

GIRL ZINES: A FORUM FOR GIRLS TO BUILD COMMUNITY
AND ESTABLISH THEIR OWN IDENTITIES

by

AMY DIANE BOYTZ

A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 1999

APPROVED: _____
Thomas Wheeler

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Amy Diane Boytz

for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in the School of Journalism

to be taken

June 1999

Title: GIRL ZINES: A FORUM FOR GIRLS TO BUILD COMMUNITY AND
ESTABLISH THEIR OWN IDENTITIES

Approved: _____
Thomas Wheeler

The personal nature of girl zines, including the zines' diary style and articles about individual experience, lends itself to self-expression. This thesis examines three zines, *Essence*, *Limousine*, and *Touched by an Anvil* as a means of determining the reasons why girls write zines and what kinds of benefits they receive. Findings include the way these zines serve as a forum for expression of their authors' thoughts. Also, the zines serve as a way to build community among reader and writer, and the publications provide a place where authors can counteract the messages given in the mainstream media.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation to Professors Wheeler and Merskin for their assistance in the preparation of this manuscript. In addition, special thanks are due to all my friends and family who have shown nothing but support and encouragement to me during this process. Finally, extra special thanks to those who inspired this project: the zine authors. Without their incredible work, this thesis would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION.....	2
	Research Question and Brief Overview of Findings.....	4
	Significance of My Research.....	6
II.	OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIUM.....	8
	Women’s Magazines.....	8
	History of Zines.....	10
	Girl Zines.....	11
	Cultural Focus.....	12
	Vulnerable Teenage Girls.....	13
	The Mainstream Message.....	15
	Power of the Media.....	16
	Contextual Information.....	17
III.	METHODOLOGY.....	19
	The Zines.....	20
IV.	RESULTS.....	24
	Why Girls Write Zines.....	24
	Messages Conveyed in <i>Essence</i> , <i>Touched by an Anvil</i> , and <i>Limousine</i>	28
	How Zines Play a Socializing Role.....	31
V.	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	38
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	40
	BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ZINES.....	42

GIRL ZINES:
A FORUM FOR GIRLS TO BUILD COMMUNITY
AND ESTABLISH THEIR OWN
IDENTITIES

by Amy Diane Boytz

“What threads these zines together is that they are all very real and very much from the heart. They don’t have advertisers to please, and they weren’t created for financial success. They originate from a need for expression, a need girls have to discover and create the truth about themselves and their lives. Through zines, we can see young women uncensored and free to discuss their realities.” (Green and Taormino 1997, xiii)

INTRODUCTION

Imagine yourself a teenager again. Remember all of those thoughts that went through your head? All those feelings, aggressions, and emotions that you shared only with your journal? How you thought you were the only person going through the torment of liking someone who didn't like you back, or struggling with your personal identity, or fighting with your parents? Now imagine sharing all those thoughts with the world — or even a mere 250 strangers.

That is what, among other things, zines (pronounced “zeens”) do. Zines are a subcategory of magazines. They carry the same skeleton shape as a magazine but are much more personal to their authors and readers than magazines. Zines are often photocopied on plain paper (no glossy pages here) in black and white. Some are the size of a traditional magazine — 9” x 12” — while others may be half or one quarter of that size. Some are cleanly produced with computer layout programs, while others are hand cut and pasted in a collage style. Some have typed text while others are hand-written. Some zines may be only four pages long while others stretch past thirty pages. Some are stapled and bound, while others are secured with a single safety pin. In short, these are not the slick-production magazines that can be found on the shelves of Barnes & Noble. Instead, they are a more independent, quirky, alternative to glossy magazines and can be found in small bookstores, at local concerts, or even on-line. Because of their independent nature it is difficult to know a specific number of zines that exist. Various scholars of zines in the 1990s, however, have tried to estimate a number. According to Romenesko's, Brown's, and Zweig's estimates, however, there are anywhere between 10,000 to 50,000 zines in existence; from this many copies, Chu estimates that there are between one to three million readers of zines (Romenesko 1993, 39; Brown 1997, 1; Zweig 1998, 4; Chu 1997, 15).

Another difference between zines and traditional magazines is in content. Zines serve as a place where the author can share his or her thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Zines often feature opinionated, hand-scribbled, first-person accounts. They carry the first-person voice of their author, rather than a third-person voice like a traditional magazine. Zines create a forum through which both authors and readers can connect with one another. Also, zines may cover universal topics, such as life experiences, or cater to a very specific niche, such as the zine for people who obsess over office supplies or collect Pez dispensers (Brown 1997, 1; Gundleroy 1992, 1).

Although zines can be written by males or females of all ages, Chu states that tens of thousands of the publications are written by youths (Chu 1997, 2). And within this age-group, a large group of these zines is written by and directed at girls and women — so many that they have earned their own category in *Factsheet Five*¹, a compilation of zine reviews that is renowned among zine readers and writers (Chu 1997, 15). Because of the ever-changing nature and inability to track these zines, however, there are no absolute numbers available about specifically how many girl zines exist. Girl-produced zines, known as a category called girl (or grrrl) zines, are what I will investigate and analyze for my thesis. I have searched for common themes among the various publications because I want to see what these zines can offer girls that they may not get from other media, primarily women's and teen magazines.

I became interested in zines during my formative years. Around my sophomore year in high school countless numbers of my friends and peers began creating their own publications. Nearly all of these zines related personal experiences and shared private thoughts, which was a revolutionary way in which my peers could open up to others. But zine-writing is not just a trend among my circle of friends back home; it is a national and international phenomenon. Throughout my research I found examples of zines from across

¹ *Factsheet Five* debuted in 1982 as a short list of recommended zines that Mike Gundleroy, its founder, compiled for friends. This list became an internationally distributed book stretching past 100 pages and having a circulation of 10,000 zine writers and fans. (Chu 1997, 5).

the nation and world, such as *Woo-Hoo*, which is published out of Dover, New Hampshire; *Limousine*, from San Mateo, California; and *Essence*, from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada². Also, when looking at a catalog of zines such as *Factsheet Five*, one can find thousands of listings of thousands of zines from around the world (*Factsheet5 Website 1999*).

Research Question and Brief Overview of Findings

My general thesis topic was to discover what girl zines offer girls, as discovered through a preliminary textual analysis of various girl zines. I will investigate this topic by breaking it down into three questions. The three questions I have created are the following:

- 1) Studying *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine* and their authors as examples, why do girls write zines?
- 2) What kinds of messages are conveyed in *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine*?
- 3) Using *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine* as examples, how do zines play a role in the socialization of teen to twentysomething women?

I will answer these questions through my own research and also by comparing the contents of zines to others' previous research on the content of mainstream magazines.

My first impression was that the personal style of the zines I chose to research — which are all written in first person and share experiences that their authors find important — was self-indulgent. But upon reading several different zines, each written in a similar fashion, I found that this style actually created a dialogue between the zine writers and readers. Girl zines are like an open diary; they share the writers' most intimate thoughts with anyone who reads them. Because of this deeply personal nature, the zines serve as a form of communication that allows girls to reach each other through writing and ally with one another. I speculate that girl zines serve a purpose that is not met by traditional

² These particular zines were chosen from a convenience sample, as will be discussed in the Methodology section. They are by no means representative of all girl zines.

magazines: They share the voice of today's girls, as they really think, and the zines thus help to create a sense of community.

The intimate nature of zines is unique and unavailable in other women's magazines. One possible reason for this is that the goals of zines and women's magazines are very different. Women's magazines strive to attract readers, satisfy advertisers, and even shape the way their readers behave. Author Gigi Durham, a specialist in studying women in the media, asserts that the original goal of women's magazines was to guide women in how they behave: "In the tradition of women's magazines, which have, since their genesis in the mid-seventeenth century, sought to instruct women in appropriate conduct for living. . . women's magazines comprise part of a web of societal institutions that exercise a certain regulatory function in the governance of women's behavior and, in particular, their sexuality" (1996, 18). Traditional women's magazines find particular messages to convey, such as the importance of beauty or the necessity of a boyfriend/husband, and mold the female reader into a specific form.

