

circulation of many of them had been, I realized that I might possess the only copies of publications that could completely disappear from people's memories. I had them all stored safely in actual magazine storage boxes and just thought I'd think of a use for them someday.

Then, after a move, we had a flood in our new house's basement. Thankfully, the zines were stored in an area that wasn't touched, but a lot of our other things were water-damaged and I decided that if I really wanted to see these zines preserved, I needed to find a safer home for them. I began searching for libraries that I thought might want them, and during one of my online searches found out about the Sallie Bingham Center.

Of all the libraries that I thought might be interested (there were no zine collections anywhere at the time – at least that I could find) I was the most attracted to the Sallie Bingham Center because of the collections they already had—there was an emphasis on ephemera and one of a kind items like diaries that made me feel like they would know what to do with my zines. So at the end of 1999, I sent off a blind “hey, do you think you might want this stuff I have” email and got a resounding YES back right away! After a few exchanges, I felt sure that my zines would be respected and well-treated there, and that my collection might really serve some useful purpose. So in 2000 I began shipping the archive box by box (a process that continues to this day as I continue to unearth more zines and comics!)

### The present and future

A decade later, the zine collection continues to grow, many other zine collections have also come to the Sallie Bingham Center to expand their holdings, and scholarship on girl zines has started to really flourish. I have been gratified beyond my imagination to see how much impact my decision has already had.

One thing that has worried me over the years is the discontinuity of history that so often happens when material is ephemeral or marginal – and zines are both! So much information and thinking is lost, and then so much information has to be rediscovered again and again, wasting time and energy that could be used to move forward. I have seen this happening in the modern (much smaller) zine world as well as the blogosphere. Many writers have no knowledge of the work that went before them within their own lifetimes, and I see much time spent on working through discussions that have taken place many times before. But now that zines are being preserved and studied, I hope that we can avoid a continuation of this – I hope that the work that went in to all these zines can be made more and more accessible.

And I hope that future writers will be able to build on the work of those that have gone before them instead of repeating it. I look forward to seeing just where they may take us!

## Self-Publication with Riot Grrrl Ideals: Zines ≠ Vanity Press Publications

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I have been questioning why I continue to type, cut, paste, and photocopy my words for others to read. I think that I do it to remain self aware and to document my process of living. It is a way to present my ideas to a wider audience than I normally would be able to, communicate and connect.<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Whitney, *Indulgence* zine

Zines are self-published, but the motivation behind their publication is different than that driving many vanity press and chapbook authors. Punk rock and riot grrrl community ethos are fundamental to zines, not just as the cultures that birthed them in their current incarnation, but also as what separates them from other self-publications. By collecting and preserving zines, the non-music primary sources of punk rock, librarians are documenting these movements in the participants' own voices—the voices of those too young, too politically radical, too crusty, and/or too bad mannered to appeal to the corporate media. It is important to note that zine producers are not only people who have been relegated to the margins but also people who have chosen to claim the margins. In contrast to most writers, many zine producers might choose to reject an offer from a corporate publishing house. Why let someone else control what you can say, when you can do it yourself?

Since the focus of this essay is on print publications, while I will discuss non-zine self-publications, for the most part, I am going to avoid print on demand and other online publishing outlets.

To set the stage for a discussion about self-publications, I quote from Chris Anderson's *The Long Tail*, what he identifies as “mental traps,” or misconceptions people have about self-publishing ventures,

- Everyone wants to be a star
- Everyone's in it for the money
- If it isn't a hit, it's a miss
- The only success is mass success
- “Direct to video” = bad
- “Self-published” = bad
- “Independent” = “They couldn't get a deal”
- Amateur = amateurish

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<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Whitney, *Indulgence*, #5, Summer 2000: [2-3]

- Low-selling = low quality
- If it were good, it would be popular<sup>2</sup>

I assert that most of these assumptions are true of vanity press books, some are true of self-published works, and none are true of zines. I contrast the three publication types below in Table 1.

Vanity Press	Self-Publications	Zines
Scorned	Tolerated	Invisible
Publisher does most of the work	Publisher does most of the work	Author does nearly all of the work
Author has minimal control over design or anything other than content	Author has more control	Author has total control
Publishing costs shouldered or shared by author	Publishing costs shouldered or shared by author	Author solely responsible for publishing costs

Table 1

Vanity Press publications, almost universally scorned by serious writers, publishers, and libraries are ventures where the author provides some or all of the costs of publication, and the publisher in return edits for spelling and grammar, designs, prints, distributes, and to varying degrees publicizes the book, often by marketing to the author's friends and family members.<sup>3</sup> Some of this can also be true of self-publishing endeavors, the primary difference being who owns the book. Vanity publishers own the finished work, sometimes giving copies to the author as part of the initial contract, and/or selling the author copies at a reduced rate.

