

RIOT GRRRL ZINES: EXPLORING A FEMINIST MINDSET AND MOVEMENT IN THE '90S

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INTRO

The Riot Grrrl Movement began in Washington in the early 90s. The idea behind this movement was to carve out a space for women within the male-dominated punk scene. Zines became one way that Riot Grrrls were able to share their voices and provide their own validation. These zines were written primarily by white middle class teenage girls. They discuss music, sexism, love, and longing and were written by girls throughout the United States. These zines describe the longing for acceptance and the painful realities of growing up. Through research and zine analysis, this project explores the literary voice of the teenage girl and the ways in which the Riot Grrrl Movement celebrates what is most often critiqued.

METHODS + FINDINGS

The methods used to complete this project were library research, online research, purchasing and utilizing physical copies of zines for analysis as well as reading Riot Grrrl biographies and histories. Most of the Riot Grrrl zines exist in hard copies, and due to the COVID-10 pandemic, access to these materials were limited. Some zines were being sold by independent sellers through Etsy, but many exist in zine libraries or special collections.

The main focus of this capstone was to examine the history of the Riot Grrrl movement and the ways in which zines helped to spread knowledge and strengthen the feminist movement. As mentioned previously, these zines were written by teenage girls who detailed their life experiences and shared their insights. The Riot Grrrl movement is marked by the anger these young women felt. Whether it was because of sexism, family drama, school, or just growing up, they were not afraid to express anger and use it as a catalyst to inspire change. The zines that were read for this research project were refreshingly honest, raw, and did not shy away from difficult topics. They provide deep insights into the lives and minds of young women who wanted change. The teenagers who wrote these zines expressed their disapproval over their treatment and the ways in which they were depicted in society. Whether it was as naive, stupid, promiscuous, or boring, they refused to accept the standards and viewpoints placed upon them. Zines were their way of speaking out against these injustices and having a voice.

Although zines are not typically what one may consider literature, they are a serious form of written artwork that allows the reader to understand and appreciate the work of young women from the 90's. When we think of teenagers in literature, our mind tends to go to characters who do not know any better than to make mistakes, or we are frustrated by their arrogance. But the Riot Grrrls who wrote zines do not apologize for what we may consider to be character flaws. Instead, they embrace them and use them to relate to other teenagers. The research done to complete this project and the subsequent findings helped in validating and appreciating Riot Grrrl zines and the artistry and honesty that went into making them.

WHAT IS A ZINE?

Zine is short for "fanzine", which are small booklets that were made by those who were fans of punk bands as a way to celebrate and admire musicians. Aside from celebrating music, zines also explored feminism and different experiences that their authors had been through. Typically, these zines were completely handmade and used the DIY mindset of Riot Grrrl. Teens (called "zinesters") utilized magazine cutouts, pictures, and their own handwriting and drawings to craft zines. They typically used the cut and paste method to put them together and then made copies to sell or pass out to others. Teenage girls in multiple states made them, so they could also be sent through the mail. Others made zines that acted as a catalog for others' work or did zine reviews. Zines usually sold for about one dollar. These small, intimate booklets were a way for young women to connect with each other through shared experiences and build a strong community. Zines are still made today! Some use similar methods and others are more digitized.

CONTROVERSY

The controversy surrounding Riot Grrrl is due to the group's exclusivity and racist and transphobic actions and mindsets. The movement prioritized white, middle class young women and did not take into account the ways in which race also tied into feminism. According to young women of color who were interested in punk music, young white women who considered themselves Riot Grrrls excluded them just as much as men did. Another issue was the transphobia that came along with the movement. Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill, who was instrumental in the movement, participated in the Michigan Womyn's Festival, which only allowed biological women to participate and attend. The Riot Grrrl Movement claimed to be inclusive and wanted to empower women, but this was not the case. Instead, they uplifted young white biological women. This is not to say that the movement was not impactful, but it is important to recognize the ways in which it failed women of color and women who are transgender.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Riot Grrrl zines that were created shared intimate details with readers about the life of teenage girls and the anger that they felt towards society. The zines were a form of self expression and a way to connect with other girls who may have been feeling the same things. They wanted to be taken seriously and to have a sense of respect not only within the punk scene, but in society and their personal relationships as well. But Riot Grrrl was not without controversy and disappointment. The desire for change was marred by racist and transphobic beliefs and tied into the eventual falling out of Riot Grrrl. But completing this project has taught me that the end of Riot Grrrl does not mean that feminism has gone away, it has just changed, feminism will probably never be perfect, but that does not mean that it shouldn't exist. Zines are still being made, people are still angry at society, and feminism is just as important as it was in the 1990's. The goal of the Riot Grrrl's was to empower women and give them a voice, which is a task that I believe they did achieve.

SOURCES: https://docs.google.com/document/d/11WJToGtmnZPY8I1PcXQw_5yafYklyePvxZ9ISPd5fM/edit?usp=sharing

ZINE:

