

Gore as a Feminist Methodology: Questioning Postfeminism through Girl Meme Culture

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[@yunkarasu]. (n.d.). *Welcome to my girlblog*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/25/f3/c5/25f3c519eb34d61b5c19490d717e6ff8.jpg>

ABSTRACT

Postfeminism is a cultural phenomenon that emerged in the late 1980s. One of its most widespread forms claims that women have achieved full empowerment and that, consequently, feminism is no longer necessary. This research challenges this narrative, assessing whether it truly reflects women's lived experiences in the Western neoliberal context or overlooks more subtle forms of oppression. After outlining the foundations and contradictions of postfeminism, the study examines its recent expressions on social media.

The case study consists of 62 memes related to girlblogging, gathered on Pinterest and organized into two thematic boards: "Corporeality" and "Sexuality and Desire." In addition to hyper-feminine elements that echo postfeminist aesthetics, these digital self-narratives of girlhood express a sense of suffering tied to the ongoing pursuit of perfection, physical and otherwise. This pain is conveyed through textual and visual elements that suggest a condition I define as gore. Gore becomes a tool for describing the female experience, destabilizing existing identity, and proposing a new configuration.

Three research questions guide the analysis: Is the postfeminist narrative reliable? Can gore be reappropriated from a feminist perspective as a transformative resource? How do the analyzed memes position themselves in relation to postfeminism?

Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze are two pillars of the theoretical framework, which is completed by new materialist feminist theories that offer crucial concepts for turning the potentialities opened up by gore into affirmative and ethical action.

The case study reveals that while postfeminist principles are problematized, they are not entirely dismissed. Feminism is therefore needed to provide a critical counterbalance to postfeminist perspectives.

Ultimately, this research offers a multifaceted reading of postfeminism by examining it as entangled with neoliberalism, the media, and the subjects it shapes. In doing so, it not only enriches existing literature by exploring memes as forms of generational gender experience but also inspires future feminist actions to rethink identity.

Keywords: postfeminism, digital aesthetics, memes, social media, gore, girlblogging, body, affect, sexuality, desire

RIASSUNTO

Il postfemminismo è un fenomeno culturale sorto alla fine degli anni '80. Nella sua forma più comune esso sostiene che le donne abbiamo ormai raggiunto la piena emancipazione, rendendo il femminismo non più necessario.

Questa ricerca mette in discussione tale narrazione, valutando se rifletta davvero il vissuto delle donne nel contesto neoliberale occidentale o se ignori forme più sottili di oppressione. Dopo aver chiarito fondamenti e contraddizioni del postfemminismo, il lavoro procede ad esaminarne le sue espressioni recenti sulle piattaforme social.

Il caso studio consiste in una raccolta di 62 meme relativi al girlblogging raccolti su Pinterest e organizzati in due bacheche tematiche: "Corporeità" e "Sessualità e Desiderio." Oltre ad elementi iperfemminili che richiamano l'estetica postfemminista, queste auto-narrazioni digitali della "girlhood" esprimono una sofferenza legata alla continua ricerca della perfezione, fisica e non. Questo dolore si esprime attraverso elementi testuali e grafici che suggeriscono una condizione che definisco gore. Il gore diventa quindi un metodo per descrivere l'esperienza femminile, destabilizzare l'identità esistente e proporre nuove configurazioni.

Tre sono i quesiti che guidano la ricerca: La narrazione postfemminista è affidabile? Il gore può essere riappropriato da una prospettiva femminista come risorsa trasformativa? Come si posizionano i meme oggetto d'analisi rispetto al postfemminismo?

Michel Foucault e Gilles Deleuze costituiscono due pilastri del quadro teorico, completato dalle teorie femministe neomaterialiste che offrono concetti chiave per tradurre in azioni affermative ed etiche le potenzialità aperte dal gore.

Il caso studio infatti rivela che i principi postfemministi, seppur problematizzati, non vengono rifiutati completamente. Il femminismo è quindi necessario per offrire un contrappeso critico alle prospettive postfemministe.

In definitiva, la ricerca offre una lettura sfaccettata del postfemminismo leggendolo in relazione al neoliberismo, ai media e ai soggetti su cui estende la propria influenza. In questo modo, non solo contribuisce alla letteratura esistente indagando le espressioni memetiche come indicatori delle esperienze generazionali di genere, ma ispira anche future azioni femministe volte a ripensare l'identità.

Keywords: postfemminismo, estetiche digitali, meme, social media, gore, girlblogging, corpo, affetto, sessualità, desiderio

RESUMEN

El posfeminismo es un fenómeno cultural que surgió a finales de la década de 1980. Una de sus formas más extendidas sostiene que las mujeres han alcanzado un empoderamiento total y que, en consecuencia, el feminismo ya no es necesario. Esta investigación cuestiona esa narrativa, evaluando si realmente refleja las experiencias vividas por las mujeres en el contexto neoliberal occidental o, por el contrario, pasa por alto formas más sutiles de opresión. Tras exponer los fundamentos y contradicciones del posfeminismo, el estudio examina sus expresiones recientes en las redes sociales.

El estudio de caso consiste en 62 memes relacionados con el *girlblogging*, recopilados en Pinterest y organizados en dos tableros temáticos: “Corporeidad” y “Sexualidad y Deseo.” Además de elementos hiper-femeninos que evocan la estética postfeminista, estas auto-narrativas digitales del *ser chica* expresan un sentido de sufrimiento vinculado a la constante búsqueda de la perfección, tanto física como de otro tipo. Este dolor se transmite a través de elementos textuales y visuales que sugieren una condición que defino como *gore*. El *gore* se convierte en una herramienta para describir la experiencia femenina, desestabilizar la identidad existente y proponer una nueva configuración.

Tres preguntas de investigación guían el análisis: ¿Es fiable la narrativa posfeminista? ¿Puede el *gore* ser reapropiado desde una perspectiva feminista como un recurso transformador? ¿Cómo se posicionan los memes analizados en relación con el posfeminismo?

Michel Foucault y Gilles Deleuze son dos pilares del marco teórico, que se completa con teorías del nuevo feminismo materialista que ofrecen conceptos cruciales para convertir las potencialidades abiertas por el *gore* en una acción afirmativa y ética.

El estudio de caso revela que, aunque se problematizan los principios posfeministas, no se descartan por completo. Por lo tanto, el feminismo sigue siendo necesario para proporcionar un contrapeso crítico a las perspectivas posfeministas.

En última instancia, esta investigación ofrece una lectura multifacética del posfeminismo al examinarlo como entrelazado con el neoliberalismo, los medios y los sujetos que configura. Al hacerlo, no solo enriquece la literatura existente explorando los memes como formas de experiencia generacional de género, sino que también inspira futuras acciones feministas para repensar la identidad.

Palabras clave: posfeminismo, estéticas digitales, memes, medios sociales, *gore*, *girlblogging*, cuerpo, afectos, sexualidad, deseo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	9
CHAPTER 1	
MAPPING POSTFEMINISM: THEORY, SUBJECTIVITY, AESTHETICS, AND	
MEDIA EXPRESSIONS.....	12
1.1 Situating Postfeminism.....	12
1.1.1 Postfeminism's Essentials: Conditions of Existence and Supporting Forces.....	12
1.1.2 The Dialogue with Old and New Feminisms.....	13
1.2 The Postfeminist Subject.....	16
1.2.1 Between Girl and Woman: The Ontological Instability of Linguistic Constructs and the Brandable Identity.....	17
1.2.2 The Construction of Femininity and Its Consolidation through Surveillance.....	19
1.2.3 Essentializing Hyper-femininity.....	20
1.3 Postfeminist Aesthetics: From the Body to Inner Life.....	21
1.3.1 Thou Shalt Be Hot: The Supremacy of Sexual Attractiveness.....	22
1.3.2 Glow-up Culture: The Aestheticization of Habits and Daily Routines.....	23
1.4 Postfeminism and the Media Landscape: Dynamics of a Successful Entanglement	
through Emotional Leverage and Market Strategies.....	25
1.4.1 An Overview of Media in the Internet Age: Digital Platforms and Their Relation to Postfeminist Expressions.....	25
1.4.2 Girlblogging: A Postfeminist Practice or a Glitch in the System?.....	27

CHAPTER 2

CARNIVORE POSTFEMINISM: UNVEILING VIOLENCE THROUGH FEMININE DIGITAL AESTHETICS, ONLINE TRENDS AND INTERNET CULTURE.....29

2.1 Erasure, Distortion and Disfigurement: The Multiple Violence of Postfeminism..... 29

2.2 Drifting Toward Anorexia: Fitness Trends, Pilates Princesses, and Slavic Dolls.....30

2.2.1 “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels”: From Heroin Chic to SkinnyTok..... 32

2.2.2 Ozempic: The Miracle Drug..... 34

2.3 I Would Rather be a Cyborg: Beauty Apps and AI Filters and the Distortion of Self-Perception.....35

2.3.1 Postfeminist Hyperreality.....37

2.3.2 Body Dysmorphia in the Digital Age.....38

2.4 Beauty Filters Enfleshed.....39

2.4.1 Everybody Looks the Same! The Impact of Botox, Filler, and Lifting..... 40

2.4.2 Rip Me Open: The New Frontiers of Cosmetic Surgery.....41

2.4.3 Life in Plastic, Is Fantastic?..... 42

CHAPTER 3

GORE AS A METHODOLOGY..... 44

3.1 On Gore, My Body, and Suffering..... 44

3.1.1. Why Gore? Making Meaning Out of Pain Through a Feminist Lens.....45

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Foucauldian Grounds, Deleuzian Potentialities, and Feminist Ethics..... 47

3.2.1 Desiring Machines and Assemblages.....48

3.2.2 Postfeminist Desiring Machine: Territorialization.....49

3.2.3 Gore Desiring Machine: Deterritorialization and Body Without Organs.....	50
3.2.4 Feminist Desiring Machine: Reterritorialization and Resistance.....	50
3.3 Goreblogging: Introduction to the Case Study.....	51
3.3.1 Activating Gore.....	53
CHAPTER 4	
GOREBLOGGING: EXPLORING CORPOREALITY, SEXUALITY, AND DESIRE	
IN MEMES.....	55
4.1 Moodboard 1: On Corporeality.....	55
4.1.1 Get Ready with the Monster.....	55
4.1.2 Girlhood Is a Spectrum: Between Hyperfemme Euphoria and Abjection.....	56
4.1.3 Girl Help! I'm Being Perceived.....	58
4.2 Moodboard 2: On Sexuality and Desire.....	59
4.2.1 Sexualization, Sexuality, and Intimacy: The Frustration of Female Desire and the Role of Metaphorical Cannibalism.....	60
4.2.2 Intertextuality of Unhinged Girls: Mapping Inner Landscape.....	61
4.3 Commentary: Unveiling Postfeminist Contradictions.....	63
4.4 Gore, Catharsis and the Potential for Transformation.....	64
CONCLUSION.....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	69
WEBOGRAPHY.....	75
FILMOGRAPHY.....	79
APPENDIX A.....	80
APPENDIX B.....	91

INTRODUCTION

This work emerges from my embodied experience. It tells of bodies moving through a terrain of paradoxes and inner lives embedded with evolving systems of power: viscous, internalized, and continually reproduced. It speaks of the violence of normativization, but above all, it fosters creative potentialities and calls for a responsible stance, prompting reflections on how pain can be reclaimed to resist identity-based confinement.

In this journey toward a conscious engagement with action, feminism must be understood as an ongoing process. It is a horizon to strive toward, as well as a present ethical strategy for exploring a multifaceted reality in which feminism itself is fragmented, denied, or considered outdated. This last position is central to postfeminism, a cultural sensibility (Gill, 2007) that emerged in the late 1980s and that, while not entirely rejecting feminism, argues that it has become obsolete.

This research intends to challenge this standpoint by examining postfeminism in the context in which it arises and evolves for a broader understanding of the experience of new generations of women and a critical evaluation of whether feminism is still needed. Postfeminist dynamics unfold in a highly complex scenario, requiring an equally nuanced approach to fully comprehend them. Therefore, postfeminism will be addressed not as a fixed entity but as a relational construct continuously interacting with neoliberal ideology and the media industry. Consequently, despite this work focusing on postfeminism, it must be noted that it does not hold a position of hierarchical superiority, as each actor at play contributes to the co-construction of each other.

The intersections between postfeminism, media and neoliberalism have been widely explored by scholars such as Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007), Angela McRobbie (1994, 2009), and Rosalind Gill (2007, 2008, 2015-17). Their contributions offer a solid basis for the arguments that will be developed in the following pages and stimulate reflection on important cultural changes of the late 20th-century. In this regard, poststructuralism and postmodernism will play an essential role in the analysis. While recognizing postcolonialism as another considerable movement that has undoubtedly impacted epistemology, including it within the scope of this work would have exceeded its temporal and length constraints. Priority is given here to poststructuralism and postmodern influences, as they offer theoretical tools for framing the postfeminist subjectivity. Furthermore, although it is gradually expanding to include non-white individuals (Butler 2013; Dosekun 2015) and queer sexualities (Gill, 2017), postfeminism originates as a Western phenomenon and continues, to a large extent, to center on white, cisgender and heterosexual women. Since it mainly impacts this demographic, my analysis will focus on digital expression, aesthetics, and trends predominantly targeting this social category.

As stated, another characteristic of already existing studies is their attention to the media; nevertheless, postfeminism has been examined mainly in relation to traditional media such as advertising, cinema, TV series, and literature. This work aims to update the current

scholarship by expanding the debate to social media platforms. In a context increasingly mediated by the Internet, it is essential to explore the expressions of postfeminism in cyberspace, its effects on younger generations, particularly Gen Z,¹ and how they engage with these practices and give voice to their experiences online.

This interest in digital self-narration determined the choice of my case study, which consists of a collection of girlblog memes. Girlblogging refers to posts commonly shared on Pinterest, Tumblr, and X related to girlhood and characterized by stereotypical feminine motifs. However, as an “online girl” myself, I have noticed a darker trend within girlblogging. The memes I selected precisely refer to this under-category, as they do not reject the hyper-feminine aesthetic but rather juxtapose it with elements evoking violence, decay, and inner turmoil. These features find affinity with gore, a cinematic subgenre of horror centered on splatter and extreme graphic scenes. Beyond being a great interest of mine, gore became intertwined with my gendered experience, as my relationship with my body has always been shaped by an excruciating sense of inadequacy, deeply influenced by social standards of female beauty. Over time, this psychological pain grew sharper, eventually evolving into an inner condition that, as I will elaborate on in the following pages, can be described as gore.

The coexistence of girliness and violence portrayed in some girlblog memes deeply resonated with me, further reinforcing my decision to choose this content, which I call “goreblogging.” If “traditional” girlblogging aligns with the uncritical narrative typical of postfeminism, goreblogging seems to fracture this glossy façade. My objective is to explore this apparent point of rupture using gore as a method of inquiry.

To comprehend gore’s methodological validity, one must focus on its chaotic nature and explicit manifestation of suffering. I hypothesize that the pain emerging from these posts functions as a postfeminist symptom, which can be grasped and described by gore. Furthermore, gore holds a cathartic dimension that I believe provides fertile ground for an affirmative approach through which gender identity can be reimagined. Adopting this methodology, this research addresses the following research questions:

Does postfeminism provide a reliable narrative of the female experience?

In the second place, can gore, understood as a form of suffering, be reappropriated from a feminist perspective and become a transformative force to rethink gender identity?

Finally, where do goreblogging memes position themselves in relation to postfeminism? Do they reaffirm it, subvert it, or instead form an ambiguous space, neither fully critical nor entirely complicit?

To supply answers, this research draws on the contributions of Michel Foucault (1975) and Gilles Deleuze (1972/1983, 1980/1987)². Foucault’s insights on power and the production of docile bodies support the use of gore as a descriptive tool, while Deleuze’s concepts of desiring machines, assemblages, and the Body without Organs (BwO) are key to understanding how gore can operate not merely as a destructive force but as a creative one.

¹Gen Z, or Generation Z, refers to the demographic cohort born roughly between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s.

²Although Guattari was a fundamental collaborator of Deleuze in the cited works, in the philosophical tradition, especially within feminist theory, Deleuze holds a prominent role, which is why this research refers mostly to him.

Eventually, feminist contributions to new materialism complete the theoretical framework by connecting to the affirmative aspect of the Deleuzian philosophy, enabling a transcendence of the state of potentiality and shift toward productivity, which must be sustained by gender consciousness as well as ethical orientation.

In this regard, Rosi Braidotti's (2011, 2019) politics of affirmation and Donna Haraway's (2016) concept of response-ability add great value to this research, not only as tools to be adopted in the present moment, but also as veritable itineraries; inner paths to be incessantly nurtured in order to enact resisting strategies against diffused power. In this sense, they relate to the final stage of my methodology in which the subject is metaphorically dismembered, yet free to reorganize itself.

Karen Barad's (2007) ethico-onto-epistemology is another pillar supporting this study: as a researcher, I am not separate from the research itself, nor from the process and methods of knowledge building. Rather, they are connected to my intimate experience and feminist beliefs.

Having clarified the approach to postfeminism that will be adopted, the objectives of the research, and the methods and theories to pursue them, the final step before delving into the project is to provide an outline of its structure.

The first chapter maps the conditions that made possible the emergence of postfeminism and its persistence across time. The shaping of the postfeminist subjectivity will constitute another focus of the chapter, which will also unveil postfeminist contradictions. This first part will end by addressing some key traits of new digital media, laying the groundwork to transition into the second chapter.

Considering trends, digital aesthetics, and popular discourses in online spaces, Chapter Two reveals the violent implications of postfeminism, addressing eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and the increasing resort to medical procedures that invasively mark the female flesh.

This climax toward violence sets the stage for the discussion of gore as a methodological approach. Chapter Three explains in greater detail the employment of the philosophical theories I am mobilizing, introduces the case study, and explains how gore is activated in order to conduct the examination of memes.

Chapter Four is dedicated to the case study, connecting the findings on postfeminism with the ways in which girlhood is narrated in online spaces. Specifically, it explores the themes of the body, the engagement with sexual and romantic relationships, and the expression of girls' interior world through memetic forms.

Final thoughts will retrace the main findings that emerged throughout this work, offering reflections on its limitations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 1

MAPPING POSTFEMINISM: THEORY, SUBJECTIVITY, AESTHETICS, AND MEDIA EXPRESSIONS

1.1 Situating Postfeminism

Postmodernism, Post-Punk, Post-Pornography, Post-Hardcore, Poststructuralism, Posthumanism. From philosophy to art, from music to theory, the second half of the 20th century has witnessed the rise of the “post” era. This proliferation of “posts” across disciplines reflected a broader cultural trend that also affected feminism.

Although the term’s origins can be traced back to the period between the 1920s and the rise of second-wave feminism (Alice, 1995), it was in the late 1980s that postfeminism officially became a subject of academic discussion. However, interpretations on the matter have been far from unanimous. The prefix “post” was the fulcrum around which various perspectives converged: how should it be understood? Does it imply a sharp rupture from the previous feminist movement, or instead suggest a continuity, being its inevitable evolution?

Before outlining scholars’ insights, it is crucial to clarify the context in which postfeminism emerged. The first aspect to consider is the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism, influential movements of the so-called “turn to culture” (Chaney, 1994). The contributions of philosophers of the caliber of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jean Baudrillard, just to name a few, brought about an epistemic shift that transformed knowledge production. Equally noteworthy with regards to postfeminism is neoliberalism, which not only pertains to the economic sphere but feeds into a mindset that orients affects and determines lifestyles. Lastly, mass media also require attention to understand how postfeminism spreads.

Considering these premises, the following section delves deeper into the role of such actors and introduces key concepts that will be helpful throughout this work.

1.1.1 Postfeminism’s Essentials: Conditions of Existence and Supporting Forces

The post-World War II period determined a turning point in Western culture. From that moment on, the certainties that had defined the modern age began to crumble, marking the beginning of postmodernity.

In the skeptical and unpredictable postmodern world, rational linear thinking loses its relevance. Instead, conceptual metaphors like the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) and the pastiche (Jameson, 1991) prove more suitable for navigating a fragmented reality. Likewise, metanarratives lose their appeal (Lyotard, 1984), and interest shifts away from “high theory” toward pop culture (McRobbie, 1994).

These transformations determined an epistemic reorientation that also impacted the conception of identity, which was no longer understood as fixed but as a processual becoming. Such reframing of the subject benefited from Deleuzian philosophy: although he never explicitly aligned with postmodernism, Deleuze influenced postmodern thought

(Bogue, 1990, p.407). His works opposed the representationalist episteme, which posits that reality, and by extension identity, has no defined characteristics to be perfectly mirrored.

Poststructuralists, too, relied on a complex approach to understanding the shaping of subjectivity; Derrida and Foucault are two prominent figures in this realm. Building on Saussurean semiotics (2011/1916), Derrida argued that the connection between the signified and the signifier is unstable, challenging the ontological foundations of binary oppositions and showing that meaning is always deferred.

Foucault's contributions were, if anything, even broader. Besides critiquing older epistemic models (e.g., 1966, 1969) and sustaining the discursively constructed nature of the subject, he offered a nuanced view of power. In his analysis, the latter is not merely repressive and confined to top-down institutions, but also productive and pervasive. Furthermore, Foucault (e.g., 1975, Vol. 1: 1976; Vols. 2–3: 1984) introduced foundational concepts such as “biopower” and “docile bodies,” which would prove to be highly influential for feminist theorists.

These cultural developments created fertile ground for the emergence of postfeminism. The destabilization of universal categories led to challenging patriarchy and imperialism as totalizing systems, allowing subjectivities that “were historically drowned out by the (modernist) meta-narrative of mastery” (McRobbie, 1994, p. 14) to claim their voices. New perspectives such as queer theory, black feminism, and decolonial thought questioned the ontological status of “woman,” considered stable during the second wave. Feminism itself assumed various forms, branching out into different positions, including its “post” version. Similarly, the renewed conception of power is crucial when discussing postfeminism as it demonstrates that coercive norms are not confined to a specific site. Instead, they are omnipresent and possess an active aspect, being intimately linked to the agency of individuals, who make their choices while still participating in power-reproducing mechanisms.

If postmodernism and poststructuralism lay the necessary preconditions for the existence of postfeminism, neoliberalism acts as an amplifier. The self-discipline and personal responsibility principles that characterize it construct a solid ideological framework for postfeminism, strengthening its impact. The role of media will be addressed in greater detail in a separate section, as they are central in this analysis. For now, it is enough to say that, much like neoliberalism, they boost the postfeminist message, offering visibility to its contents. Thus, neoliberalism and the media intersect postfeminism, creating an entanglement of systems that feed off each other through selling strategies, rapid information dissemination, and repetition.

Having understood the contextual dynamics and the roles of the leading actors involved, it is now possible to turn to what postfeminism entails, analyzing it in light of its relationship with earlier and contemporary feminist voices.

1.1.2 The Dialogue with Old and New Feminisms

The diversity of views on postfeminism largely depends on how it relates to second-wave feminism. Susan Faludi (1991) described postfeminism as a backlash against the progress achieved by the activism of second-wave feminists. However, the excessive reductionism of this stance demanded more nuanced readings. For instance, Ann Brooks (1997) analyzed the

phenomenon in connection to postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. From her perspective, postfeminism:

Is not a depoliticisation of feminism, but a political shift in feminism's conceptual and theoretical agenda. Postfeminism is about a critical engagement with earlier feminist political and theoretical concepts and strategies as a result of its engagement with other social movements for change (p. 4).

