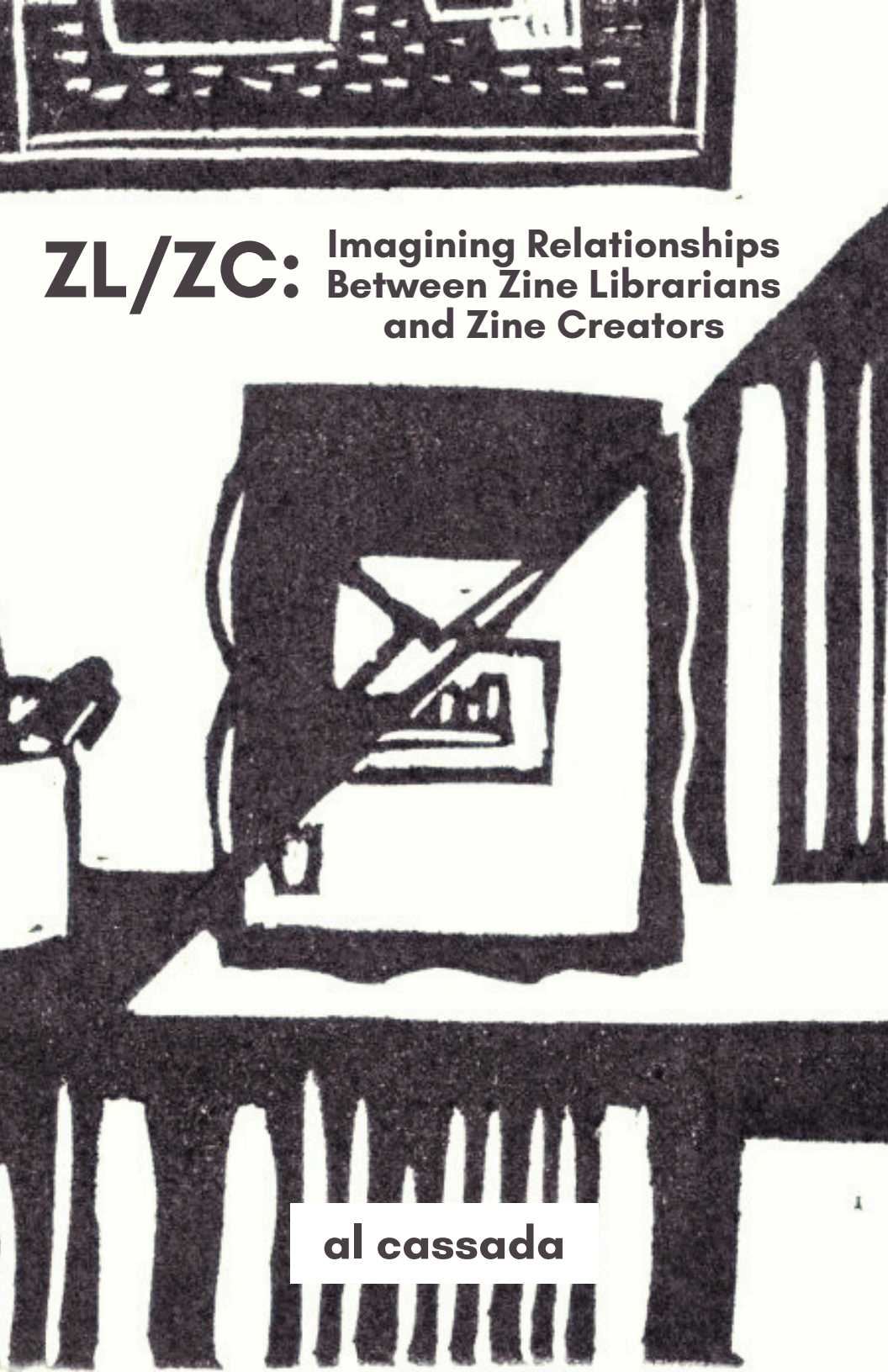




al cassada

ZC/ZL: Imagining Relationships
Between Zine Librarians
and Zine Creators

ZL/ZC: Imagining Relationships
Between Zine Librarians
and Zine Creators



al cassada

You know those pages at the back of a manga that say "STOP: THIS IS THE BACK OF THE BOOK! FLIP IT OVER AND START FROM THE OTHER SIDE"?

