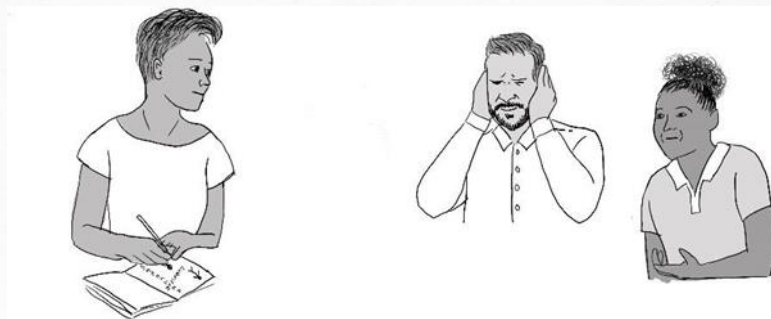


Zine and Heard



Thank you to Wellcome for funding the PhD on which this zine is based, as part of the broader MadZines project (Wellcome Trust Grant number: 219843/Z/19/Z "Crafting Contention: The role of zines in contesting mental health, knowledge and practice).

Introduction

This zine introduces some findings from my PhD research about how survivors of the mental health system (can) address epistemic injustice via zines. I am a survivor zinester and I drew on my own experiences as well as interviews I conducted with fifteen other survivors, ten of whom were experienced zinesters and five of whom I introduced to zine making through workshops. I summarize findings using a combination of text and images that I created as part of my process of reflection and analysis.

My PhD was part of a broader research project about radical mental health zines, the Crafting Contention ('MadZines') project. This broader project explored how Madzines might contest psychological, psychiatric and medical knowledge about madness and distress. More info about the Madzines project can be found on <https://madzines.org/> on by scanning this QR code.



Bibliography continued

Laugharne, R., Priebe, S., McCabe, R., Garland, N., and Clifford, D. (2012) 'Trust, choice and power in mental health care: Experiences of patients with psychosis', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 58(5), pp. 496-504. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764011408658>.

Lindow, V. (1999) Power, lies and injustice: the exclusion of service users' voices. In M. Parker (ed.), *Ethics and Community in the Health Care Professions*. London; Routledge. pp. 154 – 171.

Rose, D. and Kalathil, J. (2019) 'Power, Privilege and Knowledge: the Untenable Promise of Co-production in Mental "Health"', *Front. Sociol*, 4:57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00057>.

Shotwell, A. (2017) 'Forms of knowing and epistemic resources'. In: Kidd, I. J., Medina, J. and Pohlhaus, G, Jr. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. London, UK: Routledge.

Tobin, M., Chen, L. and Leathley, C. (2002) 'Consumer participation in mental health services: Who wants it and why?', *Australian Health Review*, 25(3), pp. 91–100. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1071/ah020091>.

Bibliography continued

Dotson, K. (2014) 'Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression', *Social Epistemology*, 28 (2), pp. 115–138. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2013.782585>.

Ferguson, M. (2025) 'What are Hermeneutical Resources? Nondiscursive Self-Interpretation and Gendered Embodiment', *Hypatia*, pp.1-16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2025.2>.

Fricker, M. (2007) *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

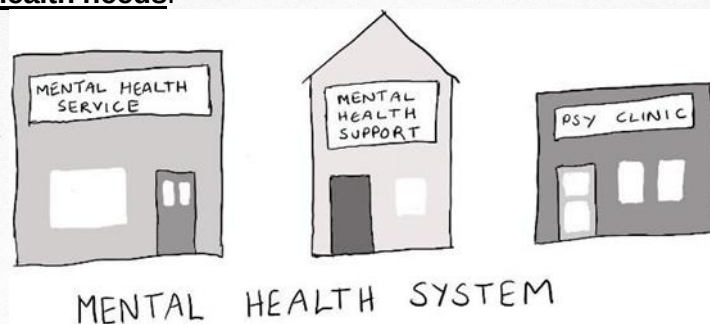
Grim, K., Tistad, M., Schön, U.K. and Rosenberg, D. (2019) 'The Legitimacy of User Knowledge in Decision-Making Processes in Mental Health Care: An Analysis of *Epistemic Injustice*', *J. Psychosoc. Rehabil. Ment. Health*, 6, pp. 157–173. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40737-019-00145-9>.

Kidd, I. J. and Carel, H. (2018) 'Healthcare practice, epistemic injustice, and naturalism'. In: Barker, S., Crerar, C. and Goetze, T.S. (eds) *Harms and Wrongs in Epistemic Practice*. Pp. 211–233. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK562587/>.

Terms and definitions

The mental health system

When I write about the **mental health system**, I mean the system of services that aim to support people with mental health needs.



Survivors

I use the term **survivors** to describe people who have received services within the mental health system, although they may not all refer to themselves in that way.



People who are receiving or have received services within the mental health system

Lindow (1999) notes that "There is no consensus about what people who receive mental health services like to be called: 'service-users', 'survivors', 'recipients', 'patients', 'loonies', 'mad people', 'clients', 'consumers' and (in Japan) psychiatrically disabled people'." (p.154).

Zines

When I write about **zines** I simply mean self-created and self-published booklets.



Zines

Bibliography

Bailey, A. (2018) 'On Anger, Silence and Epistemic Injustice'. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 84, pp. 93-115. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246118000565>.

Brady, E. (Ed.) (2001) *Healing Logics: Culture and Medicine in Modern Health Belief Systems*. Denver, CO: University Press of Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt46nwrq>.

Cresswell, M. (2005) 'Psychiatric "survivors" and testimonies of self-harm', *Social Science & Medicine*, 61(8), pp.1668-1677. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953605001280>.

Crerar, C. (2016) 'Taboo, Hermeneutical Injustice, and Expressively Free Environments', *Episteme*, 13(2), pp. 195-207. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2015.35>.

Dotson, K. (2011) 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing', *Hypatia*, 26(2), pp. 236-57. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23016544>.

Dotson, K. (2012) 'A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 33 (1), pp. 24-47. Available at JSTOR: <https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.33.1.0024>.

