Visual Interruptions

Danai S. Mupotsa and Elina Oinas

In this themed issue we explore images that unsettle, disrupt, disqualify, and transgress the visual and affective expectations visited upon contemporary girls. The articles here suggest new ways of seeing, visualizing, and representing the girl, and of feeling and thinking about her. We begin from the recognition that girls are seduced into qualifying and passing in normative, intersecting ways that work along the various axes of sex, gender, age, corporeality, class, and race, and that we need to attend to possible disruptions of this logic. How do girls both entertain and interrupt the presumably obligatory wish to qualify? We attempt to answer this by looking at the intimate and embodied aspects of being a girl, and at the processes of esthetizing, and fetishizing the girly. We ask how the girl as subject-in-process establishes and challenges the notions of failing and passing.

The visual travels in time and space, through local and global imaginaries and affects that intertwine so the questions we pose in this issue also address the methodologies and writing modalities that can be used to discuss the uncertain, the open, the affective, and the embodied. This visual and sensory responds to the call for a “girl-method” (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2013: 1) in the tradition of this journal.

A focus on the visual inevitably raises concerns about the politics of representation, and the potential difficulty and losses inherent in rebellion. All these articles discuss, in one way or another, the paradoxes and tensions in the politics of alternative representational practices and argue that critique and interruption are generative rather than destructive forces.

Jen Almjeld describes Pinterest as a space in which girls “reinscribe, resist, or reinforce cultural norms of femininity ... within the seemingly commonplace and conservative practice of collecting.” She argues that through virtual modes of curation pinners creatively make present and future selves. Then Shenila Khoja-Moolji and Alyssa Niccolini examine the role of the protagonist Kamala Khan, a superheroine in the *Ms. Marvel* comic series,

in interrupting the representation of Islamophobia and xenophobia and, thus, “making way for a comic to undertake the pedagogical work of resistance [in its] wielding [of] potentially dynamic and transformative power in social imaginaries.”

Leah Phillips examines two examples in particular of Young Adult fantasy literature that offer the possibility of re-imagining the adolescent female body “as opposed to the fixed perfection required by the fantasy femininity on offer in popular culture, including print, televisual, and social media.” Sharing an interest in the body and expanding on forms of representation, Annamari Vanska, in her analysis of what counts as innocence, attempts to dismantle the alarm around fashion advertising that allegedly sexualizes young girls. In this article “[s]exualization is revealed to be a value statement—the Other of innocence which is set up as the norm.” Danai Mupotsa then discusses the Southern African bride as the site of intense sociocultural investment and anxiety. She suggests that images of the (always already white) bride “produce a range of simultaneous identifications and disidentifications” turning the ideal girly bride into a spectacle of modern progress, and pushing social desires for success into deeply racialized categories.

Stephanie McCall explores girls’ aspirations in a North American private all-girls elite high school in relation to where they will pursue their higher education. She examines how “affective intensities of spiciness, happiness, and shame ... disrupt the visualizations of the girls’ seemingly unambiguous notions of female success.” An interesting parallel to this is made in Stephanie Skourtes’s article in which she juxtaposes the redemption tales told by “urban, working-class girls” to interrupt how “classification systems” like class work “to inscribe the girls as a problem.” Elina Oinas’s article brings this section of our Special Issue to a close with her discussion of the difficulty inherent in reading the rebellious girl. She explores three protests made by rebellious girls and suggests that they “be read as important visual interruptions that attempt to invoke an epistemic mutiny that does not beg for inclusion on pre-existing terms but, rather, challenges the boundaries of acceptable bodily integrity.”

The provocations offered in these articles are amplified in the two book reviews that follow. Liu Xin offers a thorough reading of Sara Ahmed’s (2014) *Willful Subjects* in which she explores the theoretical and methodological tools offered by Ahmed to understand willfulness itself, and the overall significance of the willful girl. Samara Ragaven reviews the collection of essays, *Undutiful Daughters: New Directions in Feminist Thought and Practice* (2012) edited by Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny

Sönderbäck that challenge the notion of a unified feminist sisterhood in their imagining of future feminisms. Ragaven's thoughtful words bring our themed issue to an end.

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We dedicate this issue to our friends Mikha Mupotsa-Mausse and Ada Kauranen who so beautifully embody resistance and integrity.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2014. *Willful Subjects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Mitchell, Claudia, and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. 2013. "Making Method in Girlhood Studies." *Girlhood Studies* 6, no. 1: 1-6.