“Life is better when you girlboss together”

Building a safe space within the digital sphere, a case study

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30-credits thesis in Cultural Studies,
Culture and Change - Critical Studies in the Humanities,
Two-year master’s programme
Spring 2023
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Figure 1: Instagram post from user @pauvreison 06/04/2023
Acknowledgments

Thanks to my supervisor Anders Hog for believing in this topic,
but, also, thanks to all the creative and supportive girls that helped me through this work!
Abstract

The study is located in feminist studies through the lens of cultural theory, more specifically in the area of “Girlhood studies”, developed in the 1990s. The development of the field correlates with the rise of the production of cultural goods targeted at girls: movies, music, and magazines as well as the development of teenage hood as an identity in its own right. “Girl studies” or “Girlhood studies”, focuses then on the relationship between “girls” as a social group to modernity. Pioneer authors such as Catherine Driscoll explores the idea of a “girl culture” and retrace the history of girlhood in an attempt to create a “genealogy of girls. Angela McRobbie, coined “Bedroom culture”, which designates the way girls and women have been historically confined to their homes and bedrooms and how they developed their own ways of participating in cultural activities from within the house. Girlhood has been historically associated with modernity. Catherine Driscolls, state “feminine adolescence is necessarily shaped by and a component of capitalism as the dominant political organization of late modernity. (Driscoll, 2002) Therefore, the existence of Girlhood and “girl culture” seem to be biased and somewhat inauthentic. In this way, girls are often dismissed as cultural agents of their own.

In the frame of girlhood studies, I intend to deepen our common understanding of how girls and young women make use of digital platforms today. In this case, I’ll be focusing on the Discord server created earlier this year the Girlblogsphere by Zoe London, or ‘pauvreoirison’ on Instagram. Through the study, I wish to put girls and young women’s online production to the forefront and get an overview of the way they create communities, share, produce culture, and craft their identities. The Girlblogsphere is a perfect case of a community and participatory-based initiative that showcases major and interesting aspects of girl culture. I conducted email interviews to accommodate each of the participants’ schedules and time zones. Conversations and pictures shared in the server were also used to illustrate theories, hypotheses, and, data extracted from the interviews.

Keywords: Girlhood, Girl Culture, Girl Blogging, Discord, Social Media, Lana Del Rey, Popular Culture
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We felt the imprisonment of being a girl, the way it made your mind active and
dreamy, and how you ended up knowing which colors went together. We knew
that the girls were our twins, that we all existed in space like animals with
identical skins, and that they knew everything about us though we couldn’t
fathom them at all. We knew, finally, that the girls were really women in disguise,
that they understood love and even death, and that our job was merely to create
the noise that seemed to fascinate them

— Jeffrey Eugenides, The Virgin Suicides, 1993
1. Introduction

1.1 From Barbie Play to online play

My mother always refused to buy me a mini vacuum cleaner, but she never refused me a Barbie doll. “Cleaning is not a game” she used to say. If chores are not a game, is being a young woman one?

Like a lot of little girls, my Barbie dolls ended up more like Frankenstein’s monsters rather than princesses. Heads were cut, hair was fried and arms were exchanged between dolls. I was testing their limits, my limits, crafting a world where Barbie would be short-legged and Ken a Punk enjoyer. When I became too old to play with my Barbies but old enough to have a computer, I switched from analog Barbies to digital ones. Welcome to Barbie Land 2.0! Although these games did not dramatically differ from my usual Barbie play, something was different…something was new. I could still play dress-up and change my Barbies’ hairstyles, but this time the possibilities were infinite. I was no longer limited by my Barbies’ plastic bodies. I could create and shape as many Barbies as I wanted. Moreover, I also felt that I was playing Barbie for the “big girls”. Indeed, I was introduced to many of these games by older girls that I looked up to. Later, this translated to social media. I made my first Instagram account at the age of 13 to follow my favorite Korean boys’ band at the time. Thus, I could connect with other fangirls but also with them. My online activities were indeed deeply connected to girl culture and to the idea of being a girl. Therefore, while stumbling across more and more online content celebrating girlhood and feminine icons, I couldn’t help but wonder what was all the craze about. Is “girl power” having a revival?

Coming back to Barbie again, while the doll has been heavily criticized for setting unreachable body standards for little girls, some scholars found redeeming qualities in the plastic doll. Indeed, Barbie as a toy herself is quite revolutionary. Quoting Greta Gerwig’s Barbie movie, “Since the beginning of time, since the first little girl ever existed, there have been dolls. But the dolls were always and forever baby dolls, until…” (Gerwig, 2023). Once there were mothers to be, and then, there were women to be. In this way, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell, almost 20 years before Gerwig, studied the doll as a site of resistance and cultural production for little girls. Through memory work, they gathered testimonies of ways in which “Barbie play” shaped girls’ identities (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 1995)

I do not intend to focus on Barbie as the center of my study. However, Barbie has been established as an icon as well as one of the most emblematic girl artifacts. Therefore, she
appeared to me as an easy and inevitable starting point when exploring girlhood. Indeed, the famous doll embodies and highlights certain aspects of “girl culture” and has been the center of numerous feminist discourses. The doll is undeniably a cultural site where girls explore, play and imagine alternative lives. Although she seems to replicate traditional aspects of femininity, Barbie embodies a safe space for girls to reappropriate these codes and play with them. I believe that reducing Barbie to a problematic “beauty doll” dismisses the ability of girls to be cultural producers of their own (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 1995).

Therefore, I can identify some components of girlhood and girl culture: conformity, resistance, consumption, and reappropriation through the “Do it Yourself” process. Those can be applied to “Barbie play”, up to girls’ magazines, forums, and social media, where girls seem to particularly gather the most. In the early 2000s, girls between the ages of 12 and 17 were reported to be the fastest-growing demographic of Internet users (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell). In this way, we get a sense that girls mostly use the Internet as a communication and connection medium. This phenomenon could partly explain the girl blogging culture of the 2000s. Moreover, this reinforces the idea that girls reappropriate cultural sites with the help of DIY and community building. The case of ‘cybergirls’ is particularly interesting, as they are confined to the Internet, which requires them “to make a space within the discourse they oppose” (Driscoll, 1999, p. 183).

In GirlWideWeb, Sharon R. Mazzarella makes a similar observation about girls’ various use of the internet. In her study, she observed that the Internet and online platforms dedicated to girls at the time (2005) acted as safe spaces for girls to explore their identities, interact with each other, and engage in often denigrated cultural activities (Mazzarella, 2005). In the same fashion, I intend to explore the new ways girls and young women make use of the internet and pre-existing online platforms to build ‘safe spaces’ of their own.

I am interested in how and where girls and young women convene today and their motivations. For that, in this thesis, I’ll conduct a case study about an online server made for and by young women, created earlier this year on Discord. The online group is the result of its creator, Zoe London’s many years of online presence. Primarily on Instagram under the pseudonym ‘pauvreoison’ where she gathers over 37 000 followers, some of whom, helped with the building of the Discord server. At first, I had the intention to analyze Zoe London’s Instagram page (pauvreoison) as the principal source of my thesis. Fortunately, early on in my research process, Zoe London posted on her page about her latest project: a Discord server dedicated to girls and young women. Discord is primarily used by the gaming community to connect, chat,
and perform live streams of their game sessions. It is fair to say that it is quite surprising to find a girl community based on the application. But somehow, Zoe London and her community made their way into the male-dominated website and created their own online niche.

Research questions

**RQ1** How do girls establish and maintain safe spaces online in a case study looking at a girl blogging community?

**RQ2** What are the members of the Discord server seeking that conventional social media platforms don’t provide?

**RQ3** In which ways do the GirlBlogSphere community online practices fall within the scope of feminism?

1.2 “Congratulations girlboss you survived the day!”

Zoe London’s content mainly targets young women, or as she states in her Instagram bio “recovering girl-bosses”. Her account includes screenshots from Tiktok’s videos to memes, quotes, and Tweets among other things.

An average post from @pauvreison would be a picture of actress and model Lily-Rose Depp during fashion week that says “hot girls eat” (appendix A Figure 14, 15 & 16). Her style consists of salvaging current or older pop-culture icons and objects, especially ones appreciated by girls and young women such as Paris Hilton, Bratz Dolls, Lana Del Rey, Megan Fox, or Hello Kitty into “inspirational quotes” or darker jokes about femininity. In other words, you can come across a picture of Nicole Richie who infamously joked about holding a party for girls under 100 pounds in 2007 (appendix B Figure 17) plastered with the words “recovery is hot” (meaning recovery from eating disorders). In that way, @pauvreison uses controversial feminine figures to both convey positive messages to her peers and highlight the antinomic experience of being a young woman. Through seemingly inoffensive imagery she approaches diverse challenges and common experiences among young women such as self-image, eating disorders, mental

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1 User @pauvreison on Instagram posts daily pictures with the quoted text where she talks about her day and congratulates her followers for making it through the day.

2 The term coined by businesswoman Sophia Amoruso is now heavily criticized by feminist circles for complying with American corporate ideals. Girlboss is now a meme.
health, misogyny, relationships, dealing with the male gaze, etc. Although I am focusing now on @pauvreison’s content, many other Instagram accounts follow similar content. Typically, once I started to follow @pauvreison, I started myself being followed by much less popular accounts that fell into the same scope. They all share similar content about girlhood and womanhood and self-described themselves as “It girl” or “doing it for the girls and the girls only”. In that way, quite a strong sense of community and sorority emanates from these accounts.

Zoe London, who is behind @pauvreison had for ambition to launch a discord server for “girls/youth interested in girl blogger culture”. The idea has been given by a follower of hers, according to her latest post and she intends to work with other “girl bloggers” on the board. This reinforces the idea of participatory culture among girls and young women. Zoe London hopes to create a space for girls to engage, discuss and share “art, articles, poems, etc.” This project is obviously reminiscent of blogging culture and forums in the early 2000s. In fact, London explains that she is inspired by *Rookie Magazine* created by fashion blogger Tavi Gevinson in 2011. The online magazine addressed topics such as fashion, pop culture, feminism, and adolescent social issues. Contributors to the platform ranged from journalists and celebrities to the magazine’s readers. Unfortunately, *Rookie Magazine* was defunct in 2018 for financial reasons.

Zoe London’s both Instagram page and Discord project could be understood as reminiscent of DIY culture and zines in the same fashion that the Riot Grrrls did in the 1990s. However, by being settled on platforms such as Instagram, Discord, or Tiktok, this type of production hardly escapes the current cultural landscape. As such, Catherine Driscoll compares the conditions of media production of the Riot Grrrls to the one she calls the “cybergirls”. She states: “Being confined to the Internet, cybergirls are required to make a space within the discourse they oppose” (Driscoll, 1999, p. 183). Here is probably the main issue of media produced by girls for girls but also why it is so enticing. As Driscoll report, The Riot Grrrls webzine’s launch provoked a certain amount of discontentment, not only for accessibility issues but also for leaning toward the “mainstream” culture. She states:

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3 Literally a girl/a young woman owning a blog or producing online content targeted to girls about girls. According to Urban Dictionary: “A girlblogger is a young female that owns an internet blog, in which she spreads very creative and cute content.”

4 The website started off as a fashion blog which quickly grew up in popularity. Gavinson was only 11 at the time.

5 Wiktionary: “A girl who is active in cyberspace; a young female Internet user, especially one who publishes.”
The web is not the universe. riot grrrl is still very much alive, not in your sorority
girl circles, but in real life, grassroots, punk communities [sic]. Alive in people who
don’t own computers or have email addresses. Media conglomerates [sic] and
webpages do not an organization make. (Driscoll, 1999, p. 179)

However, as of today, it is widely acknowledged that the Internet pushed for the fluency of
information and the media. Social media has been the site for the latest feminist discourse and
the most impactful social changes, such as the #MeToo movement, to the extent that we often
hear that we live in a “post #Metoo” era. Those are easy observations to make but they highlight
the way in which the internet is used by women aligns itself with the feminist tradition of
“collectivizing individual experience” (Driscoll, 1999, p. 183). In that way, the Punk Riot Grrrls
do not differ that much from the more mainstream Cybergirls. However, their cultural
productions and activities are closely tied to domesticity and Cybergirls do not seem to be out
and about.

2. Context

2.1 Girl blogging

In order to better understand Zoe London’s online presence and her community, it is important
to start by taking a look at her predecessors. The History of girl blogging, teen bloggers, or even
fashion blogs can be traced back to the early 2000s when the concept began to gain momentum.
This rise of girl blogging coincides with the democratization of the Internet as well as the
increase of visibility of feminist discourses surrounding female empowerment. As defined by
Shanly Dixon in Girl Culture An Encyclopedia, a blog is a “website that has diary-style entries
that are date and time stamped organized in reverse chronological order.” (Dixon, 2007, p. 188).
These types of blogs often revolved around personal narratives and topics of interest such as
fashion, beauty, and other lifestyle choices. Dixon identifies two main purposes that Bloggers
serve, which are: “to inform the public and shape opinions about various news items or to share
their personal experiences, thoughts, and ideas.” (Dixon, 2007, p. 188). In other words, girl
bloggers are the ancestors of today’s influencers. That is to say, they used their platforms to
share their experiences, opinions, and advice with their followers, creating a sense of
camaraderie and connection among their readers. This echoes the need for a trusted and safe
place for girls and young women to openly discuss topics of interest and personal issues.
Moreover, Dixon explains the appeal of blogging to girls as the activity highly relates to girls’
popular practices. Thus, she refers to journaling, or holding a diary, and determines blogs as
online diaries. Therefore, a blog was an open window to connect and to participate in a new shape of the public sphere to “which girls have not traditionally had access” (Dixon, 2007, p. 189).

