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The *BUSTin'* and *Bitchin' Ethe* of Third-Wave Zines

Our article seeks to integrate alternative voices into traditional rhetorical study by turning to *Bitch* and *BUST*, two mainstream zines that serve as dynamic examples of young women's rhetoric in action. We believe these zines are shaping the present and future of women's rhetoric. Their most significant contribution to the understanding of women's rhetoric is located in the way they accommodate ethotic constructions that are at once contradictory and complementary. While these texts can seem abrasive and perhaps even outrageous, the ways in which the writers shape their *ethe* can teach rhetoricians and teachers of rhetoric and writing about the modes of argumentation practiced by this subculture of the current feminist movement, one which is firmly grounded in the larger public sphere.

In the last twenty years, the rhetorical canon has been disrupted by feminist scholars who have examined it through a gendered and feminist lens. Andrea Lunsford, Cheryl Glenn, Susan Jarratt, Kate Ronald, and Joy Ritchie, among others, have sharpened and refocused the gaze of rhetoric to fall on the rhetorical moves made by women who have been historically overlooked and deliberately silenced. In *Teaching Rhetorica: Theory, Pedagogy, Practice*, Ronald and Ritchie reflect on their compilation of *Available Means* and remark that they want their collection of women's rhetorics "to prompt scholars, teachers, and students to look to other rhetors who are more transgressive . . . [and] to stretch the heuristic

possibilities of rhetoric for constructing and deconstructing knowledge and power" (6). Thus, women's rhetorics become texts to be taught as well as texts that teach (Ronald and Ritchie 9). In *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, Glenn notes that her text "identifies women's bodies, explores their contributions to and participation within the rhetorical tradition, and writes them into an expanded, inclusive tradition" (2). As a result of this work in reclamation and revision, the rhetorical tradition has indeed expanded. Our students have heard *Rhetorica*, and we, along with them, have learned much about the art of rhetoric and rhetorical pedagogy.

At present we are at an important moment in the study of feminist rhetoric. Women have been established as rhetors and rhetorical theorists in their own right, challenging the status quo and using language to effect change; as a result, conceptions of what it means to persuade, to connect, to appeal, and to *do* rhetoric have been challenged as well. Like others before us, our work on third-wave feminist rhetoric is intended to integrate alternative voices into rhetorical study with the goal of transgressing the conventional rhetorical tradition and opening up new spaces that make meaning and create knowledge.

The zines *Bitch* and *BUST* offer such voices. In these alternative discourses, we witness the third wave's desire to forge a feminist movement that both absorbs and reconfigures the progress of its feminist "foremothers." Most remarkable is the overriding urge of third-wave writers to make feminism less serious and more light-hearted, warmer and more familiar, to make it "hot, sexy, and newly revolutionary" (Labaton and Martin xxiv). In some circles, these zines might be dismissed as inaccurate or distorted purveyors of feminist ideology because of their marked "hipness," their efforts to attract a non-academic audience, and their stated mission to critique popular culture. Their discourse might even be considered a "crime of writing" in its "impropriety," a charge traditionally leveled at "women's practices of reading and writing" that "[pose] such serious threats to the rhetorical status quo" (Lunsford and Ede 17). As dynamic examples of young women's rhetoric in action, *Bitch* and *BUST* are shaping the present and future of women's rhetoric.

Over the five years we studied these publications, we came to see them as provocative sites where third-wave feminist voices collide to create new ways of thinking about rhetorical theory. In her examination of zines as a "nonacademic third-space," Adela C. Licona claims that "[b]y challenging, re-imagining, and replacing exclusionary and oppressive discursive practices, zines perform new representations of subjectivity" (109). We believe these zines' most significant

contribution to the understanding of women's rhetoric is located in the way they accommodate ethotic constructions that are at once contradictory and complementary. In effect, the zines develop several different types of *ethos*, or *ethe*,¹ which not only define them as feminist rhetorical texts but also define readers as either participants or outsiders to this newer manifestation of feminism. While these texts can be off-putting and perhaps even shocking at times, these ethotic constructions can teach rhetoricians and teachers of rhetoric and writing about the modes of argumentation practiced by this subculture of the current feminist movement.

