

Ring
of
Zines

*Making Use of the Zines at Glasgow
Women's Library*

Introduction

I'm Lea (*as in sea*), a zine maker, zine librarian at Edinburgh Zine Library and PhD researcher working on a project with the zines at Wellcome Collection. My funder CHASE will support you to do placements during your funding period, which are meant to make you more employable I guess, and which can't be directly connected to your PhD research. I organised a placement at Glasgow Women's Library - because they have a collection of older zines, and they are a cool organisation, and they are near me (I live in Fife), and what really interests me is the overlaps between zine librarianship, and research, and zine making, and community, and public spaces etc.

I spent much of my placement reading zines - at the moment there's 11 archival boxes of zine catalogued A-Z by title, and a further two archival boxes worth of uncatalogued, new donations to the collection. As you'll see in the other zines in this set (the review zines *Box 1-Box 6*, the *Index* and *Constellations*) I was really interested in exploring how people could navigate the collection, and in some ways of, I suppose, making it more use-able. But, this brings up the question of use - who is using the zine collection, and how? Hence this short 8-page zine. The first page is for people who are encountering the zine collection for the first time as readers. The next is for people coming to the zine collection as zine makers. The following pages are for people who are coming to the zines as researchers.

Reading the Zines

This might be the first time you've come across a zine, or the first time you've come across a collection of zines from different times and places. It's totally up to you how you go about reading them, but I'm going to make a few suggestions or things you might want to think about.

Do you want to read them closely, slowly, individually, one at a time?

Do you want to read lots at once, quickly, skimming and flicking through a whole box or several boxes?

(there's no right answer)

There's a lot of zines in the collection - too many to read in one go. How are you going to decide what you read? Are you going to start with one box? Are you looking for zines about something in particular? *(the Index might help with this)*

Sometimes zines can be about unexpected things, and there aren't any content notes on the GWL zines (although you'll find some for box 1 - 6 in this series of zines). Is there anything you want to avoid? What is your plan if you come across something that is upsetting, unsettling, or triggering?

If you see something in a zine that you want to share with others, that you think is cool or funny or important or interesting, how are you going to do that? Will you send a photo to your friends? Will you put it on your ig stories? Are there things in zines that people might not want on social media?

Making Zines

Zine collections can be a really good place for inspiration if you are making your own zine.

Topic

As you'll see from the Index, there are zines about lots of different topics in GWL. It can feel a bit overwhelming thinking your zine could be about anything - how do you decide? Maybe you want to think about making a particular type of zine to start with? If you made a fanzine, it could be about a band, tv show or book that you love. If you made a perzine, it could just be about what happened yesterday. If you made an infozine, it could be about a topic you know lots about and want to share that knowledge with others.

Binding

There's lots of different examples of bindings in the GWL collection - using staples, thread, wool (eg. *i am, i am, I AM*) or safety pins. There are some examples of zines made out of single sheets of A4 paper (see Mini-Zines in the index).

What you want people to be able to do with your zine?

Some of the zines in the collection have instructions about what you're allowed to do with them - for example, they might give you permission to reproduce the zine to give it to other people, or say you're not allowed to digitise it. Many of the people who made zines that are now in GWL collection would never have imagined that their zine would be preserved in a library, to be read and used by people - including researchers. It might be worth thinking about any instructions you want to leave on your zine for how it can be used. Would you be ok with someone reproducing a page from your zine in their own (you might want to explore Creative Commons licenses if so)? Would you be ok with it being digitised and put online to preserve it? Would you be ok with a researcher writing about it in an article? No? Then say so!

Zine Research

There's been plenty of productive discussions about the ethics of zines in libraries from the perspective of zine librarians and archivists - you can check out the Zine Librarian's Code of Ethics (ZLCoE) online, or Kirsty Fife's work 'Not for You? Ethical Implications of Archiving Zines' However, it's still early days in discussions of the ethics of zine research. I can't give you a comprehensive guide - but I am going to share some questions you might want to consider if you are using the zine collection as a researcher.

