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Riot Grrrl and Girl Zines: Intersectional Feminist Art in Action

Paige Szmodis

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Submitted to the faculty of Ursinus College in fulfillment of the requirements for

Honors in Gender and Women's Studies

Abstract

This project examines the Riot Grrrl punk feminist movement of the 1990s and its production of girl zines as artistic, cultural, and political artifacts. Zines, or self-produced and self-published magazines, allowed young women access to DIY (do-it-yourself) mediums for self-representation. As Riot Grrrl's third-wave feminist consciousness and cultural production tactics spread to more girls throughout the 90s, zines became a primary method of communication and community-building for girls in the movement and on the outskirts of the scene. From girl zines in the Barnard Zine Library, I gathered data to map over 600 zines from the 1990s in the United States to show how girls used zines to form non-geographical communities. In addition to being neither private nor public, zines also disrupt binary formations between the mind/body, producer/consumer, and personal/political discussed in each chapter. In Chapter 1, I analyze both the content and materiality of girl zines such as Nomy Lamm's *i'm so fucking beautiful* and Lauren Jade Martin's *You Might As Well Live* among others to show how they challenge the patriarchal mind/body dualism by applying political consciousness to personal experiences. In Chapter 2, I examine how girl zines like Marie's *Rock Candy* emphasize communication and community-building as tactics that blur traditional hierarchies between producers and consumers. In opposition to many scholars' construction of Riot Grrrl as only a cultural or personal revolution, my third and final chapter claims that girl zine creators were actually developing accessible and experimental third-wave political strategies that feminists can continue in the 21st century.

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Introduction

Private/Public: Mapping Non-Geographical Girl Zine Communities

"Riot Grrrl is……
BECAUSE us girls crave records and books and fanzines that speak to US that WE feel included in and can understand in our own ways.
BECAUSE we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.
BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own moanings."

— Bikini Kill, *Girl Power* No. 2

In an early Riot Grrrl manifesto, the creators of the band and zine Bikini Kill declared the purpose of the 1990's Riot Grrrl movement to "make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work" and "take over the means of production in order to create our own [meanings]" through records and zines. In cities with thriving underground punk scenes such as Washington, D.C. and Olympia, Washington, bands like Bikini Kill spread feminist politics through their music and promoted a "girls to the front" ideology in the punk scene. But Riot Grrrl was more than just a new music scene for angry young feminists; the movement combined punk subcultures with third-wave feminist consciousness to encourage young women all over the country to create their own cultural production including music, art, and zines. In response to both a predominantly male punk scene and exclusionary second-wave feminism, riot grrrls wanted to "[put] the punk back into feminism, and feminism into punk" (*Riot Grrrl NYC*). Riot Grrrl's third-wave feminist consciousness and cultural production tactics spread to more and more girls throughout the 1990s. Zines became a method of communication and community-building used by girls both in the Riot Grrrl movement and on the outskirts of the scene.

Zines are self-produced, self-published, and self-distributed mini-magazines that typically have a small circulation. "Fanzines" originally began in the 1930s from science fiction fan communities, but were generally shortened to "zines" when used by the 1970s punk movement (Duncombe 11). These underground subcultures employed DIY (do-it-yourself) ethics. As a

result, zines as noncommercial and nonprofessional publications were usually printed with photocopiers and distributed for sharing the views of the creator(s) rather than for profit. Riot Grrrl zines in particular tended to blend genres of fanzines, art zines, literary zines, comics, political zines, and personal zines (or "perzines"). Therefore, the girl zines referenced in this project typically express personal and political consciousness with combinations of textual and visual content.

Zines provide a medium for self-representation for girls who have been traditionally silenced and excluded from participating in artistic production in mainstream media and society. Even though the punk scene remained male-dominated, punk DIY mediums still allowed girls access to their own media forms to create spaces to share their punk feminist ideology. As a result, zines became a primary form of communication within the Riot Grrrl scene. Though the Riot Grrrl movement can be traced back to origins in Olympia and D.C., zines allowed its ideology to spread because they were primarily distributed through mail. Some of these zines were created in affiliation with bands, such as the band Bikini Kill's zine of the same name and Bratmobile's *Girl Germs*. However, Riot Grrrl zines were not limited to band members and fans in this physical community. Zines permitted more young girls who were geographically isolated from punk scenes access to punk and feminist politics, but they also enabled mainstream media attention, especially through teen girl magazines such as *Sassy*'s Zine of the Month column. Magazines like *Sassy* and *Seventeen* became the center of conflicts between riot grrrls' desire for self-representation and the media's attempt to commodify the movement, causing many Riot Grrrl chapters to begin an unofficial media blackout by 1992 (Marcus 234-35).

Though many original Riot Grrrl bands and chapters disbanded by the mid to late 1990s, zine scholar Stephen Duncombe assesses in *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of*

Alternative Culture that the zine scene was at its height with the most publications circulating in 1997, though the exact number is difficult to estimate (17). Because Riot Grrrl began encouraging more girls to make their own zines in the early 90s, this increase in publications may have been a result of more young women starting their own zines, whether or not they identified as riot grrrls themselves. Whether directly or indirectly, Riot Grrrl inspired them to take control of the means of cultural production. More teenage girls resisted their positions in society as passive consumers and turned into producers and pop-culture critics through zines.

Though Riot Grrrl also became a label applied to a genre of girl punk music, the use of "Riot Grrrl" as a self-identifier and term for the broader movement actually began through zines and letters between girls involved in the scene. Tobi Vail, the creator of the zine *Jigsaw* in 1988 and founding member of Bikini Kill, first coined "grrrl" by labeling her zine an "angry grrrl zine." Jen Smith and Allison Wolfe added the "riot" to Vail's "grrrl" after exchanging letters in response to the 1991 Mount Pleasant race riots with a line that read something like: "We need a girl riot" (Marcus 72-73). Later, Molly Neuman and Allison Wolfe of Bratmobile and Tobi Vail and Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill collaborated on a new zine called *Riot Grrrl*—the growling triple r acting as a feminist reclamation of "girl" from its derogatory connotations. Through these zines, riot grrrls made feminism relevant to younger women, though the ages of girl zine creators ranged from young teen girls at fourteen or fifteen to young women in their twenties. Zines were at the center of Riot Grrrl's formation, continuation, and expansion of girl-powered productions throughout the 1990s.

While a growing number of scholars have acknowledged and written about the significance of the Riot Grrrl movement and its impact on third-wave feminism, my project seeks to further explore and analyze how girl zines embody Riot Grrrl's third-wave

consciousness-raising. Because of the growing literature about the history of Riot Grrrl, several zines have been "canonized" due to their popularity within Riot Grrrl scenes at the time. For example, zines such as *Bikini Kill*, *Jigsaw*, *Girl Germs*, and *Riot Grrrl: a free weekly minizine* have been copied in anthologies and acknowledged as foundational Riot Grrrl texts, especially because their creators Kathleen Hanna, Tobi Vail, Molly Neuman, and Allison Wolfe were associated with original Riot Grrrl bands, Bikini Kill and Bratmobile. Other Riot Grrrl zines such as *Evolution of a Race Riot* by Mimi Nguyen and *i'm so fucking beautiful* by Nomy Lamm, among others, have been studied critically due to the intersectional perspectives they bring to issues such as race, class, body type, ability, and sexuality. While my project is concerned with the impact of these notable zines, I will also include lesser-known zines by girls who are queer, people of color, fat, disabled, and from lower or working-class backgrounds. Some of these girl zine creators were younger than the college-aged riot grrrls in the original scene, and some may not have even identified as riot grrrls themselves. With these zines, such as *With Heart in Mouth*, *Wild Honey Pie*, *Rock Candy*, *Gunk,* and more, I seek to better understand what the Riot Grrrl community and zine network meant to girls on the margins of the Riot Grrrl scene. Girls who were geographically isolated from central Riot Grrrl locations were often also marginalized by other identities, and therefore needed access to zines even more to express themselves and form non-local communities. Because girl zines creators were often marginalized by both identity and geography, zines became a space for them to reflect their liminal positioning in society.

As previously mentioned, many scholarly introductions to Riot Grrrl emphasize the cities of Olympia, WA, and Washington, D.C., as original urban centers of the movement. However, zines were not bound to these specific underground scenes. Scholars have noted how zines enabled the formation of non-geographical communities through the mail that anticipated the

internet's establishment of non-geographical communities as the norm. Because zines did not rely on physical contact the way many other punk or underground communities did in the 1990s, Jennifer Sinor writes that the "zine community is difficult to name, categorize, or map" in her essay, "Another Form of Crying: Girl Zines as Life Writing" (253). However, unlike most content found on the internet, zines are still material objects that arise out of and can be tracked back to a specific physical contexts through their mailing addresses. Because their materiality remains important to many zine creators and scholars, I chose to map girl zines found in anthologies, archives, and zine reviews from the 1990s in the United States to better understand the girl zine network and their relation to physical contexts as part of this project. I gathered data for this mapping portion of the project through girl zine anthologies as well as reviews and listings from girl zines in the Barnard Zine Library at Barnard College.

The theory that informs the creation and analysis of this map is Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender.* Massey constructs a feminist visualization of geography, claiming that "geography matters in the construction of gender" (2). A central part of her argument is that "space must be conceptualized integrally with time," with time coded as masculine and linear and space being perceived as an absence, static, and feminine (2). Rather than viewing space as passive and therefore depoliticized, geographical analysis must challenge this space/time dualism because it "connects directly with a wider philosophical debate in which gendering and the construction of gender relations are central" (6). Therefore, the spaces discussed in reference to zines are inherently political and relate to a broader argument about how girl zine creators defy binaries between urban and rural and private and public spaces while creating their art. In her theorization of space, Massey shows how the "identities of place" relate to personal identities since they are also "multiple, shifting, possibly unbounded" (8). One central question throughout

my research, including this mapping project and beyond, is how much the zine network and community allowed isolated or marginalized girls to transcend their geography and better understand their personal lived experiences and identities.

Mapping girl zines from the 90s can show how zines allowed ideologies like Riot Grrrl to spread beyond physical communities such as Olympia and D.C. to more suburban and rural areas. Because zines are not limited by geography, they were essential in developing underground communities. Duncombe reflects that this "idea of zines holding a scene together is not new" and coins the term "virtual bohemia" to describe non-geographical zine communities (61). Similarly, Alison Piepmeier writes in *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* that "zines emerging from locations not known for having alternative or bohemian subcultures are the most interesting" because they represent how "girls and women create community and identity in the absence of a supportive in-person community" (21). My map shows how girl zines were both influenced by physical communities and created new non-geographical networks (see fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Riot Grrrl and Girl Zines,
https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1JfXI0tfQjxzrlQhoDCx6pCjZ6R4&hl

As expected, the map shows an abundance of zines on the East and West coasts, particularly around Olympia and Seattle and Washington D.C. where zines were a central part of a larger underground Riot Grrrl punk scene. The map does show more urban areas other than Olympia, Seattle, and DC where girl zines seemed to flourish, including New York City, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Minneapolis, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Boston. Geographical location certainly plays a role, but does not illustrate clear rules about how zine communities formed. On one hand, the presence of a physical underground punk feminist scenes in cities and college campuses can encourage more girls to create zines in those areas. On the other hand, girls who are geographically isolated from these areas are often still inspired by zines to build non-localized communities to find girls with similar ideologies and experiences. Therefore, girl zines are neither urban nor rural, local or universal, private or public; they reflect the liminal, ambiguous positions of their creators by disrupting these binary formations.

Although this map is only a sample of all of the girl zines from the 1990s, it illustrates the wide geographical distribution of girls contributing to the mass cultural production of zines across the United States. Dispelling the assumption of zines being predominately from urban subcultures, Duncombe's study of the geography of zines "found an almost two-to-one ratio in favor of small-city/suburban/rural origin over large urban areas" (17-18). Though my map focuses on girl zines from the 90s, the distribution of locations also indicates a large amount of zines outside the large urban areas that were considered centers for the Riot Grrrl movement. Many zines were also spread out in suburban and rural areas around Florida, outside of D.C. and Detroit, throughout New England, Eastern Pennsylvania, Northern Ohio, and more. In addition, 45 out of 50 states on the map are represented by at least one zine, excluding the rural states of

Montana, Nevada, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Carolina. While the map's zine distribution is affected by population density, my map shows that there is clearly not an absence of zines in rural areas or urban areas between the East and West coasts.

While zines are not necessarily bound by geography, they can still be influenced by physical location. I want to acknowledge the ways that zines are influenced by local and private spaces because, as Massey notes, there is an association between the feminine and local because of the assumption that "women lead more local lives than do men" which causes local and privates spaces to be denigrated (9). Even though zines are not clearly limited to urban, suburban, or rural areas, the map shows how local setting plays a role in the geography of girl zines, particularly because zines typically appear around colleges. Because many riot grrrls created zines during their college careers, many of the zines on the map center around college campuses. For instance, Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, is often referenced as a center where Riot Grrrl ideology and zines spread due to the attendance of prominent riot grrrls and its progressive and nontraditional liberal arts education. Some of these other colleges include the University of Oregon and the University of California, Berkley, and smaller liberal arts or women's colleges such as Oberlin College, Mt. Holyoke, Bard College, Wesleyan, and Hampshire College, among others. Clearly physical location, in this case proximity to colleges, can indicate trends in what spaces and times girls were empowered to create their own zines.

While this map functions as original evidence of how zines form non-geographical communities, girl zine creators also discuss how they form these communities within their zines. For instance, in Issue 1 of *Photobooth Toolbox*, Andrea Fernandez writes that "my 'scene' is not bound by geographical boundaries" (273). Similarly, other girl zine creators engage with physical space and geography in their zines through imagery. Kristy Chan includes an image of

her mailbox, a liminal space in a bare and isolated setting, in the conclusion to Issue 9 of *Wild Honey Pie* (see fig. 2). While the setting of this photograph reflects disengagement from physical communities, Chan contrasts this isolation with a request for her readers to communicate with her through mail. Similarly, other zines use images of maps, showing how their zines allow them to reflect on how their location impacts their social relations. In *Red-Hooded Sweatshirt* Issue 2, Marissa Falco displays a map of the United States with text labeling locations "Where I might be found" (see fig. 3). This map functions as a visual representation of Falco's desire to travel. Therefore, zines document where creators are from and where they have traveled, but they also provide hopeful projections for future travels and experiences for girls who may lack agency and mobility. Issue 26 of *Looks Yellow, Tastes Red* and Issue 3 of *Not Sorry* both include maps as a background to their text that discusses their relation to their location and past and present social communities. As a result, geography is a theme present throughout girl zines that attempt to understand their creators' identities in relation to space. While zines are rooted in these physical locations, they also enable their creators to transcend location in some ways by building non-geographical communities among otherwise isolated girls.

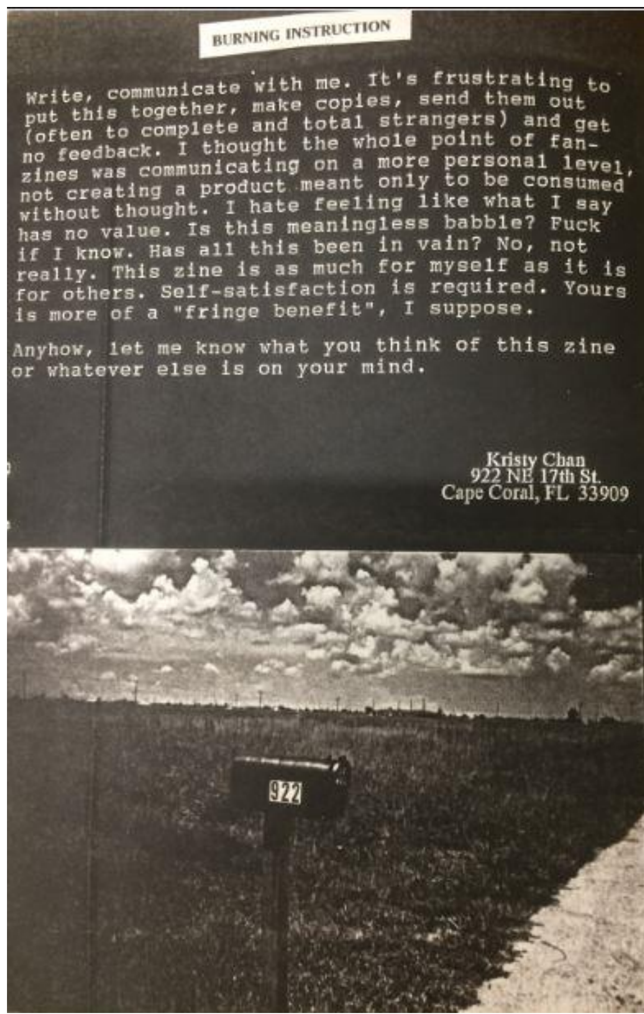


Fig 2. Page from *Wild Honey Pie* Issue 9 by Kristy Chan.

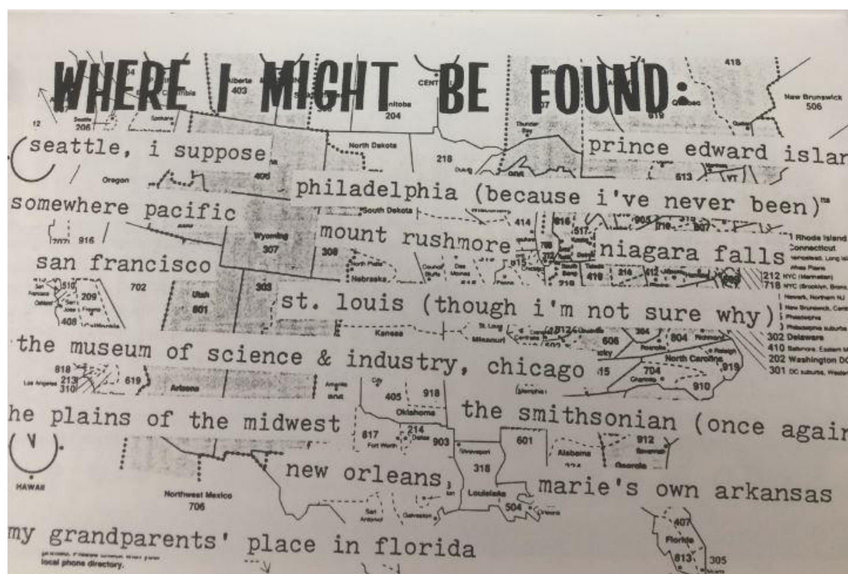


Fig. 3 Page from *Red-Hooded Sweatshirt* Issue 2 by Marissa Falco, courtesy of creator.

In addition to girl zines' discussion of geography in their content, zines work to bridge the gaps between private and public spaces by articulating personal lived experiences and sharing this content with others across the country. I also look to the materiality of girl zines to show how zines both embody the personal and local experiences of girls and transcend geography by being sent to girls in other locations. Zines' material production blur another binary here: though they are usually mass copied through Xerox machines and can be sent to a wide audience through mail, their material elements also provide a more personal connection between the creator and reader. The final, tangible product—including elements such as size, pasted images, typography, and other sculptural elements—creates more intimate connection between artist and audience. Because zines connect otherwise separated girls across various locations, their materiality stands in for the girls' physical contact.

