

# The Doll “InbeTween”

## *Online Doll Videos and the Intertextuality of Tween Girl Culture*

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**Abstract:** Over the last 10 years, girls on YouTube have been creating stop-motion videos with their American Girl dolls. Many of these girls began producing videos when they were tweens and have continued participating in the American Girl YouTube (AGTube) community into their late adolescence and early adulthood. In this article, I explore the intertextuality of tween girl culture as it is performed and reflected on by teen (13 to 18) and young adult (19 to 24) girls in their online doll videos. Through an examination of their AGTube channels, I show how girl producers negotiate their experiences and desires as teens and young adults within the tween culture of American Girl. I argue that AGTube functions as an audience-generated paratext of American Girl, and demonstrate how teen and young adult girls interact with and challenge the marketplace boundaries of tween girl culture in digital spaces.

**Keywords:** American Girl YouTube, digital culture, fans, girls’ media production, paratexts, tweens, YouTube

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Like many tweens in the late 1990s, I played with American Girl dolls. At the time, I would never have imagined that some years later girls would be filming and uploading videos to YouTube of their dolls dancing to Taylor Swift, sledding in the snow, or exploring the sand dunes of Dubai. AGTube, as it is known by fans, is comprised of tween, teen, and young adult girls, some of whom have been making videos since 2007. These AGTube channels showcase American Girl Stop Motion (AGSM) stories, new dolls being unboxed, customized accessories and set pieces, and tutorials on doll hair-styling and maintenance (Stewart 2012). In a BBC News video exposé, AGTube producers explained the process of taking thousands of photos of their dolls in various positions before editing them into a stop-motion narrative (Tomchak 2015). While the American Girl company is aware of these videos, having hosted several YouTube events at their stores, AGTube continues to run as a fan-operated network of girls who take pleasure in



sharing their American Girl doll play in video form. The emergence of this online community of fans, which has generated contests and hangouts beyond the YouTube comments section, illuminates the influential role digital culture has in sustaining engagement with a doll franchise that defined and continues to define the childhood of many girls.

Arguably, American Girl dolls have become a staple of tween girl culture since American educator and entrepreneur Pleasant Rowland founded Pleasant Company in 1986. The 18-inch preadolescent dolls come with period clothing, accessories, set pieces, and a book series documenting each doll's historical journey. As more dolls have been added to the line, scholars in girls' studies and childhood studies have explored how girls create and modify cultural meanings through consumption practices (Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel 2002; Marshall 2009); how adult women's nostalgia for American Girl informs identity construction (Brookfield 2012); and how Pleasant Company has shaped girl culture in the consumer marketplace (Acosta-Alzuru and Roushanzamir 2003; Duffey Story 2002). Although tweens are often discussed as the target market for American Girl, girls in their teen and young adult years have also been known to collect and play with these dolls. While the practice of playing with dolls past childhood is not new, recording and uploading these play performances to YouTube raise new considerations for scholars of girls' media studies in understanding how girls challenge the social and cultural limitations on how they should play and behave at a certain age. In the case of AGTube, girls produce videos and comments that communicate their varied experiences in and across each other's YouTube channels, developing a larger knowledge of tweenhood that goes beyond its marketplace conception. AGTube thus creates a digital space in which girls share and validate perceptions of girlhood that might not fit into the thinking behind American Girl's targeting of its preadolescent consumer group.

These fan-generated videos can be understood as paratexts of the American Girl brand, introducing new narrative elements and expanding on American Girl's tween material culture to include other identities and experiences. Media studies scholar Jonathan Gray argues that paratexts in mediated environments "fill the space between" (2010: 23) the text, audience, and industry. Audience-generated paratexts, such as fan fiction, fan videos, fan art, fan songs, and fan sites, are spaces in which fans oppose and reinscribe industrial meanings resulting in alternative entrances to the primary text. It is important to consider paratexts in fan culture since they "tell us what to expect, and in doing so, they shape the reading strategies that we