Girl blogging has evolved over the years, becoming more inclusive of diverse narratives and tackling intersectional feminist issues. As the surrounding feminist discourse evolved as well as the digital landscape, girl bloggers eventually shifted from traditional blogs to “new” spaces such as YouTube, Instagram, and more recently, TikTok. Therefore, the term “girl blogging” as it is used today by girls today, does not refer to the activity of owning a blog, but rather to any type of online activity a girl or a young woman can engage with within the frame of mainstream “girl culture.

2.2 The new girl bloggers

There is no official definition of girl blogging, but from my research and personal experience engaging with this community, girl bloggers usually associate themselves with hyper-femininity and like to share, like their predecessors, about fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and relationships. While the shape may have changed, the core of these communities seems to be quite similar. The girl bloggers of 2023 appear to be a niche identity within today’s girl culture. Indeed, if we refer to Urban Dictionary’s definition of what a girl blogger is, we understand that what makes a girl blogger is very precise and linked to external factors that are unrelated to the activity of owning a blog:

hot, intelligent, and probably mentally ill; a girlblogger is someone chronically online saving soft, luxurious coquette posts on pinterest while listening to lana del rey and cigarettes after sex. she's a bookworm and probably obsessed with 90s kate moss and lily rose depp

i look like such a girlblogger with my pink sweater, wired headphones, and chanel sunglasses (By diorcigarette doll via Urban Dictionary, 2022)

As they act within the subculture genre, it is difficult to track and define their activity with the help of academic studies. Furthermore, the study of girls in relation to subcultures was and seems to be still quite unexplored (McRobbie & Garber, 2000). One explanation that can be offered is that girls tend to express themselves within the scope of what is socially expected from them. Therefore, their cultural activities and ways of expression will most likely appear as “mainstream”, or as something that will not raise their parents’ attention, as girls are most likely to be confined to their rooms due to safety concerns (McRobbie & Garber, 2000). As a
result, “girls organize their social life as an alternative to the kinds of risks and qualifications involved in entering into the mainstream of male subcultural life” (McRobbie & Garber, 2000, p. 18). Thus, girl culture tends to take place at home and emanates from activities that can be home-based and that are home-based. Those activities range from doll play to more ritualistic ones such as “trying on clothes, and experimenting with hairstyles and make-up” (McRobbie & Garber, 2000, p. 16). As for today, these activities could be extended to the digital sphere: buying clothes and make-up clothes online, making “haul videos”, sharing outfits with friends on social media, or experimenting with the latest hair trend. Although smartphones and laptops can be taken out of the private sphere, all of these activities remain closely bound to the home and domesticity. However, the visibility of girl culture is enabled by these devices and social media. Girls and their culture go beyond their bedrooms even though it is produced behind closed doors. When studying girls on TikTok, Melanie Kennedy makes use of Angela McRobbie’s concept of ‘bedroom culture’ to highlight the shift in the way girls produce and share culture through social media. Kennedy, states “The phenomenal rise in TikTok’s cultural visibility during the Coronavirus crisis can be seen to contribute to the transformation of girls’ ‘bedroom culture’” (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1070). Thus, that said culture became sharable and disposable to anyone who can log on to TikTok or YouTube, for instance. This seems to go against what used to be the main characteristic of girl culture, girls’ online content may escape the authority of their parents, but not the one of their male peers and strangers on the Internet. On one hand, Melanie Kennedy offers to read this phenomenon as a “celebration of girlhood”, but on the other hand, she encourages us to take into account the “surveillance” aspect of it all. She explains that the “conceptualization of the girl’s bedroom in this new context of TikTok is that girls’ bedroom culture can no longer be understood as ‘private’ or ‘safe’ from gendered surveillance.” (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1071). Moreover, it is also interesting to ask how much girls’ private data, and to what extent their bodies and bedrooms are subjected to algorithms. The big spectacle of girls’ bedrooms is not only accessible to the private individual but also, and, perhaps, first and foremost, to big tech companies that decide whose bedroom is desirable and sharable whose bedroom stays in the dark.

In March 2020, The Intercept (Biddle et al., 2020) published leaked internal documents from the makers of TikTok instructing its moderators to algorithmically suppress posts by users deemed to appear ‘abnormal’, ‘ugly’ (indicating factors including wrinkles and obesity) and ‘slummy’, and to censor politically ‘defamatory’ and ideologically ‘vulgar’ content. With popularity on TikTok determined by algorithms and metrics – with the ‘For You’ feed upon opening the app populated with seemingly random videos, each with the potential to go viral –
such suppression and censorship work to make invisible those subjects judged not to fit the ideals of young white femininity. (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1072)

Thus, girls’ culture today, still deals with notions of safety, however, it is highly emphasized by their visibility, which correlates with the nature of the platforms on which they exercise their culture. Nevertheless, the act of being visible is also an act of feminist resistance. Indeed, McRobbie urges us to remember that “one of the central tenets of the women’s movement has been that the personal is political.” (McRobbie & Garber, 28:2000) when studying girls and subcultures. Stepping out of the bedroom increases vulnerability, however opting for a ‘moral panic’ discourse would be aligning myself with the same culture that restricts and policies girls’ and women’s bodily autonomy. Nonetheless, if we refer to the dichotomy between the public sphere and the private sphere, it is worth noting that the Internet doesn’t exactly fall within either category. Thus, the Internet appears as some sort of semi-public sphere, a comfortable and appealing liminal space from which girls can produce culture and explore their own identities without directly involving their bodily self with the ‘other’. Moreover, social media’s algorithms push us, more than ever, to ask ‘Who’s girlhood?’. While it is not new that the representation of girls in the media has been historically, mostly white, thin, and normatively attractive, today’s girlblogger’s world is characterized by the rampant nostalgia of the early to mid-2000s. A period of time that is quite infamous for its toxic diet culture and the widespread body control of women and female celebrities. Thus, this is how cultural critic Biz Sherbert introduces us to the world of the 2.0 girlbloggers:

Subliminal messages that help you develop those ultimate doe eyes and other pseudoscientific secrets to perfect beauty. A fascination with recent and, at the same time, passé cultural micro-epochs of the Victoria’s Secret shows of the 2010s – and the UGG boots from 2013/2014. Floral bedsheets, Home-workout videos, pink yoga pants and palm kisses: welcome to the universe of girlblogging. (Sherbert, 2022)

According to my own research and from observing both the Discord and Zoe London’s Instagram account, Biz Sherbert offers the most precise depiction of what we call girlbloggers today. As mentioned earlier, the niche is very specific about its interests and signifiers that fall within the scope of normative femininity and whiteness.

A girlblogger is a girl who blogs about being a girl, a girl’s girl, a girly girl who looks like she dances ballet, weighs little, wears lip products from Dior, and is tightly wound but loosely tied together with silk ribbon. A girlblogger runs a page under a name like waifbambi or diormarmont — always a coupling of delicate,
feminine-sounding words that could be skimmed from Lana Del Rey lyrics. (Sherbert, 2022)

If listening to Lana Del Rey, wearing Dior lipgloss, and doing ballet makes you a girlblogger, there is a quick draw to traditional and problematic expectations of what it means to be a girl. However, the online revival of hyper-feminity is supported by the desire the reappropriate typically feminine interests and cultural productions that are often dismissed because of sexism.

As mentioned earlier, Sharon Mazzarella highlights this aspect in girls’ use of online platforms. Acting as semi-public spheres, digital spaces are safe for girls to discuss and enjoy such topics without any fear of judgment. Moreover, I believe that it is also important to not dismiss girls’ and young women’s abilities to reflect on their own practices and biases. Indeed, one main aspect of girl bloggers’ culture is the reappropriation of a culture that mocks them and reduces them for their interests while actively pushing it on them. Being aware of that dichotomy, most girl bloggers engage with feminism and often satirize themselves.

2.3 Discord

2.3.1 What is Discord?

To set a common ground, in this part, we will be learning about the platform where the GirlBlogSphere is hosted, and thus get an overview of why it was appealing in the first place. Indeed, Discord is a popular communication platform that combines voice, video, and text-based chat capabilities. The platform was initially designed to cater to gamers but has since expanded to serve a variety of communities and interests (Minor, 2023). Discord allows users to create individualized and personalized servers. Each server is a virtual room where individuals can meet, chat, share media, and collaborate. Therefore, Discord offers a way to
host a large number of participants while keeping it organized since each topic of conversation is subdivided into different rooms. Consequently, these types of servers can host communities with diverse and shared interests. Indeed, a single Discord Server can hold up to 500,000 members and can be divided into a maximum of 500 channels (rooms) (Minor, 2023).

Discord was founded by Jason Citron and Stan Vishnevskiy and opened to the public in May 2015. Before Discord, Citron was developing his game Fates Forever, which was experiencing communication and voice chat issues. This inspired him to create a purpose-built communication platform that addresses these challenges and enhances the gaming experience.

Thus, Discord was originally intended to provide gamers with a seamless, low-latency voice chat experience. Discord allowed players to communicate with each other during gameplay, and this was the basis for Discord's success. Over time, Discord expanded its capabilities beyond voice chat, introducing text-based channels, video chat, screen sharing, and other collaboration tools. This development has expanded the user base and brought together a diverse community beyond the game. Discord's versatility and ease of use have made it a popular choice for socializing, organizing events, coordinating team activities, and building online communities.

Discord has gained a lot of attention, for its reliable performance, intuitive interface, and variety of features tailored to gamers' needs. Features like role-based permissions, robust moderation tools, integration with popular gaming platforms, and the ability to create custom bots make it even more appealing.

![Figure 3: “Create an invite-only place where you belong” Discord website home page](image)

This success financially translates as well. In fact, Discord secured investments from venture capital firms such as Greylock Partners and Index Ventures to support its growth and development. The platform has experienced rapid growth, reaching important milestones such
as over 25 million registered users by 2016 and over 100 million active users by 2017 (Brown, 2020).

As Discord continued to grow, it began to attract attention in many areas outside of gaming. Communities dedicated to hobbies, professional networking, education, and other interests have started using Discord as a means of communication and collaboration. Recognizing this change, Discord has expanded its capabilities to better serve these diverse communities (Minor, 2023).

Discord has seen significant updates and improvements over the past few years, including an improved mobile app, improved privacy settings, and additional features like stage channels for public voice conversations and threads for organized discussion. Discord has also worked to address user concerns around harassment, security, and moderation by implementing policies and tools that promote a positive user experience.

Discord is still the leading communication platform with millions of active users worldwide. Its continuous evolution and adaptability have allowed it to become a versatile platform for communities to connect, collaborate and have meaningful interactions beyond their gaming origins. However, many concerns about safety have been raised in recent years. While Discord seems to hold itself accountable and provides safety resources on its website, some groups are especially at risk of bullying.
2.3.2 Discord, youth, and safety

It was to my surprise that the Girlblosphere found its place on Discord. Indeed, from my point of view and the origins of the platform, Discord was for me some kind of boys’ club, a space reserved for gamers and people like my brother and my cousins who understand the mechanics of online gaming and live streams. Moreover, I also was aware of the frequent harassment and bullying towards girls and women in online gaming spaces, to the extent that some women players actively avoid disclosing their gender identity, use non-identifying usernames, and game with male characters (Cote, 2017). Even though the gaming community is slowly evolving,

Nontraditional game audiences are still perceived as “outsiders.” Because of this, women, ethnic minorities, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) players, for instance, are frequently targeted for harassment. (Cote, 2017, p. 137)

While the gaming community, which finds itself on platforms like Discord, is often described as “toxic” and unwelcoming to “outsiders”, one of the main appeals of Discord is that communities are private and closed. That is to say, unlike applications like Instagram, a Discord group is not accessible to anyone who logs on to the platform, a link from a member or an invitation from a friend is needed to access a group. Moreover, Discord users do not have a personal “page” where they post pictures and videos, and there are no followers, but friends you can add to chat with. In other words, Discord does not revolve around a personal narrative and self-images, but rather the communion of ‘like-minded’ individuals that share the same interests. A Discord server is an organized group chat, with channels dedicated to certain topics, rules established by the community, and moderators that make sure things are running smoothly. Therefore, the privacy of a Discord server appears as a great alternative to image-based applications for girls and young women.

Regarding the subject of safety, Discord has its own blog where resources are available for teenagers and worried parents. Moreover, blog posts concerning Generation Z’s mental health and lists of female-owned servers were shared on Women’s Day. In this way, Discord shows support and accountability on issues they’ve been accused to enable.

Seen on Discord’s blog:

Now more than ever, conversations once reserved for face-to-face interactions are happening online, necessitating robust mental health resources in these spaces. Platforms like Discord can provide the safety and anonymity that some seek when discussing topics like identity, sexuality, and mental health. (Via the Discord Blog)
Thus, the people behind Discord seem to be aware of the possible issues behind their platform. The Discord team is placing themselves and their platform at the center of current discourses and trends surrounding mental health and politics via the blog accompanying the platform. Indeed, this is a way for Discord to signal their position regarding these topics, although I am not sure if it is more to ease the media attention rather than the parents who probably don’t even know the name Discord. Overall, the platform image has shifted from a toxic gaming platform to a useful and fluid chatting app where communities from all horizons can gather. What is so attractive about Discord is the way it differentiates itself from traditional social media such as Instagram which are self-image-based and require a lot of the time some sort of social performance. On Discord, only your belonging to a certain community is important, the participation is made through texts, voice, and images relating to the topic. Moreover, each server or group can only be accessed through an invitation in the shape of a link. Therefore, it is not open to outsiders or strangers that have nothing to do with the conversation, which makes the sense of privacy and belonging even stronger.

