Recurrence of 'girly' trope causes *feminist regression*

Graphic by Annika Skorski

Commentary
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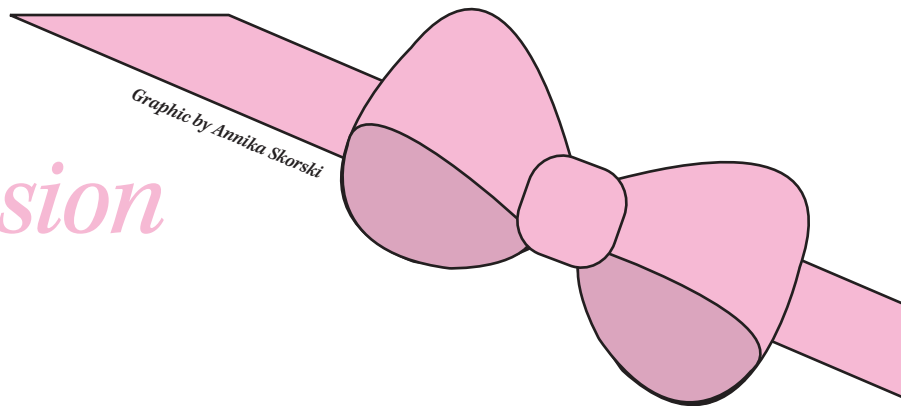
In today's climate, phrases such as "run like a girl" and "she's smart - for a girl" are rightfully recognized as sexist and diminishing. However, the current surge in online trends embracing "girly" aesthetics indicates that pop culture has simply rebranded archaic sexism.

As of March 2024, 240,000 and 116,400 TikTok posts containing hashtags of terms such as "girl dinner" and "girl math" respectively. These trends bear a painful resemblance to sexist ideologies prevalent in the early 2000s that marginalized women in STEM fields and perpetuated harmful attitudes towards body image, including disordered eating and fatphobia.

Portraying women as using "girl math" to distort their perception of money and rationalize frivolous spending suggests that women are not inherently financially savvy or even capable of math. The revival of this stereotype is particularly alarming as it is now being mass-marketed to young girls as relatable content, and these influencers that curate their platforms to present an idealized lifestyle.

Similarly, the "girl dinner" trend labels various meals that are often tiny portions, nutrition deficit or include cigarettes as feminine. In the wake of the body positivity movement of the mid-2010s, the resurgence of diet culture undermines progress, feeling reminiscent of fatphobia prevalent in popular 2000s movies such as "Mean Girls" and "Clueless."

Nevertheless, even the satirical content poses a significant danger when taken at face despite subtly rejecting labels associated with "girly" stereotypes. Young audiences on social media are at risk of not grasping possible ridicule of traditional gender norms at the heart of viral content.

These messages are no longer solely a product of male-dominated marketing teams and screenwriters. Instead, independent female content creators have become the promoters of diminishing jokes. The "girl dinner" and "girl math" trends are largely well-received by female audiences, often presented alongside feminist content surrounding the recent blockbuster film "Barbie." Consequently, dismantling gender stereotypes becomes more a complex task as sexist messages are misconstrued as celebrating femininity and reinforced by the same women they oppress.

Audrey Lorde's feminist novel "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" contends that we cannot fault oppressed individuals for the ways in which they adapt to a system not designed for their benefit. This applies to women internalizing sexist ideologies as blame ultimately lies with the patriarchal structure itself. This perspective helps explain the behavior of female content creators who propagate "girl dinners" and "girl math."

Additionally, narrow portrayal of "feminine" traits, particularly those associated with childhood and domesticity, is highly reductive. It reinforces the notion that women are "child-like" and "dependent," suggesting that their purpose is to serve others' needs rather than prioritizing their own autonomy and desires.

Behind this escalating trend lies a more insidious implication as many of its symbols such as bows, pastels and flowers are associated with innocence and purity. Associating feminism with symbols linked to outdated, restrictive expectations for women pushes feminism decades backward.