will take with us 'into' the text" (26). AGTube makes it possible to read American Girl through a range of intertextual experiences and to understand the multiple purposes the doll franchise has in girls' lives. These online doll videos thus bring attention to how girls who are no longer tweens (but still fans of American Girl) navigate marketplace conceptions of tweenhood through media-making practices that reflect on and complicate the realm of tween girl culture. With this particular subset of the community in mind, the AGTube paratext also operates as what girls' media scholar Jessalynn Keller calls a "networked counterpublic" (2016: 78). Keller draws on Nancy Fraser's notion of subaltern counterpublics, which describes how members of subordinated social groups develop oppositional discourses that support a counter interpretation of their identities, to show how networked counterpublics rely on the participation of girl bloggers to "continually perform identity" and "produce and circulate particular discourses" (84) about their identities to a larger public. As teen and young adult girls continue to perform an identity that seems reserved for tween girls, they help create a counter discourse about what it means to be a girl who still plays with the objects of her childhood.

In this article, I explore how AGTube's positioning as a paratext reveals the ways in which girls challenge the marketplace parameters of tween girl culture and negotiate their relationship with it in a digitally networked environment. This work situates its concerns in the field of girls' media studies, which privileges "cultural practices, artifacts, sites, and meanings" in understanding how girls' identities are a "complex composite of multiple, interdependent, and unisolatable modes of being" (Kearney 2011: 3). The production, circulation, and reception of AGTube videos are significant elements in a consideration of how young girlhood identities are articulated and shaped in the videos and comments of American Girl fans. Searching for AGTube channels and its most popular video genre, American Girl Stop Motion (AGSM), yields over 300,000 results with videos like "First Day of School AGSM" and "Struggles ONLY AGTubers Understand!" I selected channels of girls who began making videos when they were tweens (8 to 12 years of age) and are now teens (13 to 18) or young women (19 to 24). The girl producers either indicated their age in their YouTube bios, videos, or linked social media accounts, and I then compared this information with the year they launched their channel.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, this context was provided in other ways. For instance, mixiepixie<sup>72</sup> conveys in one of her videos that her eight years on YouTube have been half her life (placing her video production years between 8 and 16). I examined 30 different AGTube chan-

nels that met the criteria, and categorized videos from each channel by content (such as school, life updates, music video, web serial) in order to identify common themes and patterns. For this article, I analyzed 10 AGTube channels that illustrate girl producers reflecting on their video content in some way. For example, InfinityAGStudios<sup>3</sup> filmed herself reacting to her old videos. This allowed me to understand how teen girls and young women were positioning their experiences within the context of American Girl and their former tween selves on YouTube. I also considered the comments section of some of the videos when they evoked a question to the audience because, in studying AGTube, it is important to consider not just the video producers but also the viewers who contribute to the American Girl fan discourse. By thinking of AGTube as a paratext, I argue that the play performances, experiences, and reflections of teen and young adult American Girl fans help identify tween girl culture as an intertextual entity not bound by marketplace definitions.

## **Tween Tensions: The Shifting Meaning of Tween Culture Online**

Since the term tween emerged in the consumer-niche marketplace of the post-World War II era and crystallized in the media deregulation of the 1980s (Cook and Kaiser 2004; Coulter 2014), its understanding has depended on its discursive relationship to consumer histories, industries, and audiences. In some contexts, the age of tweens has been placed as early as 7 and as late as 14. The age of the tween, while part of its constructed meaning, might not be that significant when we are locating and describing tween culture online. However, tweenhood is still mostly conceived of as the period before adolescence, particularly in the marketing of fashion and beauty. As Sharon R. Mazzarella and Alison Atkins (2010) discovered in their study of teen fashion site Alloy.com, tween girls are positioned as rising consumers for the teenage demographic through online quizzes that reinforce norms about dating and beauty. While the commercial industry hails girls to engage in tween and teen culture, it cannot fully account for the many ways in which they might disrupt meanings of tweenhood online. As the tween market has transitioned into the age of social media and online networked communities, what it means to be a tween has become more fragmented and contestable.