Although less simplistic than the backlash, the idea of postfeminism as a continuation of 1960s feminism remained relatively marginal within academic debate. Conversely, perspectives recognizing its complexity have achieved greater resonance.

Melanie Kennedy's (2019) contribution is a case in point: while acknowledging that postfeminism has political outcomes, she denied it has an intentional political nature. Instead, she spoke of it in terms of a "cultural context" and a way "to call out the complex and contradictory sets of ideas related to girlhood and feminism within those cultural spaces" (p.6). Sarah Projansky (2001) defined postfeminism as cultural discourse, while Jess Butler (2013) and Simidele Dosekun (2015) framed it as a transnational culture. They transcended postfeminism's historical and geographical Western roots and considered its influence in new sites and subjects. A thought-provoking viewpoint comes from Ruby Grant and Meredith Nash (2017), who provocatively suggested inserting a question mark between "post" and "feminism" to emphasize that "feminist engagement is multiple and shifting and that the range of issues involved in feminist identification is much more complex today" (2017, p. 13). Similarly, Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra offered an articulated standpoint. In *Interrogating Postfeminism* (2007), they argue: "[P]ostfeminism signals more than a simple evolutionary process whereby aspects of feminism have been incorporated into popular culture—and thereby naturalized as popular feminism. It also simultaneously involves an "othering" of feminism" (p. 4).

The idea of "othering" also appears in Sarah E. Whitney (2016), who conceptualizes postfeminism as doppelgänger; the spectral double of feminism. To convey the complex nature of postfeminism, Angela McRobbie used the expression "double entanglement" (2009, p. 6), which indicates an undoing of feminism that manifests through "disarticulation and displacement, accompanied by replacement and substitution" (p. 26). Rosalind Gill (2007) too provided a conceptually rich perspective refraining from interpreting postfeminism as an epistemological or historical framework, instead defining it as a sensibility.

Postfeminism thus emerges as a reconfiguration of the previous feminist discourse in response to contemporary cultural metamorphoses. Tracing a common thread among its various readings it is possible to state that postfeminism acknowledges the importance of 1960's feminism as its fights allowed the achievement of an empowered female condition, yet its success made feminism obsolete.

In other words, the "post," whether understood as progression, a rupture, or a mixture of both, signals a departure from core old feminist principles.

To further comprehend postfeminism, it is essential to consider how it dialogues with the new feminist groups it shares the stage with. In this regard, Gill (2017) observes, "the new

visibility of (some kinds of) feminism raises complicated questions about the extent to which postfeminism is—or should be—defined in relation to feminism” (p. 611). This difficulty arises, first, from the absence of a single form of feminism as a term of comparison. Second, the current landscape is characterized by a double contradiction: although postfeminism implies that feminism has outlived its purpose, the two coexist. Meanwhile, misogynistic rhetoric accompanies the renewed visibility of feminist discourse. Illustrating these contrasting dynamics in the 1990s United States, Allison Yarrow (2018) observes that “the more women assumed power, the more power was taken from them through a noxious popular culture that celebrated outright hostility toward women” (p. 12).

This paradox demands closer scrutiny to elucidate the relationship between postfeminism, contemporary feminist formations, and anti-feminist standpoints. To this end, I propose imagining a spectrum with “political feminisms” and “aesthetic feminisms” at the poles.³ Postfeminism occupies the aesthetic extreme. Its aestheticizing force will emerge later in this work. Starting from this pole, preceding towards the center of the spectrum are pop feminism and “bimbo feminism.”⁴ Liberal feminism has a more hybrid position, while eco, trans, and intersectional feminism occupy the political area of the spectrum. This distribution is linked to a more or less pronounced degree of social visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Generally, more explicit political feminisms receive less media attention, unlike those in which the aesthetic dimension is more accentuated, where, however, there is no stark critique of systemic forms of oppression.

At this point, the paradox arising from the coexistence of pro- and anti-feminist perspectives is, at least partly, resolved. The feminisms that gain resonance do not challenge institutions and do not advocate for social transformation moving on a superficial level. After all, as Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) noted, nowadays, “everything can be labeled as feminist” (p. 10). It is therefore necessary to reflect on who uses this label and understand what meaning is attributed to (or removed from) it.

Envisioning the placements on the spectrum also illuminates how postfeminism relates to other feminist expressions, helping a broader comprehension of its structure. In the case of pop feminism, the degree of conflict is practically absent. Despite its use of the term “feminism,” pop feminism is often deployed in media as a brand, stripped of political substance and fully aligned with the postfeminist uncritical narratives on empowerment. Bimbo feminism might initially seem to present greater friction. It has become particularly visible on social media. On TikTok, for example, there is a dedicated hashtag, #BimboTok, which gathers content related to this trend. In this online space, singer Chrissy Chlapecka has become a representative figure, defining herself as the quintessential Gen Z bimbo feminist. According to Chlapecka (@chrissychlapecka, 2020) Bimbo feminism has a radical leftist stance supportive of sex work, Black Lives Matter, and LGBTQ+ rights. However, it remains

³This division should not be understood as a rigid categorization, as doing so would require a detailed explanation of the components of each movement, which goes beyond the scope of this work. Rather, it is intended as a heuristic strategy to make the relationship between postfeminism and contemporary feminist movements more readable and systematic.

⁴The term “bimbo” is a slang word that initially referred to an unintelligent man. However its meaning changed in the early 2000s when a photo showing Paris Hilton, Britney Spears, and Lindsay Lohan, dubbed the “Holy Trinity of Bimbos,” became popular.

inextricably tied to hyper-feminine aesthetics, without which it arguably would not exist. This reliance on aesthetic codes constitutes a meaningful point of intersection with postfeminism. A similar dynamic applies to liberal feminism, which continues to invoke the feminist label and acknowledge ongoing struggles yet ultimately emphasizes empowerment and individual choice, central themes also in postfeminist discourse.

Concerning political feminisms, one can identify a relational ambiguity similar to that observed with the second wave. Particularly with intersectional feminism, which addresses structural forms of inequality more broadly than the more targeted focuses of eco or transfeminism, postfeminism tends to distance itself from the more overtly politicized aspects while simultaneously appropriating certain elements to ensure social appeal. For instance, the ongoing postfeminist inclusion of identity categories such as race, queer sexual orientation or age (Gill, 2017) reflects an appropriation of intersectional insights, stripped of their critical edge.

In essence, the “post” in postfeminism remains ambiguously configured as it draws selectively and strategically from the legacy of 1960s feminism. Positioning it within the current landscape of feminisms does not resolve this murkiness as it either replicates relational dynamics reminiscent of those between postfeminism and its predecessor or generates apparent tensions between the “post” and the alleged feminist stance adopted by other contemporary formations. However this contrast remains on a superficial level: the conflict with which postfeminism relates to other feminisms decreases as the aesthetic component within these movements grows.

1.2 The Postfeminist Subject

The cultural developments mapped out so far to outline the necessary contextual references also provide insights into how postfeminist subjectivity is built.

A key aspect of the postfeminist subject is its postmodern legacy. In this regard, Kennedy (2019) states:

It is in [the] entanglement of postfeminist and postmodern discourses, located in the transformative, reflexive project of the self—largely through consumption and performance—that we see the tween representing the model subject of postfeminism. As a subject seemingly always in the process of constructing a self (‘becoming’), the culturally constructed tween is ideally suited to postfeminism’s requirement for girls and women to make the right choices in the reflexive and consumerist project of the self (p. 7).

The question of “becoming” inevitably recalls Deleuze’s (1980/1987) notion of becoming-woman. However, I argue that the postfeminist version of becoming diverges significantly from the philosopher’s. While in Deleuzian thought, becoming-woman involves a destabilization of fixed identities and gender categories, in postfeminism, it works in the opposite direction. The becoming-(postfeminist)woman seeks to re-territorialize and essentialize identity through specific markers offering the illusion of fluidity while serving the late capitalist market. Not by chance, Tasker and Negra (2007) speak of the postfeminist individual as a buying subject, which implies that the becoming-postfeminist is economically conditioned.

The poststructuralist's focus on language equally contributed to understanding how the postfeminist subject is formed. The use and particularly the repetition of terms such as "woman," "girl," "feminine," and "female" take part in identity consolidation, as supported in poststructuralist views.

It is to be noted that a poststructuralist approach alone risks erasing the agency of the individual granting too much power to language. In contrast, I propose a broader reading of postfeminist subjectivity, which comes to being through the entanglement of multiple elements: language, attitudes, markers, and individual choices. Indeed, the postfeminist subject is a desiring one who chooses how to perform identity and engage in acts of consumption to do so. In other words, it is agential. However, agency is expressed within a delimited territory, so, the actions enacted within its borders lead to the illusion of becoming.

In spite of this, acknowledging that subjectivity results from an interplay of factors that does not exclude action implies the possibility of resistance. Since agency exists, it can also transcend the confines within which it is constrained, opening new horizons to identity reconfiguration. Such transformative potential will be a central topic of discussion in this work, but first, it is fundamental to examine how the postfeminist subject comes into being.

1.2.1 Between Girl and Woman: The Ontological Instability of Linguistic Constructs and the Brandable Identity

My first assumption is that **the quintessential postfeminist subject is a woman**. The reference to Derridean contributions to poststructuralism already revealed the lack of ontological stability in language structure. Hence, the first step is to clarify how postfeminism signifies the category of women. Judith Butler (1999) opens her seminal *Gender Trouble* by wondering:

Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? And is not such a reification precisely contrary to feminist aims? To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix? (p. 8).

These questions raise astute reflections for the purpose of this work, which is why I propose to use them as a guide throughout this discussion.

A core characteristic of postfeminist subjectivity is the focus on youth, or, better, on looking young. This performance of youth operates through various channels, including language. Let us consider the term "girl," predominant within postfeminism, which relies on the rhetoric of "girl power." Semantically, "girl" denotes "a female child,"⁵ whereas "woman" refers to "an adult female human."⁶ These definitions suggest a clear chronological distinction that becomes irrelevant in postfeminism. As the meaning attributed to girlhood collapses into womanhood, a profound instability in the relationship between the signifier and

⁵Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *Girl*. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Retrieved May 2, 2025, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/girl?q=girl+>

⁶Oxford University Press. (n.d.). *Woman*. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Retrieved May 2, 2025, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/woman?q=woman+>

the signified of the two terms comes to the surface, resulting in the “girlification” of adult women.

In her article “Woman, Girl, Child–The Infantilization of Women,” Elizabeth Loose (2024) suggests that women’s self-identification with girls can function as a coping mechanism, relieving the pressures imposed by capitalist and patriarchal structures. Women reappropriate the infantilizing terms that define them, creating space for the re-signification of degrading labels. However, the counterpart to using childish terms to define womanhood risks harming women by creating an aura of false optimism around their gendered experiences. In postfeminist discourse, the reliance on a girlhood narrative associated with lightness and playfulness upholds uncritical postfeminist ideals according to which feminism has already achieved its goals, leaving little need for further political struggle and ultimately obscuring the structural challenges that women continue to face.

Additionally, the obsession with youth intersects and serves the neoliberal economy. Through market strategies, women are encouraged to purchase products to preserve youthfulness and enhance beauty. In this context, the signification of “woman” is intertwined with the fresh aesthetic of girlhood, making it unnecessary to draw a dividing line between “girl” and “woman.” The postfeminist identity emerges as a hybrid of the two, which leads to my second assumption: **the postfeminist subject is a girlified woman.**

Gill (2007) refers to the blending of girlhood and womanhood with the expression “girlification of the adult woman” (p. 151), while Tasker and Negra (2007) highlight the narrowing distinction between youth and adulthood, emphasizing the cultural devaluation of aging. They write: “Women’s lives are regularly conceived of as time starved; women themselves are overworked, rushed, harassed, subject to their ‘biological clocks,’ and so on to such a degree that female adulthood is defined as a state of chronic temporal crisis” (p. 10). The two scholars further elaborate:

The “girling” of femininity itself is evident in both the celebration of the young woman as a marker of postfeminist liberation and the continuing tendency to either explicitly term or simply treat women of a variety of ages as girls [...] Girlhood is imagined within postfeminist culture as being for everyone; that is, girlhood offers a fantasy of transcendence and evasion, a respite from other areas of experience (p. 18).

This passage reinforces the idea that girlhood should not be understood as a biological or developmental stage but rather as a performative status accessible to anyone who adopts its codes. Within the contemporary media landscape, the criticism of actress Millie Bobby Brown illustrates how youth is constructed primarily in aesthetic terms rather than in demographic ones. Despite being 21, she has been attacked by users on social media for allegedly appearing as a much older woman (@mtvuk, 2025).

This pressure to maintain a youthful appearance even for those who are already young reinforces gendered expectations and generates anxiety linked to the body. In the postfeminist framework, “to look like a mature woman becomes a failure of self-marketing” (Winch, 2013, p. 29), hence physical appearance needs to undergo a process of disciplining. Market-available tools aimed at rejuvenating appearance, along with a frivolous rhetoric, are fundamental aspects in the postfeminist process of constructing the category of woman.

Having highlighted them, it is possible to provide an affirmative answer to Butler's initial question on the reification of gender norms. Furthermore, fostering a sense of inadequacy to monetize women's insecurities responds positively to the second question regarding the detrimental effects of the categorical construction of "woman" in relation to feminist aims.

Ironically, this rhetoric exposes a contradiction within postfeminism: while it asserts that feminism is no longer necessary, it simultaneously marginalizes certain groups of women, especially when they resist pressures to appear younger.

Nevertheless, the emulation of youth is only one axis along which postfeminist subjectivity is constructed. Beyond chronological markers, postfeminism defines femininity through aesthetic practices.

1.2.2 The Construction of Femininity and Its Consolidation through Surveillance

My third assumption on the postfeminist subject is that **the girlified woman is feminine**.

By this, I do not intend to frame femininity as an in-built identity trait of the woman subject. Indeed, it would not even be accurate to assert that the postfeminist subject *is* inherently feminine, attaching to femininity an ontological value. In line with Butler (1999), I understand femininity as something one *does* rather than something one *is*. Nevertheless, the formulation of my assumption remains pertinent in this analysis. Although postfeminism constructs femininity entirely through discursive and material practices, it presents it as inherent to womanhood. In doing so, postfeminism appeals to the subject's affective dimension, producing a sense of moral obligation to prove them feminine. In essence, "in a neoliberal postfeminist society [femininity] is promoted as a performance that one wins at" (Winch, 2013, p. 157).

The emphasis on neoliberalism draws attention to a thriving postfeminist market that consolidates the hyper-femme aesthetic through the sale of clothing, cosmetics, and beauty products. The increasingly frequent use of cosmetic medical procedures has expanded how the competitive performance of femininity takes shape, rendering it "a fragmented and abject condition waiting to be renewed and redeemed by the postmodern Prometheus of cosmetic surgery" (Tincknell, 2011, p. 84).

In light of this, the postfeminist girl-woman is an active agent in sustaining the capitalist economy, driven by a sense of fulfilling what is perceived as her "natural" duty. The emotional implications of this participation operate on multiple, overlapping levels, most notably, self-affirmation and self-surveillance, which do not necessarily contradict one another but coexist in tension.

The resurgence of hyper-feminine aesthetics can be understood as a generational response to the gender-neutral kids fashion that characterized the period from the 1960s until the early 1980s (Kennedy, 2019). In this light, embracing a hyper-femme look may be interpreted as a conscious stance expressing pride in one's femininity and claiming one's belonging to a gender identity. However, the postfeminist world offers no leniency: the pleasure of self-affirmation is granted only to those who perform an identity deemed worthy of being considered empowered, which demands engaging in a continuous practice of self-discipline.

Reflecting on the consolidation of normative femininity, Winch (2013) theorized the existence of a “Gynaeopticon,” a form of peer body surveillance that has gained even greater potency in the Internet age. Interestingly, this form of control relies on what Winch calls “girlfriend gaze,” meaning that power no longer merely emanates from a male external observer but has been internalized by the girls themselves. A striking example is the TikTok trend “What’s my blindness?” (@abrupodesta, 2024) where predominantly young women invite online scrutiny, actively seeking critiques of flaws they may fail to recognize.

Essentially, postfeminist femininity is, first and foremost, configured as an act of self-branding closely tied to the consumption of products and services that produce a feminine aesthetic. Secondly, it is a contradictory process in which empowerment is contingent upon adherence to normative standards, reinforced by self and peer scrutiny, that functions as a sort of postfeminist police. Despite such blatant reliance on external elements, postfeminist rhetoric asserts that femininity is an innate womanly aspect. In this regard, Gill (2007) notes that postfeminism conceptualizes femininity as a “bodily property rather than social structural or psychological” (p. 149), assigning it a biological dimension that evokes authenticity.

Given this emphasis on femininity’s supposed naturalness, one must examine how postfeminism essentializes it into the female body.

1.2.3 Essentializing Hyper-femininity

My fourth and last assumption is that **the postfeminist subject is a girlified woman whose femininity is aesthetically essentialized.**

Whereas the late 1970s and early 1980s encouraged a shift toward gender equality and a departure from the rhetoric of sexual difference, the 1990s witnessed a resurgence of biologically deterministic discourses. This re-essentialization was bolstered by the fields of psychology and genetics and the enduring imperative to legitimize traditional representations of gender relations in mainstream media (Gill, 2007).

The body assumed a central role in this renewed cultural investment in sexual difference, emerging as the primary site through which femininity is constructed. The deterministic link between the female sex and gender identity is further reinforced through its opposition to masculinity, which naturalizes biological differences and sustains a binary conception of gender. The essentialization of hyper-femininity also functions as a regulatory mechanism of sexuality within a heteronormative framework. Gill (2007) notes:

Sexual difference discourses also serve to (re-)eroticise power relations between men and women. At one level this simply means that difference is constructed as sexy. At another, discourses of natural gender difference can be used to freeze in place existing inequalities by representing them as inevitable and – if read correctly – as pleasurable (p. 159).

Such re-eroticization manifests vividly in certain micro-trends circulating on TikTok, where young women assert their aversion to male partners exhibiting alleged “feminine” behaviors such as having a tummy ache, wearing nail polish, or feeling cold (@elenaspinellaa, 2024; @marjagiulia2, 2025; @sofiaaasssb, 2025). These expressions raise important questions about how younger generations perceive masculinity and femininity, as they seem to, at least

in part, reinforce an essentialist understanding of gender. Further examples of this matter can be identified in digital aesthetics. The “Rockstar Girlfriend”⁷ and the “Mob Wife,”⁸ for instance, show how femininity is complementary to male-centered roles (Scott, 2024).

A closer look at this media field, where the division between males and females is visible and imbued with erotic charge, also allows to address the last of Butler’s questions regarding the coherence and effectiveness of the woman category within the heterosexual matrix. Based on the evidence presented so far, it can be asserted that within postfeminism, the shaping of the hyper-feminine, girlified woman not only reaffirms traditional gender roles and offers little in terms of feminist advancement but is predominantly validated within a heterosexual framework.

Before proceeding to illustrate how the postfeminist subject takes shape in practice, it is important to highlight one final point that reveals a further contradiction. This attempt at essentialization is nothing more than a winning market strategy since, beyond its clear reliance on the commodification of femininity that generates revenue, it does not challenge existing beliefs about gender. By avoiding any confrontation with established norms, it requires no political commitment to their deconstruction, making for a process that is quite easy to assimilate.

1.3 Postfeminist Aesthetics: From the Body to Inner Life

Up to this point, it has been highlighted that, on a theoretical level, postfeminism employs affective, material, and linguistic tools to construct subjectivity. Although contradictory, postfeminism manages to shape a form of identity by leveraging the emotional sphere that masterfully generates feelings of competition and inadequacy. It also produces an aesthetic appeal that works seamlessly within a context permeated by capitalist logic.

This section thoroughly explores how consumer and behavioral practices concretely express identity. Moreover, it revisits a key aspect of the earlier discussion on postfeminism: its aesthetic dimension. Identifying aesthetics as a core feature of postfeminism has been a useful strategy for analyzing it in relation to other forms of feminism. Here, I aim to exemplify what I mean when I argue that postfeminist performs an aesthetic function.

The term “aesthetic” refers to attractiveness, understood as a form of visible, tangible beauty. Postfeminism operates in accordance with such definition, molding the materiality of the body and subjecting it to strict beauty norms imbued with the moral value of empowerment. Essentially, to achieve the promise of emancipation, the subject must conform to specific standards of “hotness,” marking the first aesthetic frontier of postfeminist action. At the same time, the aestheticizing dimension also permeates immaterial aspects of identity, influencing the subject’s practices. Postfeminist aesthetics penetrate lifestyle and glamourize it, devaluing the original purpose of pastimes and habits, whether they are aimed at pure entertainment or well-being. Such an aesthetic refinement is even more relevant in a social media-mediated context. Beyond the body, ordinary life is spectacularized and offered to a

⁷The Rockstar Girlfriend is an aesthetic that gained popularity in 2022, drawing inspiration from the feminine grunge clothing styles of the 1970s to the 1990s.

⁸The Mob Wife is an aesthetic that has been popular since 2023, inspired by portrayals of mafia wives in popular culture and media.

broad audience, fueling surveillance and nurturing a sense of competition. Hence, even daily routines must adhere to aesthetics expectations to appear desirable and sustain the subject's sense of worth.

Following a progression from the outside inward, it is possible to see how postfeminism aestheticizes the expression and content of the identity it produces.

1.3.1 *Thou Shalt Be Hot: The Supremacy of Sexual Attractiveness*

Hotness is an imperative of postfeminism.

Parallel with postfeminism's development during the 1980s and 1990s, full-fledged sexualizing fashion trends became trendy, presenting themselves as emblems of women's liberation.

One need only think of raunch culture (Levy, 2005), where strip-club aesthetics, based on skimpy clothing, extremely high heels, and visible lingerie, normalized the hypersexualization of women. The phenomenon of porno chic also contributed to cementing the cultural value of sexiness. McNair (2002) describes this pornification of aesthetics as:

The representation of porn in non-pornographic art and culture; the pastiche and parody of, the homage to and investigation of porn; the postmodern transformation of porn into a mainstream cultural artifact for a variety of purposes including, as we shall see, advertising, art, comedy and education (p. 61).

From this excerpt, it is clear that by the end of the last century, explicit references to sexuality were no longer confined to pornography but became an integral part of the cultural expression of the time. Relative to this phenomenon, McRobbie (2009) speaks of a "hyper-culture of commercial sexuality" (p. 18) characterized by the proliferation of T-shirts with porn-inspired slogans, and the peak in popularity of Playboy bunnies, whose appeal reached even younger generations of girls.

By the end of the last century, the self-sexualization of the body had become an essential requirement for being considered liberated to the point where Gill (2008) theorizes the existence of a "compulsory (sexual) agency as a required feature of contemporary postfeminist, neoliberal subjectivity" (p. 40).

However, postfeminism lacks internal coherence. Gill (2007) herself points out that "only some women are constructed as active, desiring sexual subjects: women who desire sex with men (except when lesbian women 'perform' for men), and only young, slim, and beautiful women" (p. 152). Once again, this exact exclusive nature of postfeminism, which continues to dictate the terms of female visibility, raises questions about the supposed irrelevance of feminism. Even when one is willing to accept sexualized aesthetics as an undisputed form of empowerment, it would remain confined to those who choose to conform to it.

