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**Unearthing the underground: a comparative study of zines in libraries**

**Statement of originality:**

**This dissertation is the work of 02015645 and has been completed solely in fulfilment of a dissertation for the MA in Information Services Management at London Metropolitan University.**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the treatment of zine collections in various libraries. Most were academic libraries based in the US but data was also obtained on public and UK based libraries.

An open questionnaire was administered via email to staff in libraries hosting zine collections. This questionnaire found that zine collections vary greatly in size. Most collections were broad in focus although a few collected only geographically local zines and all the libraries focussed on women's collections collected zines either about or by women only.

Most zine collections were found to have begun due to the impetus of a committed individual or on receipt of a significant donation of zines. Donation was also found to be the main method of obtaining new zines. Reasons given for collecting zines including documenting a wide range of viewpoints and experiences (particularly women's experiences) and encouraging creativity.

Most collections sought to catalogue zines individually although only a few have done so and this has proved difficult given an absence of clear bibliographic information. Nevertheless librarians in this field have demonstrated that they have the will to overcome such difficulties.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Zines (also known as fanzines) are self-published (usually photocopied) creations available in a vast range of formats and covering a vast range of subjects. All that can be said to unite zine makers is a non-commercial approach and a desire to create a physical object expressing something of interest to themselves. The format is dominated by, but not limited to, young people.

While the antecedents of today's zines are usually traced back to the 1930s science fiction fanzine or the 1970s punk fanzine (Duncombe 1997: 6-7), few libraries seem to have begun collecting zines until the 1990s. Although at time of writing the number of libraries collecting zines is still low, more libraries are seeing benefits to current and future patrons of collecting them. Such collections are still largely restricted to academic libraries although the research does include information on a public library pioneer in this field.

The research seeks to find out how such material is organised and compares approaches to cataloguing zines, where cataloguing is undertaken.

The key aim of the research is to discover why individual libraries collect zines and whom they see this material as useful for and for what purposes. As far as possible, it aims to discover whether zine collections are proving successful in making available and promoting zines to library users.

Given the dearth of comparative studies in this field it is hoped that this research can shed some light on differences and similarities between those libraries which collect zines. Since research to date has focussed on the United States it is hoped that this can also provide an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of zine collections in the United Kingdom.

### **A note on the term “zine”**

While in the early stages of this research the terms “zine” and “fanzine” were used interchangeably, it became clear that the term “zine” was considered to be current usage, particularly in the US where most of the literature emanated from. “Fanzine” seemed to often be used to refer only to zines created by fans of, for example, science fiction. In the UK, fanzine is still frequently used but often refers to football fanzines rather than more general titles. For this reason this paper has used “zine” except when referring to publications created by and for fans of a sport or genre and, of course, in quotations.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **Existing work on the topic**

In examining the subject of zines in libraries, very little literature was found on this specific topic. In order to build up a picture of the topic, the search was broadened to include material on zines in general and to material on other types of “alternative literature” in libraries. The literature review will therefore be looking at the existing work uncovered by the literature review under these three subheadings.

### **Work on zines in general**

Most of the available texts on zines in general took the form of anthologies of writing from zines (Green K, 1997), interviews with zine creators (Vale, 1996 and Vale, 1997) or a combination of these two formats (Block, 1998) rather than providing analysis or a history of the subject. As anthologists, the editors of these works have used their introductions largely to assert the importance of zine creation and assert their relevance to the potential reader of the book. They provide a snapshot of zine culture of the late 1990s but fail to provide a context for this picture.

The only scholarly work on zines in general which could be obtained was *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Duncombe, 1997). As the title suggests, this is an in depth cultural study of

the genre from its history to its possible future. It makes a strong case for the importance of the fanzine in the context of cultural and media studies as well as for students of political movements of all kinds.

The work on zines in general also helped to clarify the concept of zines, providing definitions and histories of the format. Duncombe (1997: 6) defines zines thus: “zines are non commercial, non professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish and distribute by themselves” and other definitions offered by the other literature were along similar lines, with broad agreement on what the genre consists of.

Haynes’s (1995) *The Football Imagination: The Rise of Football Fanzine Culture* deals in similar depth with the British football fanzine in particular, largely on how it has influenced coverage of football in more mainstream media. This work demonstrated that British football fanzines are potentially of great value to students of media studies and sporting culture alike.

While this dissertation does not deal in depth with zines themselves, the background reading on zines provided by the above does support the idea that zines are worth reading, which helps to support the assumption made by the more specific literature on zines in libraries that they are worth collecting.

The literature on zines also touched on why creators create zines and this helped to explain why, as mentioned by the literature on zines in libraries, zine authors can actually be opposed to their work being collected in libraries,

seeing preservation of their work as being “institutionalized” (Chepesiuk, 1997: 70). The literature on zines tends to emphasise that zine creators or “zinesters” tend see their work as separate from (and “purer” than) conventionally published material: “[z]inesters consider what they do as an alternative to and strike against commercial culture and consumer capitalism” (Duncombe, 1997: 2-3). Kucsma (2002) also notes the inherent contradiction in collecting material often antithetical to US cultural traditions in US institutions. Zine creators who see their works as existing outside of the formal environments of traditional publishing and distribution may object to overtures to include them in official (if non-commercial) institutions such as libraries. However some zines do not have a problem with the conventional channels for disseminating information and entertainment with Duncombe also noting that as of the mid-1990s, Tower Records was stocking more than 500 zine titles (1997: 165).

Irrespective of whether zine creators allow their works to be sold or collected via more conventional channels, Duncombe feels that zine publication is a challenge to the hegemony, quoting Antonio Gramsci’s argument that “All men are intellectuals...but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals”, continuing “zines and underground culture provide the medium for all people to be intellectuals – cultural creators – and this itself is a radical act” (Duncombe 1997: 179). Duncombe does conclude that zines are a form of cultural activity rather than political activism (1997: 192), but while zines may not be a threat to the mass media the literature finds that they can be an effective critique of it.

Knobel & Lankshear (2001) approach zines from an educational point of view, and argue that zines allow young people to resist and subvert mass media messages and images. Discussing *Girlswirl* zine's critique of images of women in the media they say "[w]hile not a direct 'attack' on or resistance to popular media, *Girlswirl* is the product of Taryn's 'making space' in the niches and crevices of institutions such as mainstream magazines and television by thumbing her nose at the formal structures and strategies of these institutions" (ibid). Their work argues that zines can help teachers develop pedagogies which can prevent students from becoming passive consumers and as will be discussed later, a similar strategy has been used in a public library working with teens.

One important aspect of zines noted in the literature was the idea of the zine community and the personal nature of the zine. "Perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of the zine medium, the zine community, and zine publishing as a social activity is the personal nature of it all...[zines] come across more often than not as a form of personal communication between writer and reader" (Wright 2001: chapter 2). Marshall McLuhan refers to low participation media as "hot media" and high participation media as "cold media" (McLuhan 1967: 31). Zines would appear to at least attempt to transform the "hot" print medium into a "colder", participatory medium by often requiring personal contact in order to obtain the zine and by encouraging reader comments as well as by the often personal, intimate tone of the writing. However, having the zine collected by libraries may reduce the personal or "cold" aspect of the medium by placing the creator at a further remove from

the reader and this could possibly lead to resistance from some zine creators to having their works in libraries.

More recent literature has dealt with the e-zine and the fact that many former paper zine publishers have moved online with others supplementing their paper zines with an online presence. Wright's (2001) PhD thesis deals with the impact of electronic publishing on the zine community in depth, concluding that there was "little evidence that the zine medium could not exist online with its characteristics that were forged in print intact" (ibid) but that since most readers prefer the paper format e-publishing is unlikely to kill the traditional zine.

In general it was found that the fanzine-focussed literature tended to emphasise the benefits of zines to the creator rather than the reader, whereas the work on zines in libraries were more focussed on the potential reader. Since this is the approach this paper will take it will now move on to the literature on zines and alternative literature in libraries.