Like Nedra Reynolds, we consider *ethos* to be a salient feature of rhetorical persuasion and, in turn, regard it as the means most noteworthy of addressing in our study because *ethos* "encompasses the individual agent as well as the location or position from which that person speaks or writes" and because it can "open up more spaces in which to study writers' subject positions or identity formations, especially to examine how writers establish authority and enact responsibility from positions not traditionally considered authoritative" ("*Ethos*" 326). Johanna Schmertz has identified *ethos* as a "natural place from which to begin feminist inquiries into rhetoric" because "it raises questions of authority and agency from the outset" (82). Schmertz further argues that the *ethos* of postmodern feminism and feminists may be "read in such a way as to multiply the positions from which women may speak" (83), concluding that "contemporary feminist subject position theories can refigure ethos as an ever shifting point of intersection" (89). In the case of *Bitch* and *BUST*, the writers—nearly all of them women—write about issues important to other women within a genre that, while accessible, has been given little exposure or credence within academia and the larger public sphere. Thus, while the zines' voices are contemporary, they remain virtually absent from academic discussions about feminist rhetoric. Rather than arguing for the right to speak as their feminist predecessors were often forced to do, *Bitch* and *BUST* writers benefit from a history of women who were persecuted for their resistance and interruptions. Third-wave feminists grew up with women writers listed in the table of contents of their literature anthologies. Third-wave women do not wander the library, as Virginia Woolf did less than ninety years ago, searching for Shakespeare's sister. Indeed, third-wave women can look to Supreme Court justices, presidential candidates, and scientists for role models. In other words, these cultural markers greatly affect the subject positions from which these women write.

The Zine as a Rhetorical Site

Because the ideology informing third-wave feminism remains elusive, the answer to understanding the rhetorical aims of these zines may lie in an informed study of how they use *ethos* to connect with their readership. In his *On Rhetoric*—in both Book I (Ch. 9) and Book III (Ch. 14)—Aristotle (citing Socrates) famously explains, “it is not difficult to praise the Athenians in Athens” (83). Centuries later in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke argues, “When you are with Athenians, it’s easy to persuade Athenians, but not when you are with Lacedaemonians” (55). Both Burke and Aristotle stress this point: If rhetors want an audience to respond appropriately to their argument, they must first know whom they are addressing. The rhetor’s objective, then, is to compel an audience to unite with the rhetorical aim at hand. As Burke explains, unification can be reached if listeners trust the speaker by identifying with two elements: the sentiments expressed in an argument and the rhetorical form with which they are expressed. Burke extends Aristotle’s thesis through his description of the rhetorical trope he terms “consubstantiality,” which he defines as a deliberate appeal to identification (20). Consubstantiality succeeds as a means of persuasion if the rhetor crafts an argument in response to an audience’s ideological leanings, its emotional state of mind, and the likelihood of moving it from one standpoint to another. By tailoring the content and structure to suit an audience’s expectations, a rhetor can work collaboratively with the audience to shape an *ethos* appropriate for the rhetorical situation. The question of audience and the writer’s ability to project an *ethos* with which readers identify is essential in understanding the rhetorical turns made by *Bitch* and *BUST* writers; audience consideration and the quest for consubstantiality becomes especially significant considering that “[o]ne of the grounds for dismissing women’s writing has traditionally been that it ignores audience” (Ronald and Ritchie 8). Neither zine ignores its audience; rather, both appear to *assume* a consubstantial relationship with their readers, as they do not so much argue for an ideology as embody it.

Aristotle, when discussing *ethos* in Book II of the *Rhetoric*, explains the need for the speaker “to construct a view of himself as a certain kind of person” (120). Marshall W. Alcorn Jr. elaborates by suggesting that “Although our understanding of *ethos* has changed over the years, one feature remains constant: thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Kenneth Burke agree that often it is not a person’s *ideas* but a person’s *character* that changes people” (3; emphasis in original). Thus, *ethos* is more expansive than some writing textbooks

may suggest when defining it as the ability to “create goodwill” or “establish credibility.” *Ethos* is about character—character created, character perceived, and character identified. And it is the characters of these zines and how they reflect the ideology of the readers that captures the imagination.

These third-wave publications foster a sort of “in the know” attitude, addressing an audience they rightly assume is “up” on the latest of the latest. Moreover, *Bitch* and *BUST* assume their readers have a working knowledge of traditional feminist principles and share common concerns, such as reproductive rights, equal pay, and equal access. Yet the zines also make concerted efforts to account for multiplicity, or the relationships among race, class, gender, sexuality, and global cultures, and seek to teach readers to see the world through a similar lens. Consubstantiality, then, is critical: the zines have already identified their audiences’ political and ideological leanings, their tendencies and preferences, and they shape appropriate *ethe* to match. This assumption—this expectation that the audience always already agrees—alters the rhetorical situation at hand such that the *ethe* these zines construct do not *have to* speak to readers who disagree because it’s assumed that those readers won’t be reading anyway.