Hotness still holds social value in current society; its centrality is found in Gen Z's increased resorting to invasive and non-invasive beauty practices, as well as in trends and

slang expressions like “hot girl walk”⁹ and “hot girl summer.”¹⁰ Even allegedly politicized new forms of feminism give prominence to sexual attractiveness. Aforementioned bimbo feminist Chrissy Chlapecka, for instance, recalls how desiring a sexy body is no longer intended for the male gaze but rather for one’s gaze before adding: “And damn, my tits look good” (@chrissychlapecka, 2020).

OnlyFans (OF) represents another recent and more evident example of the encouraged sexualization of the self. Although OnlyFans did not invent sex work, it undoubtedly popularized its digital expression, hence raising questions about its social value in current times. Launched in 2016, OF is an adult content platform where creators, 70% of whom are women (StatisticsOnlyFans, 2023), publish their material retaining 80% of the earnings generated from user subscriptions.

This significant profit margin raises an interesting reflection regarding the notion of empowerment. Opening an OnlyFans account is a voluntary choice made by the creator, whose lifestyle is presumably improved from a financial standpoint.

Nevertheless, this very idea of empowerment seems to pertain more to an economic discourse than to the social status of women. Therefore, without falling into binary reductionisms, equating sexualization with emancipation proves to be just as reductive as claiming the opposite. In this regard, Levy (2005) provocatively notes that sexual liberation and objectification may reveal more about how far there is still to go than about what has been achieved.

In the current context, which has certainly changed compared to the 1990s, assessing the value of self-sexualization requires further reflection. If it initially arose as a reaction against a victimizing narrative allegedly upheld by second-wave feminism that seemed to deprive women of their agency and served to reframe the representation of women in more empowered terms, today’s young women are coming of age in a cultural landscape where sexual performance is already normalized: an achievement also made possible by sex-positive position within feminism. Remaining within this logic, there is no longer a dominant “victim” image to resist, as one can imagine early postfeminists intended it, following that even the potentially postfeminist political value of reclaiming sexuality is less powerful compared to the 1990s, granting more relevance to a pure aesthetic performance.

1.3.2 Glow-up Culture: The Aestheticization of Habits and Daily Routines

Outlining the features of postfeminist sensibility, Gill (2007) identified the makeover paradigm as one key trait, giving prominence to postfeminism’s aesthetic value. Ten years later, interrogating how the phenomenon had evolved, she noted how the makeover culture had not only remained pivotal but had expanded its reach “beyond the surface of the body to an incitement to ‘makeover’ one’s interior life, developing a new, ‘upgraded’ postfeminist subjectivity” (Gill, 2017, p.607).

⁹Hot Girl Walk refers to a trend popularized on TikTok where walking becomes a form of empowerment, often accompanied by positive affirmations.

¹⁰“Hot Girl Summer” is a phrase attributed to rapper Megan Thee Stallion, valuing female confidence, independence, and amusement which became popular online.

In such a framework, where postfeminism has expanded its range of action, self-esteem becomes a primary demand for women, converging in a veritable “cult of confidence” (Gill & Orgad, 2022). Besides being imbued with an emotional charge that links it to social worth, confidence is also considered “sexy,” shedding light on how aesthetic stance now reaches attitudes.

To further understand how postfeminism aestheticizes the subject’s inner life, let us consider the question of personal choice. It has already emerged how postfeminist identity is framed as a becoming (Kennedy, 2019). Considering self-identity in late modernity in relation to the transformations imposed by global capitalism, Anthony Giddens (1991) highlighted the existence of a project-self in which “individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options” (p. 5). Choice holds great significance for women, portrayed as subjects liberated from the past’s social, political, and economic constraints, engaged in ongoing processes of reinvention and self-investment (Keller, 2016). Furthermore, negotiating personal choice is particularly significant when discussing postfeminism, as the individual is constantly called to update their lifestyle to achieve empowerment through external makeovers and changes in habits and behaviors. The growing online attention to the “glow-up” phenomenon is particularly telling.

On TikTok, for instance, “gym bunnies”¹¹ promote workout and share low-cal and high-protein recipes, reinforcing a moralized aesthetic of bodily discipline. Viral trends such as “Eat Your Skincare”¹² exemplify how pursuing aesthetic ideals increasingly relies on regulating the body’s inner life just like abdominal vacuums, and debloating massages merge gut health routines with the desire for a flat, sculpted stomach. This expansion of self-regulation into lifestyle management is also evident in the evolution of digital femininities, as illustrated by the transition from the alt aesthetic of the “e-girl” popular in 2020 to the “clean girl.” More disciplined than the former, the clean girl embodies a female archetype where self-worth stems from daily routines, including skincare, fitness, diet, journaling, manifestation practices, and vision boards.

This shift may signal a growing sensitivity to mental health and emotional well-being. However, one must remain critical of these practices as they serve consumerism. Physical and mental health can be used as a mask to cover the real intent of achieving a corporeal and emotional standard, romanticizing wellness activities, depriving them of their real intent, just making them aesthetic. Moreover, aestheticizing inner life as a lifestyle entails an additional problem. Linking the promise of empowerment and personal value to a life marked by Instagrammable meals, cosmetic treatments, and expensive gym memberships can trigger guilt in those who lack the financial means to attain it. The inner makeover is also tied to the market, thus it requires economic and emotional resources, as one never feels enough in the ongoing race toward self-realization according to postfeminist and neoliberal standards.

¹¹Gym bunny is a slang term typically used to describe a woman, who spends a lot of time at the gym, with a strong focus on physical appearance.

¹²“Eat your skincare” refers to TikTok videos that show how to incorporate skin-beneficial substances like retinol or collagen through food.

Social media contributes significantly to this dynamic, offering us a window into the lives of celebrities, influencers, and even ordinary people who often showcase bodies and routines polished to perfection.

1.4 Postfeminism and the Media Landscape: Dynamics of a Successful Entanglement through Emotional Leverage and Market Strategies

At the beginning of this work, I stated that the media amplifies the resonance of postfeminism, conveying its content with increasing speed. The scholarship on postfeminism has consistently considered its relationship with the media, investigating how it manifests in advertising campaigns, literature, cinema, and television series.

Building on this body of research, this section first reflects on the link between postfeminism and media to expand the argumentation, considering new digital platforms.

However, before turning to these recent developments, it is worth reflecting on why the bond between postfeminism and media has proven so effective and enduring. A significant aspect in this regard is the appeal of the postfeminist discourse. Aimed at provoking positive feelings, postfeminist rhetoric works perfectly within media (Banet-Weiser, 2018) precisely because it is easily branded, visually appealing, and highly shareable.

Let us consider an example from advertising. The famous Dove slogan, “You are worth it,” in the guise of self-love, grips the emotionality of the audience, linking value to the purchase of a product. In this perspective, the phrase might more accurately be read as “You are worth it if you buy this item.”

As has already emerged, postfeminism can provoke a strong affective response by playing on the rhetoric of empowerment. This affective pull and the positive feeling attached to objects occurs in the other mediatic postfeminist expressions, not explicitly aimed at selling. Regarding TV series, Winch (2013) observes that “to be emotionally invested in the program is to be emotionally invested in the brands” (p. 145). Thus, even the media aimed at entertaining creates an affective tie between the audience and characters that naturally extends to the products woven into the stories. This investment transforms viewers from passive spectators into active participants in neoliberal postfeminism, seduced by the promise of personal transformation through consumption.

Compared to the late 1980s, media today are much more pervasive. The advent of the Internet and social media, in particular, has marked a point of no return in the media landscape. Its functioning mechanisms differ entirely from literature or cinema, allowing users to participate directly. Users not only engage with fictional characters but also interact with their peers, with influencers, and with their self-image while managing an enormous and fast-paced stream of content.

These significant changes call for an updated reading of the relationship between postfeminism and Internet-based media.

1.4.1 An Overview of Media in the Internet Age: Digital Platforms and Their Relation to Postfeminist Expressions

Understanding the impact of postfeminism’s most recent expressions on young women’s embodied experience requires elucidating specific characteristics of the digital world. Since

its early days, cyberspace has been configured as a fertile ground for identity exploration (Turkle, 1995), allowing individuals to engage with parts of the self that might otherwise be repressed “offline” (Russell, 2020). However, virtual spaces are not exempt from power dynamics and can also become arenas for reinforcing repressive social norms. Social media platforms, in particular, have become key vehicles for disseminating normative models to be emulated.

Referring to TikTok, Cosimo Marco Scarcelli (2023) asserts: “If we consider the so-called postfeminist cultural context, TikTok fits neatly into that dilemma that sees digital media as safe spaces of liberation and empowerment or as hegemonic sites of reproduction of the status quo” (p. 94).

TikTok offers an interesting case worthy of attention. While platforms like Instagram and Facebook had already emphasized the performative power of image and aesthetics, functioning as channels of mutual surveillance, besides possessing these characteristics, TikTok adds a layer, namely the accent on authenticity. Seemingly less staged and polished than photographs, TikTok videos create a stronger sense of intimacy with the content being consumed. TikTok has also become the realm of influencers, who often play a prominent role in promoting narratives of self-confidence (Hund, 2023) and are eager to present themselves as trustworthy and friendly, though often for commercial purposes. The result is a space that feels accessible and familiar, yet what truly matters is not the content’s genuineness but rather the authenticity’s performance. Moreover, TikTok involves a high level of body exposure. In this regard, Angela Maiello (2023) states:

The immediacy of the TikTok experience stems primarily from this process of embodied simulation, in which the technologically mediated performativity of the body stimulates the relationship between perception and action. [...] TikTok establishes a sort of intersubjective space, governed by the continuous reversibility between looking and being looked at, touching and being touched, the pleasure of seeing and that of acting (p. 19).

As soon as TikTok is opened, users are swept into an endless stream of fast-paced content where countless bodies catch the viewer’s scrutiny and prompt participation. Reliance on algorithms is also relevant. Based on users’ preferences, algorithms organize the exposure to digital content. Such a mechanism implies that the more one engages with a type of content, the more one will be exposed to it. Thus, engaging with postfeminist media can lead to the form of echo chambers that, repetition by repetition, build and consolidate postfeminist identity. According to such media functioning, “algorithmic suppression and spectacularization render some girlhoods hypervisible and others hidden in their shadows” (Kennedy, 2020, p. 1703).

Since, as it emerged, postfeminism does not challenge existing hierarchies, being instead in harmony with the neoliberal economy and centered on positive feelings, it is unsurprising that narrations of girlhood that align with postfeminist aesthetics became predominant online. In this sense, the phenomenon of girlblogging is an interesting case to observe as it sheds light on how postfeminism operates within new media while displaying first-person narration of girlhood online.

1.4.2 Girlblogging: A Postfeminist Practice or a Glitch in the System?

Anyone who is chronically online will likely be familiar with the girification of the Internet. “Girl Internet” is the term that, since 2020 (Santiago Cortés, 2023), has been used to describe virtual spaces where girlhood-related content flourishes, often expressed through girly trends. Two well-known examples are “Girl Dinner”¹³ and “Girl Math.”¹⁴ Hashtags like #justgirlythings, #femalemanipulator, #femaleurge, and #femalehysteria often appear under girly-pop posts. At the same time, new micro-trends constantly emerge in the form of digital feminine aesthetics, such as Rat Girl, Coconut Girl, and Tomato Girl.¹⁵ The term “girlblogging” has also become increasingly widespread.

Jessalynn Keller (2016) frames girlblogging as a site of feminist digital activism that resembles a contemporary extension of traditional feminine self-expression such as diaries and zines.

However, today’s girlblogging often departs from explicit feminist politics, reflecting Gen Z’s communicative style expressed through ironic memes and a curated aesthetic. On the website Urban Dictionary, user @diorecigarettedoll provides a more fitting explanation reporting the following:

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, probably obsessed with 90s Kate Moss and Lily Rose Depp.¹⁶

The first element that stands out is the use of the word “hot,” which points to beauty and sexual attractiveness, both central to postfeminism. Likewise, the mention of models signals a stark interest in beauty, especially when understood in terms of thinness, while softness, luxury, and the term “coquette” evoke a hyper-feminine scenario. Even the reference to Pinterest is significant, as this platform is primarily used to upload visually appealing content, echoing the centrality of aesthetics in postfeminism. The model of femininity privileged in girlblogging aligns perfectly with the postfeminist subject described earlier, as it is primarily represented by conventionally attractive white, cis women, conforming to Eurocentric beauty standards.

Therefore, girlblogging, at least in its current form, appears to be much more aligned with a postfeminist aesthetic than with the feminist political expression Keller (2016) attributes to it.

¹³In 2023 Girl Dinner became popular as a slang term when Olivia Maher posted on TikTok a video of her meal calling it “girl dinner.”

¹⁴Girl Math is a TikTok trend that jokingly describes how women justify spending habits.

¹⁵These labels are examples of digital aesthetics that tie girls’ personalities and expressions to the vibes or symbolic qualities of foods, animals, or other elements like celestial bodies.

¹⁶Urban Dictionary. (2022, March 22). *Girlblogger*. Retrieved May 2, 2025, from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=girlblogger>

However, despite the many similarities, there is an essential dissonance with postfeminism. While the latter often focuses on expressing positive, lighthearted emotions, female anger finds significant space in girlblogging, a fact evidenced by the icons of girlbloggers themselves.

Films such as *Possession* (Żuławski, 1981), *The Virgin Suicides* (Coppola, 1999), *Girl, Interrupted* (Mangold, 1999), *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), *Gone Girl* (Fincher, 2014), and *Pearl* (West, 2022) are frequently referenced in these memes, as their protagonists embody aspects of girlhood and address challenges closely tied to the gendered condition. This apparent contrast with more traditional postfeminist expressions could mean two things. Either anger has become fashionable, acquiring the same appeal and paradoxically functions as positive emotions, or it represents a crack in the system. If, as postfeminism claims, girls are already empowered and all feminist battles have been won, what reason is there to be angry? Where does this negative feeling come from?

Discussing surveillance in the context of postfeminism, Winch (2013) notes that girls are encouraged to regulate and contain negative emotions. In contrast, in girlblogging, female rage is so disruptive that it has become a consolidated trend embodied by what is known as “femcel.”¹⁷

Beyond enraged expressions, girlblogging also gives space to other unsettling and violent content that I will analyze as a case study of the research. Thus, there seems to be a crack in postfeminism’s perfect façade.

The following chapter aims to delve into this fracture and explore postfeminist forms of violence.

¹⁷Initially, the term femcel emerged in online spaces as the female counterpart to the incel, which stands for involuntary celibate. Similarly, femcel refers to women who cannot have romantic or sexual relations with men. However, in more recent Internet subcultures, it has acquired a new meaning, evolving into an aesthetic known as femcelcore, which centers around the idolization of melancholic female singers or specific female film characters.

CHAPTER 2

CARNIVORE POSTFEMINISM: UNVEILING VIOLENCE THROUGH FEMININE DIGITAL AESTHETICS, ONLINE TRENDS AND INTERNET CULTURE

2.1 Erasure, Distortion and Disfigurement: The Multiple Violence of Postfeminism

“Ci bell vuj paré, l’ujss e la pedd t’ava dulé”¹⁸

This is a popular saying from Apulia—the Italian region I come from—that my grandmother used to tell me when I was a little girl, her tone loving but firm. At the time, I naively associated it with the pain I felt when my mother would comb my endlessly tangled curls into a tight ponytail before school. Later, I understood its deeper meaning: beauty requires the sacrifice of the flesh.

Physical and psychological suffering will be the leitmotif of this chapter, which builds on the theoretical discussions explored earlier on the postfeminist aesthetic force and its entanglement with neoliberalism and media. The aim is to demonstrate how postfeminism takes shape in online spaces through concrete examples and, most importantly, shed light on the forms of violence it enacts upon the very subjects it produces. To this end, the chapter spirals down the “online girl” rabbit hole, tracing digital aesthetics and trends that primarily target a girl audience, thus being a compelling site for exploring how female subjectivity is constructed online today.

The phenomena that will be addressed strongly resonate with postfeminist ideals, as they are deeply oriented toward the satisfaction of beauty standards, often bordering on an obsessive pursuit of attractiveness at any cost. Unsurprisingly, this dominance of a certain kind of appearance also manifests even through the promotion of seemingly healthy lifestyles, which recalls the earlier discussion of the aestheticization of everyday life. In addition, the mechanisms of peer and self-surveillance are central to the digital trends in question, echoing the postfeminist principle of self-regulation intended to prove individual success. Social media, in particular, becomes a venue where a desirable appearance or status must be constantly performed and shown off.

Within these cyber-arenas, often covert postfeminist forms of violence are expressed across multiple layers. The previous chapter has offered a glimpse of how postfeminism partakes in systemic violence by exposing its contradictions and its complicity with existing norms, which it does not challenge but rather reproduces. Foucault’s (1975) notion of internalized discipline and docile bodies is especially relevant here: self-policing does not require overt coercion but operates quietly, as patriarchal and neoliberal sets of beliefs become embedded in self-perception and behaviors.

With this new chapter, I want to focus on how such violence materializes in embodied experiences. In this regard, I identify three distinct forms of violence, each tied to a specific postfeminist manifestation in virtual spaces: erasure, distortion, and disfigurement.

¹⁸ If you want to appear beautiful, your bones and skin must hurt.

Erasure refers to the uncritical idolization of thinness, which in some cases can be taken to extremes, potentially leading to anorexia. In this radical scenario, one erases oneself from within as the starved body quite literally begins to consume itself.

Distortion refers to body dysmorphia, which arises from comparisons with body ideals popularized by the media. Although primarily psychological, distortion eventually impacts the body itself, resulting in a form of violence I refer to as disfigurement. The latter affects the body through medical procedures like botox, fillers, and cosmetic surgery.

Such a framing of violence shows how postfeminism feeds on female flesh through an endless cycle in which emotions are seized and manipulated, ultimately impacting the body.

2.2 Drifting Toward Anorexia: Fitness Trends, Pilates Princesses, and Slavic Dolls

In 2024, two fitness challenges went viral online: “Winter Arc” and “75 Hard.” The rules are nearly identical and involve a rigidly structured routine: waking up at dawn, regular physical exercise, and a diet free of refined sugars and alcohol. Romantic relationships are even discouraged, as they are seen as distractions from the primary goal of personal improvement. In the case of 75 Hard, an additional requirement is to monitor progress through a photo that participants must take of themselves daily.

Despite these challenges appearing under the banner of wellness, a closer reflection on their premises makes it challenging to ignore three significant points: the rigidity of the self-imposed regime, its spectacularization, and its underlying aesthetic goal. The first two aspects are evident. With the rise of digital technologies, neoliberal ideologies of self-control have found countless tools to take root deeply within the subject’s interiority. Apps for counting calories, steps, or hours of sleep are perfect examples of how every life parameter becomes quantifiable and controllable. At the same time, the media enables people to display their achievements within a system that fuels competitiveness and feelings of inadequacy. The third element, the aesthetic objective, might be contested. After all, one could argue, these are healthy practices that promote fitness. However, there is reason to believe that psychophysical well-being is not the driving force behind these trends. On this point, Susan Bordo (2009) insightfully observes:

Capitalism adores proliferation and excess; it abhors moderation. One moment the culture begins talking about greater health consciousness, which is surely a good thing that no one would deny. But the next moment we’ve got commercials on at every hour for every imaginable exercise and diet product, and people are spending huge quantities of their time trying to achieve a level of “fitness” that goes way beyond health and straight into obsession (p. 27).

As further proof that Bordo’s standpoint holds value, one can observe the growing convergence between health and beauty on social media. The popularity of the “Pink Pilates Princess” is a clear example.

Although it may seem to promote a healthy lifestyle rooted in a passion for Pilates, the Pilates Princess is primarily a purchasable aesthetic constructed around the consumption of green smoothies, skincare products, and pastel pink activewear (Maguire, 2024). Above all, it

requires having a slim, toned, and snatched figure. Hence, Pilates Princesses have little to do with genuine athletic commitment.

Instructor Norah Myers has critiqued fit influencers who deviate from the core purpose of this discipline by prioritizing body goals over holistic wellness (@wellnessbynorah, 2025). Exposing herself online, Myers was also attacked under her videos by users who questioned her professionalism as a pilates trainer precisely because she does not have a physique that conforms to the widespread idea of the “pilates body.” This unpleasant episode gives even more weight to her stance, but most importantly raises concerns: for those who do not naturally possess a snatched body structure, achieving the results displayed online can imply prolonged calorie deficits, which can lead to risks such as amenorrhea, hormonal imbalances, and the development or worsening of eating disorders.

While with the Pilates Princess the physical ideal is obscured by an apparent interest in wellness, the “Slavic Doll” aesthetic explicitly reveals the connection between thinness and social desirability.

Slavic Dolls is a term used to refer to models of Slavic origin who, after the collapse of the USSR, found success in Western countries. These figures are experiencing a resurgence in popularity, especially on TikTok, where they are associated with weight loss motivation. Specifically, Ukrainian model Snejana Onopka has become the face of such a digital aesthetic. On TikTok, one can see an old resurfaced video of the model in which she admits to eating nothing (@mutaant10000, 2024). Her image also appears in numerous video edits discouraging food consumption and offering tips for staying exceptionally thin. Examples include titles like “What I eat for breakfast to become Snejana Onopka” (@mel.matchalate, 2024) or the “Slavic Doll Diets” (@amiriovaXrysa, n.d.).

Fashion is cyclical; despite such Slavic models’ peak of fame belonging to the past, it is evident that runway models continue to shape women’s relationships with their bodies. Reflecting on the impact of fashion icons, McRobbie (2009) highlighted that women often look at supermodels with longing. Such fascination is crucial for understanding the production of female subjectivity, mainly because it removes the male gaze and instead centers on an intimate interaction between two female bodies facing one another.

According to the scholar, thinness becomes a way to depart from patriarchal constraints while simultaneously fostering an unattainable desire for the innocent, prepubescent body, which recalls a time before beauty standards and sexualization became dominant in everyday life.

In this sense, fashion imagery is saturated with unfulfilled needs, and the frustration born from these unreachable ideals generates what McRobbie (2009) calls an “illegible rage.” This expression defines a form of frustration that stems precisely from the paradox of living in a condition where violence has become so subtle that it is internalized, making it difficult to identify its origin, leading to a voluntary adherence to norms that, however, does not spare the suffering that comes from conforming to them.

The fading look of the Slavic Doll encapsulates this paradoxicality as her youthful charm is intertwined with a deep fragility. This blend of beauty and vulnerability recalls the inner turmoil of the postfeminist subject, who, in the constant quest for attractiveness, is continually confronted with a violence that can push it towards erasure.

The pressure to comply with beauty ideals, especially in a context where the body is exposed to the gaze and surveillance of others, can trigger a series of behaviors that are symptomatic of inner distress, such as self-harm, cutting, alcohol and drug consumption (McRobbie, 2009, p. 96). In the fashion world, for instance, cocaine becomes a strategy to suppress hunger and stay thin. Similarly, there are posts where Slavic Dolls are associated with consuming coffee and cigarettes as a weight loss method (@itssmartiii_ ___, 2025).

The spread of these digital aesthetics is particularly alarming because the idea of thinness is not only promoted through the normalization of pathological conditions but is also presented as healthy even when it is not, thus making the risk of developing disordered eating behaviors less visible but not less likely.

Beyond digital aesthetics, the Internet offers additional mechanisms for promoting starvation, engaging the audience on a deeper level.

