Veelen and Derks study academics rather than "girlboss" culture, their findings cannot show the ideal directly shapes young women's career priorities outside academia. Its relevance instead lies in how it illustrates the way gendered ideas of professional success can shape the qualities women are encouraged to develop. This creates a tension with Lewis (2014) and McRobbie (2009): women are encouraged to see professional success as something they can achieve through individual effort, yet the qualities associated with that success remain unevenly available depending on gender. For young women, career ambition may therefore be accompanied by pressure to demonstrate particular qualities while navigating wider gendered expectations.

At the same time, valuing career success does not necessarily mean accepting all of the pressures that accompany it. Lamberg (2021) examines how women working in media negotiate competing ideas about professional achievement, personal fulfilment, and what it means to be a successful woman. Rather than simply accepting or rejecting these ideals, participants navigate them in different ways, balancing their ambitions with concerns about the pressures and compromises that professional life can involve. This tension is particularly relevant to the "girlboss" image, which frames ambition as empowering while placing considerable importance on achievement and advancement. Career can therefore remain an important priority without being understood as an uncomplicated source of fulfilment. The appeal of this model partly lies in the opportunities associated with it, but pursuing those opportunities can also involve personal demands and compromises.

The emphasis on initiative is not limited to conventional employment. It can also be seen in the growing promotion of entrepreneurial forms of work, including the side hustle. Allen and Finn (2024) examine this trend among young women, particularly those in higher education, where such activities are presented as ways of developing skills, generating additional income, and strengthening future employability. Their analysis suggests that this message has become especially relevant within an increasingly uncertain graduate labour market, encouraging students to invest actively in their future prospects (Allen & Finn, 2024). Entrepreneurial activity can therefore function as more than an alternative to conventional employment; it can also provide another way of demonstrating initiative and preparing for the world of work. Unlike Lewis (2014) and McRobbie (2009), who describe career advancement mainly in terms of choices made within paid employment, Allen and Finn (2024) show that the same pressure to take initiative can extend into what they call "time-freedom". Students are encouraged to use their own free

time to prepare for their careers, rather than keeping that time separate from work. For young women, this may encourage them to turn personal interests and abilities into projects that could contribute to their professional futures. This fits with the entrepreneurial qualities associated with the "girlboss" image, where creating opportunities and taking initiative are closely connected with success. Allen and Finn also draw attention to the pressures behind this expectation, particularly when these activities are undertaken alongside education and paid employment.

Taken together, these studies suggest that a career can carry significance well beyond earning a living. This helps explain why career can occupy such an important position among the priorities associated with the "girlboss" ideal. Progress at work may influence how other goals are evaluated, particularly when moving forward professionally is treated as evidence of ambition and self-sufficiency. For young women, career goals may therefore be particularly significant even when pursuing them involves uncertainty, competing demands, or personal compromises. Within the "girlboss" ideal, career consequently represents more than an achievement in itself. It can also reflect wider ideas about being successful, independent, and capable of taking control of one's future.

The media representation of the "girlboss" image has also shaped how this form of success has been understood. Byrne and Giuliani (2025) examine the rise and decline of the phenomenon through a large-scale analysis of media coverage, finding that portrayals of women entrepreneurs changed alongside broader expectations surrounding female success. Their study suggests that the "girlboss" image did not simply reflect existing experiences of entrepreneurship; it also contributed particular meanings to those experiences (Byrne & Giuliani, 2025). Ambition, achievement, and specific expectations of femininity became closely associated with the image, shaping how women entrepreneurs were represented in the media. Its eventual decline, meanwhile, points to growing tensions surrounding this model of achievement and the expectations attached to it. This is relevant to young women because ideas about career and success are shaped not only by individual aspirations, but also by the cultural messages through which particular forms of achievement become desirable.