### **Work on alternative literature in libraries**

The scarcity of literature relating specifically to fanzine collections in libraries lead me to look for work relating to related types of materials in libraries. A variety of terms were used to describe the wider area of non-traditional publications, including "grey literature" (Auger, 1998 and others), "alternative literature" (Atton, 1996 and others), "popular materials" (Moran, 1992) and

“fugitive literature” (Dendo, 2002). While zines share collection and bibliographic control issues with all types of non-traditional literature, however, Atton rightfully notes that the fanzine is as different from the traditional idea of “grey literature” (official publications) as is possible (1996: 9).

The case made by authors of work on alternative literature in libraries was analogous to the more specific work on zines in libraries. Schuman noted that standard information sources frequently lag behind alternative information sources using the example of “rape as a social issue” (1982: 3). While alternative magazines covered this subject as early as 1971, only in 1975 were the first books treating rape “as a socio-political issue” (ibid) available from major publishers. Dendo (2002: 76) also notes the importance of libraries collecting alternative materials on women in response to the feminist movement, something noted here since the literature on zines in libraries in particular (with the exception of Kucsma (2002)) rarely mentioned feminist collections despite the large number of female-created and feminist zines.

In addition to making the case for alternative material in libraries, the literature in this field noted the difficulties of collecting such material, with Auger (1998: 3) listing the characteristics of “grey literature” as “uncertain availability, poor bibliographic information and control, non-professional layout and format, low print runs”. Solutions offered to the problems of collecting and cataloguing such material were similar to those offered in the literature more specifically on zines, discussed below.

## **Work on zines in libraries**

The literature focussing on the specific topic of this research tended to focus on arguing the case for including zines in libraries, on delineating the problems of cataloguing zines and on case studies of individual library zine collections.

Most literature tended to concentrate on the role of zines within academic libraries. Work covering the role of zines within public libraries includes Julie Bartel's (2003) study of the Salt Lake City Public Library zine collection, which argues primarily that such collections bring new patrons to the public library, teens in particular, a point also made by Dodge (1995: 26-7). Both Aul (1995: 82) and Chepesiuk (1997: 68) cover the New York State Library's Factsheet Five collection and the latter also covers San Francisco Public Library's collection (ibid: 69). References to only three public libraries collecting zines in the US suggest that such collections are rare in this type of library at the time of writing.

The primary strength of the literature relating to zines and alternative literature in libraries is the case it makes for collecting such material. All of the work seemed to feel strongly about the important role zines could play in a library collection. US authors (Kucsma, 2002; Bartel, 2003: 233) have claimed the American Library Association's Bill of Rights supports the inclusion of zines in library collections, with its assertion "materials should not be excluded because of origin, background or views of those contributing to their creation"

(ALA, 2004), asserting that collecting such material supports established professional values.

Much of the existing literature on this subject is a call to arms to fellow professionals from both the academic and public librarian's standpoint. Bartel (2003: 233) says "I believe that public libraries have a responsibility to aggressively seek out and acquire alternative materials in every subject and media available to them".

The literature also offered a strong historical grounding with the lengthy history of zines often mentioned by authors who dated their appearance to the science fiction fanzines of the 1930s (Herrada, 1995: 79) and also identified roots in high school underground newspapers, the literary small press and mini comics (Dodge, 1995: 27).

Links were also made by authors between zines and past forms of underground publications such as the 1960s Little Magazines (Chepesiuk, 1997: 69). Kucsma (2002) notes that few academic libraries today have substantial collections of the 1960s underground press, without which researchers cannot work on the era's "social revolution", a mistake which today's academic libraries need to learn from in time to collect their modern day equivalent – zines.

Annie Knight's (2004a) paper "Scratching the Surface: Zines in Libraries" deals with the treatment of zines in both academic and public libraries, with

special emphasis on catalogue records, online catalogues and other and finding aids. Unfortunately Knight's paper was published only after this research was underway and thus it covers some of the same ground. Since Knight covers catalogue records for zines in detail this paper has covered this area in less detail in order to avoid duplicating her findings.

While zines are suggested as a valuable service for patrons of public libraries, it is usually argued that academic libraries should take long term responsibility for preserving zines (Kucsma, 2002).

The literature suggested that zines should be included in academic collections for the benefit of researchers and students in various disciplines. Moran (1992: 8) suggests that zines are of value to students of popular culture and should be collected now for future researchers of today's culture. Chepesiuk quotes Washington State University librarian Laila Miletic-Vejzovic's opinion that "zine comics can tell us a lot about slang and language in our society" (1997: 69) suggesting that zines are of interest to students of linguistics. Herrada (1995: 81) suggests their value to students of media studies, stating that fanzine collections will provide evidence of how society has challenged the control of information by the mass media. The importance of collecting poetry zines for future students of American literature is taken up by Basinski (1995: 85). Trusky (1995) writes of the "Some Zines" exhibition he curated suggesting that zines can be collected as works of art as well as for their writing.

With much of the literature on fanzine collections in libraries having been written by librarians with experience of organising such collections, the literature tends to be of a practical bent, with considerable expertise in locating, collecting and cataloguing such material being passed on. Authors such as Bartel (2003), Dodge (1995) and Atton (1996) have experience of collecting zines and relate collection and cataloguing procedures in a way which is easy to follow. Atton's (1996) *Alternative Literature: a Practical Guide for Librarians* offered the most extensive guide on how to set up collections of non-standard material discovered in the course of this literature review.

While the literature dealing with specific fanzine collections states that this material is usually housed as a special or separate collection, as for example with the Factsheet Five collection in the New York Public Library (Aul, 1995: 82) some authors have argued against this approach.

Atton (1996: 152) says that “[i]t is surely more appropriate for alternative and mainstream to co-exist, for them to be able to inform one another by being housed together as part of a larger collection, than for alternative literature to remain in a ghetto that hardly represents its true place in the world of ideas”. He also points out that usage decreases where there is an extra step in the retrieval process where alternative literature is stored separately (Ibid: 153).

As might be expected from an “underground” genre, informal types of information services have arisen to collect zines, usually known as

“infoshops”. Atton (1996: 143-4) notes the (1990s) “rise of the ‘infoshop’” and says that librarians and infoshop volunteers can learn from each others’ expertise, infoshop volunteers’ in acquiring alternative publications (Ibid: 145) and librarians’ in organisation (Ibid: 146). While Atton does not make value judgements about the relative merits of libraries as against infoshops and less formal information services, Kucsma (2002) regards infoshops as unreliable since their longevity is less certain than traditional libraries, arguing that libraries have the resources to better preserve such material.

### **Weaknesses of the existing literature**

The main weakness of the literature which was found in this area was the lack of research or comparative studies on the specific topic of zines within libraries. The only traditional piece of research on the subject found was Hazel Hall’s 1997 qualitative study of football fanzines in the Lothians. The methodology of this paper was studied with interest since it was the only piece of research similar to what this research hoped to carry out but its sampling strategy was vague, noting that “[a] number of fanzine experts and collectors from the UK...contributed to the survey” (Hall, 1997: 192). This study also surveyed fanzine producers, something which it was considered incorporating into this research but ultimately rejected in favour of researching the libraries themselves in depth.

Another weakness of the literature was that it tended to focus on its own country, overwhelmingly the US (no literature from outside the US and UK

was found). There was no effort to look at the international picture regarding zines and zine libraries and to compare the US with other nations.

Literature on zines in particular (rather than on their inclusion in libraries) tends to focus on the accessibility of the medium rather than acknowledging that cultural, class and other factors may have an impact. Duncombe (1997: 8) does acknowledge that zines are largely white and (culturally) middle class. Bleyer's study of girl zine culture notes that participating "requires that one has the leisure time to create zines, a life generally uncluttered with the rudiments of survival, access to copy machines and other equipment, money for stamps and supplies, and enough self-esteem and encouragement to believe that one's thoughts are worth putting down for public consumption – all marks of a certain level of privilege" (2004: 53). Since authors such as Block (1998:1) seemed excessively idealistic in making assertions such as "[a]nyone can join in, even if they don't have the privilege of being able to read and write" it was refreshing to read more realistic assessments of individuals' ability to participate in zine culture.

Bartel (2003: 238) mentions her library's connection with the local Homeless Youth Resource Center, who produce a zine with assistance from the public library, suggesting that disadvantaged groups can sometimes gain access to self-publishing with the assistance of libraries.

