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“If I Didn’t Write These Things No One Else Would Either”

*The Feminist Legacy of Grrrl Zines
and the Origins of the Third Wave*

please listen to me you mother fuckers, i, unlike hundreds of boy fanzine writers all across america, have a legitimate need and desperate desire to be heard. i am making a fanzine not to entertain or distract or exclude or because i don’t have anything better to do but because if i didn’t write these things no one else would either.

—Tobi Vail, *Jigsaw* #3 (1991)

BECAUSE we must take over the means of production in order to create our own meanings.

—*Bikini Kill* #2 (1992)

In 1988, Sarah Dyer began working as producer of the successful, nationally distributed punk zine *No Idea*. She and her co-producer, who was male, started a record label and put on punk shows in addition to publishing and distributing the zine. They worked collaboratively at every level. Dyer quickly realized, however, that within the context of the punk scene, and the zine scene affiliated with it, her work was invisible. She explains, “We would get phone calls and they would ask to talk to Var because they just assumed that my name was on there just because I was the girlfriend, not because I was actually doing anything. And if people wanted to buy an ad, they would ask to talk to him. You know, we would do a show and the bands on the stage would thank him and they would

be thanking the guys who helped us clean."¹ In other words, Dyer was assumed to be an accessory rather than an actual co-creator.

As a result of this lack of public recognition, she decided to produce a zine that was entirely her own, emphatically "ALL MINE!" as the masthead for the second issue of *Mad Planet* proclaimed.² *Mad Planet* offered Dyer's thoughts on various bands and musical genres. It was framed in terms of her own interests. Her editorial letter in the first issue of the zine explained that she designed it as a zine "that actually covers everything I like." She went on to say, "Basically, if you're a girl-type, and you work on anything with a boy-type or types, everyone assumes that you're just along for the ride."³ Even with these explanations, however, reviewers gave credit to the men who were tangentially involved in the project—men she had labeled as "boy slaves" in her first masthead—rather than to Dyer herself. "I couldn't believe that I'm doing this zine completely by myself and people kept focusing on my friend Bill because he's doing interviews and Evan because he's doing comics," Dyer notes. She began to recognize that this was not a problem facing her alone, which led her to a radicalizing moment:

There were so many women involved in zines, and they were all treated this way, just sort of, you know, "girls don't do that." So I decided, I'm going to find the other girls doing zines, working on zines. I started looking very carefully at the ads in *Maximum Rock and Roll*, like, "This is a girl," and trying to kind of network with them. And I went to England in 1992, found a copy of *Girlfrenzy* zine by Erica Smith, and she had reviewed girl zines, and in her review list, she had maybe three or four American zines that I had never heard of, and I was just like, I can't believe I have to come all the way to England and buy a zine in a bookstore to find out about zines in America. So when I came back I did the first *Action Girl Newsletter*.⁴

Dyer discovered that it was not enough for her to break away individually, to make her own zine so that she could receive credit. She needed to intervene in the larger zine culture, to create a community of women, and thus the *Action Girl Newsletter* was born.

Dyer describes a familiar feminist story. She was part of a punk community that positioned itself as outside of and superior to the mainstream world, a community that claimed to challenge the power dynamics and oppression that characterized dominant societal practices. And yet, like suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton when she was excluded from the World

Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840, feminist activists Casey Hayden, Mary King, and Robin Morgan who were accorded less status in the civil rights movement and New Left organizing in the 1960s, or radical women of color Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, who experienced racism within the women's movement, Dyer discovered that the social justice movement with which she identified did not offer her full human recognition.⁵ While the punk community worked to undercut mainstream American practices, Dyer experienced the sexism from the broader culture replicated in the movement, which was a space that had promised to do things differently. Dyer's invisibility as a woman creator within the punk scene made her gender visible to her. She responded as many radicalized women had before her: she took action. And in a move that she helped to make a trend among young feminists, Dyer's action took the form of a zine.

Dyer tells a particular origin story for the *Action Girl Newsletter*, a feminist origin story in which gender inequities become visible and a woman decides to make a change. Zines have a similar gendered origin story, which has mostly gone untold. Most studies of zines identify them as resistant media originating in male-dominated spaces. They are positioned as descendants of the pamphlets of the American Revolution and Dadaist and Samizdat publishing, emerging from the fanzines of the 1930s and the punk community of the 1970s.⁶ According to this narrative, the zine proliferation was triggered by the convergence of punk culture and technology. Punk culture provided the "zine" terminology, along with a non-elitist, do-it-yourself (DIY) structure and aesthetic, and these ideologies were channeled into the production of zines because of technological innovations such as desktop publishing and inexpensive, widely available photocopying.

This explanation is insufficient on a number of counts when it comes to grrrl zines. Although zines are often described as though they and their predecessors have always been male-dominated media, what hasn't been discussed is the fact that these publications also have predecessors in the informal publications, documents, and artifacts produced by women during the first and second waves of feminism.⁷ One reason for this omission is that zines are resistant media, and women are, even today, rarely identified with resistance. As Dyer's story shows, our encrusted gender ideology often makes women's efforts at cultural change invisible. Even if, like Dyer, women are clearly speaking out, then they may still be erased from the story altogether, identified as someone's girlfriend rather than as legitimate agents. Dyer's story makes this process of erasure visible.

Her story also shows that she longed for female predecessors, for a female community. She sought out other zines by girls and women and then created the *Action Girl Newsletter* as a resource that could help solidify and expand that community of women. Her story is not unusual; many of the grrrl zinesters I interviewed explained that they began making zines either as a response to sexism or because they were inspired by another grrrl zine. Nomy Lamm didn't know much about feminism, but when she read the feminist body acceptance book *Shadow on a Tightrope*, it inspired her to create the zine *I'm So Fucking Beautiful*.⁸ Similarly, Neely Bat Chestnut created the first issue of her zine *Mend My Dress* after reading *The Courage to Heal*, a book for women on recovering from sexual assault.⁹ Cindy Crabb was inspired by the grrrl zine *Snarla*, while for Lauren Jade Martin it was a pamphlet from Sarah Dyer on "Doing Your Own Zine." *Bitch* and *Bust* were created as explicitly feminist interventions into pop culture, and *The East Village Inky* came about when Ayun Halliday recognized that being a mother cut her off from many of her former creative pursuits. Although some of these women were part of the punk zine community, all began creating zines because of some specifically gender-related catalyst, and that gender specificity is exactly what is missing from the general origin story that's told about zines.

Origin stories are important because they tell us where to look and what patterns to watch for. The "wrong" stories can give us a distorted or diminished understanding of the past and, by extension, the present moment. In the case of grrrl zines, if we think of them as originating from the male-dominated spaces of zines and punk culture, then grrrl zines appear as aberrations at best; as one author suggests, they seem "a side note to women's history."¹⁰ They're not quite the same as the zines produced by men, but this difference isn't taken seriously. This commonly told origin story marks grrrl zines as a rupture and the girls and women who produce them as either trying—often unsuccessfully—to be like the boys or rebelling against the male punk community.

This story of rupture provides a limited context for understanding grrrl zines, and in that view they are aberrant, unconnected, a fun but odd blip. The story is significant because it shapes our interpretations of grrrl zines. Further, because grrrl zines are places where third wave feminism is developed, this incomplete story also has consequences for our understanding of the third wave. Third wave feminism, like grrrl zines, is often positioned as a rupture, as a kind of feminism drastically different from the first and second waves—indeed, in some cases, with no evident

connection to previous generations of feminism at all. This narrative has been appealing even within a feminist context; many self-identified young feminists have relished the persona of being a rebel against feminism. In the early years of the 1990s, in particular, a number of young feminists—most famously Katie Roiphe in *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus* and Rebecca Walker in *To Be Real*—declared their disconnect from second wave feminism. Roiphe argues, "Feminism has come more and more to represent sexual thoughts and images censored, behavior checked, fantasies regulated. In my late adolescent idiom, feminism was not about rebellion, but rules; it was not about setting loose, as it once was, it was about reining in."¹¹ Similarly, Walker explains, "For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories," and she identifies feminism as "another impossible contrivance of perfect womanhood, another scripted role to perform in the name of biology and virtue."¹² In this collection she declares the third wave to be a break from the past, denying the connections with previous generations of feminism and, like Roiphe, figuring feminism as a tool of oppression not unlike patriarchal norms for womanhood.