In Chapter 1, I analyze the materiality of girl zines as extensions of their creators' bodies to understand how girls represent their intersectional and ambiguous identities in their work. I draw on feminist literary theory such as Susan Gubar's "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," Hélène Cixous' "l'écriture feminine," and Gloria Anzaldúa's "La conciencia de la mestiza" to show how girl zine creators express their bodies in their writing to embrace ambiguity and contradiction in their personal lives and identities. I focus on zines about body image and race as examples of visible marginalized identities that are displayed through zines' materiality. In Part 1, Nomy Lamm's *i'm so fucking beautiful* as well as Anna Whitehead's *With Heart in Mouth* and Sarah From's *The Pisces Ladybug* illustrate how zines' materiality can expose the process of creation to engage the audience with their process of reclaiming their bodies through their art. In Part 2, zines by women of color such as Lauren Jade Martin, Mimi Nguyen, and Ramdasha Bikceem similarly display intersectional and conflicting identities in

zines, but they also demonstrate how this materiality makes zines an appropriate medium for girls with marginalized identities who may exist on the margins of the Riot Grrrl scene. This chapter concludes that girl zines challenge the patriarchal mind/body dualism by using zines' content and material form to showcase their process of applying political consciousness to personal experiences.

In Chapter 2, I analyze girl zines that emphasize communication and community-building as tactics that blur traditional boundaries between producers and consumers. In addition to encouraging more girls to become producers of zines, girl zines such as *Rock Candy, Wild Honey Pie*, *Out of the Vortex,* and *Silver Rocket* discussed in Part 1 also equally promote critical consumption of other girl zines and mainstream media. Using cultural theorists like John Fiske, Michel de Certeau, and Luce Irigaray, I contend that through alternative communication tactics, girl zine creators resist dominant society's commodification of their art and their lives. In Part 2, excerpts from zines *Riot Grrrl NYC, Nothing*, *Cupsize*, and *Starache* demonstrate direct responses to teen girl magazines that resist the mainstream media's attempt to commodify and depoliticize the Riot Grrrl movement and ideology. Part 3 explores how girl zines' anti-consumerist and anti-capitalist distribution systems reflect a tradition of women's alternative media strategies. While feminist independent media has never fully escaped patriarchal capitalist structures, they defy traditional publishing strategies that divide producers and consumers to build new collaborative and communicative feminist communities.

In Chapter 3, I challenge many scholars' construction of Riot Grrrl as solely a cultural movement for personal empowerment. Despite girl zines' personal essays, their materiality and distribution explained in Chapters 1 and 2 expose how zines extend the private, personal sphere into public, political consciousness-raising. Zines acts as accessible and liminal spaces for girls

to construct intersectional identities and embodied communities outside of patriarchal, capitalist dominant discourses. In response to Duncombe's term of "pre-political" and Piepmeier's use of "micro-political," I use examples from *Bikini Kill*, *Wild Honey Pie, Coming Out Party*, *Silver Rocket,* and *You Might As Well Live* to reveal how girl zines directly contribute to political dialogues and activism. These young girls reject traditional forms of second-wave political action to develop more accessible and experimental third-wave political strategies.

Each of these chapters focus on how zines use materiality and content to blur multiple binary formations—including the private/public, mind/body, producer/consumer, and cultural/political—that all contribute to the feminist goal to make the personal political. While second-wave feminists articulated this connection, third-wave feminists like riot grrrls and girl zine creators were able to practice both politicizing their personal lives and personalizing politics in their zines. Rather than viewing these third-wave consciousness-raising tactics as purely personal empowerment or cultural activism, I contend that Riot Grrrl and girl zine creators contributed to larger third-wave feminist political movement by putting their intersectional art into action.

[The following three chapters also contain images from zines in the Barnard Zine Library. Thank you to the creators Nomy Lamm, Anna Martine Whitehead, Marissa Falco, and Sarah From for permission to include images from their works. Thank you to Barnard's zine librarian, Jenna Freedman, for helping me get in contact with zine creators as well. Though some creators were unable to be contacted, their images can be removed upon request.]

Chapter I

Mind/Body: Zine Materiality and Marginalized Identities

> *"Because i live in a world that hates women and i am one… who is struggling desperately not to hate myself and my best girlfriends, my whole life is constantly felt, by me, as a contradiction. In order for me to exist, i must believe that two contradictory things can exist in the same space."*
>
> —Kathleen Hanna, "Jigsaw Youth," *Jigsaw* No. 4 (Piepmeier 87).

Most riot grrrls and girl zine creators emphasize similar purposes for writing their zines: to express personal experiences but also to form communities, to educate and empower themselves while encouraging other girls to create, and to show how intersectional experiences are both personal and political. These wide variety of themes often relate to an overarching tactic of disrupting binaries. Prominent riot grrrl Kathleen Hanna even declares embracing these contradictory binaries as necessary "in order for me to exist" in Issue 4 of Tobi Vail's zine *Jigsaw*. Zines serve as this material "space" to accept ambiguity and contradiction in girls' personal lives and broader society. Zine scholars have shown before how zines' materiality, or their tangible physical form, "becomes part of the message from zine creators to their audience" (Duncombe 103). Despite this awareness of zines as paper artifacts, Alison Piepmeier argues that "few have analyzed zines' materiality as a significant component of their cultural functioning" (62). Moving beyond the interpretation that zine materiality simply affects the readers' relationship to the text, scholars must analyze how both the material and textual elements of girl zines function together to blur the traditional binary between content and form.

Western enlightenment philosophies have long promoted this divide between content/form and mind/body. Feminist theorists have shown how this mind/body dualism perpetuates gender binaries between the masculine and feminine by subordinating women to the position of the object or body, incapable of contributing to universal thought from a masculine

subject position. As Judith Butler states, “The split between form and content corresponds to the artificial philosophical distinction between abstract, universal thought and concrete, material reality” (Butler 162). Like the traditional hierarchy between mind and body, evaluating content has similarly been valued over critical analysis of material forms. In zines, however, materiality becomes just as important as content with their sculptural and visual elements often engaging with the written text. Through this comparison of mind/body and content/form dualisms, zines’ form expresses the body and connects the creators’ material realities to more abstract theoretical and political content.

While some feminist theories about writing from the body risk essentialism, or reducing women’s ability to create art to their biology and reproductive organs, they provide a foundation for understanding how women artists can use their bodies *and* minds to disrupt the Cartesian mind/body dualism. For instance, in “‘The Blank Page’ and the Issues of Female Creativity,” Susan Gubar discusses the tradition of male artists creating women as artistic objects. This dualism equates men with the symbol of the pen or tool and women with the canvas or text. As a result of women’s traditional position as object or “artifact,” Gubar concludes that “many women experience their own bodies as the only available medium for their art” (296). Through the accessible medium of zines, riot grrrls also represent their bodies in their art while resisting their marginalization in a male-dominated punk scene. Zines both engage the creator’s body in the process of creating the work and act as a representation of their bodily experiences through discussions on personal experiences and intersectional identities.

Girl zine creators also practice Hélène Cixous’ “l’écriture feminine," a new style of women’s writing that connects the female body with authorship and resists phallocentric rhetoric. Zines reflect Cixous’ call for “female-sexed texts” that publically discuss female

sexuality and reject traditional grammar conventions (415). Zines specifically provide an accessible medium for girls and women, such as Gubar's "blank page" or Cixous' "l'écriture feminine," because they engage the body in the practice of creating art. Because "the body is the only accessible medium for self-expression" traditionally available for women (Gubar 296), girls use zines as an intentional tactic to combine discussions of political or abstract themes with their personal, lived experiences. As a result, third-wave girl zines are actually able to enact the second-wave feminist philosophy of making the personal political.

The combination of the personal and political within zines allows girls to develop a political feminist consciousness that helps them understand their personal experiences that provide seemingly contradictory identities and feelings. Like Hanna's awareness of her own contradictions, zines' creative process allows contradictory experiences, often from intersecting marginalized identities, to co-exist. Gubar not only equates women's creativity to the body and reproduction, but argues that this similarity to biological creativity can cause women to experience creativity as a "violation, a belated reaction to male penetration rather than a possessing and controlling" (302). However, most creators of zines do not equate the process of creation to this "painful wounding" (296). Creative processes for making zines do not require the appropriation of masculine language or forms or the same suffering as childbirth. Rather, zines generally allow girls to engage in processes of healing by embodying fragmented identities and refusing the mind/body split to become coherent subjects and artists.

Zines also succeed at blurring the personal and political through their positioning in both private and public spaces. While most zine scholarship acknowledges the political power of girls' writing, Jennifer Sinor explains how the "kind of writing," specifically the autobiographical "life writing" of their zines, matters as well (245). Traditionally, women have

been restricted to private, domestic realms, generally unable to create art in a public setting. As a result, women writers have been attracted to “personal forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals” because they reflect “life experiences as an art or an art experiences as a kind of life” (Gubar 299). Marisa Meltzer also noted the connection of zines with diaries because they can be created in a private space like teenage girls’ bedrooms. However, she later stated how “riot grrrl sought to link these individual bedrooms and to make modern girlhood less of an isolated event to endure” (14). Zines, especially personal zines, often reflect this tradition of girls’ use of personal writing as self-expression, but zines are distinct from genres like diaries and letters due to their ability to move from personal spaces into the public realm to build community between women. Therefore, zines work to break down the boundaries between the personal and political through their liminal position between private and public spaces.

Zines’ position between the personal/political and the private/public also relates to Gloria Anzaldúa’s “La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness” through zine creators’ tolerance for ambiguity. Despite Anzaldúa’s focus on the mestiza and Chicana identities, her borderlands consciousness can apply to people in any marginalized position who may suffer from “multiple, often opposing messages” from different cultures (234). For Anzaldúa, the work of a mestiza consciousness is meant to promote “a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness” (236). Adela Licona similarly builds on Anzaldúa’s borderlands rhetoric to suggest that zines inhabit a “third space of ambiguity and contradiction” that rejects the binary formation of “either/or” and embraces “both/and” instead (11, 14). As a result, I apply Anzaldúa’s new consciousness and borderlands theories to zines in this chapter

because they embrace ambiguity and explore contradictions in girls' lives and those marginalized by race and size in particular.

These feminist theories of women's creativity provide a foundation for understanding the role of the body when girls create zines. Rather than viewing materiality as secondary to the content, I argue that girls intentionally use zines' materiality as an accessible and interactive tactic to express themes of the body. Girls not only share personal lived experiences as women of color, queer, fat, disabled, or any intersection of marginalized identities, but they also politicize their bodies while sharing their zines. Their materiality is necessary to show the blurring of personal and political content precisely because "the zine medium doesn't demand that girls and women abandon their bodies in order to experience empowerment but provides them with tools for resistance within an embodied space" (Piepmeier 84). Like Cixous and Gubar's theories on new forms of women's creativity, zines allow girls to locate and display their bodies in their work. But instead of relegating these girls to an object position in contrast to the universal male artist, my analysis of zines' content and materiality shows how girls use their minds *and* bodies in their creative processes.

While other publications certainly have material forms as well, zines' materiality makes them distinct as an appropriate medium for interactive and intersectional work. The materiality of girl zines can encompass several elements, including the zine's overall physical form, its size, typography, any sculptural elements like cut-and-paste images, stickers, ribbons, and so on. Stressing the importance of materiality, Piepmeier acknowledges that "zines are not merely words on a page: they are material artifacts that must be examined with attention to their visual and sculptural elements as components of their meaning" (18). Zines specifically function as an appropriate medium for ambiguous work because they are not restricted by formal publishing

standards of mainstream media and other publications (Piepmeier 128). As a result, zines can change titles, sizes and formats, themes and subject matter at any point based on the creator's preference. Zines can be a one-off issue or a long series of issues published under any time frame, and some creators publish their zines under pseudonyms or use only their first names.

This process of control that girls practice over their zines also suggests that materiality can help girls extend this control to their own bodies and experiences. Through their experimental potential, "zines offer a space for people to try out new personalities, ideas, and politics" (Duncombe 48). Because of the individuality that zines' accessible materiality provides, girl zine creators can embrace and display the ambiguities or contradictions in their own identities and experiences. Stephen Duncombe also notes that "zines offer a way for their publishers to 'package' the complexity of themselves and share it with others" (43). Zines' materiality puts the process of understanding the self on display to share one's experience and ideas. The interaction between textual and visual content and other material elements creates a more personal, intimate connection between the creator and reader. Due to the personal themes prevalent in girl zines, zines as material objects function as an extension of the creator's body by embodying their intersectional life experiences and sharing them with a wider audience.

The physical process of creating zines demonstrates how creators express their bodily experience through materiality as well as their content. Piepmeier explains that "the physical act of creating a zine locates zine creators in their bodies or helps them connect to their bodies" (80). For example, she quotes Nomy Lamm's description of the creation process: "There's something about when you feel something really intensely and you're hitting the keys and it's like, it's much more of a visceral experience" (81). Even though zines may be reproduced into hundreds of copies through a Xerox machine, this process is still described as a pleasurable, physical

experience. Mimi Nyugen similarly described, “I used to have a *thing* for Xerox copiers. For a girl obsessed with ‘zine-ing, it was, after all, only natural that I develop an equally fervent love-object relationship to the machine” (Piepmeier 81). Describing her Xerox machine as “my big dumb prosthesis,” Nguyen relates zines to a literal extension of her body (Piepmeier 81). Like Gubar and Cixous, Nyugen connects female creativity to her sexuality, though she describes the Xerox machine as both a phallic tool and a process of reproduction, neither solely masculine nor feminine. While Piepmeier uses these descriptions to interpret zines as material gifts made for their community, I want to emphasize this materiality as created equally for the creator and their audience through a balance of personal and political content displayed through materiality that is both self-representative and interactive.

In this chapter, I will focus on zines regarding race and body image and size as examples of marginalized identities that intersect with gender issues. Race and body type, like gender, are particularly expressed through physical appearance and the body, which makes their content more relevant to discuss in terms of materiality than less visible forms of marginalization such as sexuality or class. I question how Riot Grrrl strategies such as zines may be more accessible to girls on the outskirts of the community, both by physical geography and due to marginalized identities. Beginning with body image zines like Nomy Lamm’s *i’m so fucking beautiful*, I propose that girl zines embody their creators’ intersectional experiences and the interactive elements of zine materiality helps create community between the creator and their audience.

Part I: Body Image and Materiality

An influential Riot Grrrl zine on body image and fatphobia, *i’m so fucking beautiful* consists of 3 issues starting in 1991 when Lamm was just seventeen (Piepmeier 59). While many girl zines discuss body image issues, *i’m so fucking beautiful* is entirely comprised of personal

essays and illustrations that promote body positivity, reclaim the word "fat," rebel against social standards of beauty, and fight fat oppression in Lamm herself, the punk community, and general society. In Issue 2, Lamm lists three reasons why she's doing the zine: as a personal creative outlet, to help others learn to love their bodies, and because "fat politics are not just a personal thing" (261). Lamm's awareness of the need to reassess personal internalization of fatphobia and sexism as well as her confrontation of political power structures reflects the multiple layers of work that other Riot Grrrl zines enact as well: they are both about personal liberation and political consciousness. This zine not only reflects common Riot Grrrl themes exploring ambiguity and contradiction and combining the personal and political, it also uses material elements like the zine's size, font styles and typography, and other visuals to physically engage her audience with controversial subjects. Though these material details exist in books and other publications, Lamm and other zine creators deliberately manipulate the materiality in experimental ways to "help shape a reader's experience and understanding" (Piepmeier 60). As Lamm records her lived experience, the zine embodies her intersectional identities, as a fat, disabled, queer woman, but also connects them to broader political issues and a larger audience to blur lines between the personal and political in relation to the body.

The material elements that I will analyze in relation to the content of *i'm so fucking beautiful* include the overall text's physical format that exposes the process of creation, visual combinations of text and images through typography and illustrations, and interactive potentials and engagements with the audience. These ambiguous and contradictory elements are all exhibited in *i'm so fucking beautiful*, but I will show how they are common tactics incorporated into other girl zines as well.

First, the overall form and scale of a zine can impact its meaning. While many zines are created in a half-legal size from folded and stapled 8 ½ in x 11 inch paper, they also provide space for experimentation that can reinforce certain meanings. For example, Piepmeier notes in her analysis of *i'm so fucking beautiful* that Issue 2.5 is smaller than most, slightly larger than a business card, making its scale and form "in tension with the content" (60). However, Piepmeier's analysis ends at acknowledging the irony of creating a zine about body image with a small scale. The content of the zine provides more of an explanation of Lamm's deliberate departure from traditional zine sizes. Lamm writes Issue 2.5 to an audience of thin girls specifically, claiming that "this zine is for those of you with skinny privilege. and this is the LAST time that I'm gonna point out yr privilege/fucking abusiveness for you." While all of Lamm's content on body image and fatphobia can be used as an educational tool for people of all sizes, she creates a small, half issue to specifically respond to and address concepts of thin privilege. With this content and purpose in mind, it appears as though Lamm chose this small format as if to declare that she is not going to waste space or a full issue to educate thin people on their privilege. Although this education is clearly important enough for Lamm to make this issue in the first place, this format seems to emphasize the issue with people with privilege demanding marginalized people to do the work of educating them instead of seeking out information themselves. For example, she concludes that "(if you don't understand then please don't ask me because that means you're missing the point entirely. talk to someone else about what you think all of this might mean.)" Here, Lamm makes a statement about her priority for discussing her personal experiences, rather than just educating others, through her choice of material format.

Other elements of zine materiality are also meant to show the process of creation rather than a polished final product. Words are crossed out and corrected, spelling and grammatical errors are often let go, and the pages can often be further manipulated by their reader. Duncombe explains how this handmade, physical form "complements their personal nature" because "the hands of the creator are often clearly visible in the publication" (Duncombe 103). Not only is this do-it-yourself method "with unruly cut-and-paste layout, barely legible type, and uneven reproduction" meant to encourage readers to participate in the community by making their own zine (Duncombe 4), this exposed materiality also more directly connects the creator to the reader. Piepmeier similarly writes how this DIY approach "demystifies the medium" as "a means of resisting consumer capitalism," explaining that "something that's a process isn't a product, a commodity to be consumed" (168). Therefore, this exposure of the creative process in zines' materiality helps break down the divide between artist and consumer.

This physical process of creation also reflects contradictory content and the process of learning such as becoming more politically and socially aware and deconstructing internalized ideas about gender, race, class, body image, ability, etc. Similarly, Lamm's zine reflects this process of learning and embracing contradictions through an exposed materiality. In the introduction to her second issue of *i'm so fucking beautiful*, Lamm writes:

> when i first started doing zines i was too ashamed of my body to even say that i was fat. although i wanted my zines to be personal i couldn't bring myself to talk about my body because the only thing i could even think to say was 'why can't i lose weight?' by the time i wrote isfb #1 i had realized that i didn't have to hate my body, that i could be proud of my body, that i could be sexy, beautiful *a n d* fat (not a contradiction). i am still not at a point where i can say that i always love my body, that i never wish that i was

> thin… but i have come a long way. as i've said before, i'm always in process, i'm constantly learning. (246).

Because Lamm grapples with this process of loving her body, she must embrace a contradictory position between feeling hate and love, ugly and sexy, "beautiful *a n d* fat." The materiality's display of the process of creation reflects the political and personal progress shown in Lamm's writing.

Similarly, in Issue 3, Lamm exposes her process of relearning how to think about her body through her zine's content and typography. She writes about her rejection of sloganism, such as the title of "i'm so fucking beautiful," which means that she must discuss "all parts of fat oppression" and acknowledge "the times when i hate my body (my self)." Her zine itself embodies this contradictory position and her process of reclaiming the word "fat" and learning to love her body. Later in the same issue, Lamm writes an essay on the "mind/body separation" or "mind/body war," another dualism that she challenges while currently in an "ongoing process" to accept her body as part of herself. The ability for zines to show the editing process also allows Lamm to reveal her changing thoughts, such as her crossed out (but still visible) line that reads, "I view my body as a separate entity." Zine's display of creative and thought processes makes the process of education and creation accessible for the reader as well.

