

## Introduction

### Zines as Documents of Personal Survival

In recent years zines, small, low budget, self published magazines, have caught the interest and attention of youth media makers, magazine publishers and cultural critics. In the United States there are hundreds of types of zines and there are as many reasons for making zines as there are zine makers. Each editor has a particular history that has lead him or her to create a zine that discusses topics as vast as thrift store shopping, punk rock music, substitute teaching, roller coasters, vegan cooking or anything else he or she feels passionately about.<sup>1</sup> Within the broad landscape of zines, there is a group of young women who have chosen to create zines that deal explicitly with their personal lives. Several major themes emerge from these zines, expressed by the editors, which explain why they have chosen to publish their deeply personal experiences. Articulated within young women's zines those themes include, but are not limited to, a need for community, a desire to communicate with other people their age about issues they are facing in their lives, the belief that publishing a zine affirms complex and marginalized identities that are not represented or respected in mainstream media or culture, the need to share information about subjects ignored by the mainstream media, the process of finding one's own voice and building self-confidence, and the desire to document and share ones own experiences and life processes.

Young women use zines to express their views, including dissent, concern or disdain for the society and culture of which they are a part. Their voices are especially crucial in the face of corporate media consolidation (media outlets being owned by fewer and fewer companies), which narrows the kind of information and news that is readily accessible to the general public. More immediately, however, zines show that young women have powerful voices and can lead significant lives in a world rife with sexism,

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<sup>1</sup> See Al Hoff, *Thrift Score*(1994-1998), Dan Sinker, *Punk Planet*(Chicago, IL: 1994-present), Dave Roche, *On Subbing*(Portland, OR: Self published, 2004), Dan Howland, *Ride Theory* (Portland, OR: Self published, 2000), Sarah Evans, *Salt and Slush* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: 2004), respectively.

racism and ageism which tells young women they are only important as consumers and that their voices and actions do not matter and cannot make a difference.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to explore the connections between the writing young women have done in zines and the work of more established critical feminist writers and cultural critics. When connected to scholarly work on identity, political consciousness and radical media, zines are a dynamic example of the ways young women negotiate their own subjectivity and express themselves politically within dominant culture. Viewed through the lens of anti-racist feminist analysis zines can be viewed as a viable tool that young women, and other marginalized people searching for creative outlets for personal and political expression, can use to foster self-awareness and political consciousness. Zines can also be shown to be spaces that enable social critique outside of traditional venues for criticism such as academia and established newspapers, magazines and journals.

This paper will serve as a tool or guide for progressive and radical educators, independent media makers and youth workers who would like to understand the phenomenon of zines and the spirit of self-expression and political agency that drives their creation. By presenting writing from zines by young women along with an explanation of the history, context and concerns in which they were produced, I hope to create a resource which those interested in alternative culture, media and knowledge production can use to inspire young people in their classrooms, workshops and personal lives. Sharing young women's zines with an audience of youth workers and media makers, who may have never seriously considered how zines can be useful in the fields of education, social justice work and youth development, can show the analytic power of

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<sup>2</sup> Feminist scholars have documented declines in the self-esteem, body image and academic performance of young women. See L.M. Brown and C. Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) and P. Orienstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). For a concise and easy to read primer on how advertisers court young people for their buying power see Anne Elizabeth Moore, *Hey, Kidz! Buy This Book* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004). For information about young people's activism see Mikki Halpin, *It's Your World—If You Don't Like It, Change It* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2004) and Viven Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin, eds, *The First This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).

young women and by extension, other marginalized young people. Highlighting and contextualizing young women's zines offers many potential strategies for fostering political consciousness in young people.

This paper is divided into four sections, History and Context, Anti-Racist Feminist Theory, Zines as Sites for Shared Struggle and Dialogue, and Zines and Social Change Within and Outside of the Classroom, and a conclusion. The first section, History and Context, provides an overview of the historical development of zines. In order to bring the history of zine publishing into the present the section opens with excerpts from zine publishers discussing why they create zines. The section places modern zine production in context of other forms of independent and radical media, including independent feminist media from the 1960's and 1970's. To understand how to read zines as cultural, as well as historical, texts I draw on the work of Cultural Studies theorists and their studies of subcultures associated with the Birmingham School such as Angela McRobbie and Stuart Hall. This section examines the current context zines in which zines are being produced and argues that small, independent print publications like zines are vital in a digital era of increasing corporate consolidation of the mainstream media.

To better understand the significance of the personal writing on identity in young women's zines, section two focuses on the power of autobiography and anti-racist feminist theory. In order to illustrate how autobiography informs this particular work, this section includes a piece on my own background with zine publishing. This section presents the theory of intersectionality, an analysis of oppression that acknowledges a range of identity and power positions including race, class, gender, sexuality and age and examines how they function together. This theory was developed by feminists of color in the 1970's and 80's. Through crafting feminist theory to reflect the reality of their lives, women of color criticized white feminists who proclaimed that gender was the primary mode through which women were oppressed. It has become increasingly common over the past twenty years for white feminists to acknowledge intersections between identities and systems of oppression. However, these privileged feminists also risk ignoring the specific voices of women of color who first raised this issue by simply borrowing and using terms without giving credit to their creators. Crafting theory at the intersections of

identity raises the danger of cultural appropriation and many questions about communicating and building communities across difference, which this section explores.<sup>3</sup>

Attempting to communicate across difference is a struggle many young women engaged in zine making face and document. Section three features excerpts from zines produced by young women in order to demonstrate the power of autobiography and nuanced understandings of their lives. Like the writing by feminists of color before them, young women, both white and of color, writing zines are often creating theory out of necessity. They work to make sense of their lives as simultaneously raced, classed, gendered and sexualized subjects. As a result, theories of intersectionality and the power of autobiography discussed in section two are key to understanding the significance of young women's zines.

The zines selected for this paper have been published in the last eight years. During this time frame mainstream media lauded zines as a hip form of alternative media in the mid-to-late 1990's. It has subsequently turned its attention towards lauding the Internet as an "edgy," democratic media phenomenon. As a result zines published in the late 1990's and early 2000's have gone largely unrecognized by mainstream reporters and scholars alike. Zines published by young women in the last eight years necessitate a scholarly analysis, as they have incorporated intersectional analysis around identity and reflect a critical engagement with ideas of power and privilege in ways that many earlier zines did not.

Section four examines the role zines could play in supporting progressive education and political organizing inside and outside of traditional educational settings. It proposes that zines can be used by educators and those involved in social change to create dialogue and praxis, which Paulo Freire defines as "the action reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire 2000: 60). This section features examples from zines produced by young women in classrooms, community organizations and collectives that have been made to reflect specific organizing and educational goals and to convey specific political messages such as organizing against

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<sup>3</sup> See bell hooks, "Eating the Other" in *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992) and Lynet Uttal "Inclusion Without Influence: The Continuing Tokenism of Women of Color" in *Haciendo Caras, Making Face, Making Soul*, Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990).

sexual assault, working for economic justice and documenting the anti-war activism of people of color.

When writing and discussing zines and their relevance to young women's political empowerment, community organizing and progressive education it is difficult to avoid references to a nebulous phenomenon known as the "zine community" or "zine communities." Like zines themselves, the idea of a "zine community" means something different to each zine publisher. The zine community can be vague, a loose network of people who read, create and trade zines, or specific, such as a group of people who come together regularly at zine symposiums, conferences and events to share and discuss their zines and zine culture. Stephen Duncombe makes a valiant attempt to understand and analyze the zine community (or even "zine culture") as a whole as it was in the mid-1990's in *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*.<sup>4</sup> Instead of "zine community" he argues it is more accurate to describe zine publishers as part of "zine networks" (Duncombe 1997: 51). Personally, I have been part of a tightly knit zine community that is composed primarily of women in their late teens, twenties and thirties who create zines that deal specifically with their personal lives. However, these zines represent only a small fraction of the zines that are being made or have been made in the past.

It is important to illustrate how zines are connected to larger ideas of community and can serve a role beyond a self-contained "zine community." While it is important to acknowledge the idea of a "zine community" is held by some, but not all, zine publishers, it is not essential for zines to be a part of a particular community of self publishers to be seen as important, valuable and effective. To discuss zines only as a product of a particular zine community or as part of a particular subculture, though they might be connected to all of these, obscures the connections zines and the people who publish them, have or could have to other kinds of community. Zine publishers are members of neighborhoods, families, schools, workplaces, ethnic groups, social groups, and political, cultural and social organizations. Zines could play a role in any of these communities if their publishers so chose.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground* (London: Verso, 1997).

Though publishing zines alone cannot disrupt the hegemony of corporate owned media or dismantle deep seated historical oppressions, zines can play a role in social change. Zines demonstrate the transformative potential of connecting ones personal voice to a larger community that is speaking and acting out on social and political issues. By placing zines in context with the history of radical media and anti-racist feminist theory they can serve as a dynamic example of the capacity of young women, and by extension other marginalized people, to think critically about society and their personal lives. Though this paper is divided into four sections for the sake of readability, organization and clarity, zines and zine publishers transcend these categories. This ability to blur boundaries and exist at intersections between identities is one of zines' primary strengths.

When discussing the usefulness of zines in educational, community organizing or activist settings it is essential to recognize that the significance of zines lies not only in the objects themselves, but in the spirit behind them. Zines are one manifestation of the desire to make something creative, the process of trusting ones own voice and believing in the importance of ones own story enough to share it with a larger public. Self-publishing and politicized personal expression can take many forms such as websites, films, music, audio documentary and visual art. However, what is particularly interesting about zines is that they can incorporate elements from different artistic mediums. They also invite dialogue and offer their editors the chance to respond to one another through their pages. Zines serve as physical documents that capture a particular phase in someone's personal and political development and as a result, they offer a particularly unique and powerful medium for examining how young women understand and write about their identities and growth of political consciousness.

## Section I: History and Context

### Why Make a Zine?

In the age of mass media consolidation and the Internet many young women continue to find zines are a compelling outlet for self-expression and building critical, subcultural communities. There are major themes expressed by young women in their zines about why they choose to publish zines. These include: a need for community, a desire to communicate with other young women about the issues in their lives, the belief their experiences and identities are not reflected or respected in mainstream media or culture, the need to share information about subjects ignored by the mainstream media and belief in the process of finding and sharing ones own voice. The themes zinesters discuss for self publishing are similar to the reasons others have historically reached for the pen and printing press to publish their experiences and concerns. The reasons cited for publishing in young women's zines also echo those of the feminist press in the 1960's and 70's. While some young women were involved in Riot Grrrl, others draw their motivation from other communities in which they are involved.

These reasons for publishing are reflected by Colette Ryder-Hall in her personal zine *Looks Yellow, Tastes Red* (1997). In the introduction to her zine, written while she was still a teenager growing up in a white, working class family on Cape Cod, Ryder-Hall looks critically at her zine making process. She shows how feedback she had received from her readers made her more conscious of the power of self publishing. She writes,

First, this zine was an outlet for me... After awhile I realized one of the most profound affects of publishing a zine and writing to other people all over the country and sometimes the world was that it showed me I wasn't alone, that we have similar experiences. And I thought that maybe, by being honest, about myself, mostly, so not to hurt anyone, by being honest gently I could give back some of what I've gotten out of this, some of that reassurance, some of that empowerment (Ryder-Hall 1997).

In this passage Ryder-Hall also demonstrates that self-publishing is a powerful tool that has been used by some young women in order to build their personal power, break through a sense of isolation and gain confidence in their identities.

The feedback Ryder-Hall and other zine publishers discuss comes in the form of letters, emails, zines with articles responding to theirs; and personal conversations. Making zines can also help young women create networks of support and inspiration that they may not find in their day-to-day realities. In *Pink Tea #6* Keight Bergmann (2000) wrote about finding a community of other young women through zines. “In my case, to be part of a largely female community, even in a rather distanced way, is something everyday life just doesn’t offer” (Bergmann 2000: no page). Bergmann and Ryder-Hall’s thoughts about sharing their lives with women who may be geographically distant from themselves recalls earlier, feminist networking through journals, conferences and newsletters.

A sense of dialogue and community is what drives some women to continue making zines, even if they are no longer teenagers and no longer feel isolated or lack community in their own lives. Returning to making zines after several years, Johanna Novales (2003) reflected about the power making zines had in her life as a teenager and why she was drawn back to them in her late twenties. She writes,

I have an online journal, but that’s not enough...I want to write something more rigorous. Less emotional vomit, more critical thinking...And I met so many inspiring, warm, and altogether amazing people doing zines. I want to feel part of a thinking, creative community again (Novales 2003).

Here Novales calls particular attention to the physical process of zine making and how it is connected to the more abstract process of creative, critical dialogue and community building. For Novales, who keeps a blog, zines are a place to put more polished writing and inspire lasting discussion.<sup>5</sup> Zines then can be a way of claiming a slightly more tangible community than one something like an Internet chat room or message board might provide.

Lauren Martin (2000), now in her late twenties but who, like Novales, has been publishing zines since she was a teenager, discusses more directly why she began making zines. She also acknowledges how her needs for creating a zine changed. When she began publishing zines Martin described herself as a “bored, isolated, depressed and

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<sup>5</sup> A personal website or “web log”

friendless teenager” (Martin 2000). Though she no longer feels this way, she discusses the role of zines in building community in her life. She writes,

I am, however, still fascinated by the idea of zines creating ‘community.’ Many of my best and closest friends are, in fact, people I’ve met because of zines... I also do still consider myself a writer and artist, and zines have been one way that I can get my words and ideas and images out there, and also retain full control of them (Martin 2000).

Martin also connects her need for community to larger issues such as self-representation and artistic control. This is particularly significant for a young, queer writer of color like Martin who, like older feminists of color, often found she was denied access to or had her images manipulated by, mainstream and white feminist media.

Other zinesters emphasize the opportunity for artistic control that zines provide to them. They are drawn to zines due to the fact they enable them to share their art and writing in a relatively low cost format. These women use zines to showcase their work outside of galleries and recognized art journals. Showing their work in zines also assists these artists in building a network of feminist artists. In the first issue of her zine

*Marimacho Luna\** Kali-Maia (2001) writes,

I began putting this “zine” together with the intent of making my art more accessible to my friends and to make it also available to any one interested. In the process however, I began dealing with a lot of issues at work such as race, class, gender, homophobia (Kali-Maia 2001).

By putting the word “zine” in quotes Kali-Maia also distances herself, as a mixed heritage person, from what she views as the largely white zine community.<sup>6</sup> Though she asserts that she began her zine for the purposes of sharing her art, she also acknowledges that it became a venue for her to work through and share the issues around identity and oppression that she was dealing with in her work and personal life. Thus her zine enabled her to make connections between the sharing of a personal creation and addressing larger, systemic issues of homophobia, sexism, classism and racism. In her zine Kali-Maia was also able to share this coming to consciousness with her readers, be they white or of color, in the hopes of generating conversation around anti-racist action.

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<sup>6</sup> Kali-Maia 2001.

Like Kali-Maia, many zinesters make zines for reasons beyond participating in a particular “zine community.” Many are rooted, to varying degrees, in their communities and identities. They see creating zines as a way to seize the means of media production in order to broadcast their voices and views that mainstream media often ignores. Celia Perez (2000), a librarian living in Chicago, writes in her zine *I Dreamed I Was Assertive*,

I am a zinester of color. I’m a Mexican-Cuban-American and I make a zine. Like other zinesters, regardless of color I suppose, I like to think that in putting out a zine I am part of this community of people who have taken publishing into our own hands because we feel that our view and interest are neglected by the mainstream media, because we have a voice that is not being heard (Perez 2000).

Here Perez is acknowledging that the fact that it is not just people of color who have been shut out of the mainstream media, but white people with unpopular or marginal view points and identities as well. However, Perez also points out that for her, as a person of color specifically, the act of self-publishing is a way of claiming power in her culture and experiences and connecting to a long history of self-publishing by communities of color in the United States.

Making a zine is a means to create and assert one’s own culture. Anna, a young artist who identifies as mixed race and queer, uses her zine *With Heart in Mouth* (2004) to claim power in her culture and heritage. She also insists on the importance of making her own culture as an act of resistance. She writes,

Culture was not made by me, it was made for me- by the people and things that work against me. If I am going to expatriate culture, it means I am going to occupy an existence that has not been framed. It means I create my own culture- one that has never been a reality before (Anna 2004).

Anna is also involved in anarchist political organizations and plays music in an all girl band. For her making a zine is only part of the process of creating an “outlaw culture,” one that includes, welcomes and respects people like her.<sup>7</sup> Yumi Lee (2001), writing in her zine *External Text* shares Anna’s motivations. As a Korean, queer, middle class and young person Lee has used her zine to share her process of embracing the many different and connected aspects of her identity. She recognizes self publishing as a strategy to actively assert her existence and create a culture that is welcoming to her. She also

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<sup>7</sup> bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

relishes the opportunity zine making gives her to leave a paper trail. She writes, “In other words, my personal documentation provides a COUNTER-NARRATIVE to the assimilationist mainstream. I want to take control of my own representation” (Lee 2001). Like Anna, Martin and Kali-Maia Lee uses her zine to control her representation and to create a space outside of, or counter to, mainstream culture where her multiple identities are accepted and celebrated.

