Exchanging Life Narratives: The Politics and Poetics of Perzines

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EXCHANGING LIFE NARRATIVES: THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF DO-IT-YOURSELF PRACTICES

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My hope is that women can read my zine & say to themselves, “Hey, I can go out & change my life & live better & be happier. I don’t have to put up with this bullshit. I can fight back!” I’m not trying to start a revolution (yet). I guess I’m just trying to say, “This is where I came from & this is what I’m doing. You can do it too.”
—Ciara Xyerra, editor, A Renegade’s Guide to Love & Sabotage

Through the use of do-it-yourself (DIY) practices—the act of taking cultural production into one’s own hands, the early 1990s youth-oriented feminist movement known as Riot Grrrl constructed an ethical and political stance against male-dominance within North American punk culture primarily through the development of all-girl bands. Instrumental to the growth of this movement was the circulation of self-published magazines known as zines that provided a cheap and versatile method of communication among women involved in the movement. Used as an informal communication system among science-fiction fans in the 1950s, within British and U.S. punk cultures, zines not only relayed information among punks not covered by mainstream media, but also, though their makeshift appearance, conveyed an impression of “urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line” (Hedlige, 1979, p. 111). By adapting the punk zine as a “safe space” for women to raise awareness about gender issues, Riot Grrrls were able to mobilize women who were estranged from the production of punk culture. In discussing Riot Grrrl composing practices, Comstock (2001) notes that making and circulating zines fostered representational spaces for identity and community construction by embodying a multitude of social ills and pleasures at the site of the “traumatized girl body” (p. 387). In other words, what formerly had been a space for discussing myriad aspects of music production within punk culture became gendered spaces for both action and reflection.

As the opening epigraph to this chapter illustrates, DIY as a cultural practice contains multiple possibilities as an engaged form of literacy for young women involved in feminism. First, DIY practices have the ability to exchange feminist discourse through informal communication networks, a practice described by Garrison (2000) as “oppositional technologies,” a term she defined as “the political praxis of resistance being woven into tech, amateur, hybrid, alternative subcultural feminist networks that register below the mainstream” (p. 151). Second, they persuade others to join in the process of doing it yourself through the use of low-end technologies and skills. While

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1 The specific genre of zines that I analyze in this study are called “perzines.” As opposed to fanzines, music zines, and political zines, perzines express the thoughts and experience of individuals (Duncombe, p. 24). Although the perzines that I study are concerned with identity politics, many are not. Thus, as a group, the perzines in my study were chosen for their particular emphasis on aspects of identity politics that include gender, race, sexual orientation, class, disability, and nationality.


the exchange of narratives among Riot Grrrls illustrated the power of reading and writing practices to cohere young women around issues central to their day-to-day lives, just as significant was the occupation of both textual and material spaces that signaled a shift of women's subordinate position from observers of culture to that of producers. Whether making zines, music, arts and crafts, or t-shirts or participating in the distribution of these products, Riot Grrrls were engaged in a struggle over not only symbolic meaning but also the means of production and distribution. Furthermore, while the public face of Riot Grrrl movement quickly morphed into a consumerist aberration of its former underground self, the DIY movement generated among women continues to attract newcomers, expanding its scope of production to include an array of arts and crafts such as button, soap, clothing, candles, and alternative menstrual products.

In this chapter, I argue that DIY practitioners' participation in cultural production contains the possibility for rethinking the relationship between youth and subcultural activities as one in which numerous literacy practices engaged in a collective struggle over representation and distribution. While subcultural studies has always been invested in the politics of representation in everyday life, literacy studies has a tremendous amount to gain from viewing DIY as a collective literacy practice functioning outside of mainstream educational institutions. These practices have a number of ramifications for literacy studies, for feminism, and for composition studies. Foremost, when used as a collective and individual strategy of representation, DIY practices, especially exchanging zines, has the ability to disrupt dominant discourses through the use of visual and verbal forms of communication.

Furthermore, in light of current debates about the possibilities of electronic technologies for expanding our understanding of literacy, DIY practitioners display a complex use of high- and low-end technologies that reveal multivocalized subcultural forms of feminist knowledge making. These cultural forms include the low-tech construction of texts such as zines and other women-oriented crafts and also high-tech systems of distribution. Lastly, pertinent to literary scholars, education specialists, feminists, and writing practitioners, DIY practitioners traverse a number of discursive boundaries, being both public and private, visual and verbal, academic and popular, individual and collective, low and high tech, displaying through their cultural production, what Kress (2000) has defined as, "multimodal" learning, a process that involves selecting the means of representation and communication based on what media are made available within a particular culture (p. 194).

