University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
Fall 2023

Zines, Community, and Placemaking in Queer and Feminist Groups in the Twentieth Century

Naomi Day Todd
History Department
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisors: Dr. Alvis Dunn, Dr. Sarah Judson

Abstract

Unregulated media has been significant in many social movements as a way of providing communication without fear of censorship. For marginalized groups of people, unregulated media has also proved to be vital for not only their survival, but also for building community with one another. For queer and feminist groups between 1970 and 1990, the creation and distribution of zines provided a way for people to exchange information within their own communities. Zines, usually a small, handmade booklet, provided a unique form of both literary and visual media that people used to share resources with each other. Long left out of formal scholarly research due to their anti-capitalist, informal nature, an analysis of the role of zines and community reveals that this form of media is noteworthy in the formation of community and the spread of resources for queer people and those in feminist groups in the late twentieth century. This thesis will examine several notable zines circulated within these communities in order to demonstrate the power of zines as a form of placemaking.

Unregulated, self-published media is a significant method for creating both physical and metaphorical safe spaces. For marginalized groups of people, creating a safe community was not only more challenging, but also necessary for survival. For both queer communities and feminist groups in the twentieth century, zines were a way of creating both a literary and visual form of media that provided information about health resources, news, and the arts that were likely to be represented in more mainstream forms of media. Though zines and other similar media have been used throughout social movements over time, this thesis focuses on the relationship between zines and community in the United States and Canada in the later half of the twentieth century, and how they helped to build an integral sense of belonging in queer and feminist spaces through their creation and distribution within their own communities.

The term "zine," shortened from the word "magazine," first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1949. It usually refers to a small, self published, booklet or pamphlet that is focused on a particular subject or theme. Professor Elke Zobl writes that the "central motto" of zine publishing is the "do-it-yourself, process-oriented, non-hierarchical action" required to create them.[1] Additionally, most zines are black and white and photocopied with visible evidence of being made by hand, like cut-and-paste pages and handwriting as opposed to typeface. The inclusion criteria for what is considered to be a zine is difficult to define, and without formal criteria, media scholars struggle to distinguish what falls within the category and what falls outside. Self-published, informational booklets have been created and distributed by people for hundreds of years, placing zines in an intriguing category of things that were created long before they were given a name. Although zines and zine-adjacent works have been around for a long time, there are few formal, scholarly collections and works on this form of communication and its role in creating community. This can be attributed to the "diverse, changing, and elusive"[2] nature of the zine, which are arguably some of their most appealing characteristics.

Zines as a medium provide a unique way for information to be shared. As a result of zines being handmade artifacts, the physical form of the object contributes to the overall message of the piece. Within the zine, the content can be a diverse range of handwritten or typed words, collections of drawings, poems, photographs, collages, informational resources, or advertisements. They exist as a form of visual and sculptural artwork, which is an essential component of the overall meaning of the zine. People who created zines understood that their physical aspect was meaningful, and that the page itself contributed to the experience of the reader. Small details such as the "type of binding, illustrations, paper, typeface, layout, advertisements, scholarly introductions, and promotional blurbs"[3] all contribute to the total meaning of the text. On the same page where someone might find information about health resources or a collection of poems, they might also have found small details such as handwritten notes and drawings. Stephen Duncombe writes,

---

[1] Elke Zobl, "Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35, no. 1 (2009): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1086/599256, 4. Accessed October 1, 2023.

[2] Alison Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community," Essay, in *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 57–86, 58.

[3] Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles, *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America* (Amherst, MA: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 2.

> "imperfections and evidence of the creator's involvement invites readers" and "sets [zines] apart from the seamless commercial design. Handwriting is incorporated, the creator's effort is visible…the connection is one that brings together the body of the zine creator and the body of the reader.[4]"

As opposed to other forms of media, zines provide a sense of openness and availability as a form of modified human contact between the reader and creator, something that is not as available in other forms of mass-produced media like books and films.

Mike Gunderloy, the original author of one of the only formal zine review publications, writes that zines are defined as a publication "created by one person, for love rather than money, and focused on a particular subject."[5] Over the course of sixteen years, from 1982 to 1998, he produced sixty four issues of *Factsheet Five,* an analysis of zines and their role in culture. Gunderloy's periodical was, and remains to be, largely considered the most important corpus in the cultural history of zines. Notably, he writes that the *why* aspect, the purpose behind the writing, is an integral part of what makes a zine, a zine. *Factsheet Five* was similar to a zine database today. It included information about different zines from around the world, how to subscribe to them, and what kinds of information they included. In addition to commentary on pop culture, *Factsheet Five* also included information about politics, social movements, and international issues.