One of the ways tween culture has shifted is through the video production and sharing of girls' online doll play. Dolls, much like tweenhood itself,

have come to represent the relationship between the comforts of childhood and the uncertainties of adolescence. Dolls like Barbie and Bratz present girls with a figure that is fixed in a "permanent state of becoming-a-woman, always aligned with a shifting discourse of feminine adolescence that is itself a commodification" (Driscoll 2002: 98). While dolls are sometimes positioned as aspirational playthings that sell adolescence to girls, they also possess important meanings for teen girls and women who collect and play with them. Juliette Peers asserts that adult interactions with dolls suggest an "extension downward into girlhood." She writes, "Although it is assumed that women will put aside dolls upon leaving their girlhood years, there are myriad male and female interactions with dolls, from work-based to leisure, from closeted secret activity to hobby to commercial enterprise" (2008: 25). This attraction to dolls and the play conditions of girlhood expresses what Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh have called a "fascinating interplay of 'wanting to grow up' teen culture and 'wanting the security of childhood'" (2005: 3). Dolls, then, present unique opportunities not only for performing girlhood but also for revisiting the promises of femininity.

However, it is necessary to keep in mind that not all girls who play with dolls are trying to recover a time in their lives that seemed more secure. While some scholars have theorized that (Western) communities have found comfort in the innocence and hope of girlhood during turbulent societal transitions (Harris 2004; Hatch 2015), my research on the American Girl community on YouTube indicates that these girls are not necessarily playing with dolls because they cannot cope with the burdens of their emerging adult lives. Rather, the pleasures of participating in an online community contribute to why girls continue to create and upload doll videos to YouTube. For example, basilmentos,<sup>4</sup> a popular AGTuber with over 177,000 subscribers, realized she had not posted in a month and created a video explaining how busy her life has been in college. Without revealing her face, she films two of her dolls on her bed before showing viewers her messy dorm room. basilmentos assures her audience that she will be posting the next episode of her serial web series after she completes two essays for school: "I really want to get it out and I really want to show you guys I still care, and I'm still here, and I still love making videos, and I still love my dolls." The need to create content constantly and harness attention from internet audiences is vital to the self-brand of the YouTube producer (Banet-Weiser 2011). While the desire to play with American Girl dolls might stem from a place of pleasure and leisure, on YouTube it also emerges from the desire to accumulate views and comments from other American Girl fans who are also fans of the AGTuber.

While girls' blogs and social network accounts are useful sites for examining the multiple meanings of tweenhood in digital culture, girls' video production and their communities are particularly dynamic places in which to understand how tween culture is reworked in online videos that engage audiences in conversation. AGTube videos frame the doll play space as an intertextual location where girls of different ages, from 16-year-old mixiepixie7 to college-aged basilmentos, contribute new knowledges and experiences to the tween culture of American Girl. As the following sections show, teen and young adult girls still play with the American Girl dolls they cherished in their tween years, despite popular assumptions that they should have grown out of dolls and moved on to what are thought of as more age-appropriate activities. As these girls share their videos across YouTube, they demonstrate how audience-generated paratexts create new stories that extend as well as map different meanings of girlhood onto the American Girl brand based on the experiences they have gained since they were tweens.

### **Growing Up on AGTube: Shaping Tween Identity through Digital Videos**

In a video titled "THANK YOU FOR 8 YEARS!" mixiepixie7 celebrates her time on AGTube through a flashback of her early videos. Set to the song "Dog Days Are Over" by Florence and the Machines, the sequence includes shots of mixiepixie7 introducing her dolls for the first time as a tween girl, beginning with a single shot filming style before progressing to an advanced montage technique. In these quick snapshots, viewers take in numerous scenes of her dolls playing with Christmas lights, bouncing a volleyball, and falling over on a skateboard. After the montage mixiepixie7 appears, thanking her viewers for following while marveling over how long she has been on AGTube: "I can't even like believe it's been eight years. That is half of my life you guys. Half of my life. Like some of you guys ... I've been making videos since before you were born."

