

# babytrap



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# The Context

The male / female gaze is rooted in how women are visually represented and culturally perceived; which is dominantly through the lens of a heterosexual man's desire, dominance, or control. The fetishisation of girlhood links directly to historical constructions of the gaze, as described by John Berger, author of *Ways of Seeing*. He describes the male presence as dependent upon the promise of power which he expresses, in which that power could be moral, physical, economic, social, or sexual, as long as it is exterior to the man. On the other spectrum, a woman's presence reveals her own attitude to herself and is displayed through her gestures, voice, opinions, clothes, and other elements that maintain her in a restricted space, into the confinement of a man (Berger, 2008). This could be simplified into men act and women appear.

Film theorist Laura Mulvey drew from Berger's work and coined the term male gaze. She describes how media and culture frame women as passive objects of visual pleasure, reinforcing patriarchal structures. Women are inherently socialised to self-objectify to the point of becoming endlessly commodifiable (Mulvey, 1975).

Within the male gaze, infantilisation is a distinct strategy that reduces women to childlike figures, discouraging complexity and authority whilst rewarding passivity.

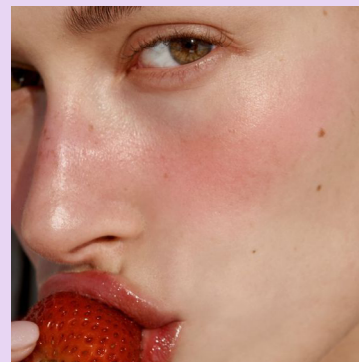
Culturally, this looks like baby-voice influencers, hyper-feminine aesthetics, youthful branding that's linked to purity and desirability (Dawson, 2020).

In practice, the female gaze is still developing and whilst it centres empathy, interiority, and complexity, it often coexists or collides with internalised patriarchal norms. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory argues an act which is being done repeatedly is performative and so sex at birth does not determine behaviour, rather societal norms that teach particular behaviour to fit in (Salih, 2006). The "my body, my choice" movement defends bodily autonomy, but in an age of reclaiming self-sovereignty under a capitalistic society, how does one uncover whether their personal identity is reclamation or another form of submission under the feminist lens? Is there a point where empowerment blurs into appeasement? These questions allow the reimagination of a woman whilst disrupting the hierarchy of who is looking and who is seen.

By recognising the nuances that follow feminism, this project focuses on the male-female gaze, with a subfocus on infantilisation, the current social shift in pop culture, to open discussions on whether trends harm or progress feminist movements without dictating what a woman must do, but evoke thoughtfulness instead of blindly following trends or aesthetics.







In a digital era where self-representation blurs who is behind the gaze, the lines between empowerment and objectification, girlhood and womanhood, become more confusing and more important to question.

53% of Gen Z women identify as feminists compared to Gen Z men at only 32% (King's College London, 2025). And that feminism exists alongside a boom in hyper-feminine trends that blur empowerment and aestheticize vulnerability. There's growing awareness of the male gaze discourse; however, challenges of infantilisation becoming a soft-power tool for internalised misogyny is at the beginning of its conversation. Within the fashion and beauty landscape, aesthetics like tradwife, office siren, coquette, and balletcore aestheticise a "soft life" whilst removing autonomy of a women, through romanticising stay-at-home narratives or seducing managers instead of working. Within clothing, peter pan collars, schoolgirl mary janes, and toy-like bags have made a strong comeback in recent design releases. Runway shows and retailers are emphasising bows, pastels, and the "babyface" look, pushed by influential celebrities such as Hailey Bieber and Kylie Jenner.

Summer 2023 is infamously known as Barbie summer. In television, the Barbie movie was critiqued for its toy-like aesthetics and using woke infantilisation to address decades long oppression within the feminism space.

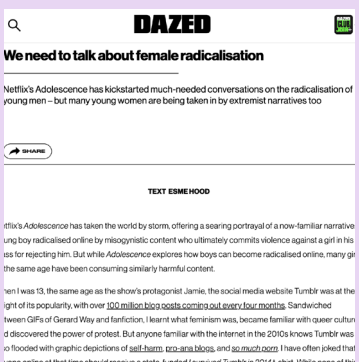
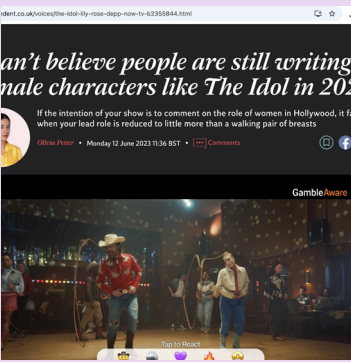
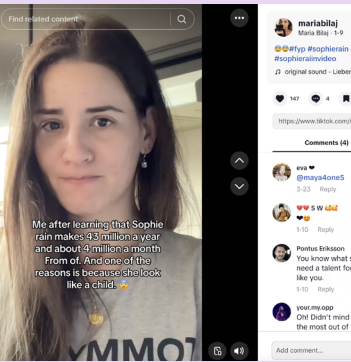
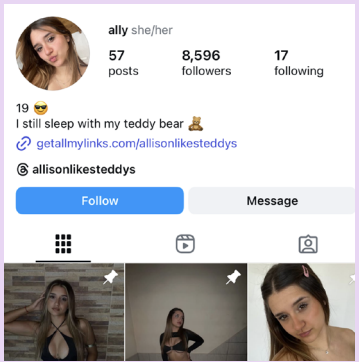
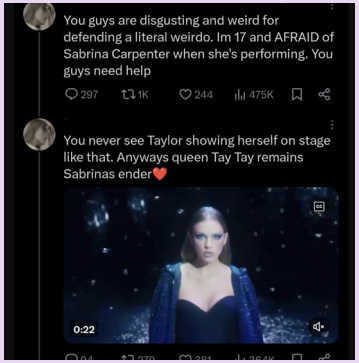
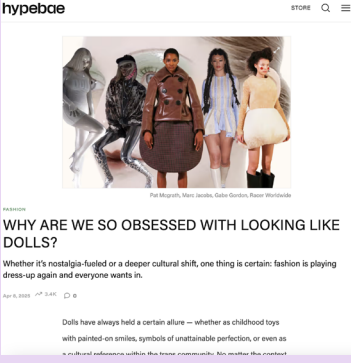
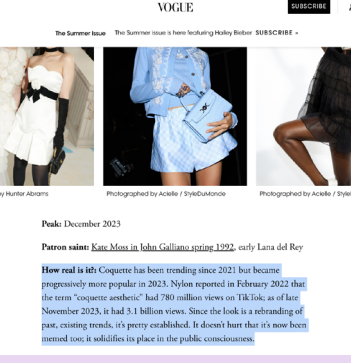
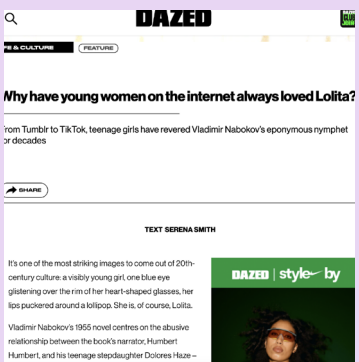
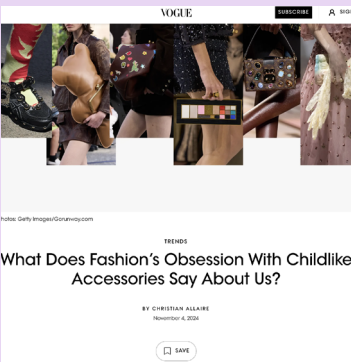
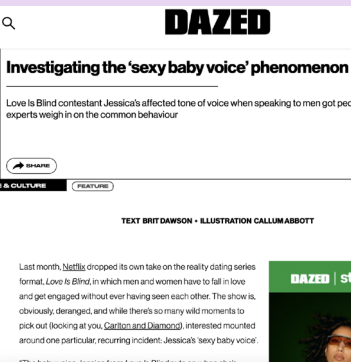
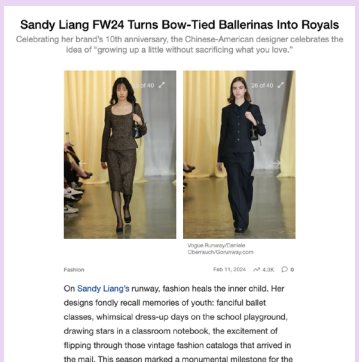
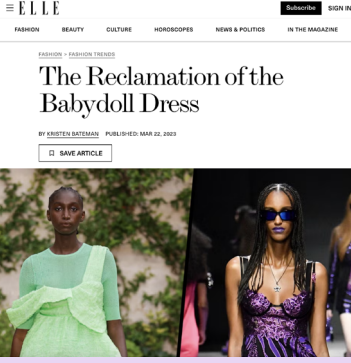
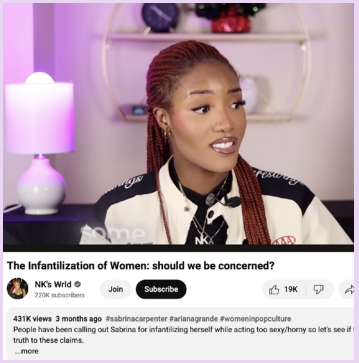
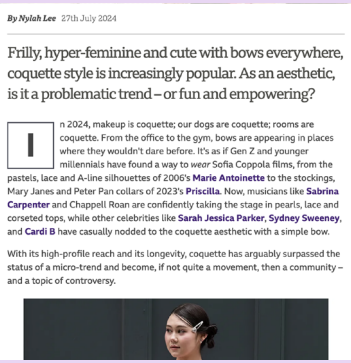
2023 wasn't just Barbie summer, but the year of the girl, where day-to-day tasks were girlified to the degree of birthing a whole lexicon. "Girl dinner" was used to justify improper eating, "girl math" was used to defend needing Sephora metaphors to learn about stocks, and "I'm just a girl" was used to account for any difficulties a women might come across, further infantilising them as those who are innocent, in need of protection, and guidance from men.