Lamm's writing also often starts with the personal, but she also reveals how her experiences can apply to other girls' lives. In Issue 2, she provides an example of her contradictory feelings on reasons why she has been feeling sexy (247). While this list begins with simple explanations like wearing a "neat purple sweatshirt," she eventually becomes more critical of her relationship with her body image. She reveals how she's internalized ideas equating thinness with beauty with a bolded line, "feeling hungry makes me feel sexy," and

further questions “what does it mean to ‘feel sexy’? is feeling sexy synonymous with feeling thin?” (247). Despite Lamm’s positive progress with body image, her examples of personal struggles and vulnerability also allows her young audience to relate to her and similarly re-evaluate their own relationship to their bodies. Piermeier similarly concludes that this sense of vulnerability through the “scrappy messiness” of a zine creates more “openness and availability for human contact” between the creator and reader (67). Whether one engages with zines as a creator or consumer, the materiality of zines helps “reconnect us to our bodies and to other human beings” to form what Piepmeier calls an “embodied community” (58). While Lamm showcases her development of her tolerance for ambiguity in her own journey, she promotes a new intersectional feminist consciousness for her audience too.

Although her zines often start off quite personal, they often become increasingly political as Lamm not only relates her lived experience to other girls, but situates them within an oppressive society. The “I’m So Fucking Beautiful” Manifesto written in August 1995 for her third issue uses a similar style of other Riot Grrrl manifestos with an emphasis on body image and fatphobia. She specifically seeks “to understand the place of fat oppression in the broader scheme of things” and “its interconnectedness with all forms of oppression.” In another essay in Issue 2, Lamm writes that “fat is definitely a political issue. fat oppression is an institutionalized form of oppression, just as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, able-bodyism, ageism, etc. are deeply rooted in, and in fact create the foundation of, Capitalist Amerika. our minds are totally colonized with lies about fat” (252). She reveals how fat-hating is not “just a personal choice made by an individual” but actually systemic through capitalism, the diet and fashion industry, job discrimination, the medical industry (252). Despite the political and academic nature of this informational essay, Lamm does not depersonalize her writing style. In the end she shows her

desire to blur academic and personal writing, asking “forgive me if i’m not a skillful enough writer to be able to write about ‘intellectual’ things without sounding like a textbook. i’m working on it” (256). Even this commentary on her writing style’s process is another example of how zines can expose the creative process in ways that other formal publications cannot.

Lamm’s illustrations also combine textual and visual art to connect her personal content to political commentary. In between written essays in Issue 3, Lamm includes an illustration of a fat female body, inscribed with text, and framed with a declaration that “This is not a marketable commodity” (see fig. 4). This visual clearly connects writing with the body. Therefore, Lamm’s commentary on a capitalist consumer culture positioning female bodies as commodities could also be referring her text and zine as well. She resists the commodification of her zine, and her body, here through a visual intersection of capitalist and gendered beauty ideal critiques.

Fig. 4. Image from *i’m so fucking beautiful* Issue 3 by Nomy Lamm, courtesy of creator.

In addition to blending writing styles, zines also allow their creators to play with font, including sizes and styles, to visually enhance their content. This typography is another example of blending textual and visual art. For example, Lamm employs repetition and rhetorical questions to confront her audience with internalized assumptions about bodies. In Issue 2, she writes, "if i were thin would my performance be more enjoyable for you? if i talk about sex are you wondering who in their right minds would have sex with me? …or maybe you're just thinking that you'd never have sex with me… when you watch fat people perform, what are you thinking? what are you thinking?" (258-59). Lamm's confrontational style here is reinforced through the formatting of her text. Throughout this passage, the word "sex" is bolded and the repeated line demanding "what are you thinking?" gets bolder and larger, taking up more space on the page to force the reader to engage in questioning their assumptions. Despite this critical tone, Lamm still does not alienate her reader, but attempts to relate to them by showing them her progress, asking "are you (like me) wondering if they've been 'educated' about fat oppression?" (258). Parenthesis are another stylistic tool that Lamm uses to bracket confrontational lines like "am i wasting my time?" to engage her reader to reflect on what they are learning from her work. This essay also ends with a visual reinforcement, a photo of herself performing with a microphone, that again asks "What are you thinking?" written below (260). Lamm employs visual representations of herself and manipulates her text through visual elements, showing how it is not enough to just analyze the textual content of zines. Lamm and others play with visuals through photos and illustrations as well as typography and formatting to emphasize certain messages.

On another page in Issue 3, a contributor to the zine plays with font size while commenting on how thinness is privileged in society and the punk scene. She writes, "Thin girls

wear: tight black pants / big white belts / punk rock bleached hair / small shirts / size small size small… Punk rock aesthetic says I don't fit / I don't fit I don't fit / size small" (see fig. 5). However, the text becomes difficult to read at times when a small font is printed over larger, bolder words in this passage. Small sizes are literally printed overtop, erasing larger words here to reflect the same celebration of small sizes in punk aesthetics. This playing with repetition and font size demonstrates the potential for zines to mirror content and physicality in a way that traditional written publications generally do not.

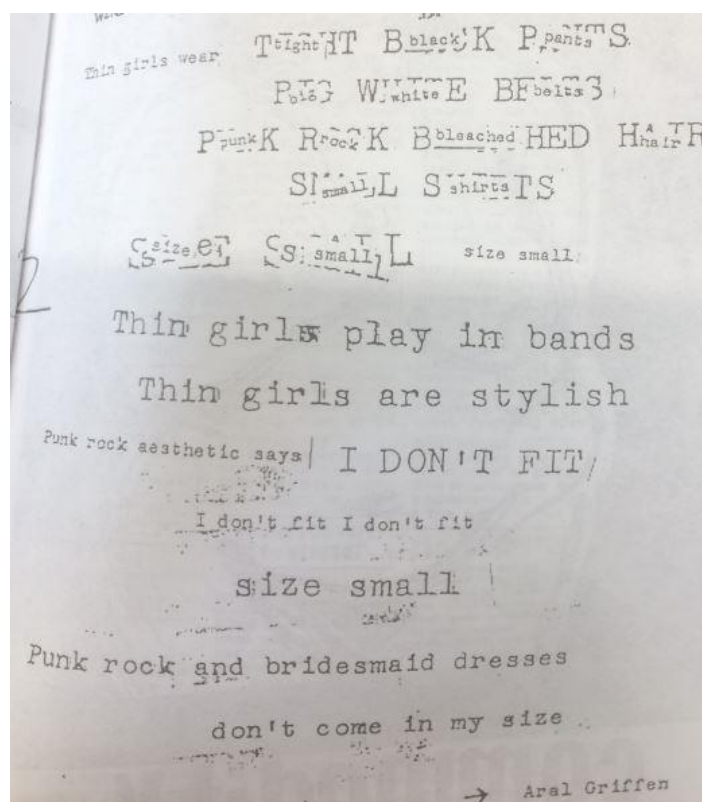


Fig. 5. Image from *i'm so fucking beautiful* Issue 3 by Nomy Lamm

Zines' materiality also allows the reader to engage with the text if the creator provides opportunities for their reader to physically manipulate the zine. For example, on the back of *i'm so fucking beautiful* Issue 2 with the mailing address, Lamm has drawn an open box, framed with text that reads "i'm in love with… you+me = revolution xo" (261). It appears to encourage the reader to paste a photo, potentially of themselves, into the box as a way to connect themselves

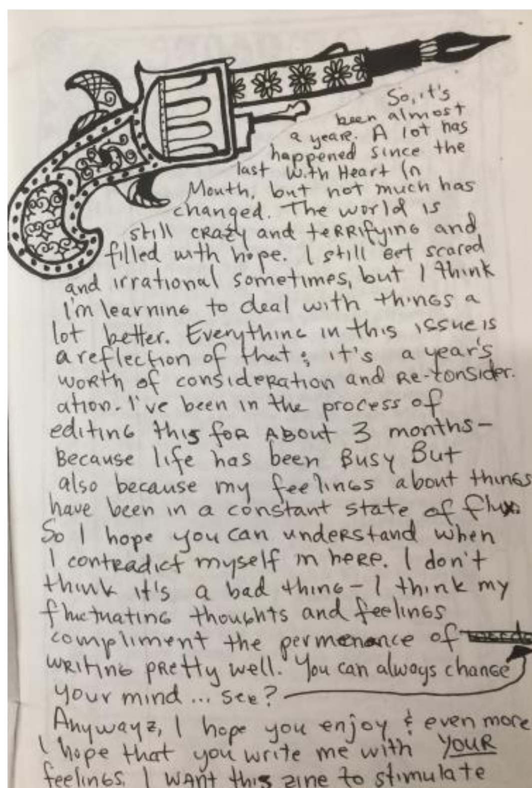
with Lamm's zine as an extension of herself. Although the producer and consumer may not be in the same geographical area, the materiality of a zine that allows for the reader to directly engage in the text also allows for some physical contact and community building between otherwise separated girls.

The material tactics expressed in Lamm's zine are also prevalent in others, such as Sarah From's *The Pisces Ladybug*. From's personal zine similarly deals with themes of body image with interactive elements alongside her own personal narratives. For example, one page includes pasted images from magazines with parts of women's bodies that From outlines so that readers can cut them out as bookmarks (see fig. 6). This page that encourages the audience to literally cut apart models of traditional expressions of femininity is juxtaposed by another essay in Issue 1 of *The Pisces Ladybug* where From describes how she cut all of her hair off. She writes that despite what her female peers and friends think, "I transgressed the societal limits of femininity and cut it all off." This personal experience served as a way for her to "[take] control of [her] own body and beauty image." In addition to the act of cutting off her hair, From's documentation of this event in her zine also promotes control over her body by sharing her experience with other girls. By encouraging her audience to literally manipulate the zine on one page, From creates an interactive space that can also inspire her readers to accept and similarly transgress traditional expectations of femininity through their own bodies.

Fig. 6. Page from *The Pisces Ladybug* Issue 1 by Sarah From, courtesy of creator.

Like Lamm and From, Anna Whitehead similarly exposes the process of creation to reflect processes of personal reflection and education in her zine *With Heart in Mouth.* In her introduction to Issue 3, Whitehead discusses the progress she made in the past year since her last issue. By acknowledging her progress, she similarly engages with themes of ambiguity and contradiction when asking her readers, "I hope you can understand when I contradict myself in here. I don't think it's a bad thing—I think my fluctuating thoughts and feelings compliment the permanence of writing pretty well" (see fig. 7). Whitehead continues with the line, "You can always change your mind… see?" with an arrow pointing to a word from the previous line that was scribbled out. In traditional publishing, the final product is meant to disguise the process. In contrast, Whitehead's visual exposure of the writing and editing process here indicates how girl zine creators intentionally use zines as an accessible medium to convey their developing

understanding of their personal experiences and marginalized identities within broader society. Clearly, zine creators like Whitehead and Lamm are aware of the ways their material work complements their content.

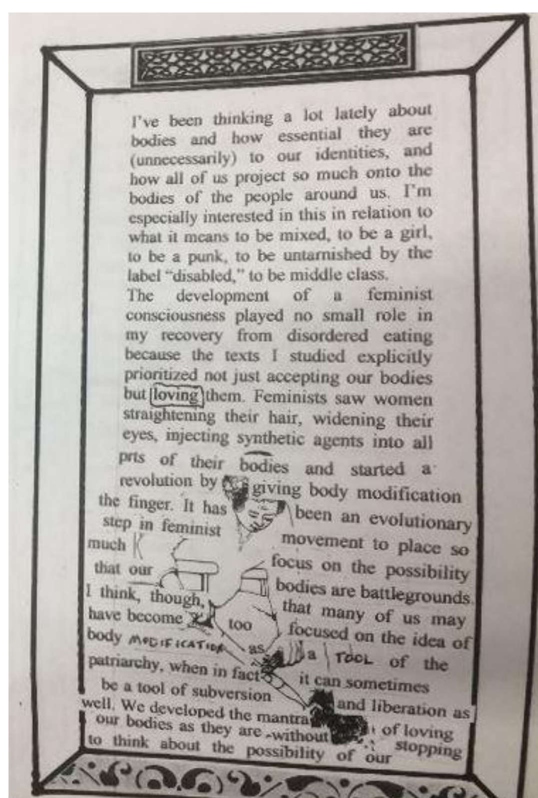


So, it's been almost a year. A lot has happened since the last With Heart In Mouth, but not much has changed. The world is still crazy and terrifying and filled with hope. I still get scared and irrational sometimes, but I think I'm learning to deal with things a lot better. Everything in this issue is a reflection of that; it's a year's worth of consideration and re-consider-ation. I've been in the process of editing this for about 3 months— because life has been busy but also because my feelings about things have been in a constant state of flux. So I hope you can understand when I contradict myself in here. I don't think it's a bad thing – I think my fluctuating thoughts and feelings compliment the permenance of writing pretty well. You can always change your mind... see?
Anywayz, I hope you enjoy & even more I hope that you write me with YOUR feelings. I want this zine to stimulate

Fig. 7 Page from *With Heart in Mouth* Issue 3 by Anna Whitehead, courtesy of creator.

The zine also acts as a site where Whitehead directly considers her body and multitude of identities through text and illustrations. For instance, she writes, "I've been thinking a lot lately about bodies and how essential they are (unnecessarily) to our identities, and how all of us project so much onto the bodies of the people around us. I'm especially interested in this in relation to what it means to be mixed, to be a girl, to be a punk, to be untarnished by the label '[disabled],' to be middle class" (see fig. 8). As Whitehead's content moves from discussing her own body and the intersection of marginalized and privileged identities to broader feminist discourse on women's bodies, she enhances this discussion with a visual representation of an older woman digging with a tool. This illustration is imbedded in the text and disrupts her

writing, forcing the reader to engage with an actual example of a woman's body in action alongside her textual discussion on body modification. Whitehead argues that body modification, while often thought to be "a tool of the patriarchy," can also be used as "a tool of subversion and liberation as well." This text about a tool is deliberately placed next to the shovel in this image as a phallic symbol for body modification also being appropriated by a woman. Like Lamm, Whitehead incorporates illustrations specifically about women's bodies in her essays. Her illustration of the body as a tool for subversion and liberation can also apply to the agency that her zine provides as a medium to represent her body.



I've been thinking a lot lately about bodies and how essential they are (unnecessarily) to our identities, and how all of us project so much onto the bodies of the people around us. I'm especially interested in this in relation to what it means to be mixed, to be a girl, to be a punk, to be untarnished by the label "disabled," to be middle class.
The development of a feminist consciousness played no small role in my recovery from disordered eating because the texts I studied explicitly prioritized not just accepting our bodies but loving them. Feminists saw women straightening their hair, widening their eyes, injecting synthetic agents into all prts of their bodies and started a revolution by giving body modification
the finger. It has been an evolutionary
step in feminist movement to place so
much focus on the possibility
that our bodies are battlegrounds.
I think, though, that many of us may
have become too focused on the idea of
body MODIFICATION as a TOOL of the
patriarchy, when in fact it can sometimes
be a tool of subversion and liberation as
well. We developed the mantra of loving
our bodies as they are -without stopping
to think about the possibility of our

Fig. 8. Page from *With Heart in Mouth* Issue 3 by Anna Whitehead, courtesy of creator.

In addition to these broader discussions about women's bodies, Whitehead uses her zine's text and illustrations to grapple specifically with her mixed-race identity, but applies this process of seeing beyond binaries to other marginalized identities as well. She writes, "I am either black or white, etc. It has only been recently that I've been able to accept myself as both"

(see fig. 9). She notes that the conflict between her personal roots as African American and her skin passing as white "goes back to that BINARY THING and the admission our vocab makes that says thing either <u>are</u> or <u>are not</u>." Whitehead also reflects on her growing tolerance for ambiguity like Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness by framing this text with illustrations of a watering can over growing plants with roots to reflect her racial identity, which may not be immediately visible on the surface, but is still a central part of personal development. Furthermore, Whitehead acknowledges that "this idea can be applied to several over identity markers" as well. Like mixed-race or other ethnic identities that may not be immediately visible, queer identities like bisexuality or non-conforming genders also challenge binary oppositions between gay/straight and male/female categorizations. Though the next part of this chapter will focus on race, many girl zine creators discussed also embodied queer identities that may be ambiguous, seemingly contradictory, and also marginalized in society.

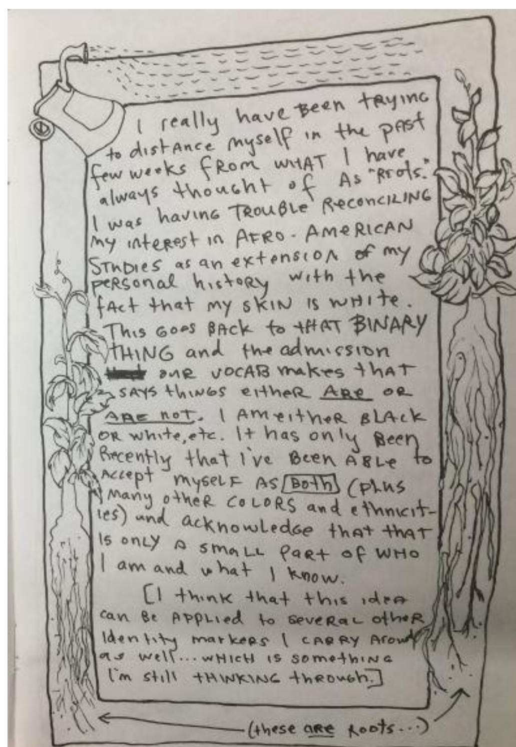


Fig. 9. Page from *With Heart in Mouth* Issue 3 by Anna Whitehead, courtesy of creator.

The zines *i'm so fucking beautiful*, *The Pisces Ladybug,* and *With Heart in Mouth* all demonstrate different examples of how interactions between visual and textual content engages the reader with the material artifact and its embodiment of marginalized, intersectional identities. Because selections of these works grapple with themes of the body and body image, they reveal how zines function as extensions of their creators' bodies when writing and illustrating their own personal experiences and progress toward a new intersectional feminist consciousness. Building on the significance of zines' materiality, the next section of this chapter considers how zines act as an accessible medium for girls of color on the margins of both society and the Riot Grrrl scene.

Part II: Race and Riot Grrrl

"I need you to know that I exist."

—Lauren Jade Martin, *You Might As Well Live* No. 4

Despite zines' relative accessibility compared to other art forms, the ability to create any art—whether visual art or writing or music—often requires a degree of privilege such as free time, resources, connections, and representation. As a result, many scholars focus on the privileges that riot grrrls had, claiming that Riot Grrrl "was still a movement started largely by and for white middle-class women" and that by writing zines and starting bands, they must have come from a privileged background that encouraged them to create (Meltzer 38-39). Similarly, Julia Downes writes that Riot Grrrl "was condemned as an individualist apolitical outlet for a privileged elite of girls… mostly white, mostly middle-class, well-educated girls" and supports these claims using critiques in zines by girls of color like Ramdasha Bikceem's *Gunk* (31). While some of these critiques are valid, generalizing statements about Riot Grrrl as for only white middle-class women often erases women of color and other marginalized groups of girls who did participate in the movement to varying degrees. By examining zines made by women of color in

this section, I conclude that marginalized girls use zines as accessible material objects to assert their intersectional identities and confront issues of race and inclusivity within the Riot Grrrl movement. Despite their marginalization by identity or geography, these girls exist in a liminal space through their zines' materiality, where they can critique Riot Grrrl and feminist movements both from inside and on the margins of the community.