It was surprising not to see more connections made between zines and self-published comics, with which they have strong links and which could also

serve a similar purpose to some of those mentioned for zines, for example attracting a teen readership. It is possible that authors do not necessarily regard zines as a separate entity from self-published comics since zines often include comics alongside text but if so, this was not made explicit.

### **Conclusions of the literature review**

The subject of zines in libraries is a relatively new one with not much literature dating from prior to the mid-1990s. What is clearly lacking are any research studies into the subject. Other than Hall (1997) and Knight (2004a) it was not possible to find any comparative studies which had been carried out. Most of the literature was based around the author's personal experience or expertise and appeared to be very useful for librarians setting up this type of collection but not offering any guidance as far as methodology for studying the subject. While a number of case studies were presented as outlined above, there was an almost total lack of comparison between each library used as a case study. For this reason it is intended to do a comparative study in order to find out what differences and similarities exist in libraries' collection and cataloguing processes.

The literature also offered anecdotal evidence of the benefits of collecting zines but many lacked information on who was using collections and for what purpose. This research will attempt to gather some information about readership from the libraries themselves although an in depth study of readers

may be a more suitable project for someone working in or with access to a library with this type of collection.

Previous studies have barely dealt with libraries outside of the US and it was felt to be important that research be done into collections outside America to counter the invisibility of collections that exist elsewhere but appear nowhere in the literature. For this reason this research has endeavoured to obtain information on UK libraries hosting zine collections as far as possible given that there appear to be only a small quantity.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this research is to explore why libraries collect zines and who they see as using this material and for what purposes. An additional aim is to find out how such material is organized and to compare approaches to cataloguing or otherwise organizing zines. For the purposes of this study Duncombe's definition of zines (1997:6) as “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” was accepted, since from the literature review it appeared to be noncontentious.

Due to the small numbers of libraries which collect zines, it was decided not to attempt to use a sample but rather to approach all the libraries which could be identified as holding such collections. Libraries which held zine collections were identified using online listings such as The Zine and E-zine resource guide: Zine libraries, <http://www.zinebook.com/resource/libes.html> and Infoshops and Zine Libraries, <http://www.undergroundpress.org/infoshops.html> (both accessed 2 December 2003).

In addition to internet listings, which focused mainly on US libraries, several UK libraries hosting zines were identified through personal contacts. In this way the British Library and the Glasgow Women's Library were identified as

candidates for questionnaires and the Women's Library (London Metropolitan University) was identified as having commenced a zine collection when the research was underway, so a questionnaire was sent to them at a late stage.

For the purposes of this research it was decided to concentrate on "traditional" libraries which collect zines in addition to other sources of information rather than those styling themselves "zine libraries" and which concentrate mainly on zines. While it was considered looking at least a small sample of informal zine collections in order to compare their approach to zine collecting with that of traditional libraries it was decided that traditional libraries differed sufficiently in their approaches to allow a comparative approach without addressing informal zine collections. The main interest of the research is how libraries are incorporating a relatively new and non-standard form of information into their existing collections rather than collections which are being set up based on that form of information, the zine. However, the research included one "non standard" library, the Independent Publishing Resource Center, in my research since it was felt that the complexity of their catalogue, available online, compared to traditional libraries and merited attention.

Although it would have been desirable to question users of zine libraries, identifying users would be difficult without visiting these libraries and time and financial constraints would have limited the research to local organisations, which would not have provided a representative sample. For this reason, this study relies on library service providers' reports to build up a picture of users.

## **The Questionnaire**

The use of an email questionnaire, as discussed, was the most suitable way of obtaining in depth information from a group of geographically disparate libraries. The same questionnaire was used for all libraries in order to allow direct comparison on the same topics (see Appendix A for complete questionnaire).

While one quantitative question was included, the questionnaire used was predominantly qualitative. This method of research was chosen since the study is addressing a complex, real world phenomenon and the questionnaire aimed to elicit in depth responses.

While the research was willing to anonymise responses in order to protect respondents' identities, none requested that this be done and all replies are identified in the research.

The first question, "how many zines (approximately) do you have in your collection?" was included as the initial enquiry in order to begin with a closed and relatively non complex question in the hope of gaining a higher response rate than beginning with a more difficult and open query would have.

The second question enquired as to the origins of the zine collection as it was felt important the original purpose of the collection would necessarily shape everything about the collection.

This was followed by questions intended to elicit information on the nature of the collection in order to discover if libraries were, for example, building up a collection based on a certain topic or topics or collecting local area zines. It was wondered whether libraries were duplicating each other's collections at all or whether some collections were attempting to collect what was not covered elsewhere.

This was followed by an enquiry on any related material in order to ascertain where zines fit in to the library's collection and whether library staff saw zines as belonging to any other traditions.

In retrospect it would have been more useful to group together questions 5, 7 and 8 concerning the practical issues of collecting and cataloguing zines. It would also have been better for question 6 concerning the users of the zine collection to follow question 2 concerning the original purpose of the collection. However despite these problems in the ordering of the questions they did elicit sufficient data to meet the aims of the research.

The research asked about the social composition of users of the zine collection and a possible follow up could be to ask how often the zine collection was used in order to find out how frequently collections were used, as well as by whom. Future research may wish to concentrate on this aspect which arose out of the study.

## **Pilot questionnaire**

It was necessary to pilot the questionnaire in order to discover any unforeseen ambiguities in wording or other difficulties in comprehension. However, due to the limited number of possible candidates for completing the questionnaire it was not possible to test it on a group identical to the anticipated recipients. It was inadvisable to cut down the relatively small pool of potential recipients of the questionnaire by using any of them to pilot it.

It was tested, therefore, on two recipients who were asked to respond as if they worked in a library hosting a zine collection. While comments were largely favourable, the piloting process did lead to a number of changes. Both pilot recipients suggested that the term fanzine or zine be defined in the email so an explanation of the term as used in the research based on those found in the literature review (“For the purpose of this research I am considering zines (also known as fanzines) to be self-published, non-professional, non-commercial magazines”) was added to the introductory remarks.

The terminology used in the questionnaire was also changed as from fanzine to zine as one recipient suggested that fanzine tended to suggest more fan orientated material, particularly in the US where most of the questionnaires would be sent. This point is further discussed in “a note on the term ‘zine’” above (pg. 7).

As a result of the pilot, examples of genres were added to the question on genres of zines collected as one recipient thought this would be helpful. It was also suggested that age and occupation be mentioned in the question on types of user, again to assist the questionnaire recipient, so these were added together with gender as examples.

### **Distribution of questionnaire**

The main distribution of questionnaires took place via email on 4 May 2004. Initially, 19 questionnaires were sent out. No deadline was given for replying to the questionnaire and in retrospect it would have been helpful to provide guidance as to when a reply was received by. However, all responses were received promptly and the research does not seem to have been unduly affected by the absence of a deadline.

It may also have been advisable to email recipients in advance of sending out the questionnaire in order to check email addresses and gauge possible response rate. As it was, two email addresses as published in the web listings mentioned above were incorrect and correct addresses had to be relocated via the institutions' own web pages.

Following the initial sending out of questionnaires, a further zine collection held at Barnard College was identified via the zine librarians yahoo group (Perris, 2004a) and a further questionnaire was sent separately to that institution. The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, started a

collection of zines during the period of research and having seen an appeal for donations (Knight, 2004b) a questionnaire was also sent separately to the library. Although this was sent at a considerable time lag to the other questionnaires it was felt important to include a collection, however young, at the institution where the research was taking place and to try and obtain another response from another UK library if possible in order to balance the heavy US bias of questionnaires sent out and responses received.

A reminder email was sent to the 9 recipients who had not yet responded on 17th May, nearly 2 weeks after the initial email questionnaire.

### **Questionnaire response rate**

The response rate to this questionnaire was very high. Of the 21 questionnaires sent out, one library responded to say they did not in fact host a zine collection making a total of 20 questionnaires sent to (as far as the researcher is aware) valid organisations. From these a total of 15 completed questionnaires were received. One response was sent via the post due to email problems but this did not affect the research as it was not received significantly later than other responses.

The unusually high response rate of 75% may be due to the fact that most library staff working with zines are likely to feel strongly about their collections and may wish to share information on their collections and contribute to research on the subject.