As readers, we easily formed a consubstantial relationship with *Bitch*, in part because one aspect of its constructed *ethos* is akin to academic writing. The zine regularly prints well-researched arguments (complete with citations) that cite well-known feminist writers and scholars as support. In addition, we admire the writers’ impatient, pushy, and humorous approach in critiquing patriarchy as it manifests in popular texts such as film, television, and advertising. In meshing irreverence and academic argumentation, *Bitch* also maintains an activist *ethos* that appeals to feminists like us who have second-wave training and who believe that feminist theory must have real-world application and relevancy. Where consubstantiality and its presumption of identification falters, however, is that not all readers share in the same educational background and the resulting academic approach to pop culture. Some of our students, for instance, have balked at *Bitch* because the articles take too long to read, a sentiment with which we grudgingly agree; a sustained effort is required to get through an entire issue, which could be unattractive to reluctant readers.

On the other hand, *BUST* practices identification by walking a line between a hip feminist *ethos* and a post-feminist desire to praise “girl power” without offering rigorous social critique. In Burkean terms, the writers of *BUST* are not speaking to the Lacedaemonians; rather, they are speaking to a new kind of Athenian. Students remark that *BUST* seems “familiar,” perhaps because,

aesthetically, it looks like any other women's glossy magazine. *BUST* readers are likely to establish a consubstantial relationship with it simply because the form itself is seductive. The differences between this zine and mainstream magazines for young women only become clear upon reading the articles. In other words, once readers grasp the "trend of the form"—or "yield" to *BUST*'s familiar tone, structure, and overall style—they become more likely to identify with the subject matter, regardless of the actual sentiments expressed (Burke 58).

Like most zines today, *Bitch* and *BUST* are independent entities, published by small groups who "consider what they do as an alternative to and strike against commercial culture and consumer capitalism" (Duncombe 3). Although both *Bitch* and *BUST* focus their gaze on popular culture, they also strive to be more politically progressive than other newsstand staples such as *Cosmo Teen* and *Teen Vogue*. The zines' contributors make the mainstream central to their publications by simultaneously indulging in pop culture and distrusting the consumer-driven nature of it. Their third-wave audience could be characterized as a sort of "alternative public sphere," a readership that is invested in popular feminism and culture, one already consubstantial with feminist issues and the inevitable frustration that comes with living out feminist principles (Comstock 394). *Bitch* (which has been "formulating replies to the sexist and narrow-minded media diet that we all—intentionally or not—consume" since 1996; "About *Bitch*") and *BUST* ("*BUST*ing stereotypes about women" since 1993; "About *BUST*") certainly embody the alternative nature of zines in their rhetoric and their addressed audience. Both zines have been published for well over a decade. *Bitch* prints approximately 47,000 copies per run and estimates that, with the sharing of issues, it has more than 150,000 readers ("Advertise"). *BUST* prints approximately 93,500 copies per issue and estimates, with sharing, a readership of 467,500 ("Circulation"). Furthermore, unlike other zines that are made available only to "in-the-know" audiences with limited distribution in independent record stores, bookstores, and other urban sites, these zines can be purchased at major chain bookstores such as Barnes and Noble, making them accessible to a wider reading public. Both provide researchers with adequate material for investigation, while many smaller, independent zines often fall out of distribution after a few issues as the authors' or the readership's interests wane.

In arranging this article, we chose to devote separate sections to the two zines because we have found that while they both address third-wave feminists, they each construct different and multiple *ethe* that embody different qualities of the third wave. Thus, our decision to examine the *ethe* of these zines allows

us to uncover how feminists today are revising and reshaping this classical concept and allows us an opportunity to understand the rhetorical choices of third-wave readers and writers as evidenced in the zines. We should also confess that we find the “rhetorical environment” (Schmertz 89) created by these zines incredibly seductive and know that some of their tone, surliness, and overall commitment to accessibility could be located in our own writing. In writing about these zines and adopting their *ethos* at times, we, in a sense, intend to intervene and disrupt the conventions of academic discourse.

BUSTing Out

On first glance, *BUST* does not appear wildly different from mainstream women’s fashion magazines. Each issue features a celebrity such as Parker Posey, Amy Sedaris, or Gloria Steinem. *BUST* also incorporates familiar elements such as fashion and beauty tips and advice columns; however, the zine generally spins them to fit its own aesthetic and the expectations of a traditional, mainstream audience who might be “drawn to the form” of conventional women’s magazines (Burke 58). Thus, *BUST* projects a variety of *ethotic* constructions that converge to create a picture of third-wave feminism in action.