3. Literature review

3.1 How to study girls?

The field of Girl studies or Girlhood studies, emerged in the 1990s, intersecting with the “emergence of new forms of cultural production” (Driscoll, 2007, p. 8). Thus, in the golden age of girl power and the new abundance of media targeted at girls, a new field was born. Coming from the need to make sense of a new fairly identity, girlhood writers mainly seek to understand social constructions, experiences, and representations of girls’ different historical and cultural contexts, but also, girls as cultural producers (Mazzarella, 2005). Inherent to the Industrial Revolution, feminine adolescence is often dismissed and deemed as inauthentic or superficial (Driscoll). Therefore, the relationship between girls and commodities is particularly intense, as it makes them who they are. Furthermore, it is also argued that Girls turn themselves into commodities, by consuming them (Tiqqun, 2012). Thus, Driscoll explains that “Girlhood and daughterhood are consistently articulated in relation to a future role—who or what the girl will be or do as a woman” (Driscoll, 2007, p. 108). As a result, girls consume in order to be, but also to prepare themselves to be the woman they are expected to be. However, this interpretation also dismisses girls’ agency and ability to reappropriate and interpret the world around them. Girl studies writers aim to understand and highlight how girls go through that process and the
way girl produce their own culture (Mazzarella, 2005). There are many ways to read and interpret girlhood, but two of the first questions that arise when studying girlhood are: what is a girl and what is girlhood? Indeed, if girls as an identity relate to modernity and materiality, it is fair to wonder was there ever girls. While some auteurs attempted to answer these questions, which we will approach later, it is possible to map girl culture with the help of different categories. In fact, Claudia A. Mitchell and Jacquelin Reid-Walsh, two of the main writers in the field, suggest a list of categories that:

“Give a sense of the range of ideas that might be seen to make up the culture of girlhood, providing a way to think about how girl culture is organized, at least within popular culture and popular representation of girlhood” (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 2008, p. xxvi)

These 6 categories include social practices, material culture, space girls’ bodies, people, and social relations. From my own research, I also have noticed similar patterns. To illustrate it, I made a map below that gathers the main aspects of girl culture as framed by Reid-Walsh and Mitchell.

![Figure 5: A map of girl culture, made by the researcher according to Driscoll and Reid-Walsh theories](#)
Indeed, the map is not exhaustive. Each category and activity could be extended to a different practice, but these are the ones that are the most relevant to my study and that came up the most when researching literature. For instance, *Girls’ bodies* could be associated with hair, fashion, makeup, or menstruation and *Social Relations* to friendships, bullying, or, break-ups. (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 2008, p. xxvii). Therefore, we can come to the conclusion that the main way to understand girl culture is to analyze their relationship to material culture and the material itself.

3.2 What is a girl?

As mentioned before, one of the first questions of girl studies is the one of history and definition. What is the history of girls? Were there always girls? And what is a girl? Thus, looking at ways to define girls, will help us to understand the manner in which girls or young women online refer to themselves.

Therefore, one way to look at it, would be to study the concept of girl historically. In this way, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell propose a look at the Western Medieval idea of the “seven stages of mankind”. Thus, they focus on the first 4 stages, which are “A man is first an Infant, then a Boy, then a Youth, then a Young-Man, then a man […] So also in the other Sex there are, a Girl, A Damosel, A Maid, a woman […]” (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 2008, p. xxiv). From this concept, the authors highlight the absence of the “infant” state for women. From this, Reid-Walsh and Mitchell draw two hypotheses: either this stage is sexless or genderless or it is exclusively male, which would give the impression that there are only six stages of womankind instead of seven like mankind. Therefore, this would mean that boys and girls have inherently different developments.

Moreover, Catherine Driscoll also proposes to look at girls historically as well as a “set of culturally specific histories” (Driscoll, 2007, p. 15). As such, Driscoll starts by looking at the portrayals of girls in literature as the reflection of the idea of girls at a specific point in history. For instance, she argues that Shakespeare’s writing genius does not apply to his girls’ characters. That is to say, “the affirmation of Shakespeare as accurately portraying developmental psychology and other processes of character formation has been less uniformly applied to his girl characters” (Driscoll, 2007, p. 17). Therefore, Driscoll understands that girls do not develop in the same “essentially human way” (Driscoll, 2007, p. 17) as boys do. Both what Reid-Walsh & Mitchell and Driscoll highlight is the supposed developmental differences between boys and girls in historical and cultural representations. In this way, the idea of girls
would be that they are simply the opposite of boys, or rather a diverging version (Reid Walsh & Mitchell). However, it is now understood that it is not that simple and that girls and boys evolve under different cultural settings depending on place and age, and that what we understand as the concept of boys and girls is influenced by said settings. Therefore, girl studies writers rather focus on making sense of the cultural settings that make girls. In this way, it is important to note that the most influential girls’ studies texts are focusing on a very specific experience of girlhood, which is white and Western. Therefore, we can imagine that such focus only makes sense when one’s study is located within that lens. Furthermore, the personal relationship of the author to the field is especially heightened in the case of girls studies. That is to say, as most of the writers of the field identify as female, they mostly all have experienced girlhood and what it means to be a girl. While every girlhood is different, every cis-gender woman has been a girl. In this way, Driscoll says “it seems every woman has been a girl and every female child is one, it is not clear what this means given” (Driscoll, 2002, p. 2). Perhaps the idea of girl culture does not lay in the nature of one’s girlhood but rather on the idea that every cis-gender woman has been a girl and that the simple experience of being a girl once produces a girl culture. However, one of the biggest criticisms of girlhood studies and probably the main reason why the field has struggled to flourish and adapt to new and different ideas of girlhood is the fact that the field was originally set in the West, specifically in North America. While the idea of one universal girl culture that would connect all girls and once girls sounds like a beautiful thought, I cannot help but be reminded of Universalism and its issues and how it could be an obstacle to today’s feminism that aims for intersectionality. Indeed, I believe that girls studies are feminist studies as they center on girls’ experiences and aim to include girls as active participants in such studies, and, to be called “feminist”, a field of study should be relevant and place itself within the current feminist landscape. However, I do not mean that using older texts to conduct girl studies is irrelevant, but that they can be adapted to current issues and should be questioned. Nonetheless, the field is kept alive and relevant by the Journal of Girlhood Studies launched in 2008 by Claudia Mitchell, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, and Jackie Kirk published by Berghahn Journals. The Journal is still active and is one of the most proficient contributors to the field today.

*Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* is a peer-reviewed journal providing a forum for the critical discussion of girlhood from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and for the dissemination of current research and reflections on girls’ lives to a broad, cross-disciplinary audience of scholars, researchers, practitioners in the fields of education, social service and health care.
and policy makers. International and interdisciplinary in scope, it is committed to feminist, anti-discrimination, anti-oppression approaches and solicits manuscripts from a variety of disciplines. (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh & Kirk, 2008)

While the Journal has been founded by the early and fundamental writers of Girlhood Studies, it does make a great effort to situate the field within intersectional feminism. That is to say, to study girlhood at the crossroads of gender and other factors such as race, place, sexual orientation, social status, etc. When introducing the Journal, Claudia Mitchell, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, and Jackie Kirk explain that they did not start thinking of Girlhood Studies as a “diverse and multidisciplinary field needing its own research apparatus such as a journal” (Reid-Walsh, Kirk & Mitchell, 2008, p. 8) until 2001. This is not only symptomatic of the lack of recognition of the field but also the extent to which Girlhood studies are linked to the personal and the individuals researching within the field as well as the limitations of Girlhood studies. Indeed, the authors of Girlhood are aware of it, but also consider that such cannot be completely separated from one’s life “my own work on girls’ education and girlhood in development contexts was not and could not be entirely separated from my own experience of girlhood and daughterhood” (Reid-Walsh, Kirk & Mitchell, 2008, p. 8). In this way, many writers signal this connection by including personal anecdotes relating to the experience of being a girl, shaping moments in their identity or seemingly to the moment when they stopped being one. As a matter of example, Catherine Driscoll opens her book *Girls Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* by quoting her grandmother on the author’s first periods:

“You’re not a little girl anymore.” (Driscoll, 2002, p. 1)

Not only does the quote relate to a common experience among girls and women, but it also raises the question of what is a girl. As such, if we analyze the sentence, we can come to two different conclusions about girlhood: 1. A girl is a female human that does not menstruate, 2. If there are “little girls”, there are “big girls” who menstruate. Defining what a girl is according to a set of biological characteristics and events such as having your first period, is one way to do it. Even though such events directly echo Reid-Walsh and Mitchell’s 6 categories to understand girl culture, which, in this case, would be the “girls’ bodies” category, I believe that relying on biology to define girls and girl culture is incomplete and, at times exclusionary to different experiences of girlhood. As said earlier, studying girlhood touches on individual and various realities. Catherine Driscoll may have gained consciousness of her girl identity when this one seemingly has been revoked, but getting your first menstruation could also be
reinforcing one’s girl identity. As such, girlhood writer Mary Celeste Kearney defines girlhood as a combination of different parameters:

1) as the subjective experiences of those who identify as “girls”; 
2) as the period in life one identifies as “girl”; and 3) as the discursive construct used by social institutions and individuals to categorize those deemed young and female/feminine, which is commonly performed and reconstructed by those who identify as “girl.” (Kearney, 2021)

Therefore, what we can first learn from Mary Celeste Kearney is that girlhood is indeed a subjective experience and that experiencing girlhood is a matter of self-identification rather than a biological fact. Moreover, it is important to note that these statements from Kearney date from a 2021 Interview on defending the need for Girlhood Studies. Therefore, they seem to be more relevant to the current intersectional feminist discourse as Kearney gives an update on her previous work from the early 2000s. Moreover, she gives as well her own definition of what a girl is, which consists of a combination of demographic categories that are “gender, age, and status of financial dependency—so, those people who identify as female/feminine and young who are still financially dependent on their parents or guardians” (Kearney, 2021). Therefore, Kearney brings the idea of financial dependence as a characteristic of what a girl is, which is interesting considering that there is no fixed age for financial independence. Moreover, Kearney states that in terms of age, what we typically associate with girls, falls between the ages of 0 to 18. She also adds the term “girl” is and has been used to describe women above the age of 18.

To this topic, Catherine Driscoll also shares some personal anecdotes, she shares feeling connected to her “girl” identity even being past the age of 30:

In my mid-thirties I am not a girl any longer, in most senses of the word. And yet I might still be called a girl and use the word “girl” about myself, especially among women around my own age. (Driscoll, 2002, p. 2)

Not only Driscoll finds herself being referred to as a girl by other people, but she also often identifies as one, especially when she is around young women her age. Moreover, she explains that she is still socially connected to and interested in “and sometimes still strongly identify with “girl” things, “girl” behaviors, and experience of girlhood” (Driscoll, 2002, p. 2) because it is something that she once experienced and once was if she ever stopped being a girl. This leads me to the idea that girlhood and “girl” as an identity, is something that is constructed and perpetuated with and by interacting with other girls or “ex-girls”. Indeed, if “girl” as a label is comfortable when used around individuals sharing the same identity, it unveils a deeper social meaning rather than just an issue of age or sex. As such, Celeste Kearney reinforces Driscoll’s
lived experience and tells us that “the term “girl” is often used among women of all ages when they are in women-only groups”, which may suggest that outside these types of groups, the use of term “girl” may have negative connotations, that are rejected by the holders of the label. It seems that one never really stops being a girl, as long as one identifies as such. Hence “the fluid use of “girl” across these various social groups points out the lack of one essential meaning as well as its relationship to the social construction of identity” (Kearney, 2021). This further echoes the importance of friendship and social relations in what Mitchell and Reid-Walsh define as “girl culture” as we can understand to be interdependent to the production of girls’ identities, not only through materiality among other things but also through their social relations. Said social relations that can be developed online with or without being an extension of the already existing ones in the analog world. Indeed, girlhood writers witnessed this transition as the field flourished between the 90s and early 2000s, however, it seems that the literature is quite stuck in time. Although what has been observed and theorized can be applicable to today’s girls’ online activities, there is a lack of interest in the latest social media platforms. In the case of my study, I tried to understand what girls do online, why, and how. One of the first authors of digital girlhoods is Sharon R. Mazzarela. In her book *Girl Wide Web*, Mazzarela explores the ways in which young girls aged from 8 to 18 use the internet to construct and express their identities. Therefore, she observes and examines the online practices of different groups of girls on blogs and forums and the different ways in which these girls engage with each other and expresses themselves in unique ways made possible by the internet. As a result, Mazzarela argues that the internet provides a unique and safe space for girls to experiment with different identities, forms of self-presentation and to connect with other girls sharing the same interests.