Three of the responses were received after the reminder email was sent out suggesting that the use of a reminder encouraged response. The reminder email also identified one response which had been sent but not received and had to be sent again which would otherwise have been assumed to have been a non-response.

### **Limitations of the methodology**

It is acknowledged that largely using the internet to identify possible recipients for the questionnaire may have led to an English-speaking bias since the internet tends to be English biased and all the libraries identified were in the UK or US. However, no other way of identifying libraries was found and libraries identified in the literature review were also found in internet listings.

## Chapter 4: Analysis and Interpretation of Results

This chapter will analyse the results of the 15 email questionnaires received from zine library staff. These questionnaires revealed a high level of dedication among information professionals working with zines. Although the questionnaire was not limited to information professionals, the email signatures (listing qualifications) of responses did reveal most respondents to be qualified librarians or archivists.

Five respondents mentioned having founded their institution's zine collection, as will be discussed below. In addition, three of those who replied had written articles on their collections or the principles of zine collection which had been read in the course of the literature review. Therefore the information amassed comes from experts in the field with a strong commitment to this type of collection. Table 1 lists all of those who responded and their institutions in alphabetical order.

**Table 1 – Respondents to email questionnaire**

Name of respondent	Institution	Date of email response (2004)
Bartel, Julie Thomas	Salt Lake City Public Library	17 May
Basinski, Michael	State University of New York	4 May
Danky, James	University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries	14 June
Down, Nancy	Bowling Green State University Popular Culture Library	7 May

Eland, Thomas	Minneapolis Community & Technical College	7 May
Freedman, Jenna	Barnard College	18 May
Grimes, Andrea	San Francisco Public Library	21 May
Hagardorn, Amy Leigh	Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture	6 May
Kemp, Beverley	The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University	2 July
MacIntosh, Morgen	DePaul University Special Collections -Underground Press Collection	11 May
Means, Greg	Independent Publishing Resource Center	22 May
Mercer, Paul	New York State Library	3 June
Mullin, Chris	University of Montana	4 May
Price, Richard	The British Library	4 May
Scott, Randy	Michigan State University Libraries	6 May

### **Number of zines held**

This question proved more difficult to answer than anticipated since some libraries did not have up to date records of the numbers of zines held or were unable to give an estimate given sheer number of zines or the complexity of deciding what exactly could be classified as a “zine” (see below for further discussion). Among those who provided numbers, estimates ranged from 50 in the case of the newly founded Women’s Library collection (Kemp, email communication) to 25,975 issues held at the Bowling Green State University Popular Culture Library (Down, email communication). The average figure of the 11 libraries which provided an overall estimate of the number of zines held was 4609 individual zines but this high figure may be indicative of the fact that larger collections were more likely to have come to the researcher’s attention

and be included in the study. Figure 1 shows approximate numbers of titles.

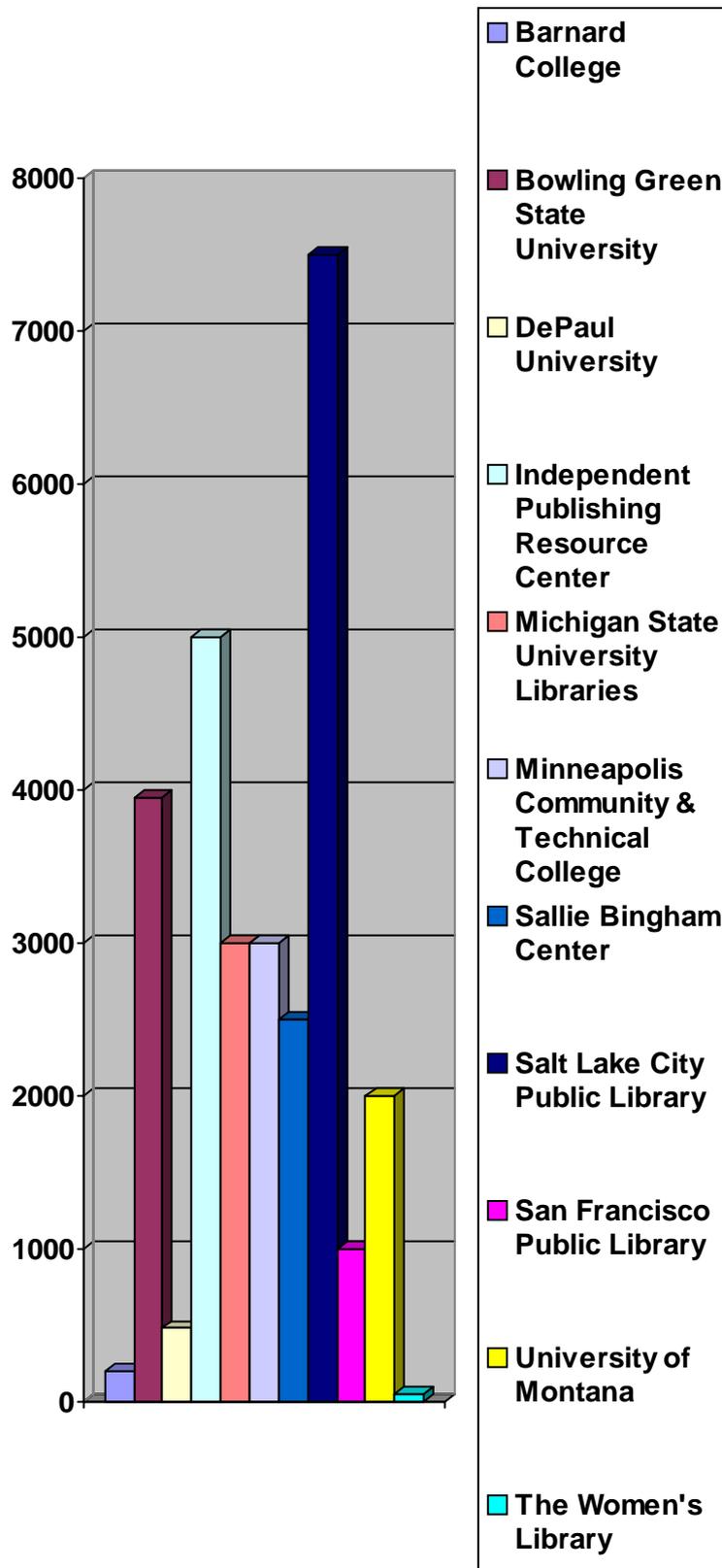


Figure 1

Many respondents included information relevant to other questions under this category and the information provided is included in the appropriate category below.

### **Types of zines held**

Most respondents' institutions appeared to have a wide focus, with 6 of the 15 collecting all or almost all genres of zine without restrictions, 4 collecting all or almost all genres but restricted by geographical origin and 3 collecting all or almost all genres limited by gender.

While Michigan State University Libraries collect only "subject matter relating to our other collections" this appeared to cover a broad range: "[s]cience fiction, comics, rock music, poetry, gay and lesbian writings, and general popular culture and/or radicalism" (Scott, email communication). Only the State University of New York concentrated on a single genre, the poetry zine (Basinski, email communication).

The large number of collections which claimed to have a wide open collections policy may reflect the fact that libraries which host zine collections are already open to a variety of forms of expression in order to collect this unusual type of publication. As Julie Thomas Bartel states: "we are open to just about anything (and have just about anything...)" (email communication).

Libraries appear to be eager to preserve local culture even where they do not impose geographical restrictions on the collection, with Greg Means (email communication) of the Independent Publishing Resource Center stating “we have a special focus on zines from our region” and Barnard College collecting zines by “urban women (especially NYC)” (Freedman, email communication).

Libraries appeared to be eager to find alternative libraries to host any zines which they received outside of their own institution’s collection development parameters. While both the Bowling Green State University Popular Culture Library and the San Francisco Public Library Little Maga/Zines collections excluded the music genre of zines from their holdings this was only because these were passed on to other departments in the same institution, the Sound Recording Archives at Bowling Green (Down, email communication) and the Art & Music Department of SFPL (Grimes, email communication) respectively.

Another possible explanation for the large percentage of libraries collecting all or most genres is that many are in receipt of donations (as will be discussed below) and thus the collection may be shaped by material donated which may be wider in remit than that which the institution purchases.