The American Girl doll on AGTube functions as an object that reflects on what it means to be a tween growing up in the digital age. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell refer to technological productions as "identities-in-action" in that "like digital cultural production, identity processes are multifaceted and in flux, incorporating old and new images." Young people on digital sites "often take up or consume popular images, and combine, cri-

tique, adapt, or incorporate them in their own media productions" where their "identities are constructed, deconstructed, shaped, tested, and experienced" (2008: 27). For young YouTube producers, identity is built through the catalogue of videos that document the transformative stages of their early lives. Yet identity is always in the process of being shaped, not just by the current moment but by multiple points of time that allow the user and her followers to revisit older content and attribute new meanings to it. The identities-in-action of the young person can be read intertextually as other knowledges and experiences intersect with it. AGTube producers illustrate how new interpretations of the primary text emerge from their video-recorded experiences of transitioning from tween to teen to young adult. This digital space provides opportunities for girls to continue engaging with tween material culture across different channels, re-evaluating what tweenhood means to them at different points in time.

One of the noticeable ways in which girls interact with American Girl is by rejecting the play scripts that arrive with their dolls and creating their own. Besides the novels that accompany some of the dolls, the American Girl play script simply encourages creativity and empowerment through accessories, outfits, furniture, and even films. American Girl invites girls to imagine their dolls as soccer champions, talented musicians, animal enthusiasts, fashion gurus, and masterful chefs. While many AGTube videos explore these predetermined scripts, others take a different, sometimes more mature route. In a video by Funny Polarbears,<sup>5</sup> a doll and her boyfriend simulate sex and panic over a pregnancy scare. The sequence begins with the title "Daily Lives of Allison and Cara" accompanied by a girl singing a lullaby off screen. Text beneath the title reads: "Contains explicit scenes and not appropriate for children 13 and under. Watch with parents [sic] permission." The juxtaposition of the theme song at the beginning and the provocative events of the American Girl dolls is striking, creating a visual and auditory dialectic between the tinkling nursery music and the stop-motion shuffle of two half naked dolls apparently kissing with one on top of the other. In a similar video called "Stomach Tied in Knots," Simspinkable<sup>6</sup> creates a lesbian love story between her two American Girl dolls. The video shows one of the dolls undressing and getting into bed with the other followed by scenes by a lake of the dolls caressing one another. While some comments praised the delicacy in which Simspinkable told this story, other users expressed outrage. A follow-up video almost three years later shows Simspinkable,<sup>7</sup> now in college, addressing the controversy of her lesbian AGTube video. Some of the comments she received included "Why would you do this with American

girls” and “I mean it ok to be gay but YOU SHOULD NOT Do this because of Very young veivers [sic].”

The sexual nature of these videos, using dolls supposedly meant for tweens, supports scholarship about how young people manipulate the play scripts that confine their imaginative worlds (Formanek-Brunell 1993; Wohlwend 2009). As Miriam Forman-Brunell and Jennifer Dawn Whitney argue, “What dolls are designed to do is not always what they end up doing, and everyday sites of play—across diverse cultural settings—can often contribute to new meanings for dolls and their players” (2015: xiv). These new meanings have been explored many times in doll studies, such as in Robin Bernstein’s (2011) work on the racialization of American doll play or Elizabeth Chin’s research on African American girls playing with white Barbies (1999) and on girls creating Barbie sex videos on YouTube (2005). In the case of American Girl, it seems that the dolls’ cherub-like faces and sexless, soft-cloth bodies might inspire more wholesome play scenarios. While many AGTube videos do stick to innocent set-ups, like dolls managing a lemonade stand or throwing a birthday party, others deviate from the American Girl play script and use it to uncover so called adult fantasies. The backlash some of these videos receive, as represented by commenters on Simspinkable’s video, indicates how influential American Girl’s tween brand is for some fans. Incorporating outside meanings into American Girl doll play threatens to disrupt ideas of what tween material culture should be used for and how, and when, girls should express their sexuality.