The Sassy Sexy Ethos

Bust projects playful sexuality as both a rhetorical device and a general attitude. For instance, the regularly featured advice columns subvert the expectations of a women’s magazine reader by interrupting the conventions of the genre. For instance, in 2005, in the recurring column titled “Ask Aunt Betty,” *BUST* printed a letter from a seventeen-year-old reader who didn’t “know how to masturbate effectively” (Dodson 102)—an issue unlikely to be discussed in other young women’s magazines. Another reader in the August/September 2006 issue, who self-identifies as bisexual, asks Aunt Betty how she can help her new girlfriend become comfortable with oral sex. Betty suggests the “Genital Show and Tell ritual,” wherein the two women look at each other’s bodies in a “freestanding mirror and a good light” (106). In the world of *BUST*, women’s concerns about their bodies and their sexuality actually count, as it sees women as sexual agents rather than as mere objects of men’s desires. Other regular features include a column called “Sex Files,” which explores topics such as a woman’s g-spot (Rems, “Splash” 101) and vibrators (Huffsman-Roth 107; Rems, “Boy” 101), and a column called “One-Handed Read” that features erotic fiction intended to encourage masturbation. Rather than dispense the kind of “wisdom” that

often clutters the covers of its competing publications, *BUST*'s advice columns reflect rather than reshape the concerns of young women.

Indeed, blunt discussions of sex weave throughout the zine. For instance, in one short blurb, *BUST* critiques a new advertising campaign sponsored by the American Medical Association (AMA) that addresses drinking by underage girls. The AMA print ad implies that drinking can lead to STDs—a connection begging for analysis. In responding to the ad, Tracie Egan argues that,

[T]he last time I checked, STDs are contracted from sucking on people, not bottles . . . Hell, isn't hooking up one of the more fun benefits of getting drunk, not a scary consequence? . . . If the AMA really wants to warn girls of the hazards of drunk fucking, the poster should have an unattractive guy on it—a really *fugly* one—because waking up next to that is a risk girls might actually consider avoiding. (10; emphasis in original)

Clearly, Egan is arguing for a woman's agency: her right to drink and have sex, if that's what she wants. What appears to be missing, however, is an adherence to *BUST*'s credo to "[tell] the truth about women's lives" ("About *BUST*"). For the truth in question is difficult to locate. The *ethos* being constructed here is audacious sexuality, a boldness that playfully mocks the material concern about sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, there is the suggestion that young women value the physical appearance of a guy more than their health. It seems worth asking whether this rhetoric undermines the work of feminists who fight for a woman's right to control her own sexuality and reproductive health. The casual and hedonistic approach to sexuality, coupled with what we know about STDs and date rape, presents us, as educators, with a dilemma. The interruption of mainstream discourses on women's sexuality is significant and encouraging, yet this sassy and sexy *ethos* is not necessarily smart.

Ethos of One

Catherine Orr observes that postfeminism (a term often used erroneously alongside third wave) "assumes that the [second-wave] women's movement took care of oppressive institutions, and that it is now up to individual women to make personal choices that simply reinforce those fundamental societal changes" (34). This observation manifests in *BUST*'s articles, which continually return to the idea of personal choice. We find that the *BUST ethos* consistently focuses on the individual rather than the collective experiences of women. For example, in her letter to the editor in the Summer 2001 issue, one reader writes, "Currently, I have a boyfriend who I love to cook for, and who loves to cook for

me. Bottom line is, cooking or cleaning is not oppressive per se, but people can be" (6). The author's intent here is to counter the experiences of one *BUST* writer who explored the historically oppressive nature of "women's work" such as cooking and cleaning—tasks this reader did not find oppressive because she had different experience than those depicted in the *BUST* article. This reader admits to leaving a relationship where she cooked for a boyfriend who would not help her with the clean-up and explains that her mother did most of the cooking for the family (including the reader's father, a professional chef), and she does not regard cooking in the home to be gendered. Her experiences have taught her that women simply need to cook for men who don't make them feel oppressed: "Do what makes you happy!" (6). This reader fails to acknowledge the social conventions and oppressive institutions that compel women to cook for a household in the first place. Rather, she insists that women oppress themselves. In other words, if women make the right decisions in life—or if they cook and clean for personally liberating reasons—gender oppression dissipates.

Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake have also identified a predilection for the individual in other third-wave feminist rhetoric. They argue that two prominent feminist anthologies—Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* and Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*—"present the reading public with a version of third-wave feminism that relies, for the most part, on personal anecdote for their definitional and argumentative strategies" (2). We locate this same reliance in many columns and readers' letters in *BUST*. Furthermore, Heywood and Drake explain, the "writing rarely provides consistent analysis of the larger culture that has helped shape and produce those experiences" (2). Third-wave women find themselves looking for agency in structures—e.g., media, the fashion industry—which have no vested interest in giving it to them. *BUST* revels in contradiction, the most fascinating being the writers' struggle to craft identities that are always already both socially *and* individually constructed.