This is not that page. :)

This is a split zine! It's two zines in one. You can start reading from either side. It's totally up to you!

I made it this way on purpose. This zine is about two distinct but related groups of people, and I wanted to share information about both of them without putting one first (literally). So please, pick whichever side you want to read first, and then read the other!

Some information for my cataloging or researcher friends:

- My name: Al Cassada
- My pronouns: they/them
- This zine was published as part of Academizines, a special issue of *Unbound: A Journal of Digital Scholarship*.
- This issue was published in January 2026.
- This zine was published using the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license.
- Please feel free to add this zine to your library, print it, and share it! Just make sure you include proper credit, and DON'T make money off of it.
- This zine is the published form of a research project I completed in 2024. I think the research is interesting and useful; if you'd like to engage with the topic, please cite this zine as your source! Don't overlook it or dismiss it because of its format. Though if you're doing zine-related research, you hopefully know better than that. :)

You know those pages at the back of a manga that say "STOP: THIS IS THE BACK OF THE BOOK! FLIP IT OVER AND START FROM THE OTHER SIDE"?

This is not that page. :)

This is a split zine! It's two zines in one. You can start reading from either side. It's totally up to you!

I made it this way on purpose. This zine is about two distinct but related groups of people, and I wanted to share information about both of them without putting one first (literally). So please, pick whichever side you want to read first, and then read the other!

Some information for my cataloging or researcher friends:

- My name: Al Cassada
- My pronouns: they/them
- This zine was published as part of Academizines, a special issue of *Unbound: A Journal of Digital Scholarship*.
- This issue was published in January 2026.
- This zine was published using the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license.
- Please feel free to add this zine to your library, print it, and share it! Just make sure you include proper credit, and DON'T make money off of it.
- This zine is the published form of a research project I completed in 2024. I think the research is interesting and useful; if you'd like to engage with the topic, please cite this zine as your source! Don't overlook it or dismiss it because of its format. Though if you're doing zine-related research, you hopefully know better than that. :)

introduction

I am a zine creator and a zine librarian. Much of my job feels like a tightrope walk—zines and libraries are very alike in some ways and very different in others. As a zinester, I love free expression, and rebellious ideas, and creativity. My librarian-self loves those things too, but the structures and bureaucracy that characterize many libraries mean that sometimes I have to follow the rules. Some of the tensions are higher-stakes, too—not just a creative drive but the necessity of keeping some information private or anonymous, in contrast to a library's desire to provide as much information as possible. So my zinester self and my librarian self are sometimes in alignment and sometimes in conflict. This is the basis for the research project that became this zine!

I have experienced the balancing act that is required of a zine librarian who also makes zines, and one of the ways that I have found to keep that balance is to make sure that I keep myself connected to the zine culture of my local creative community. So I wanted to ask other zine librarians and zine creators:

1. How do they interact with each other? What are their relationships like now?
2. How would they like to interact with each other? What would they like their relationships to be?

Since I reached out to two groups—zine librarians and zine creators—I thought it would be fun to split this zine and tell you about one group

introduction

I am a zine librarian and a zine creator. Much of my job feels like a tightrope walk—zines and libraries are very alike in some ways and very different in others. As a zine librarian, I love information, free resources, and sharing knowledge. My zinester-self loves those things too, but the rebellious nature of zines means that sometimes rules are meant to be broken. Some of the tensions are higher-stakes, too—I love access to information, but some things are important to keep anonymous for the author's safety. So my librarian self and my zinester self are sometimes in alignment and sometimes in conflict. This is the basis for the research project that became this zine!

I have experienced the balancing act that is required of a zine librarian who also makes zines, and one of the ways that I have found to keep that balance is to make sure that I keep myself connected to the zine culture of my local creative community. So I wanted to ask other zine librarians and zine creators:

1. How do they interact with each other? What are their relationships like now?
2. How would they like to interact with each other? What would they like their relationships to be?