I have learned much from my participants about the different ways zine making can be utilized and how this creative practice can be beneficial to survivors. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn this, as well as learning from participants about the benefits of alternative epistemic landscapes; specifically, the benefits of safe(r) environments in which we can share our testimony without shame, environments in which our subjective knowledge is valued, and where we might collaboratively reflect on experiences and define concerns. It has been hugely refreshing to come to an understanding about this, and about the advantages of engaging with alternative epistemic environments. I hope the light of understanding that survivors gather and develop in these environments via zines can be carried into more corners of the mental health system and wider society.

Survivor knowledge and epistemic injustice



The above cartoon was created in response to work by Tobin et al. (2002) Grim et al. (2019); Rose and Kalathil, 2019; Laugharne et al., (2012) and Lindow (1999).

Survivors face barriers to reflecting on and articulating our experiences and often have our understandings and accounts of our experiences silenced or devalued. These issues are increasingly understood in relation to theories of epistemic injustice.

I define **epistemic injustice** as unfairness related to what can be known. Discrepancies in access to knowledge, or to the means to articulate knowledge, can be unfair in the sense that they cause unnecessary harm and/or replicate or reinforce systems of disadvantage. I see knowledge as awareness and understanding, this can relate to internal or external experiences, and it can be gained (amongst other things) through experience and the application of theory or concepts.

Like Cresswell (2005), who describes survivors' testimony as knowledge and describes survivors as "experts by "experience"" (p.1671), I see survivors' accounts and understandings of our experiences as a form of **knowledge**.

Culture

Advantageous Culture in Zine

Community: Anger is acceptable/welcome; being survivor is not shameful; Survivors can be seen in terms of our strengths; Complex intersectional experiences are recognised/valued.

Disadvantageous Culture in MH System:

Anger not welcome; survivors perceived as only mad/service users; survivors devalued as knowers, rely on concepts created by and for MH professionals; non-linear thinking is perceived as pathological.

Culture of Taboos and Shame in Wider

Society: taboos about bereavement, therapeutic relationship, being care experienced; shamed for being mad/in receipt of services, being a person of colour, being older, being a woman, being disabled, being queer, being a victim of violence/abuse

Power dynamics

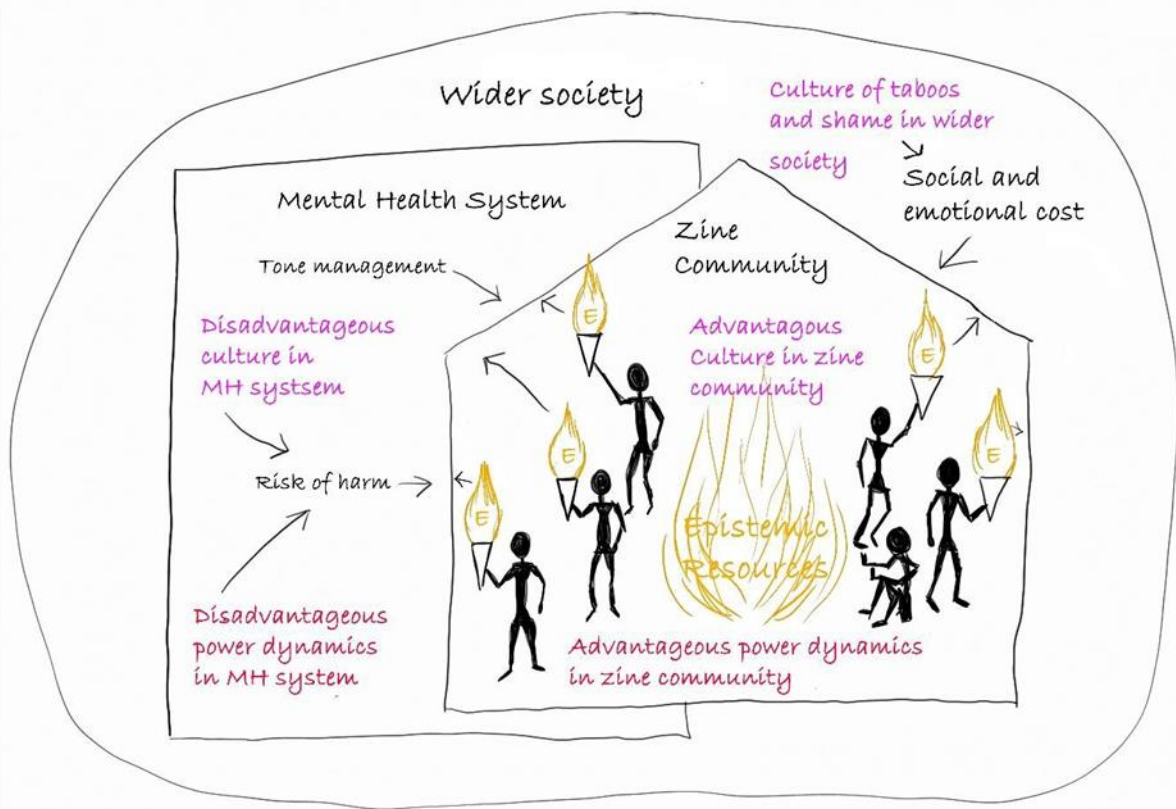
Advantageous Power dynamics in Zine Community:

Survivors are free to control how our experiences are reflected on and articulated and how experiences and understandings are shared, and it is safe(r) to share criticism of/anger at the MH system

Disadvantageous power dynamics in MH System: Deeply unequal power dynamics with professionals able to make decisions about survivors' treatment and autonomy; agenda set by professionals/systems; criticism of r anger at MH services/professionals is unwelcome and goes unshared.

Epistemic/hermeneutic resources (E)

Creative, visual and structural sensemaking resources and practices; Epistemic confidence; survivors created concepts, awareness of shared experiences and concerns; creative visual and non-linear forms of articulation; awareness that there are cultures/perspectives that differ from that of the MH system; the ability to see self and perspectives as unshameful



Some theories of Epistemic Injustice

Testimonial smothering, risk and harm

Dotson (2011) notes that people need our intended audience to perceive us as capable informants/knowers, and we also need them to recognize, understand and value the way(s) in which we share our knowledge. She argues that **when people perceive their audience to be unwilling or unable to receive and value their testimony, they share less**. She calls this process **testimonial smothering**. Dotson (2011) writes that testimony is smothered when it is risky or unsafe to share.