The vanity author also has less control over the finished product than his/herself-publishing counterpart. In the 1970s published poet Jose-Angel Figueroa chose a vanity press over small press or self-publication because he did not think a small press would be willing or able to take the risk of publishing his book in hard cover with high quality production and design, and because he did not have the resources himself for the latter method. However, when he dealt with Vantage Press, a major "subsidy book publisher," as they currently describe themselves,<sup>4</sup> and he wanted to hire his own designer, he had to have it written into his contract that Vantage could not reject the design.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to commanding a greater level of control and ownership, the self-

publisher may handle different parts of the editing, production, design, and distribution him/herself. Typically zine publishers handle every aspect of the process themselves, save for photocopying or printing. On the other hand, the word "typically" does not necessarily belong in the same sentence with the word "zine." While most zines are self-published, have a small self distributed print run, are low budget and outside the mainstream, and are motivated by a desire to share something with a subculture community, there are exceptions to each of these concepts. To illustrate what zines can be like, I will share a description of one zine I pulled off the Barnard zine shelf somewhat at random:

Rainbow Flavoured Angst, #1 is a 20 page 4.25" x 5.5" zine by Hanh Nguyen. It includes a magic marked cover cartoon about racism, a two-page introduction, an essay on identity, a poem and essays about the war in Vietnam, a poem about a death penalty victim, an article about a husband getting advice from the author's aunt, a how-to article on writing a "letter to authority," a piece about a classmate's ignorance, guest pieces—on citizenship and a poem, a cartoon about American hypocrisy, a tribute to Matthew Shepard, some political quotes, and what is known in the trade as an "outro" (the opposite of an intro...duction). You also get the author's first name (her last name is included in an essay, so your discovery of it is incidental), email and postal addresses, the cost of the zine (\$1 or two stamps or a zine trade). There is neither a date nor subscription information. The content is variably handwritten and word processed. There are drawings, photos, and clip art throughout. The back has a picture of the Simpsons, a quote from the Boondocks, and what look like two photocoped stickers<sup>6</sup>

The desire to do it oneself and to retain a great deal of control is common to zinesters and many other self-publishers. What differentiates them is the punk rock/anarchist culture from which zines emerged and to which riot grrrl zines in particular evolved. To define punk rock ideals, I am going to quote from an article about how punk ideals affect food choices,

"Being punk is a way of critiquing privileges and challenging social hierarchies. Contemporary punks are generally inspired by anarchism, which they understand to be a way of life in favor of egalitarianism and environmentalism and against sexism, racism, and corporate domination."<sup>7</sup>

To make this more specifically about riot grrrl, I want to share selected items from "Riot Grrrl Is" from the band Bikini Kill's zine:

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings. ...  
 BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (boy) standards of what is or isn't. ...  
 ... the punk rock 'you can do anything' idea is crucial to the coming angry grrrl

2 Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less Instead of More* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 167.

3 Steven Zeitchik, "Don't Publish America?: Authors Allege Publisher Deception," *Publishers Weekly*, November 22, 2004, 13.

4 <http://www.vantagepress.com>

5 *Coda: Poets & Writers Newsletter*, "Vanity Press: Stigma or Sesame?" 4, no. 2 (November/December 1976): 7.

6 Jenna Freedman, "AACR, Bendable but Not Flexible: Cataloging Zines at Barnard College," in *Radical Cataloging: Challenges and Possibilities*, K.R. Roberto, ed. 2008.