Since I reached out to two groups—zine librarians and zine creators—I thought it would be fun to split this zine and tell you about one group

at a time. This is not to say that the groups are completely different, or even completely separate! (A good chunk of the people who answered my survey were zine librarians who were also zine creators—more on that later). But still, part of my goal with this project is to pass information from one group to the other, so a split zine gives the opportunity for you, the reader, to see both sides of the results.

This side of the zine is focused on the responses of zine librarians. To start, I'll talk for just a moment about what existing research tells us about zine libraries and how they work. Then I'll tell you a bit about my survey—how it was set up, how I distributed it—and then we'll go into the results to see what zine librarians had to say. After that, I'll tell you about some of the interesting trends I noticed in the responses. To finish out, we'll talk a bit about what this research means for zine librarians and how I think we could keep this conversation going.

To recap, these are the sections:

- Introduction (you are here!) - 1
- Background research - 3
- Survey methods - 5
- Results - 8
- Analysis - 16
- Recommendations - 20

If you'd like to hear about the background research and results for the zine creators who answered this survey, just flip this zine over and start from the other side!

If you'd like to hear about the background research and results for the zine librarians who answered this survey, just flip this zine over and start from the other side!

- Introduction (you are here!) - 1
- Background research - 3
- Survey methods - 4
- Results - 7
- Analysis - 16
- Recommendations - 19

To recap, these are the sections:

This side of the zine is focused on the responses of zine creators. To start, I'll talk for just a moment about what existing research tells us about zine creators and the zine community. Then I'll tell you a bit about my survey—how it was set up, how I distributed it—and then we'll go into the results to see what zine creators had to say. After that, I'll tell you about some of the interesting trends I noticed in the responses. To finish out, we'll talk a bit about what this research means for zine creators and how I think we could keep this conversation going.

at a time. This is not to say that the groups are completely different, or even completely separate! (A good chunk of the people who answered my survey were zine creators who were also zine librarians—more on that on the other side of this zine). But still, part of my goal with this project is to pass information from one group to the other, so a split zine gives the opportunity for you, the reader, to see both sides of the results. (Some of the information in this side may be repeated in the other side because it applies to that group, too.)

background: zines

If you'd like an excellent overview of the history and culture of zines and zine makers, check out Alison Piepmeyer's *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism*¹ and Stephen Duncombe's *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*.²

There are some specific parts of zine culture (to the extent that it can even be called a singular culture) that are important for this project: namely, zines are a labor of love and community, but they and their creators are strongly individual.

Seth Friedman, the creator of the zine *Factsheet Five*, says that "what unites all zine publishers is their passion for communication."³ In other words, people make zines to make connections with other people. Those connections are not just the reasons that zines exist—they're also, in part, how they exist. Friedman also says that "network of mutual reviews and trades is the lifeblood of the zine community."⁴

1. Alison Piepmeyer, *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* (New York University Press, 2009).
2. Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Verso, 1997).
3. Seth R. Friedman, *The Factsheet Five Zine Reader: The Best Writing from the Underground World of Zines* (Three Rivers Press, 1997), 1.
4. *Ibid.*, 2.

background: zine libraries

As I said earlier, zine libraries are something of a balancing act. Their goal as a library is to provide access to zines, but since zines and zine creators are part of such a strong and alternative subculture, zine librarians often face a wide range of both ethical and practical questions. Discussing these questions makes up a large portion of zine library scholarship.

Ethically speaking, zine librarians often try to keep in mind the unique values and priorities of zine creators both individually and as a whole. The zine-making and -reading subculture prioritizes authentic connections between zine creators and zine readers. Zine libraries, by their very function, pull zines out of this personal network and place them in a separate pool to be accessed by any number of people regardless of their knowledge of or connection with the creator. This is not necessarily a negative—zine creators have expressed their approval of this increase in access to their work¹—but it's still something to keep in mind. There is also the question of how best to balance the library user's access to zines with the zine creator's desire for privacy—especially when considering digitizing zines, which opens potential readership up beyond users of a particular library to users of the internet as a whole.² Many ethical questions like these are discussed in the Zine Librarians Code of Ethics!³

1. Anne Hays, "Zine Authors' Attitudes About Inclusion In Public and Academic Library Collections: A Survey-Based Study," *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 88 no. 1 (2018).
2. Kelly Wooten, "Why We're Not Digitizing Zines," Duke University, last modified September 21, 2009, <https://blogs.library.duke.edu/digital-collections/2009/09/21/why-were-not-digitizing-zines/>
3. Berthoud et al., *Zine Librarians Code of Ethics Zine* (2015).