When viewed in this way, literacy can be defined as a rhetorical process (selecting and choosing available communication methods and forms), and one that is inherently political. Indeed, these practices have the ability to extend traditional definitions of literacy by taking into account how extra-textual activities of production and distribution are responses to living in an increasingly consumer-saturated, highly technological globalized world. A world, as anthropologist Appadurai (2001) attested, which is, "demonstrably creating increased inequalities within and across societies, spiraling processes of ecological degradation and crisis, and unviable relations between finance and manufacturing capitals, as well as between goods and the wealth required to purchase them." (p. 17)

Within the highly mediated world of media communication, global capital, and information flows, DIY practitioners rely on electronic and reproductive technologies with the intent of "making culture" for themselves. In this regard, one cannot discuss DIY practices without examining their material aspects, particularly how the use and availability of print and electronic technologies has facilitated the growth and development of subcultural literacies that have also, so to speak, gone public. In doing so, I argue for a broader understanding of youth-related literacies occurring outside the classroom that function not only at the level of the text, (its visual, verbal, and tactile qualities), but also take into account the political uses of production and distribution.

The concept of literacy as being not an "autonomous, object-free artifact of education and refinement but also a fundamentally subjective tool, made meaningful within systems of belief" was only expressed by Royster (2000) whose definition bolsters my argument that DIY practices are significant to literacy studies because they grant young women "the ability to gain access to information and to use this information variously to articulate lives and experiences and also to identify, think through, refine, and solve problems, sometimes complex problems, over time" (Royster, p. 45). In other words, the young women practicing DIY employ rhetorical and pedagogical strategies to produce collaboratively shared spaces that enable them to exchange life narratives and engage in a form of critical consumerism within the larger rubric of Third Wave feminism.3

POPULAR PEDAGOGIES: SITUATING DIY PRACTICES WITHIN "COMPOSITION'S EXTRACURRICULUM"

It becomes political whenever someone like me ever gets to speak, because for someone like me, not speaking is the norm..."

—Emi Koyama, gender queer activist and zine editor of Transformation and The Where Revolution

Concurrent with the cultural turn in the humanities has emerged an increased interest in researching literacy sites outside the classroom that may not conform to or be dictated by conventional understandings of what it means to be literate.4 As Danti (2003) claimed, the significance of these studies, what she called, "little narratives of literacy," is that they can offer vital insights into learning that quantitative or theoretical literacy accounts cannot. In particular she noted, ethnographic accounts of literacy reveal how power relations are deeply embedded in acts of reading and writing because they are marked by a tension between Foucauldian determinism and human agency, showing the power of institutions to control people controlling their literacy and the power of individuals and groups to act to act in concert with or in opposition to this power. (p. 7)

In fact, as Daniell suggested, literacy practices occur despite, and because of, tacit and overt constraints placed on certain populations to acquire formal education or to participate in civic activities. In *Literacy and Literacies: Texts, Power, and Identity*, literacy scholars Collis and Billet (2003) argued that coterminous with the 19th-century universalization of education and its promise of upward social mobility and personal growth was a marked predominance of the school as “a central institution through which the conditions of appropriate belonging were defined ...” (p. 87). Additionally, Daniell (2003) pointed out that literacy should not be defined as a neutral set of skills to acquire but as a discursive formation “always already embedded in particular social structures, instantiating the values of particular groups and cultures, which are themselves organized in response to power” (p. 13). Thus, it is not surprising that state-sanctioned policies of exclusion, segregation, and marginalization were countered by the development of informal spaces of learning organized around aspects of race, class, and gender.

Defining these collaborative literacy practices as “composition’s extracurriculum,” a term encompassing writing practices extending “beyond the academy to encompass the multiple contexts in which persons seek to improve their own writing” (1994, p. 80), Gere (1987, 1994, 1997) has mapped out a rich topography of historical and contemporary sites of informal learning in North America. In doing so, she eloquently argued that extracurricular literacy practices contained a mixture of motives fueled by personal desires, economic and social aspirations, and collective group interests (1994, p. 80). More than a history of auto-didactic practices, however, Gere’s research illustrated how literacy practices are indelibly tied to collaborative learning, thus lending credibility to the assumption among many composition scholars that the best way to become literate is “to join with others” (Gere, 1987, p. 123). Similar to Royster’s view of literacy as a socially engaged practice, Gere (1987) argued for an ideological definition, in which “literacy means joining a specific community through understanding the issues it considers important and developing the capacity to participate in conversations about those issues” (p. 120).

