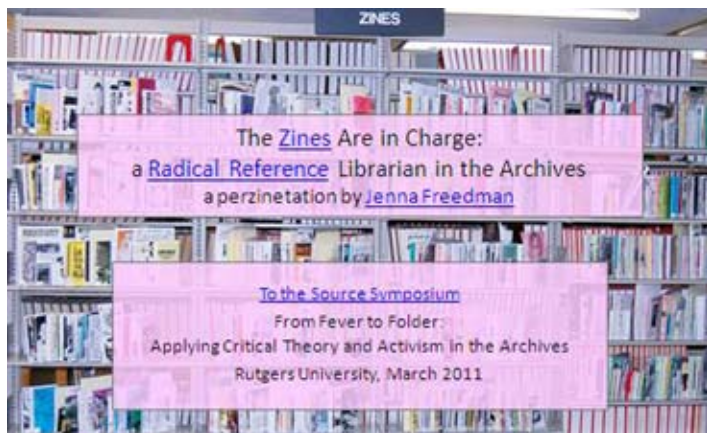


bills. In other words, what remains is something approaching an archival record. Not all of these types of materials make it to the archives. Materials may end up in vertical files, pamphlet collections, or elsewhere.

As the artist has taken up activities not specifically tied to the creation of enduring objects, the evidence of the art activity passes out of the museum's curatorial departments into the hands of archives and other [Continued on page 40](#)

The Zines Are in Charge: A Radical Reference Librarian in the Archives

by Jenna Freedman
Zine Librarian
Barnard College Library



SLIDE 1

I presented this “perzine-tation” at the “To the Source Symposium” at Rutgers, naming it after “personal zines” or “perzines.” I did so to signal that my offering was going to be far less scholarly than the presentations of my co-panelists (Laura Helton, Grace Lile, and Jonathan Lill) and our extremely erudite moderator, Rachel C. Miller, who also curated the panel.



SLIDE 2

Readers should know that I am not an archivist. I could better be described as an accidental special collections librarian, having pitched the zine collection to the (then) library dean, Carol

Falcone, and having learned a few things about archival and special collections practices, after making many mistakes along the way. While I am an academic librarian who has written or contributed to peer-reviewed publications, my focus tends to be on practice, which perhaps reflects my activism. These days I see myself as somewhere between activism and scholarship. I am not as actively engaged as I once was in political demonstrations and campaigns, and I am not writing about them much either, not even on my blog. What I am doing, and probably why I was asked to participate in this event, is collecting, preserving, and providing access to the creative, emotional, and intellectual output of young women activists, in the form of zines.

It is not just my political orientation, however, that informs my work with zines; it is my librarian orientation: reference. Archivists and librarians must constantly balance the seesaw that places access at one end and preservation at the other. As a reference librarian (or, doormat), whenever there is a choice to make, I tend to privilege access over preservation. That's no better or worse than what a trained or born archivist does, it's just important to note.

You may be annoyed by the first person, casual tone of this presentation/essay. In part, the style is meant to mimic that of a personal zine, hence the “perzine-tation” subtitle. The other part is to signal that the lines in my life as a librarian, an activist, and just me are extremely blurry. Many librarians identify strongly with their jobs, and I am no exception. I do a lot of Barnard work from home, and occasionally I do work for Radical Reference (a group of librarians who serve the information needs of activists and independent journalists) from Barnard. I feel like I am always “on” as a zine librarian, a member of Radical Reference, or as a librarian in general.



SLIDE 3

The Barnard Library Zine Collection policy is as follows:

Barnard's zines are written by women (cis- and transgender) with an emphasis on zines by women of color. We 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, trans experience, and other topics.

The policy has changed twice in the seven-year history of the zine collection, both with substantial input from the community. As a zine librarian, in addition to privileging access over preservation, I favor anarcho-punk-influenced zine community mores, rather than the tenets of librarianship, when the two are in conflict.

So that you know where I am coming from, let me quote from Dylan Clark's article "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine" (*Ethnology* 43 [2004], 1: 19), about how punk ideals affect food choices, to explain how I understand that anarcho-punk influence:

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.

Examples of honoring zinesters' wants and needs over librarianship's include removing someone's name from the catalog record, even if it is explicitly stated in the zine; always asking for permission to use zine cover and interior images and quotations, even when they would be considered fair use with a mainstream publication; and asking people whose gender expressions have changed since they published their zine whether they feel comfortable having their work in a collection of women's zines.

The more recent of the two collection changes was meant to be more explicit about our inclusion of zines by transgender and transsexual women, as well as cisgendered (meaning having your gender match your sex) women. I started by presenting the old statement and a new version and soliciting feedback on our *LiveJournal* blog (<http://barnardzines.livejournal.com/79446.html>).

Some back-and-forth on and off the website led us to our current statement. Community contributions were both surprising and helpful. We learned that in going out of our way to include trans women, we were actually reinforcing a difference. We might have done better to leave the statement as it was, at least regarding women (cis- and trans-). Getting e-schooled by the trans community was sometimes painful, but it was educational and worth the effort, and I hope it will yield trust dividends down the line. I do find that nearly everything I do purely out of a sense of duty to the zine community ends up in the plus column for the library: donations, publicity, and good will, even if that is not at all what drives me.

Being driven almost always leads to extra work. In the case of the Barnard Library Zine Collection, it sometimes means doing twice as much. I catalog the zines in the catalog Barnard shares with Columbia University, CLIO, and thereby in WorldCat. However, because the Anglo American Cataloging Rules, not to mention Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), do not always serve zines (or any library holdings) as well as they could, I enter more details about each zine in a pre-cataloging database available only on the password-protected

Barnard library network. The privacy is a good thing: it allows me to include writers' real names and other information that is important for me, my colleagues, and successors to know, but that does not belong in public view.

