Bitchfest reading draws enormous crowd

Stepping into the void left by Sassy magazine, Bitch was launched in the mid-nineties as a photocopy-and-staple zine covering the landscape of popular culture from a feminist perspective. Both unabashed in its love for the guilty pleasures of consumer culture and deeply thoughtful about the way the pop culture landscape reflects and impacts women’s lives, Bitch has grown to be a popular, full-scale magazine with a worldwide readership. Today it stands as a touchstone of hip, young feminist thought, looking with both wit and irreverence at the way pop culture informs feminism—and vice versa—and encouraging readers to think critically about the messages behind favorite television shows, movies, music, books, and blogs.

On Saturday, September 16, Bitch’s founding editors Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler read excerpts from their new anthology Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine in front of a standing-room-only crowd of over 60 people at the Regulator Bookshop in Durham, NC. During the question and answer session, many audience members expressed their appreciation for the magazine’s unique perspective and wanted to hear more about the challenges and rewards of operating an independent feminist publication. Jervis turned the tables by posing a question to the audience, asking how they would feel about accepting advertising from a cigarette company. A thought-provoking discussion of the dilemma, weighing political values against financial needs, followed.

The Bitch magazine organizational records as well as issues of the magazine from its beginnings as a zine are housed at the Bingham Center. These records, along with those of Bust magazine, our growing zine collection, and the papers of Paula Kamen, comprise the heart of the Bingham Center’s documentation of third wave feminism.

Jervis graciously agreed to answer a few questions about their inspiration for publishing the magazine and anthology as well as discussing the future of feminism. (Interview, p.2)

Bitchfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine
Edited by Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler
Foreword by Margaret Cho
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006

Bingham Center website gets fresh new look

In August 2006, the Sallie Bingham Center debuted a new online look as part of an overall website design change within the Duke University Libraries. The Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library was the first department within Duke Libraries to receive its makeover in December 2005, and now the Research Centers are following suit.

Visitors to the new homepage will find a site that is simpler and easier to navigate. The once text-heavy pages will now feature more graphics and user-friendly elements without sacrificing content. The new navigation bar on the left side guides users to their area of interest in a more systematic and intuitive manner.

The website will continue to provide the services and functions that our students, researchers, donors, and other visitors have come to rely on including information on finding materials, subject guides, bibliographies, and postings of news, events, and recent acquisitions, while also serving as an archive of information related to past events and other Center history.

http://library.duke.edu/specialcollections/bingham/
Interview with Lisa Jervis, co-founding editor of *Bitch*

*SBC:* What inspired you to create *Bitch* magazine? What challenges have you faced and what has kept you going over the past ten years?

*LJ:* When we started the magazine, we were frustrated both with our crappy retail jobs and with the way women and feminism were portrayed in pop culture—and with the sad state of magazines aimed at women. We spent a lot of time analyzing the dreck we were reading and watching—and we realized it really wasn't enough to talk to each other. We needed to make a public forum. And we also just wanted to create something that we would want to read!

The main [challenges] have definitely been money, time, and energy, especially during the time when *Bitch* had no budget to pay staff and we were working day jobs and doing the magazine "on the side."

What's kept us going, I think, is the responses we get from our readers, the way they engage with the ideas we're putting out there, and the things they say about how the magazine has affected their intellectual and political development. It makes it all worth it to be part of this community of smart, pissed-off, active feminists and to help build that community.

*SBC:* You have written about the end of the third wave and the beginning of the fourth. Could you explain your theory of this evolution of the women's movement?

*LJ:* Well, what I've written about is really the end of the usefulness of the whole concept of waves. I've never said we're ready for a fourth wave, nor do I think that's what's happening at the grassroots level. So much of what's interpreted as conflict and/or disagreement between second and third wave feminists is just the same ideological and political disagreements that have always been part of feminism. People like to talk about it in terms of chronology and age, but this is totally ahistorical and just invites stereotyping: younger women are obsessed with lipstick and glitter and fun at the expense of hard activism; older women are stodgy and anti-sex. The third wave has never been well-defined, and so whether it's a chronological, ideological, or aesthetic label depends on who's using the term.

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*SBC:* What changes have you noticed in representations of women in the media since starting the magazine?