Gere’s emphasis on literacy as a situated practice, one that does not simply facilitate individual learning and success but is invested in a group identity that transcends and sometimes resists traditional educational motivations, has been central to expanding our understanding of the affective and social dimensions of textual production outside the academy. For example, in her analysis of literacy practices in African American churches, Moss (1994) confirmed Gere’s definition of literacy by analyzing “church events” such as church sermons. Through her analysis of three different churches, Moss claimed that the sermon has the ability “to create and maintain a sense of community. This feature sets this literacy event apart from the essay ... because of the sermon’s dependence on both participants—preacher and congregation—to be considered a successful text in the community” (p. 151). In Moss’s view, the dialogic interaction between preacher and congregation thus determines the outcome and the formation of the text, one that is in direct contrast to the monologic process often imposed in academic settings.

Although Moss (1994) rightfully concluded that privileging the essayist mode of literacy excludes validating home and community literacies, one factor both she and Gere overlooked is how the spaces of literacy inform different kinds of learning. Therefore, while maintaining that literacies are organized by social relations having affective and political dimensions, I also expand Moss and Gere’s purview by claiming that if we think of literacy as being more than the acquisition of a set of skills such as reading and writing, we need to articulate more clearly how other modes of communication contribute to the development of “composition’s extracurriculum” within particular locations. In this regard, redefining “composition’s extracurriculum” involves a discussion of how the spaces of literacy are determined by ideological and power relations.

For example, in his discussion of “hush harbors,” Nunley (2004) soundly argued for the need to include spatial analyses as a method for reading sites of pedagogy for subaltern groups. Reading spatiality for its rhetorical dimensions in literary texts and nonofficial sites of learning such as barber shops, front porches, fraternity and sorority houses, Nunley (2004) observed that “hush harbor spaces are sites where certain African American counter-narratives and narratives are acknowledged, privileged, and spoken and performed differently” (p. 229). Nunley’s research highlighted how collective sites of group identification among subaltern groups are indelibly linked to survival, maintenance, and growth, thus implicitly illustrating how literacy acquisition is materially linked to asymmetrical relations of power within the United States. By using the spatial as a category of analysis, Nunley is able to situate rhetorical practices as stemming from material and ideological conditions that influence certain kinds of literacy activities. Likewise, situating DIY as a literacy practice within composition’s extracurriculum must take into account not only the production of texts and artifacts, but also the uses of subcultural spaces that produce pedagogical effects through the attainment of cultural and (as I will show later in this chapter) even economic power among its members. Acknowledging the spatial aspects of literacy can complicate our understanding of popular and subcultural literacies, which often involve complex uses of high- and low-end technologies and varied forms of nontraditional literacy practices.

Most often associated with punk culture’s valorization of amateurism, the rallying cry of DIY, “if I can do it, so can you” engendered a subterranean communication network through its invitational nature. Acting as a powerful tool for predominantly young people to reject mass culture foisted upon them, DIY practices employed the use of low-end technologies to forge their own culture. As a response to the overly produced rock music of the 1970s, the ethos of amateurism led to a particular aesthetic, what Hebdige (1979) described as its “spectacular style,” positioning punk culture in opposition to the mainstream. This stance was conveyed not only aesthetically through punks’ politics of form—the trash in-your-face confrontational stance conveyed in its music, lyrics, and attire—but also through its DIY philosophy that signified “a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and ... the active creation of an alternative culture” (Duncombe, p. 117). Within this new social formation, punk utilized alternative spaces and low-end technologies to foster resistant practices such as the production of music and zines and the creation of a punk sartorial style.

As Duncombe (1997) noted, punk and hip-hop youth cultures signaled a resistance to the hegemonic culture industries of the baby-boomer generation that provided little oppositional or representational space for a new generation of youth (p. 120). Thus, these
emerging subcultures reformulated alternative culture by reconnecting to underground music, inhabiting public spaces, and occupying often defunct and abandoned commercial spaces for street parties and nightclubs. These semi-public places helped facilitate a generational fight over representational space that paralleled the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and formed the basis of popular youth cultures that continues today. In terms of spatial analysis, the Riot Grrrl movement gathered momentum through manipulating punk spaces that were both textual and material. For example, in “Paper Planes: Travelling the New Grrrl Geographies,” Leonard (1998) explained how Riot Grrrl’s textual appropriation of punk making was inherently political. By “writing themselves into the text, through relating personal experiences and concerns, riot grrrls expanded the discursive parameters of the punk subculture” (p. 107). Additionally, Riot Grrrl musicians radically altered the way punk music was conventionally delivered in clubs where young women who were normally sidelined as spectators took to the stage as performers. This positional change from consuming music to making music projected a different model of what it was to be a young woman in “the scene,” in addition to promoting a particular style of femininity more attractive than conventional feminist thought. Nguyen’s (2003) observation on her online journal Stans and boys illustrated this point: “...who listens to the edge when the punk-hair girl next to you might argue the same thing, but with a guitar and a fuzzie in hands?” Her comment reveals the powerful pedagogical effects that both noise and music making had on young women in the punk scene leading to a collective identity galvanized primarily around gender issues. In his introduction to Popular Literacy: Studies in Cultural Practices and Poetics, Trumbull (2001) has noted that these popular forms of literacy are focused on “making” rather than “consuming,” culture and that they are “modes of rhetorical action” that often have political ends (p. 5).