7 Dylan Clark, "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine," *Ethnology* 43, no. 1. (Winter 2004): 19.

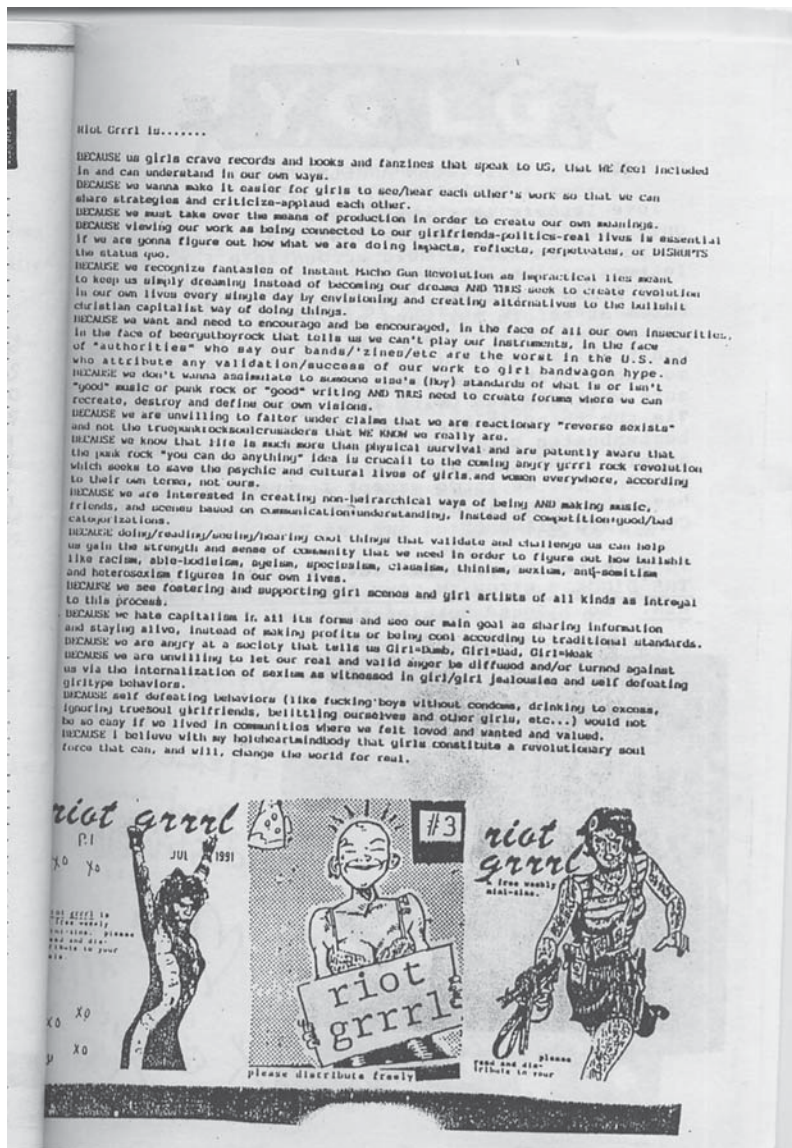


Figure 1

rock revolution which seeks to save the psychic and cultural lives of girls and women everywhere, according to their own terms, not ours. ...

BECAUSE we are interested in creating non-hierarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations. ...

BECAUSE we hate capitalism in all its forms and see our main goal as sharing information and staying alive, instead of making profits or being cool according to traditional standards.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 1)<sup>9</sup>

Riot grrrl is angry, but it is also about love, support, and community, as evidenced in the following excerpt from Cindy Crabb's widely-distributed-for-a-zine *Doris* (Figure 2<sup>10</sup>):

Zine writers generally have not submitted manuscripts to mainstream publishers as many of their vanity and self-publishing counterparts have done unsuccessfully. The Do It Yourself (DIY) ethic that is so strong in punk rock, and mentioned in nearly every article I read on the subject, is not the only reason for this. In contrast to their traditional self-publishing counterparts, they do not *wish* to participate in corporate or mainstream publishing. They do not want their product to come out looking like a book from HarperCollins. Lillah, a sixteen-year-old riot grrrl interviewed in *Signs* puts it like this,

It's important that you create your own culture that doesn't need the mainstream to exist, to go on. That allows people to grow, to learn as much as possible, to not make concessions. You need to take it away from the mainstream, build your own ballpark. It doesn't need to answer to anyone but yourself.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, riot grrrl not only rejected mainstream media, at one point participants put a freeze on giving interviews because the media were getting their message wrong and fetishizing the girls themselves while ignoring or misrepresenting the movement.<sup>12</sup>

Zines are more than self-expression. Zine communication, especially within riot grrrl, was supplemented substantially with letter writing and pen pal relationships. It wasn't enough to publish your work; you also had to respond to other writers with comments about their work.