Though making zines can be about sharing one’s words and experiences with anyone who will read them, zines can also be created for particular audiences and for particular purposes. Mimi Nguyen (1997) edited a large compilation zine (or “comp zine”) called *Evolution of a Race Riot* to create a networking and sharing opportunity for people of color and to address racism and white privilege within the zine scene. In her introduction she draws on many of the reasons other zine publishers referenced here have given for making zines. Nguyen then utilizes the urge to individually publish to concretely link a group of people of color together. By providing contact information and resources, as well as critical articles Nguyen uses her zine to constitute a very specific community of people of color. She writes,

Anyway, so this about us doing for us... This is about us talking to each other, relating, learning, commiserating, laughing, recognizing little bits and pieces and maybe whole chunks of our individual life-worlds in the writing or art of others. And feeling stronger for having pawed through these pages, and maybe even that much more powerful (Nguyen 1997: 5).

Nguyen’s insistence on people of color who make zines creating zines for themselves and each other echoes older women of color like Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga who created writing and publications for many of the same reasons Nguyen lists. Like these older feminists, zinesters like Nguyen take the means of intellectual production into their own hands in order to address the absence of the voices of feminists of color from mainstream culture and the white feminist movement. Thus zines can serve almost any purpose their editors and authors want and need them to depending not only on what they choose to publish, but what audiences they reach out to and work to connect with. When examined in the context of history of radical media zines can also be seen as part of a larger impulse of creating media that reflects the concerns and views of those who are have been marginalized in mainstream culture.

## **Rebellious Communication: A Brief History of Radical Print Media**

Zines as a subcultural phenomenon may have only come to light in the recent past, but the act of people taking media into their own hands in order to document their own histories and concerns is long, rich and complex. Zines can fit into what John D.H. Downing calls “radical media,” which he defines as, “...media, generally small scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (Downing 2001: v). In his book Downing inquires how small-scale radical media can have any lasting impact in order to create social and political change.<sup>8</sup> This question guides his overview of many radical social movements that radical media has helped to create and publicize. When placed in context of the history of other forms of self-publishing and the history of zine publishing itself, contemporary zines produced by young women can be revealed to be a part of a long history of creating rebellious communication.

### **Early Radical Print Media in the Western World**

Though the history and impact of radical print media is varied throughout the western world, it shows that in many different historical, social and political contexts people have used print to express their oppositional ideas. Downing asserts the reaction to and counter hegemonic impact of radical media has “varied from the imperceptible—especially out of context—and the long-term, to the instantaneous shock of humor and outrage” (2001: 156). Downing traces the beginning of radical print media in the western world to the 1500’s. For example, Martin Luther created pamphlets that helped fuel the Protestant Reformation on the newly invented movable type printing press. As the Reformation grew, certain European cities such as Antwerp, Strasbourg and Venice, arose in prominence as producers of small format books that could be circulated without the knowledge of the Catholic Church or the various monarchies at the time. This

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<sup>8</sup> Downing 2001: vi.

enabled readers access to ideas and literature not controlled by the church or government that was humorous, bawdy, and full of political satire.<sup>9</sup>

In the United States, perhaps the best known historical example of political self-publishing is Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*. Published in 1776, it railed against King George and worked to incite those living in the 13 colonies to support what would become the American Revolution. However, Downing explains there were many lesser-known political pamphlets that circulated during the build-up to the American Revolutionary War. The production of print media was also essential in building support for and public knowledge about the Abolitionist movement, the Labor movement and the women's suffragist movement. In addition, many different Anarchist, Socialist and Communist groups published their own newspapers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These activists were often blacklisted, jailed and beaten for their political organizing and labor union activities. Jumping forward quite a bit, but on the same theme, radical print media was also extremely valuable to the Black Civil Rights movement in the 1950's and the Black Power, Native American, Chicano, Asian American, Women's and Gay Rights movements in the 1960's and 70's.<sup>10</sup>

### **Feminist Media in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

While the 1960's and 70's is not the first time feminist independent print media was produced in the United States, the feminist newspapers, books and journals that proliferated during this time are particularly significant to understanding the current self publishing of young women. Often referred to as the "second wave" of feminist movement, the connection this feminist movement made between the personal and political, continues to be significant to politically engaged young women today.<sup>11</sup> Shelia

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<sup>9</sup> Downing 2001:145.

<sup>10</sup> Downing 2001: 149-150.

<sup>11</sup> Some feminist scholars consider the current movement of young, multicultural feminists as the "third wave" of feminist movement. The "first wave" is considered women's rights activists from the mid-1800's such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton. For a discussion of "third wave" politics see Colleen Mack-Canty, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality" *NWSA Journal, Vol. 16 No 3* (2004): 154-179.

Rowbotham writes about this connection in *The Past is Before Us*, a history of feminism in action since the 1960's, published in 1989. She explains this connection had a useful appeal for young women because, "[T]he separation of personal and political spheres was seen as a way of restricting women's articulation of grievances" (Rowbotham 1989: 246).

In his 1984 book *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*, David Armstrong connects the second wave slogan "the personal is political" to independent, feminist media. He writes, "Modern feminist media began symbolically in 1965, when two white women activists, Mary King and Casey Hayden, wrote what they called 'a kind of memo' and mailed it off to other women 'in the peace and freedom movements.' The subject of King and Hayden's memo was the status—or, rather, lack of it—of women in movement politics" (Armstrong 1984: 226). Journals such as *It Ain't Me Babe* (1970), and *Off Our Backs* (1970) sprang up from politically active women and Armstrong reports that between March 1968 and August 1973 there were 60 feminist newspapers, nine newspaper/magazines and 72 magazines and journals being published in the United States.<sup>12</sup> These publications dealt with many subjects effecting women's lives including lack of equal pay for equal work, domestic violence and rape, lesbianism, and health, and also provided forums for women's art, writing and poetry. Similar to modern zines, they helped create a network of communication and provided space for dialogue and discussion between different feminist activists throughout the United States.

Many of these publications were produced by middle class white women and thus often solely reflected their issues and concerns. It appears, at least in Armstrong's version, that white feminists such as King and Hayden ignored the active role Black women such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker and Septima Clarke had played in the Civil Rights Movement, where they emerged as respected leaders. In response to the silence of the majority white feminist movement as a whole around race, feminists of color created their own political organizations and publications. These organizations included the National Black Feminist Organization, which was founded in 1973, and Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, founded in 1981.<sup>13</sup> Similar to King and Hayden's

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<sup>12</sup> Armstrong 1984: 229.

<sup>13</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 231.

appeal to majority white women in the “peace and freedom movements,” which was a turning point in modern, feminist movements, in 1977 the Combahee River Collective published their groundbreaking *A Feminist Statement*. A collective of Black feminists based in Boston, the statement was an invitation and challenge to women, both white and of color, committed to liberation. It called on women to recognize the connections between racial, sexual, class and gender identities and discussed their own disillusionment with white feminist and Black male lead political organizations for failing to make these connections.<sup>14</sup>

Many women of color who had been involved in the feminist movement felt similarly to the women of the Combahee River Collective. In 1981 Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, two Chicana lesbian feminists, writers and poets, edited a widely read anthology entitled *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* that was the first of its kind. The anthology, which was distributed by the small, feminist run Persephone Press, included the writings of Black, Latina, Asian and Native American feminists. The writing was often intensely personal and included personal testimony of racism the author’s experienced within the women’s movement and the feeling of being ostracized from their ethnic and racial communities for being feminist or lesbian. Many writers in the anthology described the process of sitting down at their typewriters to write and the power they felt in communicating through letters and phone calls to other feminists of color around the country. They expressed their hope and belief in creating a community of feminists of color. This intimate description of the writing process and belief in building a network of communication between women is common in modern, feminist zines as well. The women published in *This Bridge Called My Back* also saw writing as a call to action. Cherríe Moraga challenged her readers in the introduction to the book with a question, “[H]ow do we develop a movement that can live with the fact of the loves and lives of these women in this book?” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: xiv). Though young women use their zines to grapple with their complex loves and lives, many do not yet have a social or political network with which to produce a magazine or newspaper. They also may have writing they want to publish and share, but lack the

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<sup>14</sup> The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in Guy-Sheftall 1995: 233.

means to print and distribute it through more established “alternative” channels, thus zines become a vital outlet for them to build community, similar to feminists in the 1960’s, 70’s and 80’s.

### **Do-It-Yourself: Fanzines, Zines and Making a Scene**

Zines, which Stephen Duncombe defines as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” provides a possible solution to the challenges faced by young women hoping to publish (Duncombe 1997: 6). Many feminist zine publishers continue to grapple with Moraga’s question of how to build a movement that reflects their complex loves and lives. They use their zines as a platform to discuss their personal experiences and build networks with each other. Though not all zines exist explicitly to inspire political discussion and action in the way Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* or the Combahee River Collective’s *A Black Feminist Statement* aimed to, Duncombe points out that most zines do express political opinions.<sup>15</sup> What is most important and unique about the history of zines is that they provide a space for their creators to express their ideas, opinions, experiences, interests and passions in an explicitly personal voice.

### **Fanzines: Havens for Geeks, Obsessives and Drop Outs**

In his research on the history of zines Duncombe finds the largest and oldest category of zines is that of “fanzines,” from which some claim the term zine has been derived. Duncombe defines fanzines as “publications devoted to discussing the intricacies and nuances of a cultural genre” (Duncombe 1997: 9). He traces the origin of the word back to the 1930’s when science fiction fans began publishing their own stories and drawings with mimeograph machines featuring characters from popular science fiction books and radio plays at that time and sharing these with each other. Science fiction fanzines remain a large zine subculture, however, since the 1970’s, the concept of fanzine has been greatly expanded by music fans.

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<sup>15</sup> Duncombe 1997: 28.

In the mid-1970's punk rock became a vibrant, influential subculture in the United Kingdom and New York City. Embracing amateurish musicianship, confrontational attitudes, and a flippant disrespect for authority, as punk rock expanded some punk bands and fans began to include a critique of capitalism, commercialism, and even sexism in their identity as punks. The do-it-yourself attitude of punk rock and the initial obliviousness of (and later misrepresentation by) the mainstream media was an invitation to punk fans to publish their own magazines. In fact, according to Jon Savage, two zine publishers from New York City, Legs McNeil and John Holmstrom coined the term "punk". They decided to start a magazine that reported on the new underground music that was coming out of the UK and New York City and the culture that was growing around it. "All of us drop-outs and fuck-ups got together and started a movement," said McNeil and fanzines such as *Punk* and many others enabled those who were interested in the punk subculture to communicate with each other about bands, concerts, fashion and the state of punk rock culture (McNeil in Savage 2002: 131). Though currently most fanzines are music fanzines, fanzines also have existed for everything from Applebee's to roller coasters.

### **Revolution Grrrl Style Now!: Riot Grrrl Zines**

In the early 1990's in Olympia, Washington a group of young women got together and declared that punk rock as a subculture was too male dominated. While they echoed the concerns of women who had been involved in punk since the beginning, these young women gave their discontent a name and started a movement called Riot-Grrrl. Elke Zobl explains that use of the term Grrrl, with its three angry rrr's, reflects the young feminists who used it to identify with a rebellious, alternative, queer youth community.<sup>16</sup> Many girls started local Riot Grrrl chapters, which held regular meetings and put on rock shows, workshops and conferences where young women provided each other with real life support. Riot Grrrl is important to discuss because many zine publishers referenced

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<sup>16</sup> Elke Zobl, "Persephone is Pissed! Grrrl Zine Reading, Making, and Distributing Across the Globe," *Hecate : An Interdisciplinary Journal of Women's Liberation* 30.2 (2004): 156-174.

in this paper have been involved in, inspired by or critical of Riot Grrrl. A large part of the Riot-Grrrl movement was publishing zines which, while they included information about bands, were far more focused on the personal experiences of the young women making them. In this way they are closely linked to the feminist journals and newsletters produced during the 1960's and 70's that aimed to build community and critical space between young women.

In 1993 the editors of the zine *Riot Grrrl* wrote, “we’re tired of being written out—out of history, out of the ‘scene’... for this reason we have created our zine and scene” (Emma in Duncombe 1997: 66). In the mid-1990's Riot Grrrl inspired zines began all around the United States. Many zine makers who did not necessarily identify with Riot Grrrl were inspired by the confessional style of Riot Grrrl zines and began creating more explicitly personal zines. Most of these personal zines were and are written by young women. Some young men, mostly white and middle class, inspired by the emotional hardcore music scene, also began to produce personal zines in the mid-1990's. Most of these zines had a decidedly “emo,” self-pitying, depressing slant, as opposed to the fierce, oppositional, confessional quality of Riot-Grrrl inspired personal zines.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Growth of Zine Culture in the United States**

With the subcultural and mass media attention garnered by Riot-Grrrl and proliferation of personal zines in the early 1990's came the growth of a larger subculture that supported and encouraged zine publishing. Zine networking had been facilitated throughout the 1980's and 90's by the publication *Factsheet Five* (1982-1996), a listing of all types of zines complete with a short review and contact information, that was began by Mike Gunderloy. However, in the 1990's zine publishing evolved as a subculture in its own right. It ceased to be seen by zine publishers and readers as a subset other subcultures or a hobby enjoyed by isolated loners. Zine publishers began creating their

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<sup>17</sup> For two well written examples of this genre that transcend whining self pity see Steve Gevurtz *Journal Song* (Portland, OR: Self published, 2005) and Bill Brown *Dream Whip* (Lubbock, TX: Self published, 2004).

own networks and gatherings that were framed explicitly around trading, selling and discussing zines. In addition, many people began operating “Zine Distros,” do-it-yourself distribution services for zine publishers who list and sell their zines in a catalogue or on the Internet. These enabled zine readers the ability to order many different zines from one place. There were also zine gatherings, such as Beantown Zinetown, a daylong gathering in Boston that began in 1998 that enabled zine publishers to meet and exchange their zines. Many similar gatherings have followed including the San Francisco Zine Fest, and the Portland Zine Symposium. The Portland Zine Symposium, an annual event which began in 2001 which I have been involved in planning, is particularly unique because it incorporates workshops, panels, films, performances and social gatherings all centered around zines and zine culture as opposed to simply an opportunity to trade zines.

There are also resources and institutions that exist to support zine publishing. For example, in Portland, Oregon the independent press emporium Reading Frenzy, is devoted to selling zines and independently published books and magazines. It serves as a local networking and distribution hub for zine publishers. The Independent Publishing Resource Center, located in an office space above Reading Frenzy is a membership organization that features everything someone needs to make a zine, including computers, type writers, work space, a photocopier, art supplies, how-to workshops and even a zine library. They also run workshops for local community and school groups. There are zine libraries and resource centers, such as the Zine Archives and Publishing Project in Seattle and the ABC No Rio Zine Library in New York City and increasingly public and university libraries, such as the Salt Lake City library and the Barnard College Library, are including zines in their collections.

### **Zines in the Mainstream Media**

Zines and the cultural production of young women involved in Riot-Grrrl have not gone unnoticed by mainstream media. In the mid-1990’s “alternative” or “grunge” culture was being “hyped” through magazines like Spin and Rolling Stone and even mainstream newspapers like the New York Times, the Washington Post and USA

Today.<sup>18</sup> Zines, some of which were on the periphery of the grunge rock scene, also received some of this mainstream media attention. Duncombe examines the odd results of zines becoming “hip” in the mass media. For example, as part of their “alternative” marketing strategy in the mid-1990’s employees of Warner Records produced their own zine bankrolled entirely by Time-Warner.<sup>19</sup> However, zines exposure in the mass media also encouraged more people to start their own. Many young women have cited *Sassy* magazine’s “Zine of the Month” column as sparking their interest in zines in the early 1990’s.

This phase of interest in alternative culture also lead several corporate and larger independent publishers to produce anthologies of zine writing. Duncombe notes that mainstream press coverage of zines was often condescending, containing overly enthusiastic language describing the zine publishers styles of hair and dress and little time spent on the concerns of the zine publisher herself. These anthologies continued that trend and did not explore why someone would be compelled to share their stories through the photocopied pages of a zine. The books, such as *A Girls Guide to Taking Over the World* (1997), *Zine: How I Spent Six Years in the Underground and Finally Found Myself, I think* (1995), and *The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order* (1999) featured pieces of writing and comics reprinted from zines as well as interviews with zine publishers. Often the anthologies’ editors they did not provide any analysis of the history and context from which the writing arose. An exception can be found in the introduction to *A Girl’s Guide to Taking Over the World* when the editors write, “[W]omen have historically had limited access to channels of communication, and, ultimately, to power... That’s why it is so vital that we continue to support this form of communication” (Green and Taormino 1997: xiii). However, in most of the anthologies, with their photographs of green haired zine writers with multiple facial piercings zines were shown to be more of a passing fad

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<sup>18</sup> David M. Gross, “Zines Dreams,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 17, 1995, 672-75, Linton Weeks, “Writes of Passage: Teens on the Zine Scene; Home-Grown Ventures in Publishing,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 1995, Style Section, C01, Pat Guy, “Wacky Magazines Know No Limits,” *USA Today*, August 3, 1992, B6.

