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## Moments of Female Adolescence, Illuminated Online and in Print

Alicia Eler March 13, 2013



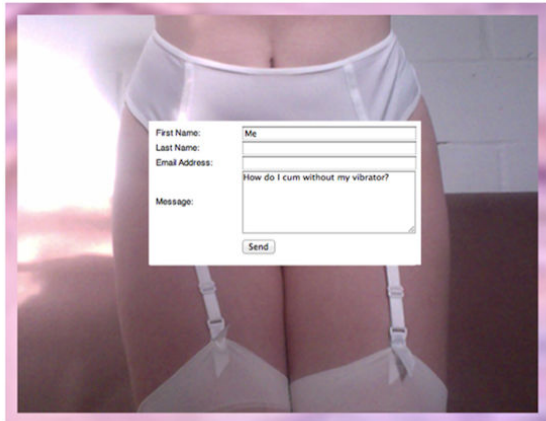
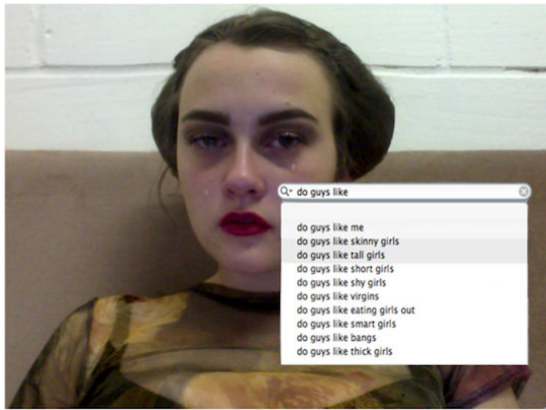
Hannah Le Feuvre in *Illuminati Girl Gang* (All images courtesy IGG)

In a culture that discounts the contributions of teenage girls yet rips them at will, co-opting their keen fashion sense into one that is marketable and desirable, *Illuminati Girl Gang* (IGG), a print and online journal of girl culture featuring work by kids who are mostly under the age of 25, comes as a welcome contribution to retaining the authenticity of adolescent expression. It offers up a space for girls to share their overflowing emotions, astute visual imagery, and not-so-covert sexual desires. This is the third issue of this publication; editor Gabby Gabby dedicates it to the reunion of *Destiny's Child*. To begin the discussion of this publication, I would like to examine the underbelly of its essence: the girl who loves pink and all things feminine, and does not yet have in her mind the idea of gender as a social construct.

In Hannah Le Feuvre's series included in the issue, we see a series of vintage photographs, including a birth certificate for Rosalind Jones, a woman who was once a baby, born December 4, 1953; an ultrasound, hospital bracelet, pink GIRL tag and a photograph of dad with his new daughter make up this quiet collage. The hospital brands us as girls from birth, awarding us pink rather than blue; we are girls from the beginning, according to the medical powers that be. Here, Le Feuvre remembers a feminine figure; it might be her mother, but it could just be a friend of the family or a complete stranger. If it's the latter, this piece functions like the work of an adolescent Sophie Calle.

In Alyse Burnside's "Dr. Love," a story is told in seven jagged parts of this man. In part two she records an observation that could only come from a girl who had experienced the exact same thing she describes:

"My mother told me that my sister must be sleeping with someone new. In fact, any time women buy new underwear it's only because they are sleeping with someone new."



### Malou Lyse in Illuminati Girl Gang

Like a teenage girl who is discovering her emotions, body, and place in the world, the writing in this compilation can seem redundant, even frustrating at times — especially for any woman-identified person, either cisbodied or female gendered, who remembers those feelings and moments. So if it hits you too hard, you have my permission to skim. But do come back to Maja Malou Lyse’s *4NeveriPhone love* series, which is part confessional notes to self and part Internet searches about sex and boys. In it, she reveals just how well Google Search can finish the thoughts of a teen girl, if it gets to know her well enough through an intimate, internet relationship that is like a cyborgian marriage of human and machine.