The role of the Internet is facilitating a safe and private space in which girls are invited to create content, advocate for change and explore questions about their minds, bodies, and roles in society. (Mazzarella, 2005, p. 52)

However, Mazzarella also acknowledges the potential risks and challenges that come with online participation, including cyberbullying, harassment, and the commodification of girls' identities by commercial interests. The book calls for a greater understanding of these issues and the development of strategies to help girls navigate the complexities of online identity construction and social interaction. Overall, *GirlWideWeb* provides a thoughtful and nuanced analysis of the ways in which girls use the internet to express themselves and connect with others, while also highlighting the potential risks and challenges associated with online participation. Nonetheless, the Internet has changed, and the ways girls connect too. Their
topics of interest may not have changed much: fashion, relationship advice, makeup, and singers, but the cultural context did their understanding of it too.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Spectatorial girlfriendship

The concept of “spectatorial girlfriendship” is a term used by girlhood writer Akane Kanai to “describe the operation of the social imaginary at play here in the circulation of the blogs that invites the reader to understand forms of girlhood as both representatives of both the blogger and reader as girlfriends who have certain experiences and knowledge in common” (Kanai, 2017, p. 190). That is to say, the ways in which online content creators (bloggers) and their readers develop and create friendships based on mutual experiences and understandings of girlhood. Therefore, Kanai puts at the center of her analysis of digital girlhood, the act of reading as a social practice but also as a creative and affective act. Indeed, bloggers share their thoughts online via images and pieces of text that are then received, perceived, recognized, and eventually reshared to other online girls. In the case of her study, Akane Kanai mainly refers to GIFs as the recipients of this process. Although GIFs are quite passé in today’s digital landscape, Kanai’s focus on them is explained by its tridimensional aspect. That is to say, a GIF is a short-animated image “capturing about three seconds of movement from diverse media material” (Kanai, 2017, p. 185) from movies, TV shows, or viral internet videos such as memes combined with text (caption) describing a specific but relatable situation. As for today, this could be applied to memes that could be identified as the successors of GIFs. Therefore, in order to understand such memes or GIFs, Kanai explains that the reader has to relate to certain situations tied to a set of “gendered social imaginary” that shapes the way in which “commonality and connection with other girl participants in the public may be felt” (Kanai, 2017, p. 185). Therefore, Akane Kanai proposes the term “spectatorial girlfriendship” to demonstrate how the self is set in the public’s imaginary, and, amongst other remote girlfriends through the act and process of reading (Kanai, 2017).
As a matter of example, right above, are two memes found on Instagram girlbloggers’ pages. On the right, the meme refers to another meme that has been recuperated and shifted in meaning by girls online. Originally, the picture was meant to illustrate a “bimbo” picking up a book and gradually fading from pink hyperfeminine clothes to a muted and “simpler” attire. This shift implies that reading and engaging in “intellectual” activities is incompatible with being part of what we could call stereotypical femininity and thus, that so-called “bimbos” are incapable of using their intellect. In recent years, Twitter users, switched the picture to make it seem like the girl in grey was dropping her book and turning into a bimbo. Some memes even refer to the two girls in the picture as girlfriends, going against the idea of feminine competitiveness and the total opposition of girls that read and girls that wear makeup. The birth of the new meme also came along with the term “bimbofication”, which describes the reversed phenomenon shown in the picture below.

As a result, the original misogynistic meme has been reappropriated by girls and young women to negate the idea that engaging with “girl stuff” is opposite to anything intellectual, or at least
to the current idea and understanding of what demands intellect. Moreover, the picture has been turned into a meme for girls to express deeper experiences of femininity and other experiences. Therefore, when the “bimbo” in the first picture “remembers” and “forgets”, she calls to stop thinking to avoid suffering. In that case, I analyze that what is called to be forgotten are all the hardships related to girlhood. As a result, “bimbofication” is understood as both feminist and escapist. That is to say, being a bimbo is no longer degrading, but a way to embrace and contradicts the mockery of femininity and escape the world it is emanating from. Thus, spectatorial girlfriendship is not to be understood by the opposition of artifice and reality, but rather by “the relation to others offering particular forms of belonging, structured through a social imaginary underpinned by discourses of girlhood” (Kanai, 2017, p. 190). Below, is the caption accompanying the “girls when they forget” meme.

**pauvreison** ignorance is bliss. bimbocore is ignorance. therefore bimbocore is bliss

March 8

*Figure 9 Caption to “Girls when they remember, Girls when they forget” meme posted by @pauvreison 03/08/2023*

Therefore, the practice of reading under the scope of spectatorial girlfriendship demands a common understanding of digital culture but also a certain level of sameness between the blogger and the reader. Indeed, as the reader must “draw on personal and social imagination” (Kanai, 2017, p. 195) to transform the bimbo that “forgets” into a meaningful scene of girlhood, the reader’s social location is a key requirement to enter a spectatorial girlfriendship. As a result, the process of spectatorial girlfriendship, inevitably and must produce insiders and outsiders to fulfill its function (Kanai). Therefore, spectatorial girlfriendship is exclusive, in the sense that it depends on “assumptions of sameness and universality” (Kanai, 2017, p. 195) that may descend from the dominant’s views related to class, race, and social locations (Kanai). Reflecting on the second meme on the right: “me” surrounded by items such as a Dior perfume, Dior lipgloss, Lana Del Rey’s Albums, and Ottessa Moshfegh My Year of Rest and Relaxation, we can assume that in order to relate, and to be “that girl” in the bed, the reader needs to own one of these items, or at least, dispose of the right cultural capital to enjoy it. Moreover, Kanai expresses that this process not only can be understood as the “process through which concrete audiences engage with knowledge of girlhood […] but also produces them” (Kanai, 2017, p. 191). As observed in the bimbo example, these two things are intertwined and are the base of the circulation of online girl culture. Equally important to the concept of spectatorial
girlfriendship, is to be aware that the commonality between girlfriends does not necessarily equal friendship but “an assumption of common knowledges and reference points and reference points within parameters of normative femininity including a shared understanding of affects linked to girlhood discourses” (Kanai, 2017, p. 190).

4.2 Bedroom culture

Bedroom culture is a theory developed by Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber in an essay called “Girls and Subcultures”. The predicament of that theory is simple, it all started from an observation: the absence of girls from subcultural ethnographic studies (McRobbie & Garber, 2000). Preceding two questions, where can we find girls and how do we make sense of this invisibility (McRobbie & Garber, 2000)? Indeed, according to McRobbie and Garber, girls are not completely absent, but rather studied and presented under one stereotypical angle: “dumb, passive teenage girls, crudely painted” (McRobbie & Garber, 2000, p. 12). Moreover, when girls seem to be included in such studies, they usually are peripheral to the main subjects: boys. As a result, when girls are present in boys’ subcultural spaces, they are acknowledged for their sexual attractiveness, pushing them to the rank of an extension, an accessory, reinforcing one boy’s subcultural identity. For instance, McRobbie and Garber use the example of the motor-bike boys’ subculture and the ways in which “motor-bike girls” were presented in Paul Willis’ study about the subgroup. As exposed by McRobbie and Garber, Willis shows a certain inability to understand the presence of girls in the motor-bike subculture other than “a common desire for an attachment to a male and a common inability to attract a man to a long-term relationship” (McRobbie and Garber, 12, 2000, p. 12). Not only does Willis dismiss girls’ ability to be participants of their own, but he also fails to understand and evaluate girls’ behaviors evolving in such groups. Consequently, he emits comments on the girls’ answers to his questions such as “unforthcoming, unwilling to talk and they retreat, in giggles in the background” (McRobbie & Garber, 13, 2000, p. 13). To that, McRobbie and Garber ask: is this the result of being observed by a male researcher, or is this just the way girls negotiate space in a “male-dominated and male-defined culture?” (McRobbie & Garber, 13, 2000, p. 13).

Therefore, McRobbie and Garber propose the idea that, since women are central to subordinate spheres, such as the house, girls may develop their own culture within the domestic sphere. Thus, this would explain the invisibility girls suffer from as well as the dismissive way they are described in ethnocultural studies. Indeed, according to McRobbie and Garber, the
spectacularism of boy-centered subcultures may distract us from looking into the bedroom, where girls thrive. Hence, girls develop a culture of their own in the place they are assigned to. Girls may have to negotiate with a more restricted space than their boys’ counterparts, however, this still “offers them different possibilities for ‘resistance’” (McRobbie & Garber, 2000, p. 24). For instance, McRobbie and Garber suggest that girls may use the bedroom’s space to explore and respond to their perceived girl’s status, away from boys and adult supervision, summing up bedroom culture (McRobbie & Garber, 2000). Moreover, McRobbie and Garber put up a list of 5 negotiation processes at stake within bedroom culture:

1. Young pre-teen girls have access to less freedom than their brothers. Because they are deemed to be more at risk on the streets from attack, assault, or even abduction, parents tend to be more protective of their daughters than they are of their sons […]
2. There are few restrictions in relation to joining this mainstream and commercially based subculture. It carries no strict rules and requires no special commitment to internally generated ideas of ‘cool’. Nor does it rely on a lot of money […]
3. Membership carries relatively few personal risks. For girls of this age, real boys remain a threatening and unknown quantity […]
4. The kind of fantasies which girls construct around these figures play the same kind of role as ordinary daydreams […]
5. Girls who define themselves actively within these teenybopper subcultures are indeed being active, even though the familiar iconography seems to reproduce traditional gender stereotypes […] These girls make statements about themselves as consumers of music for example […] this potentially awkward and anonymous space can be, and is transformed into a site of active feminine identity. (McRobbie & Garber, 2000, p. 23)

Thus, through this list, McRobbie and Garber give a way to read and understand how girls might organize their cultural life. Indeed, we find in this list similar observations to what girl culture is according to other girlhood writers. That is to say, having to negotiate a restricted sphere and restricting culture and creating forms of resistance within the ‘mainstream’ and material culture. Therefore, McRobbie and Garber use the example of teenybopper subcultures, which appear to be inoffensive at first since they fit traditional gender stereotypes, and are actually a place for girls to explore their sexual identity and desires within the walls of their rooms. However, due to their time, I can imagine, McRobbie and Garber’s Bedroom culture fail to see further heteronormative imagery and imagination. Indeed, when referencing
teenybopper subcultures, McRobbie and Garber frame fandom culture under a heterosexual lens:

Sexual experience is something that most girls of all social classes want to hold off for some time in the future. They know, however, that going out with boys invariably carries the possibility of being expected to kiss, or ‘pet’. The fantasy boys of pop make no such demands. They ‘love’ their fans without asking anything in return. The pictures which adorn bedroom walls invite these girls to look, and even stare at length, at male images […] These pin-ups offer one of the few opportunities to stare at boys and to get to know what they look like. (McRobie & Garber, 2000, p. 23)

This centers boys and the idea of being involved in a future relationship with one of them in bedroom culture. Of course, this relationship with male idols can be a privileged and safe way to explore love and heterosexual desires, but it could also be the field for bonding with other girls, or relieving loneliness and exploring their sexual orientation. Hence, Mary Celeste Kearney gives the example of Sue Wise when reviewing McRobbie and Garber’s theory. Sue Wise, as a lesbian teen was actively involved in fandom culture, particularly with the icon Elvis Presley. Her intense relationship with the singer wasn’t related to any heterosexual desire, but rather a way to fill a gap in her life and to own and entertain a private relationship. In her words, Sue Wise states:

As an adolescent I had been a very lonely person, never feeling that I fitted in anywhere, never 'connecting' with another human being. In later years I understood this in terms of my early awareness of being gay, but at the time it was just confusing. Elvis filled a yawning gap in my life in many different ways. He was an interesting hobby when life was boring and meaningless. He was a way of being acceptably 'different' because it simply wasn't fashionable to be an Elvis fan when I was one. Most of all he was another human being to whom I could relate and be identified with. When I felt lonely and totally alone in the world, there was always Elvis. He was a private, special friend who was always there, no matter what, and I didn't have to share him with anybody. (Wise, 1984, p. 16)

Consequently, McRobbie and Garber’s bedroom culture could be enriched and expanded to more diverse narratives. Although bedroom culture has evolved, and now may operate under different circumstances, McRobbie and Garber’s contribution to youth and feminist studies cannot be understated. Their bedroom culture paved the way to understanding girls as their own cultural producers and apprehending domesticity as an active and productive place. Bedroom
culture is subcultural as long as it escapes parental and patriarchal control as well as is the battlefield for self-discovery and identity shaping through resistance.

5. Methodology

5.1 Finding the girls

When exploring a defined online community, the choice of my method was crucial. Although I already was familiar with the Girl Blogger culture, and have previously engaged with it through my media consumption, I was never in contact with or part of any online community. Therefore, my first challenge with such a group was to find a way in, without appearing like an intruder. My previous knowledge of Girl Bloggers and my social media literacy was obviously a considerable advantage. Moreover, due to my age, my gender, my personal interests, and the way I present myself online, it was relatively easy to access group chats and online creators. As I mentioned earlier, as soon as I started to follow Zoe London, a number of her followers started to follow my Instagram account in the next few hours, to days. First, I proceeded by directly contacting Zoe London by sending her a ‘DM’. I approached her with a language similar to the one that is commonly used on her page, and by the Girl Blogger community as a whole. That is to say, a friendly approach, positive words, pink hearts emojis, and general kindness, as if you were talking to your long-time best friend. Although, I still introduced myself as a Master’s student in the process of thesis writing. I explained my project and my interest in her Instagram content. I did so by introducing her to my thesis subject and by highlighting the connexions between her work and the subject of digital girlhood. I shared my intentions to analyze her content as well as the Discord group in some way or another and instructed her that I would be enthusiastic to conduct an interview with her as well. Overall, this encounter was very casual, which correlates with the overall language used by the community. Zoe London replied to my message in two days only and immediately offered to help. London expressed her interest:
As I reached out to her at the early beginning of the making of the Discord group, I had the chance to witness how the members worked together to design the server. Zoe London added me to a group chat dedicated to the building of the platform among other of her followers. This period of time was a great opportunity to get an idea of the different dynamics in the group. Some members were more active than others, some knew how to create a server on Discord and were in charge of perfecting it. Overall, the building of the server was a collective effort. Zoe London is behind the Discord initiative and helped to connect the members together, but in terms of deciding on the different types of chat rooms and adjusting settings and rules, the decision-making was community-based. Once the Discord server was established and functioning, it was advertised by Zoe London on her Instagram account as well as on other members’ page. Thus, I created an account on the platform and explained in my personal biography the reason for my presence. For ethical reasons, I did not interfere with any of the decision-making, nor did I participate in the diverse conversations happening on the server. The only moment I intervened in the chat was to look for potential participants. For that, I introduced myself, explained my situation, described my project, and offered to be contacted either via my email address or privately on my Discord account if interested. A total of 5 members reached out to me. Moreover, Zoe London also agreed to participate in my research.