Third wave discourse is often complicated and contested rather than one monolithic perspective. While Walker, Roiphe, and other young feminists declared their separation from the second wave, other self-identified third wave feminists proclaimed their allegiance, arguing "to us the second and third waves of feminism are neither incompatible nor opposed" and "we see many strands of continuity between the second and third waves."¹³ The sense of a debate in progress—of a contest for the definition of the third wave—is an undercurrent in many of the third wave feminist anthologies that appeared throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. "Them's fighting words," quipped one author in response to Roiphe, arguing that she had experienced feminism not as an oppressive force but as "a way for me to be an individual and break free of society's many rules about a woman's proper place" and that she, therefore, was not interested in a third wave that wanted a clean break from the second wave.¹⁴

While there are certainly relevant differences between third wave feminism and earlier generations, I argue that an undue emphasis on—or exaggeration of—those differences masks the far more prevalent similarities between all incarnations of feminism. This is not to suggest that feminism is a monolithic, unified movement; far from it. Feminist thought

and activism have been and are multifarious, changing, unagreed upon, diverse. The dissent within feminist discourse hasn't been merely generational but has emerged from fractures of race, class, sexuality, and gender identity, and the dissent is often generative. Indeed, one of the great strengths of feminism has been its ability to alter, to expand, in order to respond to internal critiques and changing cultural experiences.¹⁵ Focusing solely on the differences, however, perpetuates a distorted understanding of earlier feminist moments, particularly the second wave, and prevents young feminists and others from recognizing feminism as a larger historical change movement. For despite the variations—the notable differences, for instance, in the understanding of women's rights espoused by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and that espoused by Sarah Dyer—I contend that it is meaningful to keep the umbrella term "feminism." It designates movements and discourses that have at their core a belief in the full personhood of women and an agenda of eradicating all forms of oppression that keep people from achieving their full humanity.

The same sorts of distortions and misrecognitions that have influenced the third wave have occurred in the origin story of grrrl zines, as well; indeed, they seem to be interlocking distortions, perpetuating an incomplete and inaccurate version of how grrrl zines relate to feminism. A recognition of connection between incarnations of feminism is important in the name of historical accuracy; moreover, it will allow young feminists to learn from and build on the past, recognizing work that has come before so that they aren't always having to act as pioneers, trailblazers.

To that end, if we recognize the particularly feminist origins and content of grrrl zines, then the story of grrrl zines as an aberration no longer holds. Here I provide an outline of this feminist trajectory, offering an alternate origin story that recognizes a U.S. feminist continuum, starting with the informal publications of the suffragists and women's clubs of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I also present a specific originating moment for third wave feminism: the early 1990s in which the feminist political and musical movement known as Riot Grrrl and the *Action Girl Newsletter* emerged. When framed in terms of a feminist history of participatory media, Riot Grrrl and *Action Girl* help reveal what is distinctive about third wave feminism, as well as the ways in which this feminist generation is linked to previous ones. The lines of connection between earlier feminist moments and this one become visible, and this provides not only a more accurate picture of first wave and second wave feminism but also a context for understanding grrrl zines and the third wave.

The third wave has been examined from many angles—as a movement that is sexy, rebellious, self-absorbed, and savvy—but it needs to be positioned within a larger feminist narrative. Rather than being aberrations, in my origin story grrrl zines are actually part of a significant trend in women's history. As explained in this chapter, women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have created informal publications—from scrapbooks to women's health brochures to mimeographed feminist pamphlets—and a textual and formal analysis of these publications suggests that they are the direct historical predecessors of grrrl zines. These publications were creative and resistant, and they provided a platform for women speaking from disempowered positions. The women who made scrapbooks, health guides, or mimeographed pamphlets, like zine creators, were denied access to the standard mechanisms for publication, because what they had to say didn't fit the dominant scripts.¹⁶ Positioning grrrl zines within this feminist history makes women's continued resistance visible and enables us to begin creating a more accurate picture, not only of zines but of third wave feminism. I contend that the third wave, like the grrrl zines that helped initiate it, is part of feminist history and not a unique break from the past. An exploration of grrrl zines shows that the rhetoric and iconography of the third wave are distinct from earlier feminist generations, but many of the underlying impulses propelling this feminism are similar among all the waves of feminism.

Feminist History of Zines: The First Wave

Dyer's story of the *Action Girl Newsletter*'s origins exhibits a number of characteristics that connect grrrl zines to their feminist predecessors. As I mentioned in the introduction, the zine is a form of what's called "participatory media," media made by individuals rather than by the consumer culture industries, and participatory media have been part of women's and feminist history since the 1850s. Participatory media represent a way of engaging with unfriendly mass culture and transforming it—if not always on a broad scale, at least at the level of the local (the nineteenth-century women's club that reads a scrapbook made by a member, the 1970s consciousness-raising meeting that distributes a mimeographed pamphlet). Historically, feminist participatory media productions have engaged with some of the themes central to grrrl zines—such as gender, identity, community, and resistance—and have offered a snapshot of their own cultural moment's take on these issues. Participatory media of the first and second

waves of feminism—scrapbooks, health booklets, and mimeographed pamphlets—have significant similarities with grrrl zines, in some cases similarities of material culture and construction, in other cases ideological similarities. Like zines, they have rarely been studied—or, if they have, not in terms of their publication practices and the effects these had on their function and meaning. Rather than offering an in-depth historical examination of scrapbooks, health booklets, and mimeographed pamphlets, I identify points of connection among feminist participatory media, provocative textual similarities that are ripe for further research.

Scrapbooking was a widespread practice in the nineteenth century, a way that girls and women could document their lives and the culture in which they lived. Although some men did engage in scrapbooking, it was widely understood as an activity for women. Scrapbooks have been understood as artifacts of personal identity, "a material manifestation of memory," as a recent scholarly collection describes them.¹⁷ The girls and women who made these books would gather together collections of personally significant memorabilia such as calling cards, newspaper clippings, photographs, and letters as a record of their lives, or they would assemble the books as reference volumes on various subjects in which they were interested.

Scrapbooks did more than offer personal commemoration, however. Like zines, scrapbooks offered a space for girls and women to comment on mainstream culture and also to construct community and solidarity. Scrapbook scholar Amy Mecklenburg-Faenger explains, "These scrapbook collections of 'rare gems' were meant to be shared with other people, and scrapbooking often, although not always, was constructed as a communal activity. That is, scrapbooks were not understood as private documents, but as artifacts meant to be shared with others."¹⁸ Individual women used scrapbooks, according to Mecklenburg-Faenger, "to critically engage the social roles prescribed for them and to construct new possibilities for women's work, and women's identities."¹⁹ For instance, women's organizations in the Progressive era often used scrapbooks to document their own work and challenge mainstream newspaper coverage. Scrapbooks were interventions, spaces where clubwomen and suffragists—both black and white—could construct their own legacy and public identity. Through what artifacts they chose to include, how they arranged the artifacts, the context into which they placed them, and the creators' own comments on magazine and newspaper clippings, women who made scrapbooks were offering contributions to and critiques of public life. Their hand-made

publications could reframe and reprioritize mainstream media reporting by pulling particular articles out of the newspaper and giving them greater emphasis within the scrapbook. Mecklenburg-Faenger gives many examples of women including media reports of various kinds in order to comment—often critically—on them in their scrapbooks. Scrapbooks were a space for women to express themselves and communicate with other women in a culture that did not provide an abundance of public venues.