<sup>19</sup> Duncombe 1997:134.

that was tied to the hype around “alternative” style than complex and complicated mediums for independent thought and communication.<sup>20</sup>

When mainstream media attention shifted from zines to blogs in the early 2000’s, many presumed zines were “dead” or not longer viewed them as viable channels through which to express political dissent. The Internet has had a huge impact on zine culture and it has made it easier to find zines and make connections with other zinesters. Zine focused websites, email list-serves, personal websites and online ordering from zine distros make finding and ordering zines and communicating with zine publishers easier and has contributed to an increase in availability and access to zines. The editors of *A Girl’s Guide to Taking Over the World* remind their readers, “[B]ut the proliferation of cyberspace and technology doesn’t mean there will be a drop in print publishing anytime soon. A big part of the thrill in making zines is the manual work it takes to put them together” (Green and Taormino 1997: xiv). The zines featured in this paper, with several exceptions, have all been produced after 1997, in my opinion, the year mainstream excitement around zines seemed to reach its apex. This demonstrates that zine publishers have continued to write and publish their concerns, passions and critiques in the face of adversity, mainstream disinterest or cooptation. Examining zines produced in the digital age also demonstrates that independent print media can and must co-exist along side web based media in order to work to foster a democratic media environment.

### **Zines and the Allure (and Necessity) of the Handmade in a Digital Age**

Even forward thinking writers such as Duncombe or the editors of *A Girl’s Guide to Taking Over the World* could not have predicted the huge impact of the Internet on all aspects of everyday life in the United States since the mid-1990’s. Since the rise of the web to widespread, everyday use there have been dire predictions about the demise of print media and of books and magazines going the way of the dinosaur.<sup>21</sup> As computer technology becomes cheaper and easier to use, the web has become an increasingly

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<sup>20</sup> V. Vale, *Zines Volume II* (San Francisco, CA: Re/Search Publications, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas L. Friedman “It’s a Flat World After All,” *New York Times Magazine*, April, 2005, 33-37.

viable resource for self-publishers, many of whom have taken their work online in the form of “blogs” or e-zines. Though the Internet can be an innovative way to distribute mediums such as text, video, and audio, and reach a world wide audience, hierarchies of power and privilege that exist offline also continue to exist online. In addition, in a digital age the physicality of zines is important. As art pieces and objects that can circulate through physical space the way digital media cannot zines continue to be viable as options of self publication, even as blogs gain in popularity.

The object of a zine—how it is laid out, the size of paper it is printed on, how it is bound—all reflect conscious decisions on the part of the creator. In the era of the e-zine, paper zines, though they are often reproduced on the photocopier, can acquire what Walter Benjamin called an “aura” of works of art. The “aura” of an object of art is created from its uniqueness, and “its presence in time and space” (Benjamin 1936). Since the rise of the Internet many personal zines have become increasingly creative and “one of a kind,” incorporating elements from the book arts such as hand binding, artful methods of printing and different artistic papers. Regardless of their authors’ artistic abilities this uniqueness emanates from the physical properties.

In 2000 Jason Kucsma argued for the importance of zines’ physical properties in his master’s thesis *Resist and Exist: Punk Zines and the Communication of Cultural and Political Resistance in America*. He writes, “[Z]ines, with their Xeroxed pages, silk-screened covers, homemade binding or handwritten text, are portable constructions of culture that can talk back either through the text or a paper cut on the hand of the reader” (Kucsma 2000: 112). In addition to potentially engaging their producers to think critically about the relationship between content and form, zines are also a material record of the process of culture. Though zines are physically fragile, they can be archived in public libraries and private collections. They can also be shared and traded through networks of peers or distributed in public places. In contrast, web based media is currently not available in a similar public, accessible form.

Many young women publishing on the web use their websites for similar purposes as zines. Though creating a website can be a highly creative act, many web publishers use pre-made templates that allow them to simply type in text and click a button to post it online. Because of the instantaneous nature of web publishing the work that is posted by

young women sometimes lacks editing or thoughtfulness. Though zines often succumb to publishing the petty and the pithy because they are also subject to their creators emotions and whims, these sites are especially prone to become just another place for rants and gossip as opposed to resources where crucial information can be exchanged.<sup>22</sup> High quality zines can be easier and cheaper to make than a web page. It takes far less skills and access to expensive technology and programs to put out a zine that is aesthetically complex and content rich than to create an innovative and well designed web page. In addition, there are far less women actively involved in designing computer programs and software than men, so young women often become consumers, as opposed to producers, of web technology.

In its earliest forms the Internet held great potential to be an accessible and creative medium that could amplify and extend political networks similar to those created by zine publishers. Originally used primarily by hackers, computer nerds, and anarchists, it has become primarily the terrain of advertisers and huge, corporate Internet Service Providers (ISPs) such as AOL and Yahoo.<sup>23</sup> This has placed everyday people largely into the role of consumers, as opposed to creators, of Internet technology and content. Computer technology also remains expensive and concentrated in the hands of those with class and race privilege. Access to the web has, however, provided activists on all sides of the political spectrum with important communication tools and ways to get information to the public. For example, radical media and technology activists, like those who created the Indymedia network after the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, have created a worldwide network of independent news websites upon which any viewer can also publish articles and responses. In addition, programmers who utilize open source coding, which any other programmer can modify and refine, have shown it is possible to use Internet technology for democratic purposes.

Robert McChesney warns against all out celebration of the Internet as a democratic medium. He notes how even early celebrators of it as a participatory sphere reconsidered their predictions when they saw how fast corporate interests moved in.

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<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Bleyer "Cut and Paste Revolution" in *The Fire This Time*, Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin, eds. (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), 56.

<sup>23</sup> Robert W. McChesney, *Corporate Media and the Threat to Democracy* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997).

McChesney writes, "...If the Internet becomes a viable commercial medium [it is common knowledge in 2005 that it has], there is a good chance that many of the media giants will be among the firms capable of capitalizing upon it" (McChesney 1997: 31). In 2005 with corporations controlling large swaths of the content and access to cyberspace, McChesney's warnings have proven to be entirely accurate.

In his pre-Internet book *Technopoly* Neil Postman warns against an uncritical embrace of computer technology as a way to democratize access to information. Published in 1992, *Technopoly* accurately predicted the problems the glut of information a computerized network like the Internet could create. Postman defines "Technopoly" as a state of culture and mind that deifies and seeks authorization from technology. He argues that the US is awash in information that is far removed from the context from which it was created and as a result, this information becomes mostly useless.<sup>24</sup> Postman's arguments are useful when arguing for the continued viability for a medium like zines. Zines are able to convey the context of a person's life, as well as writing and information. In addition, users of the Internet, like consumers of print media, need training to help them sort through the information available to them. Readers must develop media literacy to separate facts, personal opinion, advertising, and misinformation. While the Internet is a useful tool, it should be viewed alongside media formats such as television, radio, and print as having particular challenges and advantages to offer independent media makers. Corporate control of every media sphere, including the Internet, is and should be a cause for action and concern among independent media producers. Instead of lauding one method of media distribution as somehow more "democratic" than another, independent media producers should fight together for greater public access to all media outlets- print, television and radio stations and the Internet.

### **Corporate Control of the Mass Media**

Zine publishers and other independent media makers are currently producing their work in a media environment that is controlled by fewer and fewer corporate interests. This section provides only a mere introduction to the field of scholarship and critique

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<sup>24</sup> Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

surrounding corporate media. There has been much excellent scholarship on corporate control of the media and the ways in which this control impacts the quality of information the public receives and ultimately, its impact on democracy as a whole.<sup>25</sup> This section provides a framework in which to critically think about the ways in which young women producing zines can work to challenge corporate control of information. By better understanding the media climate in which zines are produced, zine publishers and other independent media makers can think critically about the potential impact, and limit, of zines making.

In 1983 journalist Ben H. Bagdikian released his influential report entitled *The Media Monopoly*, which is currently in its sixth edition. In it he details how fifty corporations control the news that people in the United States watch, read and hear.<sup>26</sup> Robert W. McChesney updates Bagdikian's findings, reporting that since 1992 the number of firms that own and control media in the United States, and worldwide, has dropped to fewer than ten.<sup>27</sup> Both discuss how mainstream media- newspapers, magazines, television and radio- throughout the twentieth century came to rely more on advertising for revenue and as a result, ceased to report on controversial issues for fear of alienating their advertisers and their middle and upper class readers who could afford to buy the products advertised. Bagdikian reports that the rise of advertising and corporate influence from advertising and pressure from corporate boards of directors (often presidents or CEO's of powerful companies) caused newspapers to shy away from criticism of corporations and to carry less local news content. When they did run local stories, it tended towards the human interest or "fluff" material.<sup>28</sup>

The increasingly corporate nature of news media has not gone unnoticed by activists and active audiences. Downing's *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication*

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<sup>25</sup> See Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney *The Global Media* (London: Cassell, 1997), Stuart Hall "Encoding, Decoding" in *The Cultural Studies Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Simon During, ed. (London: Routledge, 1999), and John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton *Toxic Sludge is Good For You!* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995). There has been a spate of documentary films produced on this topic recently including *Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism*, *The Corporation*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *War Feels Like War* and *Control Room*.

<sup>26</sup> Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> McChesney 1997:18.

<sup>28</sup> Bagdikian 1983: 180.

*and Social Movements* has shown that as long as there has been media, there has been radical media that questions, provokes and provides an alternative to the “official story.” Whether it is creating a flier or banner, publishing a community newspaper or zine, setting up a pirate radio station, getting involved with community access television or radio, publishing and sharing news on the Internet, or creating media watch dog groups there is a strong, independent sector advocating for greater fairness and accuracy in news coverage. Many activists and advocates in this sector are as well as investing in the development of a grassroots media movement. As Ana Nogueira and Joshua Breitbart write, “[T]oday’s media activists are fighting for the human right to communicate not because it is more important than other struggles for social justice, but because it is a necessary component of all those struggles” (Nogueira and Breitbart in Labaton and Martin 2004: 27).

Zines makers are part of the alternative, activist media community. By serving as a “model of participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon” zines can empower their creators and readers (Duncombe 1997: 129). Though as a medium zines is more dynamic, dialogic and democratic than mainstream media, creating a zine does not automatically make its producer a mass media critic. However, zine making can certainly lead their creators in the direction of critique and media activism. Zines also can provide their creators with an alternative space to share stories and information that does not fit with the agenda and interests of mainstream media outlets. The alternative media space zines occupy can contribute to the creation and maintenance of different subcultural groups.

### **Negotiating Culture and Power: Young Women and the Study of Subculture**

Throughout this paper zine making is referred to as a “subculture” or “underground culture.” Zines are also viewed, like other forms of media, as pieces of cultural production that can be read and analyzed seriously. Though this paper does not explicitly offer an analysis of zines as a subculture, subculture as a concept can be useful when examining the different relationships of power at work within a particular culture or society. A central theoretical perspective which grounds this paper is the study of

subculture. It focuses specifically on the work of the scholars active from the 1960's through the 1990's at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England. The theorists of the Birmingham School focused on interdisciplinary forms of analysis that explored relationships between ideologies and expression, style, resistance and youth. Current Cultural Studies discourse has developed out of the Birmingham school's work and has taken up their ideas around agency, power and resistance. It is this theoretical interpretation that offers a better understanding how young women use their zines as tools for negotiating culture and power.

Defining and linking the concepts of culture and subculture can clarify what a project rooted in the analytical mode of cultural studies can achieve. In *Keywords* (1985) Raymond Williams provides a description of the concept of culture as an active process writing, “[C]ulture in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending of something, basically crops or animals” [*emphasis in the original*] (Williams 1985: 87). Williams mentions subculture at the end of his entry, defining it as “the culture of a distinguishable smaller group” (92). Williams’ notion of culture as a process and a particular way of life can be helpful for thinking about the formation of subcultures, such as young women’s zine culture, as a historically situated processes worthy of complex analysis.

Though there are overlaps, the study of a subculture is not the same as studying a culture. In her introduction to *The Subcultures Reader*, published by Routledge in 1997, Sarah Thornton grapples with the question of what makes the study of subcultures different from studies of cultures, communities or societies. The prefix sub, she argues, indicates members of a subculture have been positioned or have positioned themselves as apart from mainstream. In addition, subcultures are often seen as less significant than dominant culture due to differences in race, class, gender or age.<sup>29</sup> Thornton’s description of subculture is especially applicable to young women making zines, who are often excluded from full participation in mainstream society due to factors such as their gender, age, sexuality, race and class. In addition, many young women actively work to create alternative subcultural spaces, such as zines, in order to critique the sexism, racism, ageism, classism and homophobia they recognize in mainstream culture. Again,

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<sup>29</sup> Sarah Thornton, “Introduction,” in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.

Thornton's description takes the activism of subcultural groups in to account. She writes, "[S]tudies of subcultures, however, picture common people not only as highly differentiated, but as active and creative" (Thornton in Thornton and Gelder 1997: 4).

Even as they act to question, critique and resist the mainstream culture subcultures are located within, they cannot be separated from the dominant, or parent, culture they are part of. Though they are distinct from the mainstream, subcultures are still bound to that culture because they act to critique or resist elements of that parent culture.<sup>30</sup> Because subcultures are firmly located within their parent culture, they can also replicate the parent culture's underlying structures of power and oppression. For example, a young middle class, white woman can participate in a zine subculture by trading her zine with other young women. Though she chooses to critique mainstream culture in her zine, this hypothetical woman can, by virtue of her whiteness and class status still enjoy the privilege bestowed on her by mainstream culture.

In response to the feminist movement in the 1970's, Angela McRobbie began seriously studying young women's involvement in subcultures. In their essay *Girls and Subcultures* (1978) Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber asked, "[W]hat broad factors might have created a situation where girls could find subcultural involvement an attractive possibility?" (McRobbie 1991: 6). McRobbie used this question to guide her research examining how working class, British women girls negotiated their subjectivity in a dominant, sexist culture. Instead of looking for young women's involvement in male dominated subcultures, she investigated the kinds of subcultures young women create on their own, often in more private or domestic spaces such as the home. She writes,

The important question may not be the absence of presence of girls in male subcultures, but the complementary ways in which young girls interact among themselves and with each other to form a distinctive culture of their own...(McRobbie 1991: 11).

Here McRobbie provides an important lens through which to investigate young women's critical thought and cultural production in zines. Interestingly, McRobbie examined young woman who found a subcultural identity through reading magazines about their

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<sup>30</sup> Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class," in Gelder and Thornton 1997: 100-101.

favorite pop stars. Creating a zine, then, echoes McRobbie's work, but places young women in a more active role.

Writing zines along in ones bedroom and then sending them out to other young women across the country is one way in which a small group of young women have worked to form what McRobbie called a "distinctive culture of their own." It is both part of dominant culture and working to create a space that is separate from and critical of it. The desire to form a distinctive culture for girls, as well as the tensions brought on by subcultures replicating oppressive dynamics of mainstream culture can be seen in subcultural movements that influenced young women publishing zines.

### **Hierarchy and Privilege in Zine Culture**

The majority of zine publishers are white and middle class. The subcultures that have developed around zines, whether they be punk rock, riot grrrl or zine culture itself, often reflects those concerns. Stephen Duncombe writes that "it is white, middle-class culture – and its discontents – that informs zines and underground culture" (Duncombe 1997: 8). Creating a zine also requires a certain privilege of access- to copy machines, computers, and other equipment, leisure time and belief that ones words are worth putting down on paper for others to read.<sup>31</sup> Zines can become self-indulgent, just another platform for young white women to center themselves and their experiences at the expense of everyone else.

Riot Grrrl, a young (and often white and middle class) women's "movement" in the mid-1990's was influential to many young women publishing zines. It embodied many of the principals McRobbie discussed a decade earlier about girls creating their own distinctive culture of their own. However, racism and classism were prevalent in Riot Grrrl zines, meetings and conventions. Riot Grrrl, like the larger feminist movement before it, was not immune to replicating the power structure of the dominant culture it was located in and sought to critique. As Jennifer Bleyer writes,

Despite the pools of copier ink spilled in earnest discussions of race and class, girl zines were largely a hobby of white, middle-class young

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<sup>31</sup> Bleyer in Labaton and Martin 2004: 53.

women. Riding on the heels of a feminist movement that had long stood rightly accused of excluding women of color and poor women, Riot Grrrl and its attendant zinesters was still a young version of a ladies' lunch society—except that the ladies have blue hair and weird clothes (Bleyer in Labaton and Martin 2004: 53).

There were many young women of color and white women from working class backgrounds involved in Riot Grrrl. Many left in disgust after their issues were ignored by more privileged “grrrls.” Altering the popular riot grrrl slogan “Revolution Grrrl Style Now!” Kristina Gray, a young Black woman, discussed her alienation from Riot Grrrl on a recent panel stating, “[Riot Grrrl] was not my revolution grrrl-style.”<sup>32</sup>

However, to simply criticize zines as being only a leisure time activity of privileged young women would be to ignore the young women of color and white working class young women who have used zines in innovative ways. They have found zines to be useful in order to share their personal experiences and as tools for consciousness raising and community building. While it is essential to critique the overt and often unintentional racism and classism that is rampant in zines and zine culture, it is also vital to acknowledge that the desire to write and self-publish is not the purview of white, middle class young people alone. Zines that women of color and working class white women have produced are connected to long histories of self-publishing and independent publishing in those communities.

Zines have been separated from other forms of independent publishing in radical and marginalized communities, such as newsletters, newspapers and pamphlets. Johanna Novales spoke about how zines have acquired a “trendy” cultural currency and are often associated with white people and the subculture of punk rock. She argued that this narrow conception of zines that ignores self-publishing efforts by people of color.<sup>33</sup> In her undergraduate thesis titled “We Don't Need You: Non-mainstream feminism and identity in zine writing from 1960 to the present” (2002) Kpoene' Kofi-Bruce resisted the distinction made between zines and other kinds of self published, radical print media. She includes everything from Women's Rights papers produced in the mid-1800's to

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<sup>32</sup> Kristina Gray, panelist *Not For Ourselves Alone: Women of Color Zines and the Power of Personal Voice* (Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY, 5 March 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Johanna Novales, panelist *Not For Ourselves Alone: Women of Color Zines and the Power of Personal Voice* (Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville, NY, 5 March 2005).

radical feminist journals created in the 1970's to current young, feminist websites in her definition of zines.<sup>34</sup> In doing so Kofi-Bruce focuses scholarly attention on the space created by self-publishers that enables feminist networking and community building to occur instead of seeing zines only as a hip activity pursued by a privileged few.