The above image was created in response to Dotson's (2011) account of Testimonial Smothering

Dotson (2011) highlights the importance of harm and uses the terms **epistemic violence** to refer to incidences where a refusal to hear a person's testimony is part of a predictable pattern AND harm is caused. She notes that harm is related to context.



The above is based on Dotson's ideas about when epistemic oppression becomes epistemic violence.

Bringing it together

I created an image (following page) to bring ideas about culture, freedom and harm together with ideas about epistemic resources and to locate survivors' experiences and strategies in the landscapes described by them (and in the literature about epistemic injustice in the MH system). The image draws on Dotson's ideas about risk and harm when sharing testimony, Crerar's work about the significance of taboo and Bailey's ideas about tone management/policing. It also brings together what I've learned about survivors' experiences of power dynamics and culture in different settings and the way in which survivors accessed, gathered and developed epistemic resources within the zine community. It shows how, by building the fire of epistemic resources (shown in the safe environment at the heart of this image) survivor zinesters can gain understandings (and hermeneutic resources) that then might be used by others outside of this space.

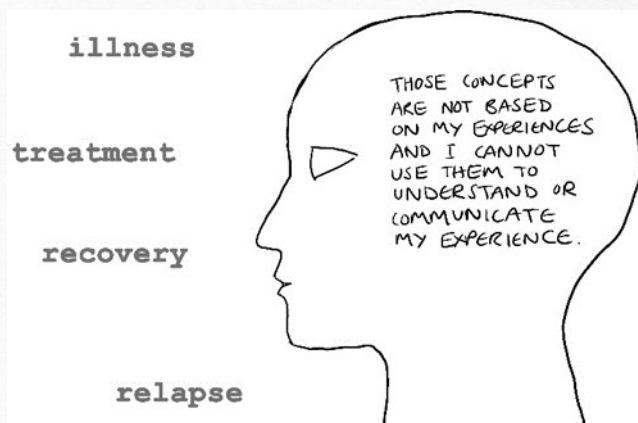
Dotson's (2014) account of epistemic landscapes helps us to understand that in opting into the zine community some survivors might be opting into an epistemic landscape that works for them on multiple levels. For example, making and sharing zines enables survivors to opt into an epistemic landscape in which their testimony is valued and they benefit from being able to engage with a range of hermeneutic resources to reflect on and articulate and share experiences.

Whilst survivors might benefit from opting into the zine community as an epistemic system, they may find that people relying on the epistemic system in the mental health system may not recognize and value the knowledge developed outside that system. When people continue to use structurally prejudiced hermeneutic resources instead of drawing on the resources which were developed by marginalized people and are more appropriate for the task in hand, Dotson (2012) would call this **contributory injustice**. Notably none of the survivors in my study expected professionals within the mental health system to recognize and value the knowledge they created and shared via zines, but they still valued the opportunities that the zine community afforded.

Hermeneutic resources and injustice

Fricker (2007) describes a type of Epistemic injustice which she calls Hermeneutic injustice. She describes **Hermeneutic injustice** as occurring when people are disadvantaged in making sense of experiences due to a gap in "collective interpretive resources" (Fricker, 2007, p.1).

The hermeneutic resources Fricker (2007) draws attention to are conceptual. However others have extended the idea of what might constitute hermeneutic resources, for example Kidd and Carel (2018) describe hermeneutic resources as including "appropriate language, metaphors, and images" (p. 219). I use the term **hermeneutic resources** to describe the resources with which people might make sense of and articulate experience.



In the image above I apply Fricker's account of Hermeneutic injustice to survivors

Tone management and silencing anger

Bailey (2018) has argued that marginalized people are disadvantaged by the silencing of anger and the devaluing of angry testimony/angry testifiers. Bailey (2018) suggests that marginalized people tend to be stereotyped as angry. She argues this is problematic because knowledge of injustice (including epistemic injustice) is often entwined with and contained within anger. She argues that pathologizing and silencing anger robs it of the knowledge it contains, and this effectively silences people's ability to communicate injustices (Bailey, 2018). In other words, injustice makes people angry and, if we silence this anger, we make it difficult to communicate the injustice because the anger and the injustice are difficult to separate from one another.

Bailey (2018) argues that a **spiral** can be created in which silencing leads to anger, then anger is silenced and with it the knowledge of the injustice of being silenced, which leads to further anger, and so on. Bailey's (2018) ideas may be particularly relevant to understanding survivors' experiences of being silenced because survivors may be particularly vulnerable to being stereotyped as overly or inappropriately angry. When survivors are given a psychiatric diagnosis, the emotions we feel are often decontextualized and perceived in terms of our pathology and not as evidence of injustice.

MH system as an epistemic landscape

Application/practice

Survivors testimony is often under valued or not acted upon and some survivor testimony doesn't get shared or acted upon. "Hard" evidence is favoured and experiential, contextual and subjective knowledge is often not valued.

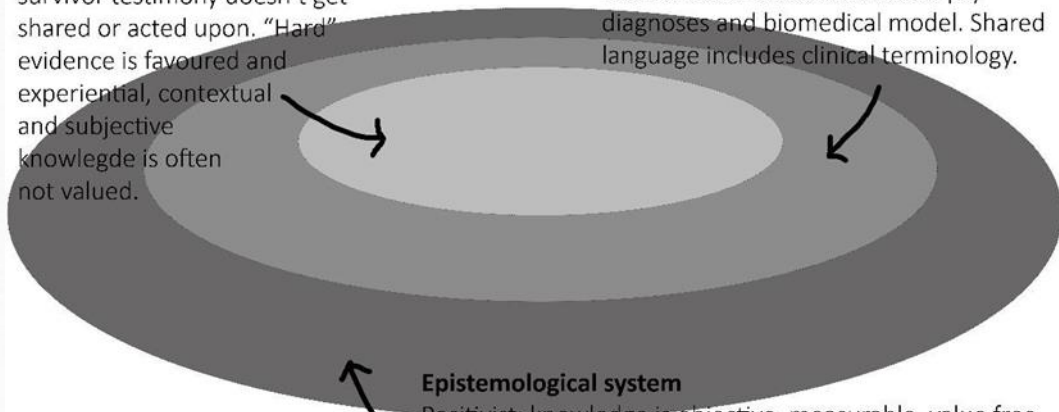
Schemata

Hermeneutic resources include psy diagnoses and biomedical model. Shared language includes clinical terminology.