Another common question in zine librarianship research is how best to describe zines in the library's catalog. Jenna Freedman and Rhonda Kauffman,⁴ Allison Jai O'Dell,⁵ and Heidy Berthoud all offer their best guidelines on how to answer some of the sticky technical questions. Berthoud⁶ points out the importance of community-building to the zine librarian, describing seeking advice about cataloging practices from other zine librarians, employing a student intern to assist with creating summaries for zines, and maintaining a conversation with the users of the collection about ways to organize the zines. As a group, zine librarians are aware of the tension between the structural needs of a library and the unique characteristics of zines, and they work to find a path to best practices with the guidance of their communities.

For the purposes of this project, these questions point me toward the stakes of zine librarianship, and I notice a trend of zine librarians relying on their community to help answer them. Interestingly, while respecting zine creators' wishes is a common theme in the research, what those wishes are is not often directly investigated. The exception to this is Anne Hays's article where they surveyed zine creators to find out how they felt about their zines being present in zine libraries (which was largely positive, provided the libraries did not infringe upon the creators' privacy by either naming them in catalog entries where they wished to be anonymous or digitizing their zines without their permission).⁷

4. Jenna Freedman and Rhonda Kauffman, "Cutter & Paste: A DIY Guide For Catalogers Who Don't Know About Zines and Zine Librarians Who Don't Know About Cataloging." In *Informed Agitation: Library and Information Skills In Social Justice Movements and Beyond*, ed. M. Morrone (Library Juice Press, 2013).

5. Allison Jai O'Dell, "RDA and the Description of Zines: Metadata Needs for Alternative Publications," *Journal of Library Metadata* 14 (2014): <https://doi.org/10.1080/19386389.2014.978235>

6. Heidy Berthoud, "My Life as a 'Like-Minded Misfit,' or, Experiences in Zine Librarianship," *Serials Review* 44, no.1 (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1080/00987913.2018.1434857>

7. Hays, "Zine Authors' Attitudes," 76.

5. Julie Bartel, *From A to Zine: Building a Winning Zine Collection in Your Library* (American Library Association, 2004), 16.
6. Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 51.

I wanted to know about how zine creators and zine librarians interacted with each other, so I decided to ask them. In 2024, I created a survey to gather information on how these two groups of people *currently* interact with each other and how they would like to interact with each other.

survey methods

For the purposes of this project, this focus on both community and individuality tells me that while I should investigate the importance of interactions and relationships between zine librarians and zine creators, I should also remember not to assume that the results of my survey apply to every zine creator everywhere. I'll say this a few times throughout this zine, but this research is meant to be the start of this conversation, not the end of it!

But they're individual, too. Julie Bartel, a zine librarian, found that out when some zine creators she talked to told her that they didn't like being lumped into one singular group. (This research is actually why I call zine creators zine creators instead of "zinesters"—some of the people Bartel talked to said they didn't like being called a zinester.⁵ In a fittingly zine-ish paradox, the zinester version of community is "something different: a community of people linked via bonds of difference, each sharing their originality."⁶)

I also asked how important they thought it was for zine creators to have interactions with zine librarians, then I repeated the question about relationships. Both times, I asked why they thought so.

I asked whether they had a working relationship with any zine librarians (as opposed to isolated interactions). If they said yes, I asked them how the relationship was built.

The first section was about their actual interactions or relationships with zine librarians. First, I asked whether they had ever interacted with zine librarians. If they said yes, I asked them who usually started the interactions and what context they occurred in. Then I asked them to tell me about a positive interaction they'd had with a zine librarian and what made it positive, then about a negative interaction they'd had and what made it negative.