My biggest LCSH complaints right now? The lack of an access point for people who identify as queer, rather than gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and people who prefer to be described as survivors rather than victims, e.g., rape survivors. The umbrella term available for queer is "sexual minorities," which is not especially popular with those whom it is meant to describe.



SLIDE 4

Other Library of Congress Subject Headings I wish the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO) would reconsider:

- Fan magazines: <http://lowereastsidelibrarian.info/lcsh/2009/week35/fanzines>

This really makes my blood boil. It happened over two years ago, and I am still outraged. The Library of Congress, in all its wisdom (ha!) merged Fanzines and Fan magazines (they are nothing alike) under the heading of Fan magazines (which is by far the less popular genre).

- Butch and Femme: <http://lowereastsidelibrarian.info/butchandfemme>

I've been agitating for ages on my blog and via the suggest terminology form (<http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh2009007614.html>) to establish headings for Butch and for Femme identities.

- Sizeism (<http://lowereastsidelibrarian.info/fatacceptanceplease>)

This is another heading I've been agitating for, on the grounds that people of size do not necessarily identify or want to be identified as overweight or obese, that these descriptors are inappropriate, inaccurate, and pejorative.

- Privilege

LC recently rejected White Privilege as a subject heading. This is a descriptor that I would love to apply to zines, along with Male or Gender Privilege, Class Privilege, and so forth. From the SACO list White privilege:

White privilege is a [Continued on page 41](#)

ZINES Continued from page 19

particular way of viewing racism; instead of looking at the disadvantages that people of color experience, the scholarship examines the privileges white people have. The concept is covered by several existing headings, such as Racism; Race discrimination; [class of persons or ethnic group] — Social conditions; [place] — Race relations; [ethnic group] — Race identity; etc. The meeting feels that the existing subject headings are sufficient. The proposal was not approved.

They are so wrong!!!

Luckily I am occasionally successful at getting new headings established, usually with the help of a for-real cataloger like Sandy Berman, Jocelyn Saidenburg, or Adam Schiff.



SLIDE 5

I often think what I do is not particularly radical. The materials I work with do have political content, and their creators may seem strange to people outside their subculture. But really, I am just trying to treat their work respectfully and make it available to researchers and leisure readers. That's not so weird for an academic archivist or special collections librarian, is it?

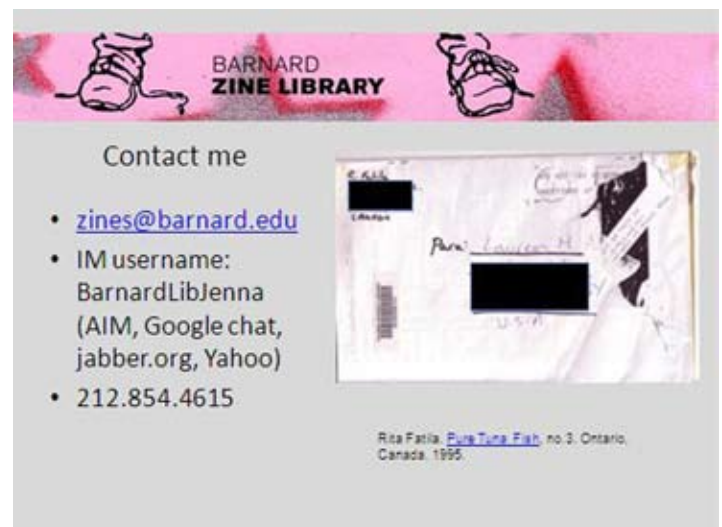
Oh, wait a minute — leisure readers? Maybe that is a little weird. Based on advice dispensed from genuine archivist James Danky, I began the collection by trying to acquire two copies of every zine, the first for the climate-controlled, acid-free archives and the second for the stacks. The stacks' zines were always browsable, but in 2007 they began circulating, including via Interlibrary Loan. I let anyone into the library to use the stacks zines and I will page archives zines on demand, without requiring credentials or a justification. There are no white gloves and no inspecting of bags. People can make photocopies and scans and take pictures of the zines. (Remember when I said where I stand on the access versus preservation seesaw?)

Another thing that I do not think is radical, but others might, is a commitment to bringing alternative voices and opinions into the library, thereby giving them greater legitimacy. If we did not have zines at Barnard, we would also not have repre-

sented the thoughts and opinions of teenage girls and young women, including women with limited education, views unacceptable or unsellable to corporate publishers, and lots of other girls and women sharing stories you'd never see unmediated and unabashed on a library shelf.

These voices are so important to me and so underrepresented that I felt that it was important to do item-level cataloging for them and to be sure they were included in WorldCat, as well as in our local catalog, CLIO. I create original catalog records for the majority of our zines, putting in a lot of my own time to do so.

Zine cataloging has become my activist project. I am given one day a week to catalog zines from home, and I generally spend ten to fifteen hours on zine cataloging in my "off" time, rather than the seven hours I'm paid to do it. I skip meetings and protests to catalog zines. I have let my other primary activist project (Radical Reference) go to some extent in favor of zine cataloging. I'm not bragging or complaining — I'm explaining my presence on a panel about activism and archives. I'm really quite thrilled to have the chance to contribute, in my own way, to the girl revolution.



SLIDE 6

This was the end of my talk, which I delivered at Rutgers at top speed, with great enthusiasm, but perhaps less structure than a better archivist would have mustered. I apologize for bringing a taste of the chaos that is my presentation style to the page. That's what happens when you let a radical into the archives. She spices things up, but not necessarily in the ways that one would have envisioned.