In pop culture, Sabrina Carpenter can't help but make it known she is short and sweet, with that very phrase being her personal branding. She also dresses in babydoll tees whilst performing explicit acts on stage. Her music video Taste opens up with the famous Rock-a-Bye Baby lullaby and she recreated a problematic Lolita look.

Sydney Sweeney announced she is selling her bath water and received criticism for feeding the male gaze and being out of touch with the harsh realities of what SW is and faces, consequently not only making her out of touch with the "girl community", but further infantilising herself by amplifying her bimbo aesthetic oversexualisation.

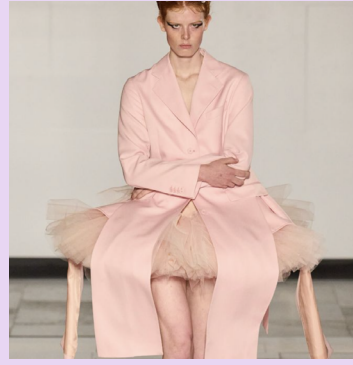
# Social Shifts

and recent media headlines





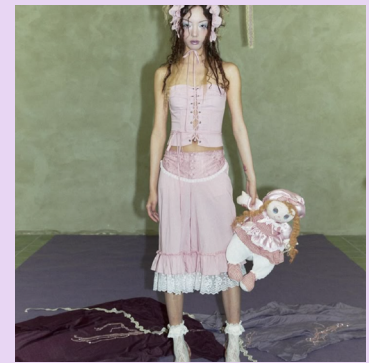
Coquette is an ultra-feminine “doll-like” look (bows, lace, pastel dresses) popular among Gen Z. Vogue reports the hashtag #coquette and related tags ballooned from ~780 million TikTok views in Feb 2022 to 3.1 billion by Nov 2023 (Spelling, 2023).



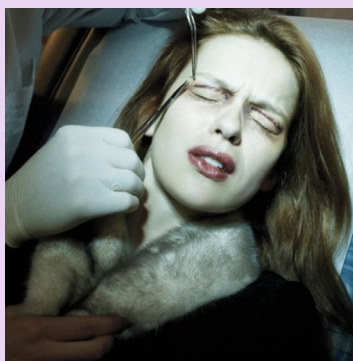
A nostalgic dancer-inspired style (tutus, leg warmers, leotards) aimed at “inner girls.” Glamour reports that by Feb 2023 balletcore TikToks had amassed 400+ million views. This “dancer-off-duty” look explicitly plays on childhood ballet imagery, and its popularity is often described as appealing to users’ “inner eight-year-old” (McQuay, 2023).



Similarly, Depop, a fashion marketplace, finds mentions of “Dainty” up 215% and “Doll Core” up 89% since late 2024. These data suggest a measurable jump in interest in childlike, “cute” aesthetics. Even plastic-surgery trends on TikTok (e.g. #BuccalFatRemoval) claim “hundreds of millions” of video views, reflecting viral fascination with achieving a baby-faced jawline (Bloch, 2023).



Post-Barbie media coverage highlights a “babyfication” of fashion. For example, a Hypebae fashion report cites Pinterest 2025 forecasts showing a 45% rise in searches for “doll-like makeup” and 130% rise in “doll shoes” over the prior period (Chow, 2025).



Cosmetic-surgery data show broad growth in wrinkle-prevention among younger women. The ASPS reports 9.48 million neuromodulator (Botox-type) injections in the U.S. in 2023, a 9% increase over 2022 (The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2023). Allure similarly notes Gen Z/Millennial Botox patients were up 8%. In other words, growing numbers of 20-somethings are injecting “Baby Botox” to freeze a youthful look (Siegel, 2024).



Retail trends echo the obsession with youth. For instance, ELLE reports that in 2024 a blush product named “Baby Cheeks” was the top-selling beauty item on Amazon. Teen influencers even coined the term “baby cheek flush” as a season’s trend, indicating blush is explicitly marketed to mimic chubby, childlike colouring. This data shows the beauty market is capitalizing on a craving for an innocent, plump-child appearance (Hou, 2025).

