

Those Miley Cyrus pics develop into a debate

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That's more like it: Miley Cyrus visited with Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse on Thursday at the Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

By Marco R. della Cava, USA TODAY

Did she or didn't she mean it?

That's the question at the heart of *l'affaire* Miley Cyrus, a firestorm lit last week by a series of *Vanity Fair* photographs featuring the billion-dollar-baby flashing some skin.

On one hand: Before the pictures pinged around the globe, Cyrus expressed regret and embarrassment, and Disney insisted that the 15-year-old *Hannah Montana* star had been manipulated.

On the other: Widely viewed video of the shoot shows a cooperative Cyrus posing at length with her father, Billy Ray Cyrus.

Team Cyrus has moved on, returning to bubble-gum form to promote the Disney Channel Games in Orlando, including a concert Saturday. Miley didn't refer to the photo flap from stage. But, the Associated Press reports, she saw a sign in the crowd that said, "Miley I'm praying for you." She responded: "I can't be more appreciative of that."

Much of the lingering discussion over Cyrus' magazine appearance falls into two camps: those who criticize the move and take issue with both the singer's age and her parents' judgment, and others who attribute the incident to the pressures inherent in transforming teen stardom into adult success.

"When she turns 17, the Disney machine will essentially throw Miley away, replacing her with another great young singer who is waiting in the wings," says Erik DeSando, president of BE Productions and a talent agent for children and teens. "She's got to think about that transition to the next phase."

In fact, Cyrus offering her bare back to Annie Leibovitz's fabled lens is almost a celebrity rite of passage — a tame one even. Other underage ingénues have consciously upped the image-makeover ante: *7th Heaven* star Jessica Biel posed for almost-naked shots in *Gear* magazine, and Dakota Fanning did a carefully choreographed rape scene in *Hounddog*. On the guy side, *Harry Potter* star Daniel Radcliffe spiced up his rep by performing nude in the erotic play *Equus*.

Often, the blistering buzz is worth the gamble. Back in 1978, preteen model Brooke Shields played a prostitute in *Pretty Baby*. Controversy followed, but her career has trucked along ever since.

But embracing a risqué image to propel a career isn't a strategy that works in all cases, says Robert Pafundi, a talent manager with MGA Talent, which years back launched Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen.

Miley "should be aiming for TV and movie roles that really stay true to who she is and the image she has created," Pafundi says. "She will grow up fast enough, and there's just no need to accelerate that process."

Indeed. Cyrus' age is what proves the biggest stumbling block for industry experts who

otherwise admire her career choices.

"This type of photograph came two years too soon," says Toni Casala, president of Children in Film, a social networking site for parents of Hollywood talent. "I'm shocked no one at the shoot thought those poses were inappropriate for someone her age."

A veteran of Hollywood's child-star machinery agrees. "Miley did not have to do this. Why not keep her 15 as long as you can?" says Barbara Cameron, who wrote about the trials of raising '80s sitcom stars Kirk and Candace in *A Full House of Growing Pains*.

Cyrus is a billion-dollar enterprise for Disney. The company's executives couldn't have approved of the results of the shoot, says Peter Sealey, former marketing chief of Columbia Pictures and now adjunct professor at Claremont (Calif.) Graduate University's Drucker School of Management.

"Hannah Montana is a lucrative brand, and this violated that brand in the same way that dressing James Bond in raggedy clothes would violate that one," he says. "This Cyrus shoot clearly fell between the cracks."

That crack has led to a dim place. Some bloggers have tarred Cyrus, and others have stewed over portraits of father and daughter looking deeply into each other's eyes and Miley reclining in her father's lap. "At its worst, these images almost hint at child porn and incest," says David Halle, professor of sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles. "There's something weird here."

Make that hypocritical, says talent agent DeSando. "This whole incident was blown out of proportion," he says. "Anyone with a 15-year-old daughter knows that this is when they start to feel their sexuality, not 18. Miley was likely just being expressive. It's clear from everything up until now that her parents are doing an excellent job with her and her career."

Lori Marick of Atlanta is among stage parents who are trying to do the same. Her daughter LinZee Yarter, 17, recently left an all-girl band to record her own material, and Marick is careful about her role as career overseer. She tempers her enthusiasm for LinZee's success with the reality of her daughter's needs as a growing child.

"I have to watch out for both the lyrics she can be asked to sing and the types of dancing she's asked to do," Marick says "It's important that LinZee make her own choices about where she wants to go with her career. But I also know that sex is so much a part of our culture today. Sex sells. So in the end, I'm her mother. And sometimes, the answer just has to be no."