

## Ranting and Raving: Reviews of Zines and Books about Zines

### Book Reviews:

**Green, Karen, and Tristan Taormino, eds. *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Griffen, 1997.**

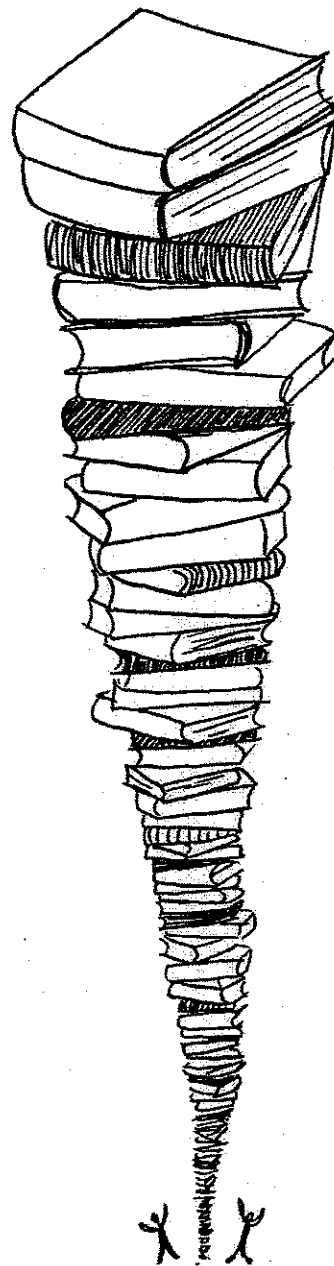
Green and Taormino's book, *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*, is an engaging compilation of published zine articles. The introduction, written by Green and Taormino, provides a brief history of zines, in which the importance of zines for girls is discussed. The writing in girl zines, Green and Taormino note, tackles significant issues for girls, including body image, sexuality and violence.

The book is divided thematically into the following seven sections:

1. *Slumber Party*: discussing friendship, secrets, and sex
2. *Mirror, Mirror*: focusing on body image and health
3. *The Parent Trap*: parents, siblings, family
4. *Dear Diary*: personal stories
5. *Fan Club*: music, stars, idols
6. *Princess Phone*: gossip, letters, technology
7. *Runaway Daughters and Rebel Girls*: politics, anger, power

The appropriate age range is for older teens (in the 16-19 age range), because the subject matter in some of the articles is for a mature reader. There are articles with graphic sex scenes, physical and sexual abuse, and foul language. The majority of the articles, however, end on a positive note and offer a sense of hope for girls.

The book provides the opportunity for teens to experience *reading for difference* - reading a story where they may not be able to relate to the subject matter or the stories being told. This is an important developmental aspect for teens: not all



experiences are universal, and this compilation showcases the many different experiences girls face. By reading something they are unfamiliar with, many teen girls will have the chance to learn more about themselves by evaluating their own experiences and opinions when it comes not only to their own lives, but to other peoples lives as well.

Other girls will be able to relate to the stories being told in *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World*, and knowing that other girls have similar feelings and experiences will show them that they are not alone. Furthermore, girls may feel inspired to tell their own stories and contribute not only to the girl zine revolution, but to their own empowerment as well.

*A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution* is a wonderful selection of zine writings that I think any mature teenage girl should read.

**Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. London: Verso, 1997.**

Published in 1997, *Notes from Underground* is widely recognized as the first book to extensively explore the full range of zine culture. In the first chapter Duncombe describes his personal journey with zines, from dismissive to awe-struck, as he attempts to wrap his head around defining zines. Although Duncombe never offers a concrete definition, he does an excellent job of conveying the enormous amount of creativity, diversity, and chaos that often surround zines. As difficult as zines are to define, the rest of Duncombe's book proves that defining zine culture is even harder.