The scrapbooks created by women's clubs and individual women share a family resemblance to many zines from a century later. Mecklenburg-Faenger offers an example from a page of the scrapbook of journalist and suffragist Ida Harper:

In her scrapbook recording media coverage of women's causes in 1912, Harper preserved one of her own articles, a response to an attack on suffrage . . . next to which she included handwritten commentary on the circumstances surrounding its publication. Harper pasted the entire newspaper page on which her article appears, including other articles that appeared on the same page. In the middle of her article, the editors of the paper had inserted a piece on "An Oklahoma Town Who Is in Need of Cats." Harper drew several wavy lines through this article, noting at the bottom of the page: "A sarcastic letter from me in regard to cutting down my important article to include one on *cats* probably led to an [unreadable] editor's dropping my department—Resumed Oct. Sept. 1914."²⁰

Harper uses her scrapbook to comment on mainstream media trivialization of her work. She crosses out the offending article in her scrapbook, a space in which she can express her own side of the story. She shares with the scrapbook's readers that when she spoke out to the newspaper editor, her column was dropped, but she faces no such censorship within the world of her own publication.²¹

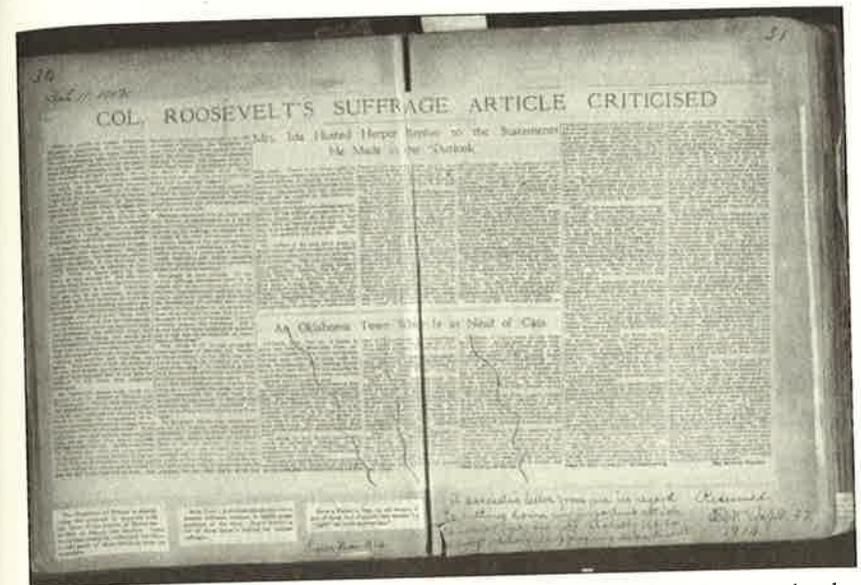
Similar strategies appear throughout the world of grrrl zines. Indeed, when I saw Harper's scrapbook page for the first time, I was immediately struck by how familiar it appeared. For instance, it resembles a page from Danielle Bustian's 1993 zine, *War*. Like Harper, Bustian engages with newspaper clippings, using her zine as a space to critique media coverage of particular political figures. Both authors remove the clipping from its original context and, by placing it in their own publication, take control over it. Both write marginal notes in their own handwriting to correct what they see as misrepresentations or disrespect and, in so doing, put

their voices into conversation with the mainstream media. Indeed, within their publications, their voices supplant the mainstream media. The visual difference of the handwriting of both women in contrast to the typeset newsprint pages gives a kind of authenticity to Harper and Bustian's side of the story. As I discuss in chapter 2, these women are creating embodied communities through their use of material artifacts. Although the scrapbook and the zine may seem to document two women alone with their clippings, in fact, each woman uses her artifacts to communicate and connect with a broader community of women.

Scrapbooks and zines also share methods of negotiating with a broader capitalist culture. Feminist scholars like Ellen Gruber Garvey have argued that scrapbooks and trade card books (in which girls and women would paste cards they had collected from various products purchased), while allowing space for personal expression, often served a more colonizing interest, incorporating people into a commodity marketplace rather than providing a site for resisting that marketplace. Garvey explains, "It was the work and play of amassing the cards, sorting them, and pasting them down that taught scrapbook makers how to read advertising, how to fantasize with its seeming promises within the social worlds of the home and religious life without seeing it as overwhelming or as a repeated betrayer."²²

As advertising images entered not only the home but also the intimate space of women's own created artifacts, these images became comfortable and familiar rather than being experienced as overt marketing tools. In other words, these scrapbooks served the pedagogical purpose of fitting their creators into capitalism. While I see the sense in this reading, my work on grrrl zines suggests that this process of being trained to respond to a capitalist visual and rhetorical marketplace doesn't always mean a process of girls and women being colonized by a consumer culture. Grrrl zinesters, like their scrapbooking predecessors, often engage intimately with magazine advertisements or, as with Bustian's zine, newspaper clippings that become parts of zine collages. By so doing, they are developing marketplace literacies that they then often use to criticize the marketplace. As I discuss in chapter 5, these literacies can become not palliative but instigative. In other words, as girls and women engage with advertising images in their scrapbooks and zines, the comfort they develop with consumer capitalism can become a tool of resistance, not just a mechanism for their complicity with that system.

Another kind of informal document with a family resemblance to zines arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: women's health



Pages from the scrapbook of Ida Harper (ABOVE), courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Page from War (left), courtesy of the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke University.

publications. The treatment of women such as Margaret Sanger and Mary Ware Dennett illustrates how transgressive clear information about health and sexuality was considered to be, particularly when that information was created by or for women. Sanger was a pioneering activist for contraception. In 1914, after many of her columns for the socialist newspaper the *New York Call* were censored under the Comstock Law, she began publishing her own paper, the *Woman Rebel*, in which she offered information about sexuality and contraception. This publication was illegal under the Comstock Law, so Sanger spent a year in Europe avoiding prosecution. While en route to Europe, she had her supporters distribute 100,000 copies of a sixteen-page pamphlet called *Family Limitation*, a publication that explained and assessed the most common forms of contraception; it included illustrations, as well as recipes for vaginal suppositories. In this pamphlet, Sanger also advocated for women's sexual pleasure, explaining, for instance, that the condom "has another value quite apart from prevention in decreasing the tendency in the male to arrive at the climax in the sexual act before the female." She also explains of women's purported sexual coldness, "Nine times out of ten it is the fault of the man, who through ignorance and selfishness and inconsiderateness, has satisfied his own desire and promptly gone off to sleep."²³ After her husband was arrested for distributing this pamphlet, Sanger returned to the United States to face prosecution. She went on to publish a great many more things through both mainstream and informal routes, but her early publications shared many characteristics with zines. She wasn't able to find outlets in existing media for her controversial subject matter, so she created her own publications.²⁴

Similarly, Dennett was a suffragist activist and writer who created a sex education pamphlet for her sons in 1915 because she found none of the available sex education literature for children acceptable. She wrote the text and included simple, hand-drawn diagrams of the sex organs that she created herself after she couldn't find any pictures in the materials of the Academy of Medicine and elsewhere. This zine-like pamphlet circulated among her friends, colleagues, and fellow activists (and their children) under the name *The Sex Side of Life: An Explanation for Young People*, until it found its way into the hands of the editor of the *Medical Review of Records*, who raised public awareness of Dennett's work. The pamphlet became popular among doctors, parents, church leaders, social workers, camp counselors, and schoolteachers, who "snatched it up by the dozens."²⁵ It was sold in bookstores and even used as the primary text in some

childcare classes. This level of popularity led to Dennett's indictment under obscenity laws, and her case became a landmark case for censorship in the United States, ultimately responsible for changing the legal definition of obscenity.²⁶

Like zines, these health pamphlets operated outside of the mainstream publishing marketplace and allowed women to convey experiences and information that otherwise couldn't be publicized. Because inexpensive technology for reproducing text was not widely available in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, however, these pamphlets required printers and a sizeable budget for their reproduction. This medium, then, wasn't as widely available to girls and women as scrapbooking, although it did allow for a broader reach. Changes in available technology made it possible for the next generation of feminists to create informal publications, make multiple copies, and circulate them without needing the kind of budget that Sanger or Dennett had or facing legal penalties.