The presence of LGBTQIA themes on AGTube is rare but worth noting because some American Girl fans feel it is a topic that cannot be discussed openly on AGTube, likely because of American Girl’s branding of heteronormative femininity. A search for “AGSM LGBTQ” generates 315 results and consists of videos like Xxagme23xX’s “Love ~ is ~ not ~ a ~ choice.”<sup>8</sup> In this video, Panic! at the Disco’s song “Girls/Girls/Boys” plays over stop-motion animation of an American Girl doll exploring her sexuality with another girl. In the text below the video Xxagme23xX writes, “As a primary lesbian, I do, in fact, support gay rights! :) wow, I really never thought I’d come out on AGTube, it’s kinda sad I hide my dolls from everyone who knows im gay, and my gay from you guys. Welp, anyway I’m gay, hi.” Another video, “A Fluid Day” by TheLoonyLoveBad1,<sup>9</sup> illustrates the life of an American Girl doll who identifies as genderfluid. In the video description she adds, “There is a lot of LGBT awareness on AGIG [American Girl Instagram], but NONE (at all) on AGTube. There are a lot of gender roles, and even a little homophobia. I want to eliminate all of that by raising aware-

ness about the subject.” The hesitancy behind embracing LGBTQIA representation on AGTube seems to speak to the strict age-bracketing of certain childhood toys and the attitude that these toys must not be taken out of that context, let alone placed in another that explores sexual or non-normative themes. Despite older girls still playing with American Girl dolls, some users on AGTube still view the doll franchise as representative of the tween market and therefore expect audience-generated paratexts to maintain a pretense of childhood innocence.

Anxieties around the sexuality and gendering of tween girls is not a new phenomenon and is often rooted in fears that these girls are growing up too fast (Jackson and Vares 2011). Yet, as these AGTube videos illustrate, the girls producing these provocative play scenarios are often teens or young adults. The presence of older girls in the AGTube community becomes doubly threatening since they not only participate in tween culture but inject their sexual desires and experiences into the American Girl play world. Yet marginalizing some of these videos, especially ones that deal with LGBTQIA themes, reinforces some audience beliefs that non-normative sexualities and genders are not appropriate for girls to explore. Examinations of race, ethnicity, and disability are not met with the same degree of backlash on AGTube, perhaps because American Girl dolls are already sold with a wide range of skin tones and accessories that include a wheelchair and hearing aid. However, some girls have filled in some gaps by designing hijabs for their dolls (demonstrated by DubaiDollGirl) or creating videos about depression and suicide (seen in some videos of InfinityAGStudios). The fact that some AGTubers feel that it is important to promote storylines of queer, disabled, and culturally and racially diverse girls in their videos recognizes a need in tween culture to begin conversations about inclusion and acceptance of people from disenfranchised backgrounds.

### **Confessions of an AGTuber: Reflections, Aspirations, and Community**

The tensions between the American Girl brand and how some girls choose to play with the dolls reveal how intrinsic normative tween girlhood is to the maintenance of the doll franchise’s image. Within this discourse exists a troubling realization that girls of a certain age should forgo doll play or else be branded weird or childish. In a video on this subject mixiepixie<sup>710</sup> films one of her dolls addressing viewers on the awkwardness of hiding doll video-

making from her peers. She admits to having reservations about sharing her passion with friends and classmates because teen girls are expected to have grown out of doll play. Older girls' engagement with AGTube sometimes becomes a secret hobby, revealing the difficult relationship they have with the tween culture that used to include them. The comments on mixiepixie7's video convey empathy and understanding of her situation; other users acknowledge how they too feel ashamed for playing with dolls. One commenter, animalsrlife, wrote, "i just started an agtube and I'm scared to tell my friends about it most girls my age don't play with dolls anymore so this video taught me its ok to tell them and its ok not to tell them." The fear some older girls have of people in their lives finding out about their dolls also trickles down to tween users, as commenter MissMayci noted, "I'm 12 no one knows I play with dolls I don't really want to tell them tho my personality doesn't seem like I have doll[s]."