Interventions into predominantly White masculine space were not exclusive to Riot Grrrl feminism but had their roots in second wave feminism’s emergence within 1960s liberation movements. In Feminist Literacies: 1968–75, Flannery (2005) analyzed similar literacy practices, having a broad pedagogical focus among second-wave feminists. With the onset of affordable printing technologies and the need to get the message out, second-wave feminists published a wide variety of independently produced publications for political purposes. Through the production and distribution of print media, women “worked to educate themselves into feminism” (p. 14) with the intention of both sanitizing women to feminism and addressing concerns, issues, and divisions as the movement gathered momentum. Furthermore, Riot Grrrl’s insistence on gender-specific spaces and interests, “consciousness-raising” groups but to radical lesbian communities in college towns and cities across the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, many of whom created an infrastructure of alternative spaces that included women-only bookstores, drop-in centers, exhibitions, and performances. (Kearney, 1997, p. 218). Therefore, in understanding the multidimensional literacy activities that Riot Grrrl engaged in, it is important to see how gender-specific spaces created during the 1980s informed Riot Grrrl’s own subcultural literacy locations.

As a form of cultural politics, DIY is not exclusively the domain of punk subcultures. For example, many disenfranchised communities existing within multiple public spheres use DIY practices to reinvest technologies as a mode of survival and a creative response to oppression. In discussing his documentary Taxi-Vala about the use of CB radios to create a low-tech communications network for South Asian taxi drivers in New York to counter growing anti-Asian racism and violence, Bald claimed.

With limited resources and limited access, people have been using whatever technology they can get their hands on... and have been pushing it, stretching it, redefining it, and usually getting it to do much more than it was ever meant to do. (Nelson & Tu, 2001, p. 89)

Using available technologies to engage in collective resistance can be seen as a kind of critical technological literacy in which people seek to gain cultural power by manipulating technology to suit their political concerns. R. Ohmann has argued technology is itself a social process, saturated with the power relations around it, continually reshaped according to some people’s intentions (1985, p. 681). Not surprisingly, most studies involved in analyzing the relationship between technology and literacy focus on computer literacy rather than low end technologies that DIY practices most often use. Yet understanding how people manipulate available technologies for communicative purposes can lead us to more enriched and complicated studies of “composition’s extracurricular.”

DIY FEMINISM: SUSTAINING DIALOGUE AND RESISTANCE OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY

Zines serve a political function in their ability to suggest alternatives to educate, and to provide readers with the kind of information that is important to critical thinking.

—Celia Perez, I dreamed I was assertive #3

Despite the increase of studies of literacy practices outside formal education institutions and the enduring practice of DIY among young people since the 1970s, youth cultures have only recently been considered significant for research in women’s studies, rhetoric and composition, and literacy studies. As an early proponent of studying subcultural composing practices, Comstock (2001) argued that zine editors largely

1. For a more extended analysis of the material conditions that facilitated the emergence of punk and hip hop culture, see Hebdige (1979) and Rose (1994).

2. See Pough (2004) for a rhetorical study that addresses how hip hop culture is part of a continuum of resistant practices enacted by Black women who have historically made use of different kinds of public and counterpublic spaces in the United States as forms of resistance, solidarity, and representation. Also see Flannery (2005), a rich cultural history of second-wave feminist literacy practices, particularly focused on the development of alternative media and a university without walls that bolstered and facilitated the women’s liberation movement.


4. See Gottlieb and Wald (1994) for an excellent early analysis of how Riot Grrrl culture disrupted punk’s White masculinity through a series of interventions, bodies, and textual.


6. Interestingly, the poor Riot Grrrl subculture that I study has become less concerned with maintaining gender-specific spaces as many feminists attempt to become more inclusive of gender minorities such as transgender, transsexual, and intersex individuals.
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been ignored despite their ability to challenge “notions of feminism
rhetorically an adult political project” (p. 383). In part, this oversight
may be due to the ephemeral aspects of youth subcultures in which
writing and reading are often consumed in the moment or
archived for future reference.14 However, as some third-wave
scholars have noted, “in the division between the waves” may
contribute to the lack of attention within the academy given to activities
practices that appear to be “feminist light” or insignificant due to
a subcultural status.15 In understanding emerging literacy practices
among second wave feminists, Flannery (2005) noted a primary con-
ceptualization of feminism is to be continued as what counts as knowledge.