The Mimeograph Revolution of the Second Wave

Informal publications of a different kind were integral to the second wave of the women's movement. Just as the women's clubs of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries made scrapbooks as a response to the technological innovations of inexpensive paper, photography, and mass-circulated media, women who were involved in the women's movement of the mid-twentieth century took advantage of the inexpensive technology of the mimeograph machine. Unlike scrapbooks (which were public documents with limited reach because they were unique, nonreproducible volumes) and health pamphlets (which required a budget for professional printing), mimeograph machines allowed second wave feminists to make inexpensive, multiple copies for public distribution. By typing or handwriting onto specialized mimeograph paper, called a stencil, an original copy was made. The stencil was then placed on the inked drum of a mimeograph machine, which was turned—often by hand—to press ink onto paper that was fed into the machine with each rotation of the drum. The process was imperfect; the ink was often messy (as well as purple), only one page could be reproduced at a time, and it was easy to fold and ruin stencils during the process of reproduction. Mimeograph machines were inexpensive and accessible, however, making it possible for small feminist groups to make hundreds of fliers and documents to reach a broad audience.

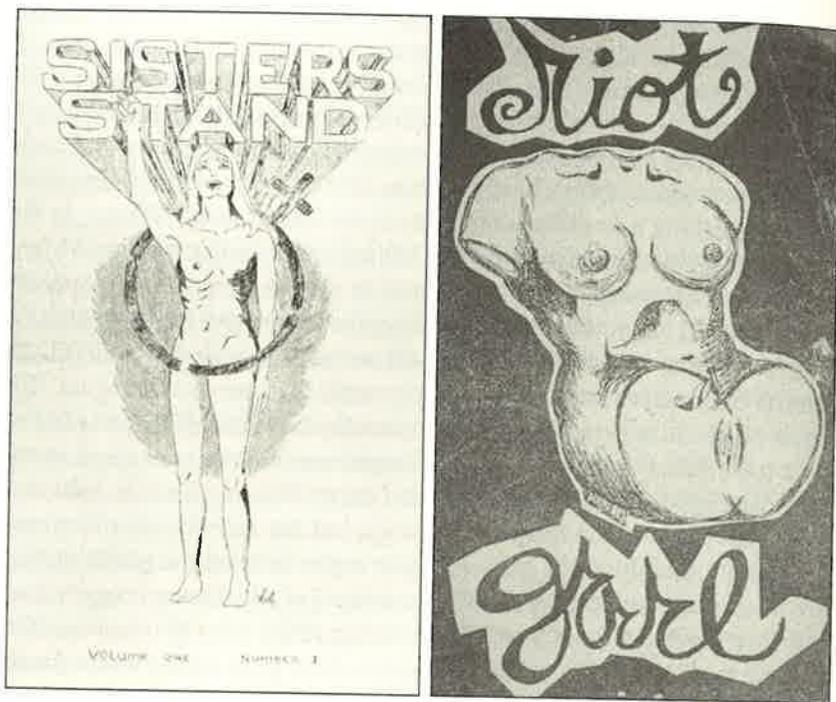
Although second wave feminists also created informal publications using photocopying and offset printing, mimeography has taken on a kind of iconic significance in histories of the movement, coming to stand for all informal feminist publishing. For instance, an advertisement for Feminist Expo 1996 proclaimed, "the current wave of the feminist movement began with mimeograph machines."²⁷ In the memoir of noted second wave feminist Susan Brownmiller, she recounts the importance of mimeographed pamphlets, leaflets, and broadsides: "In an era of technological leaps, Women's Liberation is the last major American movement to spread the word via a mimeo machine."²⁸ Another activist recalls that "Ti-Grace [Atkinson] said every revolution needs a mimeo machine."²⁹ Because there were no books or magazines that addressed the issues they were taking on, these activists had to create and distribute their own work. Indeed, many of the key second wave texts began as pamphlets or fliers not unlike zines, including Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm"; the Boston Women's Health Book Collective's *Our Bodies, Ourselves*; the Third World Women's Alliance's *Triple Jeopardy*; Bread and Roses's "Outreach Leaflet"; and even Mary King and Casey Hayden's "A Kind of Memo."³⁰

These sorts of print media were crucial for the political work of the second wave, functioning not only to spread information but also to create what historians Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon call "a shared culture, theory, and practice."³¹ Like scrapbooks, they were integral to the creation of feminist community. Baxandall and Gordon continue: "In an era before e-mail, even before xeroxing, printed publications were vital and feminists spent a significant proportion of their energy, resources, and ingenuity producing them. Mimeographed pages stapled together into pamphlets were the common currency of the early years of the movement. . . . By the mid-1970s over 500 feminist magazines and newspapers appeared throughout the country"³²—magazines and newspapers that were often outgrowths of the popular mimeographed pamphlets. Even the feminist magazines and newspapers that took on the moniker of more-formalized publications had what I would identify as a zine-like quality: Baxandall and Gordon contend that "women's liberation publications struggled along without funds or paid staff, featuring not-quite-aligned layouts, sometimes poorly written pieces, and amateur poetry and drawings. . . . Nevertheless, it was in these homespun rags that you could find the most creative and cutting-edge theory and commentary."³³

As with the scrapbooks, the look and feel of these second wave publications remind me of grrrl zines. For instance, the family resemblance

between a *Sisters Stand* cover from 1971 and a *Riot Grrrl* cover from 1993 is immediately evident. Both feature pencil drawings of a naked woman's body that has been altered—defaced or dismembered—in some way. The *Sisters Stand* cover shows a woman with no left breast, standing in the middle of a woman symbol with her fist raised defiantly. The *Riot Grrrl* cover shows an armless, legless, headless torso. In both images, the dismemberment is making a broader point. The *Sisters Stand* image alludes to the Amazon women who removed their left breasts to enable them to be better archers; the image is clearly meant to be empowering. The dismemberment is much more dramatic on the *Riot Grrrl* cover, and the body morphs into something else: the spot where the woman's legs should be has been drawn as the cross-section of an apple, with the core as her vagina. The apple imagery is obviously a visual pun on the New York City home of this particular *Riot Grrrl* group, but the image is more than a joke and seems more ambiguous than the *Sisters Stand* cover. The torso makes reference to archaic/classical art images of women, but the extreme alteration and sexualization of this body gives evidence to the fact that the grrrl zinesters are in a culture saturated with a different kind of advertising imagery than the *Sisters Stand* authors faced. The lettering of the titles also registers this difference: *Riot Grrrl* is written in cursive, both girly (with extra curls on the "r" and "l") and sharp. *Sisters Stand*, in contrast, is in block print shadowed to seem as if it's emerging from the page and rising upward, along with the face of the woman on the cover. It is not at all playful or girly. Yet both covers are hand drawn, and both are reimagining women's bodies, doing something different with the naked female body than mainstream culture, claiming ownership of that iconography by printing it on the cover of the publication. Despite the differences, these covers have a family resemblance. There's no evidence that the girls who made the *Riot Grrrl* zine had seen *Sisters Stand* or were intentionally emulating second wave publications; indeed, direct lines of influence can be difficult to trace, and the propagation of social movements is often a bit haphazard. The similarities in these publications are significant, however, even if they are unintentional. Both groups of women were dealing with a culture permeated with sexist imagery and ideology, and they responded by creating their own media that resisted that sexism and envisioned womanhood differently.

Even more striking than the similar look and feel of these documents are the similarities in distribution between second wave publications and zines. Scrapbooks, of course, were one-off productions; they were individual artifacts that could be shared within a community and used to build



Cover of *Sisters Stand* (left), courtesy of the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke University.

