

with feminist pedagogies in a range of classrooms and is an important and valuable resource for scholars working within higher education.

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GIRL POSITIVE: SUPPORTING GIRLS TO SHAPE A NEW WORLD

Tatiana Fraser and Caia Hagel
Toronto: Random House Canada,
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**REVIEWED BY KISHA
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There has been a growing interest in girlhood studies as academics, community workers, and educators use their experiences engaging and observing girls to develop programs and strategies for girls' leadership initiatives. Considering the profound diversity in human experience, there also seems to be mounting efforts to incorporate an analysis of intersectional identities within these discourses to account for the identity development of marginalized girls.

In *Girl Positive: Supporting Girls to Shape a New World*, authors Tatiana Fraser and Caia Hagel take us on a journey to explore the contemporary lives of girls living in various parts of Canada and the United States. This book can be described as an informal study of girls and young women conducted through the collection of data from the authors' North American tour. Both Fraser and Hagel lean on their experience as mothers and their many years working with various organizations for the advancement of

girls and women to legitimize their authority on girl culture. Described as "a guidebook for anyone who wants to hear from girls, and understand and support them," *Girl Positive* is a manual that combines the voices of girls with information and strategies to advance gender equity in the face of the many obstacles that impact the experience of girls in Canada and the United States.

The book speaks to a number of topics that continue to be of concern for girls as they mature and become active within their communities, including media representation, sexual violence, depression, bullying, boys and consent, among others. Rejecting the common historical notion that girlhood is a general period of "innocence," *Girl Positive* takes a strengths-based approach to assessing and describing the agency of girls as active participants in responding to the social concerns which they face. According to the authors, girls are often positioned as passive agents in discourses that speculate on their experience. This of course does not allow for the possibility of girls to contextualize their experiences in ways that can contribute to their own positive self discovery and identity formation.

Fraser and Hagel accurately describe gender equity and girls' leadership as a contemporary "hot topic." An increasing number of studies and materials have been produced in girlhood studies in an effort to explore girls' leadership and provide solutions to commonly expressed concerns. *Girl Positive* is similar to other non-academic works such as *Brave Girls: Raising Young Women with Passion and Purpose to Become Powerful Leaders* (Radin), which uses a program based out of an animal rescue shelter as a means to develop leadership skills in girls. In *Black Girlhood Celebration: Towards a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy*, Ruth Nicole

Brown (2009), however, takes a more academic approach as she establishes that girls, specifically black girls, need power, not programs for leadership sustainability.

Although *Girl Positive* makes an effort to highlight diverse voices throughout the text, the narratives and analysis do not fully or effectively communicate the dynamics of intersectionality in North America. Race and class appear to be a subtext that is often tokenized without exploration. There are a number of reflections from girls of colour, as well as girls living in poverty; however, the concerns are not properly unpacked or situated within the broader constructions of racism and classism.

Is it possible to capture and analyze the experience of girls in North America in one text? In reading this book, it becomes increasingly clear that any study on the experience of girls must be specific about the demographic being explored to begin to adequately address intersectional identities. *Girl Positive* emphasizes voices of diverse girls to some degree, yet the issues that they express are not effectively examined to include the nuances of histories which often underpin their experiences—and as a result of this omission, important factors are likely to remain unobserved. The difference between *Girl Positive* and *Black Girlhood Celebration*, for example, is that Brown's analysis of girls is focused on one specific community of girls who, through their intersectional identities, share similar experiences (Brown). This provides more context for understanding the complexities of identity and the process of self discovery, and allows for more effective exploration, which can lead to sustainable change.

On a basic level, this book can be used as a resource for girls' leadership programs. *Girl Positive* is a slightly ambitious and idealistic take on concerns that girls are facing today

and in many ways overlooks some important factors which must take us beyond an overly inclusive analysis of the girl experience.