Author and professor Stephen Duncombe's comprehensive work in *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* is one of the only formal publications on the relationship between zines and community. His work traces the circulation of zines in a variety of communities from the 1960s to the 1990s, examining the types of information contained within the zines and the identities of the creators and distributors. Duncombe's work analyzes the intersection between art, politics, and identity, using a wide variety of photographs and scans to give visual examples of the patterns he observes. He writes that zines were instrumental in both the creation and sustaining of community networks in the second half of the twentieth century. His work on the cultural history of zines exemplifies that understanding the relationship between underground media and social movements is not only vital, but should also be included in scholarly research.

Elke Zobl, a professor of media and communication at the University of Salzburg, focuses her research on the relationship between art, culture, media, and gender. Zobl uses the creation and distribution of zines as a framework to understand the connections between intersectional issues, like feminism, economic issues, the environment, health, and community. One of her publications, *Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines* examines how women's issues are portrayed in underground media, and their use of zines as a method of expressing themselves and finding community as an alternative to the mainstream. Zobl also analyzes the shortcomings of certain women's zine publications, specifically the lack of intersectionality in earlier feminist publications. Her work places

---

[4] Stephen Duncombe, *Notes From Underground: Zines and The Politics of Alternative Culture* (Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2008), 98.

[5] Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice, *The World of Zines: A Guide to the Independent Magazine Revolution* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1992), 2.

zines as a significant part of women's history and argues that they should be included in feminist studies.

Media historian and professor Barbara Freeman's research on the relationship between queer communities and zines is also foundational. In "'A Public Sense of Ourselves,'": Communication and Community-Building in Canada's *LesbiaNews/LNews*, 1989-1998," Freeman explores social dynamics at play among queer people in Victoria, Canada in the 1980s and how the publication *LesbiaNews* contributed to community building. Her research highlights the lack of representation of women of color among zine publications, and what measures were taken to center their voices. Freeman includes interviews with Debby Gregory, the creator behind *LesbiaNews*, providing insight into the inner workings of small-scale zine production. This specific publication was also aimed at a target audience, so Freeman explores why some zines were created with the intention of only being circulated into a smaller circle.

In addition to the scholarship documenting zine history, the physical organization of zines in archives is a unique source of information. These archives provide locations where zines can be cataloged by things like theme, year, location, or intended demographic. In the United States, larger universities and public libraries often have zine archives where both the original zine and scanned versions are available for public viewing. The Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in the Rubenstein Library at Duke University is one example of a library with a robust zine archive that has been diligently cataloged. The center's zine archive, called the Sarah Dyer Zine Collection, aims to preserve a large collection of both published and unpublished zines for researchers to use towards the study of women's history, queer liberation, and zine usage by both of these demographics in the late twentieth century. The Sarah Dyer Collection was established in July 2000 and continues to expand today as zines are periodically donated to the library. This collection remains notable as the archive contains only female-authored zines.

As technology has progressed, some zine archives have also been digitized for more widespread research use. As seeing the physical document is usually a necessity for use of zines as a primary source, online archives have made zine research more accessible and researchers are no longer required to travel to see such archives. The Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) was established as a small online archive in November 2003 and continues to grow today. The QZAP is dedicated to preserving queer-specific history, with their mission statement expressing their goal to "establish a living history archive" through their "collectivist approach that respects the diversity of experiences that fall under the heading 'queer.'"[6] Zine archives, both physical and digital, are essential for the preservation of this type of media.

Significant primary sources that show evidence of relationships between self published media and community vary between 1926 and 1991. During the Harlem Renaissance, Black artists, including both Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurtson worked to create the *Fire!!* magazine, a bricolage of art and writing that documented the Black experience of the time. Raymond Arthur Palmer's 1930 zine *The Comet* is largely considered the first fanzine, based on science fiction films. The first documented queer zine, *Vice Versa,* was started in 1947 and hand-distributed by creator Edythe Eyde in

[6] "Queer Zine Archive," QZAP, November 2003, https://archive.qzap.org/index.php. Accessed September 10, 2023.

order to keep the zine discreet and its readers safe. The *Rock Against Sexism* zine was circulated in the 1980s and into the 1990s with the goal of spreading awareness about the AIDS epidemic and sexism in the music industry. Lastly, the 1990 issue of *Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism* brings to light matters of intersectionality within the queer community, and encourages white readers to work towards being anti-racist.