*LJ:* As far as change goes, it's a mixed bag. Some things are better (images of powerful women in high places have become more common in venues like TV dramas), and some things are worse (three words: Girls Gone Wild). We have more high-profile women in the news and in government, but the ways in which the coverage is gendered is very troubling, such as Condoleezza Rice's leather coat being dubbed a dominatrix outfit by reporters. Overall, we've also seen an incredible intensification of media and a resulting intensification of advertising messages. There's hardly any space left that hasn't been infested with ads—they even have bulldozer-like equipment to stamp ad messages on the sand at the beach, and etching machines to put ads on eggshells—and on TV and in movies, product placement increasingly entwines ads with editorial content.
**Martha Hodes reads from The Sea Captain’s Wife**

Eunice Stone was a white, working-class woman from New Hampshire who made an extraordinary decision on November 3, 1869. That day, Eunice married Smiley Connolly, a black sea captain from the West Indies. Even more remarkable, by marrying across the color line, Eunice transformed herself from a near-destitute Yankee widow of a Confederate soldier into a genteel lady in an elite family of color in the Caribbean. Martha Hodes’ new book *The Sea Captain’s Wife* tells her compelling story.

From more than 500 family letters, and countless archives, census records, and local histories, Martha Hodes brings Eunice’s story to life. Professor of history at New York University and winner of the Allan Nevins Prize for *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*, Hodes knew she had uncovered something unusual when came upon this trove of letters in the Lois Wright Richardson Davis Papers at the Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library. Applying her expert knowledge to recreating Eunice Connolly’s uncommon life, Hodes also found descendants of both the New England and West Indian families and recorded their stories.

On Thursday, September 26, Hodes visited Duke campus again, this time to read excerpts from her book and discuss the process of researching and writing the book. She was also a guest on the WUNC radio program “The State of Things” on that date. [add info about reading]

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**Bingham Center adds new staff member**

We are once again delighted to welcome back another Bingham Center “graduate.” On August 1, Jodi Berkowitz joined the Center as our first Technical Services Archivist, the third professional position to be dedicated to the Center. In this role, Jodi will be processing and describing collections of personal papers and organizational records acquired by the Center as well as participating in outreach activities such as public programming, donor relations, and supervision of field experience students.

Jodi was herself a field experience student and long-time volunteer in the Bingham Center who participated in and coordinated a wide range of projects such as establishment of the Women’s and LGBT Movements Periodical Collection; management of a large-scale vendor digitization project, “Everyday Life and Women in America;” organization of our second biennial symposium; and initial processing of incoming collections, to name a few of her accomplishments. Jodi received her B.A. in Women’s Studies from Barnard College in 2001 and her MSLS from the UNC School of Information and Library Science in August of 2006. Jodi also found time in the past two years to work at UNC-Chapel Hill’s North Carolina Collection, Southern Folklife Collection, and Southern Historical Collection developing her skills as an archivist. Before coming to North Carolina, she lived and worked in her hometown of New York City. Jodi spends her free time knitting, volunteering at Internationalist Books in Chapel Hill, and honing her cooking skills. We’re very excited that Jodi will bring her unique talents to the happy task of defining our newest position of Technical Services Archivist for the Bingham Center.

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**New Acquisitions and Additions**

**Elizabeth (Betty) McMahan Papers**
The Elizabeth McMahan collection has grown thanks to recent additions given by Betty, an entomologist, retired professor of biology at UNC-Chapel Hill, writer and artist. These additions contain correspondence, travel diaries, children’s stories, and cartoons, including many illustrating life in her retirement community.

**Zines**
The Bingham Center’s zine holdings continue to expand, most recently through donations by collectors and zine writers Amy Mariaskin, Niku Arbabi, and Vanessa Hays. Sarah Dyer made an addition to the collection bearing her name, and individual zines are regularly donated by zine authors across the country. A searchable online database of our zines is currently under development that will provide access to the collection by subject, title, and other fields such as author or date and place of publication if known.
On October 26 at 7 p.m. in the Rare Book Room in Perkins Library, the Bingham Center will host a dramatic reading about sports and recreation. Every other year the Bingham Center plans a dramatic reading and accompanying exhibit. These events bring together faculty, staff and students to read aloud from books, letters, speeches and more from our collections. Our readers enjoy getting in character as they bring the collections to life.

This year’s theme of physical activity gives us the opportunity to showcase a wonderful assortment of materials, such as:

- Excerpts from our rare books collection including the 1951 novel about a high-school basketball player, *A Girl Called Hank*
- 19th century advice about “proper forms of recreation” for girls and women
- Directions on how to perform exercises and other athletic endeavors
- Advertisement copy that uses images of the “active woman” to sell soap and lotion
- Instructions from the mid 20th century on how exercise is important to maintaining a “proper figure”
- Zines and “girl power” books from the 1990s

We will also highlight physical education and athletics at Duke using material from the University Archives such as the University’s response to Title IX and letters and speeches by Duke Women’s College Physical Education Head Julia Grout.

The reading will include drama, humor, exercise demonstrations and even score-yourself evaluations. Join us for an evening of “living history” and maybe you will pick up a few exercise tips!

Mark your calendar: Throw Like a Girl
Thursday, October 26 at 7p.m.
Rare Book Room, Perkins Library
Duke University West Campus