5.2 Asynchronous email interviews

When deciding on my method, I had to take some parameters into account. Indeed, this community is diverse and geographically dispersed. While the group is English-speaking, I had to find a way to work with participants from different time zones, different from mine, but also different from one another. Moreover, considering the online setting, and the culture I was approaching, I wanted to find a method that was relevant to the framework and accommodating for the participants. As put into words by Nalita James, “Understanding contemporary cultures requires acknowledging, respecting, and studying the multiple overlapping spaces where people spend time” (James, 2016, p. 153). Thus, it was important for me to adjust to the digital space, which mainly works through the exchanges of texts and images. Indeed, places such as Instagram and Discord function through the activity of writing and reading. Members and followers create epistolary relationships in the short and long term (Kanai, 2017). Therefore, I decided to proceed by conducting email interviews. An asynchronous email interview is a qualitative method that consists of a repeated conversation online between a researcher and a participant within a fixed time frame (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 452). This type of method is particularly recommended when it comes to accessing niche or closed communities.
It is also fitting to discuss sensitive topics as well as to protect and guarantee the anonymity of the participants (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 459). Indeed, the email format provides a great sense of inconspicuousness and comfort. The participants can decide on the place and the time they need to answer the questions. Thus, email interviews allow interviewees to process each question, reflect on their own experiences, and answer at their own pace. Moreover, in the aftermath of the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, digital methods became more and more relevant to research (Dahlin, 2021, p. 1). Indeed, the pandemic questioned many things, but also the ways in which research is done and our relationship to work, and the location of work. Moreover, Dahlin also suggests that digital methods could be a response to the issue of climate change within the research sphere, as it avoids traveling to conduct in-person meetings. Furthermore, the method allows for a more diversified panel of participants and for an internationalized study with different time zones (Dahlin, 2021, p. 2). While this is my case, I was also dealing with participants that are “Internet savvy” (Dahlin, 2021) and not only find themselves online but also use this medium on a daily basis. Therefore, it was never a problem to contact them through digital methods or to get relatively fast answers. Our exchanges were fluid and some participants were responding exceptionally fast, even though I didn’t fix any deadline for them to give back their answers. Moreover, it is important to note that I also offered the participants to conduct the interviews via Zoom calls, if preferred. What I observed is that most participants first contacted me on Discord to manifest their interest and that no participants chose to operate on Zoom. Therefore, I believe that the method was relevant to this type of public who is conformable with digital mediums, is used to engaging with online epistolary relationships, and feel at ease with the privacy of a laptop or a mobile phone. Furthermore, in the scope of girlhood studies, I thought of the practice of writing as a reference to girls’ diary culture. In some ways, the participants and I have built a collaborative digital diary.

5.3 Asynchronous email interviews as a feminist practice

On top of adjusting my method to the digital space, I believed that it was crucial to adopt a feminist standpoint for my research. I regard my study as feminist since I aim to put to the forefront girls’ and young women’s experiences. As such, in the Handbook of Feminist Research, Marjorie L. Devault and Glenda Gross identify the notion of ‘experience’ as central within feminist studies. The notion emanates from Western feminists’ practices of collective talks between the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, Devault and Gross explain that women who were engaging in these talks were “interviewing” themselves and others like them and then working together to make sense of experiences that were both “personal” and “political” (Devault &
Gross, 2012, p. 7). As a result, qualitative research became popular and recognized as relevant and appropriate by feminist researchers “for examining self-identified women’s experiences” (Devault & Gross, 2012, p. 7). Moreover, it has been found that email interviews can act as an empowering method, which is a popular concept in contemporary feminism (Gorris Hunter & White, 2023). That is to say, the method provides space for self-reflection (James, 2016) and the ability to “name and formulate their situation” (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014, p. 455).

6. Ethical considerations

Considering my use of email qualitative interviews and the participants I reached, I had to take some steps to ensure the protection of the participants and to produce ethical research. In the case of my study, it was important to establish a feeling of trust with the participant, as it is believed to be one of the most important steps in qualitative research (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015). In order to do that, I made sure that each participant received an information letter describing the project as well as my method, under which parameters they’ll be contributing, the way the data will be processed and why, as well as a consent form with ensured anonymity. Before that, I already shared that I was writing my thesis on the subject of digital girlhood and expressed that I was looking for participants. As I was intervening in a group chat, my language was slightly less formal than in the forms, but I still made sure that my intentions were clear by describing my purpose. Moreover, after receiving the signed consent forms, and before sending the first questions, I specified again that there was no deadline to reply back and that they could take as much time as needed and thanked them for their time. Furthermore, a few people who expressed their will to participate were under the age of 18. Therefore, I explained in the email they were sent that parental consent was needed and created a form for that special case. Anonymity was granted as well simply by replacing the participant’s name with ‘participant 1’ and ‘participant 2’. Therefore, both participants’ safety was ensured, and both were aware of the way the data would be handled and the purpose of their participation.
7. Limitations

7.1 On the method

Due to the nature of my chosen method, the main limitation I had to face was time. Indeed, email interviews are more time-consuming in comparison to face-to-face interviews. This method creates a conservational thread that can last for days, weeks, or months, depending on the scale of the study. In my case, the interviews took place from the end of June to the end of July. As a researcher, the method makes you dependent on the time the participants need to answer. As a result, I could not manage to interview a large sample of participants. Obviously, this does limit the significance of my research. The sample does not provide a global and diverse view of today’s girl experience on the Internet although the participants were of different ages, nationalities, and education. Another consequential limitation is a lack of verbal and non-verbal cues that can reduce the mutual connexion between the researcher and the participant as well as more parameters to observe and analyze such as hesitation, tone, or even silence (Fritz & Vandermause, 2017). Another factor to consider is the possibility that the participants provide succinct answers and or adjust their language by shame or intimidation, which makes the interview lack authenticity. As a response, providing follow-up questions referring to the participants’ answers can help to make them feel listened to and important to the research (Dahlin, 2021). The last challenge I wish to highlight is absenteeism, which is usually to be expected when using this method. Due to the non-physical engagement and the time-consuming nature of the method, it is possible to lose participants along the way or in my case, to not receive any answer after sending the information letter and the consent form. However, the participant who did not come back to me with the consent form are the underage ones. I analyzed that as first, a simple refusal from their legal tutor, or second, the participants did not want to ask permission from an adult for various reasons. Nonetheless, I did not experience any ‘drop-outs’ from the participants who consented. As recommended by Emma Dahlin, I made sure to write back to the participants within 48 hours in order to limit their loss of interest and to manifest mine.
7.2 As a researcher

Assuming the role of the researcher, I was limited by temporal and spatial parameters, as well by my method but also by myself. First of all, why did I even choose this subject? It is obvious to say that because I am simply interested in it! But why? I identify as a woman, most of the time as a girl, I am under 25, and I am active on social media on a daily basis. I pretty much have an account on every platform available and I consume the same type of media Girl Bloggers do. As I mentioned earlier, it was a major advantage as I got accepted into these circles without any difficulty. Thus, my presence was not perceived as a threat and participants were excited to contribute to a study that represented them and their practices in a non-judgmental light. In a collaborative article *Whose Interview Is It, Anyway?* Court and Abbas highlight the influence of the researchers’ backgrounds on their work. Indeed, my own personal journey not only influenced the choice of my topic but also, and, inevitably, the way I perceived, interpreted, and analyzed the participant’s answers. One quote particularly drew my attention: “The biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct” (Court and Abbas, 2013, p. 480). Indeed, as I also engage with Girl Blogger’s culture outside my academic life, it was important to me to highlight this factor as a limitation of my study. Although I believe that hardly any researcher would come up with a topic they are not interested in, this raised the question of subjectivity in my work. Perhaps, there was a risk for me to be over-implicated in the subject matter and to self-identify with the participants. That is to say, the risk for me to project on the collected data a reality that is mine. Nonetheless, Court and Abbas’s article, emphasizes the importance of your background and interests, as it can give you the keys to reading and interpreting data: “The way we share responsibility is related to each of our particular strengths and our cultural and academic experiences.” (Court and Abbas, 2013, p. 481).
8. Analysis

8.1 A call for girlfriendship

If one thing can be said about digital girlhood, is that friendship is central. As mentioned earlier, friendship was established to be a major part of girl culture, which extends to their digital lives where girls network, connect, and exchange on topics related to girlhood (Mazzarella, 2005). Hence, in my interviews, the need for developing genuine friendships with girls sharing the same interests stood up as a common thread. Indeed, as proposed by Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, social relations could be one lens to look at girl culture, which was found to be relevant in the case of my study. For instance, Participant 2 explained that she joined the *GirlBlogSphere* in order to make friends with “likeminded” girls, in her words:

Participant 2: I saw an Instagrammer talk about how the GirlBlogSphere was a safe space for like-minded girls to come together. I wanted to join and make new friends!

The idea of a safe space here is mainly provided by the fact that the *GirlBlogSphere* was originally thought to be a girls-only space, something that cannot be controlled on social media like Instagram or Twitter. Consequently, the *GirlBlogSphere* is an invitation to girlfriendship. That is to say, when Participant 2 describes the *GirlBlogSphere* as a space for “like-minded” girls, she evokes the idea of sameness as described by Akane Kanai which enables the process of “recognition of being situated amongst a group of like-minded others” (Kanai, 2017, p. 189). In this case, the recognition process is facilitated by a number of factors, including gender, age, but also shared interests and educational background. For instance, both participants disclosed studying humanities. Here is how Participants 1 and 2 introduced themselves:

Participant 1: I am 24 years old and I am doing a master’s degree in linguistics. I also love reading and all forms of art: painting, dancing…

Participant 2: I’m a college student, studying performing arts at art school. I have an associate’s degree in fine arts and most of the topics for my projects surrounded the idea of women’s rights and diversity. I also do content creation as a hobby. This allowed me the opportunity to meet other girls my age doing the same thing.

Moreover, the *GirlBlogSphere* Discord has an entire section of channels dedicated to all subjects relating to “art”. In these channels, members can either ask for books, movies, or series recommendations or call for other members’ expertise on drawing techniques as well as share their creations and their latest “obsession”. Below, are screenshots from the art channels on the Discord group.
Therefore, the Discord’s members create a base of shared and common knowledge from which they can learn and draw inspiration. Moreover, as emphasized by the conducted interviews, the idea of showing support to other girls is primordial to the “like-mindedness” required to belong to the GirlBlogSphere group. For instance, Participant 2 explained to me that by being “like-minded” she meant “those with similar interests and values and girls who cherish genuine friendship” but also that “the GirlBlogSphere is open about valuing women and girls”. Moreover, Participant 1 disclosed feeling comfortable sharing her art with other members since “everyone is supportive”, thus she does not feel the fear of judgment on her work and describes the group in this manner “It’s such a safe space for me!”.

Thus, the idea of sameness is quite present in the Discord group, as it is one of the parameters of spectatorial girlfriendship as established by Akane Kanai. The two participants I interviewed may accidentally be from similar backgrounds and be around the same age, however, we learned that they both could find the “like-mindedness” in the group that they were originally seeking, which suggests that more members share the same ideas of sameness in the group. Therefore, girlfriendship is not only enabled by shared interests but also by a common ground consisting of supporting other members and the will to create a “safe space”. Moreover, we can understand that the members of the Discord group could be motivated by prior experiences and knowledge about the place they occupy in the world as girls and young women. That is to say, the unconditional support they decided to provide to each other as the common base of the functioning of the GirlBlogSphere could be a collective reaction to the weight of social expectations and the
stereotyping of girls’ behaviors as competitive towards each other (Kanai, 2017). Consequently, in the next part, we will further investigate this idea through participants’ own experiences.

8.2 Being a girl's girl

As mentioned above, we touched on the idea that the members of the GirlBlogSphere decided on providing support and positivity to their peers as a form of resistance against preconceived ideas about girls’ friendships and shared past experiences. Illustrating this idea, Participant 2 gave the following statement:

We want our voices to be heard, and with servers such as “girl-tips” and “personal growth”, we have the space to do so. I love being a “girl’s girl” (Participant 2)

Therefore, Participant 2 took the time to explain to me what being a “girl’s girl” is and how important the concept is regarding the making of girlfriendships in the Discord group as well as how it is an act of resistance against gender stereotypes. Thus, she shared how she was affected by the depiction of girls in early 2000s movies and books she consumed in the past:

Girls have been conditioned to compete with other girls for attention […] It definitely stemmed from the movies and books we’ve read. I can’t think of one 2000s movie where girls were not fighting over something so trivial, like a guy’s attention.

