

EDITORIAL NOTE¹

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Girls and girlhood have been experiencing a moment of hypervisibility in recent years, as it has been made apparent by their increased presence in social media and popular culture. The year 2023 has been considered by media outlets as “the year of the girl” (Firth 2023), and social media sites have been filled with girlhood-inspired trends that allude to the experience of being a girl, ranging from “girl math” to “girl dinner”. The circulation of ideas and images about girlhood has not stopped on social media; Charli XCX’s album *brat* (2024), Taylor Swift’s Eras Tour (2023-2024) or the release of Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie* (2023) have all contributed to creating conversations about girls. Besides, these cultural products, in combination with social media, have enabled girls to engage as prosumers with the girlhood phenomena.

This special issue has turned to the field of Girlhood Studies to address precisely the experiences and representations of girls in a range of formats and manifestations (Mitchel, Reid-Walsh and Kirk vii). This specialty was born out of the necessity of creating a body of knowledge about girls in which they are recognized as full subjects to analyze, rather than being considered as incomplete women (Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 4; Kearney 11). Although much has changed since the beginnings of this field of study, its interdisciplinary approach that puts girls at the center of its concerns seemed suitable as a method of analysis for this special issue. In this current context of hypervisibility, girls are praised for their ability to adapt to fluctuating social, political and cultural contexts (Harris 1). At the same time, they navigate a series of contradictory

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stereotypes that aim to define them as either passive and innocent or as hypersexualized postfeminist subjects (Gonick; Harris; McRobie), both ends of the patriarchal spectrum.

The aim of this issue has been to follow the direction established by other girlhood scholars (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh and Kirk), seeking to attend to the particularities of girlhood rather than declaring a monolithic or universalized girlhood experience. We have aimed to examine how cultural, social and political differences influence individual and collective experiences. To do so, we have relied on notions of intersectionality (Crenshaw), which have served to pluralize girlhood (Currie), and feminist theories, as these allow for the examination of the many ways intersecting oppressions (Crenshaw) become intertwined to “fix” girls within the matrix of domination (Hill Collins) that supports the maintenance of heteropatriarchal hierarchies.

The different contributions that conform this special issue have as their focus the visibility of intersectional girlhood(s) in contemporary Anglophone cultural manifestations through their approach to the varied experiences of girls. By drawing from the interdisciplinarity that characterizes Girlhood Studies, these articles have engaged with the often-invisibilized realities of girlhood through a heterogeneous mix of theoretical approaches that nevertheless keep girls at the center of their discussions. Through this combination of articles, we aim to showcase the transnational and rich character of the field, intersecting with a multitude of factors that uniquely shape each girl’s collective and individual circumstances.

Marta Aguza Berral analyses Julia Armfield’s novel *Private Rites* (2024), where three sisters must negotiate familial estrangement, intergenerational trauma, and queer adolescence within a climate-crisis dystopia. Drawing from queer theory, trauma theory, and the notion of intersectionality, Aguza Berral discusses the novel’s approach to the sisters’ vulnerability, their fragmented familial bonds, and the youngest sister’s navigation of her queerness. The article thus reveals how *Private Rites* explores the complexities of sisterhood, the affective volatility of queer girlhood, and the inheritance of unspoken traumas.

Tolulope Akinrinde’s article explores the representation of intersectional sapphic and trans girlhoods through her analysis of Emily M. Danforth’s *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2012) and Akwaeke Emezi’s *Pet* (2019). Relying on affect theory and

queer theory, Akinrinde interrogates the texts' disruption of heteronormative patterns that define girlhood in literature. Particularly, the article focuses on the novels' use of voice, genre, and affect to develop a form of queer resistance, transforming girlhood in a site of becoming marked by a variety of elements including gender identity, sexuality, sociocultural power, and race.

Emily Bent critically examines the 2024 documentary *Girls State*, which covers girls' experiences in a week-long immersive political program by the same name. Bent highlights the contradictions of girl-power feminism, which make visible some forms of neoliberal girl empowerment while others become invisible and undesirable. The article proposes to recognize girls' political suffering rather than simply present them as heroic changemakers, thus encouraging feminist scholars, activists and allies to reconsider girls' political position and go beyond normative patterns of empowered agency or vulnerability.

Elena Canido Muiño offers an analysis of the portrayal of the protagonist of the novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), by Cuban-born American author Cristina García. Here, the main character's coming-of-age is not only marked by her hybrid identity, in between a Cuban heritage and an American context, but also by her creativity and art-making processes which allow the novel to be interpreted as a *künstlerroman*, or artist's novel. Thus, the novel explores girlhood as a terrain in which girls seek new forms of identity and self-expression, and art becomes a channel to strive for individuality and expressing inconformity to social expectations.

Claudia García Pajín's article is a timely analysis of the politics of girls' rage as a reaction to their socialization into structures of sexual abuse as depicted in Dizz Tate's novel *Brutes* (2023). Drawing from affect theory, it brings female rage to the forefront as an affective force that is crucial for both girls' self-definition and justice-seeking processes against the pervasiveness of sexual violence. García Pajín's piece resonates with current and recent cases that evidence the ubiquity and cruelty of rape culture, ranging from the #MeToo movement to the infamous Epstein case.

In her article, Aoileann Ni Eigartaigh challenges the frequent stereotyping and unawareness of neurodiverse girlhoods through her examination of two novels with neurodiverse protagonists: Caitríona Lally's *Eggshells* (2015) and Alice Franklin's *Life*

Hacks for a Little Alien (2025). Ni Eigearthaigh argues how these texts visibilize the different strategies that can be used to construct social roles and identities, becoming a site of critique and suggesting that the often unseen spaces that are occupied by the protagonists offer the potential for more inclusive modes of girlhood.

Danielle O’Sullivan looks at Eimear McBride’s *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013) and Louise O’Neill’s *Asking for It* (2015) in order to analyze the depiction of sexual assault and the silencing of victims in contemporary Irish fiction. Experiences of girlhood in these texts are marked by rape culture and the threat of sexual assault, and social reactions to sexual violence reveal institutional and community responses to trauma within the Irish context. Hence, through a close reading of the novels and drawing from trauma theory and girlhood studies, O’Sullivan’s article approaches shame and trauma in connection to the realities of girlhood in contemporary Ireland.

In addition to the articles, this Special Issue includes two media reviews. Alicia Martínez Martín reviews Casey Plett’s *A Safe Girl to Love* (2014), a collection of short stories that center the lives of trans women as they navigate questions of identity, love, friendship, and survival. Marina Vega González offers a review of the film *Earth Mama* (2023), which follows the emotional journey of Gia, a young Black woman fighting to regain custody of her two children. The film exposes personal and systemic struggles of Black girlhood and motherhood.

Lastly, this Special Issue concludes with two poetic contributions from Catherine MacCarthy and Marisa Rapela Palacios. In total, we present five poems that the authors have kindly decided to share with readers in which they explore diverse girlhood experiences.

Through this varied collection of articles, reviews and creative pieces, we aim to contribute to contemporary conversations about girlhood(s), highlighting the plurality of this label. The contributions provide a space where the lives and realities of queer, trans, racialized, and neurodivergent girls are at the forefront in an attempt to give them due recognition, visibilizing their often-hidden experiences. Despite the current hypervisibility of girls, they are not exempt from facing struggles such as sexism, homophobia, racism, transphobia, or ableism. We believe that girlhood is a fluctuating category where girls should be at the center to constantly (re)define the meanings of what

being a girl is. Thus, with the contributions to this special issue, we hope to expand current views of girlhood beyond heteronormative and feminine perceptions.

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