2.2.1 “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels”: From Heroin Chic to SkinnyTok

In the 1960s, thinness held a political value for women, as it marked a clear break from the curvaceous ideal of the prevailing feminine figure of earlier decades, whose role was largely confined to that of wife and mother (Meloni & Mibelli, 2021). However, a symbolic rejection of domestic femininity gradually evolved into a full-fledged cultural obsession. In the 1980s and 1990s, a sharp rise in anorexia cases occurred, in parallel with the development of the postfeminist sensibility and post-industrial capitalism (Bordo, 1995). Not by chance, anorexia belongs to the array of behaviors that McRobbie (2009) defines as postfeminist disorders: “Healthy signs of unhealthy femininity, normalized in the Foucault sense, but also dynamic features of the heterosexual matrix in the Butler sense” (p. 96).

Of course, eating disorders are multifaceted, and it would be overly simplistic to attribute their increase solely to postfeminism. However, it is indisputable that postfeminism significantly contributed to the glamourization of thinness, also supported by the media—powerful agents of socialization, capable of setting gender norms and, consequently, body standards.

As mentioned in the previous section, the 1990s saw a surge in the popularity of runway models. During this period, media platforms were saturated with the slim, elongated figures of top models such as Kate Moss, whose statement “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels” became iconic. The widespread circulation of this physical ideal gave rise to a fully developed aesthetic known as “Heroin Chic.” As the name suggests, Heroin Chic was defined by extremely thin, pale, and fragile-looking bodies, often marked by visible signs of exhaustion to the point of resembling those of heroin addicts.

Today, the renewed interest in Y2K¹⁹ aesthetics influences not only fashion trends but also beauty norms. While the social valorization of thinness never really disappeared, it is once again becoming pervasive. Let us consider the so-called “SkinnyTok,” a term that refers to a corner of TikTok where thinspo content proliferates. A combination of “thin” and

¹⁹Y2K originally referred to a futuristic aesthetic that appeared between the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, in 2020, the term assumed a broader connotation, indicating fashion trends from the first decade of the 2000s.

“inspiration,” thinspo is typically used to promote weight loss motivation, often in harmful ways rooted in a pro-ana²⁰ mindset. Even though the hashtag #thinspo is banned on the app, which redirects to eating disorder support resources, slight alterations in spelling allow users to bypass these restrictions, providing access to damaging meal tips and encouraging extreme dietary restrictions.

The incitement to eating disorders, particularly anorexia, is not new to social media. On Tumblr, a blogging platform launched in 2007, pro-ana communities found their space, generating an aura of romance around thigh gaps, visible collarbones, and protruding hip bones. However, even during its peak in the mid-2010s, Tumblr remained relatively niche compared to the vast reach of TikTok, not to mention that there were no algorithmic recommendations at the time: once users reached the end of posts from the blogs they followed, no further content appeared (Le, 2025). In contrast, TikTok algorithms detect engagement and continuously feed users with similar material. Consequently, interacting with videos from SkinnyTok will bring more streams of related posts to your “for you page.” This repetition intensifies the internalization of damaging body ideals, often with serious psychological outcomes. With the romanticization of thinness now reaching broader, and also younger audiences, problematizing its social significance becomes urgent.

Tracing the media expressions of postfeminism from its beginnings to the present, it becomes clear that being skinny carries a moral value closely intertwined with the neoliberal context. Food restrictions, which can turn into anorexia, represent control in its purest form. Counting calories or tracking macronutrients in the more fitness-oriented version of such hyperfixation, is a remarkable exercise in disciplining the body. In this frame, starving is seen as virtuous. Conversely, hunger becomes sinful and is viewed as a loathsome impulse to cloak in shame.

In her study on disgust for body fat, Breanne Fahs (2017) highlighted that women desire to eliminate fat without really problematizing the root of such need. At first glance, pursuing weight loss might seem like a personal choice, and in a certain sense, it is. However, the tacit conformity to norms, which does not question the underlying source of discomfort, frustrates and irritates one’s system, generating the “illegible rage.”

Since the degree of constraint imposed on the body is so intense, it is not surprising that cultural expressions emerge in response to the violence of erasure, countered by another form of violence which, although metaphorical, is equally strong but opposite: cannibalism.

The figure of the eating woman is already transgressive in a Bataillean sense (1957), where the act of breaking a taboo opens the door to the sublime, which allows for opposing sensations like disgust and enjoyment to coexist. This transgression becomes even more pronounced when the prohibition of food intersects with the ultimate taboo: the consumption of human flesh. Interestingly, both eating and cannibalism have been associated with female erotic desire. Consider, for example, the film *Raw* (Ducournau, 2016) where the female eater subverts normative expectations, or the recent emergence of metaphorical cannibalism on social media as a means to express women’s love and sexuality; an aspect that will be explored later in this work.

²⁰Pro-anorexia.

If voracious eating is a strategy for resisting dominant norms, self-starvation symbolizes absolute self-mastery, an agreement to occupy the least space possible and collapse into self-erasure.

Viral restrictive lifestyles, Pilates Princesses, Slavic Dolls, and thinspo trends represent ways of exerting control over one's habits and body. Within these aesthetics, the desire for food is particularly suppressed, though to varying degrees, whereas eating, by contrast, signifies release.

(Un)Fortunately, late capitalism offers many marketable remedies that spare the effort of resisting impulses, simply by extinguishing them in favor of self-discipline.

2.2.2 Ozempic: The Miracle Drug

The recent "Ozempic epidemic" is yet another evidence of the obsession with thinness in today's society and further proof of how the media amplifies it. Developed by the Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk, Ozempic was initially created as a treatment for type 2 diabetes as its active ingredient, semaglutide, is an incretin glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonist that regulates blood sugar levels (Suran, 2023). However, its media popularity stems from its off-label use as a weight loss drug.

Besides affecting insulin, semaglutide slows gastric emptying and suppresses appetite, resulting in significant fat reduction (Suran, 2023). Its effectiveness in causing weight loss is the real reason why Ozempic has become so fashionable, to the point of earning the label of "miracle drug" on social media (Herring, 2024).

Cyberspace is again the nerve hub of visibility, where Ozempic is often discussed superficially as a magical substance, indirectly fueling the stigmatization of fat bodies (Oswald, 2024). On TikTok, users also document their weight loss journeys, consolidating the semaglutide euphoria while downplaying its consequences.

Investigating the celebrity of Ozempic on TikTok, Matthew Herring (2024) notes that "TikTok videos about Ozempic are free from the judgment and surveillance of traditional healthcare professionals, thus creating a more comfortable environment to pursue weight loss in the pursuit of healthiness" (p. 50). Thus, social media offers a space where individuals can gather information and explore potential solutions for what they consider a problem without needing to consult a doctor; a practice that, as has emerged, is not without downsides.

To complement and simplify the use of this pharmaceutical therapy, apps like SlimShot for Ozempic and Mounjaro have been developed, revealing how digital and chemical technologies can intervene in the disciplining of the body. Reflecting on the growing prominence of technology in influencing people's relationship with food, Emmeline Clein (2024) draws attention to eating disorders. She interestingly contends:

If bulimia was the eating disorder of Reaganomics and millennial girlbossery, and anorexia was the eating disorder of aughts-era austerity, [weight loss] drugs might foster an eating disorder for a new age of technocapitalism, wherein we try to recast hunger as just another inconvenience we can eliminate with an app (p.142).

The excessive enthusiasm and the uncritical discourse surrounding Ozempic, along with the ease of use facilitated by technocapitalism, operate in line with the rhetorical style of

postfeminism, which skillfully conceals fundamental social issues beneath a shiny and seductive veneer, from the true meaning of empowerment to the effect on individuals' physical and mental health. Conversely, this reductionism calls for a more critical approach to the phenomenon, in order to assess the actual impact of Ozempic and how it may reinforce the erasing violence of postfeminism.

First and foremost, while Ozempic's safety profile has been established for diabetes treatment with well-documented side effects, the same cannot be said for its off-label use. Moreover, further investigation is needed into the potential link between Ozempic and disordered eating, as current research remains insufficient (NEDA, 2024).

Besides users' simplistic narration on social media, another factor that hinders the necessary critical reading of Ozempic is its apparent diffusion among celebrities and Hollywood stars, which contributes to the drug's glamourization. Some public figures openly admitted to resorting to weight loss medications, while others denied the claims, attributing their body transformation solely to workouts.

Whether those who deny using semaglutide are lying or not is irrelevant to the purpose of this work. Still, manifesting a certain reluctance towards Ozempic reveals something interesting: in the neoliberal era, where one is provided with many tools to change their appearance, inhabiting a fat body is equated with indolence and a lack of discipline. Even though pharmaceutical and medical intervention is rendered accessible and even encouraged by the system itself, it is more "admirable" to work hard rather than leaning on pharmaceutical intervention. After all, beauty is pain, something to be earned without relying on shortcuts that would undermine the credibility of the self-made postfeminist woman.

In light of this, Ozempic has all the requisites for being labeled a postfeminist drug, being a purchasable and quick remedy that can be injected into the body to effortlessly achieve a desirable look.

2.3 I Would Rather be a Cyborg: Beauty Apps and AI Filters and the Distortion of Self-Perception

In cyberspace the obsession with aesthetic appeal takes on many forms that put the body in the spotlight, fueling surveillance and insecurities and, ultimately, causing a distorted self-image.

For instance, the growing trend of intensely labeling physical features reveals heightened body scrutiny. While scrolling through TikTok, users can discover whether they are classified as "boy pretty" or "girl pretty." Facial features determine if one resembles a fantasy archetype or fits into an animal beauty type. Even hyper-aestheticized ethnic identity exists; some examples are: "Brazilian Bombshell," "Mediterranean Mermaid," "Turkish Delight," "Arab Princess," or "African Sunlight" (@yeIsim, 2024).

This taste for classifications touches on once-ignored body areas, seriously undermining self-confidence. Expressions like "hip dips,"²¹ "cortisol face,"²² "butter

²¹Hip dips refer to the inward curve below the hip bone. Although they are a natural anatomical feature, they are often perceived as a flaw that needs correction.

²²The term refers to a puffy appearance on the face caused by increased cortisol levels.

face/body,”²³ or “strawberry legs”²⁴ all pertain to an online slang that is the reflection of a pervading social bodily anxiety. Even intimate areas like the vulva are not exempt from this aesthetic imperium, becoming the target of products like candy-scented creams and intimate care masks. In this media scenario, the body becomes a fragmented object; a sum of parts to correct not for health or functionality but for beauty’s sake.

If language verbally reveals an excessive preoccupation with attractiveness, new technological frontiers bring this fixation into material form. In this regard, it is worth examining the power of AI beauty filters.

Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, and beauty apps like FaceTune and Perfect365 include settings to tweak and refine one’s appearance through technological tools. This phenomenon has become so incisive that the term “Instagram Face” emerged to identify this digital ideal of beauty. Coined by journalist Jia Tolentino (2019), such expression refers to a look resembling faces enhanced by AI, presenting poreless skin, high cheekbones, a small nose, full lips, dramatic lashes, and lifted eyes.

Another noteworthy case of AI use regarding the redefinition of beliefs on body image is the so-called “skinny filter,” which simulates a thinner version of one’s body. On TikTok, it is possible to find videos showing mainly female users engaged in using it to get “skinny motivation” (@isthat_leti, 2025). Likewise, the AI beauty scan allows users to evaluate their attractiveness based on metrics generated by artificial intelligence.

AI’s role in dictating beauty standards raises questions about the reinforcement of Eurocentric features and the perpetuation of fatphobia, which is particularly relevant from a gender perspective since women are among the most active social media users (European Commission, Eurostat, 2020).

Given that the media amplifies postfeminism, and considering its wide range of action in the current age, it is important to consider their effect on new generations of girls. The constant self-comparison and engagement with the virtual distortion of the self are contributing to increasing anxiety levels, disordered eating behaviors, and cases of depression (Haines, 2021), a distress compounded by the fact that online people no longer compare themselves just to others but also to their own digitally enhanced versions, thus learning to perceive their natural bodily variations as irregularities to be fixed. As a result, many young women are turning to both invasive and non-invasive medical interventions, asking doctors to make them look like their AI altered form.

Essentially, what happens on the screen cannot be separated from the AFK²⁵ life. AI filters act as simulacra of real bodies, altering our perception of corporeality: we are living in a postfeminist hyperreality.

²³“Butter face” is a derogatory term derived from the phrase “but her face,” used to describe a woman who is considered to have an attractive body but an unattractive face. The reverse expression, “butter body,” refers to a woman with an attractive face but an unattractive body.

²⁴Indicates a strawberry-like texture of the skin due to clogged pores, which appear as small dark dots.

²⁵Away From the Keyboard.

2.3.1 Postfeminist Hyperreality

The concept of hyperreality originates from the French sociologist Baudrillard. In the opening of *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981/2019) he writes:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it (p. 1).

This powerful passage suggests that the relationship between reality (represented here by the territory) and its symbolic representation (the map) fades away in the postmodern era. Representation no longer reflects what is considered real but precedes and replaces it, creating hyperreality.

Building on Baudrillard's theory, it is possible to draw an analogy between the body and the territory, and between its AI-altered version and the map. The digitally enhanced body does not really mirror the reality of flesh. Rather it presents a perfected, idealized version of it. The models of femininity emerging from these images are no longer based on anatomy but on technologically distorted versions to which actual bodies are adapted (Coy-Dibley, 2016).

What follows is a process in which the real chases the simulated, with the screen engulfing reality. Referring to the effects of technological tweakings, Ana Sofia Elias et al. (2017) note:

Beauty apps 'increase the extent to which the female body and face are rendered visible as a site of crisis and commodification. Increasingly they also produce feedback loops in which cosmetics (e.g. foundation, tightening serum) are claimed to reproduce on actual embodied faces the filter/surgical effects produced by these apps: a definite case of life being forced to imitate artifice (p. 16).

This imitation of the artificial resonates with the theory of simulacra, which argues that the real is not only ontologically unrepresentable but no longer exists as an autonomous foundation, being substituted by the simulated.

Baudrillard's vision is prophetic, perhaps speaking more of our world than his. However, I believe that it must be problematized. Baudrillard argues that hyperreality is produced in a "hyperspace without atmosphere" (1981/2019, p. 2), but to believe this is to abandon oneself to nihilism. While recognizing that today, the screen acts as a sort of hyperuranion where the perfect body resides, it must also be acknowledged that its hyperreal effects are grounded in cultural models preceding its emergence. Going back to the genesis of AI parameters suggests that beauty standards are determined by historically constructed aesthetic ideals that mirror socio-cultural standards (Byrne, 2023). This perspective implies that there is still space for agency. Understanding the social sources of bias allows individuals

to intervene in taste formation and participate in constructing reality without falling into representationalist reductionisms or existential meaninglessness.

Being phagocytized by the simulacrum does not necessarily trap one deterministically in the bowels of hyperreality. The digestive-like process that comes after should not necessarily be read as destruction, but as a possibility of reorganization. The digital peristalsis leads to the guts of hyperreality, but at the same time offers the possibility to approach it from a different perspective. It is not a total annihilation, but a metamorphosis process from which one becomes scoria, unprocessed material, not yet absorbed by postfeminist hyperreality. This liminal stage opens the possibility for critical action. However, to resist hyperreality, it is not enough to survive as formless matter: an act of reorganization is required to transform a violent and seemingly destructive stage into a creative opportunity.

To enact resistance, I argue that it is first essential to recognize the existence of postfeminist hyperreality and to acknowledge that, although this system operates with a degree of autonomy, it has sociocultural origins whose legacy manifests as biases embedded in algorithmic codes. As a second point, an affirmative stance is required to deconstruct these biases and imagine new ways of experiencing and inhabiting the body.

The transformative potential that originates from violence will be addressed more extensively in the next chapter. For now, let us continue to explore the distorting force of postfeminism.

2.3.2 Body Dysmorphia in the Digital Age

As previously mentioned, frequent exposure to beauty standards can lead to an altered self-perception. Even the widespread use of selfies has contributed to this distortion by shifting the camera's focus on the face, particularly on nose and skin, which, according to the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), are among the most common areas of concern (Tremblay et al., 2020).

When it comes to dysmorphia, digital tools for beauty enhancement deserve special attention, as they are embedded in commonly used devices and their use does not require any special skills. Unlike apps such as Photoshop, these basic techniques for digitally modifying one's image have, in a sense, become democratized so that anyone with a smartphone can now effortlessly engage with an "improved" version of themselves.

The easier access to tools for altering one's appearance contributes to the rise of a new form of body dysmorphia that depends on the prominence of artificially set beauty standards. Isabelle Coy-Dibley (2016) used the term digitized dysmorphia to refer to this particular form of BDD, which is a "mental illness characterized by an excessive preoccupation with a perceived physical defect or flaw that causes significant distress or functional impairment" (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2016). The widespread use of digital alterations underscores the need for further investigation into their impact on the formation of gender identity, particularly among younger generations, who are also the most vulnerable to developing BDD. Such a risk is a concern, especially for women, who, as already stated, use social media more extensively. The gendered dimension of the problem is highlighted by Coy-Dibley (2016), who notes:

Digitized dysmorphia manifests among women, particularly in image-driven Western culture, who see their bodies as flawed in reality, and who therefore edit their images to digitally correct what they see as “wrong”, enabling the image to transcend the material, anatomical body and form a digitally reconstructed ideal self-image (p. 2).

As this excerpt suggests, the expressions of femininity popularized in social media are tied to Western standards as well as, I would add, to patriarchal and heterosexual ones, as further support to the “situatedness” of the postfeminist hyperreality I mentioned in the previous section.

The media has become fertile ground for spreading and enacting postfeminist distortion that transforms its privileged subjects into consumable flesh that voluntarily submit to the mechanisms of the fashion, diet, and cosmetic surgery industries. The constant exposure to a self-image altered to the point where it no longer reflects the reality of the physical body can lead to profound self-devaluation. As a result, medical intervention becomes not only a possible solution, but a desirable means of aligning the body with its digitally perfected counterpart (UPI, 2019).

Expectedly, the rise of face filters and editing apps corresponds with a significant increase in cosmetic surgeries.

2.4 Beauty Filters Enfleshed

The first chapter mentioned the participatory nature as one aspect of new digital media, which invites users to actively engage with what appears on screen. This level of involvement also extends to the desire to reproduce digitally improved body features. In other words, a mechanism of enfleshment of AI filters is triggered in the audience, which can manifest in varying degrees of intensity. A mild form of emulating digital beauty is makeup.

The “no-makeup makeup” trend is particularly telling in this context, as it aims to recreate a natural look that aligns with the persistent idea of feminine beauty as something biologically given. Additionally, the makeup industry continues to push its boundaries by introducing new items, such as lip plumpers, peel-off lip stains that leave temporary color, eyeliner tattoos, lip and brow tattoos, and lash lamination treatments.

The massive interest in cosmetic products has also taken root among younger demographics, as shown by the phenomenon of “Sephora Kids,” namely Gen Alpha²⁶ girls who frequently visit Sephora stores in search of beauty products. Often, they do so uncritically, without realizing that many of these items are formulated for more mature skin and may be harmful to theirs. In this regard, Parija Kavilanz (2024) reported that dermatologist Lauren Penzi has observed an increase in skin rashes and allergic reactions in girls as young as 10 to 12.

Skincare and beauty routines are another way to enhance facial traits. Such procedures are becoming increasingly complex, including dozens of steps, as shown by the morning shed rituals popular on TikTok in which girls film themselves in the morning while removing all the products and items used overnight, usually face masks, eye patches, mouth straps, chin straps, heartless curlers, and hair bonnets, to be glowy the day after according to

²⁶Generation Alpha refers to the cohort of individuals born from approximately 2010 onward.

the mantra: “the uglier you go to sleep, the prettier you wake up” (@chiara.sbardellati, 2025). Although “soft,” these interventions can have negative consequences for girls in terms of physical health and psychological distress, which can result, for instance, in dermorexia, namely the obsession with skincare (Quadrio, 2025).

However, as anticipated, more invasive ways to improve appearance exist that resort to medical intervention. The turn of the 21st century has witnessed the rise of Beauty Medicine (Poli Neto & Caponi, 2007), which has further entrenched the medicalization of beauty through procedures like injectable treatments and cosmetic surgery.

2.4.1 Everybody Looks the Same! The Impact of Botox, Filler, and Lifting

2023 saw a significant demand for facial plastic surgeries and non-invasive procedures (AAFPRS, 2024). Data collected by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) for the same year revealed that most of those undergoing such treatments are women, accounting for 93% of all interventions and marking an 8% increase compared to 2022 (2023, p. 29).²⁷

In this context, in addition to gender, age is another relevant factor to consider when examining the relationship between exposure to media-driven beauty standards and their enfleshment on the body. In particular, members of Gen Z are increasingly turning to non-invasive facial modification practices (AAFPRS, 2024) to delay the aging process for as long as possible.

A popular trend in this respect is “Baby Botox,” which consists of injecting smaller amounts of botulinum toxin than traditional Botox, performed as a preventative measure against skin aging. The need for facial enhancement procedures is strongly linked to the use of digital media, as highlighted by Dr. Hure, who points out the influence of Zoom, TikTok, and AI-based filters in shaping the decision to undergo Botox treatments (King, 2025). Internet culture also proved influential in promoting the so-called “Barbie Botox,” a procedure where the botulin paralyzes the trapezius muscles, creating the illusion of a longer neck reminiscent of the iconic Barbie doll. Such procedure gained prominence on TikTok in 2023 emerging as a veritable trend mainly motivated by aesthetic purposes (Rosati, 2023).

It is also appropriate to investigate the correlation between social media use and the increased demand for fillers (Sharifi, Rodriguez, Dender, & Nouri, 2025). These injectables restore hyaluronic acid to the skin, adding volume and hydration to areas like the lips, cheeks, and under-eyes, and are often used for skin resurfacing to enhance texture and brightness; all tweaks that recall the “Instagram face.” An example of the media popularity of filler treatments are the so-called “Russian lips,” a procedure in which the injection aims to recreate the look of a Russian doll, that, in this case too, proved successful among TikTok audiences (Goulbourne, 2022).

However, both Botox and fillers, as medical treatments, require long-term maintenance and involve potential health complications that uncritical media sensationalization often fails to address adequately. Furthermore, these procedures may sometimes produce effects contrary to those desired. A possible risk is filler migration, which causes the substance to shift from the injected area to another part of the face, altering its

²⁷The data collected by the ASPS refer exclusively to counts of procedures performed by members of the association in question.

contours in undesirable ways. Another well-known side effect of fillers is what is referred to on social media as the “pillow face,” which indicates unnatural puffiness that can even accentuate the appearance of aging. This undesired anti-aesthetic effect leads to a wave of filler dissolution, raising speculations on the beginning of a possible “anti-filler era” (Noble, 2024).

Nevertheless, turning away from fillers and excessive modifications does not mean abandoning the pursuit of beauty through artificial means altogether. Fillers remain among the three most requested minimally invasive treatments (AAFPRS, 2024) and more subtle interventions continue to be widespread. Rather than a shift from artificial to natural, a transition toward a more natural-looking artifice is currently taking place.

To face this “filler fatigue,” people turn to facelifts for a more refined and long-lasting effect (Hou, 2024). Facelift surgeries, most commonly requested by women, have increased annually over the past decade and are now performed on increasingly younger patients (AAFPRS, 2024). This trend has also been linked to the off-label use of semaglutide, which, due to rapid weight loss, can cause what is known as “Ozempic face,” characterized by an aged look caused by skin sagging.