Demand for other youth-enhancing procedures is also climbing. Hyaluronic fillers jumped 8% to ~5.29 million treatments in 2023 (The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2023), and nonsurgical fat grafting (“baby face” filler) is surging. A 2024 plastic-surgery survey finds facial fat grafting up ~50% (surgeons use patients’ own fat to restore cheek fullness for a “baby face”) (Hou, 2025).



High fashion has embraced the “doll” motif. Major brands (e.g. Simone Rocha, Dolce & Gabbana) have featured childlike bows, frills and porcelain makeup on their runways. A Hypebae analysis calls this a turn toward the “doll aesthetic” and “babyfication” of fashion. By 2025, analysts report that designers are offering baby-inspired styles as an antidote to adult anxieties (Chow, 2025).



Streaming and film have amplified the trend. Netflix’s *Bridgerton* (2020–) is often cited as a flagship “coquette” influence, blending Victorian-era pastels and bows for a modern audience. Likewise, the 2023 *Barbie* movie fuelled global interest in pink, frilly ensembles and kawaii accessories. Critics note that these mainstream portrayals normalizing childlike femininity may blur into real-life expectations. *People* magazine warns that coquette style “glorifies... the infantilization of women” (Santino, 2023).

# *Can you spot the difference?*



Hint: it's the one to the left

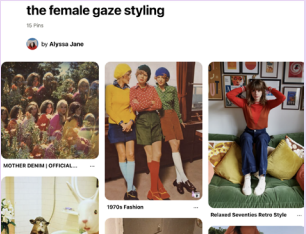
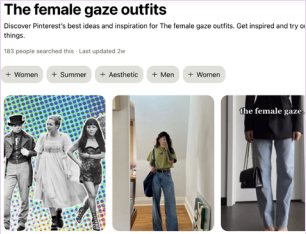
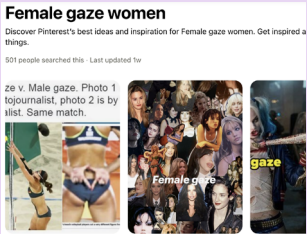
*Who is the abused teenager  
from the famous Lolita book?  
And which famous celebrity  
is cosplaying as one?*



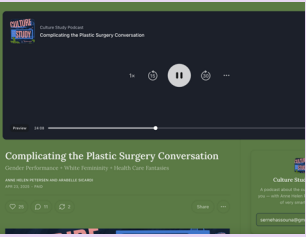
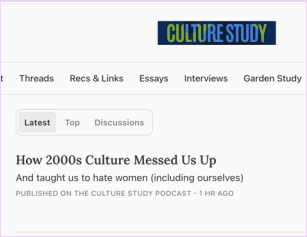
Hint: You don't say "I'm full grown, but I look like a niña. Come put something big in my casita. Mexico, I think you are bonita" if you weren't trying to infantilise yourself

To engage women aged 16–40 in critical discussions about the girl gaze and the infantilisation of women, a multi-platform approach leveraging Pinterest, Substack, and print media (zine) is in effect.

Pinterest serves as a visual discovery platform where over 70.3% of users are female, with a significant portion aged 18–34 (Dixon, 2025). This demographic uses Pinterest to explore topics like fashion, wellness, beauty, travel . By curating boards that juxtapose traditional “coquette” aesthetics with empowering imagery, we can inspire users to question and redefine femininity (Zote, 2025).

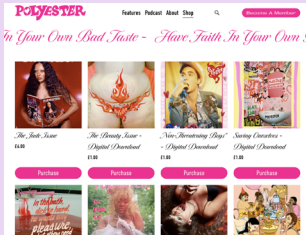
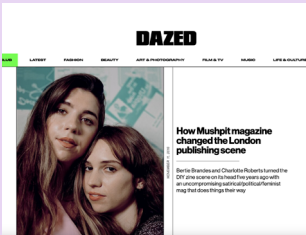
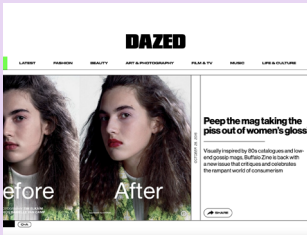


Substack offers a space for in-depth analysis and storytelling. Writers like Anne Helen Petersen have successfully utilized Substack to discuss cultural and feminist issues, building dedicated readerships. Through serialized essays and interviews, we can delve into the nuances of infanti-  
lisation in media and culture, fostering a community of informed readers.



# Journalistic Approach

Print media provides a tangible medium for archiving and reflecting on feminist discourse. Publications like The Gentlewoman, Buffalo Zine, Mushpit, and the trending Polyester have carved niches by addressing women’s issues with depth and creativity. Distributing a zine or maga-  
zine can solidify the movement’s presence and offer readers a collecti-  
ble artifact that encapsulates the campaign’s ethos.



By integrating these platforms, a cohesive strategy is formed; that meets our audience where they are, encouraging engagement through visual inspiration, thoughtful content, and lasting print materials.



# Call to Action

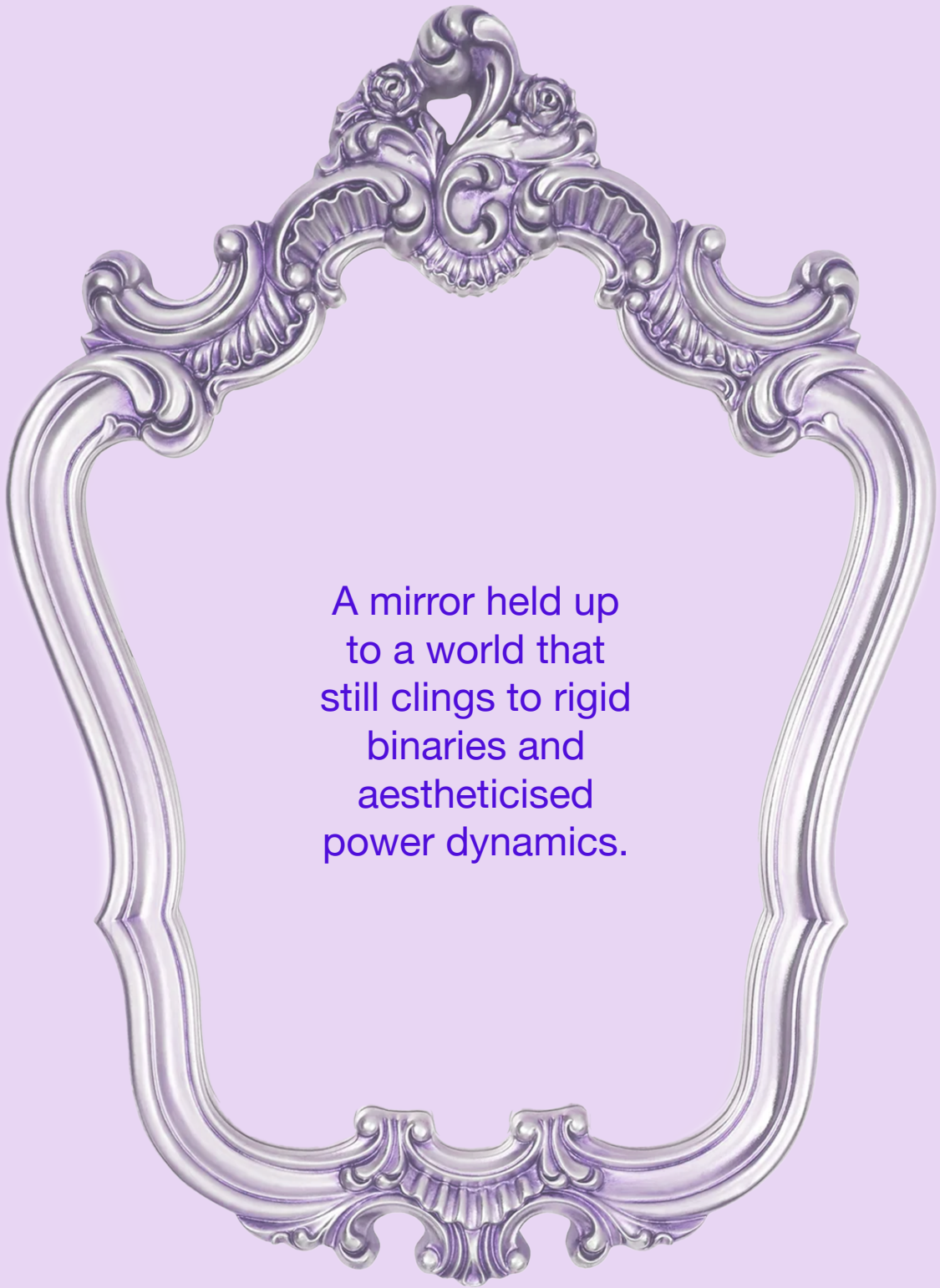
By asking, “Where does a man end and where does a woman begin?”, the viewer is challenged to question how femininity is framed, cropped, and commodified through the male gaze. The goal is not to offer a neat answer, but to rupture assumptions.