The peaks of zine publications in the United States can be traced to three main time periods, beginning in the 1930s, when a science fiction zine called *The Comet* was produced by Raymond Arthur Palmer and the Science Correspondence Club in Chicago, Illinois. This zine was the first of many self published booklets that would gain popularity as a medium for fans to discuss different science fiction movies and characters. Photocopiers had yet to be invented, so zine creators relied on a machine called the mimeograph, which could be used to duplicate stencil drawings. Mimeographs were used until the 1960s when photocopiers became available for widespread use. This method was inefficient for large scale productions, but at the time there was not a need for productions of that size. There was also some controversy arising among the creators of the science fiction zines about what to call these new publications, and so the term “zine” was officially coined. Previously, they had been referred to as “fanmags,” but in the October 1940 issue of science fiction fanzine *Detours,* author Russ Chauvenet announced that zine creators should use the term going forward to refer to the media. The name stuck, and now “zine” is the widely accepted name for this form of media.

In June 1947, the first documented queer zine was also created, called *Vice Versa* and distributed by author Edythe Eyde in Los Angeles, California. She had encountered science fiction zines herself, and wanted to create something similar to document queer culture through sharing poems, short stories, and film reviews. In the first edition of her zine, Edye described the lack of media for queer people, and stated that her intention was to give her community a medium to “express our thoughts, our emotions, and our opinions.”[7] Edye distributed the zine to her friends for free by hand at queer bars, telling them that when they were done reading, to pass it along to someone else rather than throwing the zine away. Edye estimated that each copy reached about a dozen readers.[8] Until the amendment to the Comstock Act in 1958, any publication being delivered through the mail that mentioned homosexuality was automatically considered “obscene,” with violators facing the possibility of being sentenced to five years of hard labor. This had a huge impact on magazine publishers, and many people relied on the hand-delivery of queer zines.[9] *Vice Versa* was created before the Comstock Act was amended to allow for this kind of media, which made Edye careful to distribute in person rather than through the mail. She stated in a message to potential contributors of *Vice Versa* that the material included in the zine had to “stay within the bounds of good taste.”[10] Anyone who contributed was published under a pseudonym,

---

[7] Edythe Eyde, *Vice Versa*, Issue 1, (Los Angeles, California, 1947), 1.
[8] Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990: An Oral History* (New York , NY: HarperPerennial, 1993), 6.
[9] Chris Geidner, “The Court Cases That Changed L.G.B.T.Q. Rights,” The New York Times, June 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/legal-history-lgbtq-rights-timeline.html. Accessed November 5, 2023.
[10] Eyde, *Vice Versa*, Issue 1, 1.

and no other names, addresses, or businesses were mentioned that catered to queer people.

The second peak of zine distribution in the United States took place in the 1970s and 1980s during the punk music movement. Copy stores were widely accessible at this time, making zine production much easier and cheaper. Punk culture was popular among working class people and leftists due to the prominent anti-government themes in punk music, which aligned with the anti-capitalist nature of zine creation and distribution. Out of economic accessibility, the do-it-yourself nature of zines was similarly accessible to working class people. Zines were used during this time to spread information about bands, music, and the punk subculture. It was also during this time that *Factsheet Five* was created in order to analyze the relationship between zines and culture. The last peak of zine publishing occurred during the 1990s, corresponding with the riot grrrl movement and the emergence of third-wave feminism. *Riot grrrl* emerged from the punk movement the decade before and gave women in the music industry an opportunity to express themselves through media that would otherwise not be published.

The Boston-based zine *Rock Against Sexism* addressed themes of censorship occasionally in their publications. The zine was created by an activist group of the same name who were inspired by the political and cultural Rock Against Sexism movement in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and 1980s. Musicians in the Boston area worked to fight sexism and homophobia in the local music scene, and published a zine in order to spread their message and find community. The Rock Against Sexism group hosted monthly dance parties, and hosted benefits for the HIV/AIDS awareness group ACT UP. In the April 1988 “Anti-Censorship Issue” of *Rock Against Sexism*, contributors address the nature of government censorship and skewed portrayal of the AIDS epidemic. An advertisement for an AIDS fundraiser is shown, reading, “Rock Against Sexism presents A Shot In The Arm for the Needle Exchange Defense Costs Fund!...to benefit the IV League/ACT UP, working to stop the spread of AIDS.”[11] The event cost six dollars to enter, and would provide education about preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as donating the proceeds to people living with the illness. The zine also acknowledged that women’s experiences in the music industry were often misrepresented by mainstream media, with part of their mission statement reading that one of their principles was to “support and showcase women’s and non-sexist bands generally not promoted by the commercial media.” Rock Against Sexism events were also wheelchair accessible whenever possible and encouraged people of all ages, genders and sexualities to attend.[12]