The goal of zines, however, is drastically different than mainstream magazines. Zines are written out of a need for expression by the author. This goal is often explicitly stated in the zine, such as in the letter from the editor section that explains why the author is writing her zine. Zine writers also express a more personal, human take on the world that is not shared in typical mainstream magazines. As Vale asserts in *Zines!*, a collection of interviews from various zine authors:

Why zines? They are a grassroots reaction to a crisis in the media landscape. What was formerly *communication* has become a fully implemented *control process*. . . Flaunting off-beat interests, extreme personal revelations and social activism, zines directly counter the pseudo-communication and glossy lies of the mainstream media monopoly. (1996, 4-5).

This reason shows that zine authors contradict the original goal of the mainstream women's magazine. The zine authors share such "off-beat interests" and "extreme personal revelations" because they are not getting such individualized attention from mainstream magazines. Zines offer a place where girls can show their own identity, rather than

complacently accept what is fed to them from the corporate magazines. Zines give a girl something she does not find in the pages of *Seventeen*, *YM* or *Cosmopolitan*: they show her a representation of herself, as she truly is.

Significance of My Research

Zines are frequently ignored by academia, states Judith Williamson Hudson, who researched and wrote about the way zines can be incorporated into the daily classroom curriculum of secondary schools (Hudson 1994, 6). However, I believe that these mini magazines are extremely important: They give girls and women a forum to express their thoughts, make connections with others, and a voice through which to speak. Zine-making is a valuable pastime because it gives girls an opportunity to speak their minds and perform creative tasks. I hope that this thesis will help further the scholastic study of zines. I also want to explore the cultural meaning of these zines. They are a medium that I grew up with, consulted throughout my teenage years, and found solace in. I want to determine whether my experience was just a fluke, or if other zine writers and readers find zines to be a rare medium in that they are more than entertaining — they help author and reader alike to sort through their experiences and emotions.

Within the past ten years, researchers such as Hudson and Joan Livingston-Webber have studied zines as part of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (Hudson 1994; Livingston-Webber 1994). Other scholarly journals have also approached the subject, such as *Social Justice* and *Afterimage* (Chu 1997; Zweig 1998). However, the niche of girl zines is constantly growing and changing, giving rise to further areas of research. Anthologies such as Green and Taormino's *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*, a book containing numerous excerpts from girl zines as well as interviews with girl zine authors, acknowledges an increasing cultural interest in girl zines (Green and Taormino 1997). Despite these sources I have not come across much critical analysis or research done about these zines. Although the zines I

studied are only a small portion of those in existence, I nonetheless feel that they serve as a jump-off point to begin the scholarly analysis of zines. I hope that my thesis will fill this gap and create more academic discussion about zines as a serious medium.

OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIUM

Women's Magazines

While studying girl zines, it is also important to look at how women's magazines have evolved. Early women's magazines, such as *Gentleman and Lady's Town and Country Magazine* (1784), served as a way to guide women's behavior. This trend of shaping behavior continued through the mid-nineteenth century with magazines like *Godey's* that focused on the four virtues of a woman: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Endres 1995, xii). After the Civil War, a new generation of women's magazines began that focused on fashion. Magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Woman's Home Companion* promoted fashion as well as advice on traditional roles, such as housekeeping, cooking, and child care (Endres 1995, xiii).

At the turn into the twentieth century, women's magazines such as *The Woman's Journal* and *The Woman Citizen* helped usher in the suffragist movement. These magazines rallied for women's support of the right to vote, and were a primary factor in the success of the movement. Linda Claire Steiner, an historian of the suffrage press, agrees. She states, "Suffrage periodicals drew together geographically isolated women into an emotionally bonded community sharing a set of values, concerns, and way of looking at the world" (qtd. in Jerry: 28). As women gained the vote and asserted their independence, the home-decoration and self-beauty magazines that appeared in the late nineteenth century, such as *Good Housekeeping* (1885) and *Vogue* (1892), continued to dominate (Endres 1995, xiv). The 1920s and 1930s saw a surge of these magazines, such as *Better Homes and Gardens* (1924), *Woman's Day* (1937), and *Glamour* (1939) to name a few (Endres, 492-494).

In the mid-twentieth century, yet another new type of women's magazine was born: the teen women's magazine. *YM*, first titled *Calling All Girls*, was the first of such magazines, published in 1941. Quickly following were *Seventeen* (1944) and *'Teen* (1957). These magazines were targeted at teenage girls, ranging from ages twelve to nineteen.³ Teen magazines ushered in a division of magazines for the adolescent girl, highlighting such subjects as fashion, boys, celebrities, and teenage problems. Magazines like *Seventeen* had "frank discussions of teenage problems which other magazines shied away from" (Endres 1995, 330). But the content of these magazines was nonetheless tame, as far as discussion of sexuality and other private matters, in light of what was to come (Endres 1995, 331). The most recent of such teen magazines was *Sassy*, which appeared in 1988 and was viewed as a contrast to the more traditional teen magazines like *Seventeen* and *YM*. *Sassy* targeted itself to girls aged fourteen to nineteen, but its approach to this age-group differed significantly than the other teen magazines:

What *Sassy* did — to its everlasting shame or credit, depending on one's point of view — was to suggest not only that these teenage girls had sexual lives but that it was a proper editorial mission for a magazine to address their urgent informational needs about sex. The result was gasps of shock and horror from the other magazines aimed at young women, an advertising boycott organized by the Fundamental Religious Right, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, an immediate success with its teenage readers. (Endres 1995, 314).

For several years, *Sassy* approached its audience with those bold attitude about sex and life. In the mid-1990s, however, *Sassy* folded. Today, teen magazines like *Seventeen* include much more explicit content than in the past, such as articles about incest, contraception, and homosexuality (Endres 1995, 332). However, these magazines continue to approach such topics with somewhat conservative attitude. I speculate that with the demise of a bold magazine like *Sassy* and the conservative attitude taken by other teen magazines, girls once again were in need of such frank discussion of important elements of their lives; thus, girl zines seem a logical place to find such open discussion.

³ *'Teen* was originally created for both girls and boys, though it switched its focus to solely girls in the early 1960s.

History of Zines

Although it has only been in the past decade or two that zines have received attention, they are not an entirely new medium. Early versions of zines have roots in other forms of press, such as pulp magazines and fanzines, that are alternatives to the mainstream press. But while it is true that these publications all serve as alternatives to mainstream publications, it should be noted that not these all these publications have the same format as zines; not all are independently produced on a low budget, for example. Therefore, while zines may retain alternative characteristics, they are not truly comparable in style and mission to their predecessors.

Early versions of zines, called “fanzines,” have roots in science fiction pulp magazines from the 1930s, such as *Comet* and *Time Traveller* (Romenesko 1993, 41). The term “fanzine” originally referred to publications written by science fiction enthusiasts, though it later began to refer to magazines devoted to other subjects, such as popular music groups. This term can also refer to independently created comic books (Gundleroy 1992, 2). In the early 1940s a New York psychiatrist named Fredric Wertham stumbled upon zines while studying the links between psychology and literature. He was one of the first observers of the publications (Romenesko 1993, 41), who became attracted to the zines because of the “aliveness and naturalness” of them (Romenesko 1993, 41). Wertham goes on to say:

Having seen, in my years in psychiatry, so much of the general flaws in our human relations, I was attracted to something that was so positive and was not acknowledged as such. I felt that [the zine culture] was essentially unpolluted by the greed, the arrogance and the hypocrisy that has invaded so much of our intellectual life. (Romenesko 1993, 41)

Self-published works continued to evolve through the mid-20th century with the likes of literary chap books of the 1950s and '60s and underground high school newspapers of the late 1960s and '70s (Chu 1997, 4). Similar to these underground, self-published publications is the “alternative press,” though this phrase typically conjures

images of glossier magazines such as *Mother Jones* that tend to be more formally organized and made for profit (Gundleroy 1992, 2).

Zines, as we know them today, have increased in number in part due to the rise of computer technology since the 1970s (Gundleroy 1992, 3). With the possibilities of home publishing through computer software programs, as well as the proliferation of copy-supply chains, anyone with a vision can create a zine (Gundleroy 1992, 3).

Girl Zines

The genre of girl zines has rapidly expanded in approximately the past decade, with a projected yet untraceable increase in the numbers of these zines produced (Green and Taormino 1997, xi). As with zines in general, it is difficult to explicitly define the characteristics of girl zines. However, the easiest and most obvious way is to simply look at zines created by and for females in their teens and twenties. There are different categories within the girl zine genre, such as music, hobbies, or lifestyle.