These themes of marginalized and contradictory identities persist in many zines by girls of color such as Lauren Jade Martin, an extremely prolific zine writer. Martin created several long-lasting zines throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, including *Boredom Sucks*, *You Might As Well Live*, *Princess Charming*, *Quantify*, and even some smaller side-project zines such as *Art Missive*. As a result, Martin's personal zines track her growth from high school through college and into her professional life, as well as her changing relationship with Riot Grrrl and feminist activist spaces. Piepmeier shares how "Martin articulates a complicated point of view: wanting to value those parts of Riot Grrrl that were of use to her—the sense of belonging, the power she felt as a woman—while also critiquing those parts that were alienating and painful" (Piepmeier 134). Zine creator Mimi Nguyen illustrates a similar perspective in an essay, "Revolution don't come easy, honey" in her zine *Slant* Issue 5, with her declaration, "I want to make it crystal clear that I totally support riot grrrl as a feminist project, period. I care, therefore I critique" (306). Women of color like Nguyen and Martin are positioned in a liminal space, both inside and on the margins of the Riot Grrrl movement, where they can act as both "an insider…*and* a critic" (Piepmeier 135).

Like zines on body image, zines' materiality by women of color permit personal connection with their audience to engage them with potentially controversial critiques of racism and inclusion within Riot Grrrl communities. For instance, in Issue 4 of her long-running zine

You Might As Well Live, Martin writes an open letter to the Riot Grrrl community confronting the issue of race, questioning the effectiveness of "a predominately white suburban upper-middle class girl revolution." Martin clarifies that the letter is not exclusively for Riot Grrrl, punk, straightedge, or indie communities, but rather about "acknowledging that I exist." While Martin confronts some girls' use of "Sisterhood" as a response to racial issues, she still ends the letter with "p.s. i still love you. i still believe." Martin's critique exemplifies most challenges of racism within Riot Grrrl as well as her hope for the progression of the movement and education within the community. Martin's frustrated yet hopeful tone reflects her ambiguous position on the margins of the scene. Through the materiality of her personal zines, Martin can assert her intersectional identity as a queer woman of color and engage in the process of progress and education of the feminist Riot Grrrl movement as a whole.

Martin often resisted the label of a riot grrrl when she was younger and used her personal zines to articulate her ambiguous position in relation to Riot Grrrl. In Issue 8.5 of her earlier high school zine, *Boredom Sucks*, Martin distanced herself from the Riot Grrrl community and questioned the phrase "every girl is a riot grrrl." Although she claimed that it is a compliment to be called a riot grrrl and is interested in the same things as other riot grrrls, she still resists labeling herself one. Her writing clearly grapples with what it means to be a riot grrrl in a decentralized, nonlocalized movement. By the end of this essay, she reached the conclusion that "if you're ever in a position where you just have to put a label on my head, you can just consider me this: a teenage feminist who likes girl bands and doesn't tolerate sexism or homophobia, who has the heart, but not the title, of a riot grrrl." In Issue 8 of her later zine, *You Might As Well Live*, Martin writes about the multiplicity of herself and that she is not just interested in identity and politics, but also interest in simple activities like baking and art projects. She writes, "Fracture

me into a thousand and one pieces and I'll put myself back together with a mean flour and water paste. Pushin' my way out of the margins…" Both these zines function as vehicles to help Martin acknowledge but also resist her own marginalization by embracing multiplicity in identity and interests.

Despite resisting the label of riot grrrl, Martin was involved in the scene through zines, which gained her access to some events such as Riot Grrrl NYC's Thanksgiving show in 1995. She felt more comfortable at the event when meeting other girls whom she already knew through zines, so by the time she left, she was resolved to go to a Riot Grrrl NYC meeting "now that I know I don't have to be so scared of them!" However, on another page in Issue 2 of *You Might As Well Live*, Martin records her social anxiety during the event in more depth, reflecting, "it shouldn't be a regular habit that whenever i try to be 'social,' go to an 'event,' i come home being depressed!" Even though Martin may not be geographically separated from Riot Grrrl communities, her anxieties expressed here illustrate another form of social isolation. Whether or not this social anxiety is related to her other forms of marginalization as a woman of color, Martin's zines allow her to form a shared girl community to reflect on these experiences of isolation.

In her zine from the early 2000s, *Quantify*, Martin reflects on her past experiences and feelings toward Riot Grrrl at the age of 24. The first issue maintains similar themes as her previous zines, such as her explanation of the title *Quantify:* "because I am obsessed with the idea of fracture, fragment, splitting apart, infinite pieces, multiple identities, & tallying them up to make a grand total. X + Y = Z. where are the parts, what is the whole, & which is the most authentic? CAN YOU QUANTIFY MY DISCONTENT?" In Issue 2 of *Quantify*, Martin records how she became politicized through Riot Grrrl even though she "shied from the label for

years." For three years before actually attending Riot Grrrl meetings, zines were Martin's way of making connections that "helped [her] realize that there was a community out there for [her], that there existed like-minded individuals." Despite her access to Riot Grrrl through zines, Martin's contact with the physical Riot Grrrl community did shape her critical perspective on the movement to help her realize "the ways in which her own social location, as a woman of color, differed from that of many of the other participants in Riot Grrrl" (Piepmeier 134). After attending the 1996 convention in Philadelphia and witnessing the racism and classism within the community, Martin "declared riot grrrl to be dead" to her while simultaneously just having gotten involved in the physical community. Martin's reactions to her other experiences with political organizing and service jobs can relate to similar issues that Riot Grrrl faced. She reflected that "[a]ctivist circles are clearly not oppression-free utopias…it just makes it all the more easy to become paralyzed by problems, to burn out, to give up. I want to be able to identify what I see as wrong, unjust, or fucked up, and make a concerted effort to initiate change." As a result, women of color like Martin involved in Riot Grrrl often exist in liminal spaces, both marginalized by the movement and attempting to critique issues with racism from within the community through zines.

Ramdasha Bikceem, the creator of the zine *Gunk*, wrote about similar feelings of marginalization during the Riot Grrrl Convention Summer in 1992 in Washington, D.C. She reflects on how the D.C. scene is mostly white, with some Asian girls and that she "was one of the only 3 black kids there" (158). Although Bikceem acknowledges that "Riot Grrrl calls for a change," she still "questions[s] who it's including" (158). This critique of the racial inclusivity of Riot Grrrl leads Bikceem to question the effectiveness of a separatist, "secret society," underground feminist movement because focusing on girls' issues can be "limiting and

excluding” (158). Bikceem shows her mixed feelings by writing, “I think Riot Grrrl is filled with positive stuff and as a group I think it gives girls a sense of solidarity and self worth to girls in need. But still when you have all your beliefs in one bucket…. You’re digging yourself a serious hole and it’s called stagnation” (158). Bikceem continues this page with positive examples from the convention, writing in frustration, “Fuck! I’m not all negative about Riot Grrrl cuz there were so many aspects of this whole convention that were so fuckin rad!” (158). Like Martin and Nguyen, Bikceem demonstrates both critiques and care for Riot Grrrl in her personal zine. The ambiguity that zines allow their creators to express makes them appropriate mediums for marginalized girls to use to effectively promote inclusion and progress within the Riot Grrrl community.

Furthermore, zine’s materiality is what makes them appropriate mediums for girls of color to express their intersectional identities in spite of Riot Grrrl’s general lack of inclusivity. For instance, Piepmeier writes about how the visual elements of zines allow creators like Martin and Nguyen to offer representations of themselves to “[debunk] both race and gendered stereotypes” (146). In one example, Martin provides a filmstrip with headshots of herself that she has drawn on with pen to create different facial expressions and personas to suggest “the notion of identity as performative rather than inherent or essential” (Piepmeier 150). This photographic self-representation is importantly paired with Martin’s writing about possessing seemingly contradictory identities. She writes, “in real life I, too, could be more than meets the eye. Not ‘just’ Lauren, but many Laurens, different versions of who I am, not competing with one another, but all of them calmly resting inside. Chinese and Jewish, and that is not a contradiction” (Piepmeier 123). By acknowledging how mixed race and queer identities appear contradictory through both the content and visual representations of the self, zine creators like

Martin are able to reconcile contradictory identities within themselves and others to form embodied communities.

The "accessibility and mutability" of zines as a nontraditional publishing form provides new opportunities for girls of color to connect and form community through shared experiences despite marginalization (Piepmeier 128). Specifically, Nguyen's compilation zine, *Evolution of a Race Riot* reprinted selections from zines made by other women of color. In the introduction to the first issue, Nguyen writes about the purpose of *Race Riot* as "written exclusively by people of color around punk and grrrl" in order to "begin dialogues with each other." Martin's letter challenging the inclusivity of the Riot Grrrl scene discussed previously was published again in the first issue *Race Riot*, providing a larger audience access to pages specifically on issues of race that would have otherwise been scattered through personal zines. The end of Nguyen's introduction presents a similar frustrated and hopeful tone like Martin's work. She writes about her disillusionment and rejection of punk rock: "I have no desire myself to redeem punk rock." However, she acknowledges what she has learned from Riot Grrrl and making zines as "the importance of irony, satire, and contradiction." Directly followed by this statement is another contradiction: her encouragement of others to challenge and change the punk rock scene. She ends her introduction with "And maybe I'm just bitter. Go ahead, then. Prove me wrong. Change something" and challenges her audience with "I double dare ya," a Riot Grrrl phrase originating from a Bikini Kill song. Despite Nguyen's claim about giving up on punk rock, her work creating this compilation zine for over two years (she began soliciting works in 1995 and finally finished in 1997) is itself a form of hope for change within the scene. Despite Nguyen and other zine creators' skepticism about political change being possible from zine-making, this persistent

expression of contradictory hope supports Piepmeier's conclusion that zines enact "pedagogies of hope" as "small-scale acts of resistance" (159-60).

Although Lamm, From, Whitehead, Martin, Nguyen, and Bikceem's zines express a wide variety of content, their works all emphasize the significance of zines as a material form that allows girls to develop what Anzaldúa calls a new consciousness with a tolerance for ambiguity. Whether on body image, size, or race, themes of contradiction through intersectional identities and experiences promote a form of progress for individuals or the Riot Grrrl community or society in general. After a long history of women artists and writers responding to patriarchal standards for creating art, these girls in the 1990s worked to break down binaries between content/form and mind/body through their zines. Through zines, girls have transgressed traditional standards of femininity and blurred the lines between public and private spaces. As a result of their developing intersectional feminist consciousness, these zine creators became active subjects even while positioning themselves in liminal spaces by embracing their minds and bodies and expressing their personal experiences with political awareness.

Chapter II

Producer/Consumer: Resisting Commodification through Zine Communication

While Chapter 1 emphasized how girl zine creators disrupt binaries between their minds and bodies, this chapter will explore how zine creators also work to break down hierarchies between producers and consumers through their content and materiality. As established, zines' malleable materiality allows them to serve as accessible and appropriate spaces for girls to express their individual, intersectional lived experiences. As a result, zines' accessibility appears revolutionary to young girls with little access to other creative outlets for self-representation. Girls appropriated the medium of zines precisely because they felt excluded from and misrepresented by other forms of media such as magazines, literature, television, movies, music, and so on. Furthermore, girl zines act as a form of anti-capitalist, grassroots political organization that rebels against the silencing of girls in society.

Consequently, scholars have focused on zines as a tool for individual production and self-expression. Stephen Duncombe emphasizes how girls who both make zines and network with each other "become producers instead of merely consumers, creating their own spaces" (Duncombe 76). Similarly, Brandi Leigh-Ann Bell suggests that "the most important characteristic of zines for feminism is their ability to make women and girls cultural producers." However, zines also equally promote active consumerism in young girls, allowing them to be critical of other girl zines and other forms of media like mainstream teen girl magazines. Like Duncombe and other scholars, Jennifer Sinor writes that riot grrrls use writing zines to empower themselves over others (248). However, most girls acknowledge that the purpose of their zine creation is also for networking and community-building. While they do empower themselves,

this individual empowerment is not at the cost of inspiring others. Therefore, reading and responding to other girl zines is just as important as writing and creating for oneself.

Unlike what many scholars highlight, creators of zines discussed in this chapter like *Rock Candy, Wild Honey Pie*, *Out of the Vortex* and *Silver Rocket* did not only write personal essays like diaries for self-representation. Other elements of their zines, such as printing letters from readers and zine reviews and promoting other girls' projects, focus more on community than just personal empowerment. These elements show that girl zine creators rarely ever only produce zines; they almost always exist within a girl zine community. In addition, girls also used their zines as a space to respond individually or collectively to mainstream media's representation of teenage girls and to challenge the media's situation of girls solely as consumers. Zines' alternative communication methods work to break down the binary divide between the creator and reader to encourage more girls to be both producers and critical consumers of other zines and mass media.

Historically, women have not only been positioned as consumers, but also as commodities themselves. Luce Irigaray discusses how in patriarchal economies, women function as objects of exchange between men; therefore woman "has value only in that she can be exchanged" (802). Zines as embodiments of their creators' lived experiences also resist turning the creator into a commodity because they do not function as traditional objects of exchange in a capitalist economy. For instance, girls price their zines only to cover postage and/or printing costs or trade them with a bartering system. When Irigaray questions what will happen if women abandon their position as commodities, she writes that it cannot be done "by reproducing, by copying, the 'phallocentric' models that have the force of law today, but by socializing in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language, and desire" (811). By

acknowledging their bodies and desires through language in non-commercialized work, girls appropriate the medium of zines to reject traditional phallocentric models of expression. Whereas mainstream media wants to turn women into commodities to promote consumerism using advertisements, girl zine creators desire to promote genuine, interactive communication through zines to encourage more girls to produce their own art, rather than passively accepting content that other media sources provide.

In addition, zines serve as cultural artifacts that allow girls to create social identities through non-commercial and anti-capitalist economies of creation and distribution. As tools for self-expression, zines help girls unite what John Fiske calls "meanings of experience" with "meanings of the subject (or self)" (1268). Girls use personal zines to create "constructions of social identity that enable people living in industrial capitalist societies to make sense of themselves and their social relations" (1268). Importantly, these social meanings are not separate from the political economy. As a result, girls create zines to intentionally challenge traditional patriarchal and capitalist economies. They accomplish this by appropriating male strategies of networking for purposes of community-building and by creating zine distributions systems that help girls produce, print, and circulate their work outside of traditional capitalist publishing structures. Zine oppose patriarchal capitalism by critiquing teen girl magazines' advertisements that sell beauty standards and traditional feminine role expectations as sexual objects and consumers to young girls. The media may not consciously attempt to subordinate girls; as Fiske explains, dominant classes' harmful ideologies "rarely, if ever, [result] from the conscious intention of individual members of those classes" (1269). However, girls do consciously and intentionally resist dominant ideologies spread through media that position them as consumers through their zines.

The power of established magazines and the resistance of girl zines can be distinguished through Michel de Certeau's theories of tactics and strategies in "The Practice of Everyday Life." Mainstream media sources have access to strategies that "are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces," whereas zines function as tactics that "can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (Certeau 1248). While zines attempt to escape traditional economies all together with their experimental form, they more accurately appropriate images found in dominant culture to challenge ideologies, such as literally manipulating text and images from teen girl magazines. These girl zine creators cannot actually "[leave] the place where [s]he has no choice but to live," but they may be able to establish "a degree of plurality and creativity" in their work due to their liminal positioning within society (1248). Riot Grrrl communities and zines also lack a central place because their tactics function in "the space of the other" (1253). When mainstream media sources featured Riot Grrrl bands or zines, their tactics that were originally from "an absence of power" became strategies due to the media outlet's establishment as "the postulation of power" (1253). Due to these power differences, the media's appropriation of Riot Grrrl zine tactics will always turn them into strategies that further the goals of dominant ideology to make girls into consumers again, rather than producers. Contrarily, zines afford girls a space to blur these traditional divides between producers and consumers that resist the media's efforts to reduce them to passive consumers.

The DIY medium of zines may allow girls to find personal creative and critical voices, but the question of how girls can gain power outside of dominant culture through countercultural movements still remains. Riot grrrls and other girl zine creators do not necessary want agency through access to mainstream media outlets, but rather seek power through personal connections and community-building that allow them to reclaim a voice outside of traditional capitalist power

structures. While riot grrrls use zines to attempt to escape from patriarchal and capitalist models of expression, zines do not fully escape this system. As a result, girl zines are full of essays and critiques where the creators discuss better methods for anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist communication in their zines and communities. These girl zine creators are aware of how their works may not escape traditional power structures; however, their zines work to continually subvert the systems that they function within.

This chapter will explore how girl zine creators use these DIY ethics in their materiality and content to critique and subvert patriarchal and capitalist modes of production, both in their own zine communities and while engaging with mainstream media. In the first part of this chapter, I focus on the zine *Rock Candy* as well as examples from *Wild Honey Pie*, *Silver Rocket*, and *Out of the Vortex* as evidence of how zines encourage anti-consumerist ideologies that blur the binary between producer/consumer. In the second part, I discuss excerpts from the zines *Riot Grrrl NYC, Nothing*, *Cupsize*, and *Starache*, and their examples of girls' direct responses to mainstream media's commodification and misrepresentation. In the third and final part of this chapter, I situate these critical communication tactics and zine distribution networks in a history of women's alternative independent media sources.

Part I: Critical Consumerism and Communication

Girl zines all use their materiality to encourage reader engagement, communication, and critical consumerism. As expressed in Chapter 1, accessible communication strategies are important to build community between girls of differing marginalized identities. The four zines in this part all discuss communication tactics that encourage interactivity, critical responses, reviews, and dialogues that break down hierarchical divides between the creator and consumer.

While scholars emphasize girl zines' revolutionary potential to encourage girls to produce, girl zine creators challenge this simplification of zines' potential by encouraging critical consumption. *Rock Candy* created by Marie, who does not identify her last name, presents a common message of accessibility of language and writing in her zine. In the introduction of Issue 5, she asks "please write, or hang out with me and share your ideas about the stuff in here… i want my words to be as accessible in writing as they are in person." Accessibility as a tactic through content and materiality encourages readers to respond and communicate about political or personal experiences. Another girl zine creator, Kristy Chan of *Wild Honey Pie*, *Tennis and Violins*, and *Riot Grrrl Review,* confronts the reducing of zines to products created solely for consumption on the final page of Issue 9 of *Wild Honey Pie*. She writes, "I thought the whole point of fanzines was communicating on a more personal level, not creating a product meant only to be consumed without thought." Rather, she wants her zine to encourage communication and actively works to break down barriers between producer/consumer and creator/reader through her zine's materiality. Nicole Solomon in *Silver Rocket* Issue 8 similarly expresses that "the key to this whole zine scene is communication. So you can write to me. [But] I'm not up for bullshit fake communication." Girl zine creators clearly articulate their desire for more genuine, interactive communication through zines that is absent from traditional media consumption.

Issue 9 of *Wild Honey Pie* continues to illustrate how girls use zine materiality to promote communication rather than just consumption of their work. From the introduction page, Chan gives agency over to her reader by introducing her zine first as "a tool for however you choose to use it" rather than her intentions as a creator. She also labels the zine "open for interpretation- open to response. But then again, it might just be 'junk mail'. Do you care?" This ambiguous and confrontational tone is a common tactic used in zines, one also employed often in

Nomy Lamm's *i'm so fucking beautiful,* to engage the reader to invest interest while reading the zine. Interjecting questions directed at the reader work allow the reader to resist their conditioning to consume zines like other products "meant only to be consumed without thought" that Chan critiques. These strategies invite responses as opposed to girls' socialization to passively listen to voices from mainstream media. In addition to these confrontational questions, Chan includes more ambiguous messages throughout the zine that make the work "open for interpretation" rather than simply demanding that her readers respond to her zine. For example, on the bottom of the introduction page, Chan includes a small block of text that reads "DON'T SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS" (see fig. 10). However, the typography here, with "DON'T" in a different font slightly separated from the uniform "SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS" appears to challenge the reader to determine if the statement wants the reader to share their thoughts or not. Contrarily to how girls are socialized to passively consume media that tells them how to look, dress, and think, Chan encourages girls to show their active engagement with her work with questions and ambiguous phrasing that gives the reader agency.