One must ask not only what was taught and learned, in what ways, by
whom, and under what circumstances, but also how knowledge was
conceptualized. (p. 19)

When applying this statement to zines and other popular and
subcultural feminist production, we can see how feminism has been
understood invisible not only by mainstream media, which periodically
claims feminism as “dead,” but also by institutionalized forms of
feminism such as national organizations and women’s studies pro-
grams, feminist journals, and conferences.16

Yet, in her groundbreaking article on subcultural feminism, Gar-
on (2000) pointed to new forms of feminist expression, some that
are registered above ground, emerging in response to the feminist
clash and the impact of communication technologies on everyday
life (p. 142). For third-wave scholars such as Garrison, feminist
knowledge is not solely produced in the academy or within feminist
situations but covers a range of DA activities including producing
everyday arts and crafts, and music, and organizing annual meetings
that determine a popular literature that defines feminism for a
younger generation.17 Specifically, I explore how DIY practitioners
use narrative, invitational discourse, and popular cultural forms to
facilitate a form of feminist pedagogy that holds “the potential for
building learning conditions leading to full and equitable social par-
ticipation” (The New London Group, 2000, p. 9).

The power of zines as a pedagogical tool within this subculture
lies in its focus on how the “everyday” is used for both action and
reflection. In discussing the importance of narrative, Clara Kyriss,
a co-founder of A Renegade’s Handbook to Love & Sabotage, explained
that “many zines seem to tell the story that gets lost in the shuffle of
everyday life, because a lot of zines are chronicling things that are
very ordinary & everyday, but that matter hugely to the people who
experience them.” (E-mail to Author [11/02/02]). Clara’s comment
suggests that a critical aspect of using narrative is its accessibility as
a communicative form for both readers and writers. Commenting
on the predominance of narrative as a third-wave feminist strategy,
Jacobs (2005) observed that personal narrative provides those
who may not have access to more established publishing institutions
with the ability “to document their lives and their histories” (p. 197).

Relying on their own experiences, zine editors are able to theo-
ratize a self deeply embedded in material and historical relations
with others. As noted by McLaughlin (1996), zines enact a “vernacular
cultural criticism,” a subcultural discourse that cannot be inherited
by academic theory. “Zine theory has the advantage of operating
within the culture it describes, with an intimacy and specificity not
possible for the academic observer . . .” (p. 62); simultaneously, zine
editors are able to use local resources in the academy to document “the
theoretical work that goes on in everyday life” (McLaughlin, p. 62).
The particular vantage point that zine editors occupy between popu-
lar and academic discourses allows zine editors to utilize popular
and academic discourse in a way that allows them to utilize popular
as a means of critique, self-reflection, and self-definition. As Celia
Perez, editor of the zine I dreamed i was asserting, said, “I write mostly
about that issues that affect my life and these are subjects like race,
poverty, injustice . . . my writing is influenced by my experiences and
supplemented by the things I read and . . . by the things I see” (E-mail
to The Author, 12/21/02). Many zine editors consciously incorporate
everyday experiences into their zines as a means of reflecting on how
their politics have come to be defined by their own subject positions.
For example, riding public transportation or grocery shopping
grants Celia the opportunity to reflect on class and race politics.

After describing the beauty of the produce at Whole Foods Market
where there are “no straying brown lettuce leaves dangling over the
edge. No squashed grapes underfoot . . .” Celia (2002) compared the
clientele to the Whole Foods workers:

I noticed that while most of the employees at the store were African-
American, Latino, or Asian, most of the shoppers were white. I started
thinking about how many of the store’s employees could even afford to
shop there. (p. 7)

Later in the essay, she described the stores where her family used
to shop in Miami—the bodegas and corner shops run mostly by
immigrants—comparing the disparity of those experiences to what
she has witnessed at a mega-grocery store like Whole Foods Market
where relations between customers and employees are extraneous. This
excerpt also illustrates how the use of “the popular,” what Trinbur

In recent years, a growing number of academic and community libraries
have begun zine collections, primarily at the insistence of feminist
and queer librarians. Some of these collections are located at the Sallie Bing-
ham Center at Duke University, Special Collections Library at San Diego
State University, and Barnard College. Also, community-based zine librar-
ies continue to spring up in many university towns and small cities. These
spaces often act as a space for alternative culture and feature DIY
workshops, the distribution of zines, and political/community meetings.

Debates concerning second- and third-wave feminism have generated numer-
of Social Philosophy 12.3 (1998), Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and
Society (1998), and NSWJA (National Women’s Studies Association Journal)
(2004) for ongoing debates that reveal a variety of positions implied by the term
third wave.”

