

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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A Different Kind of Popular

Girl Discovers Secret of Success in 1950's Book

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

A 15-year-old eighth grader named Maya Van Wagenen was struggling, as many girls do, with how to become popular. So she turned to a source that many might consider outdated: a 1950's tome of advice called *Betty Cornell's Glamour Guide for Teens*.

"My mom said I should follow the advice and see how it applied to my life and write about what happened," she told NBC's Today.com. "At first, I was really against the idea because I didn't want to be made fun of more than I already was. I knew this would mean putting myself out there and getting noticed, which is a little dangerous in middle school. But there was a part of me that wanted to give it a try, and after I finished the first month, I knew I was going to finish [the whole book]."

She began wearing white gloves (as the book suggests) and grew mindful that girdles can be, as Deadline.com says, a "girl's best friend."

"(My friends) thought I was going crazy," she says. "I had people ask me if I changed religions, if I'd suddenly got a boyfriend, if I just wanted to dress like an old lady!"

She also took to heart the book's other, more timeless tips: being honest, kind and understanding. She learned how to grow her own self-confidence as she befriended those around her, including people in a wide range of middle-school cliques.

Now, Maya is very popular—perhaps in part because her diary documenting the experiment has been sold to a major publisher—with a possible movie deal in the works. The book, *Popular: Vintage Wisdom for a Modern Geek*, will be released next May.

Talk About It:

Fashions change, and trends are inherently trendy; but Maya found the secret to her popularity wasn't in how she looked or dressed, but how she treated other people. Do you think that if she had gone to your school she would have had the same experience? Can you become popular by being nice? Is there a difference between being popular and being well-liked?

How important is it to be popular? Does it matter to you? Have you ever worried about your popularity? If you were popular, how would you know?

In her quest for popularity, Maya turned to a source more than 60 years old—suggesting that even as the world changes rapidly some things remain timeless. Your parents or

grandparents might have some wisdom that works in the 21st century, too. What have you learned from your parents? What have you learned from your grandparents? What sort of lessons are you learning now that you'll try to pass on to your own kids?

What the Bible Says:

Speaking of timeless advice, the Bible has plenty of it. Indeed, much of what Maya learned in *Betty Cornell's Glamour Guide for Teens* actually was written thousands of years earlier, and might be summed up in Luke 6:31: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Other verses are applicable, too.

"When He (Jesus) noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, He told them this parable: 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited... But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted'" (Luke 7:7-8, 10-11).

"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man" (Prov. 3:1-4).