Fig. 10 Image from *Wild Honey Pie* Issue 9 by Kristy Chan

Another predominant way that girl zine creators promote constructive criticism within the zine community is through zine reviews. Like other girls who critique Riot Grrrl discussed in Chapter 1, Marie of *Rock Candy* similarly explains why she critiques other zines because "It's only cuz I give a shit that I even bother critiquing it. If it wasn't for all the brilliant girls out there doing zines, I wouldn't exist. seriously. Zines are SO important to me." Because of her positive experience with the zine community, she critiques common zine reviews to promote more genuine and individual communication. She expresses that "[o]ften times when I read a review of my zines it sounds all impersonal & detached, like whoever's writing it is thinking: 'god, this is a pain in the ass but I've gotta review these zines just because i'm supposed to have zine reviews in here." Here, she challenges girls not to be negative in their zine reviews, but to be more original and personal and critical. Because zines are meant to be a flexible medium, she confronts the inclusion of zine reviews out of obligation for including a review section, rather than out of real interest to engage with and promote other zines.

While other girls have encouraged spreading the Riot Grrrl motto of "girl love" through supportive zine reviews, Marie still finds it necessary for some reviews to be critical. She claims that "I rarely see any reviews that are critical because we still think the only way to be supportive/helpful is to re-affirm like crazy and we never CHALLENGE." This reflects another contradiction in the zine community as girls grapple with how to support while remaining critical of their peers' work. Similarly, girls of color discussed in Chapter 1 viewed criticism as a form of caring for the Riot Grrrl movement and community. Therefore, these girls' use of "critical" is not mean to be negative, but honest and engaging. Marie deconstructs the reasons why girl zine reviews tend to be more supportive than critical, claiming "we're conditioned to that girl stereotype which tells us: A. Not to have meaningful conversation with anyone, and B. to be very

POLITE, avoiding 'mean' things & the risk of being a 'bitch'." While riot grrrls try to support "girl love," they also acknowledge and resist the stereotyping of girls as polite or nice. As a result, Marie sums up her critique of zine reviews, not because they are too nice or supportive, but that "most reviews anger me b/c they are SO impersonal, objective, insincere, and I think we really need to start acknowledging other zines in more important ways." Rather than just receiving compliments from girls who say they like the zine, Marie encourages girls to further engage with the content of zines in their reviews and responses.

Marie's critique in Issue 3 is also an example of how zines do not necessarily escape systems of consumerism where both creators and readers view their work as commodities. However, zines provide a medium for creators like Marie to push back against the viewing and consumption of their work as a product and to more deeply engage with zines' content with the community. She boils her critique down to how within the punk rock scene, zines are being consumed like products "despite standing against materialism." Rather than being about fashion and consumerism, Marie writes that to her, "zines are SURVIVAL" because "I am silenced and cut off from so many aspects of myself & other women in this culture that wants us all to be isolated from each other, alone just enough that we never really COMMUNICATE." As explained in the introduction and Chapter 1, zines' ability to transcend physical location and connect isolated girls reveals their potential to encourage this communication. However, as Marie notices, more work can be done within the girl zine community to break down communication barriers within these non-geographical communities.

In Issue 3, Marie also proposes many ideas and counter-cultural communication tactics that girls can do "to make zine[s] our VOICES, and not our products." These ideas include encouraging girls and readers of zines to write letters and see zines "as personal efforts, as part of

a larger dialogue." She points out that in every girl zine "the author says something about wanting feedback," but "no one is actively responding to them" despite the "thought-provoking pieces." She encourages this communication because zines are the only medium "where a one-to-one, individual correspondence is possible, and also one of the only outlets for honest, uncensored REAL writings to be presented." Marie writes about how she has been trying to respond to zines more because of the importance of communication to sustain zine communities. She writes that "submissions/letters help bridge this reader/author gap" as well. Even though zines provide the potential for all of these different types of anti-capitalist communication, Marie's critiques expose how these communication outlets may not have been fully utilized. Another idea that Marie proposed to encourage communication includes more interactive pieces, which act as a deliberate choice to engage the reader. Rather than just submissions, she recommends interviews with other girls, including round table discussions instead of just two-way interviews. For zine reviews and responses, Marie encourages analyzing specific writings and reprinting articles that girls' like or do not like and explaining why. In addition, Marie urges others to quote other girl zines and "name-dropping… to incorporate eachother into our lives & become more than pieces of paper stapled together." Most importantly, Marie encourages "learning how to be CONSTRUCTIVE." She wants girl zine creators to have a "common understanding that criticism = GROWTH, that it doesn't have to be an attack, maybe we can start to get HONEST." To Marie, constructive criticism is not negative, but rather engaging in honest and educational dialogue.

The need for communication also applies to issues of intersectionality and marginalized identities within punk rock girl communities discussed in Chapter 1. Marie addresses these themes of intersectionality in her zine, writing that "[e]verything is interconnected, and by

isolating our zines, the subjects we address in our zines, and the way we respond to zines, we are denying the ways that our words & experience overlap AND differ." Through her ideas about communication, Marie acknowledges that "[t]here are some real obvious divisions among punk rock girls and differences need to be fucken dealt with and NOT glazed over." She references this need for communication when difficult issues, such as classism, that need to be repeatedly discussed, instead of in just one issue of a zine. Zines' ability to express series of conversations between the creator and readers promote education and progress, especially regarding how punk girl communities can be more inclusive. Marie claims that the power of this communication is that "[b]y paying attention to our words, stories, actions, etc, we are acknowledging [each other] in very real ways and helping a community to further develop & be strengthened." While girls of color often critiqued Riot Grrrl for not being inclusive of them, Marie here proposes real forms of communication that could strengthen communities between girls of differing identities and experiences.

In the final page of Issue 3, Marie demonstrates images and text that portray her work as non-linear, anti-capitalist, and anti-product. She reflects on her own zine's process, "i'm learning the value of process over product, i'm making new connections, and beginning to think endings are way over-rated" (see fig. 11). Marie choses to end the zine with the lines, "so that's it. You could write me, though." This text is paired with a visual of young girls holding hands in a circle, visually showing no end to a cycle of contact and communication. The sentence "so that's it" seems to contradict the final line, "You could write me, though" in which asking her reader to communicate shows how the zine is not really ending if it continues dialogue. Like the record player image in the introduction to *Wild Honey Pie* Issue 9 (see fig. 10), these circular images promote the non-linear content in zines that strive to work against Western, masculine traditions

of writing and art. Rather than focusing on the ending, girls care more about the process of education and communication in their zines.

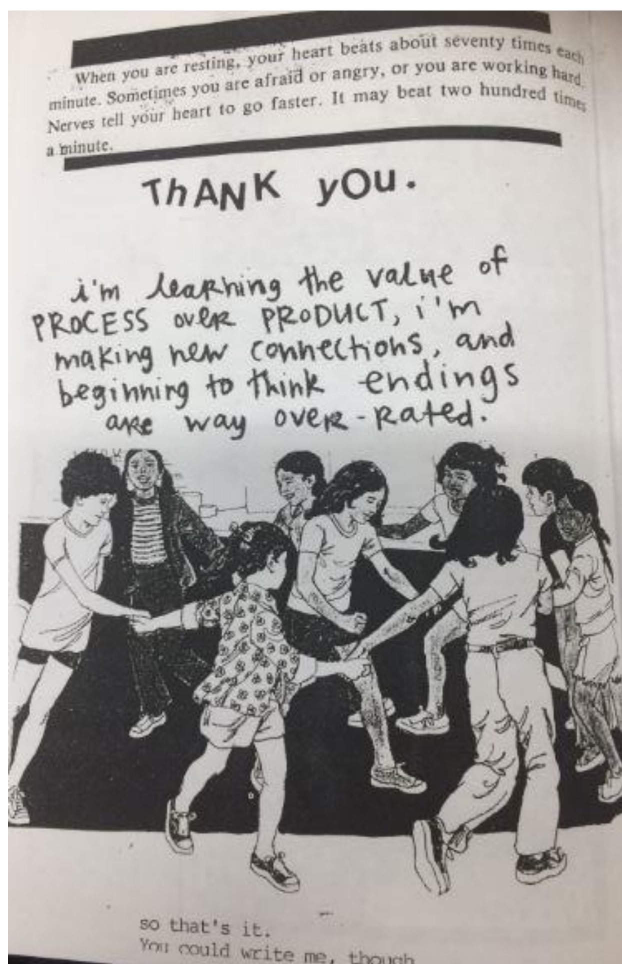


Fig. 11 Page from *Rock Candy* Issue 3 by Marie

These themes of communication, conversation, and growth that Marie promotes in Issue 3 can also be seen in action when compared to later issues of the same zine. Issue 4 and 5 of *Rock Candy* continue to discuss how she uses her zine to transform her silence and break down communication barriers. In Issue 4, she applies the theme of blurring binaries to breaking down the divide between written and verbal communication through zines. She reflects that she is learning "to break the division & incorporate the two into a process of constructing a whole." Marie's discussion of her zine and writing as "a process" relates to zines that educate others on

body image and race discussed in Chapter 1. Marie uses her zine as a space to show her individual growth as she finds a voice and gains confidence and communication skills to apply to her daily life. Along with an illustration about wanting to run away, these pages relate her conflicts with communication to physical stasis because "there are other reasons why i'm traveling because this is the place where i've build dreams and identity, a place that has been my life-long womb and i'm ready to leave." The zine is not only a place for this imagining of her mobility in a physical sphere, but also a place where she can prepare for traveling and adulthood. Geographic mobility, both literally in this example and metaphorically through zines, continues to represent the desire for growth and connection in the girl zine community. These spaces allow girls to grow up as more confident in their voices, freeing them of some patriarchal constraints.

Rock Candy also directly challenges formal, patriarchal writing conventions when promoting new approaches to feminine conversational communication. In Issue 4, Marie challenges her formal writing education: "i'm always comparing the language i (have to) use in there to the language i find comfortable in zine writing. I started realizing that the thesis/essay/right/wrong way i've been taught to write in school blocks the words i want to say & the ways i want to say them when i am writing for myself, or in zines, or any other way not for Them." She acknowledges how argumentative writing she has learned in school promotes a binary of right/wrong, which makes it an inappropriate style for the zine that values personal process and progress. Next to butterfly and chrysalis illustrations with the text "transforming my silence," Marie writes that silence "fragments me into little pieces as opposed to a whole. I think the silence im talking about is learned, not created. It's learned & re-enforced and maybe if i start to understand it I can deconstruct it" (see fig. 12). Her zine engages in this process of deconstructing, where she seeks to understand and critique the methods of writing and silence

she has internalized in order to find new ways of communication through personal and conversational styles in her zine.

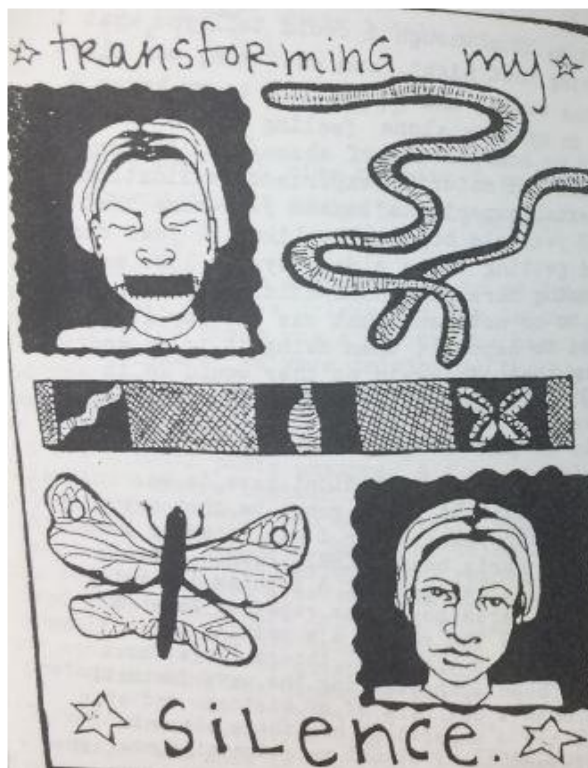


Fig. 12 Image from *Rock Candy* Issue 4 by Marie

In addition to zine reviews, another way that girl zines often promote communication is by reprinting letters sent from readers. In Issue 5, Marie prints a letter from a male reader along with a list of reasons for doing so. She argues against concerns about privacy because it can perpetuate silence about serious issues. She justifies her printing of a controversial letter by writing that “this really isn’t about throwing around accusations or being confrontational for the sake of it. It’s about trying to open up communication lines where we can be challenging eachothers behavior.” Marie’s inclusion of other letters and critiques in her zine allows for readers to express nuanced arguments with personal emotions, while not necessarily being confrontational. In addition to promoting individual progress and education for the zine creator,

Marie also notes here how communication through letters in zines can challenge and help readers grow as well.

Sara Marcus supports a similar position on zine communication as Marie in an essay on zine theory in Issue 7 of her zine *Out of the Vortex*, published in 1995. Marcus recognizes the validity of all zines, claiming that "when I critique the zines that I receive, I'm not questioning the validity or importance of what the zine-doer has to say… We all need to break-down our walls and communicate." In this essay, Marcus recognizes other general positive purposes of zines as both "powerful political tools" and "to share our experiences." In these ways, zines differ from other media outlets, which Marcus lists as "Mainstream press, television, movies, the established 'alternative' press" as examples of inaccessible mediums for girls. Marcus concludes that "[o]nly by controlling the medium do we control the message. We are the medium; we are the message. For this reason zines are extraordinarily unique and powerful political tools." Her claim here supports how zines as a medium act as an extension of the creators themselves and their experiences, which can inspire political and personal change when communicated to a broader community. In addition, Marcus writes about how DIY mediums can inspire "confidence" and "self-sufficiency" that "can carry over into all aspects of their lives." Just as Marie wants to apply this confidence to her verbal communication skills outside of her zine, Marcus also emphasizes that these skills are "particularly important to kids, girls, minorities, anyone who is discouraged from taking charge in their lives." As a result, DIY mediums of communication not only encourage community and education, but also empowerment for marginalized people.

Despite general consensus about the positive power of zines as a DIY medium by girl zine creators, girls also have varying perspectives on how to engage with mainstream media

sources. For example, Nicole Soloman in *Silver Rocket* Issue 6 defends how indie bands like Sleater-Kinney work with mainstream magazines like *Seventeen* and *Spin* that many riot grrrls critique. While Soloman writes about her experience with zines as "THE accessible underground DIY publishing format of the written word," she still provides a more generous perspective on mainstream media sources. The next part of this chapter will concentrate on how more girls like Soloman use zines to respond to mainstream media and its conflicted relationship with the Riot Grrrl movement.

Part II: Responding to Mainstream Media

As a DIY, anti-consumerist movement, Riot Grrrl certainly had a complicated relationship with the mainstream media. While the DIY ethos of making one's own band and zines contradicts the consumerist purpose of the media, newspapers and teen girl magazines often attempted to feature or promote Riot Grrrl conventions, chapters, bands, and zines in the 1990s. Many girls wanted to spread the Riot Grrrl ideology beyond the underground, but the mainstream media often trivialized the movement beyond their comfort level. *USA Today*'s feature article on Riot Grrrl, "Feminist Riot Grrrls Don't Just Wanna Have Fun" mocked the sassy tone in many girls zines from its very first lines: "Better watch out, boys. From hundreds of once pink, frilly bedrooms, comes the young feminist revolution. And it's not pretty. But it doesn't wanna be. So there!" (Marcus 169). Despite writer Elizabeth Snead's genuine desire to accurately capture the Riot Grrrl movement, the article ran with a focus on fashion, claiming that the movement's dress code was "unshaven armpits and legs, heavy, black Doc Martens boots, fishnet stocking and garter belts under baggy army shorts" (Marcus 170). When DC riot grrrls did work with *SPIN*, an alternative-press magazine, on a feature piece in 1992, they ended up disappointed by the continued emphasis on fashion using condescending language and a paid

model for the photo that ran with the piece (Marcus 193). As Fiske and Certeau explain, these reporters and the media may not consciously want to misrepresent Riot Grrrl; however, in these examples, the media's appropriation of girls' voices will always turn their tactics into strategies to further their consumerist agendas.

These feature pieces on Riot Grrrl, whether from alternative magazines, teen girl magazines, or mainstream news sources, all attempted to position the girls as consumers, rather than producers, by reducing their ideology to a fashion trend. After the *SPIN* article, the DC Riot Grrrl chapter decided on a media blackout because they "wanted to spread the message, but [they] were interested in alternative ways of doing it" (Marcus 200). As a result, girls turned to their zines to continue to critique the media and resist their commodification. Ananda of the DC chapter wrote two pages in her zine that critiqued the latest *ABC News* coverage. She wrote that by attempting to define Riot Grrrl, magazines attempt to reduce the community into "one thing" as if "you have to look a certain way or be into a certain type of music… in order to be a riot grrrl, when there are no such requirements." She wanted to counteract these "boundaries" created by mainstream writers by "keeping alive the 'underground' aspect of Riot Grrrl-keeping alive our communication with each other" (Marcus 198-99). Despite most girls' desire to make Riot Grrrl open and available to all girls, their experience indicated that the media's misrepresentation of the movement would have spread a more harmful limiting idea of Riot Grrrl and preferred their own zines and productions to spread the word.

Although teen girl magazines like *Sassy* and *Seventeen* were sometimes praised by girls because they allowed more of them to become aware of the Riot Grrrl movement, we must distinguish between texts' "accessibility" for consumption and texts that encourage more girls to create. In *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*, Marisa Meltzer writes that mainstream

female pop/rock stars are more accessible to most girls than riot grrrls' style, but these popstars are only accessible for girls to imitate their style or persona, rather than develop an individual voice. On the other hand, the Riot Grrrl tactic of DIY accessibility through zines and music was to allow their audience to be inspired to produce art by and for themselves. In addition, Duncombe generalizes about all punk zine creators' issue with being discovered by the mainstream press by the threat of "selling out" (151); however, I argue that Riot Grrrl and girl zine creators' issue with the media was specifically about being misrepresented and commodified, based on how girls confront magazines in their own zines. By focusing on Riot Grrrl bands' and zines' styles, magazines encouraged girls to buy clothes and an image, rather than picking up a new feminist consciousness. Mainstream media's portrayal of Riot Grrrl as a commodified fashion trend was not just a misrepresentation, but rather an attempt to situate girls as consumers again instead of producers. As a result, this part of the chapter focuses on the zines *Riot Grrrl NYC, Nothing*, *Cupsize*, and *Starache*, and their examples of girls' responses to mainstream media.