Socially Active Ethos

The regular one-page feature titled "News From a Broad" by Janice "La Girl-bomb" Erlbaum attempts to investigate women's status in the United States and abroad. The Summer 2001 issue of the zine features a brief article about women living under the Taliban—an impressive bout of pre-September 11 political awareness. However, the article depicts not real Afghan women living under the Taliban, but a cartoon image of an Afghan woman wearing a full burqa. The woman is surrounded by taglines such as, "The Burqa is a fashion

must,” and, “Don’t use cosmetics or paint your nails—you might lose a finger” (14). It’s unclear what kind of reaction this combination of social critique and humor is meant to elicit. Furthermore, it’s nearly impossible to imagine young women looking at the cartoon and feeling motivated to join feminist and civil rights activists in their struggle to empower women in Afghanistan.

The same approach is echoed in the Summer 2003 issue when “News From a Broad” examines “Women’s Rights (and Wrongs) in the Gulf” by providing some basic background on women’s social roles in Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. For each, Erlbaum briefly discusses women’s historical roles, and concludes by addressing whether each country is a “U.S. Friend.” To make such a determination of Iraq, she explains, “Are you serious? Honey, we *own* them” (16; emphasis in original). Of Iran, she writes, “Bush named Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, as one of three ‘axis of evil countries.’ Let’s take some of them extra bombs we got over there already and liberate the shit out of ‘em” (16). While our impulse is to give the zine credit for addressing women’s rights in the Middle East at all, we question whether there is even a message with which to identify. We doubt that the article will achieve consubstantiality because readers aren’t given the tools needed to think outside their own Westernized understanding of the world and act globally.

The Ethos of Chic Domesticity

Like most magazines targeting young women, every issue of *BUST* includes a fashion spread, complete with information on the brands of clothing the models wear, how much they cost, and where to buy them. Most of the featured outfits (*short* shorts and skirts, bikinis) tend to favor certain body types, as indicated by the size of the models. While the zine makes a concerted effort to feature models from various ethnic backgrounds, it still conforms to conventional beauty standards, particularly with regards to thinness. When larger models are featured (i.e., women whose body types are most reflected in society), their bodies are either covered in free-flowing dresses or they are photographed from the waist up. *BUST* appears to mimic rather than interrogate the “beauty myth” that the media continually propagates and which young women habitually sort through.

In summer 2006, when *BUST*’s and *Bitch*’s fashion issues sat side-by-side on newsstands, *BUST*’s approach seemed fairly conventional. A headline on the cover read, “Be a Feminist or Just Dress Like One.” The accompanying fashion spread features models dressed to resemble “fashionable feminists” such as Camille Paglia, Angela Davis, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whose outfits

range in price from \$174 to \$946. While readers are told where to purchase the clothing, they are not told *who* the feminists are or what they did to earn public recognition. In other words, the zine's focus is on consumerism, not the history of activism.

On the other hand, crafty readers who can't afford the clothes featured in the fashion spreads can always make their own. *BUST* regularly devotes a front section to "Real Life: Crafts, Cooking, Home, Health," a column that teaches domestic skills, such as how to turn a "moronic" Hawaiian shirt into "an ironic skirt" (Krohnert 21). *BUST* readers can also learn how to nurture houseplants, make raw-milk yogurt, and assemble a first aid kit, as well as how to bake everything from a whole chicken to desserts. The "Real Life" features, for the most part, support a traditional view of woman as seamstress, cook, homemaker, and gardener, personas that echo the observation made by Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards in *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* that third-wave women attempt to reclaim "formerly disparaged girl things" such as art projects, sewing, the color pink, home design, and cooking (80) as a way to celebrate being a girl, albeit a do-it-yourself girl with both a cordless drill and a sewing machine. In *BUST*, domesticity is über cool.

One Bitchin' Zine

Drills and sewing machines would likely be key tools in the arsenals of *Bitch* readers, too. However, *Bitch*, a nonprofit venture, is markedly different from *BUST* in design and form. The overall arrangement and visual aesthetic point to the value of audience participation in the rhetorical act. *Bitch*'s covers are full-color like conventional magazines, yet they regularly feature women's artwork instead of cover girls. In each issue, *Bitch* carefully deconstructs representations of women in popular culture and profiles women who actively work to "make" representations of women that, as they say, "don't insult our intelligence" ("About *Bitch*"). Most of the zine's pages are printed in black and white and feature advertisements only at the beginning and the end of each issue (products advertised range from sex shops to natural menstrual products to recently published books). *Bitch* devotes at least six to eight pages of each issue to letters to the editor where readers discuss previously published material, often writing harsh, well-supported responses. The zine frequently calls for readers to take action. *Bitch*, then, is not only about talking and writing back, but it also embodies the feminist belief of listening and honoring multiple perspectives.