Of course some institutions simply have a very wide remit and the large number of subjects included in their zine collection reflects a general commitment to including a large body of knowledge, for example the British Library’s Collection Development Policy states that “[a]t the core it represents the collective memory of the nation” (British Library, 2004). Such a broad

remit it is not surprising that the British Library's collection spans sport, "adult comics" and punk zines (Price, email communication).

With a fifth of respondents hosting collections of zines created by or about women this question brought out the fact that zines would appear to be considered especially valuable by woman-focussed libraries. The Women's Library collects zines "about" women (Kemp, email communication), the Sally Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture collects zines "created by women or girls" (Hagardorn, email communication) and Barnard College, a women's college, zines by "all those who identify themselves as [women]" (Freeman, email communication).

### **External constraints**

While the collections policies of libraries which host zine collections are likely not to be restrictive, the type of material collected was of course restricted by institutional collection policy. Most commonly, libraries were restricted to the local geographical area which may be limited to a metropolitan area, with the San Francisco Public Library concentrating on Bay Area zines although willing to "consider West Coast zines" (Grimes, email communication) to the British Library which focuses on zines "published in the UK and Ireland" although it does hold a small collection of US zines also (Price, email communication).

Funding means that the law is an issue, with Julie Thomas Bartel stating "[b]ecause we are taxpayer-funded, we do not collect anything that is illegal

(hate speech, pornographic, for the most part)” (email communication). Paul Mercer of the New York State Library noted that “[g]iven our standing as a public research library, there could conceivably be problems relating to “controversial” content, although I stress that this has not been a problem to date” (email communication). No libraries reported problems with contentious issues but Bartel as the only public librarian surveyed noted that she took special care to ensure sensitivity with regards to age boundaries, hosting separate collections in the teen departments of the Salt Lake City Public Library: “[z]ines in those collections are selected especially for teens, and the content is toned down accordingly” (email communication).

It appears that such measures have so far ensured that zine collections have not attracted opponents despite the potentially contentious nature of the material housed within them. It is also possible that the sometimes difficult nature of accessing the collections ensures that only those less easily offended are likely to obtain it. These collections may not be well known enough to attract censure or calls for censorship.

While most libraries appear to collect zine material of all types without imposing any kind of institutional or personal biases, political or otherwise, it is likely that the nature of zines themselves ensures a dominance of left-leaning viewpoints, as uncovered in the literature review. Duncombe sees zines as filling the gap created by the failure of the official left: “[t]hroughout the 1980s while the Left was left behind...zines and underground culture grew by leaps and bounds” (Duncombe, 1997:3). It appears there may be few right wing

zines - a recent appeal (Wolfe, 2004) on the zine librarians yahoo group for suggestions of titles of “conservative zines” in order to provide balance in a zine exhibition elicited no titles. Nevertheless, libraries which collected zines reported that they included alternative publications encompassing the “far right” (Danky, email communication) and “libertarian material” (Mullin, email communication). It would appear that some academic libraries at least are collecting alternative publications across a wide range of political viewpoints although zines themselves broadly remain on the left of the spectrum.

### **Sport zines**

The research found that one genre of zine was found only in the UK: sport zines. Whereas no US library mentioned holdings of sport related zines as a genre, the British Library’s football related zine collection was estimated at “1,500 to 2,000 separate titles” (Price, email communication) ranging back as far as 1967. This coverage includes general zines such as *When Saturday Comes*, regional zines such as *Football North* as well as the largest category, club specific zines. The genre even extends to electronic zines such as the Manchester United title *United on CD* (Price, email communication).

While football dominates the collections due to a “major acquisition” other sports do feature with smaller numbers of, for example, rugby zines (Price, email communication). Since none of the US libraries questioned mentioned sport zines as a genre, an enquiry was sent to the zine librarians yahoo group on whether any US libraries hold sports zines (Perris, 2004a). This elicited a

response from the Denver Zine Library who hold 16 zines with “sports” as a keyword, mostly on skateboarding, out of a total of 4206 zines (Costello, 2004). That such a large collection includes such a small proportion of sports related titles and that the literature review uncovered no mention of American sports titles suggests that zines on this subject do not exist in sufficiently large numbers in North America to form a significant part of library collections. It would appear that the lack of sports related titles is not a deliberate omission or oversight rather than a reflection that these titles are far less prevalent in the United States.

This research had hoped to provide further comparison of United States and United Kingdom zine collections but since only 3 zine collections in the UK were identified (of which 2 responded to the questionnaire) it has proven difficult to make any direct comparisons given that the libraries themselves are very different in nature. While the US would seem to be much more advanced in this field with many more libraries hosting such collections this may be a reflection that zine culture itself is more established and extensive in the US, relative to publication, although this is something that could not be measured for this research.

It would appear however that the UK does have an advantage in that its national library appears to be taking the lead in the collection of zines and in creating a collection on behalf of the nation, whereas no evidence could be found of any library in the US undertaking a similar task or of a zine collection at the British Library’s US equivalent, the Library of Congress. Having

searched the Library of Congress catalogue (<http://catalog.loc.gov/>) a number of guides to zines were found (using “fanzines” as is the Library of Congress subject heading) but no zines themselves. Since most US libraries are able to collect by donation only it would appear unlikely that any of the libraries surveyed is able to take on the task of building a national archive representative of the entire US’s output in the way that the British Library is attempting to do with UK and Irish zines. So while few UK collections were uncovered by this research, the British Library’s comprehensive collection and commitment to zines may to some extent reduce the need for smaller collections elsewhere. Should zine collecting become more widespread among other UK libraries, the British Library could potentially take a leadership role and offer guidance as they do in other areas.

### **Genesis of zine collection/why collect zines**

The questionnaire asked why but not when the zine collection at the respondents’ libraries had started and it would have been better to have asked the approximate date of commencement also. However, many replies gave this information unasked, with collections having begun as long ago as the 1960s through to as recently as June 2004, although some dates referred to the foundation of the collection in which zines are included rather than a “zine collection”.

Through asking why the zine collection had begun it was hoped to gain some insight into the ethos of the collection and also, hopefully, how it had changed or developed over time.

Several respondents reported that they had founded their institution's zine collection themselves, often due to links with the zine community. Jenna Freedman of Barnard College, and creator of Lower East Side Librarian Winter Solstice Shout Out reports: "I drafted an elaborate proposal for my Dean" (email communication). "I had been involved with a small press and with zines...for some years and thought the library should have some," was Julie Thomas Bartel's "short answer" to how the Salt Lake City Public Library's zine collection began (email communication).

Many zine collections seem to have been started as a result of receiving a collection of zines via donation. Amy Leigh Hagardorn from the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture states: "[w]e knew that zines were critical to documenting contemporary feminisms, but were reluctant to begin collection piece-meal. It just happened that Sarah Dyer...offered us her collection after finding out about the Bingham Center online" (Hagardorn, email communication). Dyer, publisher of Action Girl Newsletter from 1992-6, amassed a collection weighing one hundred and forty pounds over the lifespan of her "girl zines" listings newsletter (Bleyer, 2004: 47). Similarly, the collection of Mike Gunderloy, retiring editor of zine listing publication Factsheet Five was the foundation of the New York State Library's zine collection (Mercer, email communication). While these libraries began

with large donations, The University of Montana's collection began with only a small donation of zines from a student (Mullin, email communication), suggesting that a donation need not be extensive to start a successful collection. Donations will be dealt with more fully in the section on obtaining zines but the phenomenon of individuals donating their collections to libraries suggests that many people involved in the zine community both see the need for preservation of zine culture and see libraries as the best site for preserving that culture, and that such links are benefiting both libraries and zine culture.

As previously seen, the literature review brought up a number of reasons why various authors felt libraries should collect zines including preserving "underground" culture for future generations, documenting women's experiences and for students of popular culture, all of which were mentioned in the responses received to the questionnaire.

The San Francisco Public Library's collection of underground publications was begun "in response to the literary renaissance exploding in the San Francisco (the Beats, the San Francisco Renaissance, Hippies, radical politics...)" (Grimes, email communication). While these 1960s publications may predate the modern zine it can be seen that this collection is and will be of great interest to scholars of that time and place and that more recently founded collections of zines may some day fulfil a similar role as custodians of the counterculture.

