

Fading Solidarity Among Women on Tiktok: A Phenomenological Analysis of the "Girls Support Girls" Movement Among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The Girls Support Girls movement on TikTok initially emerged as a form of inclusive solidarity among women but has shifted toward selective and conditional support. This study aims to understand the forms of female support, the meaning of conditional support, and the factors causing the decline of female solidarity in the Girls Support Girls movement on TikTok from the perspective of young women. This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive phenomenological method. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with four female participants aged 19–25 years who actively use TikTok and have experience interacting with content related to the Girls Support Girls movement. The findings reveal three main results: (1) support among women on TikTok most often appears in the form of positive validation, encouragement, and defense; (2) such support is perceived as selective and conditional, depending on appearance, social norms, and specific situations; and (3) female solidarity easily fades due to insecurity, competition, and pressure from beauty standards that transform relationships among women into social comparisons. This study confirms that although Girls Support Girls is understood as emotional support among women, its practice is heavily influenced by the social context on TikTok, where validation, social judgment, and aesthetic pressure become the main factors shaping support dynamics.

Keywords: *Girls Support Girls; female solidarity; TikTok; conditional support; phenomenology; young women*

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INTRODUCTION

The *Girls Support Girls* movement is a form of digital solidarity that is growing rapidly among young girls, especially on the TikTok platform. As a highly visual and interactive video-based medium, TikTok not only serves as an entertainment space but also as an arena for identity formation, self-expression, and social relationships among women (Papageorgiou et al., 2023; van de Waal et al., 2024). The large number of female users in Indonesia makes TikTok have a significant influence in shaping the way women interpret and practice solidarity in the digital space.

TikTok's dominance among Indonesian teenagers is supported by statistical data showing that by 2025, Indonesia will have 108 million active TikTok users over the age of 18, making the country one of the largest markets for such platforms in the world (Ceci, 2025; DataReportal, 2025). The distribution of users by gender shows a fairly balanced ratio, with 50.8% female and 49.2% male (Maya et al., 2024). Furthermore, the 18-24-year-old age group dominates TikTok users, with a percentage of 14.1% for women, showing that this platform is very popular among teenagers and young adults who are active in various digital trends (Asyari, 2024).

Although ideally the *Girls Support Girls* movement prioritizes the principle of unconditional support, the development of content on TikTok shows a shift in meaning. Solidarity, which was once inclusive, now appears to be increasingly selective, marked by the emergence of narratives such as "*girls support good girls*" that emphasize that support should only be given to women who are considered to meet certain moral or social standards. This shift

shows that women's solidarity is no longer universally understood but rather influenced by the judgments, perceptions, and expectations formed in digital interactions.

Several previous studies have discussed the dynamics of women's solidarity on social media. However, those studies generally focused on solidarity in general and have not specifically examined how adolescent girls interpret conditional support in the context of TikTok. This condition shows that there is an important research gap to fill, especially considering the growing role of TikTok in shaping the digital culture of adolescent girls. Based on this context this study aims to describe the form of women's support in the *Girls Support Girls* movement on TikTok, understand how young women interpret selective support, and identify the factors that contribute to the fading of women's solidarity on the platform.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to explore in depth the subjective experiences of adolescent girls in interpreting conditional support in the *Girls Support Girls* movement on TikTok. This approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to capture the essence of participants' experiences as they experienced them, including how they perceived, understood, and interpreted the changing forms of women's solidarity in a digital context.

The participants in this study were 4 (four) women aged 19-25 years who actively use TikTok and have experience interacting with content related to the *Girls Support Girls* movement. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, taking into account the suitability of their experiences, the intensity of TikTok use, and their involvement in trends or discussions related to women's solidarity. The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data sufficiency (data saturation) according to the needs of phenomenological research.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. The interview will be held in September-October 2025 online through a video call platform (Google Meet, Zoom, or WhatsApp Video Call) selected according to the convenience and availability of participant access. Each interview session lasts 35-50 minutes and is recorded with the participant's permission to then be transcribed verbatim. This format allows for the flexibility of conversations while maintaining a focus on formulating the research problem, resulting in a rich narrative of their experiences. All conversations are documented and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy.

The collected data were analyzed using Van Manen's descriptive phenomenological approach, which included the stages: (1) reading transcripts repeatedly to understand the participants' experiences in depth, (2) identifying significant statements relevant to the phenomenon being studied, (3) performing thematic coding to group statements into categories of meaning, and (4) compiling descriptions of the essence of the experience that reflect the fundamental structure from the phenomenon of conditional support on TikTok.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of four resource persons (P1-P4) who were adolescent girls aged 19-25 years old and actively using TikTok, this study identified the tendency of their views towards the dynamics of the *Girls Support Girls* movement. Data were collected through semi-

structured interviews conducted online, then transcribed and analyzed using a phenomenological approach. In general, the answers of the interviewees showed a similar pattern, namely that support between women on TikTok was present in the form of positive validation, but at the same time it was also interpreted as selective support and influenced by social pressure on the platform. From the overall data analyzed, this study found three main themes that describe their experiences related to the form of support, the meaning of conditional support, and the factors that led to the fading of women's solidarity on TikTok.

Theme 1: Women's Support Emerges in the Form of Positive Validation, Encouragement, and Advocacy

The first theme shows that support between women on TikTok most often appears in the form of positive validation, passion, and advocacy. The speakers described that the support is usually given through positive comments, praise, and encouraging sentences that help other women feel more valued and not alone. Support is also often present in the form of duets or reply videos that contain a defense when a woman receives criticism or unfair treatment.

As P1 said, "the form of support is more about enthusiasm, validation, and defense." All of the speakers had a similar view that the support room on TikTok tends to be warm and provides a sense of security for women. P3 reinforces this view by explaining that the support "feels sincere, warm, and becomes a kind of distant embrace of fellow women reminding each other that they deserve to be loved properly." This shows that support is not only verbal, but also has a profound emotional impact on the woman who receives it.

P4 also added that the form of support received includes efforts to "help girls get to know themselves better, so that they understand themselves better so that they are not insecure about what others have." This statement shows that support is not only reactive to negative situations, but also proactive in building the confidence of other women. Overall, this theme confirms that for adolescent girls, Girls Support Girls is primarily understood as a space of emotional empowerment through positive words and defensive solidarity.

Theme 2: Support between Women is Interpreted as Selective and Conditional Support

From the results of the interviews, the second theme that emerged was that support between women on TikTok is often interpreted as conditional support. The interviewees revealed that support is not always given equally, but is more likely to appear for women who are considered to meet certain standards, such as beautiful, polite, aesthetic, or have no history of controversy. Support is considered not entirely universal, but rather is influenced by the moral and aesthetic judgments that develop on the platform.

This can be seen from P2's statement which states, "support on TikTok is not always sincere, usually only for girls who meet the standard, aesthetically rich or safe," illustrating that the acceptance of support is often related to an image that other users consider appropriate. P3 explains more deeply that support often comes with certain conditions: "support only exists if you fall into the category of 'worthy of support.'" This statement confirms that women's solidarity on TikTok is not universal, but rather depends on the moral and social judgments that develop on the platform.

P1 also added that "girls who are considered 'nice,' polite, soft girl, or have a relatable life are usually more likely to get support. But if a girl whose lifestyle is considered 'too free,' her

clothes are open, or has caused controversy, people are quicker to judge than support." This narrative makes it clear that support does not only depend on the same gender, but also on the extent to which one meets the social expectations that prevail in the digital community. In general, this pattern appears almost all of the speakers, suggesting that teenage girls interpret Girls Support Girls as a form of warm support, but remain selective and influenced by social expectations on TikTok.

Theme 3: Fading of Solidarity Influenced by Competition, Insecurity, and Social Pressure

The third theme shows that the fading of solidarity between women on TikTok is largely influenced by competition, insecurity, and social pressure on the platform. The speakers explained that TikTok creates a space that encourages women to compare themselves, so that feelings of envy, fear of missupport, and a tendency to criticize faster than to understand.

P1 states that "now that many girls are more focused on competing than supporting, there are ultimately more negative comments between women." This statement shows a shift in orientation from solidarity to competition. P3 added that women are now "increasingly afraid of missupport, because a little mistake can be directly attacked by netizens," reflecting how social pressure on TikTok has made women more selective and cautious in providing support. P2 also explains that "competition Between girls is becoming more visible. Many feel that they have to appear perfect in order to go viral. So instead of supporting each other, we compare each other."

This phenomenon is also reinforced by TikTok's algorithm that more often highlights drama and conflict content, so that empathic responses from women are becoming less and less visible. P3 further explained that "algorithms also raise conflicting content more often, so sincere support is drowned in the midst of a crowd of opinions." This shows that the structure of the platform itself contributes to shaping social dynamics that are less supportive of solidarity. Overall, this theme emerged consistently from all the speakers and illustrated how social dynamics on TikTok contributed to the weakening of women's solidarity.

This section outlines the meanings of the three main themes found in the study, then links them to relevant theories and compares them with the findings of previous research. In general, the three themes show that adolescent girls' experiences regarding Girls Support Girls' support on TikTok are not only positive, but are also influenced by social dynamics such as validation, selective assessment, and aesthetic pressure. The following discussion explains how the field findings are understood theoretically and how this phenomenon is in line with or different from previous studies.

Theme 1 Discussion: Support in the Form of Validation and Defense as a Form of Emotional Solidarity

The first findings in this study show that support between women on TikTok most often appears in the form of positive validation, encouragement, and advocacy. The speakers (P1-P4) described that the support was present through supportive comments, praise, and actions to defend other women when facing criticism or discrimination. This form of support provides a sense of security and fosters a sense of "understood" on platforms that are often harsh on women. This pattern consistently appears throughout the speakers, indicating that for adolescent girls,

Girls Support Girls is primarily understood as a space for emotional reinforcement through positive words and defensive solidarity.

These findings are in line with Robin Morgan's Sisterhood Theory, which emphasizes that women's solidarity is born from shared experiences and the need to strengthen each other in the face of patriarchal social pressures. The forms of validation and advocacy that have emerged on TikTok reflect the basic principle of sisterhood, which is that women support each other not only for emotional comfort, but also as a collective response to the injustices they experience. When the speakers described advocacy in the comments section, it showed a practice of solidarity that was consistent with Morgan's idea of "fellowship among women" that works against the criticism, stigma, and social attacks often directed at women in the digital space.

The findings on this first theme are in line with several previous studies that highlighted the dynamics of support between women on social media. Research (Naispospos & Amin, 2024) shows that women's support on social media tends to be inconsistent and often only appears in the form of validation or defense in certain contexts, this is in line with the findings of this study which found that support that appears on TikTok is often in the form of positive comments, emotional reinforcement, and advocacy in the digital space. Research (Athirah et al., 2023) also found that women support each other through digital resistance measures such as strengthening each other when faced with unpleasant treatment, even though the context is cyber-flashing. Although the focus of the platform is different, the pattern of support in the form of empathy and recognition between women still emerges as a common thread. The findings of this study also have similarities with a study (Zeng, 2020) that discussed women's solidarity in #MeToo campaigns, where collective emotional support is the foundation of the movement. Thus, the findings of this first theme reinforce the evidence that validation and advocacy between women is a form of digital solidarity that has consistently emerged in various social media contexts, even though the platforms and focus of the issue are different.

Discussion of Theme 2: Conditional Support as a Reflection of Selective Social Perception

The second finding showed that women's support on TikTok was understood by the interviewees (P1-P4) as conditional, not always given to all women, and often dependent on appearance, social standards, and specific contexts. For The resource person admitted that many positive comments arise when supported women are considered to meet certain aesthetic standards or social norms. However, when someone is perceived as "different", "less than standard", or in a controversial situation, that support tends to be lost. This pattern appears consistently in all interviewees, indicating that for adolescent girls, Girls Support Girls is not universal support, but selective and influenced by social judgment.

This phenomenon of conditional support can be explained through Fritz Heider's Social Perception Theory, which emphasizes how a person forms social judgments based on perceptions of others. In the context of this study, women on TikTok provided support after assessing whether a person was "worthy of support" based on factors such as their appearance, morality, or social situation. The process of prejudging before endorsing this is in line with Heider's idea that individuals tend to make internal and external attribution to understand the behavior of others. When the interviewee said that women were more likely to support "pretty girls", "girls who don't have drama", or "women who are considered right", it shows that support comes after a filtered perception, not unconditional solidarity.

The findings on this second theme are in line with research (Naispospos & Amin, 2024) which shows that support between women on social media is often inconsistent and depends on the context and who is involved. The study highlights that women are more likely to judge other women when it comes to jealousy, competition, or differences in appearance, which reinforces the study's findings about conditional support. In addition, these findings are also relevant to studies (Mishra et al., 2023), which show that the pressures of social norms make women judge each other based on certain body standards and self-image. While the focus of the research is different, both studies show that perceptions and social norms influence the way women support each other. Thus, the results of this study broaden the understanding that women's support in digital media is not only a matter of solidarity, but is also influenced by perceptions, judgments, and social standards that shape the dynamics of their support.

Theme 3 Discussion: Weakening of Solidarity Due to Competitive Identity Construction in the Digital Space

The third finding shows that the fading of women's solidarity on TikTok is largely influenced by insecurity, competition, and social pressure related to beauty standards. The speakers (P1-P4) revealed that TikTok is a very visual space, so women often feel compared, judged, or required to meet certain standards. This makes support between women unstable, sometimes even turning into envy or veiled competition. One of the speakers (P3) said that "girls become insecure when they see other girls who are more beautiful or more perfect", showing that social pressure plays a big role in eroding the sense of togetherness. In general, this theme shows that women's solidarity is often disrupted by intense emotional dynamics and social comparisons on TikTok.