In *The World of Zines,* Mike Gunderloy writes that so much of a zine’s essence can be defined by the intention behind making it. Unlike other forms of media, zines were not created to simply communicate a message out into the world to an audience. People who created zines wanted to share information with their reader in addition to wanting a reciprocal relationship with their community. People who created such media were able to define their own identity and relationship to their world through what they made and shared with their communities. Chris Atton, a journalist and professor of Media and Culture at Edinburgh Napier University, writes that the zine is “more

---

[11] *Rock Against Sexism*, Volume 2, Issue 3, (Boston, Massachusetts, 1988), 18-19.
[12] *Rock Against Sexism*, Anniversary Issue, (Boston, Massachusetts, 1982), 67.

interested in the lived relationship" that the writer has with the world, and that this position "develops the possibility of the social."[13] Not only do the zine and its readers have a mutual relationship, but the zine and the creator do as well. Atton continues, noting that the zine creation process can be instrumental in the "construction of self-identity," and due to the potentially personal nature of a zine's content, others are inherently "invited to engage in a dialogue about that identity." An individual documenting their experiences through literary or visual artwork shows an embodiment of personal history and authorization of oneself to speak, "validating one's life, making public one's voice," something that might not be heard otherwise.[14]

One of the most significant things in the cultural history of zines is that they were primarily created and distributed within the same, self-defined communities. Even if a zine were to reach a wider audience, the title usually identified the intended audience. For example, the British Columbia-based monthly periodical *LesbiaNews,* or the *Rock Against Sexism* zine in Boston. Unlike other forms of formally published media where there was a wide audience, zine makers were able to focus on more specific topics relevant to their community, because they knew exactly who the readers were. In the book, *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings From the Girl Zine Revolution,* the author Karen Green explains that the majority of publications were not safe spaces for young women to express themselves, if they were even able to have an opportunity to contribute to a more regulated publication. In self-published media, young women writing zines were "uncensored and free to discuss their realties,"[15] and could write about topics relevant to their lives. Zine networks that document the experiences of young women could provide a historical snapshot of how women viewed and interacted with the world at a particular moment in time. These networks provided "virtual" meeting spaces for creators and readers alike to unite together over their shared experiences. Professor and author Kristen Schilt argues that the involvement of young women in these safe, supportive communities gives them the confidence to express the realities of their lives, which ultimately can empower them to become involved in larger political movements, such as feminism.[16]

Mainstream and mass-media publications historically have not documented the experiences of people with disabilities, people of color, children, and poor people accurately. Journalists are less likely to interview people from these communities, so their stories are rarely written. In turn, mainstream media has become synonymous with white, upper class, able-bodied, and male individuals. Analyses of the relationship between zines and culture often use words like "counter-public," and "alternative," usually referring to the "specific media produced by, for, and about women and or racial,

---

[13] Chris Atton, "What Use Is a Zine? Identity Building and Social Signification in Zine Culture," essay, in *Alternative Media* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2010), 54–79, 61.
[14] Chris Atton, "Zines and Communication," essay, in *Alternative Media* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2002), 67–68, 67.
[15] Tristan Taormino and Karen Green, eds., *A Girl's Guide to Taking over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), xiii.
[16] Kristen Schilt, "'I'll Resist with Every Inch and Every Breath,'" *Youth & Society* 35, no. 1 (2003): 71–97, https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x03254566, 93. Accessed October 20, 2023.

cultural, and political minorities."[17] Production and distribution within the same group of people allows for the sharing of more accurate and inclusive information. However, alternative press should not be viewed as the primary alternative to the mainstream media. Even though alternative media arose out of necessity in order to center the voices of marginalized groups, media content cannot exist in a binary between mainstream and underground. Mitzi Waltz, author of *Alternative and Activist Media,* argues that mass media cannot be beaten at its own game, and that the ideals that originally inspired zine creators to create their own media will become diluted if the two are compared.[18]

Certain zine publications also arose out of necessity for some demographics. Within queer communities, some zines were circulated to address issues faced by specific identities within the larger LGBT community. *LesbiaNews* was a monthly publication based in Victoria, Canada in the 1980s that was the only lesbian-specific zine in Canada at the time. Sustained by subscriptions, limited advertising, fundraising events and news-stand sales, creator Debby Gregory wanted to provide a "public forum" where both contributors and readers could discuss "lesbian feminist ideas and how they related to their sense of political identity and community."[19] The publication became a vital part of how the lesbian community of Victoria communicated with each other, through collections of cultural reviews, community announcements, photographs, cartoons, and even a letter to the editor section. In an interview with Gregory, she stated that part of what she wanted to do with the publication was to give the lesbian community a "public sense of community and sense of ourselves…as well as to function as a safe forum for communication and exploration."[20] Contributors to *LesbiaNews* were encouraged to submit content that would be thought-provoking and inspire self reflection to its readers in order to further improve the local queer community.