This kind of medical compensation for the side effects of weight loss further illustrates the connection between erasure and disfigurement, revealing the complex interplay of different layers of postfeminist violence.

2.4.2 Rip Me Open: The New Frontiers of Cosmetic Surgery

Even when it comes to invasive cosmetic procedures, the ASPS (2023) has highlighted that women are the predominant recipients, once again accounting for 93% of all procedures performed in 2023, signifying a 5% increase compared to the previous year.

On her TikTok profile, Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Catherine Haung-Bevovic (@beautybydrkat, 2024) revealed the five most popular surgical trends in 2024, clearly showing a correlation between the mentioned procedures and the role played by social media.

According to the surgeon, one of the most requested procedures is the “Skinny BBL,” a variation of the traditional Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL) that uses a smaller amount of fat to create curves while maintaining a slimmer silhouette. This technique allows achieving a body type in line with current popular ideals, as it provides some curvature while still fitting within the preference for slimmer bodies. Confirming that a fuller figure is now perceived as out of fashion is the popularity of the hashtag #reversebbl on TikTok (Goldbach, 2022). The reverse BBL has recently attracted media attention because, although there are no official confirmations, it seems that the Kardashians, known for being trendsetters of the BBL, have undergone this type of reduction, to appear thinner.

Haung-Bevovic also highlighted the strong influence of new digital media regarding the increase in submental liposuction procedures, stating that the pressure to look good in selfies has led to a growing demand for this intervention, which removes fat under the chin to create a more defined jawline. Similarly, the Cat Eye Brow Lift is influenced by celebrities such as Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner as well as AI-based filters, while other popular procedures include facial fat grafting, vaginal rejuvenation, and labiaplasty.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, in recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on sports and wellness practices, where the aesthetic goal prevails over

the health objective. Another trend in cosmetic surgery, identified by the ASPS (2023), reinforces the idea that appearing fit now holds greater social value than actually being fit. This trend involves the so-called “Ballet body,” a combination of procedures such as breast augmentation, fat transfer, liposuction, and body contouring to create a lean, athletic, and seemingly natural physique.

Similar to the Pilates Princess phenomenon, this aesthetic ideal elevates the fusion of wellness and beauty to new levels, revealing how the pursuit of a desirable body often drives individuals to undergo multiple highly invasive interventions.

2.4.3 Life in Plastic, Is Fantastic?

All the aforementioned practices, from minimally to highly invasive, constitute what I have called disfigurement. Before proceeding with the reflection on the implications of this postfeminist violence, I find it necessary to clarify a point. At this stage, my intention is not to take a stance against body modification techniques, nor do I intend to blame those who undergo them. On the contrary, I firmly believe everyone can use their body as they see fit. What I aim to do here is not to criticize body correction procedures per se, but rather the system that precedes them, which through emotional leverage, instills discomfort in individuals, who may then choose to cope with this unease through medical intervention.

In other words, I aim to critically consider postfeminist violence’s effects on subjectivity. In light of this, establishing whether the subject is agential or not deviates from the central point of the discussion. As already emerged when addressing the sexualization of the self, it is clear that the postfeminist subject is capable of acting autonomously. The neoliberal context is based on personal choices, yet this does not mean they are free. In this regard, Bordo (2009) reminds us: “There is ambiguity and contradiction, multiple meanings and consequences, in human motivations and choices” (p. 24).

Bordo’s perspective perfectly grasps a Foucauldian idea of power, which demands a more structured reading of the subject’s capacity to act. Amidst the paradoxicality of the postmodern world, agency can no longer be understood through a binary lens. What requires investigation is the structural dimension from which this desire to act arises. After all, individuals do not make choices in the void but in a built-up territory whose structure can be examined, comprehended, and deconstructed.

Thus, going back to the question of plastic surgery, it must be acknowledged that women do actively choose to expose themselves to the postfeminist disfiguring violence, even risking “bleeding, embolisms, pulmonary edema, facial nerve injury, unfavorable scar formation, skin loss, blindness, crippling, and death” (p. 50).

But what are the emotional repercussions of such a choice and its effects on the body? What lies behind this glittering façade of postfeminist beauty?

A passage of Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* (1995) is particularly revealing in addressing this question, as it highlights the *fil rouge* that links erasure, distortion, and disfigurement; all of which can be glimpsed in the scholar’s words:

Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women—we are rendered less

socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough. At the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death (p. 162).

In the postfeminist system, aesthetics is a transaction one can choose to undertake. Self-disgust, dysmorphia, frustration, alienation, and the body itself are the currency of exchange. The yearning for beauty lurks beneath the skin and parasitizes the mind. Under the guise of free choice, one starves oneself, letting the body turn consume its own tissues. Substances of all kinds, injectable, ingestible, spreadable, are used to redeem the sin of hunger, to mask a guilt that does not exist, exposing the flesh to infections, allergic reactions, and rashes. Obsession distorts self-image, rendering it monstrous.

We learn that remedy lies in disciplinary intervention: needles that puncture, scalpels that slice, surgical knives that mutilate, cannulas that suck out bloodied matter, lasers that cauterize fat, curettes that scrape bone, sutures that pierce organic tissue.

Technocapitalism and neoliberalism have developed a cannibalistic taste for female flesh. This is carnivorous postfeminism.

How gore.

CHAPTER 3

Gore AS A METHODOLOGY

3.1 On Gore, My Body, and Suffering

So far, this research has outlined the main features of postfeminism, highlighting its core belief that feminism is unnecessary due to the already-achieved women's emancipation. As the work progressed, it challenged this narrative by showing how women remain exposed to forms of violence stemming precisely from postfeminism itself, in conjunction with neoliberalism and media. A vital passage was that violence is not always immediately recognizable as it often takes ambiguous forms and does not exclude the subject's agency. In this paradoxical framework where violence comes into being through personal choice, normative mechanisms and their effects grow increasingly harder to decipher as individual agency does not automatically entail improving living conditions. However, its mere presence makes alternative paths conceivable.

This chapter aims to propose a way to activate agency in a new dimension not yet colonized by normative power where gender identity can reach new expressions. To this end, it explores the transformative force of pain, which here I frame as gore.

My proposal, then, is not to reject pain but to navigate it and use feminism as a way to make it affirmative, further contrasting the postfeminist standpoint on the inutility of feminism. This process is what I call using gore as a methodology. I believe that violence has become so intrinsically embedded in everyday life that thoroughly rehearsing it would imply assuming a dichotomic stance that is not well adapted to the configuration of the postmodern context. Therefore, new strategies must be sought and applied. Before explaining in detail what this approach entails, I must clarify what gore is and how I signified it in this work.

Gore originally refers to a cinematic genre characterized by extreme violence, highly graphic scenes, and splatter representations of mutilation and torture. These films do not pursue educational or moral purposes, being an open window into moral and physical decay where violence is showcased for visual pleasure.

Fred Vogel's *August Underground* (2001) is the film that inaugurated my passion for extreme cinema. I still remember the excitement I felt when watching it for the first time at fifteen, but I could not explain why it struck me so profoundly back then. Growing up, I understood that there was a connection between that fascination and my condition as a gendered individual. Specifically, I have always felt inadequacy and worthlessness towards my body, stemming from the conviction that I did not meet beauty standards or appear feminine enough. These sensations grew so horrifying and grotesque inside me that they became comparable to gore itself.

The distorted sense I have of my image provoked an emotional torture rooted in the abnegation of my flesh, a kind of inner dismemberment mirrored by the physical mutilations portrayed in gore films. My suffering encompassed all forms of postfeminist violence: I collapsed in erasure, live in distortion, and I would give myself to disfigurement.

I am the postfeminist subject.

Since I was thirteen, I have worn make-up to look prettier and straightened my hair to tame it. I vomited the food I ingested in shame and then starved myself until I could see my

bones protruding from my body. I have taken pills and laxatives to be skinnier, and I believed that yes, “nothing tastes as good as skinny feels.” I have bought too many skincare products and lip plumpers to look sexier. I have cried in despair in front of the mirror, and even more so when beauty filters improved my image, only to distort my self-perception further, making me compare my real face to its perfected, hyperreal version. At twenty-three, I already buy anti-aging creams and quietly long for fillers and surgery, hoping they will help me feel more of a “woman.” In secret, I yearn for the surgical knife to redeem me from the humiliation of my flaws.

I suffered, I suffer, but I am a feminist, and as such, I want to reclaim my experience of gore from a feminist perspective and transform pain into a political action. This gesture is not separate from the act of knowing itself. As Karen Barad states: “Knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility” (Barad, as cited in Dolphin and Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 52).

Following this line of thought, where knowledge-building is not a sterile process but something that emerges through embodied engagement, in the following lines I will draw on my corporeal and affective experience, my suffering, and my feminist stance to imagine new ways of rethinking gender.

3.1.1. Why Gore? Making Meaning Out of Pain Through a Feminist Lens

In *Gore Capitalism* (2018) Sayak Valencia frames gore as a category to be applied in the realm of philosophy “to analyze the contemporary episteme of violence, its logics and its practices” (p.19). Building on this insight, this section illustrates the reasons underlying the use of gore not simply as a descriptive but also as an analytical tool.

I have already mentioned the enjoyment I feel when watching gore, as it evokes in me a profound sense of recognition. More than disgust or repulsion, gore brings me relief, as it externalizes the tension I feel with my body, allowing me to see it momentarily displayed on the outside rather than trapped within. In gore cinema there is always a breach between interiority and exteriority: viscera, bones, blood, vomit, sperm, feces, urine transcend the bodily boundaries to merge with the outside. The violation of physical integrity through which interiority is brought to light is a cathartic stage, which is worth pausing on. Graphic violence functions as an effective mirror of emotional suffering precisely because of its shock value, and like a sexual climax, it leads to a moment of release. In my framework, this phase of gore is cathartic and holds the potential for transformation.

This double value of gore, descriptive and potentially creative, enabled by explicit violence and catharsis is one of the reasons that led me to use it as an analytical tool. Another reason lies in my already mentioned emotional involvement with gore, which I believe deserves a few more words of explanation.

As has already emerged, I am clearly entangled with this research. Essentially, my *being* the postfeminist subject is inseparable from my way of producing knowledge *on* the profeminist subject; yet the resort to elements of intimate life should not be read as a limitation. As Donna Haraway (1988) contends: “Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (p. 583). Thus, rather than a descent into relativism, I argue that my personal experience can add value to the research, as my situatedness is determined by social, cultural, political, and

historical factors that shape my gender and inform how I am taught to inhabit my body. In this sense, I also draw on Barad's concept of (2007) ethico-onto-epistemology, which holds that not only is knowledge production inextricably entangled with who conducts the research, but that ethics, too, cannot be excluded from such a process. Indeed, in this work, beyond the absence of separation between observer and observed, my feminist ethics is embedded in the very process of knowledge building.

Moreover, approaching gore from an analytical perspective has also compelled me to confront my non-innocence (Haraway, 1988), acknowledging my implication in dynamics that perpetuate postfeminist violence. It has pushed me to recognize the privileges I carry and to reflect on how to engage with them responsibly: in addition to being white, cis, able-bodied, and feminine-presenting, I benefit from access to academic spaces that equip me with the tools to critically reflect on pain and rework it into a form of expression.

Lastly, my interest in gore as a method also stems from its resonance with the contemporary economic landscape which, as is now clear, is closely interwoven with the logic of postfeminism.

Since the late 20th century, the socio-political landscape we inhabit has become so saturated with violence that it can be described as a "gore reality," a term borrowed from Valencia (2018, p. 21), who sees necropolitics, drug trafficking, and organized crime as its pillars. However, I contend that the gore also pertains to the postfeminist scenario I am investigating here.

First, Valencia (2018) identifies a fundamental link between neoliberal economy and gore, showing how late capitalism depends on the exploitation and degradation of the body, becoming this way "physically palpable" (p. 45). This connection is particularly significant for my work, as postfeminism is intricately tied to this economic structure, and postfeminist violence, with its focus on the body, becomes tangible in much the same way. In this context, gore shifts from being merely a metaphor to an enfleshed presence.

Second, Valencia insists that capitalism thrives on bodily destruction. While her analysis emphasizes physical violence, I expand this claim to include psychological forms of harm. In my reading, the entanglement of neoliberal capitalism and postfeminism produces an economy of violence that penetrates the psyche and reorganizes desire.

Third, the author discusses how new technologies function as disciplinary tools, reshaping the body in line with neoliberal imperatives. This insight is echoed in my research, which considers how technological and medical progress contributes to the "taming" of the body, aligning it to an idealized version of itself.

Before illustrating the theories that will form the basis for the use of gore as a method, I consider it important to offer one final reflection on gore's problematic nature. In its original cinematic realm, gore often relies on the spectacle of women's physical and psychological suffering. Beyond the field of entertainment, the scenario highlighted by Valencia also reveals that gore is deeply connected to gendered violence, with women at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking. For this reason, gore should not be romanticized; however, precisely because of these troubling gendered connotations, reclaiming gore for feminist purposes carries a deliberately provocative and subversive potential.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Foucauldian Grounds, Deleuzian Potentialities, and Feminist Ethics

The previous chapters showed how postfeminism affects inner life, applying emotional leverage that gives rise to aesthetic transformations in the body's outward appearance and the subject's inner experience. Therefore, the drive behind these changes originates from affective states, whether positive or negative.

Discussing the affective turn (Massumi, 2002) as a development within feminist theory, specifically within beauty studies, Elias et al. (2017) illustrate the perspectives of Foucault and Deleuze, who will be a central part of my theoretical framework. What emerges is that while Foucault acknowledges the importance of affect in how power shapes subjectivity, he does not fully explore how affects themselves move and operate, thus ultimately prioritizing the focus on power. It must be noted that, in this framework, affect is not simply an emotional state but an impersonal and pre-rational force that enables individuals to act and move towards transformation through the engagement with other systems (Massumi, 2002). By contrast, Deleuze shows less interest in power itself and centers more on the forces that can destabilize it. His perspective moves beyond binary oppositions such as right/wrong or empowering/disempowering, offering a more affirmative vision of change. I consider both approaches essential to my research as each is connected to a particular aspect of gore that I intend to mobilize methodologically.

Considering the cultural events necessary to understand postfeminist dynamics, the first chapter mentioned the Foucauldian conception of power, an idea that deserves further elaboration at this stage. Power privileges specific subjects and grants them visibility, but simultaneously, it sets the boundaries for their expression. To better understand how normative regimes affect gender, it is worth referring to what Butler (1999) has defined as "intelligible genders," namely those identities that "in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (p. 23). Intelligible genders have a greater degree of privilege and social recognition, which, however, comes at the cost of the normativization of behaviors and self-expression, which reveals power's dual function as both enabling and repressive.

Since my analysis is primarily centered on the postfeminist subject, who, as stated, is typically a cis woman, feminine in appearance, and generally heterosexual, Foucault's ideas are particularly relevant. In the postfeminist context, power subordinates individuals to beauty ideals while offering the opportunity to pursue them and consequently gain a desirable social status. Even when one achieves the sought-after aesthetic goal and experiences positive feelings, they remain trapped in a persistent state of pressure and anxiety, as maintaining such standards demands continuous effort. This creates a cycle of self-esteem and self-hatred: when someone deviates from the norm, self-satisfaction quickly dissipates, giving way to feelings of inadequacy.

However, relying solely on a Foucauldian approach risks remaining sterile. While acknowledging the complexity of power relations is undoubtedly a necessary first step toward developing an awareness of one's situatedness, such consciousness must be followed by concrete action.

To transition into a transformative stage what is needed instead is a "line of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983): an escape route capable of breaking free from the cycle that

oscillates between polarized perceptions of the self. For this reason, I turn to a Deleuzian approach, not as rejecting Foucault but as expanding his insights. If Foucault lays the groundwork for understanding the conditions experienced by the subject, Deleuze points toward creative possibilities beyond them.

I propose an integrated approach that bridges these two positions, which can and should coexist. Such a combination of standpoints is also pertinent to the current socio-economic scenario, where old control systems have not been fully overcome (Braidotti, 2013; Preciado, 2015). On the contrary, they continue to function within a landscape that has undergone profound social, cultural, and economic transformations. These changes have rendered patriarchal and sexist mechanisms of control less explicit, yet still deeply operative, thus necessitating both continuous critical reflection on power (Braidotti, 2013, p. 97) and affirmative actions to counter them.

What further complicates the current context is not only the increasing opacity of control mechanisms: contemporary media and their functions contribute to the creation of spaces where distinct and even contradictory realities coexist, each maintaining internal coherence despite their opposition (Xun, 2025). In this framework, some positions continue to recognize women as still exposed to gender oppression, while others assert the opposite, whether from a postfeminist or even openly misogynistic stance.

The major cultural shifts discussed in Chapter One, poststructuralism and postmodern theories, have illuminated this complexity; affirmative politics must be employed to navigate it and respond to the most violent aspects of contemporary reality (Braidotti, 2019).

This integrated approach aligns with my idea of gore as a method. Foucault contributes to framing gore as a descriptive tool through which it is possible to become aware of the mechanisms of postfeminist violence and visibilize pain. Moving beyond the reflection on power through the Deleuzian lens, gore becomes a possibility for transformation, inspiring concrete action. In line with Deleuze, feminist new materialist perspectives breathe vitality into these actions, making them concrete rather than mere potential. In this light, gore does not mean destruction but rather the cessation of the “old” to make way for the emergence of something new, a position from which to construct knowledge.

3.2.1 Desiring Machines and Assemblages

The Deleuzian contribution I draw from also provides theoretical instruments, which I will now outline to clarify my methodology.

One is the “desiring machine,” a concept developed in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972/1983) by Deleuze and his colleague Félix Guattari. Desiring machines are animated by desire, which is understood not as a feeling of lack as in the Freudian tradition but as a productive force that enables the machine to connect with others, generating new relationalities.

Another crucial theoretical tool is the “assemblage” (Deleuze & Guattari 1972/1983, 1980/1987), consisting of heterogeneous elements in non-hierarchical relations. The association among these diverse elements constitutes the assemblage; however, its structure remains temporary, always open to change and reorganization. An aspect to bear is that the assemblage is tetravalent, considering both content and expression as a material aspect and

territorialization and deterritorialization as non-material factors. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) words:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away (p. 88).

The desiring machine is intrinsically linked to the assemblage, as the flux of desire, through its acts of connecting and linking, shapes the assemblage itself. Various material-discursive and affective practices can be territorialized within assemblages becoming organized and momentarily stabilized, endowing the structure with temporary coherence. However, new flows of desire and the emergence of new desiring machines can deterritorialize the assemblage, opening up new remodeling of practices.

In this work, I consider the postfeminist subject as an assemblage made up of multiple interwoven practices that involve: the role of language in constructing subjectivity, including the use of Internet slang, the body, fashion trends, AI filters and media platforms with their algorithmic functioning, which circulate digital aesthetics and promote lifestyles. Alongside these, affective practices, operating both consciously and unconsciously, shape an emotional regulation capable of eliciting negative, self-deprecating feelings as well as intensely positive ones, binding the two together. These elements interact without a fixed hierarchy, shaping a subjectivity that is both situated and continually open to reconfiguration.

Within this framework, the horizontal axis is constituted by the material-discursive-affective elements that produce the idea of “girl-woman,” while the vertical axis represents the degree of stabilization of what is constructed along the horizontal plane.

In this context, gore functions as a vector of deterritorialization, destabilizing postfeminist subjectivity. Let us now examine how desiring machines operate.

3.2.2 Postfeminist Desiring Machine: Territorialization

The first desiring machine to consider is the “postfeminist desiring machine,” which is linked to the territorialization process.

In this initial phase, fluxes of desire territorialize from the concreteness of the body, modes of consumption, and fashion to immaterial elements like attitudes, linguistic expressions, beliefs, and personal interests within a postfeminist framework. In other words, material, discursive, and affective practices move in a postfeminist direction, constituting the “organs” that sustain the whole structure and allow the process of territorialization. It should be noted that the term organs here does not refer to its common-sense meaning. In Deleuzian philosophy, organs are to be understood as functional structures necessary for the existence of the body-territory.

Although the theoretical tools used to discuss postfeminist subjectivity as an assemblage derived from Deleuze and Guattari, this stage is closely intertwined with

Foucauldian contribution. The territory emerges from multifactorial power relations, enabling the subject to exercise choices aligned with postfeminist culture, leading to a (re)territorialization of patriarchal power (McRobbie, 2009; Gill, 2016). Within this framework, the “blocked” and economically conditioned becoming, previously mentioned in relation to the construction of postfeminist subjectivity, occurs.

3.2.3 Gore Desiring Machine: Deterritorialization and Body Without Organs

The second desiring machine is what I call the “gore desiring machine.”

At this stage, the assemblage of postfeminist subjectivity begins to dissolve as gore acts as a line of flight.

The destabilization of the assemblage signals a distinctly Deleuzian moment that embraces change. If, in the Foucauldian phase, the subject could move only within the boundaries of the established territory, now the territory is no longer existent. Hence, the subject is potentially free as the postfeminist organs that ensured cohesion to the assemblage have been eliminated. What used to be a postfeminist subject now looks like a frameless matter freed from fixed structures. Essentially, gore does not destroy; instead, it produces the so-called Body without Organs, a stage of pure potentiality that resists any codification. Referring to the BwO, Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983) state:

An apparent conflict arises between desiring-machines and the body without organs. Every coupling of machines, every production of a machine, every sound of a machine running, becomes unbearable to the body without organs. Beneath its organs it senses there are larvae and loathsome worms, and a God at work messing it all up or strangling it by organizing it (p.8).

The BwO reacts with irritation to imposed configurations, yet it must be intended as a stage of transition that does not constitute a solution alone, nor does it propose alternative ways to envision identity as it is not yet productive. It is rather a threshold, a liminal stage that needs an act of reterritorialization to retrieve a productive force.

3.2.4 Feminist Desiring Machine: Reterritorialization and Resistance

At this point, a “feminist desiring machine” is needed to enact the process of reterritorialization that reorganizes the organs, giving new coherence to the body and reconstituting an assemblage.

Essentially, this phase is driven by an ethical impulse, in which one first becomes aware of one’s situatedness in the surrounding context and subsequently takes responsibility for enacting feminist agency.

However, assemblages remain fluid and vulnerable entities. Each reterritorialization carries with it the risk of new deviations, repressive captures, or conformisms. For this reason, feminism is not only the engine of change but also the condition for its preservation: it ensures the possibility of new configurations and their defense against attempts to re-subject them to the norm, which, as has been shown, evolves, changing in form, though not necessarily in substance.

Two clarifications are needed before explaining how I intend to apply this theoretical framework to the selected case study. The first concerns my use of the term feminism. As mentioned in the first chapter, feminism has been plural for the past forty years; therefore, I must explain what I mean here by feminist action. Since offering a complete and detailed account of my feminist perspective goes beyond the scope of this section, I will limit myself to pointing out two features that I consider essential for this work: the political dimension and processuality of feminism.

By political, I mean that feminist engagement must have a tangible social impact that implies visible change and is willing, if necessary, to be “uncomfortable,” challenging existing hierarchies and institutionalized forms of repression. Symbols and slogans certainly serve to create a sense of unity and community. Still, they should not be the foundation of the movement and should not give in to commodification.