The survey started with a question making sure the person agreed to take the survey and was old enough to do so. (If they said no, the survey ended.) Then I asked if they were a zine creator, a zine librarian, both, or neither. (If they said neither, the survey ended.) If they said they were a zine creator, they got the zine creator version of the survey.

the survey

These are the three pieces that encouraged me to start this project: the stakes of zine librarianship, the common values of community and connection, and Hays's example of surveying zine creators directly!

survey methods

I wanted to know about how zine creators and zine librarians interacted with each other, so I decided to ask them. I created a survey to gather information on how these two groups of people currently interact with each other and how they would like to interact with each other.

the survey

The survey started with a question making sure the person agreed to take the survey and was old enough to do so. (If they said no, the survey ended.) Then I asked if they were a zine creator, a zine librarian, both, or neither. (If they said neither, the survey ended.) If they said they were a zine librarian, they got the zine librarian version of the survey. If they said they were both a zine creator and a zine librarian, they also got the zine librarian version with a small set of extra questions. Since many of the ethical questions in zine librarianship are about how zine libraries treat zines, people who are both librarians and creators fall closer to librarians in terms of their institutional power (a theme that, while I didn't ask about it directly, came up repeatedly in survey answers—more on that in the Results section).

The first section was about zine librarians' actual interactions or relationships with zine creators. First, I asked whether they had ever interacted with zine creators. If they said yes, I asked them who usually started the interactions and what context they occurred in. Then I asked them to tell me about a positive interaction they'd had with a zine creator and what made it positive, then about a negative interaction they'd had and what made it negative.

I asked whether they had a working relationship with any zine creators (as opposed to isolated interactions). If they said yes, I asked them how the relationship was built.

I also asked how important they thought it was for zine librarians to have interactions with zine creators, then I repeated the question about relationships. Both times, I asked why they thought so.

The second major section was about what kinds of interactions and/or relationships they'd like to have with zine creators. I asked what context(s) they'd like to interact with zine creators (giving them the option to say "none") and then asked them to describe the ideal relationship with a zine creator (again, giving them the option to say "none").

The last question asked what they wished zine creators knew about their work as a zine librarian.

limitations

No research project is perfect—there are always things that you have to keep in mind when you look at the results. In my case, I sent out the survey almost entirely online (the only exception was when I told people in my personal network about it). That means that if someone didn't know me and doesn't use the internet too often, they probably didn't see the survey. Also, the survey was only open for one month (September 30 to November 1, 2024), so some people who might have been interested might have just missed it.

how i sent out the survey

The second major section was about what kinds of interactions and/or relationships they'd like to have with zine librarians. I asked what context(s) they'd like to interact with zine librarians (giving them the option to say "none") and then asked them to describe the ideal relationship with a zine librarian (again, giving them the option to say "none").

The last question asked what they wished zine librarians knew about their work as a zine creator.

results

I intentionally didn't ask people about their demographic information—age (besides making sure they were old enough to agree to take part in the research), race, gender, dis/ability, where they lived, how long they had been making zines, etc. (The best way to protect someone's privacy is to not collect data on them at all, and since none of these things affected my research question, I just didn't ask.) That means that there could be important distinctions to my conclusions that could change depending on how a given person fits into any of these characteristics. If we want to know more about how someone's race, for example, affects their views on relationships between zine creators and zine librarians, we'll have to study that specifically. Those aren't the kinds of conclusions I'm trying to draw here. This is just meant to be a starting point.

This is the cool part! (Well, one of the cool parts. I think the whole thing is cool.)

Once the survey closed, I read through the responses and identified trends or common topics that came up multiple times. Then, once I noticed a trend, I read through the responses again to make sure I identified every place that trend came up. I repeated this a few times to make sure I noticed as many trends and examples as possible. (This is called thematic analysis!)

Unfortunately, I don't have the space to tell you about every answer to every question (this zine has to be short enough to print, after all!), but I'll tell you the most important trends I noticed. I'll also break up the results into sections based on what topic they tell us about to make them a little easier to skim.

how i sent out the survey

To make sure zine librarians saw the survey, I shared it on the Zine Librarians email list (which had about 554 members) and posted about it in a zine librarianship Discord server. Every time I posted about the survey, I encouraged people to share it with their own networks, and a lot of them did!

limitations

No research project is perfect—there are always things that you have to keep in mind when you look at the results. In my case, I sent out the survey almost entirely online (the only exception was when I told people in my personal network about it). That means that if someone didn't know me and doesn't use the internet too often, they probably didn't see the survey. Also, the survey was only open for one month (September 30 to November 1, 2024), so some people who might have been interested might have just missed it.