The response sought is both internal and external: first, a personal unlearning that is accessible through our free Substack. The audience should recognise the ways infantilisation has infiltrated everything from media portrayals to beauty trends, and to begin reclaiming space that allows for complexity, maturity, and contradiction.

But awareness is not enough. There is a call for action: boycotting brands that aestheticise submissiveness and signing petitions that demand responsible advertising standards to the Advertising Standard Authority (think: Mia Goth Miu Miu SS15 campaign). After building social media awareness through our #wheredoibegin movement, there will be online discussions on how music videos, song lyrics, fashion campaigns, and films push that narrative. That will be accompanied by physical demonstrations on “decolonising” the male gaze with a focus on protesting infantilising portrayals in fashion and media.

The call of action pushes engagers to resist performative empowerment and opt for representations that are complex, adult-like, and real. This isn't about women being seen, it is the contrary. Women must be heard, empathised with, and most importantly understood before looked at. To fight the hierarchy of who is looking and who is being looked at, the social change will push for a national women “blackout” protest day, where women will withhold from engaging with media, whether it is social media, written articles, or moving pictures. The day is also about remembering and speaking of all the women who were oppressed by the media and the male gaze (think: Brooke Shields in ‘Pretty Baby’).





A mirror held up  
to a world that  
still clings to rigid  
binaries and  
aestheticised  
power dynamics.

look into the mirror and ask

**#where  
doibegin**



# Ethical & Safety Issues

This editorial addresses sensitive, politicised themes such as the infantilisation of women, the male gaze, and the commodification of femininity; all of which invite scrutiny, potential backlash, and emotional vulnerability. In creating a project that deconstructs culturally ingrained behaviours, particularly around how women are expected to look and behave, there is a risk of provoking strong emotional reactions, including defensiveness, misinterpretation, or online harassment. This is especially true when challenging widely accepted or aestheticised trends like “coquette,” “girl math,” or even the romanticisation of girlhood itself.

As the creator, I must acknowledge the emotional labour involved in speaking from a personal and political lens. I must make sure to not undermine any feminist movement such as #mybodymychoice and approach topics from a cultural research perspective, as opposed to scrutinising and name-calling. Models and collaborators featured in visuals or zines could become targets of online cancel culture, informed consent and clear communications of how images and writing submissions will be used is essential.

The project might evoke critique and trolls, where a clear differentiation will be made. Critiquing is structural and trolling is personal. The latter will not be acknowledged nor interacted with; however, as this project is about amplifying women’s voice, critique and discussion is invited to challenge social views and exemplify the extent of the complexities.

Ethically, I am aligning the project with media theory and a harm-reduction approach. No imagery is will infantilise, sexualise, exploit, or aestheticise trauma. The focus will be on empowerment, making loud visual statements, and a refusal to comply with mainstream narratives. To ensure ethical rigor, all claims will be supported by academic or journalistic sources, and lived experience will not be co-opted or sensationalised.



SYDNEY  
SWEENEY  
SAYS

**"HELLO YOU DIRTY  
LITTLE BOYS ARE  
YOU INTERESTED IN  
MY BODY... WASH"**

AND THAT'S  
PROBLEMATIC

# Editorial

content creation

The editorial is composed of an article that will be used for Substack and will reference images that will appear on Pinterest. These components together will form a small section of a zine, which will then be monetised.

The article ties in infantilisation in fashion media, pop culture, and feminist theories. The photographs have 2 directions: one being women shot through the female gaze and the other being a defiance of what a women's "social behaviour" should look like. The zine utilises both to gain engagement and give voices to women, creating a community and giving women autonomy.







At what point does reclaiming harmful stereotypes reinforce these harmful stereotypes? And how do you separate reclamation from the internalised oppressor voice in your head? These are questions every woman must ask herself to authentically know she has autonomy over her own body.

In the *Ways of Seeing*, by John Berger, he defines the gaze as not only gender driven, but takes into consideration the disparities in class, race, and colonialism. The gaze is then not only defined by men, but a particular man who creates art for a very specific type of man. That gaze then creates an echo-chamber in its expression and representation of the female form that went to influence the masses (Berger, 2008).

Laura Mulvey, film theorist, drew from Berger's work and coined the term male gaze. In her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* she writes: "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (Mulvey, 1975).

LET ME BE MISUNDERSTOOD  
DIFFICULT, DEADPAN AND —  
DIFFERENTLY DIFFERENT,  
DREAMS OF WEDNESDAY  
WORDS BY APRIL LONG  
TRANSLATIONS BY JONAS LOFÖREN/  
BILDMEKANIK

This not only tells us who creates art and media, but whom it is made for. Women were never the target demographic, merely passive consumers. Shortly after Mulvey's theory was published, the female gaze, a direct opposite to the male gaze, came about, fighting for women's agency in media.

A quick scroll through social media (pictured on the next page) showed how the male gaze in mainstream culture is associated with modern beauty standards. The female gaze embraces vulnerability as emotional richness and interiority and when expressed visually through fashion, a nostalgic dressing comes about. Outfits show modern interpretations of the 50s, 70s bohemian, regency, Victorian, and rococo era (contemporary cottagecore), or 2010s Tumblr era; which could be attributed to the popularity of cottagecore and Bridgerton at the time of the hype. That nostalgia dressing has other and more problematic trends that include nymphette or balletcore, aesthetics that are visually rooted in the Lolita-esque or women-child imagery.