RELATIONSHIPS

Romantic relationships are another area of young women's lives that may be shaped by expectations associated with the "girlboss" ideal. Few of the studies in this section test the influence of "girlboss" culture on relationships directly. Instead, this section asks how values associated with the ideal, particularly independence, ambition, and self-sufficiency, intersect with existing expectations surrounding romantic relationships. Lukan and Appleton (2025) identify the "power couple" as an important feature of the contemporary girlboss image, describing relationships in which both partners are ambitious and supportive of one another's goals. Within this model, career and romance do not necessarily have to compete. Instead, they can be presented as compatible, with an ideal partner expected to support both personal aspirations and professional ambitions. This is particularly relevant during early adulthood, when decisions about employment, relationships, and financial stability often develop alongside one another. Youmans et al. (2022) similarly find that emerging adult women negotiate romantic commitment

alongside career plans and financial stability, with these decisions influenced by wider social expectations. Maintaining a relationship can therefore involve compromises as women consider how intimacy fits into their longer-term plans. Together, these studies suggest that relationships may be evaluated not only in terms of emotional connection, but also in relation to whether they fit with wider ambitions for the future. For women who identify with the "girlboss" image, a relationship may consequently be valued partly according to whether a partner supports their ambitions and fits with the future they want to build.

Expectations surrounding work and family provide a broader context for understanding these choices. Meeussen et al. (2016) examine how gender norms influence young adults' expectations about combining work and family identities. Their findings show that traditional gender associations remained evident, with women more strongly connected to family roles and men to work-related roles. Young women nevertheless displayed a distinctive combination of aspirations: they reported relatively strong family aspirations while also modelling their career ambitions on a traditionally male career model. The authors describe this as an attempt to "have it all", highlighting the expectation that women can pursue professional success without abandoning aspirations relating to family life. This provides an important context for the "girlboss" ideal, because its emphasis on ambition does not necessarily require relationships or family to be rejected. Instead, success may come to mean managing several valued areas of life at once. Meeussen et al. (2016) do not examine "girlboss" culture specifically or focus on romantic relationships alone, so their findings cannot demonstrate that the ideal produces these expectations. They do, however, show the wider gendered context in which young women develop aspirations around work and family. Viewed alongside the girlboss image, this suggests that the pressure may not simply involve choosing between career and relationships, but meeting expectations to succeed in both.

The characteristics women look for in a partner may also shift alongside their career expectations. Croft et al. (2019) examine how women's expectations about their future family lives relate to the characteristics they prefer in romantic partners. They find that women who anticipate taking on a stronger provider role may place greater importance on partners who contribute in other areas, particularly through caregiving and domestic responsibilities. Their findings therefore challenge the traditional arrangement in which men are expected to provide financially while women take greater responsibility for the home and family. Croft et al. do not examine "girlboss" culture, so their research cannot establish that the ideal directly changes young women's relationship preferences. It nevertheless provides a useful basis for considering how greater financial independence might alter expectations within intimate relationships. If women anticipate being less financially dependent on their partners, traditional divisions of responsibility may become more flexible, making equality and mutual contribution more important. Independence and self-sufficiency may therefore extend into expectations about partnership, with a fulfilling relationship involving a partner who respects personal autonomy while also contributing to a shared life (Croft et al., 2019).

The emphasis on independence also raises questions about whether women's financial independence changes what they expect from a relationship. The evidence here is mixed. Croft et al. (2019) find that

women who anticipate taking on a stronger provider role tend to place greater importance on partners who contribute in other areas, particularly caregiving and domestic responsibilities. This suggests that expecting to be financially independent can change what women look for in a partner. Medved (2016), however, shows that becoming the main earner does not automatically produce this shift: female breadwinners still often face expectations around caregiving and femininity, and couples must renegotiate how domestic responsibilities are divided. Khamis and Ayuso (2022) offer a more optimistic counterpoint, finding that greater female financial contribution can be associated with more egalitarian arrangements, and that women earning more than their partners does not necessarily produce conflict or reinforce traditional roles. None of these studies examine "girlboss" culture directly, so they cannot show that the ideal itself produces these outcomes. Taken together, however, they suggest that financial independence does not automatically produce equality. Instead, it can push couples to renegotiate how responsibilities are shared, though how that plays out varies.