Therefore, being a “girl’s girl” counter this in the way that Participant 2 aims to do “the exact opposite of this outdated social norm”. This echoes, Jessalyn Keller’s study on girls and feminist blogging, where she argues participation in such digital circles can have positive benefits, and “one of these benefits is the formation of positive female friendships” (Keller, 2015, p. 95), which was found to be the main motivation behind both participants. Moreover, Keller explains that girl bloggers, through their networking and literacy practices, can be understood as “counter publics” that form networks “around particular discursive feminist identities and issues, coming together, dissolving, mutating, and reconvening in a fluid manner”. Thus, girl blogging can fulfill the role of feminist practice, in the way that it provides positive benefits for girls through the sharing of knowledge, tips, and advice, countering the idea of girls’ competitiveness. In this way, Keller supports the belief that digital girl friendships can “function as a much-needed support system for girls” (Keller, 2015, p. 98). For instance, Participant 1 shared that found out to have more in common with the younger girls in the group than she expected. Consequently, she felt like she could relate to them and also give advice on issues she used to struggle with in the past. For example, she recalled a girl on the Discord group
feeling very upset about getting the wrong shade of hair dye, she reported her saying that she felt “dumb but couldn’t help it”. This girl’s distress and guilt for feeling upset over something “dumb”, could be explained by the emphasis on girls’ hair as an identity maker. In the same manner, Kathleen O’Reilly-Scanlon and Sonya Corbin Dwyer studied the importance of hair and identity in the frame of girlhood. That is to say, how “tween magazines actually create anxiety about one’s female identity” (O’Reilly-Scanlon & Corbin, 2005, p. 80), which echoes Participant 2 feeling of being influenced by the representation of girls in movies. Indeed, hair relates to the self and can be the subject of a number of anxieties if it is not “right”. It could be the wrong color, but it could also be the wrong texture. For instance. Regarding this topic, Participant 1 declared that “I saw myself in her, and I also saw some of my female family members that struggled so much with their hair”, which suggests that hair topic is not limited in time and space and seems to be center of a lot of concern for girls and women. Furthermore, O’Reilly-Scanlon and Corbin, reflecting on their memory work on hair, stated that “when we look at our memories and think of them as identity-shaping, we both acknowledge that our memories focused on the power of hair and how we used hair to try to become who we wanted to be” (O’Reilly-Scanlon & Corbin, 2005, p. 89). Therefore, we can acknowledge the feelings of that Discord member as a failure to achieve her desired look, but also the person she wanted to be through dying her hair. Consequently, by sharing this experience she is not only calling for girlfriendship, but she is also creating a sense of collective memory among the girls on the server, which permits receiving and giving support.

8.3 “For some reason, we all love Lana Del Rey”

Girls’ intense relationship with music and pop singers has been long and well-documented (Susannah Stern, 1999). Indeed, as explained by McRobbie, fandom culture is privileged by girls since it acts as a “safe space” for them. As mentioned before, mainstream activities provide some form of shield, from parent’s authority and the threat of their male counterpart. Moreover, McRobbie suggests that membership in such mainstream spaces does not require much money or personal commitment and carries few risks. Furthermore, I would say that these observations are heightened by the digital context. Indeed, girls participating in online fandom groups, do not need to disclose their real identities, either commute or spend money to feel and be included in such activities. You can just create a Discord account from bed and start sharing your Top 10 all-time Lana Del Rey songs. Adding to that, from experience but also my exchanges with possible participants, the girls’ parents are not well aware of their online activities and do not
want to share about it with them. For instance, as soon as I mentioned the need for parental consent in order to participate in interviews, all the underage girls completely stopped engaging with me. This anecdote echoes McRobbie Bedroom culture’s theory but also implies that Discord’s group members cherish this space as some sort of secret garden, in imitation of a diary. Consequently, it is no surprise that the *GirlBlogSphere* Discord members engage in fandom culture. Hence, the Discord group has an entire channel dedicated to one pop singer only, which is none other than Lana Del Rey. Interestingly, she is the only personality to have one channel for herself. Indeed, the members discuss other singers, but there seems to be a general adoration for Lana Del Rey as if it is almost a requirement to enter the group. Thus, the singer quickly got mentioned in both interviews. When asked about sharing similar hobbies, Participant 1 stated:

Participant 1: For some reason, we all love Lana Del Rey and there are a couple of them who like Taylor Swift as well. I believe we also talked about Melanie Martinez at some point.

Moreover, on the fact that Lana Del Rey has her own channel on the group, Participant 2 shared her excitement and surprise:

Participant 2: That is so true! There is a whole server dedicated to Lana Del Rey fans! It’s really interesting to see how influential her music inspires people. I even see Lana memes.

“For some reason” make it seems like the shared bonding and love over Lana Del Rey is hard to explain. Indeed, I tried to ask why they all seemed to love her and got some answers relating to the ‘aesthetics’ of her music and persona, but didn’t get a clear explanation. Moreover, it is interesting to note the way Lana Del Rey is often simply referred to as “Lana” as if she was a friend or some acquaintance. Overall, it emphasizes the closeness and relatability the girls experience over Lana Del Rey. The artist has been both praised and criticized for her vintage and somewhat gloomy aesthetics. As described by Participant 2 her style represents “dark femininity and ‘sad girl Tumblr’”. The ‘sad girl Tumblr’ refers to a specific type of content that used to be generated on Tumblr, which was a popular blogging platform during the 2010s. The Sad Girl movement was defined by ID magazine in 2015 in the next manner:

Sad Girls are young women, likely from affluent Western countries, who spend their time online and embody a particular paradox: the desire to express their deepest interior feelings through an aesthetic many consider formulaic (waifish frames, cursive tattoos). (Hines, 2015)
Moreover, Lana Del Rey is often portrayed as the Sad Girl aesthetic headliner. Hence, the number of pictures of the singer illustrating ID magazine’s article on the subject. In other words, Lana Del Rey’s imagery has been referred to as “precarious aesthetics” by researcher Arild Fetveit. That is to say, Fetveit analyzes Lana Del Rey’s music videos under the frame of Judith Butler’s precariousness of life theory, from which he reads Lana Del Rey’s as “vulnerable”. Moreover, Fetveit refers to Lana Del Rey’s vulnerability not only as potentially a physical fragility but rather “the instability and risk that is fundamentally relational; it is grounded in a condition that is contingent on other people or entities” (Fetveit, 2015, p. 189). Therefore, Lana Del Rey’s existence and perception as a woman is grounded and conditioned by other people, as explained by Judith Butler:

In its surface and its depth, the body is a social phenomenon: it is exposed to others, vulnerable by definition. Its very persistence depends upon social conditions and institutions, which means that in order to "be," in the sense of "persist," it must rely on what is outside itself. (Butler, 2009, p. 33)

Thus, as a woman, Lana Del Rey is inherently vulnerable, which is something girls and other women can relate to due to their similar condition (Appendix C Figure 18). Similarly, Participant 2 stated that Lana Del Rey’s music “catered to the girl experience”, which she further explains by the main themes of the singer’s music. That is to say, songs that are about “love and heartbreak” under Lana’s “own point of view” (Participant 2), which suggest that her fans relate to her “own” subjective experiences as a woman (Appendix C Figure 19). Moreover, as an artist, Lana Del Rey conveys precarity through multiple visual strategies and narratives. One of the distinctive aspects of Lana Del Rey’s style is nostalgia, which she partly expresses through vintage clothing style, reminiscent of old Hollywood and 1960s Americana. Similarly, Participant 1 explained the artist’s appeal from what she represents and embodies for her and other fans. In her own words, she stated:

Participant 1: I personally love Lana since I was a teen. I think we like her because she embodies this carefree and wild yet delicate and poetic spirit. She also has a certain kind of melancholy attached to her songs, and I think the sensitive ones are really drawn to it.

Once again, Lana Del Rey is affectively referred to as “Lana”, which seems to echo Participant 1 personal relationship with the singer since she was a teenager. Both participants describe quite accurately Lana Del Rey’s “precarious aesthetic” and are able to pinpoint the singer’s antinomic qualities: “wild” but yet “delicate” as stated earlier by Participant 1. Moreover, Arild Fetveit in
his analysis of Lana Del Rey’s music videos also pointed out these paradoxes, but this time, visually as part of her “precarious aesthetic”. For that, he uses the example of her *Summer Time Sadness* music video, where two young women, who in their summertime sadness throw themselves to their deaths” (Fetveit, 2015, p. 190). Fetveit, thus highlight the combination of beauty and death and its aestheticization in the video, he states that “a curious sense of beauty emanates from the potentially shortened duration of a life lovingly lived” (Feveit, 2015, p. 192).

Lastly, a final quote from Fetveit regarding Lana Del Rey’s aesthetic, which I believe reinforces the way both Participants qualified the singer:

> Love propels the persona evoked by Del Rey out of the monumental, sad, and melancholic yearning for the past to a playful and innocent life lived, as if the past has become her present, unfolding in the now. (Fetveit, 2015, p. 193)

Thus, it is interesting to observe how young women under the age of 25 feel drawn and connected to Lana Del Rey, now 38 own nostalgia and melancholy using old Hollywood and the 1960s Americana imagery. However, we learned that this could be achieved through the process of recognition as theorized by Judith Butler. Indeed, we understood that both participants feel a deeper personal connection with fellow *GirlBlogSphere* members, to the point of dedicating to” Lana” and “Lana” only a channel in the group. This could be explained by multiple factors, but the most important one we decided to focus on is, what Lana Del Rey embodies and represents: a precarious, delicate, and yet wild and morbid femininity that appeals to girls and young women but also reflect their own experiences. Finally, we could even argue that the relationship between Lana Del Rey and her fans stems from the concept of spectatorial girlfriendship as girls and young women read through her text personal experiences that are rooted in common knowledge and social imagination of girlhood drawn from “codes of feminine poise and postfeminist sexual discernment” (Kanai, 2017, p. 95). Indeed, both participants shared their thoughts on the way Lana Del Rey’s persona and aesthetic can be tied to normative views on women. Hence, Participant 1 statement:

> Participant 1: I must admit myself that her aesthetic has gone beyond her own person and some people use it to promote traditional values in women, and I think that’s something we should all reflect on.

Consequently, even within fan culture heightened by *spectatorial girlfriendship*, girls seem to be aware and are able to reflect on the “ins and outs” of such phenomena. Even though Lana Del Rey’s fans seem to be aware of the problems surrounding the artist, they still indulge in her world of feminine sadness. As Participant 1 stated, “The sensitive ones are really drawn to it”.
Moreover, indulging in such aesthetics and manifesting feminine sadness in radical ways was also read as a form of resistance by previous “Sad Girls”. For instance, Audrey Wollen who coined the “Sad Girl Theory”, explains that girl’s sadness is an act of protestation, a “Sad Girl” isn’t weak or passive, but rather as she suggests:

Sad Girl Theory is the proposal that the sadness of girls should be witnessed and re-historicized as an act of resistance, of political protest. Basically, girls being sad has been categorized as this act of passivity, and therefore, discounted from the history of activism […]. Girls’ sadness isn’t quiet, weak, shameful, or dumb: It is active, autonomous, and articulate. It’s a way of fighting back. (Wollen, 2015)

Thus, as proposed by Wollen herself, Lana Del Rey is also a “Sad Girl” reclaiming female sadness as a political stand, from which her fans read themselves into and form girlfriendships “tethered to a common position in affects and discourses of femininity” (Kanai, 2017, p. 194).

8.4 Logging back to the perfect world of girlhood

In fact, on social media, I didn’t notice that strong sense of girlhood like I did with PC games and forums I stumbled on. My first experience on online games was like a child discovering candy. If I could see myself, I probably had wanderlust all over my face. It was like an escape into a whole new world. A perfect world in my opinion. (Participant 2)

In order to better understand the participants’ relationships to social media and digital culture as a whole, I asked them to share their first memories of logging on to the digital world as well as any shaping anecdote. Thus, both participants recalled with a lot of enthusiasm playing PC games quite frequently. Hence Participant 2 reaction to the request: “I absolutely adore this question” which suggests a strong and positive connection to digital culture in relation to their past selves. For instance, Participant 1 and Participant 2 both used to play online Barbie games, which translates Barbie in the frame of Bedroom Culture into the digital world. Indeed, girls could play dress up with their dolls but they could also do the same behind their screen,Participant 1 stated that she “used to play dress up games a lot (I religiously logged in the Barbie web and played all of them). Thus, their first approach to digital culture was inherently related to the one of Bedroom Culture and thus, girl culture. Indeed, Barbie is often described as the culminating point of girl culture and its most iconic artifact (Driscoll & Reid-Walsh, 1995). Thus, what Participant 2 painted earlier as a “perfect world”, is a place where she could endlessly indulge in girl culture through an extended and limitless bedroom that is the Internet. Moreover,
we have seen earlier that the term “girl” is used by the members of the *GirlBlogSphere* to name the members regardless of their age, by the way, “girl” is also found in the very name of the Discord group, signaling by whom and for whom the server is made for. We have also touched on the idea of nostalgia through Lana Del Rey’s music but also the heavy use of icons from the 2000s such as Paris Hilton to reclaim hyper feminity. Thus, we can understand girlhood and girl culture to be tainted with nostalgia and longing for a time in one’s life that was open for rebellion, exploration, and indulgence without the threat of adult life. Indeed, how can one not feel nostalgic about such a “perfect world” (Participant 2)? Therefore, if all women used to be girls, they’ll always be girls in mourning. Consequently, the *GirlBlogSphere* mirrors aspects of girl culture that could be found in PC games such as Barbie games and online forums, which gave Participant 2 a strong sense of girlhood when she was younger. Thus, the *GirlBlogSphere* provides space for its members to ask questions and share advice about “girls’ things” as it used to be the standard on forums. Indeed, the Discord server is divided into different channels, including a “fashion” channel, a “skincare and makeup” channel, and a “relationships” channel, echoing both Bedroom Culture as well as forums and magazines targeted at girls and young women. The difference is that the platform as well as the content is shared by girls for girls. Thus, the Discord members participate together in ritualistic aspects of girl culture as described by McRobbie and Garber in their theory of Bedroom Culture. Consequently, the *GirlBlogSphere* can, on one hand, be a space for escapism and indulging in nostalgia for the older members and, on the other hand, a safe space for younger members to explore, learn and seek mentorship among girls who understand them and went through what they are currently going through. Indeed, we have learned that girls simply do not stop being one as soon as they reach a certain age, which is explained by Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh by “how unnatural how or, rather, how “constructed, artificial and fabricated the nature of youth is” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008, p. xxvi). Therefore, “girl” as an identity is malleable and is a term to which a person can relate as long as they feel some sort of belonging. Indeed, as suggested by Celeste Kearney, the use of the term is far more widespread within “girls only” spheres, which suggests that girlhood is entertained in relationships with other girls. For instance, a young woman may not feel like a girl at work, in her everyday life, assuming “adult” responsibilities, but as soon as she logs on to the *GirlBlogSphere* she logs back into the world of girlhood and may feel again like a “girl”, in a space where it is safe and celebrated to be one.
9. Concluding discussion

This research aimed to better understand the ways in which girls and young women make use of social media to network, develop communities, and create “safe spaces” for themselves. For that, I got interested in a specific online community made by girls for girls that found its place on the Discord application. Thus, this group reminiscent of the blogging culture called the GirlBlogSphere, aimed to be a space for like-minded girls to meet, chat, and develop friendships around similar interests within the frame of girlhood. Therefore, to help me study the GirlBlogSphere case, I asked the next 3 questions:

RQ1 How do girls establish and maintain safe spaces online in a case study looking at a Girl blogging community?
RQ2 What are the members of the Discord server seeking that conventional social media platforms don’t provide?
RQ3 In which ways do the GirlBlogSphere community online practices fall within the scope of feminism?