However, the male gaze still existed in these eras and those outfits were the preferred dressing for women by men. Which establishes the only issue with viewing male-female dichotomies as binary is the existence of a power imbalance fundamental to the male gaze. The female gaze should have never been treated as an opposite to that of the male, rather a disruption to the hierarchy of who's being looked at and who's doing the looking.

Sabrina Carpenter made headlines during her Short N' Sweet tour that sparked conversations on whether her display of sex positions feeds the male or female gaze; and whether society has gone too prudish to accept it.

She was also scrutinised for playing into a "pedophilic fantasy", a prepubescent feminine ideal that is fundamental to the male gaze and infantilises adult women. Whilst Carpenter's behaviour is problematic, she did recreate a Lolita scene from the movie, infantilisation does have a history within the fashion and pop culture landscape.

The surrealist era saw a femme-enfant, a woman who never left childhood behind. As enfant, she had innocence, virginity, ethereality; and as femme, she channelled the erotic. Picturing the Woman-Child by Morna Laing breaks this down. Art historian Whitney Chadwick describes *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1927), describes as: "that enchanting creature who through her youth naiveté, and purity possesses the more direct and pure connection with her own unconscious that allows her to serve as a guide for a man." This manifested in later fashion photography with notable examples being Juergen Teller's photography of Jen Dawson. The surrealist femme-enfant evolved into what Liang describes at the femme-enfant-fatale, represented through depictions of characters like Wednesday Addams, with menace being a central characteristic (Liang, 2021). The portrayal then evolved into the Lolita, a manipulative, erotic, and dangerously alluring girl. Her aesthetic is heart-shaped sunglasses, knee socks, schoolgirl skirts. The figure reemerged during Tumblr 2010's "nymphette" era and was notably commercialised by Lana Del Rey before finding its final form as coquette subculture on TikTok; where delicate, doll-like styling continues to romanticise fragility under the guise of the female gaze.



social media depiction of male (top) and female (bottom) gaze

The 1980s and the 1990s saw the Madonna and the Kinderwhore aesthetic. The Madonna was subverted to the virgin-whore binary by blending teenage aesthetics with sexual empowerment. Her rebellion, however, remained filtered through male fantasy, revealing the limitations of aesthetic subversion. The Kinderwhore movement was led by Courtney Love and depicted baby doll dresses, smeared lipstick, messy hair and messy hyperfemininity to mock infantilisation. But as with many subcultures, that aesthetic was dulled and aestheticised to the melancholic “sad girl” with central figures like Lana Del Rey (again), giving us what is now known as the nymphette or coquette.

Fashion media played a role in concretising consciously and subconsciously the woman-child (coined by Liang) persona by constructing images focused on nostalgia, vulnerability, romanticism, purity, and white dressing; which Liang argues has been distinctively used to align women with children in the 18th and 19th century. She goes on to say that the woman is “elevated as ethereal creature, abstracted from the humdrum, everyday world.” Her construct sways from carefree to something less pleasant. References of Pre-Raphaelite white death imagery are constructed to portray the sense of loss and blankness.

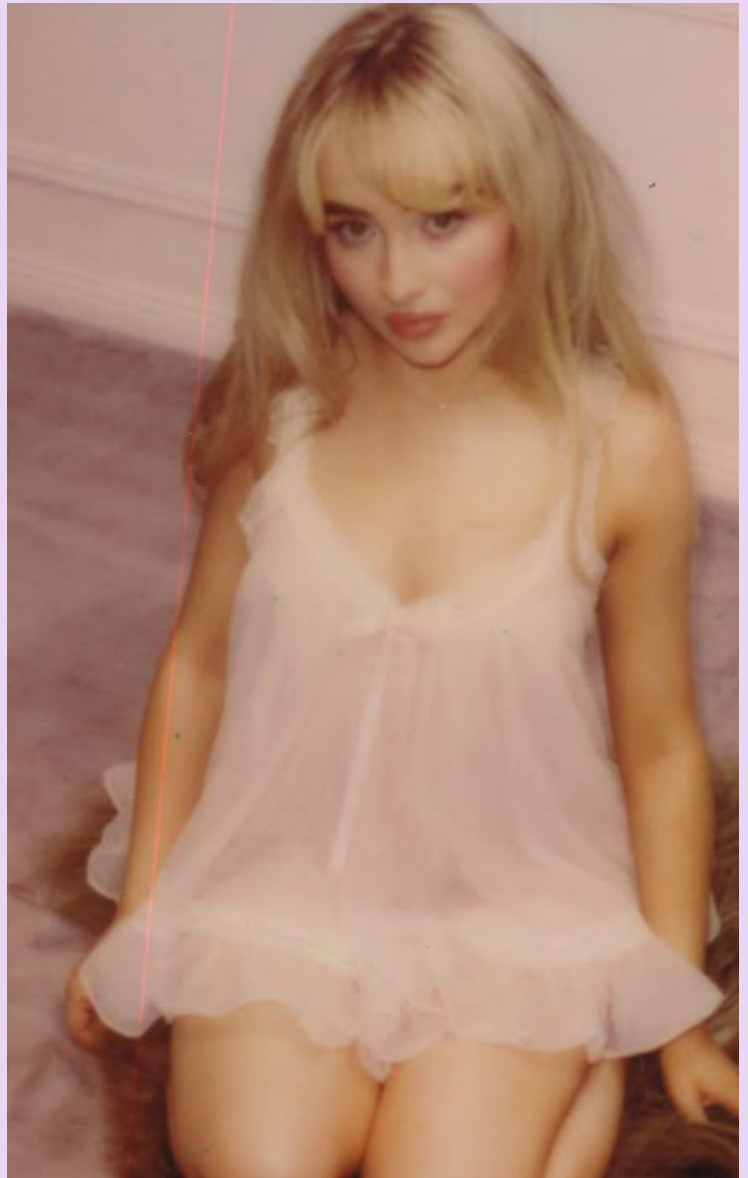
British Vogue has published a plentiful of examples portraying this very archetype. Heavenly Creatures photographed by Benjamin Huseby. Liang describes heavenly creatures as belonging to a type of visual representation “in which white femininities are made to ‘glow’.” The use of soft focus, sun flare, and white garments provide the images with a sense of blankness and divinity. This is amplified in Sofia Coppola’s *The Virgin Suicides*. The Lisbon sisters are blonde, ethereal and mysterious. They are idealised by the neighbourhood boys and seen as nostalgic. Coppola’s dreamy visual language includes soft lighting, pastel

bedrooms, white dressing, flower crowns that encase the girls in a romantic fog that fetishises their oppression by their parents, which is intensified at a man’s presence. The girls are trapped in a suspended girlhood and their portrayal remains dainty, delicate, emotionally childlike which denies them the complexity of full womanhood; they were teenagers grappling with depression, repression, and suicidal ideation. *A Long, Long Way From Home* by Yelena Yemchuk, *Star Girl* by Mario Testino, and *White Nights* by Tim Walker follow along the very same theme (pictured below in chronological order).