Despite the reservations some AGTubers feel about their doll play, others have found encouragement in videos like mixiepixie7's that discuss the complicated relationship between girls and dolls. Some even challenge the social expectations that girls must grow out of their dolls by defending their hobby or finding the courage to tell their friends. AG Awesomeness responded to mixiepixie7, saying, "I'm so glad I told my friends because to my surprise they had dolls of their own and they also loved dolls!" The collective of AGTubers supporting each other's supposedly taboo hobby reflects Keller's conceptualization of networked counterpublics. By continuing to perform doll play as teen and young adult girls, AGTubers are producing and circulating the counter discourse that girls can still play with, and find meaning, in the toys of their childhood. Vocalizing these feelings and insights to other girls on YouTube becomes part of the way these play practices can be viewed as challenging assumptions that tween material culture is suitable only for tween-aged girls.

For some of these girls, AGTube videos are more than just a fun pastime they share with other American Girl fans; they also engage them in the processes of cultural media work that defines their potential career aspirations. Playing with dolls does not mean simply that these girls are refusing to grow up but that they are negotiating the stability and pleasures of their youth with the exciting potential of their early adult years. For instance, basilmentos and Rockstar13studios have discussed their filmmaking dreams with their followers. The former, now in college, has credited AGTube for building confidence in her video-making and helping her earn a scholarship to study filmmaking. Rockstar13studios, a high school junior who began making videos

in the seventh grade, found that she continues returning to AGTube videos even while making live-action content through her independent film channel, Frog City Films. Whether or not these girls actively pursue filmmaking after their academic studies, the discourses they create on AGTube allow other girls to see that playing with dolls can also be productive cultural work.

These participatory media practices provide a way of thinking about tween girl culture as a constructive site where girls can view their doll play as an active rather than a passive process leading to the development of their selfhood. Mary Celeste Kearney notes that the cultural work girl media producers create can also subvert traditional roles and practices of femininity. She argues that

such girls are helping to expand the experiences of contemporary girlhood and thus the spectrum of identities and activities in which all females can invest, for by engaging with the technologies and practices of media production, they are actively subverting the traditional sex/gender system that has kept female cultural practices confined to consumerism, beauty, and the domestic sphere for decades. (2006: 12)

Media production has often been considered a masculine domain, but feminist scholars have challenged and disrupted the notion of the girl as the passive consumer of commodity culture by offering evidence of girls' media work. Yet what is interesting about AGTube is that girls are still participating as consumers when they purchase multiple \$115 (USD) American Girl dolls and their affiliated accessories and sets.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, AGTubers are taking these commodities, as well as their knowledge of style and beauty, and using them to produce original stories. These girls are still operating within the confines of traditional feminine cultural practices but they are retooling this work to suit their personal and professional interests in filmmaking. For example, the videos of *agoverseasfan* showcase beautiful tableaux of doll rooms and outfits, from customized unicorn bedrooms to a recreation of Elsa's sparkly blue gown in Disney's *Frozen* (2013). Consuming and producing do not need to be mutually exclusive. As these girl media producers demonstrate, partaking in capitalist consumer culture can operate alongside the development of their video-making skills.

For the AGTubers who have been creating content since they were tweens, YouTube also provides a space for reflective critique of their early filmmaking. A popular type of YouTube video is the reaction video in which users film themselves or others responding to older videos or videos on different channels. In one such video, 15-year-old *InfinityAGStudios* appears as herself to react to old AGSM videos she made when she was 12. A superimposed box

at the bottom of the video shows the viewer what InfinityAGStudios is watching on her laptop screen. She calls her old videos “cringey,” suggesting embarrassment at her sloppy editing skills and poor styling of her dolls’ outfits. While watching one of her stop-motion music videos, she comments, “I like how long these clips are, like, could I not cut this?” The opportunity to return to older videos and publicly critique their quality and what could be done differently allows AGTubers to reflect more thoughtfully on their cultural work. It also provides them with the chance to hear from their followers about how much their video-making skills have progressed. On InfinityAGStudios’s channel, commenters noted that her past videos were not terrible but that her current ones show improvement. Through content like the reaction video, AGTubers convey how their work is in constant dialogue with their past selves. AGTube thus connects girls to a past tween identity that is being reconfigured in the context of their current lives.