Consequently, I conducted 2 asynchronous interviews among active members of the group. These interviews took place for a month, starting from the beginning of June to the end of July. Unfortunately, Zoe London, Instagram creator, and person at the origin of the GirlBlogSphere, couldn’t participate in the study as I hoped, which would consequently have enriched my study. The sample being small and restricted in age, location, and social background, the study does not give an overview of the way girls use the Internet today, but rather a deep and specific testimony of how a group of girls and young women decided to make use of a certain part of the Internet in 2023 under a post and Covid 19 world in the West. Indeed, the GirlBlogSphere has been created in 2023, stemming from a context of nostalgia and revival of girlhood on social media by an English-speaking Instagram creator with English-speaking followers. Nonetheless, I analyzed the collected data within four distinct parts. Thus, each of the parts corresponds to four main themes that stood out in both interviews. Therefore, the first part highlighted the concept of “girlfriendship” as central to the interviewees’ participation in the GirlBlogSphere. Indeed, as proposed by Akane Kanai, the concept of spectatorial girlfriendship stems from a common understanding and a shared social imaginary of girlhood and its postfeminist roots in order to create friendships via the exchanges of texts and images online. Thus, through the practice of reading and exchanging texts and images, both
participants not only responded to the call for girlfriendship that the GirlBlogSphere is but also made friends on the base of “like-mindedness” as they stated. The GirlBlogSphere Discord is divided into channels each being dedicated to one particular topic, every member can participate and share based on their expertise and interests. Thus, members can find tips and advice from peers that share similar experiences but also can gain self-confidence. Indeed, the participants were very “vocal” about their intent to support other girls and shared instances when they related to a younger member, and helped them but also moments they received helped themselves and applied it to their daily lives. This brings us to the second part, which investigates the idea of resistance through the making of positive female friendships. Indeed, the participants disclosed actively going against the idea of “female competitiveness” that they’ve been taught by watching movies and TV shows in their childhood. For that, they aim to show unconditional support to other members of the group and advocate for openness to other people’s ideas and beliefs as well as positivity. Moreover, we have seen that the GirlBlogSphere was thought to be a more or less controlled place, for girls and girls only. This reinforces the idea of feminist resistance through the idea of sameness but also a safe and positive space for girls to make friendships without parental or masculine control. Thus, the GirlBlogSphere is a place to indulge in specific interests that have been long associated with girl culture without any fear of being judged or mocked by external forces. Indeed, we observed a general love for singer Lana Del Rey, being the only artist to have a dedicated channel in the group. Therefore, pictures and memes of the singer are exchanged proficiently as the currency of spectatorial girlfriendship. Thus, members not only develop friendships around her but also seem to feel very close to “Lana” and engage in a spectatorial girlfriendship with the artist, relating to her persona and lyrics. Hence Lana Del Rey’s precarious aesthetic that her fans understand too well. Indeed, Lana being the certified “Sad Girl” that she is, compels for unapologetic displays of sadness, melancholia, and interest in love. This sadness has been reappropriated by fans as a non-passive form of activism, going against associations between sadness and weakness. Therefore, the GirlBlogSphere is a place where its members can express themselves in many ways, they can be hyper-positive but also display forms of sadness and anxiety about the world that surrounds them. Consequently, the GirlBlogSphere seems to be an ideal and privileged place can engage in activities and behaviors associated with girlhood and thus passivity without being deemed as such. Finally, this brings us to the last part of the analysis emphasizing the nostalgic dimension of the participant’s online activities. Indeed, both are in their early to mid-twenties and displayed strong affection towards girl culture, especially through their digital lives as younger girls. As a result, having in mind what has been observed, engaging with the
GirlBlogSphere is a way for them to log back into a perfect world, the world of girlhood as imagined by Zoe London and her followers where “life is better when you girl boss together” (London).

In this study, I’ve addressed a renewed niche on social media which is girl blogging. Indeed, youth keeps evolving but the trends, memes, and social media platforms are changing every day even faster. Thus, due to its unpopularity girl studies seems to be somewhat struggling to keep track of it all. Blogging has been studied by girlhood researchers, but blog culture has shifted and girl bloggers are more than ever aware of the feminist discourses and the world surrounding them. Indeed, it is hard to avoid the overwhelming amount of news and information when most of your time is spent online. Girl bloggers are certainly girls of their time, and so were the Riot Grrrls and the Go-Go Girls. Moreover, we have seen earlier how girlhood is tied to modernity and materiality. Thus, it has been deemed somewhat manufactured. Indeed, it is fair to question and have a critical view of how and by whom “girl” material and cultural production is made. Almost everything that has been studied and stated in this thesis, results from Western big corporations and cultural industries, such as Mattel. Therefore, we could eventually talk about a form of girlhood imperialism. However, girls have shown to be extremely creative and have found ways to reappropriate some of these objects, in relation to their own condition. Consequently, for further girlhood researchers, I would suggest to keep going and studying this constantly evolving field through all new lenses that the Internet is providing. Furthermore, to include as many and as diverse participants as possible to highlight the many different faces of girlhood, something that I, unfortunately, didn’t have the time and resources to do.
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Appendices

1. Interviews transcripts
   1.1 Interview thread 1

19/06/2023

1. Can you introduce yourself? Who you are, what you do, and anything that you believe is relevant.

My name is Celia/Cero. I’m 24 years old and I’m doing a master’s degree in linguistics. I also love reading and all forms of art: painting, dancing…

2. When did you join the Discord group and what compelled you to join?

I joined a few months ago, when Zoe announced it on her Instagram story. I was already in a group chat with some of Zoe’s followers, so I thought it will be interesting to join Discord, even when I didn’t really know how to use it that much!

3. Can you describe with as many details as you can what you do in the Discord group?
   What happens there?

It depends on the day! Sometimes I just make jokes, I talk about my day, or I give some advice. Since some girls are younger than me and struggle with things I did at their age, I try to be extra supportive and empathic with them.

I also love sharing my art there because everyone is super supportive, and I love seeing other people’s pieces. Finally, I vent in the channels designated to do it (the kids have no access to this one). It’s such a safe space for me! For some odd reason, I think this little community helps us grow in some way.

20/06/2023

4. You’re 24 years old, we are the same age. I always refer to myself as a 'girl' even though I am supposed to be a woman. How do you identify yourself? I also noticed that the word 'women' is absent from the vocabulary of the girl blogger community in general, but also in Zoe's content and the Discord. Why do you think it is that way? How do you feel about it?
Since English isn’t my first language, I tend to change how I identify myself as. I see “girl” as way too young for me, so I think I might use more “woman”. However, in Spanish I always refer to myself as “chica” which would be similar to girl. I think most of them use girl because they are actually pretty young, but I think the kind of memes we consume plays a significant role in it too. For example, there’s this trendy meme about being “just a girl”, so I think that also affects everyone’s vocabulary.

5. Can you tell me more about this group chat? How did you connect with Zoe's followers? Are they around your age range? What would you say is your main connecting point?

At first, I didn’t really connect with them. I knew Zoe and we talked a bit, we are around the same age. However, the rest is younger, so I was a bit uncomfortable being there, I wasn’t even sure I could be there, so I asked Zoe, and she told me it was fine. Then I started engaging with the group chat and I realized we had a lot in common: same hobbies, same liked artists, same struggles… Of course, I’m older, so I have a different perspective in some topics, but it’s nice to have a community with similar tastes than you. I’m also protective about them, so I warn them about the possible dangers of the Internet.

6. Could you give an example of a piece of advice you gave in the group? What are the kind of struggles the younger girls are dealing with that you relate to?

I always tell them not to worry so much. The other day, a girl was talking about how upset she was because she didn’t get the right shade of hair dye, and she was telling us she knew it was dumb, but she couldn’t help it. I saw myself in her, and I also saw some of my female family members that struggled so much with her hair. Moreover, when I was younger, I too struggled with some aspects of my image and with feeling guilty for being a bit sensitive, so I told her it was completely okay to express your feelings.

7. What are the topics you usually vent about in the designated channel? Do you get answers from the members? How is it contributing to your well-being?

Mainly anxiety related stuff, and I do get answers from the members. It’s helping me feel less alone with my own issues, and sometimes they give me a fresh perspective.
8. In what way do you believe the Discord group helps the members to grow? Do you have an example of something that has impacted your own growth?

Once, I was really anxious and frightened about meeting with a friend. I was telling them that and someone suggested me to go because if I didn’t, I’d probably regret it later. She told me it was completely okay to feel scared, she struggled with it too, but there was no real danger out there. That really helped me and I managed to go! Sometimes I remember that comment when my social anxiety is overwhelming me and I go out! There’s also a channel for personal growth, seeing other people archive their goals, no matter how big or small, inspires me a lot.

21/06/2023

9. You mentioned sharing similar interests with the girls, such as hobbies and artists. Could you share the name of the artists and other hobbies?

For some reason, we all love Lana del Rey and there’s a couple of them who like Taylor Swift as well. I believe we also talked about Melanie Martinez at some point. The hobbies we share are drawing, reading, writing poetry, watching films, taking photographs and just appreciating fashion, there are separate channels for all of them, so it’s easier to talk about them.

10. You said that you warned some of the girls about the "dangers of the Internet", were you ever the victim of these dangers? What kind of dangers were they?

I actually had to face some strange interactions with strangers online, but I grew up a thick skin about insults, death threats or weird dudes being… weird. However, many of my friends were severely cyberbullied or groomed, so I think that’s why I’m so protective. On the other side, there’s a part of the internet full of young girls that romanticize eating disorders, so I think that’s also something to be aware of.

11. You talked about struggling with your own image in the past and you mentioned the topic of hair. Are you still dealing with it? Do you believe that the Discord group helps when it comes to self-image, as it is a big topic for girls? Also, if you have a specific memory about your hair, could you share it with me (or something else)?
I really didn’t struggle that much with my hair, but the girls in my family have always had an issue with it since they want straight hair, when ours is naturally wavy! I started going blonde at 16, but I’ve had some other colours, for a while I was a ginger, I had pink highlights… I don’t have much issue with it. However, I must say that I have a chronic illness and for a while it made my hair fall out a bit, and I felt really stressed. I think that, for some odd reason, hair is really linked with our identity and I completely understand the stress of not identifying with it.

12. In your opinion, what makes the Discord group unique and special compared to other online communities or social media platforms? How does it stand out in terms of fostering meaningful connections, and personal growth, as well as creating a safe space?

I’m not quite sure about the number of members, but I think the fact that it isn’t really that clogged (as some other servers or communities are) helps us get to know each other better. Additionally, I think the mod’s work is great, they don’t really let anyone be intolerant with other religions, cultures… They are quick to give warnings. Finally, since we are all followers of Zoe or similar accounts, I think we share beliefs and ideals, so there’s no space for harassment of any kind.

In my opinion, all of this contributes to creating a safer environment than in other social media platforms such as Instagram or Twitter. Even though you can make your “own bubble” in those, I believe it’s hard to keep it safe. For example, I created a Twitter account about fashion and photography, and it was great for a while, but then the algorithm kept showing me thinspo tweets. I think that can be really damaging, especially when you’re younger.

26/06/2023

13. How would you explain this intense love for Lana Del Rey in Zoe's community? Can you explain what you like about Lana Del Rey and about her songs and persona?

I personally love Lana since I was a teen. I think we like her because she embodies this carefree and wild yet delicate and poetic spirit. She also has a certain kind of melancholy attached to her songs, and I think the sensitive ones are really drawn to it. However, I must admit that her aesthetic has gone beyond her own person and some people use it to promote traditional values in women, and I think that’s something we should all reflect on.
14. You mentioned the romanticization of eating disorders, was there ever an issue or any sensitive situation related to this topic on the Discord? How was it dealt with? Are eating disorders a common topic within the community?

I think there hasn’t been an issue on the Discord about eds, at least, not that I’m aware of. I know there are some girls who suffer one and some others who are recovered, they usually speak in the “ed-recovery” channel. However, I don’t know much else about it. Since I’ve never experienced one myself, I try not to talk too much about it because I don’t think I have anything meaningful to add to the conversation.

15. Can you explain what a 'mod' is, what are they doing and who are they? Could you share an example of when they had to intervene?

Mod stands for moderator. As the name suggests, they are some members who the admin (the person who created the server, in this case, Zoe) chose to moderate the chat and give warnings when someone is doing something against the rules. Every server has its own mods and own criteria, here they are focused on creating a safe environment for everyone. For example, someone said that she hated mean Christians, then a mod told her that they don’t tolerate disrespect of any kind.