I intentionally didn't ask people about their demographic information—age (besides making sure they were old enough to agree to take part in the research), race, gender, dis/ability, where they lived, how long they had been making zines, etc. (The best way to protect someone's privacy is to not collect data on them at all, and since none of these things affected my research question, I just didn't ask.) That means that there could be important distinctions to my conclusions that could change depending on how a given person fits into any of these characteristics. If we want to know more about how someone's race, for example, affects their views on relationships between zine creators and zine librarians, we'll have to study that specifically. Those aren't the kinds of conclusions I'm trying to draw here. This is just meant to be a starting point.

results

This is the cool part! (Well, one of the cool parts. I think the whole thing is cool.)

Once the survey closed, I read through the responses and identified trends or common topics that came up multiple times. Then, once I noticed a trend, I read through the responses again to make sure I identified every place that trend came up. I repeated this a few times to make sure I noticed as many trends and examples as possible. (This is called thematic analysis!)

Unfortunately, I don't have the space to tell you about every answer to every question (this zine has to be short enough to print, after all!), but I'll tell you the most important trends I noticed. I'll also break up the results into sections based on what topic they tell us about to make them a little easier to skim.

general information

The survey gathered 67 total responses. One person indicated that they did not consent to the survey, so I discarded their response. Six other people did not identify as either a zine librarian, a zine creator, or both, so I discarded those responses, too. That left me with 60 total usable responses. Of that group, 19 identified themselves as zine librarians, 24 as zine creators, and 17 as both zine librarians and zine creators (I'll refer to them as librarian/creators or creator/librarians.) Of those 36 people (zine librarians and librarian/creators), 19 worked at academic libraries, 12 at public libraries, and 5 at independent libraries.

actual interactions and relationships with zine librarians

Note: If someone said they were both a librarian and a creator, I gave them an extra set of questions asking how their experiences as a zine creator impacted their actions as a zine librarian and vice versa. I'll include the results from those questions on both sides of this zine!

The survey gathered 67 total responses. One person indicated that they did not consent to the survey, so I discarded their response. Six other people did not identify as either a zine librarian, a zine creator, or both, so I discarded those responses, too. That left me with 60 total usable responses. Of that group, 19 identified themselves as zine librarians, 24 as zine creators, and 17 as both zine librarians and zine creators (I'll refer to them as librarian/creators or creator/librarians.)

20 of the 24 zine creators said they had interacted with a zine librarian before. (The zine librarian usually started the interaction.) Zine creators most commonly interacted with zine librarians in the contexts of donating or selling zines (17 responses) and attending events or programs (12 responses). Of the 20 zine creators who had interacted with zine librarians, only 6 said they had a working relationship with one (beyond isolated interactions).

general information

Most zine creators (16) said they had never had a negative interaction with a zine librarian! The ones who did have a negative interaction tended to talk about a lack of communication or a lack of courtesy. "No acknowledgement of my donation," one creator wrote. "Did it exist?"

When I asked about what positive interactions they'd had, all three groups made a point to talk about interpersonal interactions (expressions of emotion, interest in the other's work, openness, expressions of gratitude, and respect for the other party). They also all mentioned the positive power of interactions where the agency of the zine creator is respected. Zine creators specifically described being happy to learn about zine libraries and share information about their own zines and creative processes!

Zine creators mentioned building relationships through collaboration on zine fests and discussing zines. Also, both zine creators and creator/librarians mention creating zines collaboratively as a powerful way to build a relationship! It's also important to note that the type of zine interaction brought up the most was not, as you might expect, zine purchases or donations. Instead, people talked about simple discussions about zines—talking to a creator about their work or sharing what types of zines each person enjoys. The interactions that help to build relationships are not simple transactions but conversations about each person's appreciation for zines themselves.