Each of the chapters that follow relates to a different aspect of zine culture: *Identity, Community, Work, Consumption, Discovery, Purity and Danger*, and *The Politics of Alternative Culture*. In each chapter, Duncombe mixes the historical with the contemporary to offer insight into each chapter theme. Within *Identity*, Duncombe traces the popularity of "the loser" as an identity often adopted by zine creators and embraced by zine readers. When discussing politics and zines, Duncombe points to Thomas Paine's eighteenth-century pamphlet *Common Sense* and then links it to popular political movements of the 1960s in pages to follow.

Despite casual subheadings and the personal tone of the first chapter, Duncombe offers a very comprehensive, academic look at zines. Where Duncombe's book disappoints is in its layout and lack of historical, chronological order. Readers are likely to find references to one historical event in multiple chapters, with more information added each time. However, the book is full of great details and insights about different aspects of zine culture

throughout history. Patient readers and researchers will undoubtedly be rewarded with fantastic information.

This book is a good resource for anyone conducting scholarly research on zines and would be the perfect companion to university-level students writing essays on the subject. It is a worthy investment for any academic library.

**Robbins, Trina. *From Girls to Grrrlz: A History of ♀ Comics From Teens to Zines*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999.**

Traditionally, comic books have been written for and marketed to boys. In *From Girls to Grrrlz*, Trina Robbins sets the task of delineating the history of comics designed for female readership. Robbins begins her examination in the early 1940s, when the concept of "the teenager" as we have come to know it was beginning to enter into societal discourse. She divides her exploration into distinguishable genres with their accompanying dates: girls' comics (1941-1957), women's comics (1947-1977), womyn's comix (1970-1989), and grrrlz' comix (the 1990s). In each section, Robbins discusses the popular comics geared towards females, and also points out, particularly in the final two sections, any underground movements that were noteworthy.

Robbins' intent in this book is not to look solely at comics created by women, but more to take the reader on a historical romp through the under examined terrain of comics created for female readership. The book takes a fairly informal tone and has wonderful illustrations and excerpts from comics, which combine to make it a fun and informative read.

Although presenting an extensive overview of comics geared towards females, Robbins' abstains from providing both criticism and historical/cultural context in most cases. Her analysis tends to fall back on summary, and while this allows her to remain neutral, it tends to make the narrative somewhat repetitive. Her examination also lacks historical and cultural context. In the section on the 1990s, for example, she states that "[t]imes have changed" (114), but she does not elaborate, or explain how times have changed. This lack of context creates the sense that these comics exist in a bubble, although their content is very obviously influenced by their surroundings.

This chronicle is a good resource for anyone looking to gather a list of titles of comics intended for a female audience, but would not serve many other purposes. This book is a handy reference resource to have on hand, but by no means an essential work for most collections.

**Block, Francesca Lia and Hillary Carlip. *Zine Scene: the Do It Yourself Guide to Zine.* Girl Press, 1998.**

This book is an excellent resource for anyone looking to learn more about zines and how to make them. All topics are covered, from the construction of zines in different sizes and formats, as well as what various zines might be about and how to get ideas out of one's brain and onto paper.

The style of the book is designed to look like a handmade zine itself, with collage, clip-art, zany patterns and that grainy type of black and white only a photocopier can truly create. The book is meant to be visual, engaging, and inspiring to budding zine creators that might not know where to start. More than just advice, *Zine Scene* offers a huge array of examples from a multitude of zine creators who submitted their work for inclusion in the book. Various creators are given short profiles, with sample pages of their zines to share experiences and spark the creativity of the reader.

*Zine Scene* is a book truly suited to teens more than librarians, but it could be very beneficial in zine-related programming in the library. Whether it is used on-hand to help ideas flow, or is recommended to interested teens for further reading for the construction of their own zines, the book provides a solid framework for the conception and construction of zines, and would be incredibly useful in any collection.

**Kennedy, Pagan. *'Zine.* New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995.**

*'Zine* is one girl's story of her life as a zinester. Pagan Kennedy tells the story of her success as a zine writer, in a chronological account punctuated by the reprinted issues of her zine in every chapter. In 1988 through to 1994, during a huge surge in the underground DIY movement, Pagan describes how she made her life into an exciting story, and herself into a first-class character.