These findings are very much in line with the framework of Postmodern Feminism put forward by Judith Butler, which views that women's identities are not fixed, but are shaped and negotiated through ever-changing social norms. In the context of TikTok, beauty standards and gender expectations are reproduced through visual content, trends, and interactions between users. This makes women feel that they have to adjust to the dominant norms in order to remain socially accepted. When interviewees admitted to feeling insecure, comparing themselves, or being pushed to "compete" with other women, the phenomenon reflected how social constructs on TikTok shaped their experiences. In other words, Butler's perspective of postmodern feminism helps explain that the fading of women's solidarity comes not only from personal relationships, but from the pressures of social norms that are labile and constantly changing on digital platforms.

This theme reinforces the findings of previous research, in particular (Mishra et al., 2023) which found that South Asian women experience pressure on their body image due to beauty standards on social media, thus affecting their confidence and social relationships. This is also in line with research (Seekis & Kennedy, 2023) that shows that beauty content on TikTok exacerbates shyness, anxiety, and social comparison in young women. In fact, (Fitriani & Purnomo, 2023) emphasized that teenage girls who use TikTok often feel pressure on their body image due to beauty norms that continue to be reproduced on the platform. This equation shows that the dynamics of insecurity, social comparison, and the pressure of beauty standards are indeed the main factors that weakening women's solidarity in various social media contexts, including TikTok (Irhazt Angga Denilza & Fohan Muzakir, 2025).

Discussion Synthesis: The Complexity of Women's Solidarity in the Digital Space

Overall, this discussion shows that the three main themes found in support in the form of validation and defense, conditional support, and the fading of solidarity due to insecurity and social pressure are interrelated in describing the complexity of relationships between women on TikTok. These three themes are then understood using relevant theories, which help explain how women's solidarity is formed, changed, or even faded in digital contexts. In addition, when compared to previous research, the findings of this study show a consistent pattern that the dynamics of women's support on social media are influenced by emotional factors, social perceptions, and aesthetic norms. Thus, this discussion strengthens the understanding that Girls Support Girls on TikTok is not a simple phenomenon, but is influenced by various social conditions that shape the way adolescent girls give and receive support (Puspita & Sulistyan, 2021).

Theoretical Implications: From Ideal Sisterhood to Complex Digital Solidarity

The findings of this study provide important implications for the development of women's solidarity theory in the digital era. Butler's postmodern feminist perspective not only helps to understand the fluid construction of identity, but also shows that women's solidarity in the digital space cannot be understood as a stable entity (Gustavsson, 2020). Solidarity is now negotiated through technology-mediated interactions, where algorithms and platform culture help shape who is deemed worthy of support. Furthermore, the ideal concept of sisterhood as stated by Morgan faces new challenges in the digital era. (Bäckström Olofsson & Goicolea, 2024) asserts that women's solidarity is now often "at a distance", where support is provided through the mediation of technology but is still influenced by social distance and contextual differences.

This phenomenon reinforces the study's findings that solidarity on TikTok is selective as women must navigate not only value differences, but also expectations shaped by the platform's culture (Malle, 2022). From the perspective of social cohesion, (Chatterjee et al., 2023) remind that fragmented solidarity can have an impact on women's collective well-being. When support is only Given to those who meet certain standards, the space for inclusive solidarity becomes increasingly narrow, thereby weakening the potential of women's collective movements in the face of structural injustices (Puspita & Sulistyan, 2021; Salsabila et al., 2023).

This research has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the limited number of participants (4 people) makes the findings contextual and cannot be generalized for the entire population of adolescent girls using TikTok in Indonesia. Second, this study only focused on the TikTok platform, so it did not cover similar dynamics that might occur on other social media such as Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook. Third, the phenomenological approach used relies heavily on the subjective narrative of the participants, which can be influenced by their level of openness and reflective ability to narrate experiences. Fourth, online interview methods can limit the ability of researchers to read non-verbal expressions and build a deeper rapport with participants. Fifth, the context of the research that focuses on Indonesian girls makes the findings cannot be directly generalized to other cultural groups that have different dynamics of solidarity and social norms.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the complex and unstable experiences of adolescent girls with the *Girls Support Girls* movement on TikTok, highlighting three key dynamics: support primarily manifests through positive validation, encouragement, and advocacy via comments that foster security; it is often selective, conditioned by appearance, social norms, and situational factors favoring "worthy" recipients; and solidarity readily fades amid insecurity, competition, and beauty standard pressures that fuel social comparisons. Overall, while the movement is framed as emotional support among women, its practice is profoundly shaped by TikTok's social context, including validation, judgment, and aesthetic demands, rendering digital women's solidarity an interplay of supportive needs and platform dynamics. For future research, scholars could employ longitudinal designs or comparative analyses across platforms (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok) to track how evolving algorithms and cultural shifts further influence the longevity and authenticity of such solidarity movements among diverse adolescent demographics.

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