Note: If someone said they were both a librarian and a creator, I gave them an extra set of questions asking how their experiences as a zine creator impacted their actions as a zine librarian and vice versa. I'll include the results from those questions on both sides of this zine!

actual interactions and relationships with zine creators

Most of those zine librarians had interacted with zine creators before (all 19 zine librarians and 14 of 17 librarian/creators). Zine librarians tended to start the interactions. Zine librarians most commonly interacted with zine creators while acquiring or buying zines (28 responses), while attending events or programs (26 responses), and while organizing events or programs (22 responses).

29 zine librarians said they have a working relationship with a zine creator. Zine librarians were most likely to mention building relationships through attending community events, existing community membership, networking, and zine-based interactions, especially discussions about zines. Librarian/creators focused on collaboration, especially in planning zine fests and in creating zines with other creators; and zine-focused interactions, including discussing, purchasing, and trading zines.

When I asked about what positive interactions they'd had, all three groups made a point to talk about interpersonal interactions (expressions of emotion, interest in the other's work, openness, expressions of gratitude, and respect for the other party). They also all mentioned the positive power of interactions where the agency of the zine creator is respected. Many librarians shared stories of ensuring zine creators' permission for their work to be included in the zine library or deferring to zine creators' requests about what information should be added to the catalog.

Most librarians (20) said they had never had a negative interaction with a zine creator! The ones who did have a negative interaction tended to talk about a lack of communication (7 responses). Librarians also mentioned structural barriers—tension created by their library's policies going against zine creators' wishes (6 responses). One person wrote, "I think the creator felt disrespected by our library's refusal to use the title that they use for the zine, and I don't blame them. I think sometimes the strict rules of traditional cataloging are not well-suited to the unconventional formats of zines."

ideal interactions and relationships with zine creators

32 of the 36 zine librarians said it was very important to interact with zine creators. When I asked about how zine librarians would like to interact with zine creators, the most common choices were acquiring zines (34 responses) and while attending events or programs (33 responses). Zero zine librarians said they would never want to interact with zine creators!

Most zine creators (23 out of 24) said that relationships between zine creators and zine librarians are either very important or slightly important. When I asked them to describe their ideal relationship with a zine librarian, 17 zine creators mentioned professional aspects the relationship—for example, collaborating with each other (10 responses), having good communication (9 responses), and sharing information with each other (8 responses).

When I asked why they thought it was important for zine librarians to interact with zine creators, one creator wrote simply, "We make the content."

Zero zine creators said they would never want to interact with zine librarians! Since the survey focuses on interactions and relationships between the groups, it's possible that any librarians or creators who held this view would have simply chosen not to participate. But while this result may not be ironclad, it's still a strong indicator of a prevailing belief in the zine librarian and zine creator communities.

All 24 zine creators said it was either very important or slightly important for a zine librarian to interact with zine creators. Creators most commonly wanted to interact with zine librarians while donating or selling zines (24 responses), while attending events or programs (19 responses), and while organizing events or programs (15 responses).

ideal interactions and relationships with zine librarians

In addition, I asked people who fill both roles what they would like to say to both communities. Like their counterparts in each group, they mentioned institutional difficulties, cataloging information, and expressions of support.

When I asked zine creators what they wish zine librarians knew about them and their work, their most common responses discussed a desire for information and an emphasis on the value of zines. The zine creators were interested in how zine libraries function and the processes that go on behind the scenes (for example, how zines are cataloged). They also frequently discussed how much they value zines. One creator says that they wish that librarians knew about the "extensive amount of intellectual research behind the content," and another writes, "We do what we do because it's a passion. Actually, it's more than that. It's life. We have to create. It has to come out." Other common threads included expressions of appreciation for zine librarians and assurances that their goals are aligned—one creator wrote, "We are allies to the library," and another affirmed that "[w]e're thrilled to work with them to add to their collection and we're excited they showed interest at all."

what zine creators want zine librarians to know

15 zine creators mentioned interpersonal aspects of an ideal relationship—for example, having a personal relationship like a friendship (6 responses) or spending time discussing zines (4 responses). One zine creator wrote, "I have a feeling the relationships should be personal, as hand-made and home-grown as zines."

Since the survey focuses on interactions and relationships between the groups, it's possible that any librarians or creators who held this view would have simply chosen not to participate. Still, it's an encouraging indicator of a prevailing belief in the zine librarian and zine creator communities.