Similar to Angela McRobbie's research on the subcultures formed by girls outside of male dominated alternative culture, examining zines produced by young women of color, working class white women and those who strive to be their allies, reveals a potentially transformative cultural space. This space is critical because it reveals publications that create new (sub)cultural spaces. This space provides an opportunity for a critique that responds to the ways marginalized and dissenting voices are shut out of dominant culture and even the subculture of zines to be heard. It is largely the zines that occupy this critical space that I have chosen to feature and analyze in this paper.

## **Section II: The Power of Autobiography and Anti-Racist Feminist Theory**

### **Invading and Informing: Autobiography and Theory**

With the tenant of the "personal is political" came an investment in using personal experience to construct political theory. Autobiography, then, becomes a critical mode of inquiry that can function both within and outside of academic spaces. Angela McRobbie (1991) recognizes this power, writing, "autobiographies invade and inform a great deal of what is written [by feminist academics]" (McRobbie 1991: 18). Central to McRobbie's statement is not only the connection between autobiography and theory, but her insistence that one's lived experience informs, but does not determine, the theory one works to produce. This tradition of critical autobiography is crucial for understanding the personal writing young women have published in zines.

Autobiography can show an author's investment in the subject and text about which she is writing. Critical autobiographies, or feminist academics who approach their disciplines from a standpoint that works to understand and acknowledge their own

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<sup>34</sup> Kpoene' Kofi-Bruce, "We Don't Need You: Non-mainstream feminism and identity in zine writing from 1960 to the present" (Undergraduate thesis, Middlebury College, 2002).

personal investment and position in that discipline, can create political writing that is both personally moving and politically astute. Creating theory out of one's lived experience is an act of resistance against false divisions that are often made between a woman as a member of society and a thinker, writer or activist.<sup>35</sup> Many young women produce zines that center around sharing their personal stories. These zines become a space where young women can approach autobiography critically. In doing so these zine writers take an active role in their personal, political and intellectual development. In their zines many young women draw directly from the writings of older feminists in order to better understand the current conditions of their lives. Young women's zines mirrors, and is connected to, a much longer tradition of feminist theory production and intellectual pursuit, especially among women of color.

In order to show how my experiences influenced and informed this paper, and to illustrate McRobbie's point of lived experience informing the work of feminist academics, I am going to perform an autobiography that traces my involvement with zine publishing. Reading and publishing zines have had a significant effect on my personal and political growth. By practicing autobiography in the context of this paper I demonstrate my belief in the transformative potential of zines in young women's lives comes out of my own experience, as well as my research. I discovered zines quite by accident. In 1997, when I was sixteen, I received a photocopied catalog for a "Zine Distro" along with an order of records from an independent record label.<sup>36</sup> The catalogue listed many different zines for sale and included an introduction by the young woman who ran the distribution service. She explained that she sold these zines through the mail out of her bedroom because she wanted to give other young women greater access to them. I ordered a huge pile of these little magazines, all priced at about a dollar each, and waited eagerly by my mailbox.

Reading zines felt simultaneously immensely private and boldly public. They were like secret messages written only for me and bold manifestos that demanded the world stop and pay attention. Most of the zines I read were explicitly feminist and

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<sup>35</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>36</sup> "Zine Distro is short for zine distributor, small businesses that sell many different titles of zines.

written by young women close to my age (late teens and early twenties). They wrote about their personal lives, sharing how they understood their identities and the struggles they faced. Many discussed topics that were intensely personal: stories of coming out and living as queer, the sting of racism and finding strength in one's racial identity, struggles with eating disorders and mental illness, and the survival of sexual and emotional abuse. These stories felt particularly powerful to me because I was living in a small town in Maine. There were not many young women in my daily life who cared about political issues such as feminism and queer rights and reading zines enabled me to build a network of politically astute young women throughout the United States. The stories I read in zines became a source of strength for me as I came out as queer and healed from an abusive relationship with my first boyfriend. I carried zines with me in my backpack and back pocket to remind myself that I was not alone in my struggles.

I decided to add my own voice to the fray by starting a zine called *Random* with my best friend Ariel. We included collages, fiction, poetry and political commentary (especially angry rants about the appearance of Starbucks in our hometown). In order to encourage dialogue we got a post office box and encouraged our readers to write us and send us whatever "stuff" they wanted for us to print. To print our zines we "borrowed" photocopies from our high school. We distributed our first 100 copies around town at the record stores, coffee shops and to our friends. "We are the coolest people we know right now!" We declared after completing the first issue. I have since been publishing a personal zine called *Indulgence* for the past seven years in addition to other self-publishing projects.

Reading zines by young women of color in high school enabled me to begin thinking critically about race and my own whiteness. These zines directly addressed readers like myself: young, progressive, white women who were seeking to be "allies" to women of color, but who were often blind to their own race and class privilege. These zinesters also lead me to writers like bell hooks and Angela Davis and anthologies like *This Bridge Called My Back*. When I began studying anti-racist feminist theory and African American autobiography in college I found the themes such as the power of self-representation, the struggle for political rights and holding white people accountable for their racism similar to the ideas presented in zines by young women of color. The central

theme of this paper, how zines fit into a tradition of marginalized women claiming their voices and demanding their concerns be heard and lives be respected, was generated from my initial recognition of the connection between young women of color's zines and the themes in Black feminism and African American autobiography.

Recognizing the fact that creating zines has been a site for my own personal transformation, I was further motivated to examine how they can aid in and document the personal and political growth of other young women. Connecting my own experience of being politicized through the reading of zines to the experiences of other young women making zines and older, anti-racist feminists is a strategy that enables me to explore the cultural significance of what could be regarded as an isolated, personal experience. By actively making these connections as a young white woman I explore the ways in which theory produced by feminists of color can have an impact on the lives of white women, as well as women of color. To do so is to not only claim, but also strive to practice building solidarity between women based on related, but differing, sites of struggle.

### **Centering Intersections: Feminist Theory from an Anti-Racist Standpoint**

Creating intellectual work from personal experience is not the property of white, western feminists who began writing in the 1970's. Among Black women in the United States there exists a long tradition of invoking ones personal experience to call for political change. This can be seen in the anti-slavery, feminist speeches of Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth, women writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance such as Zora Neale Hurston and Jesse Redmond Fauset, and women organizers and leaders in the civil rights and Black Power movements such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker and Elaine Brown.<sup>37</sup> In their speeches and writings these women, and others, drew on their daily experiences of oppression to critique the current political order and outside visions and strategies for change. Though these oppressions, whether it being slave labor in the cotton fields or in the kitchens of masters houses, living in the segregated south, or dealing with constant police harassment in a modern, urban setting, share similar features

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<sup>37</sup> For a collection of these writings see Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

they are not all the same. However, they show the long history of endurance and resistance by Black women in the United States. In *Black Feminist Thought* Patricia Hill Collins asserts that, “Many contemporary Black women intellectuals continue to draw on this tradition [of earlier Black women intellectuals and activists] of using everyday actions and experiences in our theoretical work” (Hill Collins 2000: 33). For Hill Collins, and other Black feminist intellectuals approaching their everyday experiences with a critical eye, theory becomes an act of viewing the world that can be created at the kitchen table or in the classroom.

However, merely bringing one's own personal voice or identity into the creation of intellectual work does not make it automatically powerful. Shelia Rowbotham warns against simply claiming identity as powerful in *The Past Is Before Us*;

It cannot be assumed that the act of claiming identity is itself politically radical. It depends on who is claiming what. It is necessary to enquire more closely into the context, the specific power relation, the consequences of the asserted identity in terms of power and resources (Rowbotham 1989: 264).

One might ask how bringing a personal analysis to critical work, or seeing personal work as critical work, might enable power relations to be seen in more specific terms? For example, the consequences of a working class Black woman asserting a queer identity would be different than a white, middle class, queer woman discussing her identity. While both are women and queer, race, class, education, age and many more factors also mediate their experiences and the power they hold in society.

Black feminists forged a form of analysis that examines the intersections of different elements of identity and lived experience. Approached from an intersectional standpoint autobiography can be politicized in ways that acknowledge and grapple with subtle interworkings of power. Defining intersectionality Hill Collins writes,

Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice (Hill Collins 2000: 18).

Like McRobbie noting that autobiography informs, but does not determine, feminist theory, Hill Collins' definition of intersectionality creates room for identity and the theories that come from lived experience to be mutable and changing. An intersectional

analysis acknowledges how an individual is connected to larger power structures, but not completely determined by them.

In the 1970's and 80's, feminists of color responded to what they viewed as white feminists ignorance to issues of race and class. They created writing that dealt with the intersections of identity to protest white feminist narrow focus on gender alone. They worked to create writing that claimed space for themselves within feminist discourse and in society as a whole. This theory, created as a form of protest and often published in women of color-centered journals, demonstrated the theory of intersectionality as Hill Collins explained it. The Combahee River Collective's *A Feminist Statement*(1977) is one prominent example of theory that recognizes the complexity of identity and provides a venue for women of color to call out oppression as they see, understand and experience it. The women of the collective state, "...[W]e are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking" (Combahee River Collective in Guy-Sheftall 1995: 232). The women of this collective used their personal experience to create a call to action and a critique of white, middle class feminism and male dominated radical movements. According to the collective, in order to find the roots of domination one must recognize the intersections of power and oppression. They pushed the connection between personal and political beyond a simplistic explanation, examining how racism, sexism, classism and heterosexism synthesized to create the structural oppression they faced as Black feminist lesbians.

Cherríe Moraga's writing in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) reflects a standpoint similar to the Combahee River Collective as a Chicana lesbian. She writes about how her identification as a lesbian connected her to the history of struggle of Chicano/as in North America. She writes, "[I]t wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression—due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana—was realized" (Moraga in Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: 28). Here Moraga demonstrates how coming to consciousness about one form of oppression, for her it was her identity and

oppression as a lesbian, can lead to greater understanding of the ways oppression functions as a whole.

In order to explicitly connect the struggles against racism and sexism are connected, Barbara Smith clarifies the definition of feminism in her essay *Racism and Women's Studies* (1982). She writes,

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women—as well as white, economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement (Smith in Anzaldúa 1990: 25).

Smith raises concerns similar to Rowbotham's, reminding her readers that claiming identity is part of a broader struggle for liberation from all oppression. Smith feels to lose the focus on liberation for all women is to do a disservice to feminism and lack a truly intersectional lens.

From her scholarship and standpoint as a black woman, bell hooks has named North American society a “white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 1989: 20). She uses this string of descriptors to illuminate the ways racism, classism and sexism function together. hooks reminds her readers that, “To understand domination, we must understand that our capacity as women and men to be either dominated or dominating is a point of connection, of commonality” (hooks 1989:20). hooks’ demonstrates a nuanced reading of power by insisting that even those who are disempowered in society in some ways can also hold power over others and thus it is everyone’s responsibility to critically interrogate domination in their own lives. hooks’ naming of the system as a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy is particularly important for understanding the theory of intersectionality because this system includes everyone, including those who are privileged by it. In order to counteract and resist the damage done by white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy and homophobia, in brief, by all forms of oppression, those struggling for a more equitable world must become critical of their place within the system and the ways in which they are both injured and rewarded by it. Simply put, white people, men, rich and middle class and heterosexual people are also responsible for challenging racism, sexism, classism and homophobia on a personal and systemic level.

## Cultural Appropriation and Eating the Other

When applying theory created largely by women of color to a phenomenon such as zines, which are largely produced by white women, the question of cultural appropriation arises. Cultural appropriation occurs when a group that is in power takes an aspect of another culture for their own use, ignoring the context and deeper meaning of how that aspect functioned in that culture.<sup>38</sup> On their webzine Colin Kennedy Dowell and Qwo-Li Driskill describe cultural appropriation, stating, “[A]ppropriation ignores the lives and struggles of oppressed communities, and instead takes what is seen as interesting, useful or beautiful, disregarding our cultures and lives” (Dowell and Driskill: 2005). It is understood by modern, anti-racist feminists that white feminists have a history of appropriating theory produced by women of color. This history cannot be ignored when using this theory to apply to the lives of young women, both white and of color.

The appropriation of the intellectual labor of women of color by white women in feminist academic circles is a fairly recent phenomenon. However, it connects to a long history of white women relying on the labor of women of color for their own benefit and advancement. This can also be seen in white women who relied on women of color nannies to take care of their children and do their housework when they decided to pursue their careers. Appropriation can be difficult to recognize because it can occur with good intentions. Many white women have tried to justify the ways they have appropriated the work of women of color by claiming that they are acting in solidarity with or out of love for women of color.<sup>39</sup> Appropriation is particularly pernicious because it can hide the fact that women of color, or other disempowered people, are continuing to be exploited. In the introduction to the *Racism in the Women’s Movement* section of *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) Cherríe Moraga discusses the use of women of color’s work by

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<sup>38</sup> Colin Kennedy Dowell and Qwo-Li Driskill, *What Are You Talking About?*, <http://www.makezine.org/mohawksdreads.htm> (March 16, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> See Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global* (New York: Anchor, 1984). A survey of the international women’s movement, Morgan, a white woman, has been criticized for appropriating the struggles of women of color.

white women without an accompanying challenge to racism. She writes, “In academic and cultural circles, Third World women have become the subject matter of many literary and artistic endeavors by white women, and yet we are refused access to the pen, the publishing house, the galleries, and the classroom” ( Moraga in Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981: 61). Thus women of color become an object of study for white women, but are unable to represent themselves and their own struggles in academic, political and cultural spaces.<sup>40</sup>

Women of color working in academic, literary, artistic, political and cultural circles such as Moraga have called attention to the appropriation of their work by more powerful white women. Like Moraga, bell hooks has commented on the fact that though women of color have been speaking out against racism and racism within the women’s movement since its inception, racism became only became an acceptable topic to discuss within feminist circles when white women decided these discussions were valid.<sup>41</sup> This experience has also been described by feminists of color as tokenism, the act of white women including women of color in their spaces to make a group look diverse or multi-cultural without actually altering their behavior or critiquing their own racial privilege. Lynet Uttal (1990) comments on the experience of tokenization and appropriation of women of color in her piece *Inclusion Without Influence*. She writes,

This experience suggests to me that while many Anglo feminists are very actively trying to provide support for women of color, many have not yet altered their own core concerns to really see the relevancy of the dynamics of race, class and gender to their own work or how they might benefit from incorporating varied perspectives into their own work (Uttal in Anzaldúa 1990: 43).

In Uttal’s example women of color are let in to a space, movement or thought process, that has already been defined by those with greater power, instead of being able to take an equal or leadership role in that defining or shaping. By neglecting to consider how race or class shapes their own lives, white feminists views women of color as objects

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<sup>40</sup> See also Chandra Talpade Mohanty “Under Western Eyes” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds. (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin To Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 51.

upon which they can bestow feminism. Thus, Uttal illustrates how appropriation can be “well meaning” but still serve to keep dominant power structures intact.

Appropriation can also be malicious and dangerous, especially in an economy based around consumer capitalism. bell hooks (1992) has written extensively about how Black culture has become commodified, turned into products and experiences that can be bought and consumed, for the pleasure of white people. Echoing Moraga and Uttal’s observations that incorporating representations and voices of people of color into one’s life does not necessarily challenge racism, hooks writes about this commodification in her essay *Eating the Other*. She writes,

To make one’s self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish forever one’s mainstream positionality. When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other (hooks 1992: 23).

hooks highlights the fact that the struggle against racism and all forms of domination is more than just donning a multi-cultural aesthetic or seeking out contact, experiences and cultural artifacts of those who have been “Othered” by mainstream culture. These actions play into long histories of colonial exploration where Europeans set out to “exotic” locales in search of riches, power and adventure.

Young women of color’s zines have also grappled with similar questions of being made into exotic objects and appropriation. Because writing published in zines is often more casual than academic writing and does not go through any kind of peer review or editorial process, the danger of white zinesters appropriating or plagiarizing of women of color is particularly high. In her personal zine *Slander* Mimi Nguyen (1999), a graduate student who teaches feminist and queer studies at UC Berkeley, challenges the white people reading her zine to think critically about the ways they exoticize and consume parts of non-western cultures. She writes,

Every encounter with the ‘other’ is mediated by (uneven) power. If indigenous peoples had *not* been subjected to genocidal wars and broken treaties, long decades of federal policies aimed at elimination and assimilation, do you really think you’d be able to waltz into a downtown ‘spirituality’ shop and buy yourself a dream-catcher? [*emphasis in original*] (Nguyen, 1999)

Like Nguyen, Luna\* Kali-Maia (2003) also discusses appropriation in her zine *Marimacho*, writing about her identity as a queer woman of mixed heritage in a mostly white punk subculture and expressing her outrage at the ways she sees white progressive people romanticize resistance movements by “third world” nations and Native Americans.<sup>42</sup> However, these young women writing in their zines to mostly white audiences, like hooks, Uttal and Moraga, also are striving to challenge their audiences, to work to forge communication and build solidarity across differences of identity and power.

