Taylor Swift accepts being a role model, but do celebs influence teens' health?

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Taylor Swift has finally weighed in on whether she considers herself a role model for impressionable young people. And the verdict is ... she accepts! In an interview to be broadcast this Sunday on "60 Minutes," the singer said she believes she can be an influence among some fans, and she's OK with that.

But how influential are celebs when it comes to health-related issues such as drugs, alcohol, smoking and weight? Studies show that teens' habits and choices may be affected by famous people they admire, but they're not the only ones who hold sway.

Using appealing actors may be influential in helping teens not smoke. A 2009 study in the journal[Nicotine & Tobacco Research](http://ntr.oxfordjournals.org/) showed different anti-smoking public service announcements to 110 teens ages 11 to 17. Among them were PSAs that focused on the long-term effects of smoking. Viewing those messages was linked with higher self-efficacy to resist smoking, but when likable actors were used, the effect of the messages was even stronger.

A 2002 study in the journal [Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine](http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/) found that celebrities and sports figures are popular teen role models, and looking up to famous people might not be such a bad thing.

Among 749 Los Angeles County teens ages 12 to 17 who were surveyed, 56% said they had role models. Of those, 42% said it was a parent or relative, and 39% named a media figure. Parents were the most popular role models (22%) followed by sports figures (18%), siblings (10%) and singers (10%). Well, maybe Swift has a little less influence than she thought.

Teens who had role models of any type achieved higher grades, had higher self-esteem and a stronger ethnic identity than those who did not.

But when it comes to role models for sexuality, most teens might turn to Mom and Dad. A survey presented at the 2011 [Canadian Paediatric Society's](http://www.cps.ca/english/index.htm) annual conference reported that among 1,200 teens ages 14 to 17, 45% considered their parents role models on the subject of sexuality.

Friends were named by 32% of the teens, and celebrities by 15%.

Swift isn't exactly known for drunken clubbing or antagonizing paparazzi. In the "60 Minutes" interview, she said: "I definitely think about a million people when I'm getting dressed in the morning, and that's just part of my life now. I think it's my responsibility to know it and to be conscious of it. It would be really easy to say, 'I'm 21 now, I do what I want. You raise your kids,' but it's not the truth of it. The truth of it is that every singer out there with songs on the radio is raising the next generation, so make your words count."

We applaud Ms. Swift's maturity and hope she maintains it.