By processuality, I mean that feminism is not a destination nor a phenomenon that exhausts itself. Rather, it is a continuous flow that evolves alongside social transformations that must be considered and that, most of all, requires a deep self-interrogation of one’s beliefs and privileges.

I also want to stress that with this work, I do not intend to oppose stereotypically feminine gender expressions or even the existence of intelligible genders. What I contest is the normativity surrounding this way of being, which should be one among many and not the dominant one. Furthermore, I want to stress that capitalism, like patriarchy, gains solidity precisely through the normalization of this model of femininity, which demands to be read critically. Nevertheless, I am not calling for its total abolition; at least not at this stage.

Even if the need to dismantle this scheme of femininity entirely were to arise, doing so without a deep understanding of its underlying mechanisms would risk being counterproductive. Ultimately, the disruptive action of gore allows for the imagination of new future directions, but it also requires the support of an ethical foundation to ensure its function is not rendered meaningless

3.3 *Goreblogging*: Introduction to the Case Study

To critically examine postfeminism in its most current expressions, I have chosen a case study closely tied to the Girl Internet consisting of a collection of girlblogging posts. It has already emerged that girlblogging is distinguished by its typical coquettish and hyper-feminine content. In the selection of memes to be analyzed these motifs are paired with visual or textual references to blood, decay, rotting, and violence.

As anticipated in the introduction, I refer to this specific subcategory of girlblogging with the term “Goreblogging,” which stands as a combination of the words “girl” and “gore.” Although the portrayal of grotesque and horror-themed elements may seem more evident, identifying these memes precisely as goreblogging proves fitting as the convergence of elements of violence and the female experience renders them “gore” in the sense articulated in this chapter.

To collect the analytical material, I used Pinterest, an app launched in 2010 that enables users to collect and organize images into thematic boards. Three main reasons guided the choice of this platform. The first is practical: when a keyword is typed into the search bar, Pinterest provides access to a wide archive of images related to the original search. Due to

how the app works, there is no need to look for profiles that publish posts aligning with the researcher's interests, nor to trace their activity over time to collect more material. This quick access to a large number of pins suited the time constraints of the study.

The app's structure leads to the second reason, which is ethical. Pinterest is mainly focused on images rather than social interactions, which partially explains why users rarely provide their full names, preferring instead to use nicknames. This aspect did not raise issues regarding obtaining the publishers' consent, as their anonymity is protected. It also clarifies the reason why, in the appendix, the quotation under each meme includes the username used on Pinterest.

The third reason is conceptual. In Chapter One, the Urban Dictionary definition outlining the features of a girlblogger mentioned Pinterest as one of the most popular platforms, making the app symbolically relevant, as it resonates with the aesthetic style adopted in girlblogging.

The meme collection phase lasted five months, beginning in November 2024 and ending in March 2025. Throughout the process, I kept a notebook to record my observations on recurrent patterns to trace connections between the online imagery of girlhood and its link to the impact of postfeminism on bodies and emotional life. The research began by typing the keyword "girlblogging" into the Pinterest search bar; from there, the algorithm suggested a cascade of similar images. Through this process, I could select a total of 62 pins, later organized into two mood boards: "Corporeality" including 22 memes,²⁸ and "Sexuality and Desire," gathering the remaining 40.

The analysis of these posts considered both textual and visual elements, including chromatic aspects. A detail worth mentioning is that where relevant hashtags or keywords were used by users on Pinterest, I included them as titles in the quotations; otherwise I provided the meme titles myself.

It should be noted that recurring visual and linguistic templates can be identified within these mood boards, forming distinct subsets united by a shared expressive structure. This is the case with the "Girls When" group, which constitutes a meme cluster that repeats the same background image and opening formula. Similarly, "Girlhood is a Spectrum" is a meme series that consistently features the same caption, while the images at either end of the spectrum change. "Feminine Urge" also forms a recognizable textual memetic pattern.

While acknowledging the existence of these clusters, I have chosen to categorize memes based on the content they convey, prioritizing what they express in relation to the body or affective experience. Therefore, the criteria for selecting the memes were exclusively tied to my operationalization of *gore*, a concept I have broken down into indicators that allow recognizing and describing violence, bring pain to light, and enact critical reflection aimed at transformation.

In the final instance, I find it relevant to provide a rationale on why I chose to work with memes. As a form of communication typical of social media, they represent an innovative and relatively recent site of inquiry that is highly accessible and widely democratized, since anyone can create or share them. Furthermore, memes are characterized

²⁸The memes in question are available for review in the two dedicated appendices included at the end of the thesis.

by virality (Dawkins, 1976) and spreadability (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), which makes them meaningful for research as they convey experiences that are deeply relatable: they circulate because they resonate.

Moreover, they express a generational shared feeling through slang, intertextuality, and aesthetics, functioning as constantly evolving ecosystems capable of encapsulating the zeitgeist (Tanni, 2023).

Specifically, goreblogging memes offer valuable material to address the central research question regarding postfeminism's capacity to articulate a coherent or distorted narrative of the female experience, since they function as form of testimony to girlhood directly expressed by the demographic that is precisely the main target of postfeminist discourse.

3.3.1 Activating Gore

To conclude this chapter on the use of gore as a methodology, I will illustrate how I operationalized the concept in order to identify the analytical indicators that activate it as a methodological tool. The part of the analysis aimed at visibilize suffering and stressing the gore's transformative capacity relies on three key aspects of gore: messiness, decay, explicit violent content.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor are they arranged hierarchically; each meme often embodies multiple aspects at once, but for the sake of analytical clarity, I have grouped them according to the dimension of gore that appeared most prominent to me in each case.

The indicators are as follows:

1. **Messiness:** This criterion refers to the chaotic and scattered nature of gore. It was prioritized when memes reflected a distorted and fractured perception of the body and inner torment. The images grouped under "messiness" are frequently marked by alienation, a disrupted sense of embodiment, psychic pain, the absence of a stable identity, dysmorphia, or emotionally charged states such as crying and frustration. They also convey paradoxical emotional conditions, such as the coexistence of opposing needs or affective states, and a pervasive sense of helplessness.
2. **Decay:** This indicator helped select memes portraying decay and conveying corruption of flesh. Memes included in this criterion evoke disgust, explicitly mention the word "rotting," depict bodies in a state of decomposition, or include elements such as insects, darkness, skulls, fading figures suggesting decomposition, or filthy environments.
3. **Explicit Violent Content:** References to violence include both textual and visual elements. On a textual level, this refers to the use of violent language, direct mentions of gore, or references to acts of cannibalism. Visually, it includes blood, monstrous figures, raw meat, organs, or allusions to murder even when conveyed through a memetic or cartoonish style.

Lastly, there is one more aspect of gore that proved relevant in my analysis: catharsis. This concept informs the stage of the methodology where potentiality must be converted into

productivity and will be connected to, and made meaningful by, feminist philosophical theories.

CHAPTER 4

GORELBLOGGING: EXPLORING CORPOREALITY, SEXUALITY, AND DESIRE IN MEMES

4.1 Moodboard 1: On Corporeality

This first mood board focuses on girls' corporeal experience. While physical perceptions are rooted in emotional states, the body holds a central place in both postfeminist culture and the analyzed memes, thereby warranting closer scrutiny.

Of the 22 memes included in "Corporeality," three were selected based on explicit depictions of violence (Figs. 1, 12, 17), ten according to the criteria of decay (Figs. 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13–16, 20), while messiness was the indicator used to collect the remaining nine (Figs. 2–4, 7, 10, 18, 19, 21, 22).

The thematic core of this collection is a profound discomfort with the body, which emerges as emotional distress arising from the confrontation with the physical dimension (Figs. 1-8), unfolds into internal fracture (Figs. 9-17), and culminates in a desire to transcend corporeal limits (Figs. 18-22).

4.1.1 Get Ready with the Monster

Although moments dedicated to self-care are not inherently harmful, in light of the reflections that emerged particularly in Chapter Two, it is unsurprising that these memes often take on an unsettling tone when referring to "getting ready."

Take, for example, Fig. 1, which shows a stickman engaged in deplorable acts such as murder and cannibalism simply because "hair isn't perfect." At first glance, it appears to be just a lighthearted, ironic meme with a touch of dark humor. However, the broader constellation of posts to which it belongs reveals a turbulent experience of corporeality, demonstrating that beneath this irony lies a much deeper discomfort.

This conflicted dynamic of self-perception is echoed in the recurring motif of the mirror, which features both visually and textually in five memes (Figs. 2–6). One of these depicts film scenes in which characters, caught in moments of frustration, restrain tears while looking into a mirror as they grapple with makeup (Fig. 2). The image is accompanied by the phrase "men will never understand," framing the exhausting aesthetic labor as a distinctly feminine experience.

Within the mood board, one figure I find significant is Nina Sayers, the protagonist of *Black Swan*. Beyond her iconic status among girlbloggers, she resonates with postfeminist themes, as she embodies the tension between achievement and self-discipline in the pursuit of perfection even at the cost of jeopardizing her physical and mental well-being. In Fig. 3, Nina returns before the mirror, accompanied by lyrics from Radiohead's "Creep": "I wanna have control/I want a perfect body/I want a perfect soul," further emphasizing the interplay between physical and inner flawlessness, and surveillance. Failure to meet these expectations triggers scorn that reinforces "a sharply neoliberal view of the body as laboring individually toward goodness/perfection/moral superiority" (Fahs, 2017, p. 91).

In a similar vein, the meme featuring Jennifer Check from *Jennifer's Body* (Kusama, 2009) captures a moment of tension related to corporeality (Fig. 4). Also in this case, the

mirror remains a central factor, while an ironic caption highlights the oscillation between “body dysmorphia” and “god complex,” reflecting polarized emotional responses toward the body.

Sensations provoked by simply inhabiting a corporeal form become particularly troubled during the physical transformations of adolescence, as the childlike body gradually acquires adult characteristics and gendered social expectations assume a more prominent role in girls’ life. As noted earlier, maintaining a youthful appearance is a central imperative of postfeminist aesthetics; consequently, anxieties intensify as teenage features give way to a more mature look.

Fig. 5 exemplifies the feeling that emerges when one looks in the mirror and sees “a grown woman instead of a teenager.” This ensuing discomfort is embodied by an eerie hooded figure draped in a dark cloak, whose blurred facial traits are reminiscent of decaying flesh and convey a profound sense of alienation from a body that no longer feels familiar.

Elements of decay recur in another meme involving the mirror. In Fig. 6, a woman seen from behind gazes at her reflection in a dark and gloomy setting, where a human skull rests on the shelf before her. Notably, the image in the mirror does not show a female face but rather that of a human-like creature with a dark, indistinct visage, evoking an aura of monstrosity.

This distortion of the self recalls Braidotti’s (2003) observation that women shaped by the phallogocentric gaze often develop a fractured and negative self-perception. Recalling the testimonies of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, Braidotti describes how the two women envisioned monstrous creatures emerging from their mirrors and sustains that in post-industrial culture “the fascination with the monstrous, with the duplicate with bizarre features, is directly proportional to the concealment of images of ugliness” (p. 238).

In this light, disgust is incessantly concealed but never fully erased, returning as a haunting presence that must be continually managed and subdued.

The monstrous becomes a central dimension in the fraught relationship with physical appearance, a tension is vividly embodied in Fig. 7. Here, a girl-lamb embodying the quintessential sacrificial creature is paired with a caption that blurs the line between “the shape of a girl” and “that of a monster.” Girlhood and monstrosity do not stand apart; instead, they endlessly entwine, leading the contours of the monster and the woman to merge and contaminate each other, suggesting an underlying messiness in the emotional states tied to identity. Fig. 8 deepens the connection with monstrosity, depicting a decaying, hellish creature labeled as the “ideal female body.”

However, the meme’s provocative tone does not simply equate the female body with monstrosity; instead, it suggests a form of reclamation that eases the tension seen earlier, hinting at an embrace of the monstrous.

4.1.2 Girlhood Is a Spectrum: Between Hyperfemme Euphoria and Abjection

The relationship with the body goes beyond mere dissatisfaction or discomfort, producing a fragmentation that leads to an inner split. This dichotomizing effect unfolds on multiple levels within the memes, as indicated by the very concept of girlhood, expressed in bipolar terms. The phrase “Girlhood is a Spectrum” is often found in girlblog memes, associating duality to the feminine experience. This formula appears in three selected posts (Figs. 9, 10, 11), textually conveying the idea of splitting which is further reinforced by images.

The memes in question juxtapose the beauty icon Marilyn Monroe and the hideous humanoid figure associated with the “Russian Sleep Experiment”²⁹ creating a stark contrast between extreme femininity and the corruption of the flesh. Another split is between Hello Kitty at one extreme pole, contrasted by a disturbing stick man figure, marking a shift from childhood innocence and cuteness to a sense of disorder, where even reality is questioned, suggesting chaos. Similarly, the contrast between an angelic girl and a centipede symbolizes the tension between physical and moral elevation, and decay, with the worm serving as a stark opposing image.

The color palette is another element in which the dualism of being a girl is rendered explicit. In Figs. 10 and 11, the pink and white tones that characterize the images on one end of the spectrum contrast with the darker hues on the other. Even when fictional characters are referenced, the juxtaposition consistently pits the culturally celebrated notions of beauty, cuteness, and femininity against representations of disgust and bodily corruption. This pervasive sense of aversion toward the body emerges as a crucial emotional dimension within the postfeminist framework, where achieving beauty, and thus self-worth, often entails a consumerist effort.

Another direct reference to the split is found in Figs. 12 and 13. The former suggests duality through the words “outside/inside,” chromatically opposing shades of white and light colors to blackish tones, and graphically portraying what resembles a blonde sex doll alongside a monstrous and deformed figure, whose mouth appears unnaturally torn open into a black void. Likewise, the latter uses text to convey the sense of polarization through the sentence, “To be a woman is to be rotting from the inside while portraying beauty from the outside.” This opposition perfectly encapsulates the paradoxical condition already encountered in the previous set of memes analyzed, where beauty results from the taming of the body to conform to social demands, ultimately provoking detrimental feelings, here represented by a sense of internal decaying.

Rotting is also a common theme in “Corporeality” when addressing girlhood (Figs. 14-16). Fig. 14 explicitly refers to decay through the word “rotting” in the foreground, written in a childlike style where the dot on the letter “i” is replaced by a tiny heart. In the background lies a feminine figure on a bed, her face obscured by long blonde hair adorned with a pink bow. This coquette imagery, alongside the light colors used, contrast with the idea of putrefaction expressed by the text. In Fig. 15, rotting has an explicitly feminine connotation, arising as a “feminine urge.” Once again, the meme relies on irony to create contrast since, despite its dark content, the text appears pink and elegant in form. As in the previous image, the background shows what seems to be a girl curled up under the sheets, turning her back to the viewer. Lastly, Fig. 16 uses an intertextual reference portraying Emily, the protagonist of *The Corpse Bride* (Burton, 2005), caught in the act of “Rotting (Girlishly),” where the use of character stresses the contrasting coexistence between decay and daintiness even more.

²⁹The “Russian Sleep Experiment” is a well-known creepypasta. The monstrous human figure associated with this story—found in the referenced meme in the appendix—is often juxtaposed with girly memes, creating a striking contrast between the grotesque and feminine aesthetics.

The split is also found in Fig. 17 where it takes on a more marked connotation as a departure from the corporeal form. The meme portrays a dramatic scene taking place in an obscure setting: An older man with a face contracted in horror, eyes wide shut, is holding what seems to be the bleeding corpse of a younger man. Above, the older figure represents a “teenage girl,” while the words “having a body” appear on the other. The textual and graphic assets of the pin suggest that girls do not experience a sense of unity with their bodies; rather than *being* a body, they seem more to *have* a physical form. Beyond this, the overall mood of the pin conveys that the experience of the flesh is lived with terror.

The rejection of those parts of the self that provoke disgust, coupled with a profound alienation from the body, resonates strongly with Julia Kristeva’s (1982) concept of abjection. She describes the abject as “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (p. 9). Applying this insight to these goreblog memes allows the understanding that the corporeal condition of young women under postfeminism is fundamentally shaped by a pervasive sense of rejection and estrangement. As evidenced by the current obsession with beauty on social media, an increasing number of bodily features are being exposed and denigrated, with body fat in particular standing as a threat that must be neutralized. Nonetheless, this exclusion remains perpetually provisional. As Kristeva (1982) contends, “abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it; on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (p. 11).

One can regain weight, body hair regrow, and new micro-trends perpetually emerge, reigniting insecurities, particularly within a screen-mediated culture where the labor of self-validation demands relentless vigilance. Thus, the abject, however repressed, reordered, or domesticated, returns like a ghost; an unsettling presence that continually threatens the boundaries of identity.

The corporal form then feels like a condemnation that evokes a yearning to transcend its limitations.

4.1.3 Girl Help! I’m Being Perceived

The last motif of the mood board is the desire to transcend the body, which becomes a place no longer desired to inhabit, calling for abandonment in favor of freer forms of being.

However, it must be acknowledged that the physical shape is not rejected in itself. In this regard, the phrase “hot girls are touch repulsed yet starved for it” displayed in Fig. 18 is worthy of analysis. This sentence is the prevailing element of the meme, being at the forefront of the image, showing the figure of a girl dressed like a doll, looking down, sitting on the grass in an unspecified and rather dark setting. The first interesting element to note is the adjective “hot,” which, as it has been said, is crucial in shaping the postfeminist identity. While postfeminism associates empowerment with attractiveness, here, the main feeling is fragility. Indeed, even if girls have an intense desire for physical contact, the touch reminds them of their corporeality, which makes them refuse it: to be touched is to be seen, and to be seen is to be confronted with the materiality of one’s flesh.

Similarly, Fig. 19 displays a cockroach invoking a girl’s help just because it has been perceived. The choice of this bug is not causal, as it recalls Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (1915), where the protagonist inexplicably wakes up as a cockroach and is

forced to face this new condition as well as the alienation that comes with it. Inhabiting a corporal form that does not feel like it belongs to oneself deeply resonated with the female experience as narrated through goreblogging. The shadow figure in Fig. 20 declaring she is “the embodiment of void” exemplifies this emerging estrangement, as the deep body discomfort gives rise to a fantasy of disembodiment articulated through symbolic representations of alternative physical states.

Fig. 21, further stresses this move toward immaterial and ethereal modes of existence, portraying the outline of a winged faceless female figure accompanied by a pink caption reading: “Do not engage with me; I am better as a concept.” The absence of definite features and the angelic wings make the female silhouette appear closer to a nonhuman state, while the warning to not engage with her recalls the rejection of human interaction, already encountered in Fig. 18.

The sardonic smiles of the memetic stickmen in Fig. 22 reveal the excitement that stems from avoiding perception, which is humorously represented as an event to be celebrated.

These images collectively point toward a retreat from corporeality into an imagined, immaterial, and astral realm, where the burdens of bodily perception and social legibility can be eluded. In her article addressing Internet female archetypes, Arianna Caserta covers the descent into a nihilistic irony, patronizing in girly memetic cyberspace. She states:

If today’s internet is a bizarre mix of irony and sincerity, the archetypes of the “Sad Girl” and the “Schizo Girl” are its two favorite children. If the former glorifies attachment issues, family trauma, and the concept of healing by embracing a visual vocabulary made of fragile bodies, white lambs, lace dresses, and Lana Del Rey songs, the latter escapes earthly passions to align with a heightened level of perception made of cryptic mental structures [...] and self-erasure (2025).

In Caserta’s account, the Sad Girl functions as a precondition for the Schizo Girl, with both figures emerging from the same foundational source: being a girl. Similarly, I contend that girls’ embodied experience, read in this work through its entanglement with postfeminism, generates a form of alignment with the dominant standard. Such acts of conforming manifest in adhering to the codes that determine the hyper-feminine aesthetics typical of the Sad Girl. The latter has emerged, especially in the first two sections of the analysis of the case study, with the doll-like female figures, feminine dresses, and references to lambs.

However, beneath this dainty aesthetics lurks frustration, self-disgust, and a need to escape: a schizoid sensation that fragments the self and propels it toward meta-states of existence.

4.2 Moodboard 2: On Sexuality and Desire

This moodboard centers on the emotional realm of girlhood, focusing especially on sexuality and intimacy. Of its 40 pins, twenty-five fall under the criterion of explicit violence (Figs. 1, 4-8, 10, 11, 13-26, 29, 38, 40), four were selected according to the indicator of decay (Figs. 2, 12, 35, 36) and eleven were selected according to messiness (Figs. 3, 9, 27, 28, 30-34, 37, 39).

The main theme concerns sexuality and love, represented in 23 pins. Among these, 17 address love and romantic relationships (Figs. 6-18, 21-23, 25), while 6 deal more explicitly with sex and erotic desire (Figs. 1-5, 20).

Another prominent theme, recurring in 9 memes (Figs. 26-34), is the desire to go unhinged, either explicitly stated or implied through intertextual references.

4.2.1 Sexualization, Sexuality, and Intimacy: The Frustration of Female Desire and the Role of Metaphorical Cannibalism

As anticipated, the theme of sexuality is strongly present in this second mood board. If postfeminism constructs its narrative around a self-confident femininity, in which the self-sexualization of the body is uncritically read as a form of emancipation, these memes tell a different reality. Unlike the polished aesthetics of porno chic and raunch culture, which align well with the postfeminist imaginary, these memes show that being in one's "slut era" (Fig.1) does not necessarily generate positive experiences of lightness and pleasure. On the contrary, they suggest a tormented emotional state, visually represented in the meme by a desperate stickman bleeding until it dissolves into a chaos of scribbles.

Being sexualized emerges as a bitter experience, which contrasts with a more profound desire to be loved (Fig. 2), even when the subject autonomously enacts the sexualization of the self. In this sense, Fig. 3 is particularly interesting for the intertextual reference it proposes: the meme depicts Cassie Howard, one of the protagonists of the TV series *Euphoria* (2019–present), who in the show deals with the discomfort of being perceived as a sexual object. Some of the memes in the "Girls When" series further reinforce this critical view of objectification, extending the reflection also to sex itself and heterosexual relationships.

In these posts, stickmen in the grip of acts of violence express female discomfort that arises when one remembers "being treated like porn categories by men" (Fig. 4) or simply that sex "is a real thing" (Fig. 5).

Relationships with men deserve further discussion since the theme reemerges in other memes (Figs. 6, 7, 12) that represent them in a strongly negative light. Men seem to be perceived as incapable of satisfying even the most basic needs of women, and the mere thought of having relationships with male peers provokes feelings of discomfort. Even more concerning is the desire to appear "less appealing for men" to avoid forms of abuse.

What emerges from these posts is a dimension of vulnerability, in stark contrast to postfeminist representations that does not fail to depict the woman as a dominant figure even over the man (Gill, 2015). Given this criticality of heterosexual relationships, which at times also hints at forms of gender-based violence, it is not surprising that the feeling of love is also represented by online girls with the irony typical of Gen Z, highlighting its critical aspects through the use of violent images (Figs. 8, 15).

Other examples report frames taken from films in which the characters are in the midst of a full-blown psychotic crisis, used to represent "Girls when they have a crush" (Fig. 9). Similarly, monstrous creatures embody girls when they feel romantic interest in someone (Figs. 10, 11).