### **The Possibility of Solidarity and Communication Across Difference**

In her essay *White Women Listen!* Hazel Carby (1982) writes, “[T]he herstory of black women is interwoven with that of white women but this does not mean that they are the same story” (Carby in Baker et al.1996: 73). Carby is arguing that white supremacy has been historically constructed to affect both people of color and white women. Carby’s argument is similar to those made by hooks and Uttal referenced in this paper. Each insists that when attempting to challenge white supremacy, or any other kind of oppression, it is not just the job of the people most disempowered by that system, but everyone’s, because everyone is immersed in that power structure. However, building solidarity to challenge oppression between those who are oppressed by a certain system and those who benefit from it requires a constant negotiation of power, privilege and openness to communication and understanding.<sup>43</sup>

Feminists of color who began producing theory in the 1970’s and 1980’s did not produce this theory for women of color alone. They also used their theory to build communication between women of different backgrounds. These feminists of color believed that in order to build a society free from oppression white women must also come to see that they too were implicated in, and damaged by, racism. Barbara Smith

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<sup>42</sup> Luna\* Kali-Maia *Marimacho* (Portland, OR: Self Published, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> hooks 1992: 28.

(1982), a prominent Black lesbian feminist and one of the founders of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, writes,

White women don't work on racism to do a favor for someone else, solely to benefit Third World women. You have to comprehend how racism distorts and lessens your own lives as white women—that racism affects your chances for survival, too, and that it is very definitely your issue. Until you understand this, no fundamental change will come about (Smith in Anzaldúa 1990: 26).

Writers like Smith urged white women and women of color to look outside of themselves, to connect different forms of oppression and understand that solidarity was not only possible, but necessary.

Because the lives of white women and women of color are so entwined within white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy it is possible to use the theories produced by women of color to apply to lives of white women. Despite this, feminists of color like Smith and Carby warn against collapsing the lives of white women and women of color into each other. Instead, these theories can be used to critically examine the ways women's histories are connected. Thus, theory produced by women of color also avoids being essentialist, though it speaks to the realities of women of color most specifically, it is not exclusive. Remarking on the non-exclusive nature of feminist theory and movement, bell hooks (1984) echoes Smith when she writes,

Women must learn to accept responsibility for fighting oppressions that may not directly affect us as individuals. Feminist movement, like other radical movements in our society, suffers when individual concerns and priorities are the only reason for participation. When we show our concern for the collective, we strengthen our solidarity (hooks 1984: 62).

It is important to remember the constant possibility and history of appropriation of the thought and labor of women of color by white women. When making connections between women who occupy differing locations of power, one must always proceed with critical thoughtfulness and not make these connections hastily. By being historically specific about the ways lives of white women and women of color are connected white women who draw on theory produced by women of color can work to build solidarity between women of different backgrounds.

There are white women responding to the calls of women of color to critically interrogate their own whiteness. They too grapple with the question of solidarity and

work to communicate across difference. Like many feminists of color, this work is informed by these women's lived experiences. Also similar to the work of women of color, some young white women creating zines have been exposed to the work by anti-racist white feminists and have been moved to use their zines as sites to question and critique their whiteness and racism. Because the majority of personal zines are produced by young white women, it is crucial to examine the work of two prominent anti-racist feminists, Ruth Frankenberg and Mab Segrest, to understand the history and struggles young white women face as they discuss race and racism in their zines and attempt to share dialogue with women of color making zines.

Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) study of white women and their views on race and racism *White Women, Race Matters* grapples with the task of connecting the history of whiteness to the history of oppression of people of color. Frankenberg insists that whiteness is a raced phenomenon, one that refers to a "set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination. Naming 'whiteness' displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance" (Frankenberg 1993: 6). Frankenberg pushes her readers to consider race, like gender, an idea that has been constructed through specific present historical struggles and actions, such as slavery and the genocide of Native Americans, rather than as a category that has an inherent, immutable meaning. However, she also insists that the consequences of race and racism are very concrete and tangible. In this way Frankenberg views race and gender, as well as class and sexuality, as formed in political processes and all interconnected.<sup>44</sup>

While Frankenberg examined how white women understood race and racism in their everyday lives from a sociological standpoint, Mab Segrest (1994) turned a critical eye towards her own anti-racist political work as a white woman. In her book *Memoir of a Race Traitor* Segrest describes her experience as a grassroots organizer against the far right, white supremacist movement in North Carolina in the 1980's. In her book she explores her position as a queer, white woman coming from a middle class, racist, Southern family. Segrest writes about how she was raised as a white woman to compete as an individual for jobs, recognition and self-esteem. It was through her political work

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<sup>44</sup> Frankenberg 1993: 11.

that she was better able to understand and to see the connections between white people and people of color, heterosexuals and queer people, poor and middle class people, in short, what Hill Collins and other Black feminists called intersectionality. Segrest writes, “Traveling across race and class and cultural boundaries [in her organizing work], my ear eventually became tuned to different vibrations so that I began to hear, first as a murmur, then as clearly articulated sound: *We... are... in... this... together*” (Segrest 1994: 174). For Segrest, seeing and trusting the importance of the connections between white people and people of color enabled her to do anti-racist political organizing. Segrest’s memoir also shows the power that sharing stories of shared struggle can have on creating solidarity and recognizing intersections between forms of oppression. Segrest’s experience becomes particularly important for examining young women’s zines, which act as vehicles for sharing potentially transformative stories.

Simply recognizing the connections between white women and women of color is not enough to undo centuries of racial oppression or avoid cultural appropriation. Such consciousness must also be rooted in organizing work that challenges historically constructed systems of power. However, recognizing the connections and intersections between histories and identities can create spaces where these histories can be shared, explored, discussed and questioned. Stories that have been silenced can be brought to voice, ears can be opened to hear these stories and dialogue and exchange can occur. At the end of her memoir Segrest informs her readers she forged her understanding not in solitary self-analysis, but through actual relationships and dialogue with other people.<sup>45</sup> The experience of older anti-racist feminists like Segrest and Frankenberg provides a history to the dialogue and exchange around race, power and privilege occurring between young white women and young women of color in their zines. The message of these feminist writers, both young and old, who use their personal experiences to inform and guide their writing and political work, is that through these kinds of exchanges they can push each other’s political consciousness and be moved by each other’s struggles in ways that enable them to build movements for greater social justice.

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<sup>45</sup> Segrest 1994: 175.

### **Section III: Zines as Sites for Shared Struggle and Dialogue**

Though theory produced by women of color and anti-racist white women was developed from the realities of these women's lives, it often has stayed within the academy, or adult, literary and political organizing circles. However, this theory, and the lives of the women who produced it, has also influenced, directly or indirectly, the writing that many young women have recently published in their personal zines. Zines create a space where writing about identity and political consciousness can be shared. This is a space where questions can be generated and clarity sought around the operation of power and oppression in young women's personal lives. Zines also provide an arena to break silences around issues that have been determined culturally taboo, such as mental health and sexual violence. As a result, zines are a medium where young women can empower themselves through participating in creating media and a community, or subculture, that surrounds it.

#### **Reflections of Intersections: Zines as sites for critical consciousness of identity**

Zines are spaces where an author can represent herself however she chooses and, as a result, they welcome the assertion of multiple and complex identities. Many zine publishers have embraced the kind of intersectional analysis that Hill Collins describes and use their zine to examine themselves critically as raced, classed, gendered and sexualized subjects. By understanding themselves as complex subjects, zine writers, both of color and white, levy a simultaneous critique of racism, classism, sexism and homophobia. Making a zine also allows the author to create a space where she can come to understand herself through her own process and assert herself in her own words. This process mirrors that of women of color in the 1970's and 80's who created theory informed by their personal lives for each other and in order to hold the white women's movement accountable for their racism. Zines also function differently than this theory. Though many are produced by people who have gone to college or are familiar and comfortable with reading theory, the language used in them is neither academic nor intended for audiences within the academy. Because zines can be produced by people of

any age, for young women who have yet to (or may never) go to college, zines can be a way to be exposed to ideas such as intersectional analysis through the lived examples of other young women. Zines are also be a way for young women to come to terms with their identities in regards to family history and heritage.

Some young women publishing zines, particularly young women of color, use their zines as a place to assert and find strength in their identities which are not valued by a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. Kristy Chan (1997) confronts racist beauty standards that validate thin, white women in her writing in *Evolution of a Race Riot*. She writes, “I don’t deserve to feel that I am ugly when I should be pissed. I also started to think about how issues of race affect me from reading different zines and such where most of the time, race is discussed from a white privileged viewpoint” (Chan in Nguyen 1997: 44). Making a zine can give a writer an opportunity to write against a white centered viewpoint by asserting ones self as counter to a racially privileged viewpoint. Chan’s determination to write about race in her own words as a woman of color echoes earlier feminists of color, such as Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga, who insisted that women of color must represent themselves in discussions about race. Writers like Chan, Smith and Moraga represent themselves as subjects in feminist discussions, not objects to be discussed by privileged, white feminists.

In addition to critiquing racially privileged viewpoints zine writers, like feminists of color writing in the 1970’s and 80’s, critique society that would only see them in terms of race, or class, or gender. By discussing the multiple positions they occupy in terms of identity, power and privilege, these young women challenge binary thinking about cultural and racial identity. In her zine *Marimacho* Luna\* Kali-Maia (2003) shares her frustration with what she sees in mainstream culture as a constant need to define her in binary terms. She discusses the denial of her Native heritage, writing,

I inform people of all my cultures, they conclude only one aspect, Mexican. It’s like they are only listening for the one word to make their first assumptions accurate/validated. I am made of a bunch of pieces. I am not one simple box. I am a container for many things, all at once (Kali-Maia 2003).

Here Kali-Maia invokes the idea of intersectionality and the importance of an intersectional understanding of the world to understand her identity. Like the members of the Combehee River Collective, who insisted that their identities and oppressions

informed each other, young women like Kali-Maia use their zines to represent their multiple, overlapping identities.

The theme of how intersectional realities and identities are lived and understood flows through many zines by young women of color. Some young women who identify as mixed race find zines useful to explore the complexities and nuances of a mixed identity. These zines become site where the theory of intersectionality as explained by Hill Collins can be constantly innovated. By actively seeking connections between their multiple identities, young women publishing zines do not simply use the idea of intersectionality as theory, but as a reality that is constantly shifting and evolving. One such investigation into the nature of how intersections between identity categories are formed and inform each other is Lauren Martin's (2000) "Mixed Race Queer Girl Manifesto," published in her zine *Quantify*. Examining how her experience as a mixed race Chinese and Jewish woman has informed her queer identity, Martin concludes,

I want to shake up people's assumptions... I want people to acknowledge the existence of other mixed-race queers. Finally, by understanding how our racial identities affect our sexual identities and vice versa, we can begin an honest conversation about why rigid binary identifying categories are useless, hurtful, and not relevant to most of our lives (Martin 2000: 34).

Martin's manifesto recalls Cherríe Moraga's discussion of coming to understand her mother's oppression as a poor, Chicana woman through understanding her own lesbian identity. Similar to older feminists of color, who produced theory for each other and for anti-racist white feminists, Martin's writing reflects a complex understanding of her audience. By stating she wants "people to acknowledge the existence of other mixed-race queers" Martin shows that she is not only writing for that particular audience, but wishes to speak to people who may not have considered why binary identifying categories are harmful and irrelevant. Thus Martin's writing serves to assert her own identity and to challenge systems of power that work to fit people into rigid identity groups.

The questioning of binaries in zines, such as Kali-Maia's and Martin's, extends beyond the questioning of rigid race or sexual categories and into the realm of gender. In his zine *Subject to Change* Toby Beauchamp (2003) discusses how binary categories do not apply to him in terms of gender; examining how growing up white and working

class in Florida has informed his gender and sexuality. Beauchamp used his zine to question and examine gender binaries as he transitioned from female to male and took on a transgender identity. Drawing on gender theory, Beauchamp challenges it to relate to his reality as a transgendered person in a binary gendered world. He writes,

I have a love/hate relationship with gender theory that treats all gender as performance. I love it because sometimes it is the only place I can go to find non-binary gender acknowledged and discussed...[but] It is not really realistic for me to quote Judith Butler when someone demands to know if I'm a boy or a girl (Beauchamp 2003).

By using his zine to write about transgender issues, race, class and sexuality, Beauchamp's zine *Subject to Change*, becomes a "container for many things" similar to Kali-Maia's analysis of herself.<sup>46</sup> Zine makers can represent themselves as multiple, complex and often contradictory. They draw from theories outlined by women of color who understood that recognizing intersections between different parts of their identities was vital to their survival. However, they also innovate and update the theory of intersectionality by examining how it is relevant to their lived experiences. By presenting these experiences in their zines, though they may not fit together seamlessly, a zine writers multiple identities cannot be separated from each other.

### **Autobiography and Examining History**

As well as asserting their complex identities young women use their zines as a chance to examine their personal, family histories. They often reveal what might be termed "family secrets" and work to represent themselves in context of their families' past and reflect on the ways in which they grew up. In doing so, zine writers work to ground their understanding of how they experience their identity in the history of their families. This writing enables them to understand how identity categories, such as race, class, gender or sexuality, are not binary or historically fixed, but are constructed throughout history. Writing about growing up tenuously middle class, white and Southern in her zine, Kimberly Mitchell (2003) explores how her mother and grandmother's past connects to her own present. She writes,

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<sup>46</sup> Luna\* Kali-Maia, *Marimacho #3*, (Portland, OR: Self published, 2003), no page.

My Mom...Those washed-out Irish eyes. They tell of generations of poverty, backbreaking work. Alcoholism. Her story is not mine because she ‘made it’ in certain ways for certain reasons. She grew up in utter chaos... My mama escaped by being white, by being smart and stubborn...Most importantly, she won the heart of a boy who was MUCH more privileged than she was (Mitchell 2003).

Here Mitchell examines her personal history through the differences in class status she and her mother grew up with. Mitchell includes race and ethnicity in her analysis, attributing some of her mother’s ability to escape generations of poverty being due to her whiteness and the fact that the Irish are less stigmatized as an ethnic group than they were in the past. She also acknowledges the role heterosexual privilege played in her class background as she discusses her mother’s ability to “marry up.”

Like Mitchell, Izz Poehelman (2004), a transgendered person who uses non-gendered pronouns, also uses hir zine to examine hir family’s history and write hir own history in terms of class.<sup>47</sup> Histories like Poehelman’s are important for understanding intersectionality. Hir writing on class how class affects one’s identity is particularly important because discussion of class is often silenced in the United States, a supposedly classless society. Poehelman writes,

It is a strange thing, being middle class and yet having these deeply ingrained money traumas. The commercial version of my class status is so incredibly different that the one I experience that I constantly feel a disconnect...By the same token, I have all of these opportunities and options that my parents didn’t, that my friends with lower-income families don’t.<sup>48</sup>

Here Poehelman also disrupts binary thinking about class, discussing how even though ze grew up middle class, “money traumas” from hir parents’ working class past remain. Ze also understands the privileges ze has received in terms of opportunities for education, travel and a comfortable life that separates hir from the working class history of hir family. By writing about their family histories of economic hardship and struggle zine writers like Poehelman and Mitchell connect themselves to their families’ histories and

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<sup>47</sup> Some transgendered people prefer the pronouns “hir” (pronounced “here”) instead of his or her and “ze” instead of he or she because they disrupt binary conceptions of gender.

<sup>48</sup> Izz Poehelman, *The Wicked Which #4* (Minneapolis, MN: Self published, 2004), no page.

arrive at a complex understanding of their class status and how it informs their racial and gender identities.

Other zine writers divulge their experiences of growing up poor or working class by recounting their memories from growing up. They also view these memories as connected to their racial, ethnic, gender and sexual identities. By telling their stories young women are able to claim pride in their histories and identities and to question the assumption that becoming middle class is a normal and benign process. In her zine *Swing Set Girl* Sarah Sackett (2004) writes about hiding her class identity from her peers in order to fit into a largely white, middle and upper middle class suburban town. She writes,

I am from a working class family, my father laid carpet and my mother cleaned houses and the only reason that we could afford to live in Levittown was because we lived with my grandmother to take care of her in her elder years...I was always afraid to admit what my parents did for a living (Sackett 2004).

By breaking this particular silence in her zine, Sackett is able to claim pride in her identity as working class, similar to earlier feminists proudly proclaiming their identities in independently published books and journals. She also connects her experience growing up working class to developing an anti-racist stance as a white person. She writes, “[M]aybe growing up in a white, racist town has taught me something very significant. I learned by example what I never wanted to be. I was forced to make my own effort to self educate in order to not be part of those people” (Sackett 2004). Sackett’s commitment to the process of self education about her own racial privilege recalls Barbara Smith’s warning that racism effects white women’s chances for survival and liberation. Sackett understands this, emphasizing “I learned by example what I never wanted to be.” Her insistence on white anti-racism recalls Mab Segrest’s *Memoir of a Race Traitor* in which Segrest develops her anti-racist stance not only from her anti-Klan political work but from observing and critiquing her own racist family.