Epistemological system

Positivist: knowledge is objective, measurable, value free and decontextualised. Interpretive tools are things that can be used to explain and/or predict. They include generalisable concepts and theories.

Relating schemata, practice and epistemic systems to literature about the MH system



Zine community as an epistemic landscape

Application/practice

Survivor knowledge is shared, welcomed, valued and acted upon. This includes experiential subjective knowledge, and accounts which are critical of, satirise, or express anger at the mh system or professionals.

Schemata

The shared language includes visual articulation, emotion and words. The social imaginary is one in which criticisms of the mh system/professionals can be conceptualised and perceived as warranted, survivors anger can be understood and perceived as meaningful and non-pathological and survivor zinesters can be conceived and perceived in terms of their capabilities. It also includes survivor created concepts.

Epistemological system

Interpretivist; all knowledge is subjective and contextual. Tools can be creative/expressive/experiential (anything that helps people articulate describe, understand, or empathise). Testimony can be non-linear.

Relating schemata, practice and epistemic systems to my findings about survivors' use of zines

By using Dotson's accounts as a model to create illustrations of both the epistemic landscape of the mental health system (following page) and the zine community (above) we can see that they appear to differ in significant ways in relation to each level of the epistemic landscape.

Taboo and expressively free environments

Crerar (2016) argues that context is important for making sense of experiences. For example, taboo shapes how and whether interpretive resources can be used to make sense of experiences. They further argue that "an expressively free environment in which to discuss a particular subject has an important role to play as a *hermeneutical resource*" (my emphasis, Crerar, 2016, p.196). In other words, to make sense of experience we need access to spaces in which we can use different concepts or tools to make sense of and articulate experience, without this resulting in a social cost or shame.



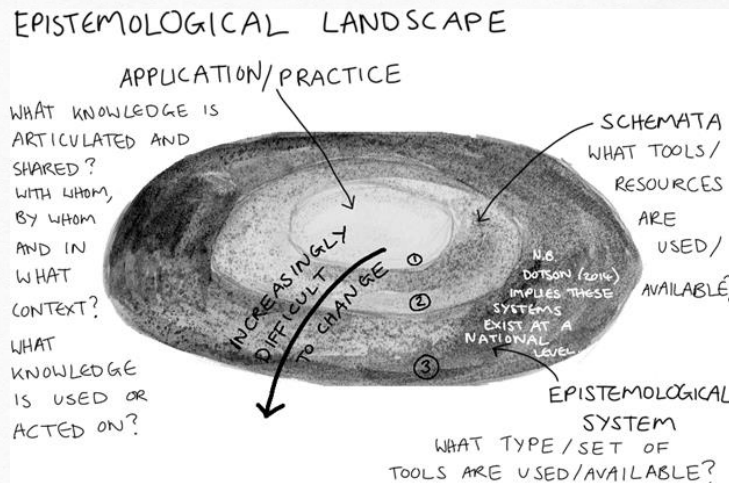
The above image is intended to represent Crerar's account of the impact of taboos.

JUSTICE THEORY KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE THEORY

Epistemic landscapes

Dotson (2014) has described epistemic landscapes as being comprised of the following:

- 1- Schemata: the tools and hermeneutic resources that are available and the ways in which these are perpetuated by social systems and structures.
- 2- Application and practice: the ways in which schemata are (or aren't) reenforced in practice. This might include what knowledge is/can be shared, with whom, by whom, and in what context, and what knowledge is used/acted upon in practice.
- 3- Epistemological systems: the types of interpretive tools and resources used: everything that shapes how we (can) know what we know.