Gregory also thought it important to align the publication with the goals of progressive feminist groups of the time, including the emerging concept of intersectionality, in order to respect the racial and class diversity of her readers and contributors. Prior to *LesbiaNews,* the majority of lesbian life in Victoria had to take place in private, for both safety reasons and the lack of a physical community, but the publication advertised several coffee shops and bookstores in the area where it would be safe to gather in person. Instead of simply being a counter-publication to the mainstream media, as a lesbian-specific publication, *LesbiaNews* was also an alternative publication to the "feminist and gay publications that sometimes included them but were not exclusively about their issues."[21] The publication was formative for the community of Victoria at the time, and Gregory and the other contributors hoped that it would plant a seed with future generations of queer women and feminists.

---

[17] Barbara M. Freeman, "'"A Public Sense of Ourselves"': Communication and Community-Building in Canada's *LesbiaNews/LNews*, 1989–98," *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 8, no. 3 (2011): 143–67, https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.138, 146. Accessed September 27, 2023.
[18] Mitzi Waltz, "A Brief History of Alternative and Activist Media," 17.
[19] Barbara M. Freeman, "'"A Public Sense of Ourselves,'" 146.
[20] Debby Gregory, *LesbiaNews,* "Editorial," September 1989, (Victoria, British Columbia), 2.
[21] Freeman, "'"A Public Sense of Ourselves,'" 158.

Another significant publication for lesbians and feminist women was the *Lesbian Contradiction,* a self described "Journal of Irreverent Feminism."[22] This was a periodical that ran from March 1983 to November of 1994 out of San Francisco, California, and was supported by the San Francisco Women's Center. *LesCon* was a self-published journal that was made by women, for only women, with a note on the back page of every edition asking that men not request subscriptions. The journal relied on complete financial support from its subscriptions, single copy sales, and contributions. The creators of *LesCon* included this information in every issue, writing that they chose to "put our limited energy" into making the journal the most "lively, woman-serving, paper possible, rather than seeking grants or advertising income."[23] Readers could opt to buy a single issue for one dollar and fifty cents, or purchase a yearly subscription for six dollars. Subscribers would receive four issues a year, mailed to their address in plain brown paper packaging in order to be discreet. Even though the ask was six dollars, on the back page of every journal was an announcement that the creators wanted "any woman who wants *LesCon* to be able to get it…the six dollars is only a suggestion, contributions above six dollars will help us keep the subscription price low and able to send to women who are locked up."[24]

The publication uniquely included contributions from women who were currently incarcerated, and as they write, worked to get issues of *LesCon* inside prison walls. Issue 37 of the journal, from the winter of 1990, was their notable "Special Focus on Race and Racism" issue, which included a letter written by an incarcerated woman. This letter, along with six others, were included in Issue 37 as responses from readers to the publication's call for writing about what "race and racism mean in women's lives." Other examples of letters included were one on being a Black queer woman and a few readers' experiences at an anti-racism conference. Even though this was a single issue, Issue 37 includes a message from the creators stating that while they were satisfied with the responses they got, readers should not "consider the conversation finished," and that they are always interested in "provocative articles on any topic, including this one."[25] Every issue of *LesCon* also included an announcements and resources section with things like further reading and upcoming events for both straight and queer women. Issue 37's announcements section included a message from the Anthology of Contemporary Black Women's Journals at the University of Georgia asking for Black women to send in their reflections on "self, family, love, friendship, and work."[26] Another advertisement for further reading was for a resource packet called "Creating Inclusive Community" and aimed to address issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class. This resource was available for *LesCon* readers for fifteen dollars, and included a mailing address to send the money to. The last announcement in this issue was for an anti-racism newsletter written specifically for lesbians to address the harms of white supremacy in their own communities, also accompanied by a mailing address and suggested donation. In addition to promoting self reflection and inclusivity among their