Many girl zines, and in particular those used in my research, closely resemble a personal diary. These personal zines differ from diaries, however, in that the zine writings are openly shared. The authors of the zines not only write personal stories and share them with their closest friends, but they also share them with complete strangers. Webly M. Disaster Bucket, author of *Touched by an Anvil*, alludes to this phenomenon when she says, "It's great to know that there are people who are enjoying my 'zine without hav[ing] any connections to anything I am connected to" (3 March 1999, 1). Erin M. of *Essence* also states that one of the reasons that she writes her zine is to share herself with others with hopes that they will learn from it and relate. She says, "Take what you can from these pieces of myself. If it doesn't do anything for you, pass it to someone who might enjoy it" (*Essence* #12, 1). By sharing personal moments of her life, Erin is hoping to find a connection with others who will understand.

Cultural Focus

“Girl Power” is not just a catch-phrase coined by the Spice Girls. It’s an attitude, an identity, and a revolution, and girl zines are a natural part of this phenomenon. These days girl zine authors don’t passively let the days go by. Instead they put themselves to work and create mini-magazines expressing their beliefs, frequently standing up for such causes as women’s rights, racism, and other such personal and political topics.

As discussed by Francis A. J. Ianni (1989, 675) and Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1997, 197), both of whom studied the way adolescence affects socialization and behavior, girls are in search of way to fit in during their adolescence. They form peer groups with which to associate. Adolescence is also a time that girls want to express themselves and their emotions (Ianni 1989, 677). Logically, then, girl zines flow from these needs. Zines serve as a way for girls to counteract the messages given out by traditional media. As I will discuss, traditional teen magazines like *Seventeen* and *Teen* push for girls to depend on others, such as boyfriends, to solve their problems (Peirce 1993, 63). But I assert that the girl zines I analyzed promote assertion power in their contents. They discuss the need for girls to stand up against sexism (*Essence* #11, 10) and suggest ways to educate each other (*Touched by an Anvil* #7, 8), for example. Teen magazines devote more than one third of their pages to fashion spreads (Evans 1991, 105), while girl zines frequently express disdain for a fashion-driven world (*Essence* #13, 5).

Girl zines come in part from the Riot Grrrl movement, an early-to-mid-1990s movement based on women’s empowerment and a do-it-yourself attitude. Riot Grrrl created a movement towards self-expression from girls; the Riot Grrrls formed bands, held meetings, and published zines in order to further their message (Vale 1996, 54, 64). There are many ways of interpreting what Riot Grrrl specifically entails. Here is one example, taken originally from a Los Angeles Riot Grrrl zine entitled *Sheila-Na-Gig*, 1993:

Riot Grrrl Is. . .

Women who have come together to create a sisterhood designed to support each other & to build a strength that aims at bringing a long overdue change for our

equality. It is women who are aware that we are by no means men's "compl[em]ent" or a secondary human form which exists to be subjective to men. It is going to build awareness that our place is not in the home but rather our place is out in the world making a difference. Most importantly it is women fighting for women, women helping women & no longer competing with women. (Vale 1996, 66).

There are many variations of what defined Riot Grrrl, but it generally was about having the courage to try new things and get your voice out. A former Riot Grrrl and current co-author of the zine *Housewife Turned Assassin* said, "The motivation and momentum that Riot Grrrl gave me helped me put out my own zine" (Vale 1996, 55). Examples such as this indicate that the Riot Grrrl movement was an important contributor to the rise and proliferation of girl zines.

Vulnerable Teenage Girls

Adolescence is a time of change and insecurity. Girls and boys alike may experience self-doubt and lack of self-esteem. For adolescent girls this time is also difficult because of the mixed messages handed to them from the media. As Brumberg writes in her book *The Body Project*: "On the one hand, their parents and teachers told them that being female was no bar to accomplishment. Yet girls of their generation learned from a very early age that the power of their gender was tied to what they looked like — and how 'sexy' they were — rather than to character or achievement." (1997, 195). She goes on to explain that young women are developing physically earlier than before, but that this development is not being met with the proper actions. She writes:

they do so within a society that does not protect or nurture them in ways that were once a hallmark of American life. Instead of supporting our early-maturing girls, or offering them some special relief or protection from the unrelenting self-scrutiny that the marketplace and modern media both thrive on, contemporary culture exacerbates normal adolescent self-consciousness and encourages precocious sexuality. Too often popular culture and peer groups, rather than parents or other responsible adults, call the cadence in contemporary teenage life. Contemporary girls *seem* to have more autonomy, but their freedom is laced with peril. Despite sophisticated packaging, many remain emotionally immature, and that makes it all the more difficult to withstand the sexually brutal and commercially rapacious society in which they grow up. (1997, 197).

With this lack of nurture from parents and society, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable. This is the time when adolescent girls (and boys) turn to groups of friends to assist their needs (Ianni 1989, 675).

One of the hallmarks of adolescence is the formation of peer groups, that is, groups of close friends with whom adolescents can interact with and learn from. In the 1950s sociologist James Coleman studied peer behavior in high schools. He found that peer groups were major sources of socialization for adolescents because ‘adolescents are looking to each other rather than to the adult community for their social rewards’” (Ianni 1989, 674). Ianni points out the modern-day importance of these groups in the socialization of adolescents:

Peer groups, which are important influences in the lives of all children, are particularly important for teenagers. . . They are institutional settings for adolescent social development (just as much as families, schools, and churches are), and their influence on adolescents is considerable (1989, 677).

Ianni asserts that, in order to fully develop a socialization role, peer groups must somewhat isolate themselves from adult influence:

Lacking a territory of their own, adolescent peer groups must either stake out space belonging to one of the traditional institutions, such as the home or the school, or they must find some neutral and usually temporary space in which to meet, outside the scrutiny of adults (1989, 677).

Though Ianni implies a physical meeting ground, such as a playground or local hangout, this statement can apply in a less material way to zines. Julie Chu, author of an article entitled “Navigating the media environment: how youth claim a place through Zines,” asserts that zines serve as this meeting ground. She writes:

Zines, in particular, articulate young people’s strong need for a place of their own, despite the vanishing of such public spaces from the material environment. For zine publishers, the media environment provides some of the few remaining resources and opportunities for youths to carve out a space for themselves (Chu 1997, 4).

In other words, zines serve as this “neutral” and “temporary space” for girls to meet. In their zines, the girls can be completely open and honest without the “scrutiny of adults.”

Therefore, for the purpose of my research I will consider the community of girl zine authors and readers to be a peer group.

Given the above discussion of the importance of peer groups to adolescents, one can conclude that this same sense of socialization is created through the peer group created in the zine scene. Coleman's previous statement about adolescents looking to one another exactly correlates to the power of building community that girl zines hold. Brumberg writes that girls profit from their connections to others. She says, "I think that most girls desire and profit from connections with their mothers, their aunts, their women teachers, and even their friends, and that individual autonomy has been oversold as a model for female development and for social life in general" (1997, 209). Given this statement, one can speculate that girls also profit from the connection developed through their zine-writing and zine-reading group of friends. The girl zine scene serves as a bona fide peer group for girls, capable of socialization and building community.

The Mainstream Message

Many mainstream teen magazines indicate, through their editorial and advertising content, that girls and women must depend on others — usually men — to be successful. In a study of the socialization messages in teen magazines, author Kate Peirce states that articles about fashion, beauty, and pop stars are some of the main components of these magazines. She found that almost 60 percent of the content of *Seventeen* was comprised of articles about fashion, beauty, food, and decorating (Peirce 1993, 61). In a 1993 study of the fiction found in *Seventeen* and *Teen* magazines, Peirce found that the girls in the stories "depended on others" more than half (62%) of the time to solve problems (1993, 62). One such example of this is given in *Seventeen*. In this story, the main female character appears to find herself only after getting a boyfriend. She says, "Now I was someone with a future. . . A few weeks ago I'd been a zero and now I had a boyfriend!" (Peirce 1993, 63). Statements such as this convey a message that girls must have a boyfriend to establish them as a somebody. As Peirce states:

The messages in teen-magazine fiction are not unlike those in women's-magazine fiction and do not contradict those in teen-magazine non-fiction. Through the stories, a teenage girl learns that male-female relationships are more important than just about anything, that she is not supposed to act or be aggressive or solve problems — others will do that for her — and that there really are male and female professions. (1993, 65).