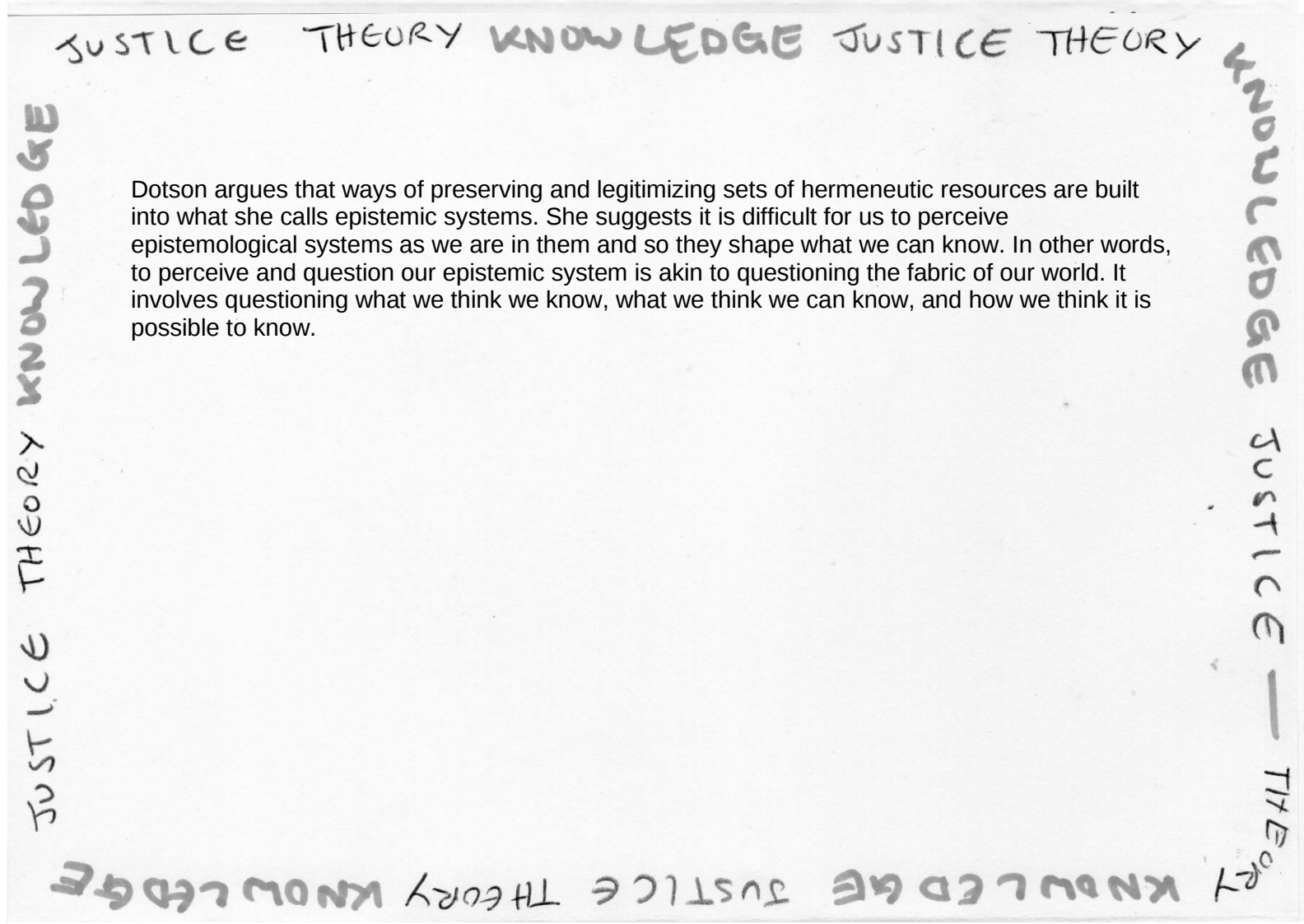
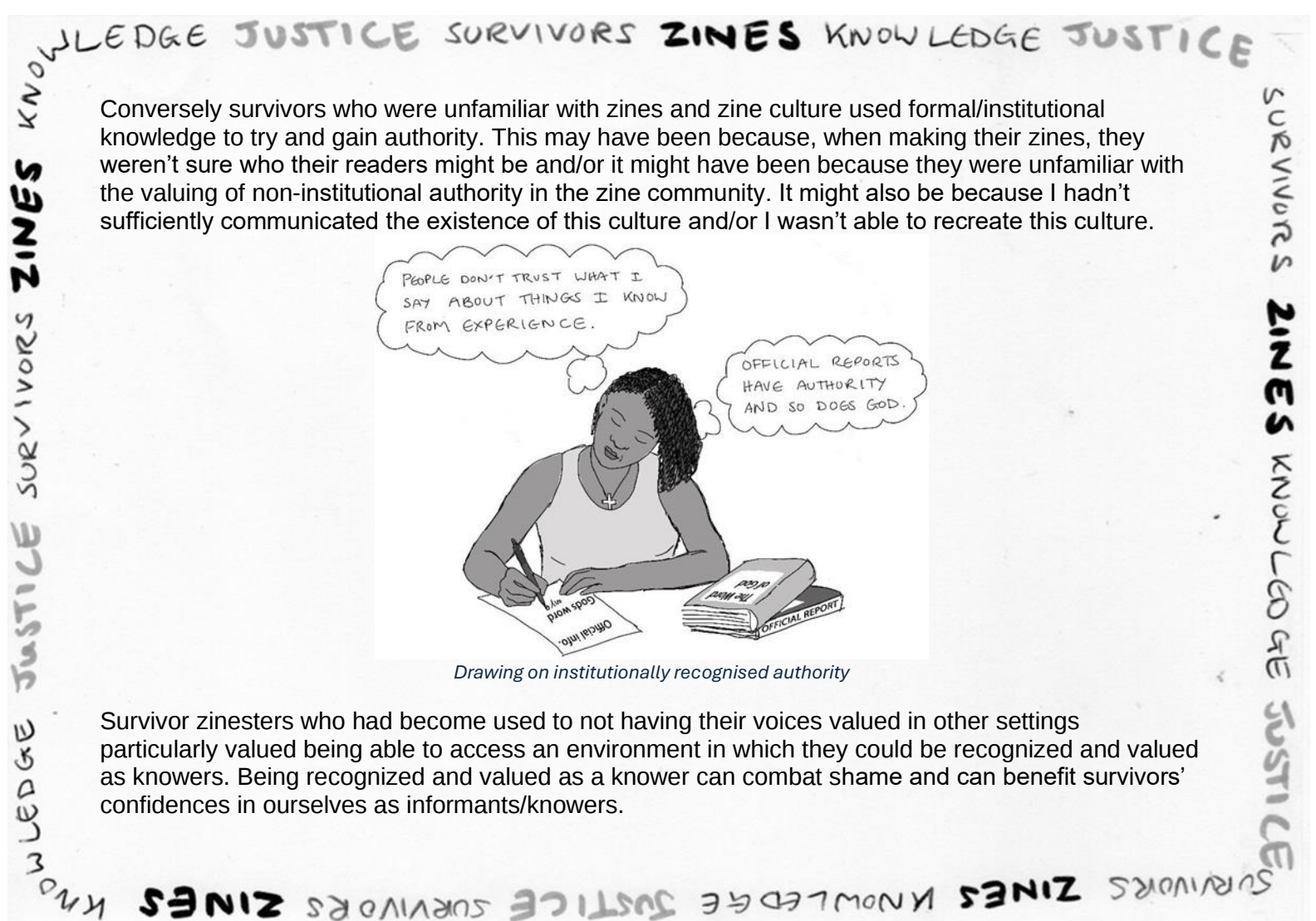
The above image is based on Dotson's (2014) account of epistemic landscapes.

Comparing the zine community to the mental health system

Dotson's account of epistemic landscapes helps us recognize that there are different landscapes and that sensemaking processes and hermeneutic resources which are unrecognized in one place may be valued and relied on in another. It helps us understand why survivors might choose to create and share zines within the zine community.

In this section I draw on Dotson's account of epistemological systems to create illustrations of the zine community and the mental health systems as epistemological systems. Dotson describes epistemic systems as resilient because the elements are interlinked e.g. what we consider to be knowledge, which interpretative resources we use and whose knowledge is valued and utilized, are all connected within an epistemic system.

In relation to my research, it could be argued that the epistemological system in the zine community is one in which survivors expect subjective experience (including emotion) to be recognized and valued as knowledge. In addition, it can be seen as a system in which testimony isn't expected to be linear, where visual articulation can be used to reflect on and articulate experience, and where processes of articulation can help contain emotions and prevent overwhelm. It is also an epistemic system in which survivor zinesters can be conceptualized and treated as valued informants and creators of knowledge/understanding.