In a recent interview with Kathleen Hanna and Gloria Steinem about
feminism, Steinem admitted to not covering the Riot Grrrl movement in
Ms. magazine because “older feminists don’t always recognize feminism
when it comes in a different form” (54).

I use the term “younger” as an age differential but a marker that defines
feminism differently from second-wave feminism. Often misrepresented as
a rejection of feminism by young women or as an over-reliance on individual
rather collective politics, third-wave feminism, as Garrison (2000) stated,
is not a term that must be viewed as an historical marker rather than a generational
one. While acknowledging its affinity with prior feminist movements, Gar-
son (2000) described third-wave feminism has been influenced by “post-
modern cultural conditions” that include “the media backlash, violence,
and other kinds of historical remanence, products and monsters” (p. 149).
(2001) defined as "the ways in which ordinary people make the act of consumption—whether of texts, entertainment, or public places—into productions of cultural meaning" (p. 129), functions as a form of pedagogy. In other words, for readers an event as commonplace as a trip to the grocery store becomes an opportunity to critique how racial and class politics are woven into everyday life.

Researching public forms of writing taken up by Hmong immigrants in Wisconsin, Duffy (2004) defined a "rhetorical conception of literacy" as one in which the development of literacy skills is highly contextual, one in which "rhetorics of public and civic life influence how people learn, use, and value the possibilities of written language" (p. 226). Since their development in the early 1990s as a tool of feminist resistance, zines have moved beyond the borders of the hardcore punk movement in terms of audience. Acting as both private and public testaments to the power of theorizing the everyday, zines have the capacity of "talking back" to dominant culture and among zine editors themselves. The political and emotional investments involved in producing this kind of cultural production facilitate a form of literacy that attempts to resist, if only symbolically, what Collins (2000) termed, the "matrix of domination", described as the "overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained" (p. 228). Many zine editors employ textual strategies that often begin by claiming one's identity markers as the epistemological basis in which to confront the world. Noemi Martinez, editor of Hermenea/Rezista, has described her desire to produce zines as being motivated by reading "other zines that did not entirely identify with my experience, didn't express the feelings of a chicana" (E-mail to Author 12/28/02). Often the motivation to make zines stems from a desire to be heard and represented not only within dominant culture but also within the subculture, and/or the feminist movement itself.

Questioning the inclusion of nondominant sexual, racial, and class identities is manifested through the production of collaborative texts that directly address exclusions, revealing that these subcultural sites are not utopian, conflict-free zones. In fact, in Race Riot 2, Nguyen stated in her intro that this compilation zine is geared toward disruption rather than harmony. "I don't want to make this comfortable, or comforting—this is supposed to fuck with you." Both in terms of pedagogical and political practices, compilation or comp zines such as Race Riot convey a range of experiences and critiques by subcultural members organized around specific identity markers or issues. Although limited in their distribution, these collaboratively produced and written texts reveal how hierarchies and power structures are reproduced even within progressive communities.

Interestingly, both Evolution of a Race Riot edited by Nguyen and How to Stage A Coup edited by Helen Luu assumed an interventionist position within subcultural feminism, acting in a similar fashion to Antaldua and Moraga's anthology (1981) This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color as a representational space for feminists of color. Reclaiming textual spaces by marginalized feminist identities disrupts the continuing representation that feminism is primarily for White, middle-class women. In addition, because of their handmade qualities, compilation zines, such as Nguyen and Luu's, contain richer possibilities for self-representation and collective practices in terms of design, editing, and layout of individual contributions. They insist on developing a collective voice, but rather than fusing identities through anonymous publications or collective editing as occurred in second-wave feminist publishing, the editors provide each contributor with the freedom to design her own contributor. In this way, comp zines display complex visual and verbal literacies that perform, so to speak, individual differences among the contributors. If, as Luke suggested, feminist pedagogy is understood "as reversing women's silences, and as conducive to generating non-competitive dialogue among women about their shared and different experiences," (1998, p. 18), then the exchange of personal narratives in zines can provide one non-competitive learning space that is capable, of generating awareness and respect for differences among women.

HIGH TECH/LOW TECH: CONSTRUCTING ETHICAL CONSUMER LITERACIES

Making shit yourself is a fucking radical concept. Crafting is a political act in that it can enable one to grasp out of a consumerist culture... It is as much about aesthetics as it is about DIY, about proving that art is for everybody, and not some highbrow entity inaccessible to "regular folk"...