Riot Grrrl NYC, a collaborative zine made by the New York chapter of Riot Grrrl, includes an essay, "Who is Choking and Dying," contributed under the name "Kake" that directly confronts *Sassy* magazine in Issue 5. Despite the "good articles" that some girls acknowledge that *Sassy* writes, Kake critiques their format and visuals that are "the same as all other magazines with a female audience- thin, VERY attractive models AND the 'Lose weight so boys will like you' advertisement in the back." As a for-profit magazine, *Sassy*'s advertisements still promote beauty standards even if their articles appear progressive. However, Kake claims that because of these magazines, "that's why Riot Grrrl exists-so that all our grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunts, friends, and selves have fought and suffered through will

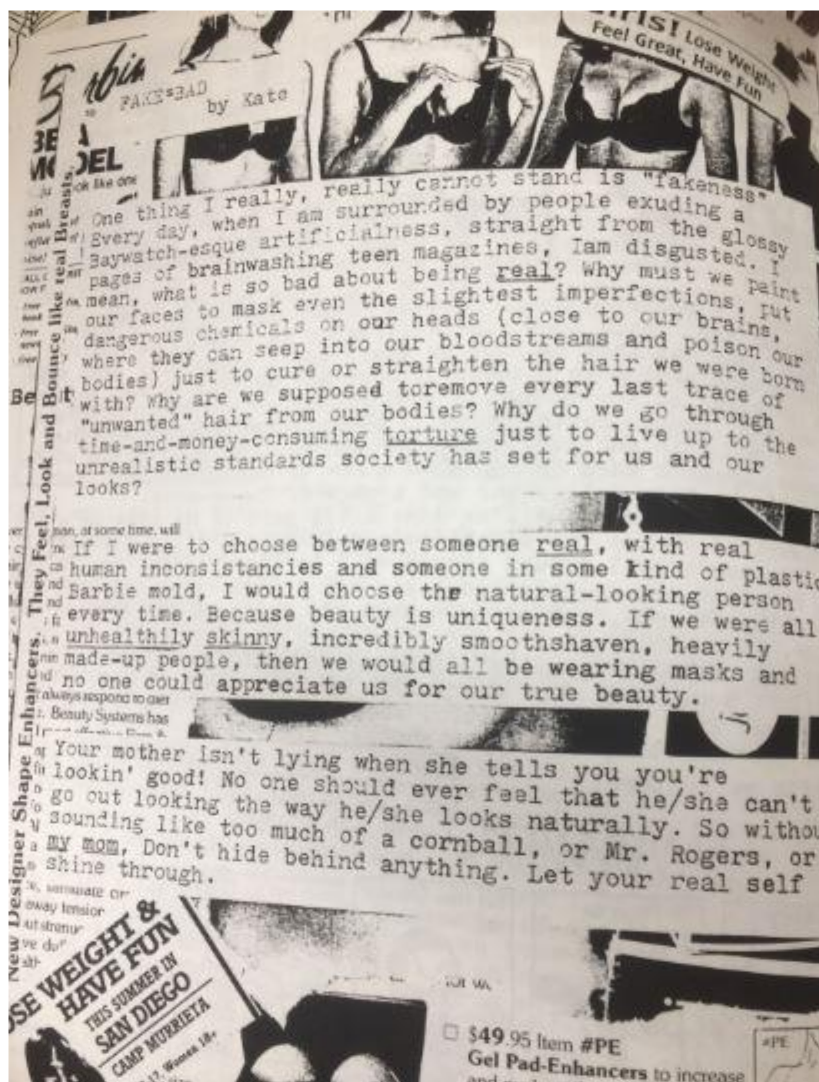
not be compacted into easily digested bullshit bits of information." She emphasizes how Riot Grrrl zines are not easy to digest because of their purpose to provide information and education about gender issues such as body image and beauty standards. Before Riot Grrrl was written about in the mainstream media, girls recognized the purpose of their zines in opposition to the consumerist ideology of teen girl magazines.

Issue 9 of *Nothing* by Marissa Falco also represents how girls directly engage with teen girl magazines in their own zine. A page titled "eye-opener" made by Falco uses clippings from *Seventeen* magazine pasted together with some of Falco's own writing to critique the magazine (see fig. 13). This page serves as an "eye-opener" for other girls to recognize problematic ideology perpetuated by teen girl magazines like *Seventeen* and encourages other girls to critique it as well. Falco explains how she received her last issue of *Seventeen* in January 1997 and "saw how sick it really was" but was also "[worried] about all the girls across the US whose heads are being filled with this crap." Using phrases about fashion from the magazine that stand out like "ruffled shirts," "dark denim jeans," "crushes," and "guy magnet," Falco exposes the lack of substance in the magazines' content for girls and young women. At the bottom of the page, Falco writes "What will I do without 17?" with a list of responses, "I will like myself more/I will have more self-confidence/I will learn what it means to be strong." Her zine provides empowerment through self-representation by rejecting the consumerist girl culture promoted in *Seventeen* and other teen girl magazines. However, Falco also challenges her reader with "your turn" at the bottom right hand side of the page to encourage more girls to also develop critical perspective on consumerist media.

Fig. 13 Page from *Nothing* Issue 9 by Marissa Falco, courtesy of creator.

Falco also includes contributions from other girls in this issue of *Nothing*, such as the page titled “Fake = bad” contributed by Kate, which attributes “fakeness” as “straight from the glossy pages of brainwashing teen magazines” (see fig. 14). Her textual critique is pasted on top of magazine advertisements of women’s bodies about losing weight. While Kate critiques magazines for promoting artificial beauty standards, the zine serves as a way to present imperfections, realness, and differences. Girls were not only critiquing teen girl magazines in their own writing, but also appropriating images from the magazines as a way to expose misogynistic images and allow their readers to later identify these tropes in magazines on their own. This interaction between text and image displays how the materiality of zines, focused on

in the first chapter, provide a medium to confront mainstream media's images and ideology in exchange for embracing imperfections and differences between girls.



FAKE=BAD by Kate

One thing I really, really cannot stand is "fakeness". Every day, when I am surrounded by people exuding a Baywatch-esque artificialness, straight from the glossy pages of brainwashing teen magazines, Iam disgusted. I mean, what is so bad about being real? Why must we paint our faces to mask even the slightest imperfections, put dangerous chemicals on our heads (close to our brains, where they can seep into our bloodstreams and poison our bodies) just to cure or straighten the hair we were born with? Why are we supposed toremove every last trace of "unwanted" hair from our bodies? Why do we go through time-and-money-consuming torture just to live up to the unrealistic standards society has set for us and our looks?

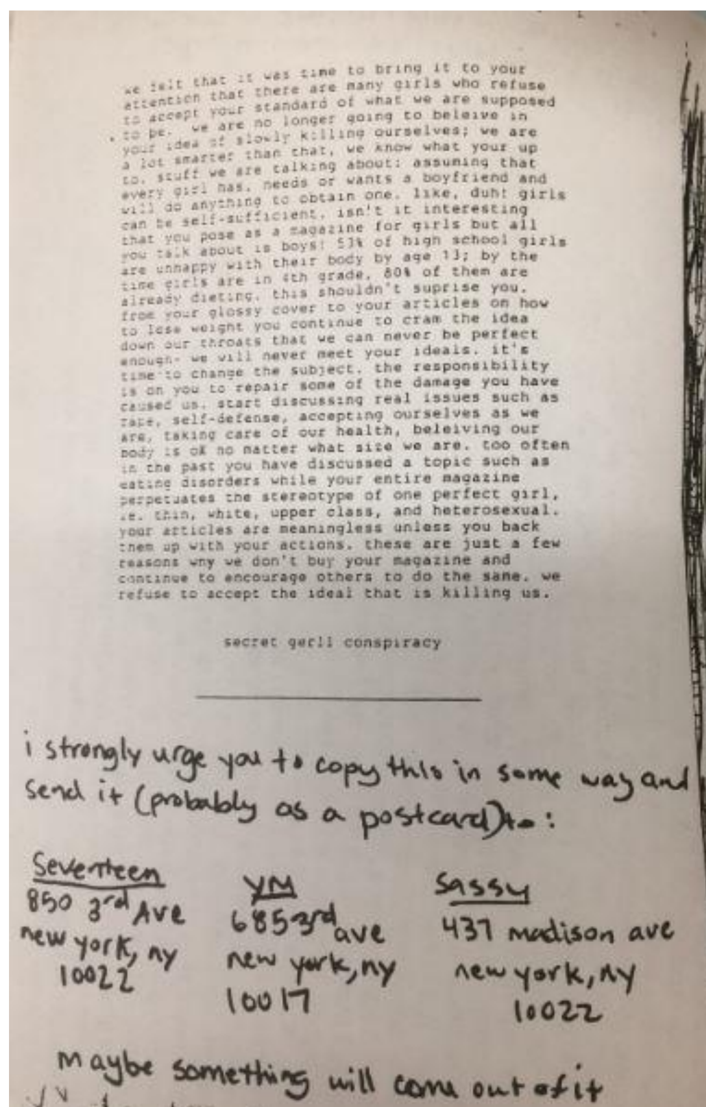
If I were to choose between someone real, with real human inconsistancies and someone in some kind of plastic Barbie mold, I would choose the natural-looking person every time. Because beauty is uniqueness. If we were all unhealthily skinny, incredibly smoothshaven, heavily made-up people, then we would all be wearing masks and no one could appreciate us for our true beauty.

Your mother isn't lying when she tells you you're lookin' good! No one should ever feel that he/she can't go out looking the way he/she looks naturally. So without sounding like too much of a cornball, or Mr. Rogers, or my mom, Don't hide behind anything. Let your real self shine through.

Fig. 14 Page from *Nothing* Issue 9 by Marissa Falco, courtesy of creator.

Issue 6 of *Starache* includes a page that has been copied from other girl zines. This method of reprinting allows their confrontation of *Seventeen*, *Sassy*, and *YM* magazines to spread further throughout the girl zine community. Rather than being written directly to an audience of young girls, however, this page directly addresses the magazines by writing that "there are many girls who refuse to accept your standard of what we are supposed to be. we are no longer going to believe in your idea of slowly killing ourselves" (see fig. 15). The message addresses the harm

of beauty standards and dieting culture on young girls, as well as the lack of substance behind articles that focus on stereotypes about thin, white, upper-class, heterosexual girls. While they challenge the magazines to write articles about real issues that affect young girls, they also note that "your articles are meaningless unless you back them up with your actions" to reject their inclusion of progressive articles while still profiting off of the positioning of girls as consumers. The writers of this page also encourage girls to copy the message and send it as a postcard to the listed addresses of the three magazines. As a result of critiques like these, teen magazines potentially included more progressive articles, but riot grrrls also noticed their attempt to cover up harmful ideologies spread in advertisements through seemingly feminist content. While we cannot know whether or not writers for the mainstream press would have seen this page while attempting to report on the Riot Grrrl movement and zine production, this page still serves a dual purpose for empowering the zine's readers to reject the media's standards for girls and beauty through its direct, confident tone.



we felt that it was time to bring it to your
attention that there are many girls who refuse
to accept your standard of what we are supposed
to be. we are no longer going to beleive in
your idea of slowly killing ourselves; we are
a lot smarter than that. we know what your up
to. stuff we are talking about: assuming that
every girl has, needs or wants a boyfriend and
will do anything to obtain one. like, duh! girls
can be self-sufficient. isn't it interesting
that you pose as a magazine for girls but all
you talk about is boys! 53% of high school girls
are unhappy with their body by age 13; by the
time girls are in 4th grade, 80% of them are
already dieting. this shouldn't suprise you.
from your glossy cover to your articles on how
to lose weight you continue to cram the idea
down our throats that we can never be perfect
enough- we will never meet your ideals. it's
time to change the subject. the responsibility
is on you to repair some of the damage you have
caused us. start discussing real issues such as
rape, self-defense, accepting ourselves as we
are, taking care of our health, beleiving our
body is ok no matter what size we are. too often
in the past you have discussed a topic such as
eating disorders while your entire magazine
perpetuates the stereotype of one perfect girl,
i.e. thin, white, upper class, and heterosexual.
your articles are meaningless unless you back
them up with your actions. these are just a few
reasons why we don't buy your magazine and
continue to encourage others to do the sane. we
refuse to accept the ideal that is killing us.

secret gerll conspiracy

---

i strongly urge you to copy this in some way and
send it (probably as a postcard) to:

Seventeen	YM	Sassy
850 3rd Ave	685 3rd ave	437 madison ave
new york, ny	new york, ny	new york, ny
10022	10017	10022

maybe something will come out of it

Fig. 15 Page from *Starache* Issue 6 by Amy Lou Funaro

Another page of *Starache* shows how zines also respond to how mainstream media portrays Riot Grrrl. Amy Lou Funaro, the creator, refers to fashion trends that Riot Grrrl is associated with often in the media, writing that “it pisses me off very much that people think to be a riot grrrl you have to do certain things” (see fig. 16). She seems to blame the media for commodifying and therefore de-politicizing the feminism of Riot Grrrl. As a result, she critiques “girls [who] call themselves riot grrrl while doing exactly what their boyfriends tell them” who may have likely learned about Riot Grrrl through the media rather than the original ideology.

However, Amy still uses the Riot Grrrl label for herself "cuz i know what it means to <u>me</u>." Therefore, her zine reclaims the label from the media's misuse and commodification of Riot Grrrl. This page's text is also framed with the venus symbol, which visually emphasizes the political feminist meaning behind Riot Grrrl and the zine.

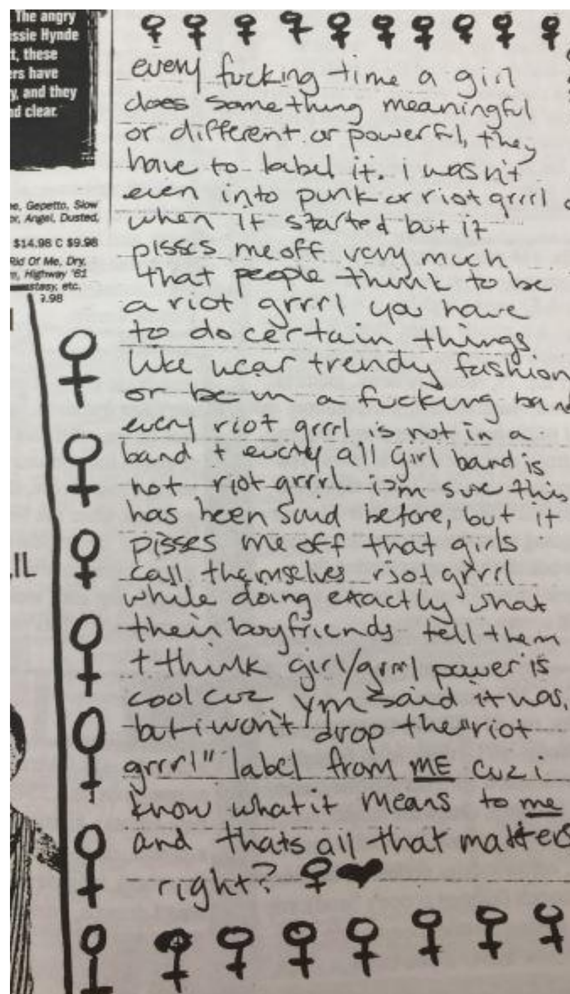


Fig. 16 Image from *Starache* Issue 6 by Amy Lou Funaro

Another page in *Riot Grrrl NYC* includes direct responses to mainstream media's inaccurate portrayal of the movement in the zine. The page reads with large text, "Fight the Riot Grrrl Backlash! in the media, the boy's club called the 'punk' or 'alternative' scene, schools, etc." though the text focuses on two responses to articles in the mainstream media about Riot Grrrl. The response titled "Grrrlfriend" rejects a quotation from an article about Kathleen Hanna

being the leader of the movement. The response does not devalue Hanna's influence, claiming that "I thought I was insane until women like Kathleen Hanna stayed up long nights with me talking me out of suicidal thoughts," but it also reveals how she gained other friends through Riot Grrrl and that there is no singular leader. This example is one common way the media misrepresents Riot Grrrl: while their ideology is specifically anti-hierarchical and intentionally not centralized under any leadership, the media continuously attempts to understand the movement in dominant culture terminology like labeling a central leader. The other passage on this page, titled "Jeerleader," is a direct response to a quotation from an article in *The Village Voice* that labels Riot Grrrls as "an amorphous blob of…cheerleader rejects and unhappy amateur musicians [who] started coagulating near Seattle." The article trivializes the girls' music production and their anti-rape ideologies, and the contributor to this zine calls the writer out for "[ridiculing] one of this generation's first autonomous self-help groups."

Cupsize, a zine created by Sasha Cagen and Tara Needham in mid-1990s New York, includes discussion on the relationship between Riot Grrrl and the media in Issue 3. Cagen raises questions about the pros and cons of media attention like many scholars, asking "[b]y hiding in the underground, did Riot Grrrl keep itself from becoming a feminist identity for a wider group of girls in America? By persistently avoiding interaction with the mainstream press, did Riot Grrrl preclude the possibility of having a broad cultural impact?" Though many scholars critique Riot Grrrl for failing to have this broader impact, Cagen concludes that representation of Riot Grrrl to a mass audience would lose more in translation due to "space limitations and structural dictates of journalistic writing" that inhibits a nuanced understanding of Riot Grrrl. Cagen interviewed riot grrrls for research on this subject, who mention the lack of specific goals, non-hierarchical structure, and lack of leadership in Riot Grrrl that make it difficult for media to

neatly package its purpose without misrepresenting. Cagen also writes that this media attention inherently contradicts the purpose of Riot Grrrl because the "endgame is that RG encourages grrrls to tell their own stories, write their own zines, make their own music and reject corporate media—the mainstream media would have little interest in selling the movement so well that they would lose subscribers and viewers." The teen girl magazines that many Riot Grrrl zines originally manipulated and critiqued would certainly not benefit from genuinely promoting the DIY ethic of zines or anti-fashion and beauty standard ideologies. As a result, they turn Riot Grrrl zines' aesthetic into a style to commercialize, and therefore, depoliticize.

While girls like Cagen remain relatively anti-media involvement in Riot Grrrl, she does question if it would have been possible for the movement to "manipulate the media to its advantage." She sites queer activist groups like ACT UP and the Lesbian Avengers here, but ultimately concludes Riot Grrrl is too anarchic and decentralized to be successful at this experienced activist tactic. Despite these conclusions, Cagen recognizes the important impact that the media has had on her own personal understanding of Riot Grrrl. She notes how she fits the Riot Grrrl demographic as a young feminist who goes to Riot Grrrl events and makes a zine that's been labelled Riot Grrrl, but emphasizes that "like almost everyone else who thinks that she or he can make a judgment about RG, everything I ever heard about it was filtered through the lens of the (mostly) mainstream media. THE FACT IS THAT MOST OF US REALLY NEVER KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT IT. Us being those who weren't involved first-hand or didn't have direct access to RG culture." Cagen does not delegitimize the Riot Grrrl label for girls like herself who did not have access to original Riot Grrrl scenes in Olympia and Washington D.C., but she does question how such a decentralized community can continue to do activist work without the media.

Cagen also references Sarah Dyer of *Action Girl Guide* and newsletter that lists girl zine resources as an example of someone who successfully communicated with the media and has been in contact with *Fox TV*, *Sassy*, and *Seventeen*. Dyer, however, carefully weighed the advantages and disadvantages of each of these communications and encourages other girls to do the same. In a direct quotation from Dyer that Cagen cites, she says that girls can work the media without losing integrity, but should question, "What is my advantage? What is the person's/media's advantage? Who will benefit most? I think it depends on exactly what's being promoted. A resources, a philosophy, a message—those should be mainstream. A zine, a band, an individual, no." As a result, Dyer ended up working with *Seventeen* magazine to expose their readers to zines without plugging just one. This tactic is important because when teen girl magazines like *Sassy* would review one zine, such as in their Zine of the Month column, the large amount of requests sent to the creator would often end the zine due to the girls' inability to print and distribute so many copies. However, Dyer's experience having *Action Girl* reviewed by *Seventeen* was a positive experience with over 600 orders that allowed girls access to girl zines who would not have had access to that underground culture before. As a result, Cagen encourages girls to be more critical and nuanced in their ideas about engaging with the media by citing both positive and negative experiences. She says, "we should all ask ourselves what we ever really knew about Riot Grrrl that wasn't tainted by the biases of the mainstream press." At the end of this essay, she envisions a new "Girl Power movement" or "the new (rather than third) wave of the feminist movement" that is more accessible to create wide-spread dialogue than Riot Grrrl.