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References

- Brown, R. *Black Girlhood Celebration* (1st ed.). New York: Peter Lang, 2009.
- Radin, S. *Brave Girls: Raising Young Women with Passion and Purpose to Become Powerful Leaders*. Simon and Schuster, 2015.

AWKWARD POLITICS: TECHNOLOGIES OF POPFEMINIST ACTIVISM

Carrie Smith-Prei & Maria Stehle
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016

REVIEWED BY VERONIKA NOVOSELOVA

In *Awkward Politics* Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle analyze what they call popfeminist protests – collaborative, artistic, and disruptive performances circulated transnationally through multi-media digital networks. Smith-Prei and Stehle define *popfeminism* as a methodology for critiquing, appropriating, and re-signifying pop culture while infusing it with feminist meanings; they deploy popfeminist methodology to explore awkwardness as the central characteristic of the contemporary feminist mobilizing. According to Smith-Prei and Stehle, awkwardness

refers to actions, representations, and aesthetics that come across as ill-fitting and misdirected but also disruptive and provocative. The focus on awkwardness helps to understand irony, playfulness, and political ambiguity of feminist performances driven by information sharing technologies.

Grounded in affect theory, Smith-Prei and Stehle conduct close readings of popfeminist performances, their digital transmissions, and their connections to the earlier forms of feminist protest such as street demonstrations, petitions, interruptions of public events, the Riot Grrrl Movement, and DIY aesthetics. The significant part of the book focuses on feminist protests in the German context, including performances of Chicks on Speed collective and rapper Lady Bitch Ray; it also examines global circulations of “sextrimist” Ukrainian group FEMEN, Russian punk collective Pussy Riot, and the SlutWalk movement that gained a transnational following after originating in Canada.

Smith-Prei and Stehle elaborate on the circularity of feminist actions, meaning that these actions migrate between online and offline contexts, acquiring new meanings and drawing the layers of commentary. The uncoordinated flows of feminist content between online channels complicates further their already unstable political aims; given this fragmentary and discontinuous character of digital protests, Smith-Prei and Stehle suggest that contemporary feminist politics is not necessarily “measurable by its successes or failure on numerous issues standard to feminist analysis.” Distancing themselves from the claim to evaluate popfeminism’s effectiveness, they ask “not if, but how, such protest works politically.”

As the authors point out, digitally-enabled feminist protests uneasily intertwine the anti-capitalist ethos with commercial circulations, re-

vealing that “there is no ‘outside’ of capitalism in a global neoliberal economy.” Popfeminist protests include “pop and consumer tendencies” in a way that “not only rewrite neoliberal capitalism but also repackage themselves as part of that cycle.” For example, Smith-Prei and Stehle analyze the “awkward” positionings and circulations of Pussy Riot within the contemporary popular culture; first, Smith-Prei and Stehle identify how “awkwardness” is visible in the contradiction between the cutting edge quality of Pussy Riot’s performances and the ways in which Russian-based feminisms are commonly described in terms of “catching up” to the West. Next, they trace how the public image of Pussy Riot has been shifting, revealing tensions between the global popularity and local specificity, between anonymity of the collective and celebrity of Pussy Riot’s members Alekhina and Tolokonnikova. Another example of how mainstream and counter-cultural meanings coalesce is the 2013 #aufschrei campaign centering on women’s disclosures of experiencing sexual assault. Smith-Prei and Stehle emphasize the contradiction between the politically disruptive impetus behind #aufschrei campaign and the way in which the hashtag has been uncritically taken up by Germany’s mainstream media. Both of these case studies point out the awkward disjunctions between the subversive potential of feminist politics and the ongoing commodification of feminist rhetoric.

Drawing on Lauren Berlant’s conceptualization of cruel optimism as an affective attachment to the visions of normative futures, the authors argue that feminist awkwardness is “politically productive not because it decidedly incites political discourse or challenges social conventions in general but because it unsettles and disrupts any such fantasies