ndia, "You Don't Need to

ent Everything" (**SubStack**

2024)Alex Quicho, "Every

nline" (**WIRED**, 11 Septem

mma Copley Eisenberg, "N

A Style for the Rest of Us"

na, 10 August 2017)

W6: Girl

Girl's gotta eat.

—Alex Quicho, "Everyone is a Girl Online"

What are the available modalities of female identity circulating on social media in 2024?

This is a question that I wanted to explore this week. It's a question about gender, but a question more specifically about constructions of **female** identity on contemporary social media platforms. As Alex Quicho's reference to Andrea Long Chu's book **Females** (2018) makes clear, even the idea of what "female" itself means has become disarticulated from its biological (that is anatomical) and social (gender) moorings.

So what are some dominant modalities of femaleness and/or femininity in online social environments today? In part they are cultural stereotypes we are already familiar with. Here's the beginning of a word cloud that you can contribute your own entries to:

angel complex • bimbos • influencers • Karens • Barbie • beautiful princess disorder (BPD) • SAWs • soccer moms • mom jeans • mukbang (Korean food bloggers) • Japanese VTubers • I'm literally just a girl • wanghong (Chinese influencers) • Xiaoyongshu girls •

The two articles that I assigned for us to discuss this week offer more systematic and arguably contradictory answers to our opening question: on the one hand, the cult of the Young-Girl (Tiqqun's concept, referenced and updated by Alex Quicho); on the other, the Sexy Adult Woman (SAW) modality that is challenged by what Emma Copley Eisenberg calls Frump. Here's a good example (right margin) of the kind of value that's attached to the word in mainstream culture, and from which Eisenberg wants to rescue it.

Incidentally, if you're looking for summer reading recommendations for after the course is over, Emma Eisenberg has just published a novel, *Housemates*, that's supposed to be very good.

I'm of course very curious to hear your own responses to these two articles, for the moment will limit myself to just a couple of observations that may help to get our discussion going. I've also included a Resources section at the end of today's lecture, which has links to multiple topics either referenced in the main readings or are related to them. If you are interested in focusing on gender in social media for your research project, these links may help you to narrow down and focus on something specific within the very large field of gender online.

Beautiful Princess Disorder

Perhaps the most conceptually intriguing point to come out of Alex Quicho's article is that of the girl as a form of collective identity or **networked subjectivity**. In particular, the frequent references to **girl swarms** of course takes us back to Byung-Hul Han's chapters from his book *In the Swarm* that we were discussing a few weeks back. I'm thinking in particular of passages like this one, which references a few TikTok accounts:

> Recently, some popular accounts (@chloe21e8, @lilclearpill, and @heartlock-etxo are personal favorites, though it's more useful to read these as nodes in a swarm rather than the products of any one mind) have struck a collective nerve with their embodiment of an ever-shifting mass voice that is ecstatic, girl-coded, and unknowable. "I'm so mentally stable it's insane. I have BPD, beautiful princess disorder. I'm so clear-pilled, I can see through the matrix. I'm not left-wing or right-wing, I have angel wings that grow whenever I transcend into space," goes the swarm thinking that has transcended format, individual creator, and platform to become viral TikTok audios, million-view Reels, Grimes citations, and beautiful-princess Bible verses carved into my brainstem like lovers' initials in a tree trunk.

There are some key differences between Han's and Quicho's framing of the swarm here. First, for Han, the swarm is an entirely negative consequence of networked communication, producing the kind of scapegoating and shaming culture discussed in the book *The Shame Machine*. By contrast, Quicho is pretty upbeat about the emancipatory possibilties of the girl swarm and presents the idea of the girl as a kind of "hive mind" in which individual identity is eclipsed by a wider network subjectivity. If you have any immersion in platforms like Instagram and TikTok you will have an idea of what she means.

Crucially, for Han social media is a world of *dis*connected, atomized **individuals**, in contrast to the anonymous effacement of individuals in the modern **crowd**. For Quicho, social media is the opposite. Or at least, to paraphrase Joe Jackson, It's Different for Girls…

Post-Platform

You may have noticed a few references to the term **post-platform** in Alex Quicho's article, and may have been wondering about that. This Substack article by Kyle Chayka will help with that, but the main thing to be aware of is that the term itself is now widely regarded as discredited by the emerging new social mediascape. To get a better sense of this, take a look at Sarah Marshall's recent prediction of how "We get past 'post-platform'," which provides an interesting snapshot of the rapid transformations underway in today's social mediascape. Looking through her list, it's hard to disagree that Chayka's melancholy diagnosis of the demise of legacy SM platforms is premature, along with the term "post-platform" itself. Something new is undoubtedly emerging, as we'll be discussing in the remaining weeks of the course, but even though the future looks more decentralized, social media platforms are clearly not going the way of the dinosaurs anytime soon.

Resources

frumpenberg (ECE's Instagram)

Frump Feelings (ECE's Substack blog)

Babygirls

"So babygirl! It's the new gen Z term of endearment – but what does it mean?" (*The Guardian*, 24 January 2024).

Gita Jackson, "Why sad TV men are the internet's 'babygirls'" (*Polygon*, 8 May 2023).

Alaina Demopoulos, "'Sadness is a trend': why TikTok loves 'crying makeup'." (*The Guardian*, 31 October 2022).

#MorningRoutine

Rachel Signer, "Broadcasting your breakfast: why TikTokers obsess over morning routines" (*The Guardian*, 18 February 2023).

Amalia Ulman

Website

Instagram

Alastair Sooke, "Is This The First Instagram Masterpiece?", *The Telegraph*, 18 January 2016

"Amalia Ulman: Meme Come True" (*Dazed*)

Emilie Friedlander, "Social Anxiety: Why Amalia Ulman's Fake 'Middlebrow' Instagram Is No Different From Yours", *Fader*, 7 November 2014.