Another examination of the content of modern teen-girl magazines found similar results. In a study of *Seventeen*, *Sassy*, and *Young Miss*, researcher Ellis D. Evans et al. found the topic of fashion comprised the most space (an average of 30 percent) in all three magazines (Evans 1991, 105). Also, topics such as heterosexual dating dominated the content of the feature articles in these magazines (Evans 1991, 105). The overall message conveyed was that to be successful, a girl needs beauty and a boyfriend. Evans states, “Articles and advertisements mutually reinforced an underlying value that the road to happiness is attracting males for successful heterosexual life by way of physical beautification” (1991, 110). In a women's studies course that I recently attended on girl culture in the media, several students and the instructor discussed how modern teen and women's magazines heavily emphasize beauty, fashion, and slimness in editorial and advertising content. These factors seem to be the road to success, love, and happiness (Merskin 1999).

Power of the Media

Though there is a strong set of values conveyed by teen magazines such as *Seventeen* and *'Teen*, there still is debate over the effect of these messages on the audience. Peirce briefly discusses this debate, highlighting some of the main arguments. She says, “Media researchers have never been in agreement about the power of the media — Do they change attitudes and behavior, and, if so how much and under what conditions, or do they merely reinforce existing attitudes and behavior?” (1993, 65). Regardless of the possible effects, Peirce states:

it can be argued that teenage girls are dependent on teen magazines for information about their lives. . . Teen magazines have a unique opportunity to shape the world of the teenage girl. There is not an overabundance of magazines targeted to that age

group so the magazines that do exist are read by hundreds of thousands of teenage girls. (1993, 66-67).

But in spite of the popularity of these magazines, I speculate that teen magazines cannot possibly serve everyone. As common knowledge shows us, not everyone has the same set of opinions, values, and interests.

Zines, however, serve as a place for girls to create their own editorial content in a magazine that satisfies their interests. They offer information not otherwise available in the market. Diana Morrow, author of *Princess* out of New York, states that creating her own zine served as a way to make up for what was lacking in mainstream magazines. She says, "Because I didn't see my interests or experiences, or those of my peers, reflected in any mainstream women's magazines, I decided to produce my own magazine" (Green and Taormino 1997, 138). The contents of zines can vary from publication to publication. The contents can be shocking, such as the article about being a stalker that appears in *Woo-Hoo*. Or the zines could act as a retaliation against the types of messages that mainstream magazines usually give. For example, *Essence* # 13 has an article about not wishing to follow the fashion trends directed at women; the author asserts herself as uncomfortable in skirts and "girly" outfits, choosing instead to wear less confining clothes (5).

Contextual Information

Before looking at individual zines, it is important to understand why they matter and just who is reading these publications. There is no magic number of copies printed to qualify a publication as a zine, though most zines run 1,000 or less copies per issue (Green and Taormino 1997, xiii). Webly M. Disaster Bucket, author and publisher of *Touched by an Anvil*, claims to make approximately fifty copies of each issue of her zine, depending on her available finances (3 March 1999, 1). Fifty copies is approximately the number of zines run per press for Pagan Kennedy as well, who published *Pagan's Head* for six years (Kennedy 1995, 25). However, Erin M., author and publisher of *Essence*, makes anywhere from 250 to 400 copies of her zine (23 March 1999, 1). From these numbers

one can conclude that the goal of zine writing is different than that of mainstream magazines; the zine authors are not attempting to reach every possible member of their target audience, but rather a small group of readers. I speculate that the zinesters want to share their writings with some people (or else they would simply make one copy for themselves), but are not searching to make their product the next best-selling, large-circulation magazine.

As for distribution, zines can sometimes be found at local punk concerts and record stores. Some bookstores carry zines, though usually these are local bookstores that specialize in independent and alternative literature. As noted in *Zines!*, a book summarizing the history of zines as well as including interviews with zine authors, these publications are not always easy to find. "Zines are difficult to locate; there is no central source or network (although *Factsheet Five* makes a marathon attempt)" (Vale 1996, 4). Bucket frequently distributes *Touched by an Anvil* to friends and peers at local concerts, as well as through a distribution outlet run by one of her friends. Since moving to Eugene, Oregon, she started selling copies of her zines to local bookstores that then distribute them. Erin M. of *Essence* is more formal in her distribution. She does her own distribution in Canada and has distributors across the United States. At one time she had connections in Sweden, Norway, and England who distributed her zine there, but she no longer has contact with those people (Erin M. 23 March 1999, 1).

Financially, zines are not the best way to make their authors rich. In fact, zines often put the publisher in debt rather than making her a profit. But zines are more than about making money; they are about expression. Said Bucket of her two and one-half years of experience writing *Touched by an Anvil*: "I don't make ANY money. I usually end up losing about \$20 each time, but it's totally worth it. I love making my 'zine and I love other people liking my 'zine and that's what keeps me going," she said (3 March, 1999, 2).

METHODOLOGY

I focused solely on printed versions of zines, though it should be mentioned that a large number of girl zines can be found on the World Wide Web as on-line zines. I chose to focus on print versions because these most closely resemble traditional magazines: They are printed on paper and can be carried and read anywhere. I looked primarily at three zines: *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine*, though I also looked at *Woo-Hoo* and *Doris* for supplemental information. These zines serve as the basis for my preliminary textual analysis, though I should note that these three selections are by no means representative of all girl zines. They simply were chosen out of convenience, though I did search for publications that were similar in nature. I found almost all of these zines at local bookstores, with the exception of *Essence*, which I found after locating the on-line companion on the World Wide Web.

In order to choose similar girl zines in this convenience sample, I found zines that were written by late-teen/early-twentysomething girls whose authors focused on personal writing. Each of the three primary zines that I analyzed were written in first-person narrative style, and represent the diary-style genre of girl zines. These three zines each have distinct voices that speak to the reader with universal themes of love, loss, and adolescent struggles. Also, these zines are more of a general-interest type zine than some of the more specific zines that focus only on one specific niche or hobby. The zines that I analyzed were all hand-made, photo-copied and independently (non-commercially) distributed. Some contained advertisements, but not the kind supplied by corporate sponsors; they were ads for other zines or distribution centers.

It is difficult to know specifically who is reading each of the zines that I analyzed. But both the authors of *Essence* and *Touched by an Anvil* said they write for a primarily

female target audience aged mid-teens to mid-twenties. They also each said that their zine is typically read by people who are involved in the punk and “emo”⁴ style music scenes, and many of the zines are distributed at these concerts (Erin M. 1999; Bucket 1999).

On a personal note, these zines struck my attention not only because of their demographic similarities, but because they felt like something I would write; the authors’ style, tone, and message were all things that I could relate to. Because one of the functions of girl zines is to build community among girls and young women, it seemed only appropriate to select zines that I, as a twentysomething woman, could appreciate.

To focus my research, I broke down the zines into specific categories that I wanted to investigate. In order to review and analyze the zines in a similar fashion, I first read through each zine and all its issues from cover to cover. I looked for general themes and messages conveyed, taking notes and categorizing these findings. I looked at the editorial content within the zines, as well as the letters of correspondence between reader and author (letters to and from the editor). The letters from the editor were a very telling section of the zine, as I will explain later in this work. I also studied and interpreted the text to discover similar themes, ideas, and messages carried throughout different publications.

The Zines

Before delving into the specific zines, I should note the range of ages represented by authors and readers of these zines⁵. Most of the zines that I chose to analyze were written by women in their early twenties, some who have gone to college and some who have not. The topics discussed in these zines, such as frank discussions of sexuality and politics, appear much more mature than the contents of teen magazines such as *Seventeen* or *YM*, which are frequently read by pre-teen or junior high age girls. However, I chose to

⁴ “Emo” music is a derivative of punk music, but the lyrics tend to be more introspective and personally revealing.