Cover of *Riot Grrrl NYC* (right), courtesy of the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library at Duke University.

that community, but they could not be widely disseminated because each was unique, and inexpensive reproduction technology was not available. While health pamphlets were reproduced, the dangers of wide dissemination certainly limited their reach. Mimeograph technology allowed second wave feminists to distribute their publications widely. This was both a benefit and a challenge: activist and author Robin Morgan explains: "We were becoming bursitis-ridden, literally, from carrying around all these god-damned mimeographed papers in shopping bags when we'd go to some college for a weekend of organizing."³⁴ Yet this technology meant that every attendant at a consciousness-raising group could receive a copy of "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm." Similarly, every woman who came to a Riot

Grrrl meeting in New York City could receive one of the *Riot Grrrl* zines. They were distributed informally, person to person rather than through official publishing channels. They were often free or offered for a minimal payment (Baxandall and Gordon note that prices for Women's Liberation pamphlets ranged "from a nickel to a quarter," while grrrl zines were often \$1.00).³⁵ As I discuss in chapter 2, this is part of how zines create community. These documents, created by hand, reproduced on a small scale, and shared in intimate settings helped to bring women together.

In addition, second wave publications and grrrl zines have ideological similarities. Although not all did, many grrrl zinesters, particularly Riot Grrrl zinesters, made conscious ideological connections with second wave publications. They may not have realized the material connections—the fact that their zines were informal, participatory media in line with previous kinds—but many zinesters clearly align themselves with a feminist legacy and see themselves as carrying on this legacy. This legacy is manifested in the many reprints of second wave documents that grrrl zinesters, particularly early grrrl zinesters, have included in their zines. For instance, Lizzard Amazon, editor of the zine *Riot Grrrlz Outer Space*, reprinted "The Bitch Manifesto" by Joreen (Jo Freeman), a publication that was included in the 1970 collection *Notes from the Second Year*. In her editor's letter, Amazon writes, "Dear Jo, Shulamith and Anne, I hope y'all are not offended that I'm reprinting this w/out permission. I just want girls today to see it!"³⁶ She also reprinted Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*. Similarly, the zine *Function* #5 reprints Judy Syfer's "Why I Want a Wife" (although with no attribution or year), and many other grrrl zines include quotes from second wave publications and biographical sketches of first wave and second wave feminists.³⁷ Indeed, it seems clear that not only did grrrl zinesters like Amazon laud these second wave feminists whose writings they cited and reprinted, but they also created work of their own that pays tribute to or emulates second wave writings. This is evident in the many menstruation, do-it-yourself health care, and women's herbal wisdom zines that are carrying on the legacy of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (and, although perhaps unknowingly, the health pamphlets).

These connections are also evident in Riot Grrrl manifestos. These manifestos are lists that explain Riot Grrrl; as if answering the question "Why does Riot Grrrl exist?" they begin, "Riot Grrrl is . . . BECAUSE . . ." and offer many different political explanations after the word "because." These manifestos appeared—with much consistent content—in Riot Grrrl zines throughout the early 1990s.³⁸ They map out a complex personal and

political terrain and tie feminist social change to cultural change. They're especially strong in their eagerness to reframe the standards by which cultural productions are judged: "BECAUSE we don't wanna assimilate to someone else's (Boy) standards of what is or isn't 'good' music or punk rock or 'good' writing AND THUS need to create forums where we can recreate, destroy and define our own visions," as well as "BECAUSE we are angry at a society that tells us Girl=Dumb, Girl=Bad, Girl=Weak."³⁹ They are similar to a number of second wave feminist manifestos, such as the 1968 "Principles" of the New York Radical Women, the Redstockings' "Manifesto" of 1969, and the 1970 "Woman-Identified Woman" statement of the Radicalesbians.⁴⁰ These emphatic pronouncements offer clear, unambiguous claims about gender, sexism, and societal functioning, with content and tone that are surprisingly similar in the 1960s and the early 1990s. These shared characteristics demonstrate a feminist history for grrrl zines—a feminist legacy on which the early grrrl zines were building, rather than a story of rupture and rebellion. Even if they were unaware of this fact, early grrrl zinesters were sharing the rebellion that second wave feminists had articulated, rather than rebelling *against* those feminists.

However, the early grrrl zinesters didn't share ideological perspectives only with the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave stretched over several decades, expanded, and became more complicated as U.S. third world feminists began offering critiques and reframings of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. Grrrl zines show clear ideological links to the work of U.S. third world feminists. Third world feminist theorist Chela Sandoval identifies a new feminist paradigm, which she refers to as "differential coalitional consciousness" or "differential praxis," that "was utilized by an irreverent cadre of feminists of color within seventies and eighties United States women's movements."⁴¹ This new paradigm is one that embraces difference and discord as sites of energy and social change, a perspective voiced, perhaps, most persuasively by poet and activist Audre Lorde:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. For difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. . . . Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.⁴²

Some of the central theoretical approaches characteristic of this new paradigm were articulated in the groundbreaking 1981 collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. The editors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga called for "a theory in the flesh . . . one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience."⁴³

Grrrl zines were deeply influenced by these ideas. In part, the "irreverent cadre of feminists of color" are articulating an experience that has come to be emblematic of late-capitalist culture: fragmented identities, lack of a solid moral center, and decollectivization. Further, the celebration of difference—not as a problem to be solved but as a source of energy and creativity—resonated with young women of color and white women who had come to see some kinds of second wave feminism as too restrictive. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, grrrl zines provided a space for girls and women to explore what *This Bridge Called My Back* calls "the contradictions in our experience." The lines of transmission varied. In some cases, grrrl zinesters are, in fact, reading these scholars, hungry for the ideas they present on how to make sense of the world: many early grrrl zinesters were Women's Studies students, and bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak, Trinh Minh Ha, and other popular U.S. third world feminist scholars appear in a number of zines, including *Free to Fight*, *Slant*, *Shotgun Seamstress*, and *Doris*. In other cases, the ideas seem to have become part of the grrrl zine culture, so that zine creators could pick them up indirectly. Regardless, a comparison of these texts suggests that grrrl zines were emerging from a history of both feminist participatory media and U.S. third world feminist theory, and where they emerge from matters because of the trajectory this origin story makes visible: a trajectory of continued feminist ideology and activism that has links to the past but, as discussed in the last part of this chapter, also changes as it develops.

These informal publications—the scrapbooks, health pamphlets, and mimeographed documents—allowed girls and women to say things that weren't being said elsewhere, often because they were considered too trivial, too personal, or too controversial. In the epigraph to this chapter, Tobi Vail of *Jigsaw* identifies the silencing of women's stories as a crucial part of her inspiration for producing her zine. In emphatic capitals she announces, "i am making a fanzine not to entertain or distract or exclude

or because i don't have anything better to do but because if i didn't write these things no one else would either." She frames her own zine in contrast to the "hundreds of boy fanzine writers" who presumably have the luxury of writing for entertainment, while she has "a legitimate need and a desperate desire" to publicize the stories that otherwise wouldn't be told. Vail, like her feminist predecessors, turned to participatory media because it allowed her to skirt around mainstream publishing practices, a consumer culture industry, and even a counterculture that would have denied the validity of her voice—either by seeing her words as mere entertainment or, as with Dyer, not seeing her words at all.

Of course, grrrl zines are not identical to the scrapbooks, pamphlets, and other feminist participatory media of the past. As is the case with all participatory media, grrrl zines are affected by their cultural moment; they are created in the context of available technologies, and they make use of cultural ephemera. Thus grrrl zines are aesthetically and ideologically related to previous feminist publications, but also distinct, and the distinctiveness of grrrl zines helps to create and disseminate the distinctiveness of the third wave. Grrrl zines and the third wave work within and against the terrain of femininity, promulgate an aesthetic of visual contradiction, and articulate their own over-the-top rhetorics of anger and feeling.

In the rest of this chapter, I examine these distinctions by considering the emergence of *Action Girl Newsletter* and the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s as a more immediate origin for the grrrl zine explosion and the third wave of feminism. As I explain, the third wave came into being and was sent out into the world in large part through the early grrrl zines. To understand the zines and the third wave, then, it's important to keep in mind grrrl zines' historical predecessors. When we bring the stories of Riot Grrrls and Action Girl together with the larger origin story of feminist participatory media, what becomes visible is a more-sustained history of women's interventions and resistance. Without knowledge of the publications that were part of previous waves of feminism, the early 1990s moment looks like nothing that's ever come before, and the artifacts of Riot Grrrl and Action Girl may be hard to contextualize. We might be baffled, as the mainstream media was, at the emergence of the third wave, this "feminism with a loud happy face dotting the 'i'" or these "she-devils out of Rush Limbaugh's worst nightmare."⁴⁴ As part of a larger origin story, though, the Riot Grrrl zines and the *Action Girl Newsletter* are revealed as the newest incarnations of long-standing feminist publishing practices.