—Lauren Martin, zine editor. Quants 15

Analyzing the flexibility and expansiveness of the Internet as a communicative medium, Castells (2001) argued that it "lays the foundation for self-directed networking as a tool for organization, collective action, and the construction of meaning" (p. 55). Through the creation of electronic networks, emancipatory movements can connect with like-minded others on a more globally conscious scale. In this context, subcultural feminisms are deeply imbued in global processes such as the redistribution of resources and capital, transitory flows of people, information, labor, and economies, the dominance of American military and cultural power, and the development of information technologies. In understanding contemporary feminism within a highly technologized world, Purvis (2004) observed that third-wave feminists use electronic technologies to foster "new spaces and methods for the dissemination of information and the implementation of feminist agendas, such as the maintenance of Web sites and the utilization of cyberspace for activism" (p. 105). While many DIY practitioners use electronic technologies for communicative and representational purposes, they also use these technologies for buying and selling zines, clothing, candles, soaps, alternative mensural products, and a wide variety of other women-related items. In the section, I analyze how DIY practitioners imbue low- and high-end technologies with an ethical bent by utilizing various technologies for different ends. Thus, for example, while print zines and other crafts continue to be individually produced, electronic technologies are used for distribution and communication. DIY practitioners nuanced approach to technology use may "fly in the face" of a pre-dominant myth—that electronic texts will eventually make printed culture anachronistic.

In Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention, Self defined "technological literacies" as "a complex act of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skill involved in operating linguistically within the context of electronic environments" (1999, p. 11). However, as Self has mentioned, how literacy is determined often depends on the effective uses of certain kinds of technology such as using the Internet to do research rather than communicating with a friend online (p. 12). Within the context of zine production and distribution, definitions of technological literacies must also encompass making decisions about what medium to use in distributing knowledge.
Thus, while many zine editors engage in traditional literacy practices, they also participate in tactile literacies similar to those genres studied in "Recasting the Culture of Ephemerality." Analyzing second and 18th-century commonplace books and scrapbooks created by ordinary people, he noted how these popular artifacts served as "repositories of identity construction" from "the material culture of the past" (p. 109). The innovative use of scraps and cutouts from discarded newspapers and magazines reveals how embracing popular discourses of everyday life contribute to literacy practices that now extend beyond functional skills to ones invested in personal, familial, and communal meaning.

Making zines also illustrates an ability to posh popular discourses, incorporating already made images and text in the construction of one's identity. For example, in her zine *Hermanas: Resis.* Noemí Martinez included her favorite Tejana recipes, popular Mexican iconography, and traditional *curanderas* remedies to formulate a cultural South Texas identity. This "cut-and-paste" tactile literacy cannot be reproduced in an electronic environment or do many zines alike are perceived electronic zines as the wave of the future. For example, Giara Xavier observed that, "There's just something more satisfying (to me) about having a zine to carry around with me, to read on the train or in the bathtub. Paper seems so much more intimate & personal." (E-mail to Author, 2/21/02.) Additionally, critical issues concerning accessibility and discourse in electronic modes of zine production. Celia Perez pointed to the fact that "Online zines... contradict what zines are all about in that as much as we'd like to believe that computers and the Internet are connecting people across the world, these things are really only accessible to those who have the means to use them" (E-mail to Author, 1/28/02.). Thus, when defining technological literacy within this DIY subculture, utilizing electronic modes of communication serotonin to less with ability and more to how technology can be invested in values emphasizing accessibility, economics, and print aesthetics.

However, more and more, what one does see growing rapidly within this subculture is electronic subcultural distribution sites known as "distras." These sites convey a dual function: they sell and distribute handmade goods produced and consumed by women, and they act as aggregating spaces for those who produce and consume these goods. As a method of distribution, distras do not necessarily support print catalogs that zine distributors have traditionally used to advertise and sell their zines, but they do provide faster and more convenient service as e-commerce sites do. Furthermore, distras also serve as meeting spaces for DIY practitioners, both experienced and inexperienced, to exchange information on message boards, write reviews, sign guest books, and access links to similar sites such as blogs, activist sites, and online journals. In this way, distras reclaim or de-colonize already colonized or commercialized sites on the Web as well as facilitate a more dynamic and immediate "entrepreneurial infrastructure within youth cultures" (McRobbie, p. 135).

Subsequently, the circulation of feminist commodities challenges not only how feminist discourse is disseminated through academic and popular venues, but also what forms feminist discourse can assume. For example, while feminist discourse is typically delivered through forms such as scholarly publications, lectures, films, conferences, or women's studies classes, within DIY subcultures, zines and other women-oriented merchandise communicate information on issues concerning women's health and well-being besides providing pleasure through the exchange of craft ideas, recipes, film, and book recommendations, etc. The distro itself, despite its virtual appearance, reclaims a more intimate relationship among distributors, producers, and consumers. And in many cases, these roles are interchangeable. Discussing this relationship in zines, Duncombe noted that, "Having readers become writers and writers become readers circumscribes a fundamental tenet of the logic of consumer culture: the division between producers and consumers" (p. 124).