16. You mentioned sharing similar beliefs and ideals with Zoe and the rest of the community, could you share them?

There’s a lot, but I would say we share some feminist values, a complete support for the LGTBIQ+ community, acceptance and appreciation for other cultures, empathy and solidarity with one another!

04/07/2023

17. You mentioned the potential issue of Lana Del Rey’s aesthetic being used to promote traditional values in women. Were there ever discussions happening around that? Do the members of the Discord discuss and deal with the ambiguity of such artists? I know that
many celebrities such as Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, and Kim Kardashian have been recuperated by the girl blogger community as 'feminist' icons, or at least they got transformed into memes, that Zoe London uses frequently on Instagram. How do you feel about that?

I like them! However, I think we should be a bit critical. I think we changed a bit their narratives to fit our modern times, but we should keep in mind some people like Kim Kardashian keep perpetuating some unrealistic beauty standards.

18. What is your definition of a girl blogger and how would you describe the girl blogger community? Do you yourself identify with any community?

A girl blogger is usually a young woman (a teenager or a young adult) who posts content online regarding femininity, girlhood… they share experiences that any girl can relate to such as relationships, insecurities, the journey to self-worth, etc.

19. Do you have any example of a piece of media (a book, a movie, etc.) that impacted you as a girl? Could you share it and explain how and why it has impacted you?

Black Swan. I was really young when I watched it, but I felt really connected with the protagonist. I’ve always been a really sensitive person, and since I was really young, I’ve noticed the pressure that comes along with being a woman. It feels like we should be perfect all the time, we also have to find a balance between not being too pure nor too sexy, and yet we have to find who we are and what we like… It’s a lost battle, and I think that’s really well portrayed in the film.

20. Could you share your own experience of girlhood in relation to digital culture and social media? Your first memories of going online, using a computer, PC games, online games, forums, blogging, first social media account, any anecdote that impacted you!

I used to play dress up games a lot (I religiously logged in the Barbie web and played all of them). When I got a bit older, I was in some fandoms like the Taylor Swift or Ariana Grande one and, even though there were some boys, it was mainly a girl space! I also really liked a
Tumblr account (now it has become a bit of the butt of a joke) which is called “justgirlythings” and it was mainly an account that posted cute photos with relatable girl experiences.

1.2 Interview thread 2

22/06/2023

1. Can you introduce yourself? Who you are, what you do, and anything that you believe is relevant.

2. When did you join the Discord group and what compelled you to join?

3. Can you describe with as many details as you can what you do in the Discord group? What happens there?

My name is Jade and I'm a college student currently studying performing arts at art school. I have an associates degree in fine art, and most of the topics for my projects surrounded the idea of women's rights and diversity. I also do content creation as a hobby. This has allowed me the opportunity to meet other girls my age doing the same thing.

I joined the discord group about a month ago, because I saw an Instagramer talk about how the GirlBlogSphere was a safe place for like-minded girls to come together. I wanted to join to make new friends!

I join in conversations regarding needing or giving advice. I like to engage with other users on serious topics where they may need other's opinions without judgement. For example, there is a "venting" server where other's open up about whatever is going on in their life. I find that more often than not girls are opening up about how they are viewed. We want our voices to be heard, and with servers such as "girl-tips" and "personal-growth", we have a space to do so. I love being "a girl's girl" if you will. Lifting people up is something I try to do in the group. Occasionally, I ask for advice myself. Whether it be relationship focused or motivation related, I find that this group is a non-judgemental, helpful way to meet other girls going through similar ways of life.
4. You referred to the Girlblogosphere as a "safe space for like-minded girls". Could you explain what it means? What makes you and the other discord members "like-minded"? What do you share in common?

5. Could you share some examples of advice you've been given and that you gave? Did you notice any recurrent topics?

6. In what ways do you contribute to fostering a sense of empowerment and inclusivity within the Discord group, particularly when discussing topics related to women's rights and diversity? Are there any specific initiatives or discussions you have been involved in that address these issues? In what way the Discord group is different from other forms of social media regarding these issues?

7. You said that you love being a "girl's girl", could you explain the term and what it entails and mean to you?

By like-minded, I mean those with similar interests and values, and girls who cherish genuine friendships. The GirlBlogSphere is open about valuing women and girls. There are channels for empowerment, such as Feminism, which is one example of things I share in common with users I talk to. I, and the users alike, joined this group for a reason. Each person has their own of course. Meeting others who wanted genuine connections to chat about different topics without the worry of social media toxicity was important to me. I've met a couple girls in particular that I'm so glad I met through this group. We talk almost everyday! We have similar interests in art, fashion, politics, etc.

There were a couple of girls that wanted advice on how to handle situations with friends or partners in the several channels specifically for those topics. For example, I told one girl that if she felt hurt about her friend casually joking about something that hurt her feelings that she should consider being direct and telling her friend why she was distant after the fact. Most of the topics in the relationship and friendship channel revolve around how these girls felt during these situations, but also advice on how to handle difficult situations. A common theme I personally notice is that a lot of the time, members don't want to come off harsh or abrasive, so they don't speak their mind. This is just my experience from the patterns I've noticed, especially from younger members.
If I see a comment (in any server really) where someone mentions a win that they have, something special that happened or that they earned and wanted to share, I bring them up and congratulate them. This especially comes into play with a few of the members around my age, who are in college getting a degree in a "male dominating field", such as STEM. But aside from that, I love seeing girls coming together to note each other's differences and bringing each other up. I have not personally been involved in any conversations regarding women's rights directly, but women's empowerment in male dominating spaces and social norms concerning women. I find that this discord group is different from most social media platforms solely because it's more genuine and unfiltered. Certain words (that are not bad words or harmful) are banned off of apps like Tiktok and Instagram, because of how the algorithm works. With this group, girls have the ability to speak their mind and vent, or talk about their interests without having their comments removed for saying the word "white". I also find that this group is wholesome enough where I've never personally experienced any hate toward another user. When girls speak about issues like women's rights, there is not a nasty retort from male users, because this is a safe space specifically for the girls.

For so long, girls have been conditioned to compete with other girls for attention. It may not have been inherent, but it definitely stemmed from the movies we watched, books we've read, etc. I can't think of one 2000's movie where girls were not fighting over something so trivial, like a guy's attention. I grew up thinking that this is the norm, and it most certainly is not. Being a "girl's girl" means that I do the exact opposite of this outdated social norm. I'm rooting for girls in every way I can, no matter if it's as small as a compliment or something more. identifying as such means that I no longer see women as competition, but as close friends and girlbosses.

I've talked a bit about this before, but this group is a safe place to talk about a variety of different topics. It's peaceful, and free of any hate, as it's not allowed in the group. I appreciate how everyone is respectful of each other, and their differences, whether it be sexuality or cultural differences. There is just a sense of genuine nature in the group that I love!

24/04/2023

9. You mentioned the toxicity of traditional social media, could you share your experience with it and explain how and why it is toxic?
10. Were you already following Zoe on Instagram before joining the Discord group? If so, could you describe her content and what makes it special?

11. Another participant that I am interviewing at the moment told me that one of the main shared interests in the community is Lana Del Rey, how would you explain it? What is so special about Lana Del Rey?

12. Do you have any example of a piece of media (a book, a movie, etc.) that impacted you as a girl? Could you share it and explain how and why it has impacted you?

13. Do you know if any boys/men are in the Discord group? How is their presence dealt with? Were there any intruders?

14. Can you explain 'girlboss'? How is it used by the community? I know that the expression was made fun of a lot by gen z and reappropriated and 'memefied', what is your view on the term?

Certain Instagram pages, such as @femon of backlasinist, receive a lot of pushback from people who don't agree with their views, whether that be Trans healthcare, abortion rights. This is just one example that came to mind first, but social media opens the door for conversation and arguments. Not necessarily health arguments. I usually see personal attacks and borderline cyber-bullying.

I actually did not. I found out about the group from another member mentioning it in her stories. I forgot her name, I apologize.

That is so true! There is a whole server dedicated to Lana Del Rey fans! It's really interesting to see how influential her music inspires people. I even see Lana memes. I personally enjoy listening to 'Candy Necklace' myself. For a while, Lana represented dark femininity, and "sad girl tumblr" Her music catered to the "girl experience" in my opinion, as we know, Lana's songs about love, heartbreak, etc are about her own point of view. A lot of people can relate to some of her deeper songs.

I feel like my favorite films and shows as a kid impacted me the most. Magical girl shows like Barbie movies, Sailor Moon, Winx Club, etc. I was very girly and I loved everything bright and sparkly. These cartoons made me feel validated I suppose. I felt that I could be myself while doing whatever I wanted in the future.
I have seen one boy in the Discord group. He was very cordial in asking if it was okay to be a part of the group. A user or two replied and said it was definitely okay for him to be in the group as long as he was respectful, which he was! Other than this experience, I have not run into another male in the group.

"Girlboss" is a phrase used quite often now-a-days. Most people have heard of the phrase "girlboss, gatekeep, girlboss". Girlboss started as a phrase to define women who are successful in the business world. Now, the phrase seems to just describe a woman who does what she wants without caring about other's opinions, and in "man-eating" memes. I think that the term girlboss is heavily over used, but the incentive is there. I'm all up for women empowerment, so I don't mind the term in itself.

28/06/2023

15. What is your definition of a girl blogger and how would you describe the girl blogger community? Do you yourself identify with any community?

16. In what way do you think Discord as a platform is different from more traditional social media like Instagram? How do you see the future of online girls communities?

17. How has being a part of the GirlBlogSphere Discord group impacted your overall well-being and sense of belonging? Has it provided you with a sense of community and connection that you may have been seeking prior to joining?

18. Another Interviewee mentioned that Lana Del Rey's aesthetic is sometimes used to promote traditional views of women. Did you notice the same thing? Were there ever discussions happening around that? Do the members of the Discord discuss and deal with the ambiguity of such artists? I know that many celebrities such as Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, and Kim Kardashian have been recuperated by the girl blogger community as 'feminist' icons, or at least they got transformed into memes that Zoe London uses frequently on Instagram. How do you feel about that?

19. Could you share your own experience of girlhood in relation to digital culture and social media? Your first memories of going online, using a computer, PC games, online games, forums, blogging, first social media account, any anecdote that impacted you!
I'd identify a girl blogger as a girl that blogs. Simple I know. I hope to get into that field someday, so I do follow a few on social media. Rebecca Jay is a more recently known youtuber that I love.

I touched a little on this before. Discord does not censor specific words that identify with political or racial means. It doesn't matter if what's being said is educational either. Instagram's algorithm deletes any "trigger" words.

The GirlBlogSphere helped me to make friends with other girls my age with similar interests. I love making new friends, so this is a great group for me! I felt like I could talk about more "girly" (feminine) things with others that were also more feminine. In a way, I felt like I could be myself more. Everyone is so genuine and honest. I love that I could find a sense of community here.

Oh 100%. Lana's music has this old money American dream type of feel to it. The music videos, album covers, even some of her lyrics hint to traditional views of women and men. I personally have not seen any discussions regarding Lana's image in the discord group, however, I think that would be a very interesting conversation. The GirlBlogSphere treats similar artists with praise for the most part. I think these "icons" have been used for jokes and giggles and other harmless banter. The examples you mentioned are still very much loved by the group, and the clips and photos found of famous celebrities in their earlier days adds to this new age of idolization of 2000's stars. As long as it's not obsessive, why not laugh at a few jokes. (Unless it's directly bullying, then this is wrong.)

I absolutely adore this question. Games such as MovieStarPlanet, Barbie games, American Girl games, and MyScene games were a huge part of my early interests growing up. Ever since I was six years old, I played games and indulged lightly in internet culture. Social media is something I started at a later age, 14, and during that period I cared greatly for likes and views. My experience with girlhood in earlier times, I didn't care about social media's expectations of beauty. In fact, on social media, I didn't notice that strong sense of girlhood like I did with PC games and forums I stumbled on. My first experiences on online games was like a child first discovering candy. If I could see myself, I probably had wonderlust all over my face. It was like an escape into a whole new world. A perfect world in my opinion. Similar to how people view pinterest now; pure. Other special mentions, PetPetPark, Bearville, Webkinz. and Bratz games.
Figures

Appendix A: “hot girls eat”

Figure 14: Lily-Rose Depp “Recovery is Chic” by @pauvreaison on Instagram 04/30/2023

Figure 15: Rihanna “Hot Girls Eat” by @pauvreaison 06/30/2023

Figure 16: Paris Hilton “Recovery? That’s hot” by @pauvreaison 04/11/2023
Appendix B: Nicole Richie’s 2007 Memorial Day Barbecue Invite

Figure 17: Nicole Richie’s infamous email “No girls over 100 pounds allowed in. Start starving yourself now.” 05/30/2007
Appendix C: Lana Del Rey

Figure 18: Discussion around Lana Del Rey’s lyrics about rape, Discord screenshot.

Figure 19: Members sharing their love for “Lana”, explaining that she has a song for every situation and embodies two sides: “cute” and “flirty”, Discord screenshot.

Figure 20: Members calling Lana Del Rey “mother”, Discord screenshot.

Figure 21: Members discussing the songs they relate the most too, Discord screenshot.
Appendix D: Barbie games

Comparing Barbie games’ aesthetics to the GirlBlogSphere

Figure 22: Recreation of the original “Barbie Game Room”, a PC online game referred to by Participants. Barbie is playing games with friends in her room. Users can play different mini-games, screenshot.

Figure 23: Personalized emojis picked by the members of the GirlBlogSphere. Hearts, bows, Lana Del Rey, Hello Kitty, etc., Discord screenshot.

Figure 24: “Barbie Photo Shoot Game” is one of the games available in the “Barbie Game Room, screenshot.

Figure 25: @pauvreison Instagram Feed, screenshot.