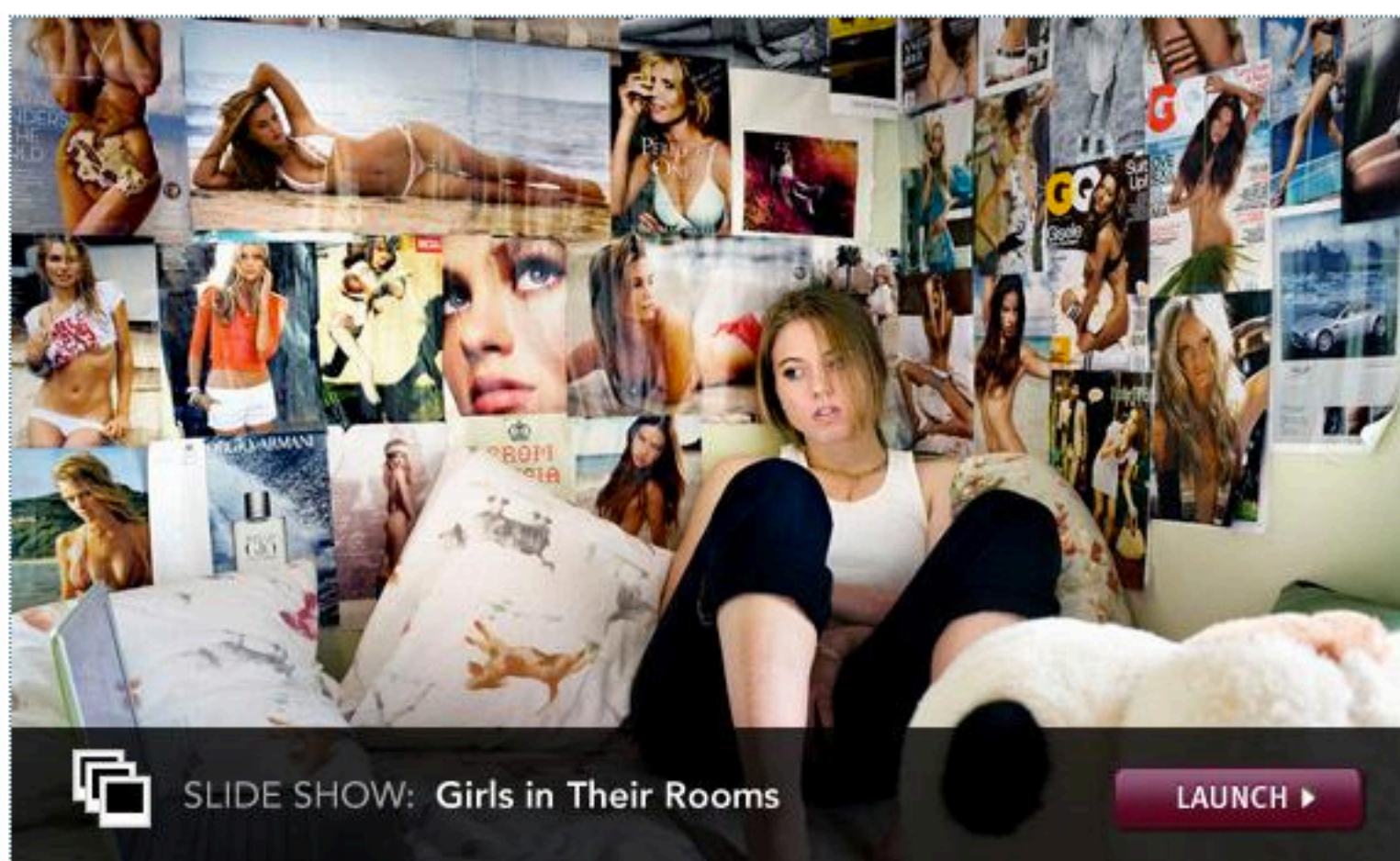


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Article from THE **Slate** BOOK REVIEW

# A Girl and Her Room

Photographs from a new book by Rania Matar.

By **Susan Minot** | Posted Friday, June 1, 2012, at 11:40 AM ET

These images are from photographer Rania Matar's new book, **A Girl and Her Room**, a collection of photos taken in the United States and the Middle East. The following is excerpted from Susan Minot's introduction to the book.

The room will be the first cocoon a girl creates for herself, of herself. It is the place she first attempts self-expression onto an environment. The development of a room shows the progress: Pink gives way to glitter, stuffed animals to figurines. Pictures of animals are replaced by pictures of people and with objects no longer selected by a parent. Then to these she adds her own creations and soon the walls are taken over, and the closets, and the bed.

The girls gather the bits and pieces from outside, returning like birds with bright ribbons to add to their nests. They choose what to hang and shimmer. A female may have a domestic gene, but at this time the nesting is not about practicality or family or nurturing others; it is about nurturing the self, and about creating the right stage for the self. Their desks are covered with pots of face paint for the ceremonial rites of attraction. Mementos from friends or good times are kept on an altar of importance saying, "These things matter to me."

Advertisement The room might be a refuge, an escape from family and school. With that door closed she can collect her genuine self. But she might also find it a cage, where she feels locked away from everything not her, feeling loneliness and separation. In the room she will comfort herself, she will suffer, she will fantasize. Here in the room it is safe for all the new emotions to emerge, fresh and strong, to be felt, if not understood. The teenager barely even understands they're new. Her world is a place of wide ideas and colors and bodies and music, not yet thickened or focused by logistics and planning.



The girls I see here in Rania Matar's pictures look so brave to me. They are brave in their selfhood, which they might not even know they are showing so boldly. When I was their age, I would not have been aware, not really, of what selfhood I had. They have adorned their walls with energy and attention, with colors and illusions and stubbornness and the things they worship.