Capitalist culture recognises women as not only the passive consumer, but the product. This reflects what Marxist feminism critiques: under capitalism, women are not only exploited as workers but also reduced to commodities (Armstrong, 2020). Women are packaged, displayed, and sold through beauty standards, fashion, and media; for the valuable man consumer. Even when advertising targets women, it reinforces the very same system that objectifies them and reshapes their oppression to fit market logic.

Recent social shifts in the post-covid world birthed Sephora kids. In short, they are tweens flooding beauty stores to purchase premium skincare brands that target older women. The discourse began when many reported sightings of 10-year-olds demanding trendy Drunk Elephant retinol creams. Many older women reacted with shock, but the shift is far more interesting. The Sephora kids are getting accustomed to the youthful beauty standards from a young age, perpetually placing them into a cycle of fear to look grownup; conditioning them to yearn for infantilisation, eternally. These are the very same kids at Sabrina Carpenter's recent questionable performance. The discourse has been divided into two: empowerment and a market-researched method to be the next 'it' popstar. Whether you sway in either direction, her sexuality inherently remains a product.



Her lyrics include pleas to men, no literally she released a song called "Please, Please, Please": "Please, please, please (Please don't prove I'm right)

Don't prove I'm right

And please, please, please

Don't bring me to tears when I just did my makeup so nice"

The theme carries on in her Short N' Sweet Album with lyrics like:

"Adore me, hold me and explore me

Mark your territory

Tell me I'm the only, only, only, only one

Adore me, hold me and explore me

I'm so fuckin' horny

Tell me I'm the only, only, only, only one" for her song Juno

and "Move it up, down, left, right, oh

Switch it up like Nintendo

Say you can't sleep, baby, I know

That's that me espresso ... Too bad your ex don't do it for ya

Walked in and dream-came-true'd it for ya

Soft skin and I perfumed it for ya"

where she isn't just making herself fit into the male gaze, but is actively competing with that man's ex.

Not only her music, but her (pop star) persona is Bimbo Feminism, reclamation through the embrace of patriarchal feminine stereotypes. The hypocrisy lies in the fact that her content should be about exploring the female desire, but her branding and marketing infantilises her, making her, in a newly coined social media terms, a podo-philic fantasy. She dresses in hyperfeminine babydoll tops and she knows her old Disney fans attend her no age-restriction concerts, where she performs explicit acts and closes her shows with references to kids TV show: on March 2023, she said “I’ve got a dirty mind but I am so pure/ Call me Dora, his body I explore/ Fort Lauderdale, you’re kicking off the whole tour!”

Sabrina Carpenter isn’t the only celebrity performing for the gaze. Sydney Sweeney utilises her hypersexuality as a marketing strategy, setting herself as a product and regressing feminist movements. Her recent scandal involves a collaboration Dr. Squatch selling soap infused with her bathwater. She jokingly calls out “boys” before saying the product is for men only.

When you have influential figures endorsing the commodification of women, when trends pick up, they will eventually sell. A recent Vogue article called “What Does Fashion’s Obsession With Childlike Accessories Say About Us?” highlighted plentiful brands embracing the “childlike” aesthetic. Coach released a bag with stickers on it and a kiddish mega-sized teddy bear bag. Simone Rocha released bedazzled hair clips, Versace released a bag with kiddish motifs, and Chopova Lowena released rhinestone covered sneakers. Vogue goes the extra mile to tell their audience to embrace “dipping into your kid’s wardrobe”. Even Marie Claire released an article this April called “This divisive Nineties trend just got a high-fashion makeover” stating “all the cool girls are wearing babydoll dresses again.” The problem isn’t just the one accessory big businesses are selling, in reality it is a lifestyle.

The problem was never about the baby-doll dress, Sabrina Carpenter exploring her sexuality on stage, and the Sephora kids joining in on trends as a result of the algorithm. The problem has always been are we conforming or are we reclaiming. Reclamation isn’t a season’s ‘it’ look, it is a lifelong unlearning and a return to self beyond the gaze and the market. Reclamation is dressing in regency or rococo inspired eras when the trends fade and your identity remains.

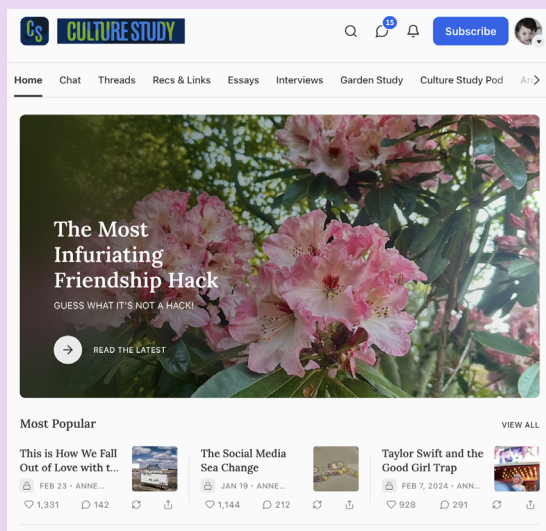
Maybe the real rebellion was never about inverting the gaze nor flirting with its power. It’s in refusing to participate in the pageant all together. Not in playing the child or the seductress, but in leaving that binary behind and entirely. And that means embracing the grotesque body, the unruly, the emotional, the you away from “soft like a baby’s butt”, “clean and smooth shaved”, “baby cheeks blush”. When culture has long shaped women through aesthetics, choosing complexity over coherence becomes a radical act. And letting it go was never a loss, but liberation.

#wheredoibegin? Maybe today, right here when the performance stops and living for self begins.

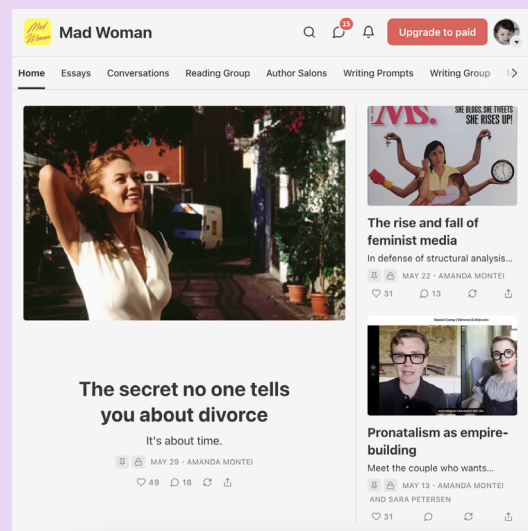


Babytrap is a first edition article and a digital letter to those unlearning the performance of girlhood through the male gaze. This Substack is all about exploring aesthetics, algorithms, and archetypes that shape femininity and asks what's left when we stop performing for the gaze. Through cultural critiquing essays, cohesive interviews with industry leaders, and reader submissions, it documents interiority, self-awareness, and most importantly leaves readers wondering if they should accept women infantilisation; or gives them the space to challenge it. It's not about telling women how to look, but asking why we ever thought we had to be seen. Our motto is soft truths, tough truths, and a refusal to be reduced.