Female desire, therefore, seems to move on a threshold: on the one hand, it would like to express itself; on the other, it is constantly frustrated, as its very expression entails a

form of emotional pain closely tied to the bodily dimension, which is central to the discourse on sexuality. Figs. 13 and 14 encapsulate this contrasting nature of desire. In the first, an unsettling female figure holds what appears to be a bloody mass, censored by a pixelated effect, conveying the idea of a painful intimacy. Analogously, in the second image, the “desire to be loved” is accompanied by negative or violent adjectives such as “crushing” and “terrible,” which stand out against a decadent and macabre background.

This dimension of frustration is also recurring within postfeminist discourse. It has already been observed how the body is the place of constant taming, in which its most spontaneous expressions are perceived as abject and, therefore, subjected to a standardization process. In this sense, any deviation from the norm is inhibited. Similarly, female desire also seems traversed by a contradictory tension: girls self-sexualize consciously but, from this process, derive frustration and suffering; they desire intimacy but experience it with anguish.

This constant repression of the desiring system emerges in a new series of memes in which desire explodes with violence, overwhelming any containment. The theme of cannibalism as a liberating act, addressed in Chapter Two in relation to the repression of the feminine appetite, now deserves to be revised. On social media, there are indeed numerous posts that use cannibalism as a metaphor for love and sex. In “Sexuality and Desire” cannibalism ironically appears as part of a list of ideal professions for women, which also includes working as a “lamb” (Fig. 19); it is associated with the imaginary of girlhood (Fig. 24) or evoked as a metaphor for intimacy and romantic love (Figs. 21–23, 25). In these memes, female desire is explicitly described as “violent” and “carnal” (Fig. 20), raw flesh becomes an evocation of eroticism (Fig. 17), and female sexual appetite is staged as a disruptive element, resonating with the liberation of physical appetite previously addressed (Figs. 16, 18).

The scenario that emerges from these contents on sexualization, sex, and heterosexual love is deeply contradictory: graphic and textual references to violence highlight the paradoxical nature of the female experience, which cannot be reduced either to that of a passive victim or to that of a fully emancipated subject. Within goreblogging girls appear trapped in a liminal condition where irreconcilable opposites coexist, giving rise to chaotic forms of self-narration.

4.2.2 Intertextuality of Unhinged Girls: Mapping Inner Landscape

To explore the emotional states displayed through goreblog memes, it is essential to consider their intertextual references, that is, the elements drawn from other texts that enrich these materials (Kristeva, 1966/1980).

As discussed in Chapter One, this intertextuality is evident in girlblogging’s symbolic repertoire, which draws heavily from cinema, music, and literature. Through these references, one gains insight into girls’ inner landscapes characterized by intrusive thoughts (Fig. 26) and “voices in the head” (Fig. 27) projected onto symbolic figures. Among them, the aforementioned Snejana Onopka functions as a spectral embodiment of anorexia, while Daisy Randone, from *Girl, Interrupted*, evokes struggles with bulimia and a fatal depression. Lux Lisbon, the protagonist of *The Virgin Suicides*, is similarly associated with deadly fate, figuring as a further psychological dimension of the goreblogger.

Interestingly, all these female icons featured in this pin are associated with beauty, yet they also incarnate fragility, emotional chaos, and profound suffering.

Allusions to suicide recur in Fig. 28, which communicates the impossibility of breaking free from a loop that depicts the tragic fates of thirteen-year-old Cecilia Lisbon and Shakespeare's Ophelia, and Pearl's frustration stemming from a desperate craving for recognition. Another element of this cycle is the woman in *Portrait of a Young Woman in White* (Jacques-Louis David, circa 1798), an image that demands closer examination as it presents an additional layer of intertextuality. The use of this image in the meme does not, in fact, refer to the painting itself but rather to the cover of Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018). In this novel, the beautiful, thin, blonde, unnamed protagonist remains confined at home under heavy medication, attempting to escape the void of her existence by withdrawing from society.

Anna Bauer, the female protagonist of *Possession*, appears in Fig. 29 as a further significant intertextual echo. In the film, her vexation culminates in episodes of psychotic rage, and the manifestation of a monstrous sexuality disrupts her seemingly perfect bourgeois life as wife and mother.

Just like in the previous mood board, the theme of the split also reappears as a defining aspect of girlhood. A case in point is the meme expressing the "two sides" (Fig. 30) of the female experience, where characters from childhood shows such as Disney princesses and My Little Pony are contrasted with mentally fragile or emotionally unstable figures: once again Nina Sayers, Pearl, Maddie Perez from *Euphoria*, Tracy Freeland from *Thirteen* (Hardwicke, 2003). Similarly, "girls be like" memes (Figs. 31, 32) juxtapose the innocent MyMelody, standing in a childish pink setting, with tormented female characters.

Another intertextual reference is Amy Dunne from *Gone Girl* (Fig. 33), who could be seen as the epitome of the postfeminist woman. Successful, wealthy, attractive, and even more admired than her husband, she is nonetheless not shielded from suffering, which stems from her troubled relationship.

Dani Ardor from *Midsommar* (Aster, 2019) and Harley Quinn from *Suicide Squad* (Gunn, 2021) are other female icons from cinema, used by gorebloggers to symbolize a descent into madness and a broader "feminine urge to go unhinged" (Fig. 34).

Intertextuality also extends to literary personalities such as Fëdor Dostoevsky (Fig. 35) and Franz Kafka (Fig. 36), who explored the drama of existence, alienation, and loneliness; experiences that resonate with the female subjectivity as it is expressed in goreblogging. In the same way, Sylvia Plath, known for addressing the theme of depression, is often referenced in memes to illustrate the duality of girlhood (Fig. 37), where the pains of womanhood are contrasted with childish imagery.

This element of childhood and infantilism can be further explored in other memes that narrate the pain of not being a child again (Figs. 38, 39) or returning to an adolescent period (Fig. 40) when, hypothetically, gender constraints were perceived as much less coercive.

Essentially, these memes portray a response to the paradoxical contradictions in women's lives, caught between hard-won visibility and persistent misogynistic backlash, within a context that appears emancipated but still rests on sexist foundations that constrain bodies and affects.

However, these violent impulses do not arise simply from the contradictions themselves. As Elisa Cuter (2022) writes, “the damage does not lie so much in the amount of contradictory conditioning that women receive throughout their existence, but in the disproportionate weight that these conditionings assume in the development of female subjectivity” (p. 29).

In other words, female desire is not necessarily directed at breaking free from these norms; rather, women are taught to desire certain lives and certain bodies. This socially codified desire is precisely a collection of postfeminist “organs” that evokes the need for the Body without Organs.

The female derangement stemming from the pressure to conform to social expectations has long populated artistic expression. Beyond the cultural references presented here, literature and cinema from the past have equally featured tormented characters torn between desire and repression. Let us think of Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947, Williams), Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* (Plath, 1963), or even Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856). Each reflecting the specificity of their time, these women embody a suffocated female desire; not so differently, through memes today’s girls give voice to gendered tensions using the codes of expression of their present, revealing that despite evolving narratives of empowerment, the world remains, to some extent, unwelcoming for them.

4.3 Commentary: Unveiling Postfeminist Contradictions

So far, gore has proven to be a useful descriptive category allowing to uncover young women’s conflicted relationship with corporeality. The latter does not stem from the body itself, but rather from the potential misalignment with its idealized version, thereby highlighting the influence of cultural factors. Similarly, discomfort emerges in the sexual and erotic spheres, especially regarding heterosexual relationships, while intertextual references point to pop culture figures, who embody a frustrated, misunderstood, and stifled femininity, obsessed with beauty and haunted by inner torment.

Emotional suffering is further expressed through explicit or symbolic references to dysmorphia and eating disorders, linking to the postfeminist violence discussed in Chapter Two. Moreover, the general discomfort related to physical appearance, which is predominant in “Corporeality” does not make it difficult to imagine a crossing into disfigurement.

These findings make it possible to address one of the key research questions guiding this work: Is postfeminism capable of effectively representing women’s lived experiences? While postfeminism emphasizes empowerment and freedom of choice, it tends to offer an overly optimistic and reductive perspective. I contend, therefore, that it fails to provide a complete reading of the female condition.

The argument I put forward here neither entirely rejects female agency nor intends to convey the idea that women are in any way unempowered; still, it differs from postfeminism as it is decidedly less optimistic, is more complex in its articulation, and calls for a feminist stance.

Within the memes analyzed, gore operated not only as a descriptive tool but also as a transformative force that disrupted the postfeminist assemblage. References to monstrosity, blood, violence, fragmentation, disorder, and decay led to deterritorialization, rendering it

possible to achieve the stage of the Body without Organs. This new phase corresponds to the dissolution of the assemblage, calling for the concretization of creative potential.

At this point, the second research question must be revisited. The latter concerned the applicability of gore as an efficacious method of inquiry, and most importantly, asked whether it could be reappropriated through a feminist perspective to contribute to the re-articulation of gender identity. Having conducted the parts of the analysis that primarily involved the action of gore, it is possible to assess the effectiveness of gore as a methodology. Now, the focus must shift to the second part of the question. To this end, the following section explores how to harness gore's cathartic potential, in the pursuit of reconstructing the territory and reorganizing the organs of the assemblage according to a feminist ethics.

4.4 Gore, Catharsis and the Potential for Transformation

In its mode of operation, postfeminism reuses hegemonic expressions of femininity considered frivolous or weak and re-signifies them in an empowering way. The problem is not the reuse of a stereotypical feminine aesthetic but the lack of criticality underlying this gesture, which produces an idea of false or partial emancipation as it marries market logic and patriarchal power. In this sense, an identity circuit is created in which the subject evolves by investing in itself, but only within the territory where, as has been already said, the evolution of the self resembles more an act of economically conditioned branding.

Before explaining how I intend to activate gore affirmatively, I consider it appropriate to make explicit a further step. Braidotti argues that identity is "a process made of continual shifts and negotiations between different levels of power and desire, that is, between voluntary choice and unconscious drives" (2003, p. 33). This process emerges from the tension between potestas, namely the repressive side of power, and potentia, its creative and enabling force, which shapes the embedded and embodied dimensions of the self.

In my context of analysis, potestas manifests itself as a process of constriction and normalization of gender identity, while potentia would lie in the subject's agency and voluntary choices. However, the decisions taken by the postfeminist subject may end up trapping it in a cycle in which potestas continues to exercise itself over it, generating suffering. In line with this reasoning, I argue that the voluntary choices enact a sort of "partial potentia." Another aspect that Braidotti mentions is the unconscious drives. In my analytical framework, gore can free pre-reflective desires, so what needs to be done is to overcome the partial potentia that gets stuck in a continuous loop with potestas, and redirect it to support less legible affective motions.

It is helpful to recall the role of affect in understanding how this shift occurs. For Braidotti (2003), the truth of an idea lies not in its correspondence to a fixed reality but in its capacity to generate positive affects, as they possess the ability to give ideas direction and intensity, ultimately leading to transformation. As previously mentioned, affect operates as an autonomous force that precedes cognition and can generate change (Massumi, 2002). In a similar way, gore resonates with unconscious drives that elude immediate comprehension, yet persist in shaping the subject, not only through deliberate choices but also via pre-cognitive flows that orient the body toward alternative trajectories. A telling example of this pre-rational nature of gore is the fact that gorebloggers are not necessarily aware that they

are at least partially critiquing postfeminism. Thus, the gore displayed in their memes operates on an unconscious level: prior to reason, yet imbued with generative force.

I find the potentialities opened by gore to be intrinsically tied to its cathartic nature, which must be supported by a feminist stance that calls for self-questioning and provides the critical perspective and political engagement necessary to rethink gender identity. In other words, brutality is not left as an endpoint in goreblogging but connects to Deleuzian evolution and a feminist re-signification through which gore leads to new “unexpected possibilities of life” (Braidotti, 2003, p. 88).

What emerges from this section is the importance of both the subject’s material and affective life, as well as the need for a critical reflection on power systems. This insight holds together all the stages that informed the methodology: the Foucauldian and Deleuzian approaches, and the opening to feminism as a strategy to creatively revalue the steps taken so far. In this sense, new materialist foundations become useful tools for reading the process of identity formation and orienting future responsible action (Haraway, 2016).

First, they provide means to acknowledge the complexity of the dynamics in which the subject is involved, which entails that the latter is neither merely passive nor the sole actor endowed with agency. This recognition of intra-actions (Barad, 2003, 2007) makes it possible to maintain a creative spirit that resists nihilist tendencies, which would otherwise render any attempt at action futile.

With this new idea of gore, one can address the last question: What position do goreblog memes occupy in relation to the postfeminist narrative?

To a certain extent, goreblogging challenges the postfeminist narrative. In this respect, these memes can be understood as manifestations of what can be defined as “postfeminist gore,” a concept adapted from Whitney’s idea of postfeminist gothic. As Whitney (2016) states:

Postfeminist gothic novels [...] violently intrude on the well-constructed fantasy of a safe and equitable world. They feature abject protagonists who are socially invisible, physically broken, or speaking from the grave. [...] Postfeminist gothic novels ask us as readers to textually inhabit women’s experiences of suffering and to arrive at the uncomfortable conclusion that to be female, even today, means to live with terrible risk (p. 2).

Likewise, the memes I have analyzed reveal the “horror” aspects of girlhood. However, they do not entirely reject postfeminism, as they continue to rely on the paradigm of “hotness” and often prioritize uncritical conformity to feminine aesthetics. In this sense, they do not constitute a full form of resistance against postfeminism.

In other words, goreblogging does not move beyond a postfeminist model of femininity; still, it exposes its flaws, revealing the conflict between the urge to conform to its standards and the distress that results from it. Perhaps one day this grey area will be the space where all gender codifications will collapse, but for now, it exists as an unresolved struggle. That is why turning to gender awareness is so urgent: it activates the feminist desiring machine, initiating a process that challenges us to question, reflect on our limits, and continuously strive for change.

CONCLUSION

This research has unfolded through theoretical contributions and expressions of digital pop culture. Now that it has come to an end, rather than summing up, I intend to offer some final reflections in light of what has been explored throughout this work.

Firstly, forty years after its emergence, postfeminism can still be considered a living phenomenon, nourished by its relationship with neoliberalism and the increasingly pervasive media sphere. Throughout this dissertation, it has been shown how a multiplicity of elements—discursive, material and affective—merge into postfeminist subjectivity, guided by the pull of desiring forces that, although giving the subject a certain degree of agency, simultaneously limit the expression of identity.

The second chapter reflected on the tension between action and constraint, demonstrating how the repeated exposure to idealized body and life models plays on the subject's emotional vulnerability, leading to various forms of postfeminist violence, some remaining on the psychological level, others materializing into the flesh. The romanticization of eating disorders, the use of AI beauty filters, and the normalization of medical interventions helped outline a scenario that has strongly questioned the postfeminist narrative on girls' and women's empowerment.

Such problematization, though, did not develop according to a binary logic that framed the subjects involved as victims, but rather allowed for a more complex interpretation that does not fully exclude the possibility of action and self-affirmation.

All the emotional shades of suffering that emerged in this second chapter informed a methodology that engaged with these states of anguish that I have associated with gore, approaching them from a creative and ethical perspective grounded in a feminist politics.

In light of the evidence provided by the case study, the hypothesis proposed in the introductory part of this work regarding goreblog memes as a postfeminist symptom is supported. Indeed, these posts articulate a sense of discomfort, even when the subject is not fully aware of its underlying causes.

These are the central critical insights developed in each chapter. Before turning to the aspects that clearly represent the contributions and limitations of this work, I want to pause to reflect on one that seems to encompass both.

The considerations presented so far offer a broad view of how the construction of women's "intelligible" gender identity is bound. However, some readers may still feel a certain sense of incompleteness about the outcome of this research. Despite emphasizing the possibilities of rethinking identity and the need for feminism to enact this process, this work has not provided a concrete solution for deconstructing identity boundaries.

The absence of a clearly defined formula is primarily attributable to the nature of the context we inhabit. Within this environment, one of the outcomes of the entanglement of its composing systems is the inhibition, though not complete suppression, of awareness and forms of resistance. Before a solution can be found, it is crucial to become familiar with navigating the hidden mechanisms of power and understanding how they function. Secondly, even assuming the existence of a precise procedure for the deterritorialization of postfeminist identity, generalizing its applicability would be unfeasible. Although the postfeminist

subjectivity is constructed through the mix of identifiable elements, these are not hierarchically ordered. Each postfeminist subject has its own history and, along its life path, encounters and connects with other desiring machines that can interfere with the process of organizing and stabilizing the postfeminist assemblage. Due to the multiplicity of desire flows, the degree of engagement with the identity elements varies from person to person; consequently, there is no single way to disorganize them.

At the same time, such flexibility of the state of potentiality represents a valuable aspect of this research, which should be understood as an attempt to stimulate reflection and motivate feminist action to be defined by individuals according to their intimate and social trajectories.

In this light, since this work aimed to employ feminism as a lens to re-signify gore and examine memes, the objective of the research can be considered achieved.

The great value attributed to feminism constitutes more openly a strength of this work. Beyond its application in the present analysis, a feminist stance is more urgent than ever in an international landscape where conservative shifts are threatening women's and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Another valid contribution in terms of innovation has been the focus on social media platforms, which enriches existing studies on the relationship between postfeminism and media. The frequent reference to TikTok as a platform from which aesthetics and trends were drawn has been particularly relevant given its popularity at the time of writing this thesis. While the findings cannot be extended to the entire girl audience, the app's wide diffusion provides insights into the tastes and interests shared by a significant portion of female users.

The use of memes also constituted an original aspect, as well as the consideration of artificial intelligence. The latter is already part of our lives, and its constant evolution leads to new challenges that require further investigation; one example concerning gender issues is the non-consensual manipulation of images for pornographic purposes.

While the multidimensionality of the approach adopted served to illuminate the interconnectedness of cultural, media, and economic systems, it also posed limitations, which prevented significant aspects from being examined in detail. For instance, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery represent broad topics that would benefit from more extensive exploration.

A further limitation lies in the focus on white, heterosexual and cisgender women. Although postfeminism is extending its influence to men (Tasker & Negra, 2007), racialized subjects (Butler, 2013; Dosekun, 2015) and lesbian women (Gill, 2017), these groups were not addressed in this study. Moreover, an intersectional lens considering religion, disability, and transgender individuals remained undeveloped here, as it does in the current scholarship (Gill, 2017).

In this respect, I deem it particularly important to explore the potential links between postfeminist culture and trans women. While there is no singular expression of transness, some trans women may align with conventional feminine aesthetics. Analyzing this aspect in relation to postfeminism could not only offer insights into trans gender identity construction, but also challenge trans exclusionary viewpoints claiming that trans women reinforce negative female stereotypes.

At the outset of this exploration, my pain motivated me to embark on this project. As this analysis concludes, it becomes evident that this form of suffering, linked to postfeminist norms, is reflected in digital manifestations of girlhood. Looking back at the tradition of female expression, the bond between women and darker themes of violence, grotesquery, and monstrosity has always been present. The canon of female gothic, which originated in the 18th century (Moers, 1976), is a telling example in this sense. From this perspective, goreblogging can be seen as an updated form of recounting the horrors of femininity within an evolved context marked by a postfeminist culture. This continuity in narrating pain stresses that despite undeniable social changes and improvements in women's status, some fights, now more subtle and insidious, remain to be fought. Their reduced visibility should not be interpreted as diminished significance; on the contrary, it is crucial for girls to develop an awareness of their gender, and learn to recognize and navigate the power mechanisms that inscribe upon them.

Interestingly, this intertwining between violence and women recurs in various contemporary expressions of pop culture. A particularly fitting instance is the film *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2024), which depicts the profound discomfort caused by patriarchal beauty standards and renders it through gory scenes. Similarly, in the literary realm the term “femgore” has been used to refer to a trend of female authors, who write about body horror and themes of explicit violence (Blakemore, 2024).

The coexistence of horrific echoes and women's experiences, along with the increasing degree of brutality with which they are narrated, constitutes an area I intend to continue exploring in future research, as they indicate deeper underlying issues warranting careful consideration. It is essential to engage critically with these media productions to prevent them from being read superficially or swallowed by the commodifying capitalist machinery that turns them into mere trends or catchy slogans.

To avoid such trivialization, I call for a feminist stance. Feminism is not an easy path to undertake, as it takes effort to challenge entrenched norms. Yet, it remains a precious strategy to maintain a critical perspective, unveil existing issues, and seek possible remedies. Most importantly, even when no solution is in sight, feminism serves as an encouragement to persist in critical reasoning.