⁵ I found no statistics on the readership of girl zines. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to know much about these readers. Zines are typically distributed through a chain of people, and frequently the authors do not know who reads their zines (Bucket 2 June 1999; Erin M. 2 June 1999).

include zines written by this older group because of their implied readership. As stated by Erin M. of *Essence* and Webly M. Disaster Bucket of *Touched by an Anvil*, the readership of their zines ranges from junior-high aged girls through women and men in their mid-twenties (Erin M. 2 June 1999; Bucket 2 June 1999). According to these authors, despite the mature themes, younger girls do read the zines. From personal experience, I and my group of friends also began reading zines in our early teens. It also should be noted that these zines are produced by one person out of love and expression rather than money, and the authors do not necessarily have a “target audience” like traditional magazines. The zines authors’ foremost concern is to express themselves rather than cater their publications certain audiences.

Essence is a one-woman produced zine published in Vancouver, British Columbia.⁶ Erin M.⁷, the 21-year-old author, focuses mostly on personal issues and stories, and she writes in the first-person narrative style. She relays her life as she lives it, giving her readers a glimpse of her happenings in college and beyond. *Essence* is the zine counterpart to your little sister’s diary — when reading it, it is as though you have stumbled upon something very private, very intimate, but she is sharing all these thoughts with 250 to 400 people per issue. Erin has been writing zines for about nine years, and has released sixteen issues of *Essence*. The zine was originally titled *Flush*, but after writing ten issues she decided to change its name to something more representative of herself. “It ended up being more my own writing than a ‘fanzine’ style thing, so I changed the name to ‘essence’ and did it all myself,” she says (3 March 1999, 1).. She also contributes to other zines and has released several of her own zines other than *Essence* (1999).

Touched by an Anvil is written by a 17-year-old girl who calls herself Webly M. Disaster Bucket from Salt Lake City, Utah. This zine chronicles her life in transition from her senior year in high school through her first year in college at the University of Oregon

⁶ Though it has the same name, this *Essence* is not the same as the publication for African-Americans.

⁷ It should be noted that Erin M., as well as the authors of many of the other zines that I studied, does not use her complete name in her publication. Other authors use pseudonyms or no name at all. This is done for a number of reasons, such as privacy or protection. (Erin M., 29 March 1999).

in Eugene. She has written this zine for approximately two-and-one-half years, and, like Erin from *Essence*, Webly writes about personal experiences and in first person (Bucket, 1999). *T.B.A.A.* has diary-like elements. But it also carries a quirky, show-off quality to it. Some passages seem like samplings from a hard-edged girl who does not care what the world thinks of her (such as the sarcastic list of “How to Take Over the World” in issue number seven) , while others show her as a hurting young woman with all-too-human desires for love and acceptance (such as the numerous entries about lost love).

Limousine is written by a young woman in San Mateo, California. The author, Libby, writes about her personal battles with loneliness, weight, and friendship. Like the other authors, she writes in first person, in a diary style. This zine is more of a collection of personal essays that speak out against the oppressions of society. It has a sense of urgency, as if Libby is trying to persuade her readers to change the world. But at the same time, she speaks as though she has accepted the ways of the world and just wants to complain about them.

Woo-Hoo is more shocking than the other zines. It is written by a 23-year-old woman in Dover, New Hampshire. Currently she only has one issue of this zine out, which is why I was only able to study one issue. Also, the author of this zine does not include her name anywhere in the publication. *Woo-Hoo* does contain personal stories, but also has comical excerpts, interviews, and music reviews. The author discusses her sexual experiences, self-defacing problems (like compulsive, self-induced vomiting), and her love of stalking others. She is frank with her subject matter, though it appears that she writes about shocking topics more for entertainment value than for any personal need to release them. This is the kind of zine you would expect Courtney Love to write.

The excerpts from *Doris* that I analyzed came both from a hard copy of this zine and also through excerpts reprinted in the collection *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World* (Green and Taormino 1997). Like the other zines, Cindy O., the author of *Doris* discusses issues from her personal life, but does more than write about them — she also

includes illustrative comics as editorial content. This is one of the more political zines that I analyzed, as the author discusses issues of anarchism and anti-fascism in her writings.

In addition to these zines, I have examined numerous excerpts of zines found in *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World* (Green and Taormino 1997). This collection has been extremely important in my research because it has allowed me to access many zines that I otherwise may have had trouble locating. The book contains excerpts from pages of real zines from around the world, as well as commentary by the authors and editors of the publications. Some of the zines represented in this collection are *ROCKRGRL*, *Bamboo Girl*, *Ben is Dead*, and *Princess*. I will use excerpts from this book in my research as supplemental information to my primary sources.

RESULTS

Why Girls Write Zines

The first part to my thesis was to answer the following question: Why do girls write zines, as answered by passages from *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine* and these zines' authors? To answer this, I closely analyzed the texts of various zines as well as questioned the authors of these zines.

Like most zines, all of the zines that I analyzed had one distinct thing in common: All had passages written in first person about some aspect of the authors' lives. Specific to these girl zines were the personal, unique stories shared by the authors. These zines may seem incredibly narcissistic because they deal with issues specific to the publishers' lives. The authors write pages and pages about themselves, and one may wonder *who cares?* But in fact, these zines carry themes that promote the building of a community of readers and writers. Examples of such themes are anti-sexist articles (*Essence* #11, 10) and articles retaliating against mainstream media messages (*Essence* #13, 5). By speaking about individual experiences, the girls are able to make all-encompassing statements that can help them ally with one another. These zines actually share a common voice, though they are written individually.

The style in which zinesters write their articles is different than that used by the traditional magazine. Instead of hiding behind a character in a novel or stifling one's voice, the authors of these girl zines are bold with their thoughts. They all write in the first-person format, sharing their experiences through their own voice. Instead of writing about someone else's story, as would typically be the style in a mainstream magazine, these girls share their own stories. They want to get their voices out. They want to share themselves

as they are, instead of standing by passively and letting the “voice” created by mainstream magazines speak for them.

Pagan Kennedy, author of the 1980s zine *Pagan's Head*, addresses the issue of using first-person narration in her work: “For so long I had hidden behind a narrator, but now I would finally let myself speak,” (1995, 9). An English major who first attempted to write fiction, she found that writing in her zine in a personal way was much more exhilarating and satisfying than her attempts to write fiction.

Erin from *Essence* is also driven to express herself through her zine. She says in one issue: “i want to share what it is like to be me in this space and time. i want you to see what i see and feel the feelings inside” (*Essence* #11, 23). She is compelled to share herself with others.

While the zine authors want to share their voice, they also want to encourage others to do the same in order to create an ongoing dialogue in zines. In *Essence* #13, Erin shares her observations of the lack of girls and women on-line. In an article entitled “cybergirls wanted” she shares this: “what i find incredible about the whole email/internet thing, is the lack of girls involved. i am only involved in one mailing list and I did a poll once to see if i was right. in the final count, i came to 52 males vs. 24 females. not even half” (15). She goes on to discuss how this value was instilled through schooling, as teachers tended to call on boys rather than girls, thus stifling girls’ desires to participate. “no wonder there aren’t more girls out here in cyberspace. we are told, in not so many words, that this isn’t our thing right from the beginning. i say: bullshit. . . if we balance it out now, we can use these tools [computers and technology] to organize and network with girls all over the place.” (15-16).

There are numerous examples of zines that speak directly to their audience, going beyond the way in which mainstream magazines do this. In many zines, the boundary between the authors and audience is completely removed. It is as though the “middleman” has been removed, and the editor is speaking, conversationally, to the audience about the

topic. Zine writers do not have to tailor their content to please advertisers, such as occurs in mainstream magazines. There is no censoring of ideas or words, which allows the message to go freely from author to reader. Instead, the authors write what they desire — usually about their personal experiences — and publish these thoughts.

Another way zines further the dialogue is by reaching out explicitly to address the reader. The authors use the first person time and again in their work, which brings a highly personal element to the text. An excerpt from the zine *Doris* by Cindy O. illustrates this concept:

I want it to break down those barriers, and I want it to make it so people talk about their lives, and secrets aren't secret anymore, and we're not all shut off and self-conscious and scared and cool and tough and alienated and quiet. (Green and Taormino 1997, 144)

One must realize that these zines are written by the same girls who read other zines; it is a constant cycle. In *Touched by an Anvil*, for example, is a section devoted to reviews of other zines (#7, 25). *Limousine* carries informal advertisements for various zines and distribution outlets, as does *T.B.A.A.* And *Woo-Hoo*'s author frequently makes reference to her friend and fellow zine-author Lisa Carver, who writes the zine *Rollerderby*. The author of *Woo-Hoo* even states that the reason she wrote her zine is because Carver encouraged her to do so. In a list of why Carver is such a great person she writes, "She's given me the courage & drive to do 'Woo-Hoo!'" (8). All of these examples show that the girls who write one zine are reading and are knowledgeable about other zines. In turn, the authors have a keen sense of their audience and cater precisely to their needs. Very often, a zine is written by a person with very similar interests as her readers. Therefore, the author has an inside knowledge of what *she* wants to read, which is often what her readers want as well.