Opportunities and strategies

This section outlines some of the opportunities zines afforded survivors in my study and some of the strategies survivors employed when making and sharing their zines.

Enabling individual reflection, articulation and communication

The zines themselves and the context in which zines were made and shared provided opportunities for survivors to reflect on, articulate and share experiences that would have been difficult to articulate and share otherwise.

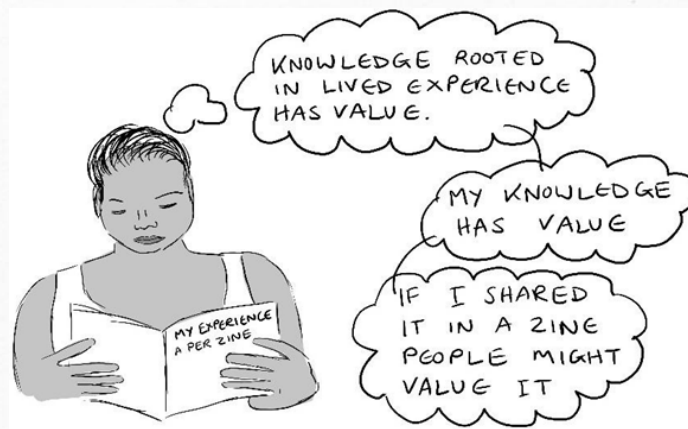
Survivors who were familiar with zine culture described people being valued as knowers in the zine community because they had what Brady (2001) calls *relational authority* through personal connection. The personal connection was, in turn, linked to the material and handmade qualities of zines and the ways in which they are (directly) shared. These qualities were valued in personal relationships, and the zine community, but not in formal settings like mental health services.



Valuing personal connection and knowledge

Valued knowledge and authority

Whilst in the mental health system there is a culture of perceiving (dominant/institutionally valued/professional) knowledge as objective, in the zine community there is a culture of perceiving all knowledge as subjective and recognizing and valuing multiple perspectives, understandings and experiences. In other words, in zine culture, one way of understanding and perceiving isn't valued above all others.



Valuing lived experience and subjective knowledge

Survivor zinesters who were familiar with zine culture described lived experience and informal knowledge and ways of knowing as being valued in zine culture. Indeed, some survivors made and shared zines as they saw it as a way to avoid seeking/requiring institutional recognition. The culture of valuing informal non-institutional knowledge may be linked to the lack of institutionalization of value within the zine community.

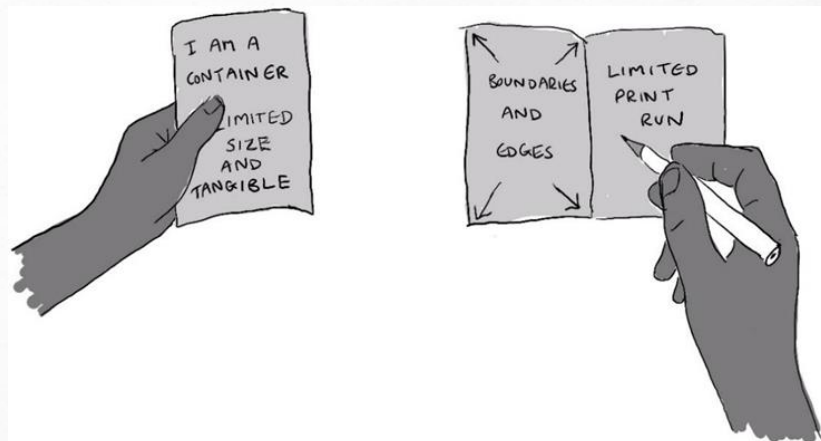
The zines

Survivors found the following qualities of zines helpful: the handmade nature of zine-making; the flexibility of the structure; the creative, visual and sculptural qualities of zines; their enjoyment of the zine-making process; and the sense of containment or distance zines could provide.



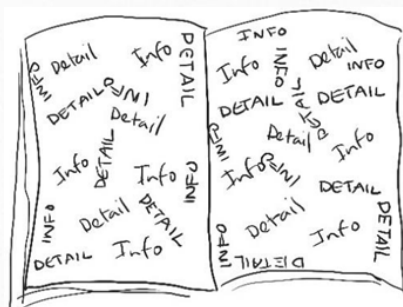
Handmade qualities of zine making.

The handmade quality helped them to reflect on and articulate experiences like madness, which are messy, chaotic or wild.



Zines as containers

The sense of containment helped survivors articulate and share sensitive and emotional experiences.



Flexible structure created space for detail and non-linear links.

Taboos and shame

In the mental health system survivors are seen as violating social norms and are expected to take on this view of ourselves. However, we are not required to do this in the zine culture, and some survivors linked sharing their zines with not feeling shame.

This suggests that it is culturally acceptable to be mad within the zine community. It also suggests that shame might play a role in silencing survivors accounts in other contexts, especially in mental health services.

Crerar's (2016) work (as outlined earlier) helps us to understand the relationship between taboo and shame and how cultural taboos might make it difficult for survivors to reflect on, articulate and share experiences and challenge epistemic injustice.

Crerar's (2016) account of an expressively free environment resonates with the ways in which survivors who were familiar with the zine community described not feeling shamed and having a sense of freedom when creating their zines.

Some survivors described learning about survivor developed language and concepts through reading zines. Crerar's account helps us understand that zines may contain conceptual resources created by survivors, or images and non-linear structure to interpret experience, partly because these are not taboo in the zine community.

KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES

In addition, because survivors' complex identities are recognized, knowledge is not expected to be generalizable and we are not perceived as a homogenous group, we can share intersectional experiences and complex nuanced accounts in the zine community that are missing from the mental health system.

Not being perceived only in terms of one's mental health status in the zine community can also help survivors feel seen, and see ourselves, as valid knowers.

KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES

The flexibility of structure created space for detail and non-linear links and creates space in which non-linear experiencing and thought processes can be articulated. It supported survivors to reflect on, articulate, share and communicate experiences of dissociation and madness; and experiences they hadn't made sense of. It also helped them to make contextual and comparative links, for example locating personal experiences of madness and services in the context of homophobia.