Back Talk Bitchy Ethos

Although multiple *ethe* are constructed and performed within its pages, *Bitch* remains consistent in its adherence to its stated mission:

Bitch is about formulating replies to the sexist and narrow-minded media diet that we all—intentionally or not—consume. It's about critically examining the images of femininity, feminism, class, race, and sexuality that are thrown at us by the media. . . . It's about asking ourselves and each other questions: Where are the female-friendly places in the mass media? Where are the things we can see and read and listen to that don't insult our intelligence? How can we get more of them? *Bitch* is about saying, We can make them. ("About *Bitch*")

Bitch talks back. In replying to the voices and the forces that attempt to construct women in dangerous ways, *Bitch* envisions itself as a maverick uncovering the truths about media messages. To turn bitching into productive action and to promote the marriage of critique and action, the editors of *Bitch* encourage their readership to take bitching outside of the inner circle of feminism and talk/write back to society, thus positioning this brand of third-wave feminism as a belief system embracing both individual expression and individual responsibility. For instance, the "Where to Bitch" section regularly features information about organizations and activist groups working for social causes, such as transgender rights. The Winter 2005 issue features a special "we haven't come a long way, and don't call me baby" edition of "Where to Bitch," which provides readers with contact information for organizations that work to promote reproductive rights and equal pay (35). Certainly, the zine assumes risks when using a term such as "bitch" in such a positive, pro-active light. Yet, the zines' editors explain that "'bitch' is an epithet hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and don't shy away from expressing them, and who don't sit by and smile uncomfortably if they're bothered or offended. If being an outspoken woman means being a bitch, we'll take that as a compliment, thanks" ("About Bitch").

Using public writing and bitching as a catalyst for social change regularly manifests in *Bitch*. For instance, in "Three Fat Cats and One Fat Girl," contributor Heather Gates recounts her frustration with the limited clothing sizes available to women in retailers such as Gap, J. Crew, and Banana Republic. She writes, "I know these complaints are pretty common, so I wanted to see what would happen if someone just asked, just went ahead and asked people with power over such things, 'Why can't I, a size 16, have normal, attractive clothing?'" (31). And she does just that, reproducing her letters to the three clothing

outlets in the zine along with the corporations' responses. This article is not meant to be a heroic narrative of what can be done "if only someone picked up a pen," yet it illustrates a young person who was bothered by a perceived injustice and *acted* on this violation with some bitchin' rhetoric directed at an audience who had the power to effect change.

In "Bitch' Pedagogy: Agonistic Discourse and the Politics of Resistance," Andrea Greenbaum suggests revising the term "bitch" and encourages feminist teachers to mentor their female students and colleagues to be women who possess "the ability, the rhetorical savvy and the confidence to assert positions" (164). The content of *Bitch* provides the rhetorical models for the subject position Greenbaum advocates: the woman who talks back. Bitching then shifts from connotations involving individual opinions and tirades, and is revised and revived to reflect an *ethos* predicated on asking the right questions, being accountable to an audience, and creating community.

The Ethos of Personal Contradiction

Like *BUST*, *Bitch* writers often rely on personal anecdotes to construct *ethos*. In the Winter 2000 issue, *Bitch* features an article called "The Skin Trade" by Andrea Oxidant who, upon completing a degree in fiction writing, needed a job that would allow her to pay bills and still leave ample time to write. Relying on her previous experience as a hair salon receptionist, Oxidant took a job as a "Well-Being Consultant" at the cosmetics store Sephora. Oxidant recounts the ridiculous wardrobe requirements and the bizarre self-image the company constructs by calling the employees "cast members" and referring to the selling floor as "onstage." The real conflict arises from the fact that she must participate in the beauty myth propagated by the advertising industry, which tells women they aren't pretty enough, they must improve their looks, and that Sephora sells just the right product to help. Oxidant writes, "it's scary to see woman after woman march through Sephora's doors like pre-programmed robots, rattling off the same list of advertised products without even knowing or caring what they're for" (24). Oxidant needs the job, yet worries she's compromising her personal convictions. Thus, she devises her own battle strategy by refusing to use Sephora's persuasive strategies: she no longer suggests to customers that shopping is an "experience"; she refuses to sell a customer more than she needs; and she tries to give her customers the best deal rather than push the more expensive products.

The case of Oxidant illuminates the willingness to admit to the contradictions inherent in theory and lived practice. While personal anecdote, as

many feminist scholars have argued, can have limitations as an argumentative strategy, it can succeed in helping readers identify with the topic under discussion—especially if that topic exceeds their experiences. In effect, readers are drawn to conventions of the personal anecdote as a form “because of some ‘universal’ appeal in it” (Burke 58). Most *Bitch* and *BUST* writers begin their arguments from a personal standpoint; however, the most successful arguments effectively move beyond their own solipsism and offer wider, global perspectives.