Both the Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture in the US (Hagardorn, email communication) and the Women's Library in the UK (Kemp, email communication) appeared to support the idea highlighted by the literature review that zines are an important document of women's lives. Kuscma (2002) notes that in the US at least, zine culture is an area where women are in the majority and states that "zines continue to act on feminist claims that women's voices need to have an outlet for the expression of ideas and sharing of experiences". While it cannot be proved that women are a majority among zine creators or readers given the impossibility of identifying and surveying the whole of these populations, it is clear that women's voices are prominent in this area and it is encouraging that this is being recognised by libraries in the areas of women's/gender studies.

The 1990s saw an explosion of female created zines in response to "riot grrrl": "a grassroots movement of young women who decided that mosh pits, bands, fanzines, and revolution were not just for boys...Zines were the perfect outlet for expressing discontent and new beliefs" (Bleyer, 2004). The Grrrl Zine Network bibliography, listing over 50 articles (Zobl, 2003) demonstrates that female created zines have been used as a resource for academic writing across many disciplines internationally.

Collecting zines as a document of popular culture was cited as the primary reason for their collection by the New York State Library (Mercer, email communication) and, naturally, the Bowling Green State University Popular Culture Library (Down, email communication), with the former adding it to an

existing collection of “ephemera’ - broadsides, posters, postcards, calendars, photos,etc.” (Mercer, email communication). It seems that libraries see adding zines to their popular culture collections as part of presenting the broader picture, of collecting more than the “official” record of contemporary society.

In addition to the above factors previously encountered, the questionnaires suggested another reason for collecting zines: encouraging creativity. Julie Thomas Bartel (email communication) declares: “we encourage patrons to create content, rather than just consume it”. This is also the Independent Publishing Resource Center’s *raison d’être*, with Greg Means (email communication) saying “[o]ur organization is dedicated to helping zinesters and book artists create their (sic) work. The library offers reference and inspiration through collecting exciting zines”. Such ideals offer a new way of thinking about the library – traditionally somewhere users think of as a place they only borrow from – as a site to which a wide spectrum of users can actually contribute their own creations. The idea of the library as a focus for creativity rather than a repository for existing ideas may not yet be widespread but there is certainly scope for libraries not only collecting zines but hosting their creation, given that most have word processing and photocopying facilities. The Salt Lake City Public Library “alternate[s] the basic ‘make your own zine’ workshop with a more advanced session on distribution and publicity” (Bartel, 2003: 238) and visits schools (*ibid*), showing how active libraries can not only attract zine donations but actually assist in the creation of new zines.

Many patrons will of course not have been aware of the concept before encountering zines in the library and as Thomas Eland of the Minneapolis Community and Technical College Library says “[p]art of the reason that we have the collection of zines is to educate people that they exist” (Carlson, 2004).

The British Library mentioned fostering creativity, too, in a comprehensive explanation of the institution’s duty to collect zines: “zines are collected to document fully the range of experiences and expression across the creative, social and political spectrum in the United Kingdom, for current readers and later historians; to encourage and give inspiration to other creative artists (whether zine artists or not); and to give pleasure and educational information to the general public...” (Price, email communication).

Only one of the zine collections mentioned having changed in focus or scope since its foundation, perhaps because the majority of collections surveyed had been founded in the 1990s or 2000s and many were still in the hands of their founders. However, the De Paul University Special Collections Underground Press Collection, founded in 1995, reported that its guidelines had been revised in 1999 to focus on the Midwestern states since “there was no longer interest from DePaul faculty present at the creation of the collection; it did not meet any curricular needs of DePaul faculty; and staff time was needed for other projects in the department” (Macintosh, email communication). While this collection was an exception since most collections appeared to have

expanded rather than narrowed, the problems related are potentially those of all such collections and bear consideration.

The large number of collections still in the hands of their founders could prove problematic should those individuals or other supporters of the collection (such as the DePaul faculty mentioned above) change jobs or retire. Of course those who change jobs may found a zine collection at their new place of work. For example, Christina Favretto, former Curator of the Sarah Dyer Zine Collection went on to co-found the West Coast Zine Collection at San Diego State University's Malcolm A Love Library (Knight, 2004a: 24).

In the case of academic libraries, it would appear that a connection with the curricula would be helpful in securing the future of a collection. Other institutions did report attempting to make or maintain such links with faculty in order to ensure that the collection was of use to the institution rather than visiting scholars: “[t]he collection is mostly used for personal interests. However, we are working with faculty to get them to include the zines in research assignments” (Eland, email communication). While the various types of user of a collection will be dealt with more fully below, it is worth noting that the long term future of zine collections in libraries may be dependent upon proving its use to the institution in which it is housed as well as to the wider academic community. Some collections are already involved in teaching, however, with Nancy Down of the Bowling Green State University Popular Culture Library saying: “Fall semester a course was taught in the Popular Culture Department on fanzines” (email communication).

While libraries would naturally not be aware of exactly how much research resulted from their zine collections, the New York State Library did state that: “[a]t least one major book has been written based largely on research in our collection” (Mercer, email communication).

### **Range of users**

Two libraries were unable to describe a typical user or range of users given the recent origins of their collections, and the British Library had no data available. Of the academic libraries who were able to respond, 5 of the 7 indicated that the primary users of the collection were their own students/academics. While most did not supply info on the disciplines of those users, the Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture said its readers’ fields “run the gamut from Psychology to Graphic Design” (Hagardorn, email communication).

The two university libraries which supplied information about their demographics had very different student populations, with the Minneapolis Community & Technical College home to a large immigrant, minority and working class student population (Eland, email communication) and Barnard College students being women only, the majority of “traditional college age” (Freedman, email communication). The example of these two very different libraries suggests that zine libraries can potentially be of use to very different student populations although of course this would require further research and Barnard’s collection is not yet in the stacks (Freedman, email communication).

The non-academic libraries who responded to this question reported a wide readership, with the Salt Lake City Public Library reporting an age range of “between maybe ten years old and very elderly...[a]ll kinds, types, occupations, genders, styles, colors, etc” (Bartel, email communication).

Also reporting a wide range of users, the Independent Publishing Resource Center noted that “older patrons seem to focus more on informational material (zines about parenting, cooking, politics, etc.)” (Means, email communication).

If further research confirmed this observation, libraries open to the public may wish to stock more “informative” zines where possible to attract older readers to zines. However based on this research it appears that such libraries are already proving successful at attracting a diverse group of readers.

Librarians were mentioned by 3 respondents as visitors to zine collecting libraries and it would appear that this group may be curious about how to host a zine collection with a possible view to creating one in their own libraries. Indeed, Paul Mercer of the New York State Library notes that: “[m]any of our reference queries--not unlike yours--come from librarians and students in information sciences researching ways to integrate zines into more ‘traditional’ library collections” (email communication). This suggests that zine collections in libraries may become a growth area – also given that the Women’s Library collection was founded during the period of this research.

## **Inter Library Loan/sharing with other institutions**

One area not specifically addressed in the research but which arose is that of interlibrary loan/document delivery. The Minneapolis Community and Technical College reported that they will be adding abstracts to their zine catalogue (<http://www.minneapolis.edu/library/zines>, accessed 19 July 2004) with a view to providing scans of requested zines to other libraries via Ariel (Eland, email communication). Such a service could be invaluable to researchers given the geographically diverse, US-centric nature of zine holdings and the international availability of Ariel. Since many zine collections, as noted above, focus on local zines, if interlibrary loan became widely used to distribute zine articles it could encourage the trend to collect locally but still enable library users to obtain zines from other areas. Inter-library collaboration could potentially allow libraries to collect fewer titles where space and money are issues and where other libraries are already collecting the same titles. Further research into what inter-library co-operation already exists could identify possible areas for working together.

## **Definition of the term “zine”**

The questionnaire asked libraries about the other types of “alternative” publications they collected in addition to zines and this raised issues about what each library considers to be a “zine” and what each considers not to be a zine.