Independence can also extend beyond financial arrangements into expectations surrounding intimacy and personal choice. Rome and Lambert (2020) examine young women's sexual and intimate experiences through a postfeminist and neoliberal lens, focusing on expectations that women present themselves as confident, autonomous, and in control of their choices. Their findings suggest that this emphasis on agency involves actively negotiating intimacy and sexual relationships rather than simply following traditional expectations. This adds a further dimension to the relationship between autonomy and partnership. Within the girlboss ideal, personal choice and control may influence not only which partner a woman wants, but also how she approaches intimacy itself. At the same time, the expectation to appear confident and self-managing can create its own pressure. If agency becomes a quality that women feel they must continually demonstrate, empowerment can become another standard against which they evaluate themselves. Independence may therefore shape both the type of relationship young women value and the way they understand closeness, intimacy, and personal choice within it.

Taken together, the literature suggests that "girlboss" values like independence, ambition, and self-sufficiency do not replace existing relationship expectations. Instead, they intersect with them. The literature on work-family aspirations and female breadwinners shows that traditional gender expectations can persist even as women's economic roles change, while research on partner preferences and on couples where the woman is the higher earner points towards the possibility of more flexible and egalitarian arrangements. Research on intimacy further suggests that autonomy can extend into more personal aspects of relationships. However, most of these studies do not examine girlboss culture directly. Their value therefore lies in showing the wider social and gendered expectations through which young women may understand relationships alongside independence and professional ambition. What seems to shift most across these studies is not whether relationships are valued, but what a "good" relationship is expected to look like. Partners may be expected to be supportive of each other's ambitions and independence, rather than fitting a more traditional role. The "girlboss" ideal may consequently present a model of partnership in which both individuals are expected to pursue their own ambitions while contributing to a shared life, but this apparent freedom can also create pressure to manage career, relationships, finances, and personal autonomy successfully at the same time.

WELL-BEING

Well-being can become closely connected to the expectations surrounding the "girlboss" ideal. Self-care and balance can offer women a sense of control over their lives, but they can also become additional expectations that require ongoing effort. This tension between self-care as protection and self-care as another form of achievement runs through the literature discussed below, appearing both in how self-care itself becomes another responsibility to manage, and in how productivity and balance become woven into everyday life and personal identity.

This tension is visible first in how self-care itself becomes another responsibility to manage. Bolaki (2024) examines the relationship between "girlboss" feminism, emotional labour, and self-care, showing how digital forms of emotional labour are connected to contradictions surrounding self-care under neoliberal feminism. From this perspective, self-care is not simply a matter of personal recovery or individual well-being. It can also become part of wider expectations about how women manage themselves within professional and digital environments. Cavallo and Collins (2024) extend this point by examining the "girlboss" archetype from a critical feminist perspective, drawing attention to its emphasis on individual achievement, self-reliance, and professional success. Their analysis questions the wider structures underlying these expectations, particularly the way women are encouraged to appear capable and successful while being held responsible for navigating difficulties within professional life. Taken together, these two studies suggest that when success depends so heavily on the individual, personal effort becomes central to how both success and struggle are understood. Rest or stepping back can then feel hard to reconcile with an identity built on ambition and independence.

The same tension is also visible in how productivity and balance become woven into everyday life and personal identity, rather than remaining separate from it. Roivainen (2023) examines girlboss channels on YouTube and shows how women construct an authentic entrepreneurial identity through productivity, ordinariness, and belonging. Everyday activities, including work and leisure, become part of a lifestyle built around entrepreneurship. Adamson (2017) similarly examines how female celebrity CEOs construct a form of "successfully" balanced femininity in their autobiographies, presenting career ambition alongside femininity, work, and caring roles. Adamson suggests that balance means more than simply having several responsibilities: it means managing them in calculated, efficient ways that stay compatible with professional success. Neither Roivainen nor Adamson measures young women's well-being directly, so their findings cannot show a direct effect on it. Their value instead lies in showing how productivity, authenticity, and balance become woven into representations of a successful life, extending the demands of achievement beyond the workplace and into how everyday life is organised and presented.