They—and the third wave they helped initiate—exhibit ties to the past and also offer useful revisions to make feminism more relevant for young women in the late-twentieth century.

Riot Grrrls, Action Girl, and the Third Wave

At the beginning of the 1990s, a confluence of events and trends created a perfect storm for young feminism. A brief glimpse at this cultural moment suggests the forces that combined to catalyze the third wave. In these years, the 1980s backlash against feminism, documented by Susan Faludi, was still gaining momentum, so much so that one feminist journalist could warn in 1992, "In the public world we are entering the darkest hour of the backlash."⁴⁵ High-profile rape trials such as those for William Kennedy Smith and Mike Tyson, along with the Tailhook scandal and the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill hearings, publicized the prevalence of violence against and sexual harassment of women—and the likelihood that such crimes would remain unpunished even when acknowledged. Popular films such as *Fatal Attraction* and television shows such as *thirtysomething* demonized women with careers as miserable, mentally unstable, and desperate for a man. During this time, Teen Talk Barbie began saying things like, "I love shopping" and "Math class is tough."

And yet this same period saw the growth of *Sassy* magazine, a publication for teen girls that assumed they were smart, politically savvy, and in need of real information about their bodies, their culture, and the latest in activism. In August 1991, Girl Night in Olympia—the opening event of the International Pop Underground Festival—marked the unofficial beginning of the Riot Grrrl movement. Rebecca Walker's 1992 *Ms.* magazine essay, "Becoming the Third Wave," demanded of young feminists, "Turn that outrage to political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they do not prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives" and proclaimed, "I am not a postfeminism feminist. I am the Third Wave."⁴⁶ The first issues of the *Action Girl Newsletter* were published. In addition, women's studies classes and programs were becoming institutionalized at many colleges and universities. By 1993, Dyer had been featured in *Seventeen* magazine, Riot Grrrl had been profiled by media agencies from the *New York Times* to *Newsweek*, and grrrl zines were an established phenomenon. Within a few years, edited collections were published which addressed third wave feminism.

The early 1990s was a moment of hope and frustration for girls and women. It was a moment that demonstrated feminism's unfinished business, a moment in which girls and women were "caught between the hope of a world that no longer degrades women and the reality of a culture that is still, nevertheless, degrading."⁴⁷ This combination of factors—a pervasive rhetoric of equality alongside clear evidence of persistent sexism, racism, and homophobia—helped catalyze the third wave but is in part responsible for the unevenness of third wave ideology. Girls and young women in the early 1990s were likely to find feminist concepts such as equal pay for equal work commonsensical, and they were often surprised when they found that these commonsensical notions were not actually in place in the real world. And when they did encounter sexism, racism, or homophobia, the culture to which they belonged—one in which large-scale social movements and collective action were no longer seen as viable, and the emphasis was on personal success within the marketplace—was unlikely to provide them with models of how to respond.

It was in these years that the proliferation of grrrl zines began, first from major cities on the coasts but soon from towns all across the country. The grrrl zine explosion was part of the feminist tradition of informal publishing, but not all grrrl zinesters were aware of this. For one thing, the backlash had so fully defined feminism that many of the grrrl zinesters had grave misunderstandings of earlier feminist generations. For instance, young feminists Jessica Rosenberg and Gitana Garofalo, in an article about Riot Grrrl in *Signs*, claim that Riot Grrrls are "much angrier" than second wave feminists, a claim that suggests that they are unaware of the fierce anger expressed in many second wave publications and activism.⁴⁸ Also Chelsea Starr, who has done outstanding research on the Riot Grrrl movement, offers several simplistic assessments of feminism, such as, "Radical feminism and heterosexual were two categories which have not mixed since the early 1970s."⁴⁹ At several points she and some of the zinesters she interviews imply that feminism is equivalent to lesbian separatism. Nomy Lamm, Riot Grrrl and producer of the popular and influential zine *I'm So Fucking Beautiful*, said, "I'd never had feminism presented to me in any way that was interesting at all"—she thought it was only about being a corporate officer.⁵⁰ Other grrrl zinesters simply weren't aware of previous generations of feminism. In an early issue of her zine *Jigsaw*, Tobi Vail reviews Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and presents it as a book she found in an attic and read with no sense of its historical significance. Since grrrl zinesters did not (and do not) necessarily

have a more accurate view of feminism than the mainstream culture itself, they sometimes saw themselves as pioneers, re-creating feminism, rather than carrying on a particular feminist legacy.⁵¹

In this case, as in others, it's difficult to pinpoint exactly how or why this social movement emerged in the early 1990s. Many young feminists did know about second wave feminism, either through encountering it in women's studies classes, through their own historical studies, or through family connections (as is the case with Rebecca Walker). Others did not. Yet the grrrl zinesters were carrying on a feminist legacy, as one observer puts it, "rewriting feminism in a youth vernacular."⁵² Their recognition of oppression, their commitment to voicing the inequities they observed in the hopes of challenging and changing them, and their attempts to document their own life experiences, experiences excluded from more-mainstream narratives, all fit within a feminist rubric. In these originating moments, two entities stand out: Riot Grrrl and the *Action Girl Newsletter*. They were instrumental in formulating a style, rhetoric, and iconography for grrrl zines, and these came to define third wave feminism, as well. The terminology of third wave feminism didn't come into the mainstream until the early 1990s, so Riot Grrrls didn't initially call themselves third wave feminists. Tobi Vail explains: "When we started there wasn't anything such as third wave, or any kind of feminism that would resemble one—it was solidly second wave. I don't know if that meant we invented it or what."⁵³ Her claim of invention isn't wrong: Riot Grrrl and *Action Girl* function as sites at which grrrl zines and third wave feminism emerged.

What follows is not a comprehensive history of the Riot Grrrl movement; this is a project other scholars have done ably.⁵⁴ Instead, I look closely at a few Riot Grrrl zines and the *Action Girl Newsletter* with attention to how they exhibit a distinctive style, rhetoric, and iconography. The look of these early zines, their playfulness within the terrain of femininity, their use of contradictory visual images, and their expressions of extreme rage and profanity would become characteristic of grrrl zines and the third wave. Riot Grrrl and *Action Girl* connected many of the core ideas of feminism with the trappings of their own cultural moment, and in so doing, they helped to create third wave feminism—a feminist generation with a family resemblance to previous incarnations but with its own distinctive approach. That approach was developed and deployed, at least in part, in grrrl zines. In later chapters, I explore the ideological significance of ideas explored in grrrl zines, but here I am concerned with the tools—the visual and verbal vocabularies that came to define grrrl zines and the third wave.



Image of Action Girl from *Action Girl Newsletter*, courtesy of Sarah Dyer.

Femininity was an iconographic terrain that these zines quickly began to mine. Since the second wave had destabilized some of the meaning of femininity, it was available to the next generation to start working with in a different way. It became mutable, not simply a hegemonic entity to be rejected but part of the cultural material to be considered. For late-twentieth-century feminists, femininity became a terrain of "rich and pliable symbolism."⁵⁵ The manipulation of this pliable symbolism, the celebration and reimagining of femininity, is apparent in any issue of the *Action Girl Newsletter*. *Action Girl Newsletter*, which Sarah Dyer created in 1992 as a way of bringing other grrrl zinesters together, became a popular and significant publication that helped define the iconography of the third wave. Dyer's cartoon character Action Girl, appearing in most issues of the zine, is identifiably feminine, with an outfit that resembles a drum majorette

with outer space boots. She's featured smiling, with shoulder-length hair and a headband. Although she is a superhero, she has no visible musculature. She seems sweetly youthful—even cute—an image of womanhood that second wave feminists might have rejected as representing all the feminine qualities from which they were trying to divest. Indeed, she doesn't seem ironic; she is as nonthreatening as a doll.