In addition to coming to a more complex understanding of their racial, gendered, classed and sexual identities, young white women writing in zines also explore their ethnic identities. One function of whiteness in the United States, as has been pointed out by writers like James Baldwin (1984) and Ruth Frankenberg (1993), is that it erases the ethnic identities and struggles of people with light skin. In his essay “On Being

‘White’...And Other Lies” Baldwin asserts that kind of denial is the price light skinned immigrants to the United States paid to become “white.”<sup>49</sup> Many young women have written against this kind of historical amnesia in their zines and Mitchell (2003) reflects directly on the price of the ticket of whiteness. She writes, “[W]hen I moved to the Northeast U.S., I realized that it is not the norm for white people to be entirely disconnected from the ethnicities/nationalities of their ancestors who immigrated to the U.S. This is very much the norm in the South, particularly so in my family.”<sup>50</sup> Here Mitchell explains that even though she had described her mother’s eyes as “Irish” she was unsure of the details of her ethnic background. This kind of disconnection from histories of immigration is connected to the construction of whiteness as an unchanging entity. By recognizing the ways the knowledge of her ethnic background has been lost or consciously forgotten Mitchell participates in a project similar to Ruth Frankenberg’s in *White Women, Race Matters* by articulating how whiteness has been constructed in her personal life.

Unlike Mitchell, Tya Kagamas (2001), writing in her zine *Belly Up*, has a specific knowledge of her ethnic identity. She uses her zine to explore the connection she feels with her grandparents, Greek immigrants living in rural Ohio, as she explains why she decided to take on their last name, instead of the last name of her father. She writes,

I was raised solely by the hand of my grandmother, a woman from a poor family who married into a slightly richer one, that of my Grandfather’s family, immigrants from Greece. My grandmother was a woman obsessed with class and privilege, since she was raised without any (Kagamas 2001).

Like Poehelman, Kagamas uses her zine to examine the history of her family’s class status, as well as her own ethnic identity. Understanding herself as Greek and from a working class background, Kagamas can arrive at a nuanced understanding of her whiteness and acknowledge the intersections between her ethnicity and class background.

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<sup>49</sup> James Baldwin, “On Being ‘White’...And Other Lies,” in *Black on White*, David R. Roediger, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Mitchell 2003.

### **Zines as Sites for Critically Confronting White Racism**

While some white young women write about their ethnic identities and their whiteness as an anti-racist act, others use their zines to directly challenge their readers to think critically about and work to counter white supremacy. In her zine *Looks Yellow, Tastes Red* (2003), which she has published since she was a teenager growing up in a working class family on Cape Cod, Collete Ryder-Hall speaks directly to other white people about the pernicious, and often hidden, nature of white supremacy. Ryder-Hall writes,

[White supremacy] is a lie that we all live...We are living out a legacy of whiteness, of taking what's not ours, of building things on the backs of people that we pretend are inferior to us and in tern pretending that this is natural or not our faults or not happening at all (Ryder-Hall 2003).

Here Ryder-Hall takes the suggestions of Baldwin, and feminists of color such as bell hooks and Barbara Smith who insisted that racism is everyone's issue, to heart and writes about her own understanding of the working of white supremacy. Like Hazel Carby insisting that the herstory of white women and women of color is woven together Ryder-Hall interprets the history of white women as "a lie we all live." She challenges her readers to see through this historically constructed lie and look at the ways they have been tied to the histories of people of color through asserting their domination over them and appropriating the labor and culture of people of color.

Though critical writing on ethnicity, white supremacy and class by white women in zines grapples with many of the critical questions that white anti-racist feminists like Ruth Frankenberg and Mab Segrest raised, writing about race in zines does not eliminate white privilege. Ryder-Hall's piece on white supremacy makes it clear that white people must remain ever vigilant about the ways in which they are privileged by whiteness, even as they recognize how whiteness has been historically constructed. Many young women of color publishing zines have expressed their frustration with white women who persist in placing their concerns first and ignore the voices, critiques and experiences of young

women of color. Writing in *Evolution of a Race Riot* Sel Wahng (1997) comments on how white women continue to fail to make connections between different forms of oppression. In a piece entitled *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Homicide* Wahng writes,

By white lesbians constantly eliding race, and making it secondary to sexual orientation, as if race was not as integral to sexuality as sexuality orientation, these whitegirls are saying that the needs and issues of coloredgirls are not as important as the needs of whitegirls (Wahng in Nguyen 1997: 64).

Here Wahng references dialogues about the importance of recognition of intersectionality. Wahng's critique is similar to that of feminists such as Lynett Uttal, Barbara Smith and bell hooks who found that even when it became desirable to include women of color in feminist organizing, white woman continued to organize most energetically around their own concerns. These concerns, as Wahng makes clear, privilege certain identities over other and thus serves to disconnect different aspects of identity from each other. Wahng echoes Barbara Smith's insistence that feminism must be focused on the liberation of all women, not just certain privileged groups or individuals. This except also recalls Martin's "Mixed Race Queer Girl Manifesto" by insisting that race informs sexual orientation and vice versa.

As zines writers of color referenced in this paper such as Wahng, Martin, Lee, Kali-Maia, Perez and Anna demonstrate, zines by young women of color are a format where they can respond to the racism of white women and express pride in their own identities and heritages through telling their stories. They can also use them to and speak out against the appropriation of anti-racist language and struggle people of color utilized by white people. In her introduction to *Evolution of a Race Riot* Mimi Nguyen (1997) addresses how white zine writers have appropriated the language of racial oppression in order to avoid accountability for their privilege. She writes,

Even worse, some white riot-types have decided to appropriate the language of racial oppression to include themselves as 'nonwhite' or at least as oppressed as populations of color. This includes anything from comparing racism to blue-hair discrimination, to emphasizing the 'immigrant tales' of their European ethnic forefathers—mothers to echo a defensive 'me too,' to insisting that a vague 'possibly' nonwhite ancestor makes one 'black' and enables one to speak for and as 'all African people.' All such approaches are patently stupid, not to mention appropriating, irresponsible, and ahistorical (Nguyen 1997: 4).

Nguyen's pointed critique of white people who use the language of anti-racist struggle to claim an identity of "otherness," but do not actively challenge their own racial privilege, recalls bell hooks' essay "Eating The Other" (1992). In it hooks critiques white people who seek out encounters with people of color in order to construct themselves as alternative or different without threatening the power and privilege that they hold in mainstream society.<sup>51</sup> Nguyen's critique is similar to hooks' because she criticizes white zine maker's romanticization, or fabrication, of their own racial otherness for the sake of gaining the authority to speak for those other than themselves. By uncritically invoking "immigrant tales" or insisting that they are "black" because they have a "possibly nonwhite ancestor," like Nguyen describes, white zine publishers attempt to construct an artificial unity with people of color. In doing so white zine publishers trivialize the power histories of immigration and mixed race identities can have to unsettle whiteness as a monolithic and historically constructed category. They also prevent honest dialogue across difference and around histories of white supremacy of the kind Ryder-Hall suggests is so important.

Many of the issues surrounding white racism raised by women of color publishing zines echo those raised by feminists of color writing in the 1970's and 1980's. They reflect the fact that the process of creating an anti-racist feminist movement is a long one and will take many generations of women speaking up and speaking out about these issues. They show that appropriation of language and struggles pioneered by women of color by white woman is a constant danger. Young women, both white and of color, use their zines to make the writing and theory created by anti-racist feminists in the 1970's and 80's relevant to their own lives. By writing critically in their zines about race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality use this medium to carry the legacy forged by feminists of color and anti-racist white feminists forward. Part of this legacy is the willingness to confront oppression in all of its forms, and understand that issues pertaining to health, mental health, and sexual violence are intimately connected to racism, classism, sexism and homophobia.

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<sup>51</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

**Breaking Culturally Imposed Silences:  
Challenging Stigmas Pertaining to Body Image, Mental Health and Sexual Abuse**

Living with eating disorders, being labeled as crazy and mistreated and misunderstood in terms of mental health, and being survivors of sexual abuse are topics young women regularly address in their zines. There is a long history of women educating each other on, speaking out about and organizing against sexual violence, body image issues and a sexist medical care system that denies women proper treatment for mental illness or misdiagnoses and mistreats their illness. Writing in zines is one way young women put these struggles in their own words and make them relevant to their own experiences.

Audre Lorde (1984), a black lesbian feminist, has written eloquently about the nature of silence and its relationship to women's fear of speaking and telling truths about their lives in her essay "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." Lorde insists that to break culturally imposed silences, around race, sexuality, and gender particularly, is an act of self-revelation.<sup>52</sup> However, writing in *Talking Back, Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* bell hooks problematizes the idea of feminism encouraging women to "break silences." hooks asserts that in Black communities women have not been silent and the struggle is not so much about emerging from silence into speech but to create speech that compels their listeners to really hear them.<sup>53</sup> Putting silence into language is a self-revelatory act for many young women creating zines, though with hooks' point in mind it is important to remember that the idea of "breaking silences" or "speaking out" is not the same for every young woman but mediated by background, culture and experience.

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<sup>52</sup> Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 42.

<sup>53</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back* (Boston MA: South End Press, 1989), 6.

### Challenging Damaging Images of Womanhood

Young women use zines to examine issues of body image and their relationship with their own bodies. It has been well documented that the advertising industries use of artificially thin, airbrushed models, who are overwhelmingly white or “white looking” contributes to young women’s low self-esteem, self-hatred and formation of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.<sup>54</sup> Though eating disorders have received some attention in mainstream media and magazines aimed at teenaged girls such as *Seventeen* and *CosmoGirl*, it is commonly believed by feminists and media critics that advertisers have done little to nothing to include images of healthy girls of different ethnicities and body sizes in their ads. This is perhaps due to the fact that the products they are selling rely fundamentally on encouraging and profiting from young women’s insecurities about their bodies.

In a media climate that compels young women to consume makeup and diet products in order to appearing attractive and accepted the non commercial nature of zines is very refreshing. Their lack of advertisements and commercial agenda enables young women to critique and “talk back” to the advertising directed at them. They also are able to represent their complicated relationships with their bodies in a nuanced form that resists a simple love/hate binary. In her zine *Hope* Elissa Nelson (2001) writes about her changing relationship with her body as a queer woman taking dance classes and struggling with illness and injury. She writes,

A lot of the zines I’ve read about ‘body image’ are written by girls who hate their bodies; for me it’s always been more complicated than that, especially lately. It’s not hate at all, ever; but sometimes it’s distrust, and sometimes it’s shame, and sometimes it’s strength and power. Sometimes it’s fear, and sometimes it’s a sort of awe (Nelson 2001).

Similar to young women writing in their zines who question racial, gender and sexual binaries, here Nelson pushes for recognition of a relationship with her body that is not based on a binary. She acknowledges the effect mass media advertising has had on her

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<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Larson, “Teen Magazines: Selling Lip Gloss, Sex and Anorexia,” *Extra!*, March/April 1991, 11.

self-image and the self-image of her peers. She also invokes an intersectional analysis as she explores the effects of living in a heterosexist society as a white, queer woman, and examines how her personal and family history of health and mental health has effected her self esteem.

There is a group of young women that have created an entire sub-genre of personal zines to deal with precisely the issues and fears Nelson lays out in her writing about her body. Many of these zines aim to tackle fatphobia and promote fat acceptance. They aim to educate their readers about the idea that one can be “fat” and healthy. These zines provide their audience with articles and information about the dangers of the diet industry and support each other in finding beauty and confidence in their bodies. In her zine *Take It- It's My Body* Kangara Alaezia (2004) discusses the positive impact of her zine, which is focused on the issue of fat oppression. She writes

...There are great fat individuals all around me that are positive, confident and a great reminder that this is a struggle worth fighting for. And there are the allies, people who do not face the judgment and stereotypes, yet give their time and energy to recognize the importance of this fight for fat acceptance (Alaezia 2004).

Alaezia also discusses organizing a support and action group with other fat positive women she has met through zines and performing with a fat positive cheerleading squad. Unlike the young women Angela McRobbie described, who built their identities around consuming teen magazines that were saturated with advertising for beauty and diet products, women like Kangara Alaezia use zines to critique this kind of advertising. In doing so, they build communities of support that offer alternatives to compulsive dieting and thinness as the only way to beauty and health. Often rooted in face to face interaction as well as zines, this collective work recalls a long history of groups of women, such as the Combahee River Collective, organizing collectively to challenge culturally imposed shame and silences.

### **Problematizing Sanity: New Conceptions of Mental Health**

Like zines which grapple with body image and physical health, personal zines created by young women which centering on mental health offer a politicized, nuanced reading of their writers experiences. These writers also link struggles for their personal

mental health to larger struggles against sexism, racism, classism and homophobia. Themes such as shame, silence, acceptance and action are common in zines where young women write about their identity and life experiences. These themes are especially strong in zines that center around mental health. For example, in a discussion her experience being hospitalized for depression in her zine *With Heart in Mouth*, Anna (2003) explicitly connects her struggles with depression and anorexia to her identity as a mixed race, queer woman.<sup>55</sup> She does not stop at telling her story, but uses her personal experience as a starting point for action by outlining ways in which she feels activist communities can be more supportive of her and other people struggling with mental health issues. In the same issue Anna also discusses struggles to be recognized as a person of color in activist communities and the racism she experiences in these communities. In this way Anna's zine demonstrates her understanding that mental health, physical health and identity inform each other and creates a complex understanding of intersectional analysis.

Other zines like Anna's which discuss mental health work to hold their readers accountable to the ways they do and do not support people struggling with mental illness. In her zine *Rock Star With Words* Korinna Irwin (2002) discusses her experiences taking medication for bipolar disorder. In doing so, she challenges readers to think critically about their own views on sanity and how they treat people who are deemed mentally ill. She writes,

It's scary to realize that you really don't have the ability to control yourself without drugs. And I find myself being painstakingly jealous of those around me who don't need medication to function, jealous of the advantages they have that they don't even know, that they have probably never pondered for one second. And why would they ponder it, what reason would they have to even question this great privilege that doesn't seem to be a privilege, but a normal natural thing to them? (Irwin 2002).

Irwin demonstrates the complexities of power and privilege. Her understanding and analysis of the privileges of those who do not live with mental illness is similar writers like Baldwin and Frankenberg who critique those who view whiteness as a naturalized, normal phenomenon. Irwin demonstrates that the privilege of sanity is often invisible to

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<sup>55</sup> Anna, *With Heart In Mouth #3* (College Park, MD: 2003), no page.

those who have it, similar to writings on whiteness that argue those living as white people do not have to recognize the privileges they receive from it if they do not choose to. Irwin also illustrates how those struggling with mental health and those struggling against racism also face unique struggles informed by differing, but often connected, histories.

Zines enable young women to form networks of support and become resources for each other on mental health issues. Reflecting on her experiences as someone who was diagnosed as clinically depressed as a young woman, “J” (2002) wrote in her zine about how her depression related to her feeling isolated as a young queer person lacking a supportive community and feeling distanced from her family. Her zine, *Slightly More Than Sound Bites*, bills itself as “zinnerific, queer, feminist, political, fun.” In addition to examining critically how sexism and homophobia, both external and internal, contributed to her depression, J discusses the difficulty and necessity of supporting other young women struggling with depression. She creates a list of conditions a community could strive to provide in order to support young women struggling with mental health issues,

Some things that I think are valuable are: Having communities of people you can relate to, being supported, being listened to and believed, having someone non-judgmental to talk to, someone who won't break your confidentiality, someone to help put what you're feeling into societal/political context (J 2002).

Like other young women doing zines and older feminists such as the contributors to *This Bridge Called My Back*, J stresses the importance of community, of having access to stories and experiences of people similar to yourself in order to put your own struggle in a larger context.

Other young women making zines centering on mental health have taken ideas similar to J's and worked to put them in an even wider context and ground them in a community that exists not only through zines, but in an actual locality. Annie Anxiety (2004) published a zine called *Witch-Hunt* focused on “addressing mental health and confronting sexual assault in activist communities” (Anxiety 2004). She wrote the zine based on a presentation she gave on the topic in Portland, Oregon for a workshop put on by the Icarus Project. The Icarus Project is a community group dedicated to supporting people in radical communities who struggle with mental health issues. Anxiety makes the connection between her personal experience as a white, queer woman diagnosed with

many different psychiatric disorders, a survivor of abuse and the political system in which she is located. She writes,

The politics and issue surrounding the subject of mental health are extremely important to me on a personal level. Furthermore, I believe they are relevant to all forms of activism, and fundamental in the fight to end oppression and its effects, both internal and external (Anxiety 2004: 2).

Anxiety attests to the strength and community she has found that are willing to have dialogue around mental illness and sexual assault. Anxiety is also very clear that people in radical communities perpetuate sexual violence and oppression. Her workshop and zine is focused on the importance of recognizing and addressing such oppressive behavior. Her willingness to address the ways in which the subculture she is a part of replicates dominant culture's sexist behavior recalls the analysis put forth by the Birmingham School that insisted subcultures are not immune from replicating the hierarchies that exist in the dominant culture in which they are located.<sup>56</sup>

### **Living Theory, Breaking Silence: Challenging Sexual Assault**

Other young women writing about their experiences with sexual assault and abuse forge connections similar to the ones Anxiety makes in *Witch-Hunt*. Through telling the story of her survival of rape and connecting it to her experience growing up working class and struggling with anorexia, Sarah Sky (2003) underscores the point made by feminist academics like McRobbie and Hill Collins that theory can come out of lived experience. In her zine *Conflagration* she writes,

I wasn't going to go into as much detail with my rape story and instead talk about the need for building a community of people who support rape survivors, but I kept getting the same feedback, it's incomplete. So, I wrote out my story. I think the lessons we learn from our experiences are just as valid as the stories. And if we are not learning from our stories, they become limited and sometimes empty. I was trying to move beyond confession and step into theory, but this is both (Sky 2003).