---

[22] *Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism*, Issue 37 "Race and Racism," (San Francisco, California, 1990), 2. Box 1, Folder 2, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[23] *Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism*, Issue 37, 2.
[24] *Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism*, Issue 37, 37.
[25] *Lesbian Contradiction*, Issue 37, 37.
[26] *Lesbian Contradiction*, Issue 37, 3.

readers, *LesCon* was also committed to being accessible to blind readers, and had audio versions of their issues available on cassette tapes through the Womyn's Braille Press.[27]

The announcements and advertisements section of zines were also a method of providing readers with information about other zine publications. *Radical America*, an independent socialist-feminist zine based out of Somerville, Massachusetts, occasionally included advertisements for *LesCon.* The two publications shared a lot of the same audience, which made providing information on how to subscribe to each other mutually beneficial for their success. Multiple issues of *Radical America* were centered on women's and feminist issues, and mentioned *LesCon* as a resource for further reading. *Out/Look* magazine, published from 1988-1992 out of San Francisco, California, had a larger audience and was directed at both gay men and lesbians. The magazine discusses themes of gender, race, politics, and pop culture through the use of both visual material and more personal narratives.[28] In the Spring 1991 issue of *Out/Look,* there is an entire page and a half advertisement for the "Special Issue on Culture and Youth" of *Radical America,* with information on how to subscribe and an address to mail a check to. For readers of *Out/Look*, there was even a special offer for two free issues of *Radical America*.[29]

The establishment and distribution of underground media has also served as an interruption to capitalistic norms of media production. Zines were often initiated as a counterpoint to the "mainstream, male-centered, bourgeois public sphere" that philosopher Jürgen Habermas claimed was necessary for participatory democracy.[30] As opposed to mass media publishers who see their audiences as a source of profit, underground media and zine creators aim to bring people together. Most people who create zines reject the idea of commercial mass media, as it is antithetical to zine culture itself. Rather than positioning their readers as "consumers, as a marketplace, the zine positions them as friends, equals, members of a community"[31] who are in a reciprocal relationship with the zine creator. Zines have primarily been exchanged without the presence of money through trade or simply given away. The ephemeral nature of zines is also often why they are short-lived, due to lack of funds and labor. The trading of zines contributes to the building of community, the exchange of information, and the rejection of traditional publishing standards in the art and literary world.

The anti-capitalist zine culture is perhaps why they have often been rejected as a legitimate form of media, unworthy of being analyzed in a scholarly context. As compared to other forms of media, and even other underground and unpublished media, the handmade, inter-community aspect is often a deterrent for more formal research. In order to analyze a zine, there needs to be a large amount of attention to visual details because the artwork and structure of the piece is so significant. A

---

[27] *Lesbian Contradiction*, Issue 37, 37.
[28] Gerard Koskovich and Jeffery Escoffier, We Created a Magazine That Wasn't Like Anything Else, *Out/Look Magazine*, July 20, 2017, http://www.queeroutlook.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/OutLook_Interview_Escoffier.final-copy.pdf. Accessed November 1, 2023.
[29] Radical America, "Subscribe Now to Radical America," *Out/Look Magazine: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly*, Spring 1991, 56-57.
[30] Freeman, "'"A Public Sense of Ourselves,'" 146.
[31] Piepmeier, *Girl Zines:Making Media, Doing Feminism,* 70.

standard literary, text-based approach to the analysis of a zine is inadequate, making it impossible to fully comprehend the piece. The imaginative, unpredictable, anti-capitalist, under-the-radar nature of zines exemplifies the differences that they are trying to make.

Although zine culture aims to be accessible and inclusive, the historical demographic trend of zine creators are primarily upper middle class, cisgender, college educated white women. As with most mainstream feminist history, white women have pioneered the movement without reflection on their white privilege and have continued the hegemonic narrative. Some of the zines previously mentioned, however, do address the prevalence of white women's contributions and did seek to create a more inclusive publication. In the publications of both *LesCon* and *LesbiaNews*, authors expressed efforts to center Black women's experiences in their zine. In the October 1989 issue of *LesbiaNews* titled "Dynamics of Color: Building a Strong Lesbian Community," author Debby Gregory acknowledges that the zine primarily receives contributions from white women, due to the majority white area in which it was published. Gregory made an effort to publish contributions from women of color, writing in the 1989 issue that unless the creators of *LesbiaNews* are making "particular efforts to include these women, then we are effectively excluding them."[32] The majority of people who have been able to create zines have had access to leisure time and the privilege of creating and distributing zines without pay, sometimes even at their own financial expense. Considering zine culture from this lens can introduce a more critical perspective of the type of media that is being produced and studied as part of alternative history.