There is more to this image, however, than a simple celebration of mainstream femininity. Dyer gives more information about Action Girl in her "Action Girl Cut and Color Activity Page,"⁵⁶ in which she does, in fact, feature the character as a paper doll. She's drawn with an array of possible outfits around her, including "Action Girl Stays Home," "Action Girl Goes to Mom's," and "Action Girl Fights Evil!" Dyer annotates each element of each outfit, interpreting her character's presentation down to the level of minutia. Several things are apparent here: although the page is lighthearted and humorous, including commentary such as "Where's a comb??" beside Action Girl's hair, the annotations also politicize the character's clothing. For instance, in describing the clothing, Dyer offers implicit recommendations: "\$10 'sports bra'—comfortable, supportive, and *never* comes undone" and "Action boots! \$9 from thrift shop—go with all action outfits and outlast Docs." She advocates clothing for her superhero—and by extension for her female readers—that is comfortable and functional. Indeed, although Action Girl's short skirt might seem to be pandering to mainstream fashion, the caption beside the skirt notes, "Short full skirt means freedom of movement!"

The most striking part of the page, however, is the bottom right corner—the closing space, the punch line, which features an outfit titled, "Oh No!! Action Girl Was Drawn by a Guy!!" Rather than being simply an outfit, what Dyer draws here is an entire female body missing only its head. This figure has enormous breasts and cleavage, which are visible because she is wearing a kind of skimpy bathing suit, along with a cape and fishnet stockings. All the captions for this image are observant and critical. Dyer critiques the body itself ("Like anyone has this body. Do these guys ever have dates? Have they *seen* a woman's body?"), as well as the utility of the clothing for someone actually fighting crime ("Like you can do anything in this cape"), and the image is surrounded by smaller captions reading, "Save her now!!" and "Help!" While the rest of the outfits on the page include instructions on how to cut them out and what colors each part should be, the instructions for this icon read, "Cut out, then rip up over a trash can while laughing gleefully!!"



Action Girl Cut and Color Activity Page from *Action Girl* Newsletter, courtesy of Sarah Dyer.

Indeed, the gleeful laughter of destroying sexist iconography seems to characterize this part of the page.

While it would be easy to look at the initial image of Action Girl and see her—as second wave feminists might—as complicit with mainstream images of femininity, what Dyer shows through her Activity Page is that she has constructed this image in direct contrast to the more common images of female superheroes in comics drawn by men. Action Girl has been deliberately designed as a kind of real girl; in fact, much of the commentary on this page suggests that Action Girl might have some things in common with Dyer herself. Action Girl is not thoughtlessly complicit with patriarchal views of women; instead, she represents a deployment of strategic femininity. As such, she is establishing a typical third wave move:

the creative deployment of feminine iconography comes to be a central trope of third wave feminism.

Dyer's visual vocabulary is different from that in second wave publications, in large part because she uses rather than rejects feminine ideals. Where the 1970 *Sisters Stand* cover exhibits a kind of militant refusal of the trappings of femininity, the *Action Girl* Newsletter and many other grrrl zines after it embrace femininity as a political tool. In this way the "Action Girl Cut and Color Activity Page" enacts a strategy somewhat similar to those in suffragist scrapbooks, a strategy of reinforcing the author's appropriate femininity in order to legitimize her and make her political message both stealthier and more palatable.

This page also shows Dyer embracing the iconography of girl culture. By offering a page of paper dolls and outfits in a publication meant for teen girls and adult women, Dyer is drawing on a rich reservoir of girlhood imagery and using it in unexpected ways—in this case, to mobilize critique and activism. As discussed in chapter 3 in greater detail, many aspects of girlhood and girl culture are rejected by mainstream society, but grrrl zinesters often deliberately revive those things and redefine girlhood as a space of pleasure, social change, and activism. Dyer's appropriately named "Activity Page" repeats the term "Action Girl" ten times. This rhetorical emphasis, like that seen in other grrrl zines (such as the "Jigsaw Manifesto" discussed in the introduction), combines with the visual excess of the repeated bodies and multiple outfits on the page to suggest an embrace of girlish speech and aesthetic styles, as well as an attempt to overcome a particular societal silencing of girls. Action Girl's nonthreatening cuteness merges with Dyer's political message about action and her critique of other representations of womanhood to create a different set of rhetorical and visual tools for grrrl zinesters. Indeed, Action Girl paves the way for later grrrl zinesters like Yumi Lee to write, in a 2000 essay called "Reclaiming Cute," "I think of my girliness and 'cuteness' as having been redefined. It's an enlightened, empowered cute—it's me telling the world that I may giggle a lot but that *doesn't* mean that I won't kick your ass if needs be."⁵⁷ Cute, then, does not mean apolitical. It becomes a tool for political activism, another rhetorical move that becomes characteristic of the third wave.

Another common trope in the early grrrl zines is the juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous—or even contradictory—images and rhetorics. This happens particularly often within the terrain of femininity. For instance, this trope can be seen in a cartoon that began appearing in each issue of the

ACTION IS EVERYTHING! *Our society, even when it's trying to be "alternative" usually just promotes a consumerist mentality. Buying things isn't evil, but if that's all you do, your life is pretty pointless. Be an ACTION GIRL (or boy)! It's great to read / listen to / watch other people's creative output, but it's even cooler to do it yourself. Don't think you could play in a band? Try anyway! Or maybe think about putting on shows or starting a label. Don't have time/ energy to do a zine yourself? Contribute to someone else's zine. Not everyone is suited to doing projects on their own, but everyone has something to contribute. So do something with all that positive energy!*

♥, Sarah



by Sarah/Action Girl

Image from *Action Girl Newsletter*, courtesy of Sarah Dyer.

Action Girl Newsletter showing Hello Kitty wearing a Riot Grrrl dress and carrying a teddy bear with an anarchist symbol printed on its jumper.

The image accompanied the call to action that Dyer printed in each issue. The image and the call to action itself are deliberately friendly. Dyer writes, "Be an ACTION GIRL (or boy)! It's great to read/ listen to/ watch other people's creative output, but it's even cooler to do it yourself."⁵⁸ She urges her readers to "try anyway" even if they're wary, and she signs it with a heart before her name. This is an encouraging girlfriend letter alongside a Hello Kitty whose iconic rounded body hasn't been altered at all—she's still wearing her dress and a bow on her head. And yet the image is somewhat hard to read: Hello Kitty's face appears particularly

expressionless when put in this context, and her Riot Grrrl clothing and anarchist bear suggest that she has a political significance far different from her mainstream market meaning.

This image captures the odd juxtapositions that came to define a particular grrrl zine and third wave aesthetic, an aesthetic that some referred to as "kinderwhore" or "kitten with a whip."⁵⁹ This aesthetic differentiates the third wave from previous feminisms; as a colleague pointed out, no self-respecting second waver would do anything with Hello Kitty imagery other than reject it, and this sort of hyperfeminine imagery does not, to my knowledge, appear in any informal second wave publications. However, third wave feminists find many cultural artifacts associated with femininity to have changeable meanings, particularly when they're combined in surprising ways. I take this up more fully in chapter 3, but the point here is that the mashing together of femininity and "fuck you" is another aesthetic element that differentiates this generation of feminists.