While Riot Grrrl was originally intended to be accessible to all girls to encourage them to create music and zines, other girls' ideas of Riot Grrrl as an exclusionary scene, like Cagen

shows, exemplifies how the media created harmful misrepresentations of the movement. The media contributed to the construction of Riot Grrrl's image as a punk style that not all girls could relate to. While Riot Grrrl originally wanted to acknowledge differences within the movement to encourage individuality and validate other girls' experiences, the media needed to categorize Riot Grrrl as a unified group or community to record the movement. As a result, the media turned political Riot Grrrl tactics of communication and community-building into consumerist strategies that depoliticized the movement. However, looking back at girl zines exposes how girl communities resisted media's simplification by deconstructing traditional divides between the producer and consumer.

Part III: Anti-Capitalist Zine Distribution Systems

Girl zine creators resisted the media's attempt to position them as passive consumers not only through critiques in zines, but through forming their own zine networks and distribution systems as gift economics. Alison Piepmeier explains how zine materiality and their qualities of "vulnerability, care, messiness—and the means by which zines are distributed keep the acquisition of zines from feeling like a financial transaction. Instead, the zine is a kind of gift" and this gift-giving is "an act of community-building" (81-82). Furthermore, girls created some zines just for the purpose of reviewing and promoting other zines and projects, such as *Action Girl Guide*, *Juncture 99*, *Riot Grrrl Press*, and *Riot Grrrl Review* and other zine distribution systems. While these zines are experimental forms of expression and connection, they do function within a tradition of women's alternative media that has historically resisted the mass media's dominant ideologies. In "The History and Structure of Women's Alternative Media," Linda Steiner considers why and how women have established their own independent media to "challenge dominant structures, ideology, and content" as well as "derive considerable

intellectual and emotional satisfaction from producing and supporting their own women-controlled, women-oriented media" (121). These examples that Steiner studies reflect similar goals in girl zine communities in the 1990s as well as Irigaray's theories on how women can abandon "phallocentric" modes of exchange. Therefore, girl zine distribution systems carry on a tradition of feminist independent media that promotes "authentic communication" through non-profit, anti-commercial ethics (124).

Like the girl zines mentioned previously, past women's alternative media also valued authentic communication over profit. As a result, they generally did not "require professional experience or formal training" and these women worked for little or no pay like girl zine creators, who could even lose money from printing costs of their zines (Steiner 124). This DIY ethic present in past feminist media also affected the appearance of the publication. Much like in girl zines, a "slick, smoothed-edge 'professional' appearance or sound is irrelevant, perhaps political undesirable" (128). Therefore, the non-professional, "messy" materiality discussed in zines in Chapter 1 applies more broadly to grassroots feminist publications that convey their desire for authentic communication between non-elitist women through content and image.

In addition, the pricing of zines reflects the non-profit motives of alternative women's media. For instance, Kristy Chan of *Wild Honey Pie* includes open discussion on the pricing of her zine in Issue 9 to promote anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist methods of transaction with her audience. She writes on the introduction page that "the 'price' of this zine always fluctuates and I've pretty much concluded that there's no point in 'setting a price' because I don't really care about money and this is not a thing I do for profit." By resisting setting a stable price for the zine, she challenges the idea that art is a commodity inherently worth any set value. Like many other zine creators, she encourages other forms of transaction in payment for her zine. Zine

creators cannot actually escape a capitalist system—they do need some money to print their zine—but they find new methods of exchange. Chan lists these options as "Correspondence, zines, music, 'art,' oh hell, money if you really want, whatever." Zine creators break down binaries between the creator/consumer divide here by giving the reader agency in deciding how they can pay for the content, whether charging for postage or print cost or exchanging their own work. Red Chidgey writes how these zine networks function as "gift economies" where "other forms of compensation are substituted for monetary returns" (Chidgey 32). In addition, girl zine creators "hold emotional currency in the networks of trading, reading, responding, exchanging ideas, and sharing work; this is typically more important than monetary returns" (Chidgey 34). Because of their values in communication and community over profit, Chan emphasizes, "I want this to be accessible to whoever wants it." Accessibility here not only applies to how engaging the zine's content or materiality may be, but also if readers can literally afford the cost of the publication.

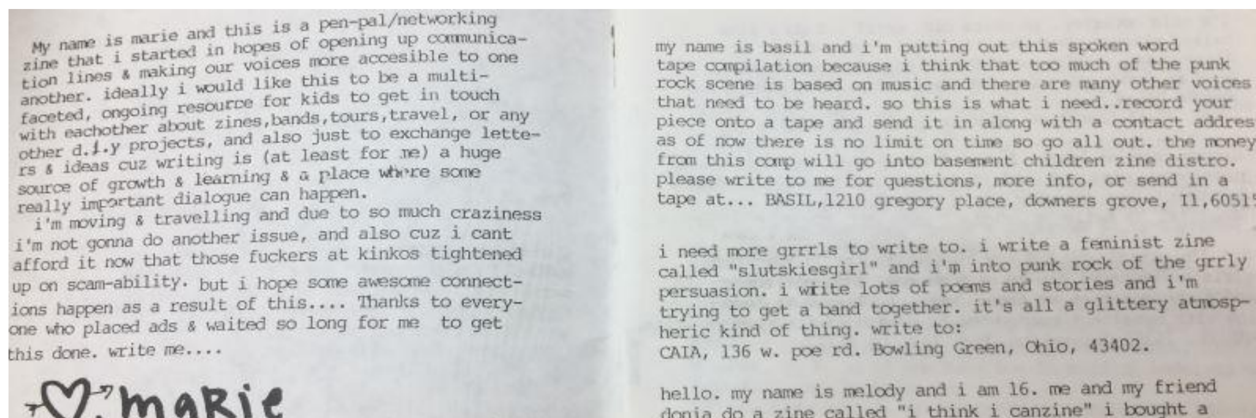
The accessible pricing of zines and alternative women's media differs from the goals of mainstream media, which must direct their content to an audience who can afford their price and subscription rates and products they advertise or sell. Because of their intent to create profit, "Commercial magazines are calculated to attract the right kind of consumers to attract maximum advertising revenues to produce huge profits" (Steiner 130). Zines and alternative media, however, do not ignore women or marginalized people who may not be able to afford mainstream magazine costs. They generally do not rely on advertising, or "limit what kind of advertising is acceptable" (Steiner 125-26). Girl zines typically only feature advertisements for other girls' zines, projects, or events to spread awareness and build community instead of using advertising for profit. For instance, a page from *Riot Grrrl NYC* showcases two examples of girls

calling for collaborations on feminist projects, including seeking models for a photo project on women who have been sexually abused and more general calls for starting new political activist projects. Contrary to mainstream magazines' for-profit advertising that promotes consumerism, many girl zines advertise other girls' zines and projects to build community rather than profit.

In addition to advertisements in personal zines, girl zine creators also often began new zine projects to review and distribute other girl zines. Erika Reinstein and May Summer created Riot Grrrl Press in 1992 as a zine distro to make more Riot Grrrl and girl zines accessible, particularly because "[t]hey were concerned that the zines, which had always been the most powerful component of Riot Grrrl to them, were getting lost amid all the controversy about mainstream media" (Marcus 231). Zine distros like Riot Grrrl Press function like zines by creating a catalog and reviews or descriptions of zines that they carry with instructions for how their readers can send postage to order copies of other zines from them. In *Riot Grrrl Press*'s Fall/Winter issue of 1997, they articulate their original purpose "to get writing by women accessible and also help women/girls get out what they wanna say." This issue also included a manifesto of "because" statements to justify the creation of the distro. Their claim that "its this or maximum rock n roll baby" and questioning of "how many girl run girl positive organizations in the punk scene can you think of?" acknowledges how the punk and zine scene of the mid-90s were still often male-dominated and did not center spaces for girls to express themselves or communicate with each other. Though zine reviews and distro catalogs may be critical, like other alternative women's media, "they are notable for their willingness to recirculate each other's information, to publicize, help, and advise each other" (Steiner 129). Girls who ran zine distros did not profit off of this work. As shown on their order form, Riot Grrrl Press only charged for

postage costs. Therefore, this work to run zine distros was done just to circulate and promote other girls' zines to build a community for communication rather than competition.

Rather than just using personal zines as ways for girls to connect with each other, girl zine creators made other types of zines like review or networking zines for more networking and communication potential. Like Sarah Dyer's *Action Girl Guide*, mentioned in Part 2 of this chapter, Kristy Chan also had a review zine called *Riot Grrrl Review*. Girls' review zines like *Action Girl Guide* and *Riot Grrrl Review* generally not only reviewed other girl zines, but provided listings of zine distros where readers can order the zines, contact information for Riot Grrrl chapters, and other feminist projects and organizations. Like Chan, Marie of *Rock Candy* similarly did not limit her zine community involvement to a personal zine. Marie also began a "pen pal zine" called *Juncture 99* that listed other girls' addresses to write to with paragraphs of their biographical information, interests, and creative projects that they want others to collaborate with (see fig. 17). Marie writes that she wants the zine to be "a multi-faceted, ongoing resource for kids to get in touch with each other about zines, bands, tours, travel, or any other d.i.y. projects, and also just to exchange letters & ideas cuz writing is (at least for me) a huge source of growth & learning & a place where some really important dialogue can happen." While these are also ideals that Marie spreads in her personal zine *Rock Candy*, *Juncture 99* provides a space to more directly encourage networking, communication, and community-building.



My name is marie and this is a pen-pal/networking zine that i started in hopes of opening up communication lines & making our voices more accesible to one another. ideally i would like this to be a multi-faceted, ongoing resource for kids to get in touch with eachother about zines, bands, tours, travel, or any other d.i.y projects, and also just to exchange letters & ideas cuz writing is (at least for me) a huge source of growth & learning & a place where some really important dialogue can happen.

i'm moving & travelling and due to so much craziness i'm not gonna do another issue, and also cuz i cant afford it now that those fuckers at kinkos tightened up on scam-ability. but i hope some awesome connections happen as a result of this.... Thanks to everyone who placed ads & waited so long for me to get this done. write me....

♡, marie

my name is basil and i'm putting out this spoken word tape compilation because i think that too much of the punk rock scene is based on music and there are many other voices that need to be heard. so this is what i need..record your piece onto a tape and send it in along with a contact addres as of now there is no limit on time so go all out. the money from this comp will go into basement children zine distro. please write to me for questions, more info, or send in a tape at... BASIL,1210 gregory place, downers grove, Il,6051

i need more grrrls to write to. i write a feminist zine called "slutskiesgirl" and i'm into punk rock of the grrly persuasion. i write lots of poems and stories and i'm trying to get a band together. it's all a glittery atmospheric kind of thing. write to:
CAIA, 136 w. poe rd. Bowling Green, Ohio, 43402.

hello. my name is melody and i am 16. me and my friend donia do a zine called "i think i canzine" i bought a

Fig. 17 Pages from *Juncture 99* by Marie

Girls' review zines and distribution systems contribute to an essential need for geographically-isolated young feminists to form non-physical communities. Non-centralized feminist movements beginning with independent publications was not necessarily new with girl zines, however. Steiner explains how nineteenth-century suffrage periodicals "were crucial in reassuring readers that they were united in a community that gave their lives a sense of significance and purpose," because otherwise, women "who resisted then dominant definitions of 'true womanhood' were geographically isolated" from each other (131). As a result, the multitude of communication tactics in women's independent publications like girl zines have always strengthened non-geographical feminist communities.

In addition to the girl zine distros, reviews, and networking zines, the personal zines discussed throughout parts 1 and 2 of this chapter all exemplify how communication and community-building tactics resist reducing girl zines into commodities of exchange in a capitalist system. While these young third-wave feminists struggled to be portrayed accurately in the mainstream media, these conflicts between mainstream media and feminist publications are also not new. Like riot grrrls, "second-wave feminists became convinced that mainstream mass media exploited, distorted, belittled, or patronized women and the women's movement" (Steiner 132). Therefore, girl zines function in a tradition of feminist publications that help women become

more than just consumers by blurring the divide between the creator and reader. Steiner acknowledges how these feminist publications may not change mainstream media institutions, but "they do offer a serious critique of dominant media structures" (140). Similarly to these past publications, zines especially can exploit, subvert, and experiment with "structures and systems" to establish "identities, communities, and whole worlds through their creative adaptions of media" (Steiner 139-40). Though third-wave feminist conflicts with the media will continue in the 21st century, zines present a multitude of tactics to reclaim spaces for expression and communication between girls.

Chapter III

Personal/Political: Girl Zines as Third-Wave Political Activism

While "the personal is political" became a second-wave feminist slogan, third-wave girl zines enact this philosophy by blurring the boundaries between personal experience and political consciousness. Many scholars recognize zines' encouragement of personal expression for the creators' individual empowerment; however, as argued in chapters 1 and 2, girls' access to zines extends from the private to public spaces when girls connect their personal lives to an embodied community to develop an intersectional feminist consciousness. We cannot only analyze excerpts of personal essays to recognize how zines blend the personal and political; we must also understand how the material artifact is constructed and distributed for the purposes of constructing anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal spaces where girls can communicate outside of dominant discourses.

Scholars have questioned both the effectiveness of Riot Grrrl as a whole movement, as well as the effectiveness of zines and other mediums of cultural production to provoke political change. Some valid critiques emphasize that Riot Grrrl's main goals were cultural production of music and zines. Many original Riot Grrrls even considered themselves cultural activists as opposed to political activists because they focused on using cultural mediums to spread political consciousness rather than channeling more traditional political activism. However, most scholarly critiques of girl zines reinforce the personal/political binary by claiming that the cultural emphasis on individual production lacked political meaning. Many of these criticisms fail to recognize the inherent political nature of how zines promote alternative forms of communication and communities of marginalized girls with little or no access to other modes of self-expression or political consciousness.

While Riot Grrrl may be more aptly described as a cultural movement, scholars' search to critique Riot Grrrl tactics have led them to devalue the political nature of the girls' goals and strategies. For instance, in *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!,* Julia Downes considers how "Riot grrrl has been understood as a fashion, a phase, as punk, as dead, as violent, as man-hate, and ultimately, as a failure" (12). As Chapter 2 reveals, however, mainstream media was largely responsible for perceptions of Riot Grrrl as just a punk fashion or man-hate. In the same book, Suzy Corrigan also writes, "As a political 'social movement' riot grrrl did not exist, but as an inspiration and incitement to politicization and self-empowerment, especially amongst isolated female youth it was vital" (126). These descriptions further the divide between political activism and personal empowerment that second-wave feminism sought to connect. When writers revoke Riot Grrrl's status as political, we must understand this "political" label as "traditional state-focused protests like marches, rallies and petitions," which girls did participate in to some degree (Corrigan 27). Rather than these traditional public political approaches, "Riot grrrl proposed a different way of conceptualizing feminist activism…towards an idea of cultural activism" (27). Even within the Riot Grrrl movement, women like Sleater-Kinney's Corin Tucker and Bratmobile's Allison Wolfe considered themselves to be solely cultural activists; nevertheless, this cultural work is also inherently political.

Riot Grrrl may not have used traditional political tactics to protest, but the large amount of girl zines created may indicate that Riot Grrrl was successful in its primary purpose: to encourage girls to produce their own culture and content. For instance, my mapping project indicates that hundreds of girl zines in the 90s were widespread geographically in the United States. Their presence in a multitude of urban, suburban, and rural spaces indicates that zine creators were likely socio-economically diverse and not solely white, middle-class, college-

educated girls. Despite not necessarily circulating in mainstream public spheres, zines were distributed beyond private use to empower a generation of young marginalized girls who would not have had access to other forms of political activism otherwise.

Rather than questioning how girl zines promote traditional political action, I am interested in how girl zines created more experimental forms of political activism by defying the binary opposition between cultural and political change that many writers still reify in their descriptions of Riot Grrrl. While considering the political effectiveness of zines in particular, Duncombe argues that zines are “pre-political.” Further, Piepmeier offers the term “micropolitical,” but also writes that the “individualized feminism” that zines promote can be problematic and that zines similarly “can be seen as laying the foundation for activism” (121). Piepmeier compares girl zines’ personal reflection to second-wave consciousness raising here (121). While I prefer the term micropolitical as well due to the personal nature of zines, Piepmeier’s claim that “zines exact a public pedagogy of hope” also implies a lack of political effectiveness in activism that operates in a more personal, private sphere than traditional social movements (20). The personal networking and community building inherent in zine culture is both a necessary foundation for traditional political organization as well as political in and of itself. As discussed in Chapter 2, even though many personal zines are produced by individual girls, they generally involve some form of collaboration and communication to form community as the basis for collective action.

Critiques of Riot Grrrl and girl zines should also acknowledge the biases that inhibit them from recognizing the work of young women as political. As Piepmeier explains, young women’s “disengagement from politics traditionally configured is thus not ignorance but ‘active disengagement’ from traditional modes of doing politics” and that their “hopeful interventions…

are political nonetheless" (161-62). As a result, I propose scrapping the language of pre- or micro-political in describing girl zines. Rather, we must recognize zines as political work, not in spite of their personal ties, but because of their incorporation of the personal with the political.

Riot Grrrl zines should also be acknowledged as political acts because riot grrrls consciously reject traditional second-wave public forms of protest in favor of new third-wave tactics that advocate for personal and political empowerment. Sara Marcus's description of riot grrrls' involvement in the We Won't Go Back March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. in 1992 illustrates how the feminist movement struggled throughout the 1980s and early 90s due to backlash of second-wave feminist (22-23). Marcus claims that in order for feminism to survive, it "traded prophetic visions of whole-cloth cultural change for a reined-in, pragmatic focus on access and ratios" (23). Because "a movement that has stopped talking about cultural change is a movement that has had its heart cut out" (23), riot grrrls of the 90s brought back an emphasis on cultural production and change that the feminist movement was lacking at the time. Marches like the We Won't Go Back March for Women's Lives promoted more second-wave feminist platforms like reproductive rights and voting. However, for young girls in high school dealing with other issues like rape culture and gender biases in school or familial dysfunction, "a feminist movement that's mostly about electing new Senators might not be all that compelling" (Marcus 26). While some riot grrrls may have attended this march and others anyway, they needed to find ways to reinvent feminism if the movement were to be relevant to their own lives and survive by becoming inclusive of more marginalized people (Marcus 26). Zines were a primary medium that these riot grrrls used to communicate about feminist issues that mattered to them and develop new third-wave strategies.

Critiques of girl zines in particular emphasize their personal nature as a limit to broader political action, which overlooks the intentional political goals that riot grrrls identified and confronted in their zines. In "Riding the Third Wave: Women-produced Zines and Feminisms," Brandi Leigh-Ann Bell discusses the limitations of zines as representative of broader third-wave feminist political strategies that encourage cultural production as political activism. Bell generalizes that "many [girl zine] producers overwhelmingly focus on the personal and fail to connect those personal experiences with characteristics of the larger society." Despite her acknowledgement that personal zines can still "lead to, and influence, political activity," Bell perpetuates this false dichotomy like Duncombe's claim that zines are only pre-political due to their connection to personal lived experiences. In addition, Bell's claim that "the most obvious and important limitation of zines is their ability to only reach a small audience" ignores the material, personal connections made through zine communities to raise political consciousness that is otherwise difficult or impossible to achieve through mainstream mediums. While it is valid to challenge how effective Riot Grrrl zines were at reaching mainstream audiences, the fact that many girl zines directly challenge culture through artistic production does not diminish, but rather enhances their political intents.

