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**Hains, Rebecca C. *Growing Up with Girlpower: Girlhood on Screen and in Everyday Life*, Peter Lang, New York, 2012, ISBN 9 7814 3311 1389, x+315 pp., US\$36.95.**

This book attempts to contribute to the literature on 'girl studies', which is a field with which I thought I was unfamiliar before reading her text. However, I was quick to find out within the first few pages that girl studies as she defines it engages with feminist theory and cultural studies scholarship.

The book opens with a survey of the literature in the 'girl studies' area, and includes an intriguing description of US-based feminist researchers engaging mainstream media to spread key messages of their findings. This is useful in setting a context for the study, and successfully demonstrates how activist-based research and media interest perhaps helped lead to a shift in gender role representations in children's television hero characters in the 1990s and 2000s. Hains also describes the impact of the huge success of the UK-based musical group The Spice Girls and their message of 'girl power' on children in the United States. The 'marketing strategy' of the Spice Girls is critiqued, and the earlier activity of the less commercially focused US-based Riot Grrrls (female punk bands who originally used the term 'girl power') is also described.

Where I think Hains' book is most successful is in its demonstration of the importance of committed engagement with the researched group through methodical and ongoing qualitative data collections. Hains spent years collecting data at set time periods, returning at various stages to find out how these girls' views had changed.

She worked with targeted age groups about their taste in popular culture, seeking their opinions and trying to understand how that related to their sense of self. Although two main cohorts were interviewed, Hains acknowledges that the most successful interactions – and certainly from my perspective the most stimulating section of the book – were with girls in the eight to eleven age range, discussing their current taste in television programs. In her excellent methodology section on 'Researching Girl Power with Girls' (Chapter 5) she explains the limitations and advantages of this approach clearly. In the following chapters, she describes her observations in the playground, the audio recorded discussions she has with the girls and

the video recordings they make with their dolls. This section is particularly eye-opening as one group of girls spontaneously tell a complex story of the underground railway and slavery with their Bratz dolls.

Hains claims that the importance of feminist parenting emerged from the study (p. 263), but I disagree, having only seen a few clear examples of girls who had described their parents' feminist beliefs and the subsequent influence on their own thinking. However, I support her other claims, which include effectively demonstrating a need for curriculum-driven pre-teen programming, the usefulness of engaging with children themselves in any study on children's taste and interactions, and her finding that 'girl power' failed in many instances to empower individual girls in their embodied realities. Hains' emphasis on the difference (race, socio-economic background, neighbourhood) between girls was useful, supporting feminist theorists such as bell hooks who have reminded feminists for many years of our divergent realities as well as our (sometimes) united aims. Ultimately, this text is a useful contribution to the fields of methodology in qualitative data collection, and cultural, feminist and gender studies – and, I am now convinced, 'girl studies' itself.

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**Halberstam, Judith, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2011, ISBN 9 7808 2235 0453, 211 pp., US\$22.99.**

I don't know how *The Queer Art of Failure* will seem to the pathologically successful, culturally normative reader. Almost two-thirds of the way through this sylph-thin volume (p. 116 of 187 pages), Halberstam quotes Naylan Blake writing on Julie Bamber's seascapes: 'From a place of completion we gaze into a haze of potential that arrests our gaze but offers nothing back that could orient us.'

Halberstam can be disorienting in this way, and that is sometimes true of this book too – more or less depending on your acquaintance with the unexpected and your willingness to embrace not only failure but what she concludes is its queered doppelganger 'the hopelessly goofy' (p. 189). Some of the texts (a term I use in the broadest sense) interrogated and