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APPENDIX A



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Figure 3. [@ohmylys]. (n.d.). *I want a perfect body.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 4. [@adiorxre]. (n.d.). *Body dysmorphia or god complex?* [Image]. Pinterest.
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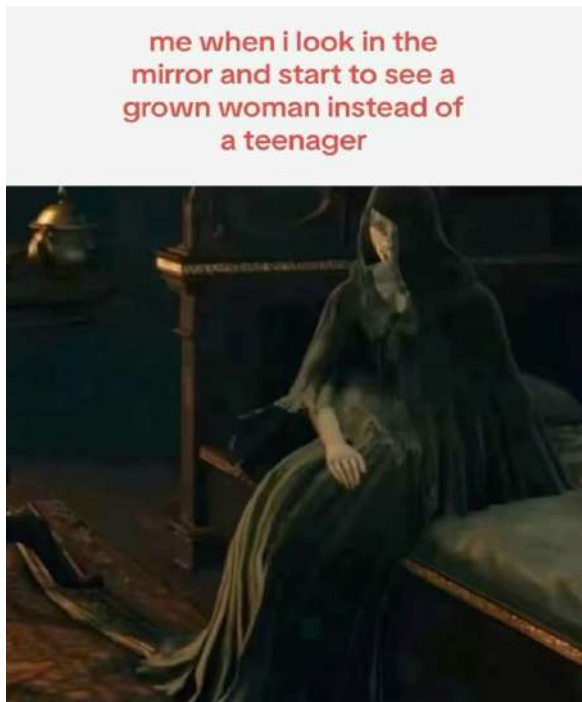


Figure 5. [@percobandz]. (n.d.). *Me when I look in the mirror*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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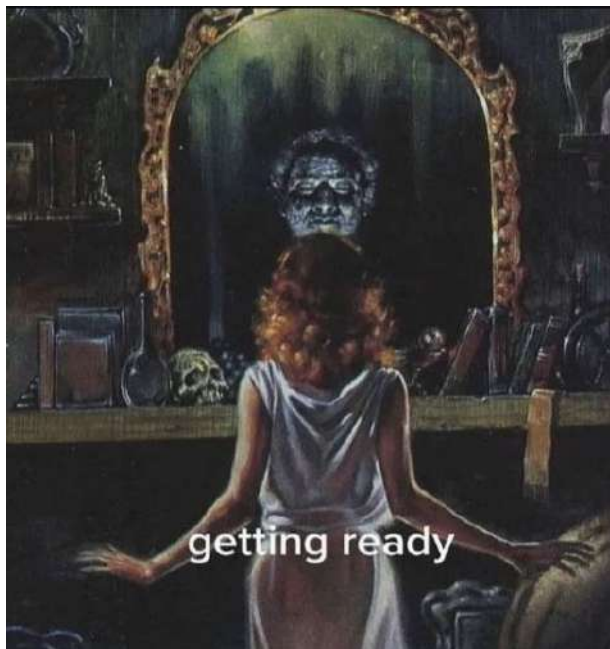


Figure 6. [@yuneed2killme]. (n.d.). *Getting ready*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/4e/6c/05/4e6c051f5290406138d1606e7e906c49.jpg>



Figure 7. [@judson21]. (n.d.). *Girl in the shape of a monster*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 12. [@seriniabae]. (n.d.). *coquette aesthetic coquette aesthetic picture dollette girlblogger coquettecore coquette aesthetic pretty whisper pretty girl crazy relatable*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 16. [@aqnesmbr]. (n.d.). *Rotting Girlishly*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 17. [@milliondollarbunny]. (n.d). *Having a body*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 18. Author not found. (n.d). *Hot girls are touch repulsed yet starved for it*. [Image].
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Figure 19. [@eugenemono]. (n.d). *Girl help. I'm being perceived.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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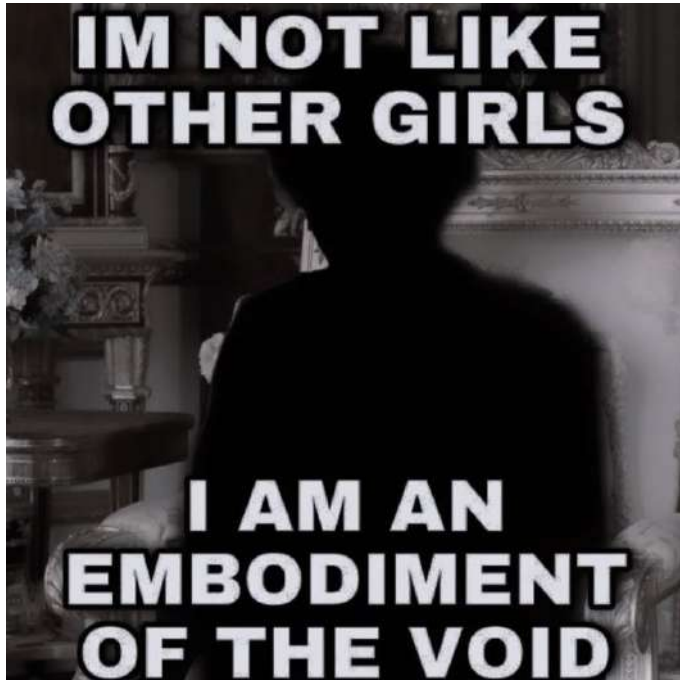


Figure 20. [@hieloxa]. (n.d.). *I am an embodiment of the void.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 21. [@grac3full]. (n.d). *I am better as a concept.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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APPENDIX B



Figure 1. [@aqnesmbr]. (n.d.). *Slut era*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 2. [@lunarmoonss]. (n.d.). *Pretty enough to be sexualized*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 4. [@BurnInHeck. (n.d.). *girlblogging misandry femcel meme from tumblr*. [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/28/4c/3d/284c3dee7d967d84c42fcf2129ca961d.jpg>

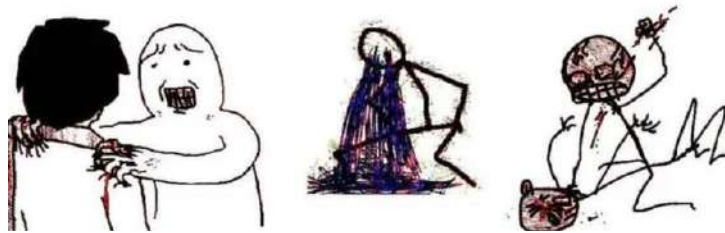
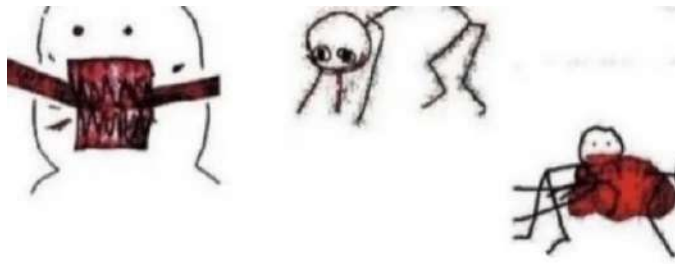


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<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/25/f7/fd/25f7fd4940decbf68de27966a44b3c67.jpg>



Figure 6. [@ghoulsrule]. (n.d.). *Girls when they remember they remember they're supposed to have romantic relations with boys their own age.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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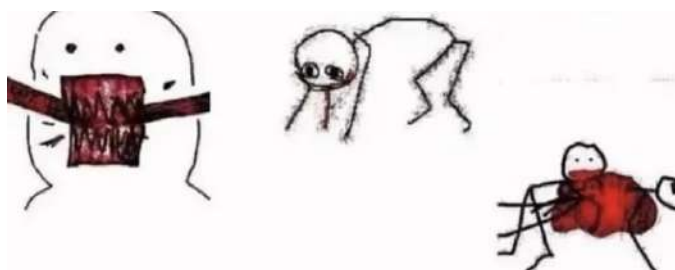


Me when trying

to be less appealing for men, so I could avoid
abuse, gets attention from a normal lad who
doesn't show any red flags



Figure 7. [@ladycranes]. (n.d.). *Girls when trying to be less appealing for men.* [Image].
Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/a0/43/e0/a043e07e5887607b37704b8b1ba71ce2.jpg>



girls when they're
in love



Figure 8. [@a9luvr]. (n.d.). *Girls when they remember they remember they're in love.*
[Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/87/5b/59/875b59abb2919fe1ed24f61f97d736c9.jpg>



Figure 9. [@tooldtoblameydad]. (n.d.). *Girls when they have a crush.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 10. [@fixy55000]. (n.d.). *When I like you.* [Image]. Pinterest.
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Figure 11. [@7wonderss]. (n.d.). *Me when I'm in love*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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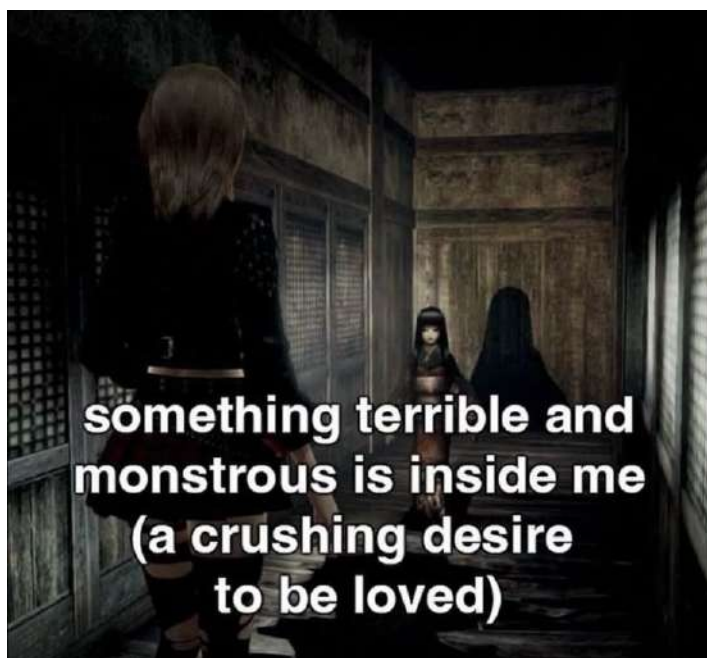


Figure 14. [@chandah_]. (n.d.). *Something terrible and monstrous is inside me (a crushing desire to be loved)*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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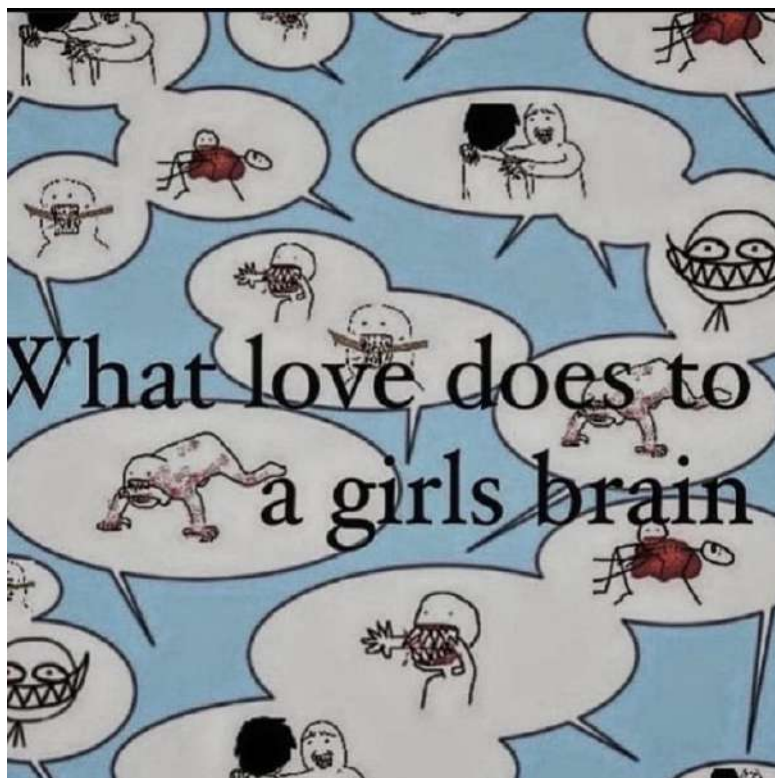


Figure 15. [@janebrooks0917]. (n.d.). *What love does to a girl brain*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/2f/55/9c/2f559ccafc89c1c2b91d50e370ae2eb9.jpg>



Figure 16. [@444amri]. (n.d.). *he is so cute i wanna eat him alive*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/6e/c4/85/6ec485039549ea2c46205720afb5d6fa.jpg>



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THERE IS EROTICISM IN FLESH AND MEAT.

2,605 notes



Figure 17. [@RWeDone]. (n.d.). *There is eroticism in flesh and meat.* [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/f8/64/51/f864511d495f373607a19a8755de496d.jpg>

love is a spectrum



Figure 18. [@xxgothicaxxandxxrosesxx]. (n.d.). *Love is a spectrum.* [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/f8/64/51/f864511d495f373607a19a8755de496d.jpg>



Figure 19. Author not found (n.d.). *Top 10 jobs girls want*. [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/ea/e4/43/ea443e952840d0ad4226491adc4f8f2.jpg>

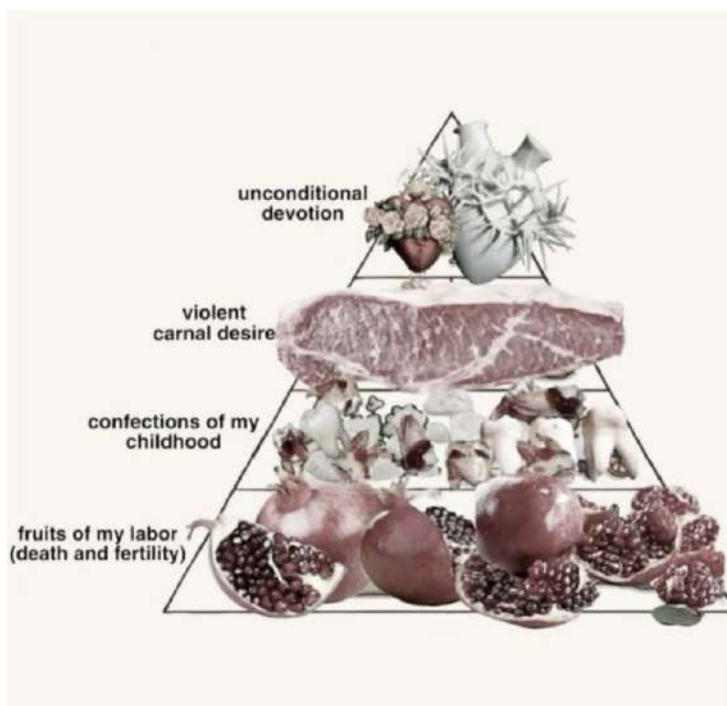


Figure 20. [@devoutgirl]. (n.d.). *Violent carnal desire*. [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/d8/7f/d6/d87fd64289d576967e9cc930845cc382.jpg>

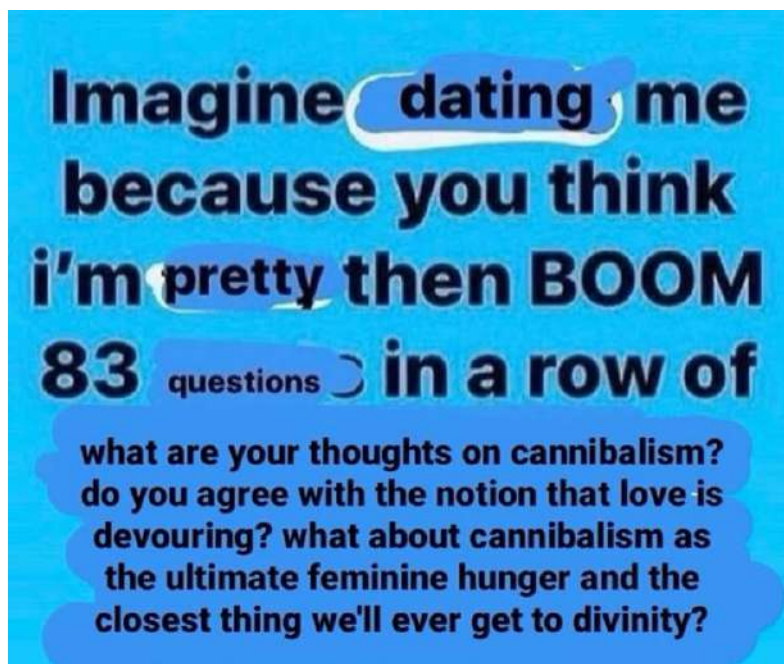


Figure 21. [@auravalentiness], (n.d.). *What are your thoughts on cannibalism?* [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/33/04/27/330427ec5e36beb23b487b5cbc55ab41.jpg>



Figure 22. [@catalicef], (n.d.). *Girls when cannibalism is used as a metaphor for immense love and intimacy.* [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/1d/6d/38/1d6d3888d7b9bcefd4ebbbbcacd2121a.jpg>



Figure 23. [@Emma_Bednarczyck]. (n.d.). *Cannibalism as a metaphor for love*. [Image]. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/cc/5d/af/cc5daf0826994aa077b69f2f3ad6c2e2.jpg>



They hate me for my girlish whimsy and the cannibalism

Figure 24. [@clovekentwells]. (n.d.). *They hate me for my girlish whimsy and the cannibalism*. [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/db/87/06/db870600b67d9826fbf9fa1a5c0afff8.jpg>

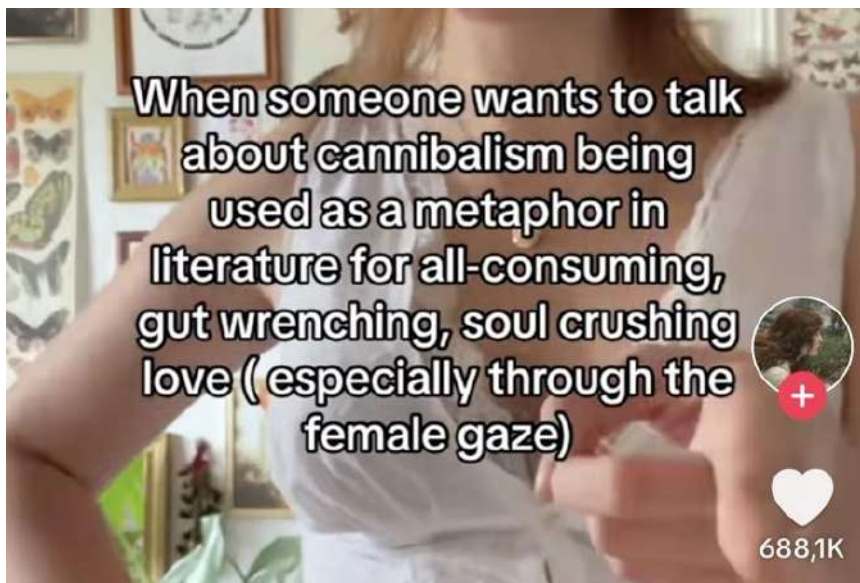


Figure 25. [@autdanir]. (n.d.). *Cannibalism being used as a metaphor in literature for all-consuming, gut wrenching, soul crushing love.* [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/25/40/db/2540dbae2270ba2c96aa715b8133f478.jpg>



Figure 26. [@rudepotato_]. (n.d.). *Girls when they are left alone with their thoughts for two minutes.* [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/2f/4b/57/2f4b57a8a82dffc87faa56e2fad13a64.jpg>

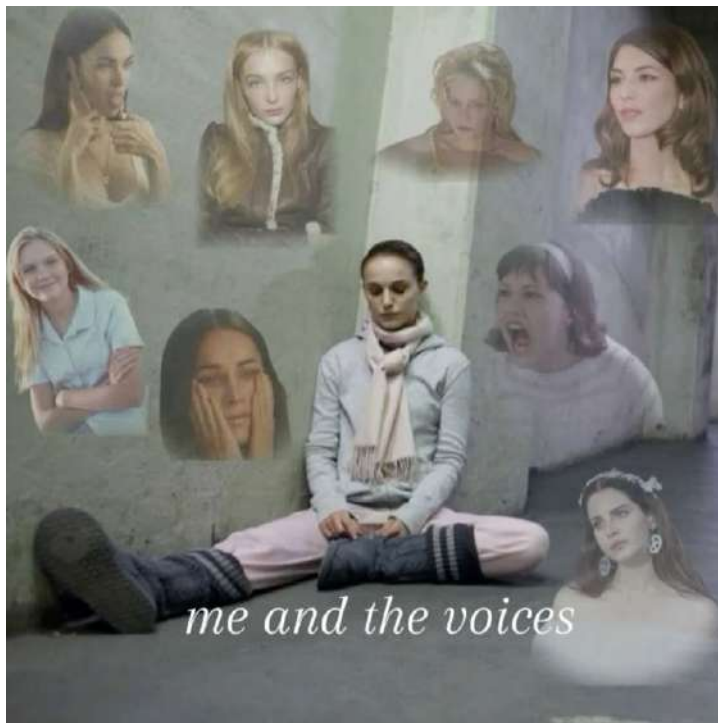


Figure 27. [@blumarinelace]. (n.d.). #girlblogger #relatable #coquette #blackswan #girlinterruptedsyndrome [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/51/95/74/51957467d315c1d93b37217f0a43c173.jpg>

everyday is the same



never breaking from
the cycle

Figure 28. [@bonoli_v_zhimomi]. (n.d.). *Never breaking from the cycle*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/78/de/94/78de94985c9e0d107b9f7ead79abce7a.jpg>



Figure 29. [@adriannnn777]. (n.d.). *Wow...she is literally me.* [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/c5/e3/fb/c5e3fb31de5aed3a4a2be0f9694f2c2b.jpg>



Figure 30. [@pinkslife496]. (n.d.). *I have two sidescoquette/cute sad girl/femcellId.* [Image]. Pinterest. <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/7d/e1/38/7de138e5758ba51eed8ba9c00c0b1a2a.jpg>

Girls be like



Figure 31. [@ladydior444]. (n.d.) *girlblog girlblogger black swan natalie portman girlhood.* [Image]. Pinterest.

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Figure 32. [@Tr4shM4gic4]. (n.d.). *#pearl #pearlmovie #girlblog #justgirlythings #mymelody #sanrio #movies #horror #horror movies.* [Image]. Pinterest.

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Figure 33. [@geminili]. (n.d.). *My current mental state*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/b9/94/95/b994957a2ea75f6fdb78ffc71c0082e.jpg>



Figure 34. [@angelwhore666]. (n.d.). *The feminine urge to go unhinged*. [Image]. Pinterest.
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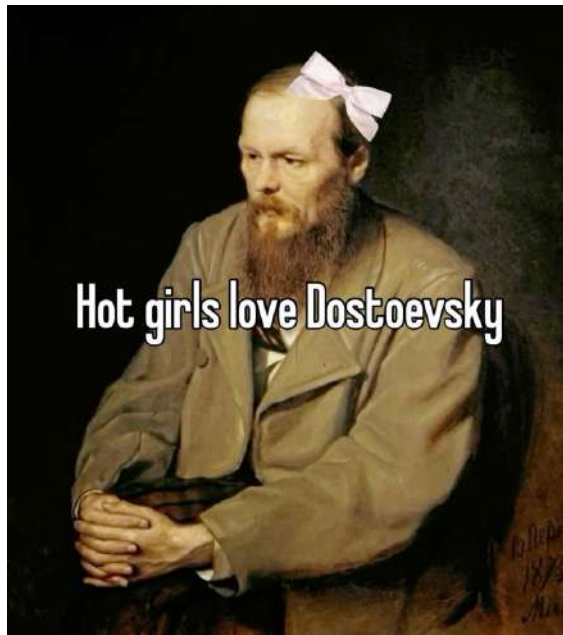


Figure 35. [@goddardsmuse]. (n.d.). *Hot girls love Dostoevsky*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/c1/42/a3/c142a31019e3e260d7d02c90e54448af.jpg>

me and the voices in my head



Figure 36. [@finnwolfhardismysoulmate]. (n.d.). *Me and the voices in my head* [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/d0/6e/20/d06e20f737a49cae90844317223d4b0d.jpg>



Figure 37. [@poeticalenigma]. (n.d.). *The duality of girlhood*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/cf/19/03/cf1903e3f937fb0c825ce7dc95f1c3b1.jpg>



Figure 38. [@esotercl]. (n.d.). *Girls when they will never be a child again*. [Image]. Pinterest.
<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/d1/db/83/d1db83d5585e4ab4d19d9de5530cd500.jpg>



Figure 39. [@parfaitangel]. (n.d.). *Me when I remember I can't be a little girl forever.*

[Image]. Pinterest.

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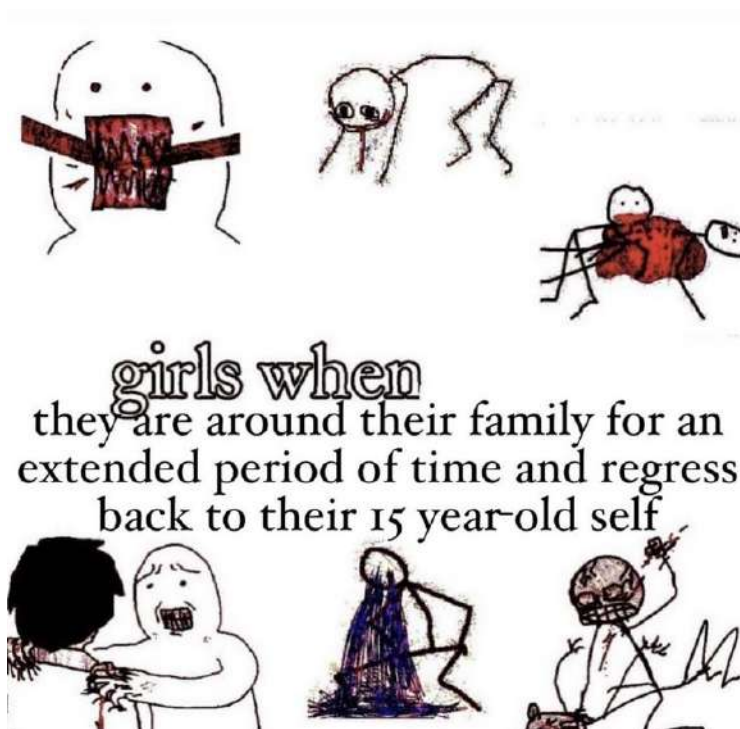


Figure 40. [@godmeat_]. (n.d.). *Girls when they are around their family.* [Image]. Pinterest.

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