The resurgence of the "girly" trope, despite its new affiliation with female content creators and feminist pop culture, is regressive. Blocking out gendered trends is crucial to shielding girls from internalizing damaging beauty standards and demeaning ideologies.
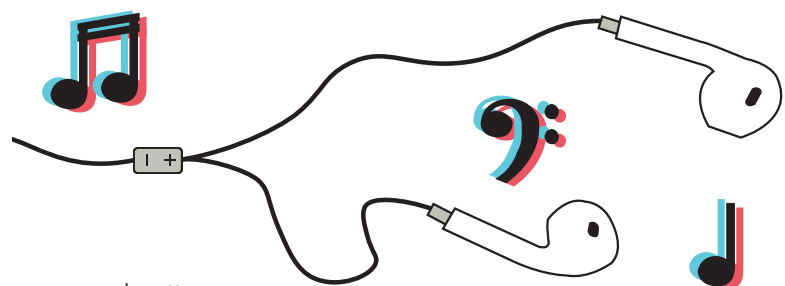
TikTok *influences* community *music* preferences

Ayra Ansari | Staff Writer

Have you ever heard a song on TikTok that you immediately added to your playlist? According to a survey conducted by The Standard Nov. 2, 2023, over 70% of the student body has done the same.

Ava Dibble ('27) said she finds her playlists consist mostly of songs she heard on TikTok, such as "I Know" by Kanii and "The Lost Soul Down" by NBSPLV. By dividing the number of popular TikTok songs on Dibble's playlist by the number of total songs, Dibble found that over 60% of the songs on her playlist grew in popularity on TikTok.

"When you hear a song on TikTok multiple times, it starts to grow on you," Dibble said.

According to The Insider, The most popular way a song rises back up on TikTok is through trends. Even old songs from decades ago can become popular again if a new trend uses that song. As a strategy to garner more listeners, marketers may even pay influencers to use certain songs to create a trend, according to The Insider.

Ryan Khatiblou ('27) said he has a variety of music genres on his playlist, yet 45% of those songs came from TikTok. Khatiblou's most streamed songs on Spotify are David Kushner's "Daylight" and Burna Boy's "City Boys," both of which recently gained popularity through TikTok.

"Some of them are really catchy, and even if I don't add a song to my playlist if I hear it outside I can identify it as a TikTok song," Khatiblou said.

Smaller artists have also made it big through TikTok. Singer Kenya Grace amassed over 1.1 million hits on her song "Strangers," which she had teased in a TikTok video of singing alone in her room. In just three months the video garnered over 11 million views, and a subsequent video gained 38 million views, all within three months. When she then released the song in September, it knocked Doja Cat's "Paint The Town Red" off the top of the charts which also attracted attention from TikTok.

Although "Strangers" grew in popularity thanks to TikTok, Dibble said the song was deserving of its success.

For Suchir Jindal ('24), he said he finds over 70% of his playlist includes songs that grew popular through TikTok.

Though these songs often find popularity as a result of trends, Jindal said he did not find this to be an invalid measure of success.

"There's a reason popular songs on TikTok are popular," Jindal said.

Though the infiltration of popular TikTok songs on users' playlists shows how present the app is in users' lives, Jindal said he does not consider this to be a bad thing.

"I never thought of it as a privacy breach, because I never really questioned how a lot of these songs ended up on my playlists, but I have found many songs through TikTok," Jindal said.

The platform also allows users to discover new music, and Dibble said she found new songs and artists through TikTok.

"One artist I found through TikTok was Odetari, whose music I have begun to explore and listen to more frequently," Dibble said.

Ultimately, students find a lot of their favorite songs through TikTok, making it a powerful medium for music to gain popularity.

Dibble said the songs found through TikTok produce an interesting playlist.

"Without TikTok, I feel like my playlist would be very boring," Dibble said. "I wouldn't have found many of the songs and artists I listen to today."

To view The Standard's TikTok playlist, scan here:

Graphic by Oskar Doepke and Eva Marriott-Fabre