Prolific tumblr blogger Molly Soda makes an appearance here as well, curating figures from fashion and movies, such as a Halloween-costumed cat woman and a woman wearing a “sexy pirate” suit; the two figures are festooned with humorous iChat-style thought bubbles. Soda’s work points to the blankness of their expressions, adding character through a gentle insertion of bubbled thoughts like “WHAT ABOUT ME” and “please check out my blog.” But of course, these women won’t talk — they aren’t allowed to. They may think this, but never say it. A scantily clad Wonder Woman/all-American super heroine’s yellow iChat bubble says “k but don’t touch me.”



Molly Soda in *Illuminati Girl Gang*

Perhaps this is why the Internet and American culture at large are so taken with the new wave of teenage girls. They are the same adolescents as they always were, however—snubbing each other, torturing one another over boys and girls, gossiping behind each others’ backs and preparing for careers that involve blackmailing and espionage. Yet they are doing this all online, in public, or in covert private spaces like email that can easily become public knowledge. The girl gang’s venue welcomes audiences both honestly curious and questionably voyeuristic to share in their collective feelings and re-experience those moments of adolescence.



Molly Soda in *Illuminati Girl Gang*

Kate Durbin’s project *Girls, Online* investigates this phenomenon from the perspective of a fellow online girl who is not a teenager, but who is an Internet scavenger and cultural anthropologist for the digital age. She collects the Tumblr posts of teen girls, curating them into a separate web presence. In her creative practice as artist/writer, Durbin embodies the teen girl tumblr aesthetic\*, which both recognizes “teenagehood” as a social construct, an idea that exists in the cultural consciousness, and a movement that is emerging on the Internet, where identity is more fluid than IRL. Participants in this aesthetic need not be between the ages of twelve and nineteen.

*Illuminati Girl Gang* magazine participates in this aesthetic, asking young women to voluntarily submit their artwork, poetry and other visual objects and text to a publication that exists both online and offline in print. The moments published in *Illuminati Girl Gang* are raw, powerful, and devoid of meaning. They are portals into the teenage girl’s mind and self-actualized moments of revealing for the girls themselves as well as the ready eyes reading along. It’s like Sarah Jean Alexander’s poem “Horoscope,” which presents that sort of out-of-nowhere sexualized moment of expression that doesn’t connect to the rest of the poem, but feels like something she needed to say, out loud and on paper, just to express her sexuality:

No, I don’t remember learning how to suck dick  
 I just remember not knowing how,  
 and then suddenly knowing how

It’s like that moment in the Catherine Breillat film, *A Real Young Girl* (1976) which was banned even in the more sexually open country of France. The main character realizes that her cunt is wet, tingling, and hungry while sitting at the dinner table with her mother and father at their villa in the French countryside. She slides a spoon off of the table, and gently inserts it inside of her. She does it coyly, with a smile on her face — both unaware and completely knowing of that feeling, of what she is doing and why. She imagines her dad’s soft dick hanging out of his pants. If Freud were there he’d call her out on a father complex of impulses relating her dad and nascent sexuality. A feminist Oedipus complex reading of the situation might see this moment as penis envy, or a moment related to the real, imaginary or symbolic phallus. Regardless, this archetypal teenage girl character in Breillat’s film is first and foremost a teenage girl who is realizing herself and her sexuality during the middle of a long, hot summer.

That said, it's hard for me to honestly review a publication of teen girl art without remembering my own adolescence. The difference between my adolescence and the girls who contribute to IGG comes down to two simple things: the internet and technology. Rather than pass notes in class, these girls text each other. Rather than take photos with cameras holding film that they will later drop off at Walgreens, these girls use Photo Booth on their Macs and achieve instant results. Instead of writing poems laden with fascination of cats, Barbies, and tattoos on sheets of scrap paper or in secret, private diaries, these girls type their thoughts onto Sticky Notes, a Mac app.

In effect, it is now up to the Internet and its gatekeepers to keep watch over these blossoming young girls. They know not the audience that they have at their fingertips.

*Illuminati Girl Gang Vol. 3 is available through the publication's website.*