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<sup>56</sup> Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, "Subcultures, Cultures and Class," in Gelder and Thornton 1997: 100-101.

Here Sky shows how her personal experience informs her process of creating theory about how communities can support survivors of sexual assault. She also demonstrates that the process of telling her story is intimately connected to the larger process of challenging sexism and the ways it manifests itself in sexual violence towards women. She reinforces points made by Shelia Rowbotham and Barbara Smith, who argued that women, especially privileged women, who only celebrated their identities or told their stories divorced from a larger context, only acted to promote themselves and did not contribute to building feminist the movement. Here Sky, who is interested in working to build a network of support for rape survivors, realizes the strength of telling her personal story when it is connected to active, critical community building.

Zines like *Witch-Hunt* and *Conflagration* stress the importance of accountability and discuss experiences with the challenges of working to hold perpetrators of sexual abuse accountable for their behavior. This is similar, though not identical to, the writing young women create that centers around race and holding white women accountable for racism in feminist movements or in the context of the zine community. Two young women who were sexually assaulted by a man significantly older than they were, who was also a publisher of zines, created a zine called *Baby I'm a Manarchist* (2003) in an attempt to hold him accountable for his assaults. In the zine they also put forth demands to ensure their own, and other women's, safety in the zine community. The zine did not treat their assaults as isolated incidents, but connected them to the workings of patriarchy. The editors write, "[This zine] is also a glimpse into some of the underlying cultural factors that allow sexual assault to be marginalized, silenced, and dismissed, even within radical communities" (Tali and Laura 2003: 2). Framed explicitly around creating accountability and raising awareness about sexual assault within the zine community, their zine functioned as a call to action and organizing tool as well as a forum for the editors to break the silence around their experiences of sexual abuse.

Many young women from different backgrounds have used zines as a powerful medium for speaking out on issues that are deemed taboo or are silenced or ignored by mainstream culture or media. Writing about the connections, and lack of boundaries between, different identity categories young women writing in their zines are able to practice what Patricia Hill Collins called an "intersectional" analysis. By critically

examining how race, class, gender and sexuality inform each other and their experiences with mental health, body image and sexual violence, young women innovate and update the theory of intersectionality by making it specifically relevant to the complexities of their lives. Zines also serve as sites where young woman can create communities or subcultures based on their shared experiences, interests and concerns. Writing based on their personal experience, these young women are able to hone and express their voices politically. By engaging in dialogue with each other through reading, writing and critique young women are also able to educate, support and challenge each other to become aware of the complexities of power, privilege and history. This kind of politicized, dialogic self-expression can lead to, build upon or compliment young women's social and political activism in other mediums and spheres.

#### **Section IV:**

#### **Zines and Formulating Social Change: Inside and Outside of the Classroom**

This section focuses on zines that have been produced for specifically educational or political purposes. It examines how zines have been used in education, community or political settings in order to provide educators, youth workers, activists, organizers and media makers with ideas of how zines might be used in their field. For young women who have been involved in zine publishing, making a zine is often a highly significant personal experience that has often lead them to greater personal, political consciousness. Zines are a space where young women can both engage in dialogue with each other and develop their own awareness and consciousness about the workings of power and oppression. Because of this, zines can be particularly applicable for use in progressive education that works to challenge hierarchical relationships between students and teachers and use education as a site to encourage critical thinking.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Zines can also be used in community settings that are explicitly tied to collective consciousness raising or creating social change. Education, community organizations or political organizations, can use zines in a variety of ways to collaborate on a creative project,

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<sup>57</sup> For a sample lesson plan that demonstrates how zines can be used in the classroom see Appendix B.

enhance or strengthen their agenda and publicize and raise public awareness around their issues and campaigns.

In my own experience I have found many educators have been incorporating zines into their classrooms and programs. They use some aspect of zine making in their classrooms at every age and level, including elementary school and undergraduate programs in Women's Studies, Cultural Studies or fine arts. For example, Patti Kim (2003), a Masters of Fine Arts student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design taught an undergraduate course on zines that enabled her students to explore zines as an art form. Kristin McAuley, a public school librarian in Portland, Oregon, teaches zine making workshops to elementary and middle school students and maintains a zine collection within the school's library. Educators can use zines in many ways, including creating zines as a creative project to showcase students written and artistic work on any subject or using zines as an example of young people speaking out on issues that are important to them, including issues of identity and education.

Many young women have used their zines to discuss their experiences in education and criticize what they believe to be a flawed education system within the United States. In her zine *Camo Jacket Jazz* McGinnis (2002) registers her unhappiness with high school and searches for alternative forms of schooling. She writes,

There was a program a few years back which developed a learning environment in which teens created themselves and learned from it. Hands on, get to it. Everything they took in would be of use and help them learn something that would help with life. Those are the kinds of schools we need. Not under budgeted, over populated dumps that believe in quantity and not quality (McGinnis 2002: 7).

The need for more progressive forms of schooling that is applicable to students lived realities that McGinnis discusses in her zine has been well documented, rigorously analyzed and critiqued by educators such as Deborah Meier (1995), Michelle Fine (1991), Sonia Neito (1999), and Lisa Delpit (1995). Black feminist cultural critic bell hooks (1984,1994) has also written on education and the importance of the anti-racist, feminist classroom in the process of coming to consciousness around issues of domination.

Many of these writers have been influenced and inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian educator who insisted on the importance of dialogue between teachers and students and outlined the ways in which education is a crucial component in the struggle for liberation from all forms of oppression. Freire insisted on education leading to praxis, which he saw as the combination of action and reflection people undertook in order to challenge domination.<sup>58</sup> Freire also insisted on the importance of people who are oppressed to be able to describe and recognize that oppression. He called this process “naming the world.” He writes, “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (Freire 2000: 69). Creating a zine is one in which young women have asserted their rights to be listened to and invited each other to dialogue about identity, power and oppression.

Creating a learning environment centered around dialogue requires listening on the part of an educator. In her book *Listening: A Framework for Teaching Across Differences* Katherine Shultz (2003) emphasizes the importance of recognizing individual students’ strengths and challenges, as well as understanding the larger socio-economic systems students and education systems are a part of. She writes, “Listening for the larger contexts of students’ lives includes inviting students from the margins to bring their stories into the center of classroom life” (Shultz 2003: 77). Creating a zine is one way that students could be encouraged to bring their personal lives into the classroom and for students to apply academic skills to personal story telling. Zine making could also provide teachers with a greater understanding of their students’ lives outside of school. In addition, zines could be useful in teacher education programs. Shultz notes that aspiring teachers, especially those who are white and from middle class backgrounds preparing to teach in urban public schools, are often asked to write cultural autobiographies to better understand themselves and their perspective.<sup>59</sup> Writing a zine could be a creative way that aspiring teachers could present their critical, personal work and learn a form of media making they could use in their classrooms.

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<sup>58</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 60.

<sup>59</sup> Shultz 2003: 11.

Zines used in the classroom can also show how academic terms and ideas can be “translated” into more practical, everyday use. According to bell hooks (1984) this translation from academic language to practical language that is applicable to people’s everyday lives should be a central goal for feminist education. She writes,

The ability to ‘translate’ ideas to an audience that varies in age, sex, ethnicity, degree of literacy is a skill feminist educators need to develop. Concentration of feminist educators in universities encourages habitual use of an academic style that may make it impossible for teachers to communicate effectively with individuals who are not familiar with either academic style or jargon (hooks 1984: 111).

Reading and creating zines could be an opportunity for university professors and students to witness and practice these acts of “translation.” Creating zines could also encourage those with privilege to recognize the ways in which people who do not have social, political and economic power are constantly demanded to “translate” their lives into the language and frameworks of understanding created and utilized by white, educated, middle class professionals. Thus, the feminist acts of “translation” bell hooks calls for are not simply those in the academy translating for those shut out of it, but part of a larger, critical project that recognizes the complex understanding people develop of their own lives and can express in their own words.

Like zines produced by individuals, zines produced in the classroom can encourage students speak out about their personal interests, identity, cultural taboos and oppression and inequality. Keisha Edwards (2004), an African American educator working in Portland, Oregon uses zines to document students and teachers’ struggles and triumphs in the public schools. One, *The Stories Project: Race, Class, & Culture in Education* corresponded with an exhibit of black and white photographs of students and teachers in Portland Public Schools and included with quotes in which they examined their backgrounds and feelings about school.<sup>60</sup> Another zine entitled *Another World Is Possible* features young students drawing and writing about creating peace in their world.<sup>61</sup> Thus Edwards uses the zine format to put student voices in conversation. In addition, zines are an economical format to document a project and each student can have

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<sup>60</sup> Keisha Edwards, *The Stories Project: Race, Class, & Culture in Education* (Portland, OR: Self published, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Keisha Edwards, *Another World Is Possible* (Portland, OR: Self published, 2004).

a copy to take home. The kind of zines Edwards with her students, which compile the work of many different contributors are referred to as “Compilation Zines” and have been used by women inside and outside of the zine community for specific political purposes.

### **Compilation Zines: Documenting and Addressing Communities in Struggle**

Often focused on a specific topic or issue, compilation zines can be used to educate and provide resources for their readers. Often produced by young women working collectively, these zines underscore the idea that the young women writing and reading zines do not struggle alone. Compilation zines can demonstrate that a particular struggle is shared by others on a local, national, and occasionally, international level. By compiling stories, information, and resources on a focused topic, compilation zine editors create a focal point for discussion and information sharing within particular communities. Given the sometimes ephemeral nature of zines, compilation zines can be an important source for young women’s stories around a particular topic. They also bring together writing that would otherwise be scattered throughout many different zines.

In the past five or so years there have been several compilation zines sharing young women’s stories of choosing to have an abortion, self-defense and survival of sexual abuse.<sup>62</sup> There are also compilation zines made by women sharing health tips and information about natural gynecological care.<sup>63</sup> These compilations have a similar feel to feminist journals and newsletters from the 1970’s that aimed to “raise consciousness” between women about the collective nature of women’s oppression by sharing personal stories. Compilation zines more explicitly focused on mental, physical and sexual health

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<sup>62</sup> See Meredith Stern, *Mine: An Anthology of Reproductive Choices* (Pittsburgh, PA: Self published, 2002), Gabriela, *This is Me Using My Choice* (Vancouver B.C.: Self published, 2003), Robin Lea and Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education, *Survivor!* (Olympia, WA: Self published, no date), Ariel Clemenzi, *Women’s Self Defense: Stories and Strategies of Survival* (Champaign, IL: Self published, 2003), and Luran Barry, *Why We Live* (Northampton, MA: Self published, 1999), respectively.

<sup>63</sup> A particularly well read guide is Isabelle Gauthier and Lisa Vinebaum’s *Hot Pantz Do It Yourself Gynecology* (Montréal, QC: Self published, 1995).

also echo organizations like the Boston Women's Health Collective, which created the seminal women's health resource book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1976).<sup>64</sup>

The resources shared in compilation zines are often the stories themselves. From my involvement in the zine community, I found Mimi Nguyen's *Evolution of a Race Riot* (and its follow up, released in 2002, *Race Riot 2*) became a highly read resource for both zinesters of color and white zinesters looking to connect with other zine publishers of color, educate themselves about the struggles and experiences of people of color and begin, or enrich, discussions about anti-racist activism. These zines have sharp critical edge and use direct, blunt language that is often not found in more academic or mainstream writing on race. Though lately book anthologies that feature young women's writing on feminist and political issues, such as *Colonize This!* (2002) and *Without a Net: The Female Experience of Growing Up Working Class* (2003) have been more common on the shelves of major book stores, zines remain a vital source for the writing of young women who often do not have access to the professional publishing world, or even the beleaguered world of the feminist small press.

Compilation zines can also be a format for young women who are involved in "real life" organizing to share their experiences and publicize the work their groups are doing. Like other zines made by young women, these zines are a way to educate each other on political work that is going on in different parts of the world, to share different perspectives and encourage action and dialogue. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2003) produced a compilation zine *Letters From the War Years* highlighting anti-war activism of queer and transgendered people of color against the 2003 U.S. lead war on Iraq. Creating this zine was a way for Piepzna-Samarasinha to counter what she saw as an overly white, middle class anti-war movement. About the importance of publications like hers she writes,

So I've compiled these writings about resisting despair, about what activism that places queer/trans [people of color] in the centre looks like, to help others resist that immobilization. I compile them as history and witness... Too many are more isolated than we need to be. This is something for you to grab on to. I want to leave a mark, write us into history, show our grappling with this hope, blood, danger and despair (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2003: 5).

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<sup>64</sup> The Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

Piepzna-Samarasinha's zine also invokes the history of woman of color centered publications such as *This Bridge Called My Back* which served to document the struggles of women of color activists which had been ignored by mainstream, white feminists. By creating a space for the voices of anti-war activists of color to be heard, Piepzna-Samarasinha features multiple representations of political activism created by people of color. Other feminist, activist centered zines have similar goals to *Letters From the War Years*. They work to raise awareness about and share strategies between feminist activists who often get written out of history, even the history of progressive movements. These zines, such as *What the Ladies Have To Say*, featuring interviews with activists in Palestine, Indonesia and the Philippines, serve to present the stories of feminist activists to audiences who otherwise would not hear about them, such as white, western zine writers and activists.<sup>65</sup>

Compilation zines can also be a useful tool for locally based groups and organizations. In 2000 and 2001 I was in a feminist art collective in Portland, Oregon in which collectively produced two issues of a zine. Making a zine enabled us to create a focused group project that honed our ability to work together as a group. It gave us literature to distribute locally and at our collectively organized art shows. The zine featured writing and visual work from the members of our group, our group's goals and mission and contact and meeting information for potential new members.<sup>66</sup> In a slightly different vein, the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP), a "direct action, anti-poverty organization based in Halifax, Nova Scotia" with a membership that includes, but is not limited to, young, working class women, produced a zine called *Dignity Through Resistance* (2005). They distributed this zine throughout Halifax and made it available at their storefront office. This zine included information on the groups activities and meetings, legal resources for homeless people and housing activists, articles by group members, reports on homelessness and housing shortages in Halifax and resources for

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<sup>65</sup> Ronni Tartlet, *What the Ladies Have to Say* (Seattle, WA: Self published, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Radical Art Girls, *Radical Art Girls Zine* (Portland, OR: Self published, 2001).

homeless and poor people in Halifax.<sup>67</sup> For HCAP this compilation zine is a tool for outreach, organizing and information and resource sharing.

Though not always produced collectively, zines can document collective struggles and provide information to their readers about different kinds of organizing for social or political change. *Vegan Food On Paper Plates* is one such zine.<sup>68</sup> Produced by a young woman named Jenna (2002) it carefully documented, day by day, her and her co-workers struggle to organize a union at the natural foods store at which they worked. The zine presents a compelling case for why a union is needed at such an establishment and provides detailed information on how to organize a union and what that process looks and feels like. Any other worker in, thinking of joining or attempting to organize a union reading Jenna's zine would get a first hand account of the tactics that can be used by management to discourage union organizing. A zine like this one, small and lightweight, could be easily circulated at a workplace to get information and ideas flowing between employees. It could also be used to educate a larger community about the struggles of employees at a particular business or organization.

The ways in which educators, community activists and organizations have used zines in their work shows the continued relevance of zines in a digital age. Increasing attention being paid by organizers and the mainstream media to "Internet activism," such as the kind popularized through websites like [moveon.org](http://moveon.org). Tools such as email and text messaging are also widely utilized for communication and information sharing between activist groups. While these websites and tools are very necessary and helpful for organizers, zines can play a role in fostering political or social change due to their concrete, collaborative and dialogic nature. They can also be used to target and reach people in a specific geographic locale and get information directly into the hands of those who can utilize it, something that might be more difficult through a medium like the Internet. Unlike a computer or cell phone, creating or obtaining a zine does not require an investment in expensive technology in order to read them and make use of the information they contain.

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<sup>67</sup> Halifax Coalition Against Poverty, *Dignity Through Resistance* (Halifax, NS: Self published, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> Jenna, *Vegan Food On Paper Plates* (Portland, OR: Self published, 2002).

Using zines in the classroom, community organizations and to highlight young women's writings on political issues pushes the uses of zines outside of a particular "zine community." Used in these contexts the zine format can become a tool for educators and organizers to reach the constituencies and communities they work with. The exercise of making a zine can be a powerful example of taking media into one's own hands and building confidence in one's own voice. It can also be a way to bring a group together and create a tool to use for outreach and organizing. As such, zines do not have to be connected to any existing zine community to be socially and politically relevant and to reach readers who can be moved, inspired and informed by their content.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the connections between young women's zines and the work of established critical feminist writers and cultural critics. This paper argues zines are a tool that young women use to employ an intersectional analysis of race, class, gender and sexuality to their lives. By creating dialogue around issues often considered taboo, such as racism, sexism, body image, mental health and sexual violence, in mainstream, United States, culture young women use zines tools to document and share their personal lives, criticize the structures of power and oppression they are immersed in and build communities that resist the different types of oppression they face. When connected to scholarly work on identity, political consciousness and radical media zines are a dynamic example of the ways young women negotiate their own subjectivity and express themselves politically within dominant culture. Putting young women's zines in conversation with the voices of older anti-racist feminists connects modern zines to histories of feminist independent media and radical media within the United States. Viewed in the context of anti-racist, feminist theory, making a zine can be viewed as a serious, yet creative, act where young women innovate theory.