This book is not necessarily a "how-to" for making and publishing zines, but it's a really interesting account of one girl's involvement in the underground print culture. Kennedy was a very successful zine writer, whose zine was distributed to readers across the US. She received letters and "fan mail" from various states, and even describes getting letters requesting her permission to start Pagan Kennedy fan clubs!

It is quite interesting to read Kennedy's account of her life through the "zine years," peppered with reprints of the zines themselves. She describes the fallout of turning herself into a character: she began dressing and acting more flamboyantly and looking at her life from the outside in, rather than simply living.

Simultaneously, however, Pagan describes the way in which such an intense focus on art and expression encouraged levels of self exploration and discovery she might not have attempted or attained otherwise.

**Bartel, Julie. *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in Your Library*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2004**

Julie Bartel is the Teen Librarian for the Salt Lake City Public Library and is a self-proclaimed "zinester". Her book *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in Your Library* is a step-by-step guide for librarians on how to successfully incorporate alternative press publications like zines into a library collection. So at this point some of you may be saying to yourself, what's a zine? Well, have no fear, Julie Bartel is here! Bartel remains true to her clever title and covers everything from A to zine and everything in between, including a very handy couple of pages describing what a zine actually is, for all those "non-zinesters" out there.

The first part of the book is dedicated to providing historical background about the history of both zines themselves and zine culture. Bartel tackles some pertinent issues such as censorship and collection development that would be of great interest to librarians considering a zine collection in their library. Interspersed throughout the book are pictures of various zines and the zine collection at the Salt Lake City Public Library, which she presents as a model success story of how to incorporate zines in libraries.

Bartel's book is an invaluable resource, jam-packed with practical information about how to get started with collecting zines, how to display and house the collection, and tips about circulation. Bartel has been heavily involved in both outreach and programming for both teens and adults with zines and includes a very valuable section about how to incorporate zines into library programs and other services, in order to market the new collection and to spark interest within the community. A helpful appendix is included that provides information about zine libraries, zine fairs and conferences, recommended reading, selection aids and review sources, and a brief section about how to start your own zine, a trend that seems to be gaining momentum within the library community itself.

Julie Bartel's book is a must have for any librarian or library staff member considering adding zines to the library collection, or for anyone interested in learning more about zines or other alternative press publications. This book needs to be read and shared amongst librarians everywhere because, not only is it a great opportunity for professional development, but it is also an excellent read!

Zine Reviews:

**Means, Greig. *Zine Librarian Zine*. Volumes 1 and 2. Portland, 2002 and 2003.**

Greig Means, zine librarian at the Independent Publishing Resource Centre in Portland, OR, started this "zine about zine librarians, by zine librarians, for zine librarians... and the people who love them" to form a community of zine librarians. Zine librarians all over the world contributed articles, which are mainly about how to set up and manage a zine collection. There are also reviews of zines (including zines by librarians) and an international directory of zine libraries in both issues. *Zine Librarian Zine* provides useful and worthwhile information for librarians who are creating or maintaining zine collections or anyone who is interested in the topic of zines and libraries.

To order, send \$1 (for each issue) to Zine Librarian Zine, PO Box 12409, Portland, OR 97212, USA or order through Microcosm Distro at [www.microcosmpublishing.com](http://www.microcosmpublishing.com)

**Baltimore County Public Library. *Baltimore County Public Library Zine Collection*. Cockeysville, MD**

The *Baltimore County Public Library Zine Collection* zine goes through all of the steps involved in setting up a zine collection, from cataloguing to collection development. It was published to publicize the Baltimore County Public Library Zine Collection, share what the managers of that collection learned in the process of creating it, and encourage other libraries to start zine collections. The zine lists many helpful references that can be used in building a zine collection, and it also contains reviews of zines by librarians.

