

From the abyss

Bitch, good girl and BUST rise from Sassy's ashes

comes hope for feminists

THREE MAGAZINES THAT COULD SAVE THE WORLD

■ **Bitch:** Published in San Francisco, this quarterly is "devoted to incisive commentary on our media-driven world." Regular features include "The Bitch List" and "The JANE Petty Criticism Corner," used to vent the editors' disappointment with Jane Pratt's current project. www.bitchmagazine.com.

■ **good girl:** This Toronto quarterly is "dedicated to publishing ideas that challenge, critique, and break the rules of the status quo." Comprised of fiction, non-fiction and poetry written by women all over Canada. www.goodgirl.ca.

■ **BUST:** Of the three, *BUST* is the most similar to the original *Sassy*. With articles like "Spinster Pride" recalling *Sassy's* "Feeling Alienated?: Make it Work for You," this American quarterly is, "fierce, funny, and too smart to be anything but feminist." www.bust.com



BUST's rack: SUBtitles' Christine Crowe stocks BUST.

Shaughn Butts

For many young women, scanning a magazine rack is like staring into a miserable abyss of beauty tips, how-to-get-a-man articles, and body-image conundrums.

Fortunately, there is an emerging wave of intelligent, hip and honest titles revealing themselves on Edmonton racks.

Nikko Snyder, editor-in-chief of Toronto's *good girl*, recognizes the need for smart, fun feminist literature.

"Young women in particular are bombarded by the media with messages that we're not good enough, pretty enough, thin enough," she says.

"Some young women probably aren't ready to hear anything different than what the mainstream media feeds us, but that doesn't mean that we don't have a responsibility to provide (them) with alternatives and choices."

The short-lived *Sassy* magazine was the first to do this, and it strongly influenced titles such as *good girl*, *Bitch* and *BUST*.

Sassy, an unprecedented feminist magazine for teens, was launched in '87 with then-fresh-faced Jane Pratt (currently the editor of the mainstream *Jane*). Not only did *Sassy* draw angry letters from publicists by publishing sarcastic interviews with insipid teen stars like Tiffany Amber Thiessen and Joey Lawrence, it was known for intelligent content with titles like "One Girl Against the Patriarchy," and frank discussions about sex.

Not surprisingly, the latter rubbed the American religious right the wrong way and *Sassy* was sold in 1994 to Petersen Publishing,

producer of both *Teen* and *Guns and Ammo*. Post-1994, "Evil *Sassy*," as many former readers came to call it, morphed into a clone of every other teen rag on the shelves, spoon-feeding young women tripe like:

"Crushes: Is He Really Boyfriend Material?"

Sassy's fall was discouraging for young feminists, and there have since been no teen

zines don't hawk an imaginary standard of beauty.

"When I read *BUST* or *Bitch* I feel proud of being a woman. They don't write down to women and they don't tell you how to be prettier, skinnier or more attractive to men. Feminist magazines respect the sexual, ethnic and moral diversity of women."

Not surprisingly, Brown Olsen is frustrated with the placement of magazines in her local mainstream bookstores. She says: "When I go into Chapters or similar bookstores I am offended when their Women's Interest magazine sections include only mindless fashion magazines. Women are interested in more than just their looks and men."

However, there are magazine retailers in Edmonton who have a clue. Elizabeth Johnson, manager of the University of Alberta's SUBtitles, at the University of Alberta, regularly orders in *BUST*.

"I think that it appeals to all women," she says. "We have university staff buying it as well as students."

Although some magazines have filled *Sassy's* void, *good girl's* Snyder is pessimistic about the future of feminist periodicals.

"Magazine publishing is essentially about advertising, and women's media is dictated by its advertisers. So when a magazine comes along that tries to do something different, like *Sassy* or *BUST* or *Bitch* or *good girl*, we're basically in the wrong industry to actually make a go of it," she says.

"That's not to say, however, that it's not important to try to sneak into the industry and try to bust it down from the inside."

Alana Pentney ■



Sassy's legacy: Good *Sassy*, top, begat *Bitch*, *good girl* and *Bust*. "Evil *Sassy*," literally and figuratively on the bottom, remains much-loathed by feminists.

publications remotely as political, non-condescending or as honest.

Fortunately, a number of feminists have created their own magazines for a twentysomething demographic who miss their *Sassy*, yet feel too young to read the more mature *Ms.*

Bitch, *good girl* and *BUST* represent the female population who couldn't care less about how to flirt or best disguise "problem" thighs. Tiffany Brown Olsen, CJSR's 23-year-old news director, reads *BUST* and *Bitch* and appreciates that the maga-