One area of possible confusion is that of “alternative comics”, as mentioned in the literature review. Many zines incorporate comics and some publications made up entirely of comic panels would seem to be zines in comic format. The British Library considered its collection of more than 500 “adult comics” to be part of the zine collection (Price, email communication), while the Bowling Green State University Popular Culture Library regarded them as related to but separate from zines (Down, email communication). It is difficult to decide what might be considered a zine and what a comic, so it is intended here to merely note that this is a significant area where there is no distinct line between what is a zine and what is not and that individual libraries appear to deal with this material in different ways.

While the questionnaire did not ask respondents specifically what they considered to be a “zine” it nevertheless provoked some thought about the distinction between zines and other small press/alternative materials. There appeared to be broad agreement that “the one essential difference between zines and other alternative publications is one of institutionality” (Mullin, email communication). Mullin felt that political publications created by organisations other than political parties could still be considered as zines if created with “no hope of making money, and basically as a labor of love” (email communication). Being “non-commercial” seems to be considered something which defines zines but is also shared by other alternative publications, so a lack of institutional links appeared to be, in general, the main distinguishing feature between zines and other small press materials in the eyes of those respondents who pondered this issue.

## **Other types of “alternative” publications held and relationship to zines**

All libraries bar two reported collecting other types of “alternative” publications, most commonly newsletters (mentioned by 6 institutions). Greg Means of the Independent Publishing Resource Center reported that although they had collected other kinds of alternative publications, they were now limited to “strictly self-published zines” (email communication). Noting that “many of these publications started as zines” (ibid), he feels however that many are collected in mainstream libraries thus the focus on zines only. The fact that zines do grow into larger publications is perhaps another good reason for collecting them – zine collections could be housing the origins of all kinds of future publications, for example the US feminist magazine *Bust* which started as a zine (Stoller, 1999: xiv).

For the San Francisco Public Library, linking zines to other alternative publications was a way of justifying collecting them: “[w]hile I believe zines are important in documenting the life of a certain time and place...at some point in their history zines were considered so ephemeral as to warrant almost complete dismissal by libraries and readers. So in order to validate collecting them, I chose to make them a part of the Little Magazine Collection, which already had some kind of status” (Grimes, email communication). It would seem that being able to place zines within some kind of alternative press tradition could help librarians justify this type of collection where its value may not be recognised.

The British Library and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Library as large research libraries with large historical collections were able to make connections between historic alternative publications and zines with Richard Price of the former saying that zines and Little Magazines “may be brother and sister descendants of the same tradition (for example, the chapbook tradition)” (email communication).

Some libraries such as the Women’s Library did not see a connection between zines and other publications they hold and it is true that such connections depend on the content of the zines. While political zines may fit more easily within past traditions, highly individual and personal zines known as “perzines” may, on the face of it, have more in common with works of memoir than the traditions of the “alternative” press.

So while not all libraries agreed that zines formed part of an alternative press tradition, it also appears that not all regarded being part of such a tradition as necessary to consider zines as worth collecting.

### **Obtaining zines**

Donation has previously been mentioned as a significant impetus for the foundation of zine collections and the research revealed that donation is overwhelmingly the largest source of zines for libraries. 11 of the 15 libraries surveyed rely totally or mostly on donations for adding to their collection. Several of those surveyed mentioned buying and donating zines out of their

own pocket (or trading their own zines for other zines), demonstrating again the dedication of the workers who maintain these collections.

Since in the era of the internet web pages offer an arguably as accessible or more accessible form of self-expression, it seems that the idea of creating a physical object could be a strong reason for creating a zine rather than a website (as touched on in the literature review, these issues are dealt with in Wright, 2001). Julie Thomas Bartel (2003: 232) says “[z]ines are about paper, about making a tangible material object that can be physically passed from one person to the next”. Librarians who successfully solicit donations may be successfully tapping into this desire to create something lasting since it is a short step from wanting to create something lasting to wanting it to last by being preserved, from wanting to pass something on to being willing to have a library pass it on to readers on one’s behalf.

Although the literature review touched on the fact that zine creators may not wish to have their works stocked by libraries, discovering what proportion of zine creators are in favour or against preservation of their creations is outside the scope of this research, which did not attempt to interview zine creators. However measuring the true scope of resistance or otherwise to being held in libraries in the zine community in general could be examined by future researchers.

Established zine libraries may be well known enough to receive donations on a regular basis but some libraries reported having to build up their donated

collections through an initial effort to publicise themselves in the zine community, through advertising in zine review zines, (Grimes, email communication) and through a “call” “which went out to the community, bookshops, libraries and local newsletters”, leading to further mentions in articles, directories and on websites (ibid). Such outreach having proved successful for these libraries these may be ideas to draw on for future library zine collections.

The British Library, of course, is entitled to a copy of all UK publications via Legal Deposit and while it seems unlikely that a large proportion of zine publishers send a copy of their photocopied works to the Library, some are received in this way (Price, email communication). The British Library was also the only library to report purchasing titles on the second-hand market.

The dominance of donation as a means of acquisition reflects, of course, the fact that normally the budget allotted for zine purchase is small or non-existent. In addition, libraries may be unable to send cash, usually the preferred form of payment by zine editors, as is the case with the Minneapolis Community & Technical College Library (Eland, email communication).

Only two respondents mentioned subscriptions, reflecting the fact that few zines offer subscriptions. Single issues were purchased from sources including bookshops, infoshops, distros, at special events, and titles were also discovered via personal contact and via email discussion groups.

One special event specifically mentioned by the Women's Library was Ladyfest, an event held in London in 2002, which generated zine donations for the Library. Connections with such events could prove a source of donations/purchases of zines as well as attracting new patrons to libraries hosting zine collections.

### **Cataloguing zines**

Having collected zine material, all libraries will of course be concerned with making it as easy to find as possible and the questionnaire asked how zines were catalogued or otherwise kept track of in order to find out how libraries dealt with this potentially difficult area.

The split between integrating zines into the wider collection and housing them separately in a "zine collection" arises again here since some libraries have a separate list or "finding aid" for zines and others include them on the catalogue with other materials. Other libraries would like to include zines on their catalogues but have not yet done so. Of the 15 libraries surveyed, 6 catalogued zines as they would any other item (although in one of these, the Independent Publishing Resource Center, zines are the norm in any case) and the remaining 9 had separate aids for finding zines, some available online and others available in the library only. Of the libraries who have yet to integrate their zines onto the library catalogue, most have plans to do so or have begun doing so.

Some libraries collecting zines, which have so far found it impossible to catalogue zines individually, or for whatever reason have no intention to do so have put a collection level description for their zine collections (or part of their zine collections) on the catalogue. In such cases, “readers are likely to need guides and/or curatorial support to make the most of the collections” (Price, email communication). Three of the libraries surveyed mentioned having “collection level” catalogue entries for at least part of their collections.

Most of those who do catalogue or hope to catalogue all of their zines individually reported difficulties with this due to the nature of the material. Two libraries noted problems with including subjects in zine records given that zine titles are apt to change subject with each issue. While it would be possible to use “zines” or a similar heading as the subject the British Library has rejected the idea of using the format as the subject “in keeping with a likely subject approach within the zines field, i.e. researchers are more likely to be researching a topic within feminism, say, qualified by a need to see periodicals on the topic, than they are simply to be looking for the many kinds of possible ‘zine’” (Price, email communication). Therefore, they use a subject heading with a “periodicals” subheading and those who are looking for zines generally can cross-reference the public catalogue with the published guides to zines held by the British Library (ibid).

It is possible to include a zine on a library catalogue both under “fanzines” and other subject headings. The record for the zine Fat! So? on the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries’ online catalogue has the following

headings:

Fanzines.

Body image--Periodicals.

Overweight persons--Periodicals.

While some libraries may eschew “zines” as a subject heading, others do wish to use it as a subject heading and are frustrated that the term has yet to be accepted by the library “authorities” making cataloguing of zines more difficult. Since most of the libraries hosting zines are in the US they tend to use Library of Congress subject headings and the fact that the Library of Congress has yet to implement “zines” as a subject heading and continues to use “fanzines” is a matter of controversy. “The Library of Congress is molasses slow in changing the term ‘fanzine’ to ‘zine’ as widely accepted by communities”, notes Andrea Grimes of the San Francisco Public Library (email communication). Christina Favretto, creator of the West Coast Zine Collection at San Diego State University has said that those at the top of the Library of Congress “‘probably don’t know much about zines’ – something she urges those passionate about preserving zines in libraries to help change by continuing to write letters to the Library of Congress, as a means to reiterate the importance of zines as extremely important and valid social documents of their time” (Knight, 2004a: 32-3).