This aesthetic became pervasive in third wave productions. It was evident in the bodily performativity of Riot Grrrls, who often brought together apparently incongruous elements on their own skin and made their bodies into billboards. For instance, Nomy Lamm was in a band playing at a public event, and she wore a dress that she described as "this horrible silky prom-dress thing [that] was way more revealing than anything I was okay with wearing at that time."⁶⁰ In order to challenge viewers' potential condemnation of her body, she wrote "No Fat Chicks" on her chest. Other Riot Grrrls wrote "Slut," "Rape," or "Property" on their bodies. In this way, they wrested control of the language from those who would use sexist terminology to degrade women. By writing these terms on their bodies in defiant black marker scrawl, Riot Grrrls appropriated these terms and altered their meaning. Just as Hello Kitty no longer represents a silent girlhood toy, words like "slut" no longer have the same power to condemn and silence girls and women. Joanne Gottlieb and Gayle Wald discuss this bodily performativity as a means of becoming visible, and they note that "this visibility counteracts the (feelings of) erasure and invisibility produced by persistent degradation in a sexist society."⁶¹ It was also a way of destabilizing gender standards and refusing the cultural mandate that girls' bodies be silent, viewable sex objects (and it was the single most-often-reported aspect of Riot Grrrls in the mainstream media). Riot Grrrls and grrrl zinesters often made the female body into a spectacle, but a different kind of spectacle than the one the dominant culture was comfortable with.

This willingness to take command of language and make it work differently is evident, as well, in Riot Grrrls' zines, and it becomes a familiar approach in grrrl zines and the third wave in general. For instance, many Riot Grrrl manifestos included the statement "BECAUSE i believe with my holeheartmindbody that girls constitute a revolutionary soul force that can, and will, change the world for real."⁶² The neologism "holeheartmindbody" is indicative of Riot Grrrls' creative reclaiming of language. When this part of the manifesto is reprinted in other zines, the spelling is sometimes "corrected" to "wholeheartmindbody," but I think the misspelling is intentional and significant, playing on the apparently contradictory terms *hole* and *whole*, making reference to the vagina and identifying the "hole" as part of what defines a woman's wholeness as much as her heart, mind, and body. Indeed, this reclaiming of sexist terms is not only something that differentiates the second and third waves but was one of the earliest obstacles between these two populations. As young feminists in the early 1990s began using words like *girl*, *cunt*, and *bitch* that older feminists had struggled to undermine and eradicate, many second wave feminists took this as evidence of the third wave's apathy or lack of political understanding rather than recognizing it as a legitimate political tactic. While second wave mimeographers and first wave scrapbookers had also challenged the sexist terminology of their times, Riot Grrrls' embrace of and use of highly charged terms was different.

Even when they were making use of ideas that were common throughout the generations of feminism—such as anger at a sexist society—Riot Grrrls and *Action Girl* did so with rhetorics that were distinctive and came to define the third wave. While young feminists Garofalo and Rosenberg mistakenly identified anger solely with Riot Grrrls, they were right to note that the ways in which anger was expressed within Riot Grrrl zines was distinctive and helped to differentiate Riot Grrrls from earlier waves of feminism. For instance, a zine called *Start a Fucking Riot* was produced by D.C. Riot Grrrls and, like many Riot Grrrl zines, it overflows with expressions of frustration. One chunk of text addresses the fact that within the punk scene, a certain kind of girl the author refers to as "bimbo girl foxy girl" uses her sexuality to find acceptance. She addresses this type of girl, suggesting that she might be hurt by this sort of behavior, and the boys who take advantage of this girl, saying, "boy you have no right to use girl like that." However, the real vitriol of the essay is directed at the larger society that trains men and women to blame the victims:

no one is excluded from perpetuating this shitfuckhell we poison ourselves with. no one is justified, "well, she let me," "well, he wants it," in their actions, their non-actions, for stopping this hellhellhellHELLhell shitfuckhell. and i cannot/will not/refuse to apologize for being judgmental. you see, i am suffocating. my air is swiftly being sucked away by the stifling amount of stereotypes.⁶³

What characterizes this anger is its excessive, dramatic quality. The swearing—typically a rhetoric reserved for men—represents an effort to articulate rage at an unfair social system. Even run of the mill profanity is not enough; she writes "hellhellhellHELLhell" and repeats "shitfuckhell" as an attempt to amplify the language to meet up with her feelings. Overt anger of this sort did not appear in scrapbooks or health pamphlets, in which the authors were attempting to validate their feminine appropriateness, and while profanity appeared in second wave pamphlets, it wasn't as common there—or as emphatic—as it is in grrrl zines.⁶⁴ Kearney argues that the Riot Grrrl movement brought together punk and second wave feminism to create a new entity that hadn't existed before, and in the rhetorics of anger, that connection to punk is particularly clear.

The rhetorical excess and flamboyance are evident, as well, in some of the exaggerated, over-the-top pronouncements that appeared in many zines, such as "The Splendiferous Oath of Riot Grrrlz Outer Space":

I riotously swear to rage in glorious anger against everything that even slightly pisses me off. I swear to be loud, vulgar, obnoxious, illogical, and emotional whenever I damn please. As an Outer Space Riot Grrrl I will dream of impossible utopias, make up wild political theories, laugh at people who oppose me, and as much as I can, be full of supreme confidence and hellacious egotism.⁶⁵

The Riot Grrrl "BECAUSE" manifestos are easier to interpret, offering a familiar format, apparent sincerity, and transparent claims. As I discussed earlier, they are firmly aligned with the manifestos of second wave feminist groups. The flamboyant pronouncements like the "Splendiferous Oath" are a bit slipperier. To be sure, the talk of impossible utopias and outer space might suggest that this is a fantasy and might cause a reader to question the serious intent of Riot Grrrl as a political and cultural movement. Yet I contend that these tell us much about the grrrl zine as a genre and about the emergence of the third wave. For the most part, second

wave feminists were more comfortable operating within a rhetoric of sincerity, while Riot Grrrls and third wave feminists were and are part of a cultural climate that is so relentlessly marketed to and so self-consciously savvy that they don't expect or offer straightforward points of view. Instead, these wild claims are mapping out a new terrain, challenging the terms of the conversation, using over-the-top language to counter staid, encrusted gender ideologies. To "rage in glorious anger against everything that even slightly pisses me off" and "to be loud, vulgar, obnoxious, illogical, and emotional whenever I damn please" are much more fun than being the well-behaved good girl or the "humorless feminist." These declarations are tapping into political indignation, as well as aesthetic pleasure. As a recent book about Riot Grrrl suggests, it may be more appropriate to see these statements as akin to love letters, dreams, and adventures rather than trying to understand them as rational pronouncements.⁶⁶

Riot Grrrl zines and the *Action Girl Newsletter*, then, were crucial publications that helped establish the tools with which other grrrl zinesters and third wave feminists addressed their culture. In the remaining chapters in this book, I revisit the rhetoric and aesthetics established by Riot Grrrls and *Action Girl* again and again, as these became familiar strategies, as well as jumping-off points, for future grrrl zine developments. The excessive expressions of emotion, the embrace of denigrating terminology, and the manipulation of feminine iconography are pervasive among grrrl zines and help make these publications both distinctive and effective.

At the same time, we must remember that beneath these distinctive approaches, Riot Grrrls and *Action Girl* were carrying on a feminist legacy. Although it's appealing in some ways for young feminists to configure Riot Grrrls and *Action Girl* as an entire reinvention of feminism, this is inaccurate. The Riot Grrrl movement and the *Action Girl Newsletter* were manifesting new kinds of feminism, even as they exhibited many of the traits of earlier generations. As with scrapbookers, health pamphleteers, and mimeographers, grrrl zinesters were using the tools at hand in order to say things that no one else in the culture was saying. The origin story I offer here—one that recognizes grrrl zines as emerging from the informal publications of first wave and second wave feminists—not only corrects the male bias of previous histories by showing some of the female and feminist predecessors of grrrl zines, but it also gives much-deserved credit to those earlier generations. First wave and second wave feminists' creative, expressive, and political work is often unrecognized and is rarely acknowledged for being as clever and transgressive as the work of third

wave feminists. By telling this origin story, I hope to correct some of this bias. Further, framing grrrl zines as part of this continuum of feminist participatory media means that the third wave also gets positioned as part of a continuum. Although it has its distinctive rhetorics and aesthetics—and, as discussed in upcoming chapters, ideological distinctiveness, as well—third wave feminism emerges from previous generations. Rather than being a rupture, grrrl zines and the third wave that emerged from them are framed in this volume as a development, a new stage in a feminist trajectory.