The Ethos of Anger

In her discussion of grrrl zines, Michelle Comstock points out that the “writing styles and practices revel in anti-discipline and the improper,” which “stands in direct opposition to the ethics and values of another writing scene—the university classroom” (395). *Bitch* writers tend to censor any internal editor and use whatever language seems best for the rhetorical moment at hand. Students who read articles from *Bitch* may be both surprised and intrigued by the use of anger as a viable rhetorical strategy, for when acerbic is just what is called for, *Bitch* delivers. For instance, in their 2006 “Anniversary” issue, *Bitch* ran a short story about the season premier of *Dr. Phil*, when the doctor claimed, “I am really focused on helping women to be at peace with their body” (Pecoraro 15). By the end of the show, viewers had met three women who were unhappy with their breasts. Dr. Phil gave each woman thirty seconds to argue for her worthiness as a breast surgery candidate; each woman spoke briefly about her lack of self-esteem and an overriding concern with her appearance. Dr. Phil felt so moved by the women’s plights that he granted each one a free breast augmentation surgery. In response to this perceived hypocrisy, Julie Pecoraro offers this reply: “Dr. Phil, being the crunchy-on-the-outside-gooney-on-the-inside guy he is, gave them each a new set of hooters” (15). Pecoraro continues, “this was just another makeover show substituting surgery for critical discussion, promising superficial fixes for a massive systemic problem. Okay, Dr. Phil, how’s *that* workin’ for ya?” (15). This writer is downright irate. While she seems to hate Dr. Phil, we admit to loving her passion.

Sarcastic ire can be located in many *Bitch* articles, which is what makes reading them so much fun. For instance, in “Mr. Heterosexual Saves the Gay,” Juliet Eastland employs a tone and attitude that epitomizes that of the zine as a whole. She describes a contest—the “brainchild” of a pastor in Massachusetts—that was intended to celebrate straight men. The author concedes that she was unable to attend the contest because “I was drinking the blood of infants with my gay friends at the time of the contest and couldn’t make

it” (16). Within one short sentence, Eastland develops her *ethos* in such a way that her audience would either stop reading or will identify with her form and feel compelled to read on. There doesn’t seem to be much middle ground here. While engaging in thoughtful critique, most *Bitch* authors remain true to its name—they bitch with language that we might tell our students to avoid when making an argument. But it’s hard to ignore the power of this “improper” rhetoric in light of the many arguments in composition and rhetoric about the changing nature of academic writing.

The Ethos of Chic

In summer of 2006, *Bitch* also published its fashion issue, titled “Style and Substance.” The editors’ letter introducing the issue plays on both the characterization of the high-fashion magazine editor (à la *The Devil Wears Prada*) and that of feminists as stylistically challenged, writing that “[t]hese dual style myths led to a discussion of our own ideas of style, in which we pondered whether the *Bitch* staff is doing our part to either uphold or disprove these notions” (5). *Bitch* acknowledges the importance of fashion, as part and parcel of popular culture. As such, the zine often publishes pieces about fashion or women’s trends; however, it is just as careful to highlight the pervasive pressure that the fashion industry puts on women to perform a culturally sanctioned version of femininity: “whether we treat it as a hobby . . . as activism . . . or as delirious media pleasure . . . fashion is an inescapable facet of our lives. But it also provides endless fodder for our feminist critiques—and we criticize because we love” (5). These critiques replace the fashion spreads. In other words, the style and fashion issue features neither. For instance, one brief article critiques popular t-shirts sold by clothing chains such as Abercrombie and Fitch that splash slogans like “Who needs brains when you have these?” across young girls’ chests (Lyon and Breshears 14). The issue also features an interview with Judith Levine, author of *Not Buying It: My Year without Shopping*. In contrast with mainstream magazines for girls and, at times, *BUST*, we have here a publication that discusses shopping with its readers through interviewing a feminist who critiques consumerism and urges readers *not* to shop.

The uneasy relationship between feminist ideals and beauty is also addressed in the ongoing column, “The Jane Petty Criticism Corner.” In one column, Miranda Featherstone relates her experience working as an intern in the health and beauty department of *Jane* magazine, a publication marketed to young women. While sorting through a closet of beauty products at the office, Featherstone overhears two editors dismissing the complaints of some of

their readership: "All those letters we get asking us to have fatter models! What are we supposed to do with the samples we get? Have them *enlarged*?" (14). Featherstone readily admits that it would be difficult to request these items from companies in other sizes; yet, she also owns up to the fact that "women's magazines, even famously, self-referentially tongue-in-cheek *Jane*, convince people to buy things that they don't have, thus supporting companies that don't need their money" (15). Ultimately, Featherstone concludes that women's fashion magazines simply may not be able to sustain a feminist agenda, but she is committed to sorting out how she can reconcile her love of \$200 shoes (and, by implication, her acceptance of the beauty standards promoted by the companies who make them) with her personal feminist agenda.²