Many current media scholars argue that white-dominated media also led to the creation of underground media made by and for specifically people of color. Writer Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes that the history of zines created by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color is there, it is just harder to find records of them. This may be because communities of color created their own methods of underground communication as a safety measure before white people did, and documenting their history was not prioritized until more recently. Piepzna-Samarasinha notes that when studying the historical context of zines, one can look at the majority white spaces where zines were famously used like the punk movement of the 1970s and riot grrrl of the 1990s, or "look through an alternative lens that sees them equally birthed out of the self-publication methods" used by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who were "artists, poets, and writers during the 1960s and 1970s."[33]

One example of an important zine created and circulated by Black creatives was the *Fire!!* literary magazine. This magazine was created in 1926 during the Harlem Renaissance by prominent artists of the movement, including Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. In 1966, decades after the magazine's publication, Hughes reflected on his intentions for participating in its creation, stating that the Black community at the time needed a medium to "express ourselves freely and independently–without interference from old heads, white or Negro."[34] *Fire!!* was also considered incredibly radical for its time, with topics like homosexuality, bisexuality,

---

[32] Debby Gregory, *LesbiaNews,* "Dynamics of Color: Building a Stronger Lesbian Community," October 1989, (Victoria, British Columbia), 9.

[33] Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "Brown Star Kids: Zinemakers of Colour Shake Things Up," 2004, 26.

[34] Langston Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude," *African Forum* 1, no. 4 (Spring 1966): 11–20, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26432673, 34-35. Accessed October 15, 2023.

prostitution, and colorism all being addressed in the magazine through different poems, short stories, and artworks. Even though there was only one issue of this magazine, it has an enduring legacy. In the same 1966 essay reflecting on his participation in creating *Fire!!*, Hughes writes of his hope that it would redefine Black literary publications of the past and inspire young Black artists in the future. Hughes continues, explaining that the creators set out to "burn up a lot of the old, dead, conventional Negro-white ideas of the past" and hoped that the publication would bring a "realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us with an outlet for publication not available in the limited pages"[35] of the currently existing Black-published magazines. The title page reads, "Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists,"[36] immediately communicating their intentions to inspire younger artists.

Zine culture has evolved alongside the digital age, leading to shifts in some elements of the culture but retaining its foundation. Many libraries and universities have both physical and digital zine archives available, and online zine archives have expanded the accessibility and prevalence of zine analysis. Projects like the Queer Zine Archive are dedicated to the documentation of a specific type of zine, and other more specialized archives like the POC (People of Color) Zine Project have emerged in the past decade. The Sarah Dyer Collection is another example of a specific collection of zines being archived in order to present a group of zines that can be used in conjunction with each other for a specific research topic. In 2002, librarian Greg Meins published the first zine attempting to document the creation of zine libraries in the United States, *Zine Librarian Zine.* As of 2023, cities in thirty three states and Washington, DC, as well as numerous countries across Europe, Asia, and Canada host a zine fest, which is a gathering of both zine creators and readers that celebrates alternative media. Even though zines have evolved quite a bit alongside people and culture, they remain as a tool for building community. Use of social media and the internet has made sharing information and resources much more straightforward, technology cannot replace the role of zines, which provide a unique handmade, more personal aspect to media. Queer and feminist groups still circulate zines among themselves, and with online archives and digitization, creators can reach a wider audience. Zines have not strayed far from some of the most foundational values that originally defined them, like being financially accessible and being created and distributed within their own communities. The continued presence of zine culture proves that they are not a thing of the past, and now they are even analyzed in more formal scholarship.

In the 1960s, Langston Hughes dreamed that *Fire!!* magazine would energize young Black artists to push the boundaries of art and literature. In the 1980s, Debby Gregory wrote that she hoped *LesbiaNews* would inspire future generations of queer people to create something similar. Today in bookstores, libraries, and classrooms, zines can be found as tools for education and creative expression. Queer people continue to use zines to share information with one another regarding healthcare, events, and media, all things that continue to not be included in more widespread media. Historically, zines have been associated with grassroots political and social movements; at present, leftist movements have found success in the utilization of zines

---

[35] Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem And Its Negritude," 35.
[36] Wallace Thurman et al., "Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists," 1926, https://issuu.com/poczineproject/docs/poczp_fire_1926_readview, 1. Accessed August 20, 2023.

to share information about prison abolition, gender affirming healthcare, and harm reduction tactics. Understanding zine history can be a model for both present day and future community building, and can provide significant context for the queer and feminist experience of the twentieth century and how these groups were able to build community.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Eyde, Edythe. Vice Versa. Zine. Issue 1. Los Angeles, California: 1947. Accessed October 15, 2023. https://queermusicheritage.com/viceversa1.html

Gregory, Debby. *LesbiaNews.* Zine. “Dynamics of Color: Building a Stronger Lesbian Community.” Victoria, British Columbia. October 1989.