Flexible structure and reflection.

KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES KNOWLEDGE JUSTICE SURVIVORS ZINES

They also supported survivors to reflect on, articulate, share and communicate experiences of MH services. Some survivors also felt that visual processes or non-linear articulation suited or represented the way that they think.

If it is important to survivors to be able to use structures and/or images to articulate our experiences then we might refer to structure and the use of images as hermeneutic resources, and the inability to make use of them might be described as epistemic injustice.



Visual and pattern thinking and experiencing when required to use words.

Identity and complex intersectional accounts

In the MH system people are seen only in terms of service-user identity /mental health status and these identities are often linked with negative stereotypes. In contrast identity is seen as complex and multiple in zine cultures.



Complex identities and intersectional experience

Being perceived as a zinester as well as a survivor meant that survivors could be seen in terms of their strengths.

Zine community as an alternative epistemic environment

Survivors do not have the power to change the way professionals in the mental health system respond to our testimony, we can only seek out individuals we believe might not devalue our testimony. In addition, survivors have limited (if any) opportunities to shape which hermeneutic resources are available and valued in the mental health system. We have limited opportunities to change which diagnostic tools, models or frameworks are used, let alone shape the understanding of what knowledge is or how it might be gained. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that survivors might opt into alternative epistemic environments like zine communities.

In this section I outline what I discovered about freedom and safety, identity and complex intersectional accounts, culture and shame, and valued knowledge and authority in the communities in which experienced survivor zinesters made and shared their zines. I then use Dotson's ideas about epistemic environments to contrast the mental health system with the zine community. Finally, I bring together my findings about the zine community, the opportunities zines afford, and the strategies survivors employ.

Freedom and safety

Survivors who were familiar with the zine community described a sense of freedom in relation to making and sharing their zines. Whilst others described sharing zines in the zine community as involving less risk than sharing in the mental health system. Some of them used this sense of freedom and safety to create and share zines that were critical of or expressed anger at the mental health system, or professionals within the system.

Note: It is significant the flexibility of structure created space in which non-linear experiencing and thought processes could be articulated because non-linear experiencing and thought processes are linked to several mental health diagnoses and sometimes survivors can't separate their mental health experiences from their experiences of services, so non-linear structure enabled them to reflect on their experience of services. It is also important that the flexibility of structure enabled survivors to include details and contextualize experiences because, the interpretive resources relied on in the mental health system often simplifies and decontextualize survivors' experiences e.g. diagnostic frames within which survivor experiences are understood simply as mental illnesses.

The context

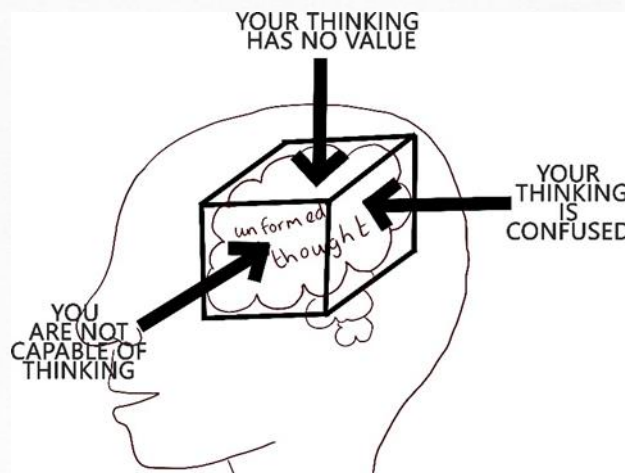
Survivors in my study valued: the sense of freedom and control associated with creating zines away from the mental health system; the ability to imagine and share zines with receptive audiences; and the associated sense of safety.



Freedom and control

Accessing or developing hermeneutic resources

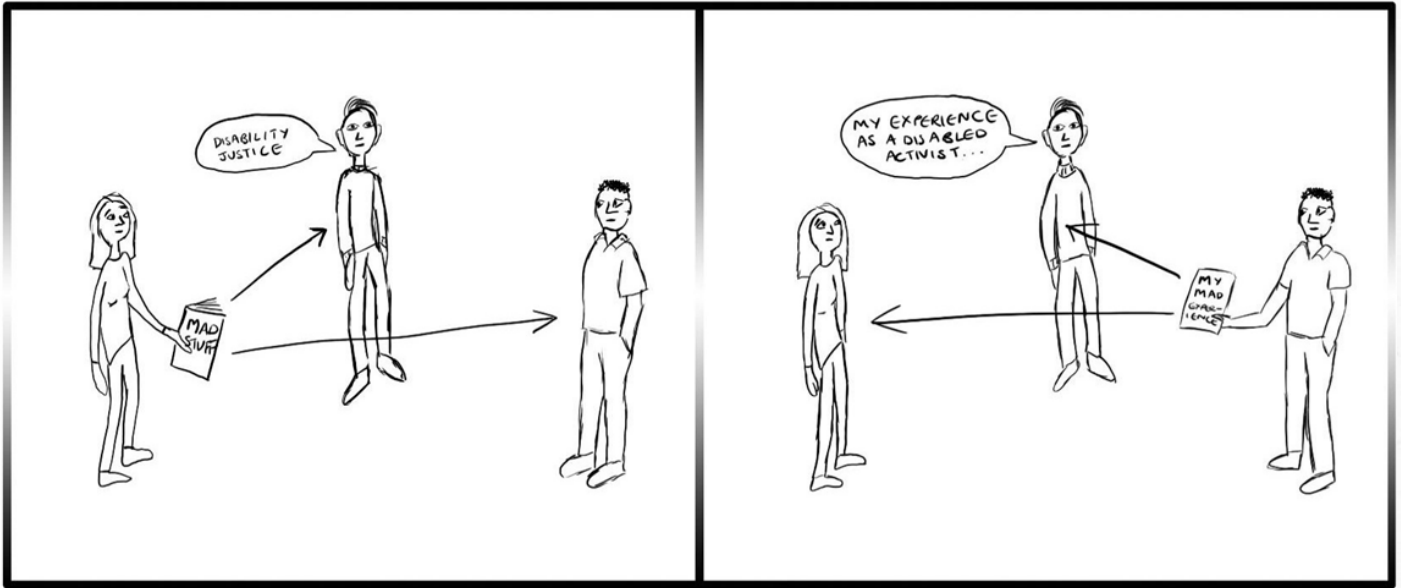
Some survivors created and shared their zines away from mental health services, in the zine community and/or with other welcoming communities as a way to support their confidence in their ability to know, make sense of and articulate their experience. This confidence might be described as a hermeneutic resource as it is very difficult to make sense of experience if you don't trust your ability to do this.



