



Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism

Alison Piepmeier , Andi Zeisler

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With names like *The East Village Inky*, *Mend My Dress*, *Dear Stepdad*, and *I'm So Fucking Beautiful*, zines created by girls and women over the past two decades make feminism's third wave visible. These messy, photocopied do-it-yourself documents cover every imaginable subject matter and are loaded with handwriting, collage art, stickers, and glitter. Though they all reflect the personal style of the creators, they are also sites for constructing narratives, identities, and communities.

Girl Zines is the first book-length exploration of this exciting movement. Alison Piepmeier argues that these quirky, personalized booklets are tangible examples of the ways that girls and women 'do' feminism today. The idiosyncratic, surprising, and savvy arguments and issues showcased in the forty-six images reproduced in the book provide a complex window into feminism's future, where zinesters persistently and stubbornly carve out new spaces for what it means to be a revolutionary and a girl. *Girl Zines* takes zines seriously, asking what they can tell us about the inner lives of girls and women over the last twenty years.

Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism Details

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From Reader Review **Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism** for online ebook

Anna says

recommended for anyone interested in zines, feminism, activism, hope for a better world. a great, comprehensive list of zine distros, libraries, etc also included in the back, and tons of other recommended reading in the extensive endnotes.

some funny connections with my favorite cartoonist/kinda zine creator l. barry which were fun to think about too.

i would give this book to anyone, and hope they give me a zine they made in response.

Jason says

Girl Zines describes key characteristics of a vernacular third-wave feminism by taking a variety of interdisciplinary approaches with contemporary grrrl zines: tracing select self-publications from the second wave to the third wave (Chapter 1), examining the rhetorical outcomes of zines' materiality (Chapter 2), interpreting how their authors construct and conceive of gendered subjectivities (Chapter 3), how they intersect with other forms of difference (Chapter 4), and, finally, by evaluating their political effect in the 21st century (Chapter 5). Like Adela Licona's book *Zines in the Third Space*, she uses case studies of zines — mostly close readings — but combines these readings with other qualitative methods, especially interviews with select zine writers. If you follow scholarship on zines, it seems to me that Chapters 2 and 5 are especially important as the former articulates the parameters of specific affordances of the materiality of zines — their physicality, structure, means for circulation, etc., while the latter helps change the terms of assessing the political effects of zine-making. This is an issue people like Stephen Duncombe and (more recently) Janice Radway have taken up in their work.

Kandace says

A great in-depth study on the radical potential of zine making by girls and women and the ensuing community that accompanies this tradition of independent media making.

Saki says

I was reading this as research into making girl zines for a project for school. Not only did it give me some fab quotes to work from as a springboard for ideas, but it gave me a lot of insight as to what types of things I should include, the history of girl zines and helped me create my own direction to move it.

I've passed this along to the other members of my group as a key piece of research material. I think that

anyone looking for some reading into feminism should check this out, it certainly gives you a lot to think about.

Rebekah says

I reread this to get ready to write about riot grrrl zines. I had more problems with it the second time round, probably because I was being a bit more critical. I think the chapter on intersectionality and zines is by far the best. Her use of *Bust* as a zine which she spends a great deal of time discussing drives me nuts since there are so many other zines she could have focused on which I think would have worked better.

I wanted her to tease out a bit more why she kept using "grrrl" to refer to the zines she discusses but then the book is titled "Girl Zines." Why the difference? I see a distinction and think that not all zines written by girls are grrrl zines, but I felt she could have addressed that a bit more.

I like that she also placed zines in a origins story that relates to other feminist work. Good stuff. But, I feel that at least for the work I'm doing on Riot Grrrl makes zines' connections to punk and punk culture equally important.

Also, I wanted more about why she chose the zines she did. Some are great choices, but there are important zines are grrrl zinesters left out. Plus, I don't think she did much research into zine distros and where to find zines. Shame on her for promoting *Microcosm* in a book about young women writing zines. It should be very easy to find reference to why that's a no-no. At the very least she should have a disclaimer or retraction or something. For some reason that really rubs me the wrong way and gives me pause as to her commitment and real research into the zine world.

Mika says

gets especially good with later chapters on race/ intersectional feminism and zines as pedagogy of hope, forming embodied communities. had to write a lot of quotes down for future reference. zines/expression/discussion: so necessary!

Ciara says

i was very pleasantly surprised with this book. i read everything that comes out about zines, & usually, people get it maybe about halfway right. a girl's guide to taking over the world was only decent because it was an anthology of real writing from girl zines. the "authors" didn't actually contribute anything useful, aside from publishing contacts. notes from underground was okay, but incredibly dated now (it came out ten years ago), & ghettoizes girl zines while slobbering all over zines like "beer frame" & "thrift score!" (both of which went on to more mainstream publishing success, for better or for worse). what'cha mean, what's a zine? was a poor & hopelessly out of touch man's "stolen sharpie revolution". i can't even remember the name of that zine book francesca lia block was involved with, but it was horrible. zine scene, maybe? completely wretched.