Barnard's holdings include several women's self-defense guides, zines about racism in punk and activist communities such as *Evolution of a Race Riot*, and a potentially libelous comp (compilation) zine called *Baby I'm a Manarchist* about a man the authors regard as a sexual predator in the zine scene. I mention the libel issue to bring up the point that zines regularly flout rules and conventions their authors see as senseless or offensive or of which they are ignorant. Many zines come with anti-copyright state-

8 Bikini Kill, "Riot Grrrl Is..." written by Kathleen Hanna, *Girl Power*, no. 2: unpaginated. (Note, misspellings corrected.)

9 Ibid.

10 Cindy Ovenrack, "Secrets," *Doris* no. 17, "Reprints." Winter 2000: unpaginated.

11 Jessica Rothenberg and Gitana Garafalo, "Riot Grrrl: Revolutions from within," *Signs* 23, no. 3 (1998): 826.

12 Rothenberg, 828.



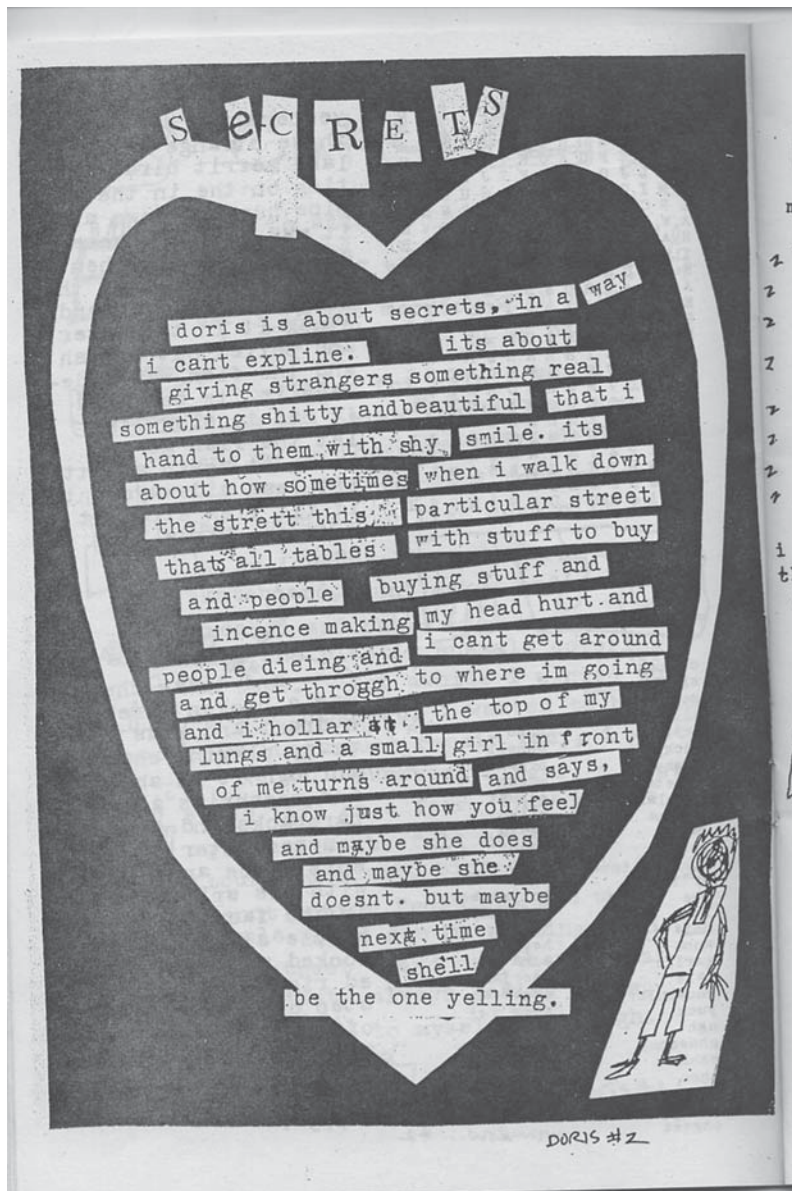


Figure 2

ments, my favorite being from a cookbook called *Please Don't Feed the Bears* that began its life as a zine,

Everything in this book is anti-copyrighted. You can repress it and give your friends copies, take out things you don't like, smear tahini all over it, wear its designs in corporate magazines, claim recipes you like as your own, replace my musical suggestions with contemporary Christian rock, lick the pictures, or even take an image out of it, screen it on t-shirts, and sell them on E-Bay for \$21 (not that that has ever happened or anything). Seriously, fuck copyrights. This books is yours now. Do with it as though wilt.<sup>13</sup>

Zines are also generous with other people's intellectual property, reprinting book, magazine, and other zine articles, private letters, and also for things few if any regular publishers would take responsibility, such as herbal abortion recipes or instructions on performing a DIY menstrual extraction. Their distribution is too small to attract the attention of most copyright holders, and they are likely not viewed as legitimate enough to cause much concern or warrant a lawsuit even if a wronged party were informed of the copyright infringement or personal abuse. Individuals that are attacked are free to respond in kind, in their own zines. And while we're on the topic of questionable practices in zine publishing, punk methodology also includes the tradition in zine publishing of liberating paper, supplies, and especially photocopies to produce the work for free (i.e. "scamming").