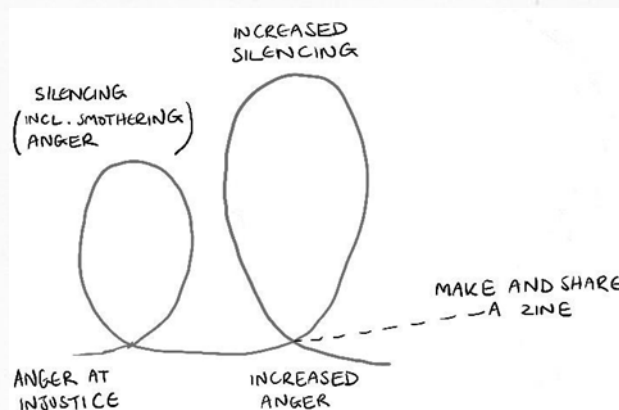
Impact of low epistemic confidence

Engaging with the zine community was also described as a way in which survivors could access survivor created concepts and language which could then be used to reflect on and articulate

Additionally, one survivor described the context in which they shared their zines as a way to turn potential allies into actual allies and another described it as a step towards collective action.



These enabled some survivors to reflect on, articulate and share zines in which they expressed anger at and criticisms of mental health services and professionals. That survivors felt able to create and share anger in their zines suggests that the context in which these zines were produced and shared provided opportunities for survivors to exit, or at least avoid, the anger silencing spirals that Bailey describes.



Exiting the anger silencing spiral

Protective strategies

Survivors employed a variety of strategies which can be described as protective, in the sense of protective from dismissiveness, shame, and negative responses. These strategies made use of zine qualities, audience choice, and the context and community in which zines were made and shared.

Using zine qualities

Some survivors used zines as creative objects to create distance between themselves and the contents of their zines as a way to reduce the risk associated with sharing zines on topics they felt were taboo; one survivor used confusing structures and sculptural qualities to try and test readers' commitment; and I share zines in which interpretive links are not explicit as a way to protect myself from negative responses to my interpretations.



Zines as creative objects with confusing structures and sculptural qualities

One survivor described the context in which they made their zines might as enabling them to identify what concerns survivors share and understand these as systemic rather than individual.



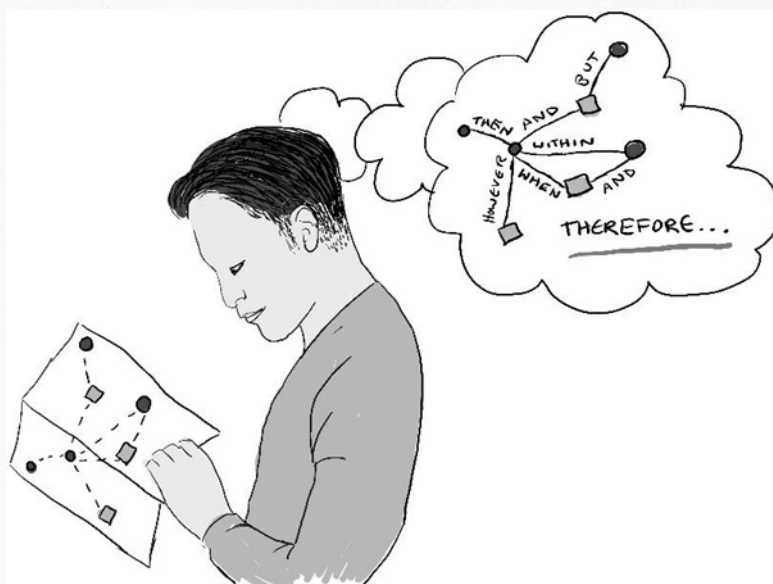
Context for shared sensemaking

Shared sensemaking, becoming aware of shared concerns and alliance building

Some survivors opt into processes or contexts which might enable them to engage in shared sensemaking, social reflexivity and alliance building.

Using a non-linear structure was seen as a means of shared sensemaking by one survivor as it can invite readers into the sensemaking process. Additionally some survivors created and shared their zines in the zine community and/or with other welcoming communities as a way to pool knowledge and/or engage in a social process through which they might become aware of shared concerns and the systemic nature of these.

Note: The context in which implicit links are shared is important. This is because texts which are open to interpretation can make survivors vulnerable to having readers (mis)interpret or pathologize what we share as well as potentially giving us the opportunity to benefit from the interpretation of another survivor who reads our zine.



Sharing implicit links

Whilst sharing implicit links might protect us from the negative consequences of making an interpretation that others dislike, or disagree with, it also makes us vulnerable to having our experiences misinterpreted by others.

Using context, community and audience choice

Some survivors in my study created and shared their zines away from mental health services, in the zine community and/or with other welcoming communities, as a way to protect themselves from having their testimony devalued. Some did this as a way to avoid the risks associated with sharing (critical and angry) testimony in the mental health system, some used it as a way to avoid or reduce shame*, and one survivor saw this as a way to resist internalizing the culture and perspectives of the mental health system. Some survivors linked their use of protective strategies to their experiences of, or expectations of, harm in relation to sharing testimony in mental health services.



Relative safety of sharing zines with chosen audiences away from services

*Shame can be described as seeing ourselves negatively because we violate cultural norms, expectations and preferences. If we are a survivor, someone in the mental health system has decided that who we are, or how we experience or behave in the world, in some way violates cultural norms. Survivors accounts of feeling unshamed when making and sharing zines suggests that they do not feel that they violate cultural norms in the zine community.

Survivors' choice of audience indicates that it was important to them to be able to share unsmothered testimony. Some survivors clearly described choosing their audience and/or the relationship in which they shared their zines as an intentional strategy.



Audience choice