The voices and perspectives published in zines are often marginalized in mainstream media, academic discourse, and male dominated subcultures and political organizations. Zines are one vehicle young women can use to hold these groups accountable for the ways their voices are excluded. Tactics used by zine publishers such

as Mimi Nguyen in *Evolution of a Race Riot* (1997), Lauren Martin in her “Mixed Race Queer Girl Manifesto” (2000), Annie Anxiety in *Witch Hunt* (2004) and Tali and Laura in *Baby I’m a Manarchist* (2003) directly confront different forms of oppression. They invite their readers to think critically about how they might be effected by and perpetuate those forms of oppression. The aim of their writing shares many similarities to the writings of older anti-racist feminists such as Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks and the Combahee River Collective. These women wrote to hold white feminists accountable for the ways in which they ignored the perspectives of women of color and worked to build an anti-racist, feminist movement in which women could organize and communicate across their differences. The issues and struggles documented in young women’s zines echo those of these older feminists. These zines show young women are actively participating in building and innovating feminist thought and action outside of purely academic and privileged frameworks. By doing so these zine publishers show that a nuanced understanding of the world and themselves within it is not the sole territory of those with the privilege of gender, race, economic class or higher education. By creating writing, resources and theory primarily for each other, young women publishing zines carry the tradition of the independent feminist press into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The constitution of a young women’s subculture through reading and exchanging zines is similar to Angela McRobbie’s (1991) study of British working class young women who bonded on the basis of reading and exchanging teen magazines. By becoming the producers of the literature that is read and exchanged, young create a cultural space that enables them to fully represent themselves and validate their experiences as young women. Because of the dialogic and creative nature of zines, they remain important and relevant as a medium for progressive cultural critics, organizers and educators to utilize and critically examine even as digital mediums such as personal websites, or blogs, are now being celebrated as the most democratic medium for media production.

The way young women have used zines to foster political consciousness and support political organizing point to the viability of small format, radical media. In an age of increasing corporate media consolidation and legislated curtailments of free

speech and dissent, such as those mandated by the USA PATRIOT act, it is important for those working to foster social change to employ every medium they can access to disseminate information. Zines are a medium that can enable information to circulate “underground,” without the support or approval of editors or corporate sponsors. Because of their physical nature zines’ circulation can be somewhat limited, as opposed to a website, whose content is open for anybody to look at or profile, including agencies like the FBI. Zines, or any other form of independent media, alone cannot challenge huge media corporations such as Clear Channel or Disney and current clampdowns on free speech. However, through their ability to raise consciousness and highlight marginalized voices, they are important in the panoply of independent media.

For many, zines give them a first taste of the power of making independent media, and have lead to larger, collaborative independent publishing projects. Well read leftist magazines such as *Clamor*, *Heeb* and *Bust* were started by zine publishers. Some zines, such as *Bamboo Girl*, which focuses on radical, queer, feminist Asian politics, have grown to resemble the format and circulation of a magazine, but remain very connected to an underground, political and artistic community. Some former zine editors have gone on to work on projects in other mediums, such as independent films or on the Internet with sites such as Indymedia. Thus, by showing it is possible and necessary to produce media for ones self and ones community, zines play an important role in the history and present of the grassroots and radical media field.

The format and history of zines offer progressive educators a model for fostering politicized self-expression and self-exploration in their classrooms. There are many possible ways in which creating a zine could be useful in a classroom or community organization. The zine format could be immediately applicable to autobiography projects, exploring different ways present research projects or interviews, connecting ones personal story to larger systems or issues, and documenting an aspect of a particular community’s history or a current issue. There are many possibilities for making a zine in conjunction with a critical examination of the history of media and the effect of mass media and advertising in the United States. In the classroom, zines could be useful for critically exploring how media is made, critiquing sexist or racist representations within advertising, examining corporate control of the media or, alternatively, documenting the

history of the independent press. In addition, zines could be created in conjunction with other mediums, such as film and video, photography, radio and audio documentaries, and websites in order to introduce young people to different forms of media and demonstrate how they can be used to develop their powers of personal expression and critical analysis.

Zines by young women show some of the ways in which they are actively engaged in the process of self reflection to constitute themselves as complex, political subjects. They use their zines as tools to participate in dialogue and create networks of support for each other. When connected to the political organizing young women are involved in for reproductive freedom, queer rights, more equitable and understanding treatment of those struggling with mental health issues, anti-racist training and education, anti-sexual violence work, union organizing, progressive education reform, and media activism zines become potential sites for political praxis.<sup>69</sup> By recognizing young women's zines as part of a larger political struggle for social justice, young women can be seen as continuing the radical, feminist, anti-racist movement of generations of women before them.

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<sup>69</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 60.

## **Appendix A**

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Blog:** Short for the term “web log,” a personal website updated frequently often focused around a particular issue or topic.

**E-Zine:** An online zine.

**Grunge:** A subculture and style of music influenced by punk that began in the Pacific Northwest United States in the 1980’s. It caught the attention of mainstream media and culture in the early 1990’s with the popularity of bands like Nirvana and Pearl Jam. Mainstream grunge influenced music and style became known as “alternative.”

**Punk:** A subculture and style of music that developed in New York City and the United Kingdom in the 1970’s which embraced amateurish musicianship, confrontational attitudes, a disrespect for authority and the belief in a “do-it-yourself” (DIY) approach to cultural production.

**Riot Grrrl:** A feminist subculture started by young women in the early 1990’s influenced by punk that focused on the personal empowerment of young women through creating feminist cultural spaces such as groups, zines and music.

**Subculture:** A group that in a society which develops their own distinguishable culture, often positioned apart from or in opposition to mainstream culture.

**Zine:** Small, low budget, self published magazine, often written, produced and distributed by the same person or group of people. Pronounced “zeen.”

**Zine Distro:** Short for “zine distributor,” a small, independent business, often run by one person, who sells zines through the mail or in person at various events.

**Zinester:** A person who publishes zines.

## Appendix B

### Sample Workshop Curriculum Using Zines

#### **Analyzing and Making Media: Working Towards a Critical Analysis of the Representation of Gender in Mass Produced Print Media**

**Introduction:** This curriculum aims to enable young people in middle or high school to develop a critical analysis of gendered representations in media images and articles through examining mass media images and making their own media in the form of zines. This curriculum also works to make connections between gendered representations and the ways race, class and sexuality are represented in the media. This workshop plan is highly adaptable and could serve as a template that facilitators can adapt to the specific interests of the group they are working with. Facilitators should have some background in independent publishing or media making and have made a zine, chapbook or newspaper/newsletter in the past. This will enable them to clearly explain the physical production of a zine to the workshop participants.

**Suggested Audience/Population:** Adolescents or teenagers grades 6-12, not exceeding 25 people participating in the workshop. Groups using this curriculum could be: middle or high school classes (especially Social Studies, English, Current Events, Art or Journalism classes), school clubs, especially oriented towards Social Justice such as Amnesty International, Gay/Straight Alliances, Human Rights programs, after school programs, especially those engaged in women's rights and gender equity issues, social justice or community organizing, community organizations that involve or engage teenagers, independent media organizations, Girl Scout troops, summer programs for teenagers.

#### **Objectives:**

- For young people to develop language to critically examine and analyze media images.
- For young people to begin to link individual manifestations of sexism (such as self-image and beauty standards) to sexism on larger cultural/institutional levels (such as advertising, corporate media and the market).
- For young people to begin to link sexism to racism, classism and homophobia.
- For young people to begin to explore how images in the media influences their own self image and ideas about beauty, health and gender roles.
- For young people to feel empowered to create and celebrate their identity and self-image.

- For young people to produce their own zine (mini-magazine) exploring issues of representation and articulating their own identity and positive self-image.

### **Workshop structure:**

*Length:* Ideally, participants would work on this project in four sessions, each about 2 to 3 hours long. However, facilitators could easily adapt this to a situation such as a class where students meet for a shorter period 4 or 5 days a week. In addition, this workshop could occur as a weekend long training session.

*Considerations facilitators should take into account:*

- Size of the group
- Age(s) of the group
- Education, cultural and socio-economic background of the group
- If the participants have worked together before or have come together specifically for this workshop
- If the group has had any experience or background talking about gender, race, class, sexuality, or media before
- If the facilitators know the participants and have worked with them before
- The political and social climate of the organization or school they are working in
- If they will be able to continue to work with the group in the future

*Preparation:*

For a week preceding the workshop students/ workshop participants will be asked to follow the news and cut out articles and photos that discuss/represent teenagers. In addition, they will be asked to bring in images from magazines, particularly magazines they enjoy reading, depicting teenagers or images that they feel are aimed at teenagers. Workshop facilitators should do the same and have many examples on hand to discuss. Facilitators should also collect alternative representations of teenagers, including zines produced by young people.

### **Part I: Examining Mass Media Images**

*Opening Discussion:* Participants selected one of the images or articles they brought in and explain why they chose it and what its significance it to them

Tape or glue articles or images to poster board, dividing them into categories of articles or images depicting girls or women, boys or men, and mixed gender groups.

*Discussion and Brainstorm:* Examine the images and articles affixed to the poster board.

*Discussion Questions:*

- **Examine:** How are women represented? Men? Mixed gender groups? Do you notice any similarities between they ways women were represented? Men?

Mixed gender groups? Did you notice any differences in the ways different women were represented? Men? Mixed gender groups?

- **Compare:** Do you notice differences in the ways men and women are represented? What are these differences?
- **Analyze:** Are these images or articles advertisements? News? What are they trying to tell us? Are they trying to sell us something? What are women, men and mixed gender groups doing in the images/articles? What poses are women photographed in? Men? What styles of clothing are they wearing? What are their facial expressions? Are women wearing makeup? Are men? Are white people and people of color represented differently? How? What do you think about when you see two men represented together? Two women? Men and women? Do the people in these representations look like people you see everyday? Do the teenagers in the collages look like teenagers you know?
- **Develop a critique:** Do all young women and men look like/act like this? Who have these images/articles left out? Why have they been left out? What are beauty standards? What are gender roles? What are stereotypes? What do they have to do with sexism, racism, classism, homophobia?
- **Search for Alternate Representations:** How do these representations make you feel? Do you see yourself represented in the collages? Where might we find representations of those people/groups who are left out of our collages? What would you like to see more or less of?

*Helpful vocabulary words:*

Representation

Gender

Gender roles

Beauty standards

Class

Race

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/transgender

Stereotypes

Discrimination

Power

Sexism

Adultism

Racism

Homophobia

Classism

Zine

*Preparation for next section:* Participants search for alternate representations of teenagers. These can be from the media and from their own photographs and journals.

Facilitators can bring in some of their own, including media such as zines produced by young people.

## **Part II: Exploring Our Identities/ Self Image**

*Opening Discussion:* Pass out alternative representations including pieces from young peoples zines and other writing and images produced by young people and collected by facilitators. Give participants some time to read/look over these.

*Small Group Discussion:* Small groups of 3-4 people discuss articles/images and the alternative representations they have collected. Instruct them to be prepared to report back their findings to the larger group.

*Discussion questions for small groups:*

- **Examine:** How do these images/articles portray young people, women and girls, boys and men? How are people of color represented? Are there any representations of poor or working class people? Are there any representations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered people?
- **Compare:** How do these representations compare to images/articles we looked at last time (collected from the mass media)? How are they similar? Different? What difference do you think it makes when media is produced independently?
- **Analyze:** What do the alternative representations we looked at this time tell us about beauty standards? Gender roles? How do you think race, class and sexuality inform how we view gender roles and beauty standards? What do you think about this?
- **Develop a critique:** Why do you think young people, women and girls, boys and men are portrayed differently in the representations we examined this time? Why did we see a broader range of people represented this time? What difference does it make when the people make media documenting their own experience?

Bring the groups back together and have each report back on their discussions and findings. Then introduce the next part of this workshop, in which participants will be looking more closely at themselves.

*Exercises to encourage self examination:*

**“Who I Am” versus “How I Am Seen”:** Students draw a circle on a piece of paper. Inside the circle they make a list or draw “Who I am.” On the outside of the circle they make a list or draw “How I am seen.”

**Free Write:** 10 minute free write about how the earlier discussions about beauty standards, gender roles and stereotypes made them feel. How do they feel those standards have impacted their image of themselves and others view of them? Why? Did

any part of the discussion make them think about themselves or see themselves differently?

*Conclusion of this section:* Break up the group into small groups of 3-4 people. Brainstorm responses to these questions: What would you change about how the media represents young people, women and girls, men and boys? Why do you think it would be important to include representations of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, economic backgrounds and different sexual orientations? As young women/men what would you like to tell the creators of mass media?

*Preparation for the next section:* Explain to the participants that they will be making their own zines (mini-magazines) in which they will incorporate writing, drawings and photographs that they provide. Have students bring in images (photographs or drawings) of themselves that they are proud of and they think represents them positively.

Facilitators should decide how the magazines are going to be made, what size, format and materials the young people will need to make these zines. Do they have access to computers? Will they be completed in the workshop or outside? Will they be photocopied or reproduced somehow?

For resources and help on how to construct a zine see resource list in Appendix C.

### **Part III: Representing Ourselves / Making Our Own Media**

*Opening Discussion:* What can we as young people do to change the way young women and men are represented in the media and challenge hurtful beauty standards, gender stereotypes and sexism?

Why is people telling their own stories and creating their own representations important? How does this relate to challenging beauty standards, gender stereotypes and sexism (and in addition, racism, classism and homophobia)?

*Making a zine:*

**Goal:** Making a zine aims to engage participants in creating media that represents them positively and critiques the way mass media portrays young women/men. Participants create zines that will serve as portfolios of the work they have done in this workshop.

Explain to the participants that based on their discussions and critical understanding of the media, they are now going to get a chance to make their own. Introduce the concept of zines and self-publishing. Encourage students to think about ways their magazine can represent their tastes and sense of aesthetics without all the resources a corporate magazine would have at their disposal. Remind them that based on their discussions they are challenging the mass media and society to find value in alternative forms of representation.

*Participants' zines can include:*

- Photographs and drawings of themselves that they feel represent them positively.
- Lists, free writes and brainstorms students produced in the workshop.
- Their ideas about how young people can challenge gender stereotypes and sexism.

- A collage of images they feel positively represents young women and men and challenges stereotypes of gender, race, class and sexual orientation.

*Participants can also brainstorm what else their zines should include, such as:*

- Title
- Introduction
- Conclusion
- Contact information for feedback
- Suggested resources/reading list

*Preparing the next section:* Facilitators collect finished zines and photocopy them. Instruct each student to choose a part of their zines they want to present to the group.

#### **Part IV: Sharing, Reflection and Celebration**

*Opening: Sharing*

Each small group can present their zines together, explaining what they chose to include and why. Each member of that group highlights a section of the zine they contributed to and discuss what they learned about media in the process of making the zine.

*Group Discussion: Reflection*

As a large group discuss:

- Where else besides the media do you see sexism and gender stereotyping?
- How do these issues relate to racism, classism and homophobia?
- What can you do as a group or individuals to continue working on these issues?
- What is the next step?
- What other organizations could you work with to address issues of gender stereotyping and sexism?
- What questions still remain for you?

*Conclusion: Celebration*

Invite participants' family and friends to celebrate the release of their zines.

## **Appendix C**

### **Zine Publishing Resources**

#### **New York City Bookstores**

St. Mark's Books, 31 Third Avenue, New York, NY  
 Bluestockings Bookstore 172 Allen Street, New York, NY  
 Clovis Press, 229 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, NY  
 Soft Skull Press, 71 Bond Street, Brooklyn, NY

#### **Online Resources**

Sarah Dyer's "Doing Your Own Zine" ([www.houseoffun.com/action/zines/diy.html](http://www.houseoffun.com/action/zines/diy.html))  
 Autonomedia ([www.autonomedia.org](http://www.autonomedia.org))  
 Independent Publishing Resource Center ([www.iprc.org](http://www.iprc.org))  
[www.zinebook.com](http://www.zinebook.com) (contains tons of resources about zine libraries, archives, distributors, reviews, legal issues, and much more)  
 Zine Archive and Publishing Project ([www.http://www.hugohouse.org/programs/zine.html](http://www.hugohouse.org/programs/zine.html))  
 Grrrl Zine Network ([www.grrrlzines.net](http://www.grrrlzines.net))  
 Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting ([www.fair.org](http://www.fair.org))  
 Media Education Foundation ([www.mediaed.org](http://www.mediaed.org))

#### **Zine Distros**

Pander Zine Distro ([www.panderzinedistro.com](http://www.panderzinedistro.com))  
 C/S Tiendita ([www.csdistro.com](http://www.csdistro.com))  
 Microcosm Publishing ([www.microcosmpublishing.com](http://www.microcosmpublishing.com))  
 Greatworm Express ([www.greatworm.ca](http://www.greatworm.ca))  
 All That Glitters ([www.allthatglittersdistro.co.uk](http://www.allthatglittersdistro.co.uk))

#### **Traveling Exhibits**

Projet Mobilivre – Bookmobile Project ([www.mobilivre.org](http://www.mobilivre.org))  
 Nomads and Residents ([www.nomadsresidents.org](http://www.nomadsresidents.org))

#### **NYC Zine Libraries**

ABC No Rio, 156 Rivington Street, New York, NY 10002  
 Barnard Zine Collection ([www.barnard.edu/library/zines/](http://www.barnard.edu/library/zines/))  
 Pratt Institute Library, 200 Willoughby Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11205

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