Gregory, Debby. *LesbiaNews.* Zine. “Editorial.” Victoria, British Columbia. September 1989.

Koskovich, Gerard, and Jeffery Escoffier. We Created a Magazine That Wasn’t Like Anything Else. Other. *Out/Look Magazine*, July 20, 2017. Accessed November 1, 2023. http://www.queeroutlook.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/OutLook_Interview_Escoffier.final-copy.pdf.

Lesbian Contradiction: A Journal of Irreverent Feminism, “Race and Racism.” Zine. Issue 37. San Francisco, California: 1990. Box 1, Folder 2. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Palmer, Raymond Arthur. The Comet. Zine. Issue 1. Chicago, Illinois: 1930. Accessed September 20, 2023. https://kimon.hosting.nyu.edu/physical-electrical-digital/items/show/1393

Radical America. “Subscribe Now to Radical America.” *Out/Look Magazine: National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly*, Spring 1991.

Thurman, Wallace, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, John P. Davis, Richard Bruce Nugent, Gwendolyn Bennett, Lewis Grandison Alexander, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. “Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists.” 1, no. 1, 1926. Accessed August 20, 2023. https://issuu.com/poczineproject/docs/poczp_fire_1926_readview.

Rock Against Sexism, “Anti-Censorship Issue.” Zine. Volume 2, Issue 3. Boston, Massachusetts: 1988. Box 1, Folder 1. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Rock Against Sexism, “Anniversary Issue.” Zine. Boston, Massachusetts: 1982. Box 1, Folder 2. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Secondary Sources

Atton, Chris. “What Use Is a Zine? Identity Building and Social Signification in Zine Culture.” Essay. In *Alternative Media*, 54–79. London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2010.

Atton, Chris. “Zines and Communication.” Essay. In *Alternative Media*, 67–68. London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2002.

Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes From Underground: Zines and The Politics of Alternative Culture*. Portland, OR: Microcosm Publishing, 2008.

Freeman, Barbara M. “‘A Public Sense of Ourselves”’: Communication and Community-Building in Canada’s *LesbiaNews/LNews*, 1989–98.” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 8, no. 3 (2011): 143–67. Accessed September 27, 2023. https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.138.

Geidner, Chris. “The Court Cases That Changed L.G.B.T.Q. Rights.” The New York Times, June 19, 2019. Accessed November 5, 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/legal-history-lgbtq-rights-timeline.html.

Gunderloy, Mike, and Cari Goldberg Janice. *The World of Zines: A Guide to the Independent Magazine Revolution*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1992.

Hughes, Langston. “The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude.” *African Forum* 1, no. 4 (Spring 1966): 11–20. Accessed October 15, 2023. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26432673.

Marcus, Eric. Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990, An Oral History. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Moylan, Michele, and Lane Stiles. *Reading books: Essays on the material text and literature in America*. Amherst, MA: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1996.

Piepmeier, Alison. “Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community.” Essay. In *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*, 57–86. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi. “Brown Star Kids: Zinemakers of Colour Shake Things Up,” 2004.

“Queer Zine Archive.” QZAP, November 2003. Accessed September 10, 2023. https://archive.qzap.org/index.php.

Schilt, Kristen. “‘I’ll Resist with Every Inch and Every Breath.’” *Youth & Society* 35, no. 1 (2003): 71–97. Accessed October 20, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x03254566.

Streitmatter, Rodger. “Vice Versa: America’s First Lesbian Magazine.” *American Periodicals* 8 (1998): 78–95. Accessed October 2, 2023. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20771114.

Taormino, Tristan, and Karen Green, eds. *A girl’s guide to taking over the world: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997.

Waltz, Mitzi. “A Brief History of Alternative and Activist Media.” In *Alternative and Activist Media*, 13–24. Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Wood, Gordon S. *The American Revolution: A History*. London, UK: Phoenix, 2005.

Wooten, Kelly. 2002. *Women's Zines In the Sarah Dyer Zine Collection.* Accessed August 10, 2023. https://doi.org/10.17615/2cvz-w141.

Zobl, Elke. “Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines.” *Signs* 35, no. 1 (2009): 1–12. Accessed October 1, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1086/599256.