The majority of zines in Barnard's collection are personal and political zines with overt or inherent feminist themes.<sup>14</sup> Through donations from Asian-American and Latina zinesters (Yumi Lee, Lauren Jade Martin, and Celia Perez), we are comparatively strong in holdings by women of color in a movement often criticized for its white middle classness. Like many zinesters, we tend to eschew literary zines (fiction and poetry), which may have the most in common with vanity press publications in their quality and motives. We also have a few art zines, but like print on demand, they are a rich topic for another paper entirely.

Before I go further into Barnard's collection, largely excerpting an essay I wrote for *Radical Cataloging: Essays at the Front*, edited by K.R. Roberto, I would like to discuss more broadly libraries' role and responsibility to zines in particular and alternative press publications in general. The American Library Association has written into its Bill of Rights:

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, informa-

<sup>13</sup> Asbjorn Intonsus. *Please Don't Feed the Bears* (Portland, OR: Microcosm, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> "Barnard's zines are written by women with an emphasis on zines by women of color. A woman's gender is self-defined. We also collect zines on feminism and femme identity by people of all genders. The zines are personal and political publications on activism, anarchism, body image, third wave feminism, gender, parenting, queer community, riot grrrl, sexual assault, and other topics." Collection policy from website, July 1, 2010. <http://barnard.edu/library/zines/about.htm>



Figure 3<sup>19</sup> (Highlighting Added)

tion, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.<sup>15</sup>

“Zines are usually written by people normally under- or not at all represented in library catalogs:

1. young people
2. poor people
3. people with ideas outside the mainstream
4. people who have bad spelling and grammar

These are some of the same people we are trying to serve and encourage to take better advantage of our collections. One way to do that is to make the collection better reflect the community it serves, by including materials published by its members.”<sup>17</sup>

“As librarians know, sometimes self-censorship is more dangerous than the overt banning of particular items. In the case of zines, the self-censorship is carried out to such a degree that we do not even consider the materials that we are de facto rejecting. The number of public and academic libraries that I know to be actively acquiring zines for a discrete collection—either with or without the engagement of a deputed librarian—is around 20. With an estimated 122,573 libraries of all kinds in the United States,<sup>18</sup> I think we can do better.”<sup>19,20</sup>

Different types of libraries have different missions. Academic and research libraries have a responsibility not just to provide access to materials for current users, but to preserve items for future scholarship. The zine collection at Duke University is a perfect exemplar of this duty, and they’re also hugely successful at integrating zines into coursework. Public libraries, when they emphasize popular use of a collection, especially when they circulate their zines, as a few of them do, necessarily select, process, and catalog their materials differently than an archival collection would. Many public library zine collections serve teen populations.

Take it from Loren, eighteen, of Lone Oak, Texas: “Young adults are at an awkward stage in life (I should know—I’m one!) and they need something that can relate to them. When I first read a zine, I was AMAZED at what these people were writing! I kept thinking, ‘You’ll never find this in a book!’ Zines should never be kept secret.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> ALA Council, “Library Bill of Rights.” American Library Association, as reaffirmed January 24, 1996, <http://www.ala.org/work/freedom/lbr.html>.

<sup>16</sup> April Hornbuckle, “[Intro],” *Cartography for Beginners*, no. 5. Summer, 2005: unpaginated.

<sup>17</sup> Freedman, AACR, *Bendable*.

<sup>18</sup> American Library Association, “Fact Sheet 1.” <http://www.ala.org/ala/alalibrary/libraryfactsheet/alalibraryfactsheet1.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Freedman, AACR, *Bendable*.

<sup>20</sup> Figures updated per more recent factsheet <http://www.ala.org/ala/professionalresources/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet01.cfm>

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Hannah Gómez, “Teens and Zines,” *Voice of Youth Advocates* 30, no. 1 (2007): 25.