What is the zine about?

My research involves zines that are broadly around topics of health and illness. They are often made by people who have had, at best, mixed experiences of medical professionals. Even though I'm disabled myself, and a survivor of mental health services, even though I've had iatrogenic trauma and my own difficult experiences of medicine and medical professionals, I know that academic research is aligned with medicine. This shapes many of the choices I make about how I chose to research and write about zines. There aren't any hard and fast rules about ethical research with zines partly because there are so many different types of zines. If you're researching music fanzines, for example, you might have a different set of things to consider than someone researching experiences of gendered violence through perzines. That said, zines rarely stay in their lane and often cover multiple intersecting and overlapping topics.

Taking Photos

Zines are super visual, and so it makes sense to want your research about zines to be visually engaging, and to include photos of the zines you are discussing. But taking photos, even of just the front cover of a zine, is an act of digitisation. What does it mean to do this - especially with older zines - to bring an object into a digital world it didn't imagine when it was created? I'm conscious when I create a zine (well, anything) these days that making it public means opening it up to being photographed and put on social media etc. This wasn't something older zine makers would have imagined when making something 'public'. Some zines - such as *Fault and Fracture* by Bettie Riot (box 3) - address this directly, and it is interesting to think about how social media has shaped zine making. It's also important to reflect on how both zine libraries and zine research may be shaping zine practices - for example, notice how in my questions for zine makers on an earlier page I discuss including instructions about use on the zine.

For my *Constellations* zine that is part of this series, I decided that I would draw icons of all the zines I was talking about. I didn't want to photograph them, especially without talking to the zines' makers first, but I still wanted to give a sense of what they looked like. Drawing these icons also felt like enacting a different relationship with the zines - it felt like I got to know them in a different way.

Citation

Most zine researchers I know cite zines like they would books, in whatever system they use. Barnard Zine Library have a handy zine called 'Cite This Zine' about this.

The question of citation is more than just a question of format. For one, how are you treating zines in your research?

Here, I want to acknowledge the book *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness* and the approach of its author Theri Alyce Pickens to the texts she write about:

'I was less curious about (and less interested in) literature as a set of primary sources than as a set of theoretical ones. They speak back to critics. And, if critics do not listen, we (ma)linger in thinking of them as having value because they solely illuminate a topic we have already decided to discuss. What happens when we view them as the drivers of these conversations?' (Pickens, 2019)

What happens when we treat zines, not as primary sources but as theoretical ones? Give them equal weighting as the academic books we cite? Let them drive the conversations?

Consent

The ZLCoE talks about permission - permission to reproduce images of zines, permission to write about zines etc. I'm interested in what happens if we reframe this as a discussion around consent. What does it mean to be consensually researching a zine? I found Cindy Crabb's zine 'Learning Good Consent' a helpful grounding for this. Some questions I might ask are:

- How might consent be a pleasurable part of research? Sometimes, getting permission or consent can feel like a chore or an add-on, a barrier to the brilliant idea you've had. But conversations with zine makers about using their zines in my research have been some of the best moments of my research.
- How might we learn better consent together? Through practicing good consent with zine makers, can we all learn something? How can researchers, librarians, archivists and creators work together to create informed consent?

- What happens when people say no? How does it feel? What do you do?
- What happens when we get it wrong?
- Can zines themselves offer consent for certain types of use? If you can't locate the maker of a zine to ask consent, does that mean the zine is out of bounds to researchers? What does it mean to work with a zine non-consensually? Can we feel out consent from within zines themselves?

This isn't an exhaustive list of questions. But I hope it gives you a sense of somethings you might want to consider when looking at zines as a researcher.

Lea Cooper

ljc72@kent.ac.uk / www.zinejam.com / [@lilithjcooper](https://twitter.com/lilithjcooper) (twitter)

Glasgow Women's Library/Dalgety Bay

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