Yet another tactic used by zinesters to create a dialogue is writing about personal opinion. One of the hallmarks of journalism is that it is objective. However, objectivity is often obsolete in zines. Instead the authors write from a subjective standpoint, boldly presenting their opinions to the reader. One such example comes from *Essence* #11. In an

article entitled “Shit Happens?” Erin discusses her disgust for the double-standard life that her male friends lead. She describes an incident where she was at a concert, and a group of guys stood near the women’s restroom, hooting and hollering at the women as they came out the door. She says: “i thought we were getting somewhere you know. i thought we were making a difference. . . it makes me so angry and so frustrated. the time and effort its taken me to be able to be independent and proud of who i am and some assholes still can make me feel dirty again” (10). Here Erin is not only relaying an event that happened in her life, but making a point. She is using *Essence* as a tool to express her views with the hope of changing the behavior of others.

In conjunction with the use of subjectivity is the sense of advocacy and urgency present in the finished product. Janet Zweig describes this behavior as the “zine impulse — that irrepressible urge to communicate because you have something to say” (1998, 4). This method, because of its honesty, is yet another tactic used by the zine authors to connect with their audience.

Letter from the Editor

One of the most revealing sections of zines is the “letter from the editor” section. Though it may not be explicitly labeled as such, this section nonetheless serves as the editor’s address to her audience. This is typically found at the beginning of a zine and is the editor’s/author’s explanation of why she wrote the zine. Often this section can be the most personal section of the entire publication, and it is the place where the author addresses the reader first-hand and often relates personal anecdotes of what drove her to create the zine. The reasons why a girl creates a zine tell a tremendous amount about her, about what kind of zine she will create, and about what topics she will discuss in her zine. One could think of this “letter from the editor” section as the preface to a book: the material not complete without a backgrounding section. A good example of this section is found in *Essence*. Erin says the following:

I write these bits and pieces to make sense of my emotions. Or try to. To explain my feelings if only for myself. I publish them because people have said seeing them out in the open helps them validate what they see in themselves. And it has therapeutic value for me as well. . . . And this is me. I am writing about emotions, feelings. Vital and important pieces of myself, as messy as they are. (*Essence* Online, #15)

In this section alone, Erin alludes to many key issues found within her zine as well as in numerous other zines. It is a tell-tale example of the soul-baring that takes place in these independent publications.

Messages conveyed in *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine*?

The second part to my thesis was to discover what kinds of messages were conveyed in the three zines that I analyzed: *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine*. To answer the question, I simply studied the text of these zines to see the various messages and themes embedded in the text.

Though the debate continues, we can at least sense that the media has some kind of effect in shaping our lives. Images portrayed in fashion magazines, such as the perfectly slender models featured on the covers of *Seventeen* or *YM*, shape the way we behave. As one author points out:

Radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood. . . Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. (Douglas Kellner qtd. in Durham 1998, 18).

One such example of a woman writing her own zine instead of writing for a traditional publication is Pagan Kennedy. Kennedy, the author of *Pagan's Head*, turned away from "serious writing" instead to zines. What she found was that zine-writing gave her something that traditional media could not: A way to be and write for herself instead of for others. She says:

Deciding to publish the 'zine was like giving myself permission to loosen up after years of trying to attain perfection and aping 'respectable' fiction. . . Instead of using metaphors and codes to make my point, I would talk plainly. . . Almost instinctively I broke every rule of respectable fiction. I published my own work (for serious literary types, self-publishing is considered a sign of rank amateurism). . . I wrote unpolished sentences and hardly went back to revise. I even scribbled in

last-minute notes. . . I did everything they'd told me not to do and I loved it. My fanzine was a fuck-you to *The New Yorker* and the University of Iowa . . . and the twenty-two-year-old novelists that Newsweek told me hung out in the hottest clubs and English Comp jobs. The whole respectable writing crowd could gather in their country club, sip tea on the long green lawns, and discuss elegant style without me. Once I discovered my 'zine, I no longer wanted to belong. (Kennedy 1995, 9).

Instead of conforming and being the kind of writer that her colleagues expected her to be, Kennedy instead chose to write about topics that interested her personally. She rebelled against the image of the ideal writer, instead searching for a means to express her true identity.

Each of the zines I analyzed discusses the image of the author in some form, such as the author discussing her experiences with trying to conform to society's expected image (*Essence* #13, 5). Like the use of first person and telling of personal stories, the initial prospect of a girl discussing her personal battles with image could seem narcissistic. It seems as though this topic could be individual and different from zine to zine and girl to girl. But image is actually a common theme shared by numerous zine writers.

Many of the girl zines I analyzed seemed to be written from a non-conformist standpoint, and I speculate that these girls are not getting from traditional media what they needed or wanted. The images created by the mainstream, such as the extreme importance of beauty and a boyfriend that Peirce and Evans discuss, do not follow at all how these zine authors truly live. Instead, these girls speak against the desire for an "ideal body" or the "need" for a boyfriend. They use their zines as a forum to contradict the images placed on them by the mainstream media, and instead discuss how they see themselves. They create their own image through their writings: an image that is more in keeping with reality, and is more representative of the girls instead of the images produced by the mainstream.

An example of the way girl zine authors use their creations to counteract the mainstream's message comes from *Essence*. Erin uses her zine as a way to counter the modern ideal. In issue #13 of *Essence* Erin discusses how it feels to be a woman in society, and how her views of herself do not connect to what she sees portrayed by the mainstream. She tells of her attempts to wear skirts, make-up and other typically feminine

items, but she does not feel true to herself in this style: “i am told from every angle to look more feminine, yet when i try it, i feel uncomfortable and wrong. a double standard as usual. what a surprise” (5). Here, Erin directly asserts how she feels different from the way the mainstream is telling her to feel — a direct counteraction to the mainstream through her zine.

In *Limousine* # 7, Libby discusses similar issues of beauty. In an article entitled “I’ve been on a diet of self-hatred since I was born a girl” she discusses how being overweight has prompted her to feel belittled by society. Even though she says she knows not everyone can be thin, she still does not feel she can ever be the type of woman that society wants. She says, “The part that was a lie is the hardest thing about being fat sometimes, the fact that I’m trying to fight size-ism and this culture of female oppression that wages war on women’s bodies and self image, while knowing that if I was granted one wish, it would [be] to be made thin.” She goes on to say how her belief stems from the way society views larger women: “I know that this is a real sign of how pervasive and INVASIVE sizeism is” (27).

In a study of teen-girl magazines, Evans found that articles concerning weight abound:

The physical beautification theme of teen female magazines further extends to a related content area — health and nutrition. Overall, this topic seems to receive incidental treatment, except for articles and ads that concern weight reduction and control. Therein the idea of “slim is in” or “slim is fit,” which has been increasingly represented in comparable American magazines for adult women over the past several decades, was pervasive (Evans 1991, 111).

With such attention given to weight control in mainstream magazines, it is of no surprise that women feel pressure to conform to this image. As in the previous example of body weight, Libby writes in direct contrast to the views placed upon her by the media. She uses *Limousine* as a way to express herself and show that her self-image is drastically different than that created by the mainstream media.

How Zines Play a Socializing Role

The final question in my thesis was: Using *Essence*, *Touched by an Anvil*, and *Limousine* as examples, how do zines play a role in the socialization of teen to twentysomething girls and women? Like before, I closely studied the texts of the girl zines as well as consulted the research of various sociologists and psychologists to answer this question.

Probably the single most discussed topic in the girl zines that I analyzed is friendship. Whether it be talk of new friends, old friends, the loss of friends, fights with friends, or the search for friends, this general issue is central to the zines. Once again, it may seem incredibly self-centered for these girls to rant about their friends and their problems. But by doing this, they are probably voicing concerns that others feel. Webly M. Disaster Bucket of *Touched by an Anvil* alludes to this occurrence when she says, “I write to show others that they are not the only ones who feel certain ways” (31 March 1999, 1).