In *Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power,* Nava argued for a critical consumerism intent on utilizing one's ability to choose what to buy. While her focus is mostly on organized boycotts and "selective buying," what she defined as "the buying of products which conform to certain criteria" (p. 59), an informal DIY economy also provides an alternative to buying mass-marketed goods by being "able to exercise control over production itself" (p. 59). Thus, for example, the rise of Internet distribution sites selling alternative menstrual products such as *Blood Sisters Project* and *Urban Armor Kicks* offer alternatives for many women dismayed by chemical substances such as sodium that are used to produce menstrual products in addition to the expense and waste of disposable items. Reusable and handmade items such as these communicate values of sustainability and foreground women's health as a primary issue of concern.

In this way, critical consumerism becomes another form of literacy that DIY practitioners engage in within this informal economy. Although women's roles as consumers in feminist studies have been, as Kearney (1998) noted, "over-privileged... as a form of political resistance" (p. 291), within this subculture, young women challenge the binary that equates adults as primarily producers and women/girls as consumers (p. 291). In choosing to make and buy individually produced goods, DIY practitioners are able "to exercise some control over the production itself, over what gets produced and the political conditions in which production takes place" (Nava, p. 59). While feminist discourse is communicated through print zines, the production of other products such as compilation tapes, patches, stickers, T-shirts, soap, alternative menstrual products, and vegan items also contribute to valuing women-made products that use ingredients or methods of production that are ethical, safe, and ecologically sound. Including these feminist approaches to consumerism as forms of literary extends Duffy's (2004) definition of rhetorical literacy to include not only written communication but other forms of discourse production that are critically geared toward attempting even at a microlevel to make our lives and the world better.

Additionally, while distras assume market practices of buying and distributing products, they are nevertheless run as a service rather than for profit. For example, Jenn of the now defunct *Greenshred di Sistos,* claimed on her mission page, "I started it because I am constantly inspired by the diy revolution, and... I wanted to help others too." Establishing a reputation of goodwill and good service within the community is important in gaining trust and support for one's efforts. While it is problematic that women's work historically has been devalued and that the female labor that goes into maintaining...
such sites can be viewed as voluntary labor, at the same time, maintaining control over the choice of products one sells can also be seen as a form of activism.

Sociologist Giddens (2000) has described the spatial, cultural, and economic processes of globalization as forming "a runaway world." By this he contended that regardless of our privilege or lack of, we are all vulnerable to risks and uncertainties never faced before (pp. 20–21). While this prognosis of the world's social, environmental, and economic milieu may appear dire, in fact, as Giddens recognized, globalization's unpredictability simultaneously offers possibilities for political and collective practice by reinvigorating global forms of communication and distribution with oppositional values and practices. Even more interesting, DIY practices of distribution and production of women-oriented crafts trouble the conventional methods in which feminist discourse is produced by invoking new forms of literacy that are socially and ethnically invested in the use of low- and high-end technologies and their relation to global and local economies.

**CONCLUSION**

"If multiculturalism and diversity are the future of the academy, then so is multiliteracy" (p. 177). — Beverly Moss

In order to recognize DIY practices as enacting various kinds of critical literacy, I look to Flannery's (2000) application of Foucault's concept of "subjugated knowledges" for a theoretical understanding of subcultural literacy practices. Through her consideration of the difficulties involved in institutionalizing nontraditional forms of knowledge, she suggested that we focus instead on recognizing their "multiplicity in its most radical form" (p. 213). In this respect, Flannery asserted that subjugated knowledges can reveal "a history of struggle" that can "provide tools for present use" (p. 211). As she explained it:

The subjugated knowledges are opposed to systematizations, opposed to the sort of discourse that would posit a picture of the whole, opposed to canon and to unitary theories of anything, in order to honor productivity, diversity, change. (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 84; paraphrased in Flannery, p. 212)

In other words, literacy activities occurring within DIY subcultures may not and should not be wholly transferable to a classroom or curriculum; however, their study can lead us to recognize and accept variegated forms of knowledge making, particularly those that "work to make possible greater autonomy and self-determination" (Flannery, 1990, p. 213).

Exchanging information about feminist issues through nontraditional forms such as commodities or objects facilitates new ways of thinking about literacy and its relation to the global economy. Within this subculture, zine editors and distributors view production and consumption as a resistant and critical act to global economic forces that have forged deep discrepancies between First and Third World, independent and dependent, and producer and consumer roles. In an attempt to circumvent contributing to these discrepancies, many DIY practitioners produce their own goods and services and in doing so they also challenge what it means to be a feminist through the complex uses of technology and popular forms of literacy.