Honourary mentions of Substack feminist or cultural research publications with a focus on women:



Culture Study by Anne Helen Petersen



Mad Woman by Amanda Montei



More than just moodboards, this Pinterest uses the platform's search engine function as a feminist tool to reclaim visual space with aesthetic boards like "Trends Through The Female Lens" and rebellious boards like "Who I Am When I Am Alone". It's a place to collect, inspire, and disrupt. The goal is to 1. drive users towards critical thought through visual inspiration and 2. to our Substack where we harness deeper conversations and uncover identity nuances. With Pinterest being a women's go to social media for inspiration boards, vision boards, and life manifestations, we hope to catch the users with our aesthetically curated pictures that intrigue them enough to direct them to our greater mission; and if not, we hope to inspire them enough to curate their lives around the rebelling against the male gaze.

The first direction, featured at the top, explores women outside the confinement of societal expectations of her behaviour. By eating the pasta with her hands, getting her clothes dirty, and getting as much food in her mouth as possible, she is her, without expectations, without watching eyes, without needing to please a gaze. The choice of clothing was satiric to mimic what is conditionally assumed as attractive on a women.

The second direction, featured to the right, explores a women's emotions. Anger, confusion, and always being made to feel unworthy. Although this direction is more common, the emotions are meant to spark curiosity within viewers to get them accross to the Substack page. The choice of dressing was purposeful to convey "childlike clothing" and angry facial expressions to not denote infantilisation.

All photography was shot by a woman.



Pinterest: @wheredoibegin  
content creation 02

Babytrap will be the first zine published under our name: Where Do I Begin. It is a quarterly submission-based zine centring women's interiority over their image. With photographs, essays, poetry, and pictures we keep in our camera roll, it asks: is infantilisation a trend or just patriarchy in soft pinks? It invites readers to break free, promises reader self-sovereignty, and provides a space for authenticity. Printed in small batches and reader or grant funded, it's physical for archival reasons and an act of resistance.

Ideation: asked my community if they would take part / find it interesting

WOMEN OF SUBSTACK!!! I WANT TO PUBLISH A SMALL MAGAZINE!! DO YOU WANT TO TAKE PART?

So I have been thinking a lot about us and how the male gaze is quite literally unescapable. Whether we are into floral dresses or a leather bodice, we are still performing aesthetic labour for the male gaze.

Part of my thinking was because women get to choose and dictate what the female gaze is (my body, my choice mentality), instead of looking outwardly, we should be looking inwardly.

SO!!! I decided to curate fun zines on exactly that!!! Looking inwardly! This would kind of be like a women community based on submissions of private note app writing / lists, close friend posts, intentional un-viral work, images that were never uploaded on social media, girl group chats, dream journals, ETC ETC

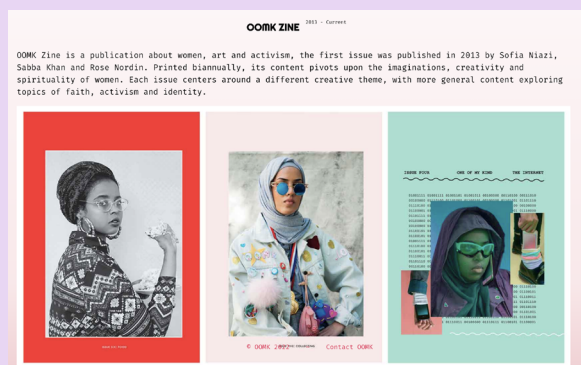
Let me know if you want to join in!

146 39 8

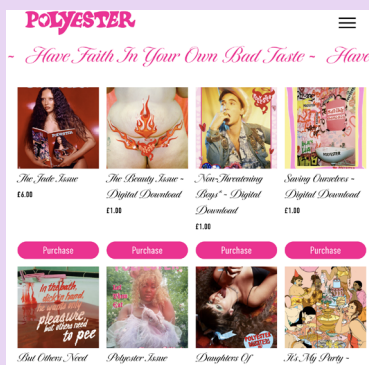


Execution: mock ups

Honourary mentions of feminist or cultural research with a focus on women zines:



OOMK Zine

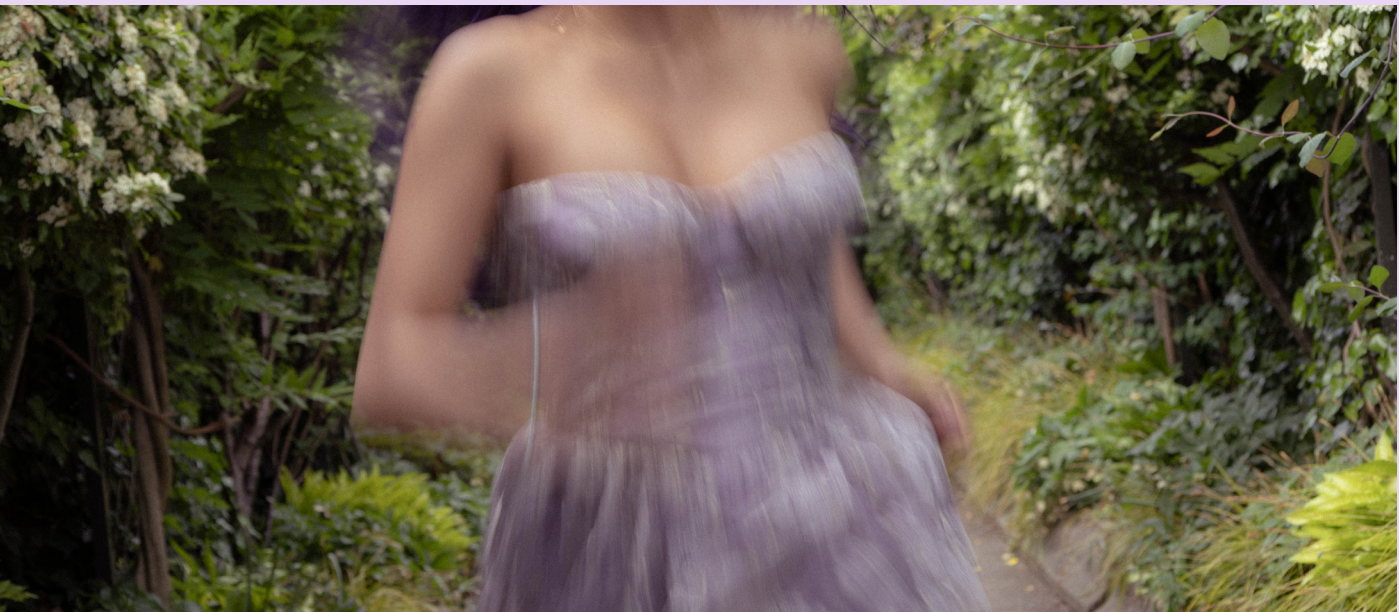
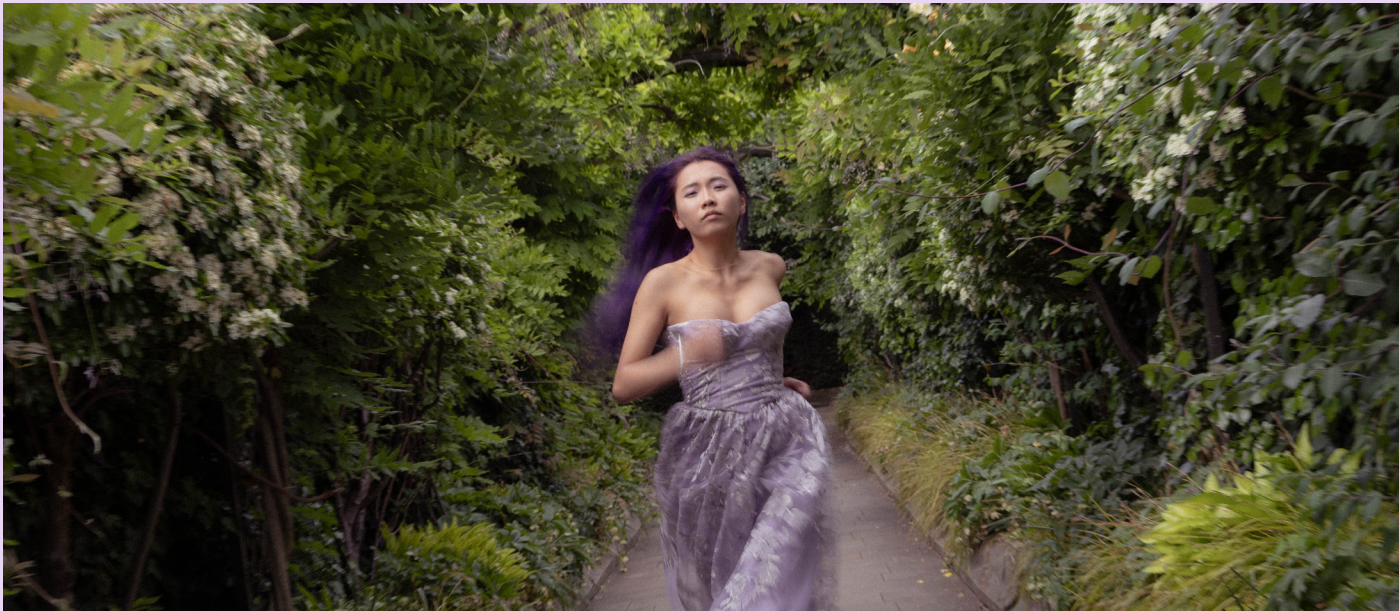


Polyester



Grrrl Zine Fair

Zine: Where Do I Begin  
content creation 03



# *Monetisation* Method

## step 01

### Leveraging aesthetics for discovery

After the pandemic, Pinterest became trendy and as of 2025, their number of users reached an all time high with 570 million global monthly active users (Dixon, 2025). Many brands have turned to Pinterest for its Gen Z audience and organic growth potential. Refy is a trendy beauty brand that is well known for their aesthetic pictures and the curated lifestyle they sell. They utilise Pinterest to further their growth as the Refy target audience appreciates aesthetics and the Pinterest audience appreciates finding that aesthetic. Through organic and paid means, Refy has managed to grow using Pinterest to redirect their audience to the Refy shop page.

Instead of providing the same trending aesthetic that could play into the male gaze, Pinterest will be used to highlight visual narratives that encourage the female gaze and introspection within the women.

The virality of the pictures will depend on optimising SEO words, where captions will highlight trends in a short sassy commentary way to spark interest and redirect users through link integration to our Substack page and the zine's digital platform.





## step 02

### Building a community

The Substack platform offers long-form content, allowing for in-depth exploration of feminist topics. Notable feminist newsletters like “Culture Study” by Anne Helen Petersen and “Mad Woman” by Amanda Montei have successfully built engaged audiences.

The Substack will be offered in three tiers:

**Free:** Access to bimonthly newsletters discussing feminist theory, cultural critiques, and giving women a voice through co-writing personal essays on their experience. This is to ensure there is more influence towards readers to push for such social change. Buy Me A Coffee button will be placed at all essays such that readers under this category can support for as little as 1£ per essay.

**Paid Tier:** Subscribers receive weekly content, including interviews, behind-the-scene insights, more in-depth essays, and early access to zine submissions. This will be at Substack’s lowest rate of 3£/month to ensure its affordability.

**Supporter Tier:** Includes all benefits of the Paid Tier plus quarterly print zines delivered to their address at no extra cost. This will also include early invitations for demonstrations and workshops.



## step 03

### Forming a business

Print zines offer a physical medium to showcase women's narratives, emphasising their internal experiences over external appearances. Institutions like the Grrrl Zine Fair and publications such as "OOMK" have demonstrated the impact of feminist zines in promoting diverse voices. This business is community led where we allow women to submit their own pieces to encourage their voice getting heard over mainstream takes. Paid subscribers can submit essays for free, but other readers' whose essays have been chosen must give a fee of 5£ to support the print of the zine. The zine will be teased on Substack, and will be purchased via feminist events, local bookstores, and our digital platform.



# Funding Strategies & Net Profits

## Explicit Appeals

**Donation Buttons:** Integrate “Buy Me a Coffee” to accept one-time donations.

**Fundraising Campaigns:** Launch periodic campaigns highlighting specific goals, such as funding the next zine issue or payment for accepted submission.

## Implicit Value Propositions

**Merchandise Sales:** When subscribing to our Paid Substack tier, a tote bag featuring feminist artwork will be sent out (examples: Vogue, The New Yorker).

**Workshops and Events:** Host paid workshops focusing on feminist topics, providing both education and funding. Ask for collaborators to demonstrate as volunteers to pursue a shared vision.

## Funding Sources

**Crowdfunding:** utilising the Substack community to crowdfund for the zine via Substack monetisation method or Buy Me A Coffee.

**Grants:** Apply for a grant with the feminist review trust as they fund media and culture projects with a political aim.

**Partnerships:** Collaborate with feminist organizations like the WOW foundation, local feminist bookshops like Bluestockings Cooperative, or the Advertising Standards Authority for sponsorships.

## Net Profit

Expense	Estimated Cost (£)
Website Hosting & Domain	100
Zine Printing (2 issues)	2,000
Marketing (Pinterest Ads) (Market Push Method)	1,000
Merchandise Production (Etsy / Ali Express)	500
Shipping & Distribution	500
Estimated Contingency	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,600</b>

Feminist Trust grants up to £15k, for this project we will consider less than half at: £5k  
Paid Substack Subscribers: 100 subscribers at 3£/month = 1,500 over 6 months  
Zine Sales: 500 copies at 10£ each = £5k  
Buy Me A Coffee donations = £100

Net profit: £11,600 – £7,600 = £4,000

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Before you leave, say  
your affirmations: I  
am letting go of girl-  
hood to finally begin  
#wherdoibegin



babytrop