Furthermore, early riot grrrls have discussed the political aims of their cultural production tactics. Despite Marissa Melzer's critique of the political effectiveness of Riot Grrrl in *Girl Power: The Nineties Revolution in Music*, her interviews with Bikini Kill and *Jigsaw*'s Tobi Vail emphasize the original political intentions behind riot grrrls' use of cultural activism. Vail notes the connection between cultural activism and collective change when explaining, "One of the ideas we were working with in Bikini Kill was that if girls started bands, it would transform culture—and not just empower them as individuals, but change society. it would not just put

them in a position of power, but the world would actually change" (11). As a result, their call for girls to create bands and zines was not meant for individual change and empowerment, but collective action. Vail also reflects that "We really did sit down and say, 'How can we change what it means to be a girl?' and 'How can we reinvent feminism for our generation?' and we actually came up with a plan and then implemented it" (13). The inherent political goals of these forms of cultural activism challenge the standards by which we judge the effectiveness of social movements. As Melzer notes, "Riot grrrl, like feminism, punk rock, or any number of movements and subcultures, did not overthrow the patriarchy. But that doesn't discount its importance—and isn't an effective means of judging its success" (40). We can generate new forms of judging social activism, such as my mapping project's collection and display of data that show the widespread creation of girl zines in the 90s as prosperous.

Riot grrrls and girl zine creators themselves were aware of this tension between personal versus political content in activist discourses and used their zines to discuss the best methods of action. As a result, many girls were already engaging in the same critiques and dialogues that scholars and writers make about their zines. These dialogues can be seen in part two of Chapter 1 as well as Mimi Thi Nguyen's later re-evaluation of race and Riot Grrrl in 2012. Nguyen provides a more nuanced critique of the personal emphasis in riot grrrl from an insider status. She writes that "the absence of justice was too narrowly understood as a problem of ignorance, and distance" and that "[t]his desire for intimacy as a political end, and the location of the self as the source of authentic knowledge, proved for some (like myself) to be too close for comfort" (178). The desire "to extend true love and intimate self-knowledge to all girls" through personal zines may have been an idyllic goal that overlooked how zines could also be used as educational tools to address structural inequality (178). Nevertheless, girl zines themselves acted as these

sites to consider the effectiveness of particular forms of activism and encourage alternative forms of political action. In this chapter, I will use excerpts from *Bikini Kill*, *Wild Honey Pie, Coming Out Party*, *Silver Rocket,* and *You Might As Well Live* to show how personal zines engage directly in political dialogues and action.

In *Bikini Kill: a color and activity book*, Kathleen Hanna writes about the purpose of girl bands and creating zines as accessible mediums that challenge notions of traditional political activism. Her lists of reasons to be in a girl band include "[t]o make fun of and thus disrupt the powers that be," showing how conscious Hanna and others were of using irony as a tool in their writing and other creative expressions to subvert power structures. The idea that political consciousness "doesn't have to be this intense dramatic self-righteous thing to affect change" reveals how riot grrrls are critical of traditional forms of political activism. Their desire to make it "fun to talk about scary issue[s]" attempts to be more accessible to younger girls. In their zines, girls' use of irony blurs the divide between serious and fun political work. Rather than devaluing this political work, we should acknowledge the use of fun, irony, and play in creative cultural activism as a tactic to promote accessibility to young girls who do not have access to more "serious," direct forms of political action.

In Issue 9 of *Wild Honey Pie*, Chan writes a manifesto page about "What Riot Grrrl Means to Me." This page exemplifies some critiques about Riot Grrrl as a neoliberal individualistic movement with Chan's series of statements such as "This is about me. It's about my own revolution" (see fig. 16). Riot Grrrl's lack of central goals allows girls like Chan to define what the revolution means for themselves. Certainly these personal definitions can exclude awareness of broader forms of structural inequality faced by other girls and marginalized

people unlike themselves. However, this page's personal definitions can also coexist with more collective political goals present in *Wild Honey Pie* and other girl zines.

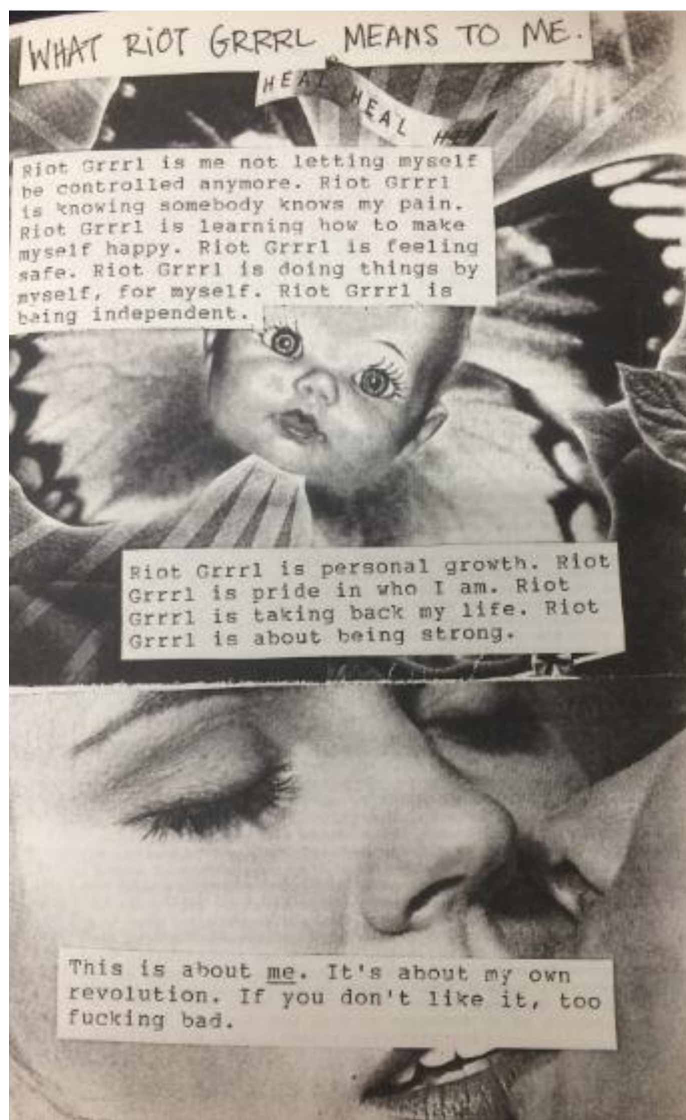


Fig. 16 Page from *Wild Honey Pie* Issue 9 by Kristy Chan

Even on another page in the same issue of *Wild Honey Pie,* Chan questions the effectiveness of revolutions that may have large numbers in contrast to personal change. While Chan acknowledges the importance of direct action, she claims that "changing the mentality of society would probably best be achieved on an individual basis." This third-wave emphasis on personal consciousness explains girls' use of zines and other media to affect change in culture

rather than just policy. To promote individual thinking that works against dominant ideology, Chan writes that "we need to dialogue and use the exchange of thoughts and ideas as a tool for personal revolution." She also discusses how the "Revolution Grrrl Style Now" slogan may be too limiting because social movements should not be limited to certain identities. As shown in Chapter 2, her zine itself contributes to this tactic of using communication for consciousness raising, particularly between people of differing intersectional, marginalized identities.

Despite Chan's initial declaration of Riot Grrrl as just a personal revolution, another page in *Wild Honey Pie* illustrates how Riot Grrrl tactics promote action in personal and political ways. Chan writes a list called "destroying the establishment" that range from examining yourself to recognizing how patriarchal ideology is harmful to taking responsibility for one's life and choices. The first point, to "Deny them of your money, your time and your attention," is an example of inaction working to advance feminist goals, but it is open to interpretation for the reader to decide what patriarchal establishments not to support. Point two addresses common personal tactics of networking and taking responsibility as an agent in one's own life. The third point, "Speak the truth. Push your reality into the faces of the masses. Make them see it and want to change it," relates to self-representation and how zine writing can be used to share one's life and reality as a first step toward political change.

In contrast to *Wild Honey Pie*, *Coming Out Party* provides further discussion on how the girl zine community can participate in political activism. The fifteen-year-old creator of *Coming out Party*, Rori, uses space in her zine to brainstorm a list of "small thing[s]" that girls can do in their own private lives, such as creating "a more girl friendly environment" in their high schools. Rori is also aware of the limitations of these strategies to affect institutional change. She claims, "There are just a few small things that I thought of. Sure, they wont really make any big change

at all, but maybe they will make a girl happy, and I think that is reason enough." When considering how mainstream media and society does not consider girls' happiness as important, Rori's promotion of creating supportive communities for girls appears more radical despite its seeming simplicity. Rather than being uninterested or unaware of how to generate more direct political change, Rori acknowledges the limited access that most young girls like herself have to traditional tactics. Like many other girl zine writers, Rori writes, "To me revolution girl style now means that we need to take action." While scholars may critique their ability to affect widespread change, their emphasis on critiquing cultural production often overlooks these direct calls for action in girl zines. Rori's line, "This change isn't the kind that can happen by voting another Washington bureaucrat into office" reveals how the girls are disempowered and unable to use voting as a traditional political strategy. Age must be taken into account here, considering how girls like Rori under the age of 18 must find alternative tactics because they could not vote.

Coming Out Party reflects girl zines creators' rejection of second-wave feminism and revision of new third-wave strategies. For instance, Rori explains that Riot Grrrl is not just a feminist movement, but "about recognizing all the issues, including the ones 'beyond' feminism." Rori does not reject feminism as a movement, but shows how third-wave feminists are calling for intersectionality and inclusion. Because Riot Grrrl attempts to encompass so many goals even beyond feminism, it may appear to fail in comparison to traditional political organization. Despite their emphasis on the personal, young girls like Rori are not unaware of these traditional strategies. Rori still promotes local political organizations and encourages her readers to attend demonstrations and rallies and sign petitions in her zine. Riot grrrls and girl zine creators often promote other politically-orientated organizations as "a way we can contact each other and help organize stuff." Clearly, girls are aware of these traditional strategies, but

they use their zines as methods of communication to expand to more third-wave tactics for political change.

While Riot Grrrl chapter meetings encouraged consciousness raising to inspire direct action, zines allowed girls like Rori to spread more information on how to be involved in political organizations. Even though Rori did not find a chapter of other riot grrrls to meet with, she claims that she has been involved in Riot Grrrl "in other ways" such as "by believing in what Riot Grrrl is and trying to use zines as a way of giving girls a voice." Many other young girls like Rori may not have access to Riot Grrrl chapters, feminist groups, or other political organizations; however, they use zines as a way to create collective political consciousness even in private spaces. Rori uses *Coming Out Party* to attempt to unite other girls to "start fighting the real enemy." She recognizes that some girls do not identify with Riot Grrrl for the same reason that other women distance themselves from feminism and that this division "is what the patriarchy wants." In the first step of challenging the patriarchy, Rori emphasizes that "[w]e need to change the way we are taught to look at ourselves and others" as a political necessity. Rori's zine exemplifies a space for this personal and political consciousness-raising for young third-wave feminists with little access to other political strategies.

Nicole Soloman's zine *Silver Rocket* Issue 6 goes even further to use her zine to promote "tangible action" that young girls can still participate in. Her suggestions include volunteering at a women's shelter, donating money, advertising girl zines, getting your school to donate money, among others. While having more specifics, Soloman still keeps the options open for girls to appropriate for themselves and encourages her readers to "fill in the specifics as they apply to you + yr priorities/desires/opinions/abilities/etc." Themes of collaboration and communication discussed in Chapter 2 also apply here, as Soloman writes, "use these if you want/can + come up

with some of yr own. Tell me yr ideas." Because of second-wave feminist and traditional politics' lack of accessibility, girl zine creators use their zines as platforms to communicate and collaborate on brainstorming new forms of indirect and direct political actions that other young girls can implement in their daily personal lives.

In Issue 6 of *You Might As Well Live*, Lauren Jade Martin directly tackles the question of what it means to be political and an activist. She challenges the assumption of an activist as a second-wave, white middle-class feminist who has all the "time and resources to spend every weekend marching on washington." Martin writes that this traditional activism must not be "the only form of activism to be valued." A letter from another girl zine creator, Rita Fatila, contributes to this discussion in Martin's zine by using Marx as an example of how "Writing & influencing people IS creating a change." Martin brings up the duality of theory and practice in political activism, and asks whether thinking, reading, writing, or everyday activities can count as activism. By expanding this notion of political activism, Martin and other third-wave feminists seek to be inclusive of more marginalized groups because "maybe not everybody can readily give up their time…in the ways that are often called for." This expansion of what counts as political contributes to broader Riot Grrrl goals to disrupt binary formations between the personal and political, private and public, and theory and practice.

While Martin does eventually conclude that these multiple forms of political engagement are valid, her zine does show her processing insecurities about her work as political. For instance, she includes a question from a letter from Fatila in Issue 6 that addresses how in the previous issue Martin wrote that she had to do more to "work for change." Fatila challenges this with the question, "what do you think yr. doing w/ yr. zine?" Fatila's intervention here allowed Martin to re-evaluate her standards for what constitutes activism in her next issue, where she

admits to having insecurity about her political credibility. Here, Martin fully admits the limitations of her activism, writing "I am not loud; I do not stand on top of tables and shout for the rights of oppressed persons everywhere." However, Martin's zine functions as a new, experimental space to find this political voice that she may not be able to express in more public political spheres. As a result, the ability to express communication in her zine's materiality, such as engaging with other girls like Fatila, allows Martin to confirm that "on a day to day basis, I am living my life as a political act." This zines' materiality with letters and responses to past issues exposes Martin's process of rejecting binaries between political actions and theories.

Martin is also able to reconcile this conflict between action and theory by situating herself in a tradition of past women artists and writers in her zine. She discusses how 20th century women writers like Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker, Tillie Olsen, and Gloria Anzaldúa have all considered her same dilemma of what counts as political in their work. These past women's anxieties about writing reflect how "the voices and creative efforts of oppressed persons get marginalized." Traditional forms of both art and activism, therefore, often require some degree of privilege to have the resources and time to be successful. Martin recognizes the overlap between art and activism too, expressing, "isn't ART a form of activism? art can be fucking revolutionary." After centuries of women's exclusion from traditional political and artistic spheres, girls in the 1990s use zines to experiment with art and writing to construct new spaces for political activism.

Despite these new third-wave strategies, it is important to note how riot grrrls and girl zine creators function within feminist traditions. In *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now*, Red Chidgey writes that "riot grrrl writers became the first generation of feminist media producers to be totally DIY" (103). However, by tracing the feminist history of DIY publications and feminist

alternative media, scholars like Piepmeier and Linda Steiner shows how this claim is not entirely true. Using examples from *Bust* and *Action Girl Newsletter*, Piepmeier reflects on how zines may still function in a tradition of commercialized women's magazines and is resistant to view zines as a completely "expressive space free from cultural constraints" (11). Ultimately, Piepmeier rejects the binary thinking that "present girls either as victims of an oppressive culture or as resistant agents who are the success stories of late capitalism" (11). Riot Grrrl and girl zines should be acknowledged as effective political tactics despite the critical view that they were solely cultural or pre-political artifacts. Like Piepmeier, we must instead "take zines seriously as literary and cultural artifacts with weight and merit" (12). They were a central part of Riot Grrrl's cultural production strategies that allowed third-wave feminism to bridge the gaps between the personal and political that second-wave feminism noticed. As a result, girl zine creators "were revising feminism without reinventing it" (18). As third-wave feminism continues to be critiqued due to its personalization and individualism, zines' continuation in the 21st century can help us remember original third-wave strategies that resist the media's commodification and de-politicization of the feminist movement.

Conclusion

By acknowledging the political nature of zines as material artifacts, we can incorporate these tactics into our independent feminist media production in the 21st century to resist the commercialization of third-wave feminism. The media's attempt to commodify the early third-wave feminist movement—whether labelled "lipstick feminism," "choice feminism," "pop feminism," or "feel-good feminism"—leads to what Andi Zeisler calls "early manifestations of marketplace feminism" (160). Zeisler's *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to Covergirl, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement* explains how the 21st century's "mainstream,

celebrity, consumer embrace of feminism […] positions it as a cool, fun, accessible identity that anyone can adopt. […] It's decontextualized. It's depoliticized. And it's probably feminism's most popular iteration ever" (xiii). While riot grrrls may have contributed to reconstructing feminism as cool, fun, and accessible, the media's misrepresentation of Riot Grrrl furthered the de-contextualization and de-politicization of feminism in the marketplace. Mainstream society's appropriation of Riot Grrrl's idea of "Girl Power" was meant only to "elevate girls as consumers" (Zeisler 177). As a result, Riot Grrrl's conflicts with the mainstream media discussed in Chapter 2 exemplify the beginning of further conflicts between the media and corporations' appropriation of the third-wave feminist movement for consumerist purposes in the 21st century.

Zines as examples of independent feminist media illustrate tactics that feminists in the 21st century can use to reconnect feminism with collective political action rather than a consumerist identity. Despite some scholarly critiques about the Riot Grrrl movement and cultural production failing to influence mainstream change in society, zines inspired more independent feminist media such as the magazines *Bitch* and *Bust*. Piepmeier explains how *Bitch* magazine, started in 1996 by Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler as a zine, "draws on the rhetoric, iconography, and aesthetics of grrrl zine culture, and it addresses a subject matter—pop cultural representations—that is characteristic of the third wave" (172). While *Bitch* began as a zine that eventually claimed magazine status, it maintains a tradition of independent feminist media with critiques of mainstream media and pop culture. Online feminist communities have also grown out of these independent feminist media traditions. In particular, the online magazine *Everyday Feminism* that began in 2012 has since "become one of the most popular feminist digital media sites in the world, with over 4.5 million monthly visitors from over 150 countries," according to

their website, everydayfeminism.com. While girl zines have built foundations for independent feminist communities to grow both in print and digitally, these new media forms can learn from print girl zines about the importance of personal, material connections to create empowered communities.

When discussing zines' relevance to the 21st century, many scholars introduce e-zines or zines that are only published digitally. While there may be more e-zines than print zines today, digital and print zines and feminist scenes have coexisted since the 90s, and we must be careful not to perpetuate false binaries between online and physical realities. Scholars often position digital zines as the solution to the limitations of material zines such as their printing cost, their short-lived nature, and their difficulty accessing wider mainstream audiences. Melanie Ferris writes that because of these limitations, "girls are now turning to cyberspace and the creation of e-zines in their search for liberation." Despite the internet's solutions to printing costs and distribution, Ferris and other scholars do not always consider the materiality of print zines that digital publications lose. Though online feminist communities are growing in the 21st century, their wider audience and lack of materiality create new issues of online harassment, spam, and other disconnections that prevent communities from forming at the same intimate, personal level as material zine communities. As a result, scholars must be careful to distinguish how the medium of print zines allows community to form distinctly from e-zines' ease of self-expression. Rather than positioning print and digital forms of self-expression as superior or inferior to one another, we must understand how the medium of feminist work serves as the most appropriate space to create supportive communities in the face of everyday harassment and oppression, especially for vulnerable young girls or women with varying marginalized identities.

Furthermore, scholarly critiques of zines' inability to reach wider mainstream audiences can also be seen as a benefit of their material form that allows for more intimate and supportive communication and communities to form. Piepmeier claims in her article "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community" that in "a world where more and more of us spend all day at our computers, zines reconnect us to our bodies and to other human beings." As claimed throughout chapters 1 and 2, zines' materiality allows girls to package complex marginalized identities and experiences to share with their audience for purposes of raising feminist consciousness and community building. Through a DIY, anti-consumerist materiality, zines construct empowered communities by encouraging more girls to create their own forms of cultural production and political activism in opposition to a patriarchal society. As long as traditional binaries between the private and public, mind and body, producer and consumer, and personal and political continue in the 21st century, third-wave feminists can continue to utilize zines or their tactics of material communication and community-building as intersectional art and political activism.

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