Teaching Third-Wave Rhetorical Strategies

Although we both love and critique these zines, we recognize that writing about women's issues today from a third-wave perspective is a tricky rhetorical enterprise, in part because the movement itself resists a clear, common definition. Furthermore, core issues around which women of all ages can rally are difficult to identify. Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar recognize the trials facing third-wave feminists who want to effect broad change today:

Some of the rhetorical obstacles that third wave feminists encounter in consciousness-raising include a perception that feminist successes have rectified most, if not all, gender inequities, a lack of recognition of contemporary and covert gender inequities, feminist backlash and negative stereotypes of feminism, and a historical understanding of feminism as an exclusive movement. These barriers mean that feminist rhetoric has to address and prove that gender inequalities still exist, refute stereotypes and feminist backlash, and create greater identification among those who call themselves feminists. (539)

Writers for *Bitch* and *BUST* strive to respond to these challenges using *ethos* and consubstantiality as rhetorical appeals. And while these zines use multiple *ethos* to achieve identification, they will not achieve identification with all feminists. Just as *BUST* may appeal to the more girly, fun-loving feminist of the third wave, *Bitch* appeals to the feminist who likes her fun but has just as much (if not much, much more) fun critiquing it. In presenting these zines to students in writing courses, Introduction to Women's Studies classes, and courses in women's rhetoric, we have come to realize that the value of these zines lies in how they work together. When taught in tandem, they present a more rounded, more complex view of how third-wave women make arguments about issues

they care most about as well as the importance of delivering those views to a public eager to learn more.

In discussions with colleagues in the hallways and at conferences such as CCCC and Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s), we've learned that instructors are slowly adding to what has become the canon of feminist rhetoric by teaching from more alternative publications. The arguments, commentary, and opinions found in *Bitch* and *BUST* are culturally important manifestations of young women's needs to express themselves without fear of retribution and ridicule. While we find *Bitch* to be more successful at navigating through the maze of contradictions presented by popular and commercial culture, both zines can teach our students the value of making arguments about personally significant issues.³ And the strong examples of *ethe* as they relate to identification and consubstantiality provide an opportunity for writing instructors to teach students the importance of making their rhetoric—their modes of expression and argumentation—public.

Not every student who reads these zines in our classes is persuaded to participate in the third wave's rhetorical stances, but some students rush out and subscribe. Others who are dissatisfied with the status quo perpetuated by women's magazines are relieved to know they have other options available to them as readers, ones that position them as the subjects and agents of discourse. And we always encounter a handful of students who are completely turned off by the zines' pushy and intrepid personas, which, we imagine, would be just fine with the zines' writers. Yet, when these zines are positioned next to other texts and points of view in our classes, they successfully disrupt both the public space of the classroom and the rhetorical tradition at large. As a liminal genre residing between mainstream magazines and academic feminism, zines become interesting texts for our students to study; they serve as rhetorical artifacts from which students can pull to create both academic and public writing. In her essay on feminist pedagogy, Reynolds insists that "We need to offer students more and greater means of resistance to the thesis-driven essay. . . . The result might be the breakdown of some of the rigid boundaries that separate life and politics inside and outside the academy" ("Interrupting" 71). Moments of this productive resistance, or a rhetorical resistance to the academy's conception of what "good writing" looks like, are located within the pages of these zines. The genre of a zine implies a lack of boundaries—writers feel free to say whatever is on their minds.

In *Teaching Rhetorica*, Ronald and Ritchie argue that teaching feminist rhetoric should go beyond the simple act of adding women to courses and

“stir[ring] them into the canon we already teach or use them as texts for classes” (5). Instead, they challenge readers to consider the possibility that these texts “provide a catalyst for examining how their presence might affect the kinds of classroom structures, projects, and goals we might create” (5). We argue that these zines—and many more like them that circulate on the Web and throughout coffeehouses and music shops across the country—should be taught alongside what has grown to become the canon of women’s rhetoric. Moreover, we can even create a space in our curriculum where students construct their own rhetorically effective zines that have a clear sense of audience and purpose and are designed to effect change in whatever arenas they choose.

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Notes

1. The plural form of *ethos* is rarely used (see George A. Kennedy’s edition of *On Rhetoric*). In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, he generally speaks of the singular *ethos*—or a single trait, characteristic, or persona embodied by the rhetor. The rarity of the plural form of *ethos* may point to a truly postmodern shift in how we regard a rhetor’s—and a text’s—character. Ancient Greeks likely had no need for a multiple *ethos* and the fragmented, multiple selves it points to.
2. *Jane* went out of print in August 2007.
3. Notably, *Bitch* released a collection of essays titled *BITCHfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine* in August 2006.

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