so i was a little bit nervous about this book. girl zines are pretty much my thing, what i have been doing for

the last seventeen years or so, & i was very anxious about seeing them misrepresented & over-academized. but piepmeier really impressed me! the book wasn't perfect, because she missed an opportunity to explore mail culture more thoroughly, & to examine the distribution networks that cropped up around girl zines. girl zines were very marginalized in the 90s (& still are to some extent today). she wrote a lot about how girl zines are distributed person-to-person along pen pal-style networks, through zine distros (like mine), or in record stores & indie bookshops. she really over-emphasized the record stores/bookshops angle. in my experience, most girl zines are distributed person-to-person & through zine distros. some end up in shops (especially shops that cater to a larger zine-reading demographic, like quimby's or reading frenzy), but most of what ends up in record stores is crappy boy-oriented local music zines. piepmeier also missed an opportunity to beef up the resource section with zine distros that actually distribute girl zines (*cough* NOT parcell press or microcosm) & are still in operation (NOT fall of autumn--try paper trail, stranger danger, starfiend, click clack, vampire sushi, marching stars, etc). but aside from these complaints, the book was awesome.

one of my favorite things about it was the new genealogy she built for girl zines, connecting them to feminist-penned position papers & newspapers from the 1960s & 1970s, reproductive health pamphlets from the comstock law days, & women's scrapbooking from the 1800s. every other traditional zine history you read will trace modern-day zines back to the zine explosion facilitated by the advent of desktop publishing in the early 90s, punk rock & xerox machine access in the late 70s, & science fiction fanzines of the 1930s & 40s. some of them go further back, to revolutionary war era broadsides written by colonists agitating against the british. this is all well & good, but piepmeier made an effort to develop a specifically feminist history, to help explain why girl zines had a different context, form, & function than other zines being published during the same time period. having been involved with zines for the last twenty years, i can definitely attest to the fact that girl zine culture is different from the zine culture at large. there is more emphasis on anti-oppression politics, confessional, building personal connections with readers, etc. & maybe piepmeier's history helps to explain this.

i also really enjoyed the chapter on intersectionality & zines. mostly because she profiled some of my favorite zines there, but also because she wrote about the erika reinstein controversy of the late 90s. it was just a single paragraph, but now that it's out there in an academic book that people will undoubtedly be building their own future research off of, erika isn't going to be able to sweep that incident under the rug & pretend it never happened (as she did when she got her boyfriend to convince the folks at zinewiki to remove the information from her entry there).

i highly recommend this book to anyone who gives a f--- about zines, though you should ask someone more personally involved with the culture where you can find zines now.

Susan Dickson says

I was hoping for a more extensive survey of zines, but Pipmeier seems to focus mostly on about 8-10 publications. As a zine-maker and feminist myself, I was excited to see a scholarly discussion of zine culture. Considering the subject matter, the book was a bit drier than I expected it to be, but on the whole, good food for thought.

Trinie says

I just reviewed this for Bookforum...but want to add it here too because it is great to see a critical perspective on zines. It's academic, would be great reference for classes and panels.

Mecque says

An excellent exploration of girl zines and one of the most comprehensive and meaningful explanations of third-wave feminism I have ever read.

Lucia P says

This book was really informational about how zines about feminism came to be. As a feminist myself, I really liked discovering more about how different people showed feminism to the world. If you want to learn more about feminism, I recommend this book.

Win Scarlett says

Great scholarship that doesn't sacrifice or stretch too far any social/cultural relevancy for the sake of academia.

Heidi says

Rather academic but definitely a champion of the girl zines as an important piece of feminist culture/history.

Erin says

very, very interesting

Caitlin Constantine says

I was very excited when I first heard about this book, because I know the impact feminist zines have had on me and I think some serious academic respect is long overdue. I am not exaggerating when I say zines taught me how to think hard and how to think critically, and they played a huge role in my political and intellectual development. They plugged me into this community of incredibly intelligent, tough people who, just by knowing they existed, gave me the courage to deal with my own life. Plus, they inspired me to stop being a consumer of media and to start seeing myself as a producer of media, as someone who was capable of

writing my own essays and books, who didn't just have to content herself with what was available at the bookstore. I am pursuing life as a writer in large part because of my experiences with zines.

Piepmeier writes, in the end of the book, that she had set out to make the point that zines fostered some sort of concrete political activism and involvement, but that over the course of her research she came to the realization that zines fostered a different, subtler kind of political resistance. I think her conclusion is right on, that what feminist zines do isn't so much about getting women into street protests or whatever, but that they change who we are at our core, so that everything else we do afterward is filtered through this new, politicized, empowered lens.

Things I liked about the book: I loved that she referenced some of my favorite zines (although quite a few didn't make the cut). Her writings about Doris gave me goosebumps, and has me all excited to re-read my Doris anthology. I liked that she dedicated a chapter to intersectionality and zines, as zines were the medium that first introduced me to the idea of intersectionality. I liked seeing the way she deconstructed select pages from zines, treating them with the same kind of respect I usually see accorded to art and literature. That was pretty cool.

What I didn't like: Obviously that she pointed people to Microcosm Publishing. There are a lot of zine distros out there that are not run by men of questionable ethics (to put it politely). Feminists and allies of survivors would do well to go through one of those other distros for their zine needs. Also, I worry that the academia-speak could make the book inaccessible for someone who isn't well-versed in theory.