Often, AGTubers have become more social with age as they gain more subscribers on their YouTube channels, compelling them to think about their younger selves in new and different ways. Weber and Mitchell note that “young people revisit their own web productions, not only to see how they might update them, but also to see what has happened to them in terms of ‘hits’ or response messages and so on” (2008: 27). The content of old productions might be “cringey,” but there is value in openly sharing that work with other users. As audience-generated paratexts of American Girl, AGTube videos of varying skill levels and popularity paint a complex portrait of how tween girl culture is constructed and played with online. Tweens might be pinned down to an arbitrary age range, but the cultural work girls perform challenges what tween culture looks like, and will look like, for present and future girls. AGTubers, like many content producers on YouTube, are concerned about how audiences will react to their work. Knowing this, these girls develop a cultural discourse with others in their community that may counter mainstream ideas of what tween girlhood should be. The fact that some of these girls continue to make AGTube videos and aspire to become filmmakers or other types of media producers could continue to push the perceptual boundaries of tween culture as primarily passive and consumerist.

## Conclusion

The AGTube channels I have reviewed reveal the varied modes of meaning-making teen and young adult girls bring to their online doll videos, an

engagement that also highlights the flexibility and intertextuality of tween girl culture in digital spaces. The experiences, aspirations, and reflections these older users bring to their videos compose an intertextual matrix of playful performativity that illustrates how tween culture can be appropriated and manipulated through various media-making processes. For some girls, AGTube functions as a paratextual entrance and supplement to the American Girl franchise, extending the brand to include narratives that fans concoct. On a social media and video production platform like YouTube, tween girl culture weaves itself into the present and past experiences of girl producers; their channels serve as a living document of girlhood in the process of being preserved and transformed. American Girl dolls then allow older girls to engage with tween culture while also negotiating their relationship between tween girlhood and their current lives.

While the influence AGTube has had on American Girl is difficult to measure, the launch of American Girl's own stop-motion series on their official YouTube channel, AGZcrew, in September 2015 suggests that the company is aware of the confluence of AGTube videos on social media. Additionally, the introduction of their first boy doll, Logan Everett, in February 2017 indicates that the company might also know about AGTubers who transform their dolls into boys with shorter wigs and masculine clothing. Online doll videos become another space in which the commodification of play occurs, further showing how girl culture informs and is informed by the marketplace. By drawing attention to the many ways in which teen and young adult girls engage with American Girl dolls on YouTube, this article describes tween girl culture on social media as a complex and performative place, one that thrives on the imaginations of girls who were once tweens themselves and who now seek to reinscribe their girlhood experiences through the commodities that once defined their youth, and still do.

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## Notes

1. On YouTube, accepting how users choose to identify by age or gender tends to be best practice in media scholarship (Green and Burgess 2009).
2. mixiepixie7. "THANK YOU FOR 8 YEARS!" YouTube video, 5:48. 14 June 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QD-fZwsSLfA&t=118s>.
3. InfinityAGStudios. "REACTING TO MY OLD CRINGEY AGSMS!" YouTube video, 4:55. 11 June 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDdrNpvoFn0&t=134s>.
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7. Simspinkable. "THEY WERE NOT HAVING SEX." YouTube video, 10:26. 27 Jan 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TddZWDWsvTQ>.
8. Xxagme23xX. "Love ~ is ~ not ~ a ~ choice." YouTube video, 1:21. 6 November 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fewAsvR86-w>.
9. TheLoonyLoveBad1. "A Fluid Day." YouTube video, 8:45. 20 September 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib3GiABQreI>.
10. mixiepixie7. "DO MY FRIENDS KNOW ABOUT MY DOLLS?" YouTube video, 6:19. 18 March 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjD1pq64MKk&t=299s>.
11. The purchasing power of American Girl fans also raises concerns about how AGTube can be closed to girls with limited economic and social mobility.

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