This zine does not provide any instructions for ordering a copy, but you could try e-mailing them at [bcplzines@gmail.com](mailto:bcplzines@gmail.com) or visiting their website: [www.bcpl.info/zines](http://www.bcpl.info/zines). On the website you can also download a PDF copy of the zine.

**The Zine Intern. *Cite this Zine! How to Cite a Zine in Your Research Project*. Barnard Zine Library, 2006**

*Cite this Zine!* was produced by a zine intern at Barnard College Zine Library. It is a small and short zine that provides instructions on how to cite zines using MLA, APA, and Chicago citation styles. The zine does not provide any instructions on how to obtain this zine, except that if you have questions you are to e-mail Jenna Freedman at [zines@barnard.edu](mailto:zines@barnard.edu). So, perhaps if you e-mail Freedman, you can

request a copy of this zine. It was helpful in putting together this issue of *YA Hotline*.

**hv, julia. *Coming to Voice: Zines, a Cut 'n' Paste Pedagogical Tool*. Arlington, 2005.**

Julia hv taught a zine-making workshop to a middle school class of English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and then produced *Coming to Voice* to document the experience. In the first half of the zine, Julia discusses the importance of engaging in critical pedagogy in schools to teach students to become democratic citizens capable of critical thought and analysis. Drawing heavily on bell hooks' writing, julia argues that zines are an important tool in this respect because they give voice to the silenced and marginalized, such as new immigrants, who often lack the language abilities to express and represent themselves in mainstream culture. The second half of *Coming to Voice* is the zine that was created by the ESL students in julia's class. The students decided together on the theme of "family" and each student produced one page of their own writing and artwork on the topic of family. *Coming to Voice* is a thought-provoking and analytical meditation on the meaning and importance of zines.

Requests for this zine can be sent to julie hv at [julia@riseup.net](mailto:julia@riseup.net) or 3000 N. Military Road, Arlington, VA 22207, USA.

**Shelley. *Chainbreaker*. Volume 4. New Orleans.**

Bicycles are a popular subject for zines, and there are zines out there on all topics related to cycling, from bicycle maintenance to travelogues of bicycle journeys. *Chainbreaker* is a zine by an avid cyclist in New Orleans that contains cycling stories from people all over the U.S. The zine has something for everyone, with topics that vary from a comic about being a female bike mechanic to an article about an audio documentary for the survivors of bicycle accidents to a political treatise on capitalism and racism in urban transportation planning. The quality of writing is high and it is not uncommon to come across beautiful, evocative passages such as this:

The end of the trail winds through all my old neighborhoods, back to where we started, from a different approach. Every break in the trail branches off into another era of my life; each crossing leading to old friends' houses and promises buried long ago. When I take one of these turns, I am almost always prodded by a surprise memory, as I inadvertently pass by the little bridge I once used as my meeting spot, or the beach of midnight swims (Gerlach 37).

*Chainbreaker* will inspire you to cycle everywhere, all the time, or at least make you think twice the next time you drive a car.

To order, send \$2 and stamps or a music or art trade to Shelley, 621 North Rendon, New Orleans, LA 70119 or order through Microcosm Distro at [www.microcosmpublishing.com](http://www.microcosmpublishing.com)

**Wreck, Alex. *Stolen Sharpie Revolution: A DIY Resource*. Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2003**

The second edition of this zine is built to last, as a little bound book made with good quality paper. It is about the creative exchange of ideas and skills, DIY ethics, and creative reuse in zine-making. Articles cover such topics as layout, bookbinding, distribution, and mail crafts. There is even an article on how to start a zine library by Grieg Means of *Zine Librarian Zine*. There is an extensive listing of zine distros and other zine resources at the back. *Stolen Sharpie Revolution* is a great resource for people who want to start a zine or another DIY print project, or are just looking for ideas and inspiration.

Order: Send \$4 plus postage to Alex Wreck, P.O. Box 14332, Portland, OR 97293, USA, [brainscanzine@ureach.com](mailto:brainscanzine@ureach.com) or order through Microcosm Distro at [www.microcosmpublishing.com](http://www.microcosmpublishing.com)