Erin of *Essence* addresses the issue of finding a connection with her readers in nearly every issue of her zine. By sharing herself through her zine she divulges personal information that she would share with close friends. And she does this with the hope of finding these close friends through her writing.

i'm trying to tell you who i am, i the hopes you want to know, because so many of us are so much alike and it's interesting to look through someone's feelings. because for all the things that are alike, there are things that are different and that's where we learn. (# 11, 23)

In one issue, Erin even acknowledges that her zine helps others who read her work to come to know her, even if they never speak or meet face to face. She writes: “if you know me at all, even by reading this zine for any length of time you would know me by now, you would know that i can't keep myself inside anyway. . . you've known when i've been in love, when i've been under stress. everything everything” (*Essence* #11, 23). Erin's zine serves as a forum for connecting with others and for making friends. She knows that by writing about herself and then distributing these writings to others, that they will in turn

read about her life and learn about her. She wants to make friends, like most people do, but does it in a different way: She does it through her writing.

This same tactic is employed by Webly Bucket of *Touched by an Anvil*. Though Bucket distributes her zine in her home town, she also distributes it nationally. She has a friend that runs independent distribution business; she sends him a copy of her zine and he mass-reproduces it and sends it out to Texas, North Carolina, and parts of Oregon (3 March 1999, 1). In this way Bucket's writings reach people that she has never — and very likely will never — met. She says: "The reason that I am so excited about this new distr[i]bution is because I sometimes get neat mail from people in places like Maine who tell me that they got my 'zine from a friend of a friend who got it somewhere I have never been. It's great to know that there are people who are enjoying my 'zine without hav[ing] any connections to anything I am connected to" (3 March 1999, 1).

In *Limousine*, the theme of searching for friends is again echoed. "I guess sometimes I need a friend that will just listen. A friend that makes no demands, doesn't expect anything from me, will not make me feel more alone. . . I'll call that friend "fanzine" and spread it all over the world" (# 7, 6). Here, the author directly addresses that this "friend" is her zine. She asserts that through her work she will spread her thoughts in to the world, with the presumed hope of finding a live person to replace her zine as this friend.

Loneliness and Moving On

In conjunction with friendship comes loneliness, loss, and sorrow. Not every friendship lasts. And because the girls who are writing these zines are in their teens and twenties, friendships are constantly changing. People find different interests, move away to different schools, and change friends during these years. Therefore, loneliness is a universal experience, and it is a frequent topic within girls zines.

In general, *Essence* is a zine full of sadness and loneliness. Nearly all of *Essence* #13 has a somber tone. It is almost exclusively about loneliness, ended relationships, and yearning for the past. In this issue, Erin shares many personal thoughts, such as:

sometimes i sit and pine in my room, staring out the window, wishing i was home. but what am i wishing for? my old friends have moved on. . . i just wonder what i'm pining for. . . i know, i know. it's the past. the time when we all laughed together and were comfortable (#13, 15).

Though Erin is writing about her personal life, chances are that her readers can relate in some way. Pining for times past is not only a part of *Essence*, but it is a theme echoed throughout all three of the primary zines that I analyzed. Another example of this loneliness arises in issue #12 of *Essence*:⁸

leaving friends again. starting all over again. for a while, I kept in touch with my friends from home. I saw them during vacations. but things quickly changed. we all had new friends and new interests, and even when I do talk to my old friends, I don't have much to say to them anymore.... those friends that I thought were so close have become mere acquaintances. (27-28).

By writing about sad experiences, the authors of these zines are able to express their feelings. And because these thoughts are then printed on paper and distributed, it is feasible that the authors can possibly even reach those lost friends that they miss by way of their zine.

Bucket from *Touched by an Anvil* writes frequently about loneliness. Issues #7 through 9 are all written at the end of her senior year in high school through the summer and into the beginning of her first term of college. This is obviously a time of great transition, leaving the comforts of home and friends behind. In her zine, she shares these sentiments. In an excerpt entitled "So Here I Stand" she says: "I have lived most of my life alone. . . what's so scary about having someone actually care about you?. . . It's what I want but I'll never get. My reason for living is someone. . . What's living worth, even if everything is 'perfect,' when you don't have the most important [thing] — your happiness. . . and someone to share it with" (#7, 24).

⁸ It should be noted that this excerpt is written by a friend of the author's, James, but the mere fact that Erin included it in her zines shows that she believes this theme to be important.

In her letter from the editor at the beginning of issue #8 of *T.B.A.A.*, Bucket addresses the implicit dismal attitude she has, as indicated by the issue title, “Every Broken Heart Has a Silver Lining.” She says: “So you[‘re] wondering if I’m okay by the issues title... I think I’m okay. Sure, it’s positive, and that’s good. I guess I am just looking on the up side of life now that I am getting out of Salt Lake” (1). However, the issue goes on to have a decidedly depressed tone, as the author talks about leaving behind her friends and her love. For example, the last entry of this issue, “Goodbye,” is an ode of sorts to her friends she is leaving behind to go to college. She wonders if her friends will know how much she will miss them: “Will the people I love know I love them before I leave this place? How do you tell someone your true feelings towards them without hurting yourself?” (25). She also asserts her independence, recognizing that the step she is making is one for only herself: “For once I’m living for the only person that is going to stick by my side forever, myself” (25).

In his article “Writing About Emotional Experiences As A Therapeutic Process,” James W. Pennebaker asserts that self-disclosure through writing indeed helps the writer process events in their lives. He writes, “Self-reports also suggest that writing about upsetting experiences, although painful in the days of writing, produces long-term improvements in mood and indicators of well-being compared with writing about control topics” (1997, 162). He also says, “the mere disclosing of the person’s problem may have tremendous therapeutic value in and of itself” (1997, 166). This theory can easily be transferred to why girls write zines. Zine authors put their thoughts into writing, which according to Pennebaker’s theory, helps them in their own lives.

I speculate that the written word of a zine can also have a tremendous effect on the reader, so much so that this idea of community can be furthered. As E. Claire Jerry states in an article about the power of the women’s suffragist newspapers, the written word had a large impact “in that it could be read and reread, continually reinforcing and reintroducing movement claims” (1991, 28). Though this quote pertains to the suffragists publications of

the early twentieth century, the central idea is key. It shows printed words, and thus girl zines, because of their printed nature, can potentially be the trigger of a movement or be a way to build community.

Also, in the same way that writing can be of therapeutic benefit to the author, reading can also help the audience feel that they are not alone. As discussed earlier, author Francis A. J. Ianni asserts that peer groups, such as those created through the zine community, greatly benefit adolescents. In this case, the authors' intimate thoughts are exchanged honestly within the pages of their zines, and the readers are then able to see that their peers are expressing similar emotions to those the readers may feel.

One such example of this help comes from *Essence* #11. In this issue, Erin discusses how her zine-writing helps people come to know her. She writes, "if you know me at all, even by reading this zine for any length of time you would know me by now" (23). Here, Erin is letting her audience know that they are not alone because they know her through her stories. By candidly writing about her life in her zine, Erin is able to reach out to others and share personal pain — something that presumably most people have experienced at some point. By sharing her stories she can let others know that they are not alone with their problems.

Love and Sex

Along with the constant discussion of friends, the girl zinesters also talk about love relationships. Again, the reason for the multitude of entries on this subject probably has a great deal to do with the age of the authors: the first couple decades of life are typically when people experience their first love relationships, and girls are renowned to talk about these relationships with their friends. They also share these details with their diaries — and with their zine-readers. What is unique about the zinesters' take on love and sex, however, is the way they discuss the topic. Instead of covering the superficial components to dating and love, the zine authors dig deeper and touch on the emotional side of these issues.

Numerous pages of the issues of *Touched by an Anvil* are devoted to the subject of love and love lost. Bucket writes: “If I could, I’d fold you up and put you in my pocket so you could come with me everywhere. Once I wanted to share part of my life without you, I’d carefully take you out, unfold you, apologize, and everything would be great.” (#9, 5). She goes on to say, “I started thinking you’re just an angel sent from heaven, for me to spend the last days of my life with.” (#9, 5). Yet more space is devoted to the subject, in entries such as “Autumn”:

With summer narrowing down that only meant one thing. I would soon be doing a lot of thinking about you and about the past we shared. . . If I could have only ripped out my heart right then and shown you it’s smile, you would have known how those three sad words touched me so deeply. . . You make me feel dumb for wasting so much ink trying to explain what you were able to say in three simple words: I miss you.” (#9, 12).