None of the studies discussed in this section establishes that "girlboss" culture directly causes poorer well-being among young women. Altogether, the literature shows how expectations for achievement can extend beyond career success, influencing how women are expected to manage self-care, balance, personal fulfilment, and everyday life. The "girlboss" ideal may therefore encourage women to value their

well-being while simultaneously presenting it as another part of life that should be actively controlled and successfully maintained.

CONCLUSION

The research suggests that this image of female success has developed into a cultural model that shapes how young women may think about their futures, particularly in relation to ambition, independence, and personal responsibility. Although the term originated in Sophia Amoruso's account of entrepreneurship, it developed beyond her individual professional narrative and became associated with wider expectations about what it means to be a successful woman. Professional achievement is central to this image. Young women may be encouraged to invest in their employability, continually develop their abilities, take initiative, and create opportunities for themselves, reflecting broader ideas of enterprising femininity and postfeminist individualism. At the same time, the literature shows that these expectations can involve pressure as well as opportunity. Ambition may provide a sense of independence and possibility, while also encouraging women to keep improving, demonstrate competence, and take personal responsibility for professional outcomes. Similar tensions emerge in relation to romantic relationships. Rather than presenting relationships as incompatible with career success, the "girlboss" ideal can promote the idea of a supportive "power couple", in which both partners pursue their ambitions. Greater financial independence may also create greater scope for equality and shared responsibility within relationships. However, research on gender norms, female breadwinners, and work-family aspirations shows that traditional expectations do not simply disappear as women become more financially independent. Young women may therefore be negotiating several expectations simultaneously: being ambitious and self-sufficient while also maintaining relationships, family aspirations, and forms of femininity that continue to carry social value. The significance of the "girlboss" ideal consequently extends beyond career ambition, contributing to a broader image of success in which professional achievement is expected to coexist with other areas of personal life.

This tension between empowerment and responsibility becomes particularly clear when well-being is considered. The literature suggests that self-care, balance, and personal fulfilment can be incorporated into the "girlboss" ideal but may also become additional areas in which women are expected to manage and improve themselves. Well-being can therefore become connected to productivity, professional identity, and the organisation of everyday life rather than existing separately from the demands of achievement. Confidence, autonomy, ambition, self-direction, and control can be empowering because they present women as active in shaping their own futures. Yet these same qualities can increase the responsibility placed on individuals to manage success, relationships, balance, and well-being. Across the three areas examined in this review, a similar contradiction emerges: greater choice and independence can coexist with stronger expectations to make the "right" choices and manage their consequences successfully. The "girlboss" ideal can therefore challenge traditional expectations while also reproducing pressures associated with neoliberal and postfeminist self-management.

The research reviewed here does not establish that exposure to girlboss culture directly causes young women to prioritise career success, relationships, or particular forms of well-being. Much of the literature examines related cultural expectations, professional experiences, gender norms, and representations rather than directly measuring the effects of the "girlboss" ideal on young women's priorities. This points to a gap in the existing research: relatively little work has directly measured young women's exposure to "girlboss" culture or tested whether it predicts their priorities around career, relationships, and well-being. The most appropriate conclusion is therefore that the ideal may contribute to the cultural environment in which these priorities are understood. It presents a particular image of a successful future: ambitious and financially independent, professionally accomplished, personally fulfilled, and able to maintain meaningful relationships and well-being alongside achievement. The difficulty lies in the expectation that all of these areas can be successfully managed at once. Overall, the "girlboss" ideal is best understood neither as a straightforward form of empowerment nor as an entirely negative cultural phenomenon. Instead, it represents a contradictory form of contemporary femininity in which freedom and responsibility, ambition and pressure, and personal choice and social expectations exist alongside one another.

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