<u>Description for the general public</u>

The project **"Failing Adulthood: Millennial Girlhood in American Visual Culture"** looks at autobiographical and semi-autobiographical TV series, comics, films, and digital self-expressions of American women representing the Millennial generation, to examine how the figure of a girl is constructed in various media. In the 2010s, a new figure of a girl emerged: a woman in her twenties or thirties who identifies as a girl rather than a young woman. She does not fit or openly rejects images of adulthood, womanhood, and success in contemporary American society. This redefinition of a girl comes from the narratives created by young women themselves: directors, filmmakers, and cartoonists. Women – or rather girls – in their twenties and early thirties, for the past ten years, have been challenging how girlhood and adulthood operate in American culture. The goal of the project is a comprehensive analysis of the figure of the girl in a historical perspective and across a wide range of media. It examines generational narratives by Millennial women in film, television, comics, and digital media to analyze the possibilities of their self-representation in these various media under neoliberal conditions of marketability. I analyze both the changes in the figure of a girl and the influence of media on the possibilities of representation in the texts of culture created between 2010 and 2019.

In their narratives, Millennial girls openly share their vulnerabilities, showing readers and viewers intimate and often embarrassing experiences from the everyday lives of young women. Exposing struggles and difficulties do not serve as a pretext for an inspiring story about succeeding despite obstacles. On the contrary – their narratives are focused on failures and being unable to "grow up." Focusing on what I identify as major characteristics of girls' narratives – aim for relatability, eagerly exposing one's failures, the notion of being "stuck" at girlhood, and questioning one's agency – I claim that the image of girlhood coming from young women's narratives stands in the opposition to the visions of adulthood that the modern Western society invests in. Portrayals of girls who do not "progress" to womanhood have been extremely rare. While young men (or boys) who seem unable to perform adulthood frequently appear in popular culture, I claim that similar images of girls have been almost absent in culture and media until the 2010s.

To examine this novel phenomenon and analyze how Millennial women re-defined girlhood, I study numerous self-representations of girls in different media. Drawing from girlhood studies, cultural studies, gender studies, and American studies allows me to design a framework for a complex analysis of the figure of a girl in different mediums. "Failing Adulthood: Millennial Girlhood in American Visual Culture" fills a gap in the research on new discourses of girlhood and adulthood, as well as girls' narratives created by young women themselves. The phenomenon of 2010s girls' narratives focused on failure has been analyzed, yet always from the perspective of one medium: most often as a television trend. My project offers to look at the Millennial girlhood and girls' narratives, using the generational framework, and creates an extensive study on the changing image of a girl, not constrained to one medium.

"Failing Adulthood: Millennial Girlhood in American Visual Culture" will conclude with a book manuscript that will be submitted to an international publisher, two journal articles published in international journals and/or edited collections, and the website which will popularize the research and make it accessible to students and the general public. There is no doubt that girls hold a specific place in American culture and, more broadly, American imagery. If the position of girls is very susceptive to broader socio-economic and cultural changes, studying self-representations of girls also creates new perspectives on cultural studies. While my project is undoubtedly located within American contexts, the texts of culture that I chose are read and also viewed and read outside the United States. Popular and marketable American TV series, films, and comics are often setting the tone for texts of culture created outside of the United States and can influence narratives of girlhood worldwide. My research will serve as a point of reference for scholars studying self-representations of girlhood not only within the American context.