This theme of love and loss echoes throughout all the issues of *T.B.A.A.* that I examined, implying that it is obviously a topic of strong favor to the author. Though Bucket’s stories and characters are unique, the concept of love resonates through humankind and the reader can find a way to relate with Bucket.

The Mainstream’s Portrayal of Love

One possible reason that love relationships are so readily discussed in girl zines is that these issues are not fully discussed in mainstream women’s/teen magazines. Typically there are columns of advice on how to get a boyfriend, how to know if he really likes you, and advice on sexual relationships (found in numerous issues of *Seventeen* or *YM*). But in issues of women’s magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, the emotional side of these relationships are not as frequently discussed. As Durham states, “Dimensions more characteristic of women’s sexuality — what Davis describes as ‘more relational, contextual, emotional responses’ — are not addressed in *Cosmopolitan* articles about sex.” (1996, 25). However, articles about the emotional side of love and sexual encounters abundantly appear in girl zines.

Erin from *Essence* admits to her readers in issue #12 that she reads these mainstream teen-girl magazines. She does not belittle them, but rather spawns ideas for her own articles off of those discussed in girl's magazines. For example, she says: "i was reading *Seventeen* magazine (i have no shame) and i came across an ad with the words 'Virtuous Reality' proclaimed across the top and all these pictures of these wonderful people who were all virgins. . . i don't understand" (16-17). Erin then continues in a discussion about advocating virginity and how it leaves non-virgins feeling dirty and unable to belong: "i realize that they are trying to make abstinence an attractive option for people. but what i don't think they realize they are doing is making it impossible for kids who have had sex feel like they can belong to their movement" (18). In her article on sexuality as portrayed in women's magazines, Durham also addresses the way *Seventeen* advocates virginity: "In *Seventeen*, virginity is highly regarded and its readers are urged to take measures to safeguard it until the right man arrives to claim it" (1996, 26). Both Erin and Durham notice *Seventeen's* push to instill the value of virginity in its readers' minds. But Erin does not agree with such a view. She instead implies that the messages given in the mainstream media do not agree with her beliefs and thus makes her own opinion public through her zine.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Girl zines are independent in more than just their production methods: They are independent in thought and message. They shake up the conventional means of creating a magazine and distributing it, and they certainly rock the boat as far as editorial content. Overall, girl zines offer a much more personal approach to writing than a traditional girl/teen magazine. The authors of zines are the readers of other zines; thus, they are intimately connected to the way the readers think, and are able to offer discussion of topics that is directly relevant to the readers. The authors speak their minds in a subjective fashion — a style shunned by traditional magazines that seek objectivity. Though these zines may seem incredibly narcissistic because they deal with issues specific to the publishers' lives, they actually carry universal messages that help bring girls together. The zines that I analyzed, as well as others I have read in passing over the last seven or eight years, are a revolution of such in terms of the way they discuss issues so candidly. They serve as a forum for girls to counteract the mainstream's projected image, to ally with other girls, to discuss the hardships of love and sex, and simply to get their publisher's voice out.

In the conclusion of her study of women's mainstream magazines, Gigi Durham asserts the following: "It is imperative that women begin to challenge and disrupt the discourses in these [women's] publications with the goal of ending the channeling of women's desires in prescribed and socially 'safe' directions." (1996, 29). Similarly, in *The Body Project*, author Joan Jacobs Brumberg states:

As we prepare girls for life in the twenty-first century, we need to initiate a larger multigenerational dialogue that speaks to the reality of earlier maturation, the need for sexual expression, and the nature of contemporary culture. . . our discussions need to be responsive to their biological and emotional growth as well as the popular culture in which they live (1997, 209-210).

Perhaps this is just what girl zines are doing. Perhaps they are establishing an alternative to the messages given in mainstream women's magazines. Perhaps they are creating a balance between the very different messages implied in the mainstream versus the underground. Perhaps they are the necessary "challenge and disruption" that Durham discusses and the "dialogue" as discussed by Brumberg.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, Ed. 12 May 1997. "Extreme publishing: supply room confidential." *Fortune*: 26.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. 1997. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Random House.
- Bucket, Webly M. Disaster. 3 March 1999. E-mail letter/interview.
- . 31 March 1999. E-mail letter/interview.
- . 2 June 1999. E-mail letter.
- Chu, Julie. Fall 1997. "Navigating the media environment: how youth claim a place through Zines." *Social Justice*: 71-85.
- Durham, Gigi. Mar. 1988. "Dilemmas of Desire: Representations of Adolescent Sexuality in 2 Teen Magazines." *Youth & Society*: 369-390.
- . Spring 1996. "The Taming of the Shrew: Women's Magazines and the Regulation of Desire." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*: 18-30.
- Endres, Kathleen L. and Therese L. Lueck, eds. 1995. *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Consumer Magazines*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Evans, Ellis D., Judith Ruthberg, Carmela Sather, Charli Turner. Sept. 1991. "Content Analysis of Contemporary Teen Magazines For Adolescent Females." *Youth & Society*: 99-120.
- Factsheet Five Web Edition*. www.factsheet5.com (11 April 1999).
- Green, Karen and Tristan Taormino, eds. 1997. *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Gundleroy, Mike and Cari Goldberg Janice. 1992. *The World of Zines: A Guide to the Independent Magazine Revolution*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Hudson, Judith Williamson. Mar. 1994. "Engaging Resistant Writers through Zines in the Classroom." Conference on College Composition and Communication.
- Ianni, Francis A. J. May 1989. "Providing a Structure for Adolescent Development." *Phi Delta Kappan*: 673-682.
- Jerry, E. Claire. 1991. "The Role of Newspapers in the Nineteenth-Century Woman's Movement." *A Voice of Their Own*. Ed. Martha M. Solomon. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press: 17-29.

Kennedy, Pagan. 1995. *'Zine: How I Spent Six Years of My Life in the Underground and Finally...Found Myself...I Think*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Livingston-Webber, Joan. 17 Mar. 1994 "How Sassy Are Grrrl Zines?" Conference on College Composition and Communication.

M., Erin. 23 March 1999. E-mail letter.

---. 29 March 1999. E-mail letter.

---. 2 June 1999. E-mail letter.

Merskin, Debra. 3 May 1999. Class lecture/discussion. University of Oregon. Eugene.

Peirce, Kate. 1993. "Socialization of Teenage Girls Through Teen-Magazine Fiction: The Making of a New Woman or an Old Lady?" *Sex Roles* Vol. 29, Nos. 1/2: 59-67.

Pennebaker, James W. May 1997. "Writing About Emotional Experiences As A Therapeutic Process." *Psychological Science*: 162-166.

Romenesko, James. Apr. 1993. "The zine explosion." *American Journalism Review*: 39-43.

Strasburger, Victor C. 1995. *Adolescents and the Media: Medical and Psychological Impact*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

Vale, V., ed. 1996. *Zines!* San Francisco: V/SEARCH.

Zweig, Janet. July-Aug. 1998. "Artists, books, zines." *Afterimage*: 4-5.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ZINES⁹

Boob, Betty and Celina Hex, eds. Summer/Fall 1998. *Bust: The GIRLFRIENDS issue.*

Doris # 11.

Essence Episodes 11, 12, 13, 16.

Girl Talk. (26 Oct. 1998). <http://www.xeney.com/girltalk>.

Girlyhead No. 2.

Hellfire. (26 Oct. 1998). <http://www.hellfire.com>.

Limousine #6 & #7.

Phitzzat. (26 Oct. 1998). <http://www.angelfire.com/ny/phitzzat>.

Touched by an Anvil: Boycott the World. No. 7.

---: *Every Broken Heart Has a Silver Lining*. No. 8

---: *I Can't Believe It's Been Exactly All This Time...* No. 9.

Woo-Hoo Issue 1.

⁹ Because many zines do not contain typical publishing information such as date and place of publication, I have separated them into a separate bibliography.