In addition, librarians who work with zines have also expressed a desire that the Library of Congress adopt headings for recognised genres of zines such as “perzine” for personal zines (Freedman, 2003).

Other library standards are difficult to fit zines into with Thomas Eland saying “[t]hey are almost impossible to catalog using AACR2 and MARC” (email communication). It would appear that assistance or guidance from the official bodies would be of great assistance to librarians for whom cataloguing zines can be venturing into uncharted territory but the reality is that zine collections are not yet well established enough to be dealt with by any of the cataloguing authorities and zine librarians are having to make up their own rules.

Nevertheless the imminent publication of the first book for librarians on collecting zines (“From A to zine : building a winning zine collection in your library” by Julie Bartel, American Library Association Press - in press at time of research) will hopefully be of value in providing guidance where none yet exists.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in cataloguing zines is the lack of bibliographic data provided by the zines themselves. Richard Price says “[i]mportant details, such as place of publication, imprint, even title, are not always clear on fanzine material, so it can present cataloguing challenges” (email communication), a point also made by several other respondents. While most zines are unlikely to ever come with ISSNs, librarians have proven that zines can be catalogued in spite of the difficulties involved. This research has shown that librarians in a variety of areas are managing to deal with providing access to zines whether via catalogue or other finding aids, despite all the issues involved.

## **Loan of zines**

The research did not address the issue of patrons borrowing zines from the library as it was erroneously assumed that all zine collections would be non-circulating. However both the Salt Lake City Public Library and the Independent Publishing Resource Center do allow zines to circulate (SLCPL barcodes zines like other materials) (Knight, 2004a: 26-7). Lending of zines and any problems arising from this could be an area for further research in future. It is worth noting, however, that allowing lending of zines demonstrates that it is possible to fully integrate them within a library collection, allowing exactly the same level of access as is permitted with books.

## **Problems associated with collecting zines**

Most of the problems reported in connection with zine collections involved cataloguing and have been dealt with above but preservation was also a concern of many libraries.

“Some of the zines are single sheets, contain objects/item pasted in, some are produced on poor quality paper, some are unconventional in their format which presents problems for storage, and preservation” was a typical point (Kemp, email communication), and this was made in reference to the Women’s Library’s still small collection. Larger collections such as New York State Library’s noted even greater challenges: “Factsheet Five—i.e. the

collection—contains a fair amount of ‘mail art’, 3-dimensional ‘objects’ (from plastic toys to condoms to small bags of dust), audio and video tapes, digital media (floppy disks) etc. All of these ‘non-paper’ formats embody particular storage, preservation and access problems in a library setting” (Mercer, email communication). While such a diverse collection of accompanying materials demonstrates the creativity of zine makers it also demonstrates that few ever saw their work as long lasting and librarians who do see zines as having value for future readers face a difficult challenge, even with standard paper zines. “The use of relatively flimsy materials, simple stapling of paper covers for instance, means that zines can damage easily and that long-term preservation care will eventually be needed” (Price, email communication).

Since the Salt Lake City Public Library displays zines they face a particular challenge with zines which include “extras” but have dealt with this by “using hanging bags, like the ones used for children’s book and tape kits, thus keeping them together and safe but allowing access for the first time” (Bartel, 2003: 237).

Librarians at zine collections housed within Special Collections seemed to be more comfortable with dealing with non-standard materials so Special Collections librarians would appear to be a useful source of advice on dealing with zines. “We’re in a Special Collections division, so there are no special problems dealing with fanzines. The security, the enclosures for fragile or floppy or small materials, the profanity and the irregularity of zines, are all stuff we deal with anyhow” (Scott, email communication).

The other problem commonly cited was that finding out about zines requires a lot of work from library staff, and that the zine community is usually very different from any other type of publisher librarians usually deal with: “[zines] are published within networks to which the Library may not naturally connect – small and/or information and/or outside the mainstream publishing infrastructure – so that Library may not secure as many zines as it should, to give at least fair representation of the creative work and views of the form for generations to come” (Price, email communication).

While innumerable potentially useful titles no doubt are being lost to posterity, this research has demonstrated that a dedicated group of librarians who may have already had connections to zine communities or were able to make connections to those communities have succeeded in creating, maintaining and providing access to large numbers of zines. While the above problems were mentioned, the respondents tended to stress that these were no excuse for not collecting zines: “as we have demonstrated even a medium sized community college library with the same understaffing that is found in every library can do it if the librarians accept that collecting alternative press resources is a part of their professional duty to provide access to a broad range of knowledge” (Eland, email communication).

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

This research found that libraries collecting zines is largely a growing area and one which is becoming more recognised. In the US the imminent publication of a guide to collecting zines by the American Library Association Press suggests that the profession is beginning to see the value of such collections. In the UK, the foundation of a new collection during the period of the research suggests that an awareness of the benefits of collecting this material is reaching some libraries.

The dedication and professionalism of the group who responded to the research questionnaire bodes well for their success in preserving zine culture and in inspiring others to do the same. At present however the continuation of collections appears dependent on the enthusiasm of individual librarians since the impetus to form and maintain collections comes from below rather than from above (either individual institutions such as universities or library bodies such as professional organisations). It seems to be important to make the collection relevant to the institution and its teaching in order to safeguard its future, something which librarians, fortunately, seemed to be aware of.

Several libraries reported receiving enquiries from other libraries suggesting both that interest in this type of collection is growing and that librarians are seeking to learn from experienced collectors.

The research found that reasons for collecting zines included documenting “underground” culture, the broadest possible spectrum of popular culture and women’s experiences. Most imaginatively, librarians collecting zines saw their collections as a way to foster creativity and encourage patrons to contribute their own writing to the library.

Financial constraints meant that most librarians depended upon donation to develop their collections. Although it is unfortunate zine collections are not yet seen as sufficiently important by many institutions as to command a budget, it is an indication of librarians’ success in making connections with the zine community that they can attract sufficient donations to maintain collections.

While libraries who had successfully catalogued, or begun cataloguing, individual titles were in a minority most libraries intended to do so eventually. This demonstrates a dominant attitude that zines should be integrated into collections where possible – at least in catalogue terms if not physically given the difficulties of zine formats. Many librarians expressed a desire for zines to become seen as another information source rather than as a curiosity.

Practice in the fields of cataloguing zines is still relatively new and inexact, but librarians’ determination to earn recognition in the form of Library of Congress subject headings suggests that progress may yet be made on formalising what is still very much an improvisatory procedure.

The enthusiasm and imagination of zines themselves seems to have been absorbed by zine librarians, who have overcome numerous barriers to create and maintain zine collections through their own effort, imagination and problem-solving skills.

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**LIST OF APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A .....69**  
The email questionnaire

## **Appendix A**

### The email questionnaire

I am researching the subject of (fan)zines in libraries for a dissertation as part of an MA in Information Services Management at London Metropolitan University.

For the purpose of this research I am considering zines (also known as fanzines) to be self-published, non-professional, non-commercial magazines.

Your library was identified as hosting a zine collection through searching internet listings of such libraries.

I would appreciate answers to any of the below questions you wish to answer. On completion of the research I would be happy to share my findings with you – please indicate in your reply if you would like a copy.

1. How many zines (approximately) do you have in your collection?
2. Why (if you are aware) did your library start collecting zines?
3. What genres of zines do you collect (e.g. personal, political, art)?
4. Do you collect other types of alternative publications (e.g. newsletters, small press magazines) and if so do you regard them as related to zines?
5. How do you obtain zines for your library?
6. Describe the range of users (e.g. age, gender, occupation if known) of your zine collection and what purposes you think they use your collection for.
7. How do you catalogue or otherwise keep records of your zines?
8. What special problems do you think zines present for your library?
9. Would you be willing to answer further, follow up questions?

Thanks for your time. You can email me the answers and any other questions at [kcp003@unl.ac.uk](mailto:kcp003@unl.ac.uk)