24 zine librarians said it was very important to have relationships with zine creators and 11 said it was slightly important. When I asked them to describe their ideal relationship with a zine creator, 25 zine librarians mentioned personal aspects of the relationship—for example, respect (11 responses) and openness (7 responses from librarian/creators and 2 from zine librarians). 24 responses mentioned professional aspects—for example, communication (12 responses), sharing information (9 responses), and collaboration (7 responses from zine librarians and 3 from librarian/creators). One person wrote, "institutional archives have rightly been criticized for being extractive, and zine librarians cultivating actual, long term relationships with zine makers is a great, necessary way to have authentic stewardship of materials."

In their extended responses, participants wrote that sustained relationships might be more difficult for a librarian to maintain alongside their other duties or simply might not be as necessary. One participant wrote, "At the end of the day it's about acquisition, organization and access. Sometimes isolated communication is all that's needed."

what zine librarians want zine creators to know

Zine librarians most commonly wished that creators knew about the internal processes of the zine library—specifically, cataloging. Multiple librarians expressed the desire for zine creators to include bibliographic information like author attributions (notably, none specified legal names) and publishing dates. They also wished zine creators knew how lengthy the process can be to add a zine to the collection. Additionally, they wanted to draw attention to the institutional barriers that they face within their libraries. One librarian cautioned, “I wish they [zine creators] knew not to trust all librarians. Library systems are not set up for their benefit so zinesters should be on their guard against institutional fuckery, even if the librarians they work with are individually well-meaning people.” Other librarians mentioned the “tough road to get administration to give a zine collection a chance” and the wide range of other institutional duties they face.

In addition, I asked people who fill both roles what they would like to say to both communities. Like their counterparts in each group, they mentioned institutional difficulties, cataloging information, and expressions of support. One person encouraged zine creators to assert their agency over their creations and contact the library if they wish to have part of the catalog entry changed (for example, if they change their name). Another encouraged zine librarians to be aware of the balance of power between their institution and zine creators and try their best to tip it in the creators’ favor. They also called for librarians and creators to support each other, noting that the two groups are both vulnerable to burnout.

what zine creators learned from being zine librarians

One participant encouraged zine creators to assert their agency over their creations and contact the library if they wish to have part of the catalog entry changed (for example, if they change their name). Another encouraged zine librarians to be aware of the balance of power between their institution and zine creators and try their best to tip it in the creators’ favor. They also called for librarians and creators to support each other, noting that the two groups are both vulnerable to burnout.

other trends

In their work as librarians, librarian/creators said they work to ensure that creators are able to maintain their agency over their zines, educate creators about copyright, and have learned about the power and academic importance of alternative literature. As zine creators, multiple people said that they have begun to make zines about books and academic topics that are specifically intended to be shared with academic communities. These creator/librarians also said that they have gained cultural knowledge about the values and norms of the zine community that they are able to put into practice in their role as a librarian, such as respecting creators’ privacy concerns when digitizing zines or a creator’s desire to remove their name from a catalog entry for a zine they created in their youth.

While I only directly asked about the research questions I’ve mentioned so far, I was interested to see that some other trends arose in the responses to my survey. There were four additional

Those values emerged through various responses across the survey. According to participants, zines are valuable as personal creations, cultural objects, and sources of knowledge. One creator/librarian encouraged their peers to "elevate zines to equal value as other collections materials, instead of relegating them to lesser, less valued spaces." The values of their creators include the passion of creation, sharing information, and uplifting zines as alternatives to dominant sources of knowledge—as one creator wrote, "my zines are an alternative to academic publishing but I'm writing about topics that I think are important and I wish they could be more accessible to people." Zine culture is also participatory: multiple creator/librarians explained that

Many people brought up ideology or ethics as a source of either alignment or tension in their engagements with their counterparts, with the concept appearing in the survey responses 24 times. Many participants viewed zine creators as sources of knowledge and guidance about community values; one librarian/creator who viewed relationships between the two parties as very important explained that "if ethical issues within zine collections come up, it's nice to have that connection to resolve them."

zine culture

topics that people tended to bring up: zine culture, zine libraries, community, and the balance of power. I'll talk about the common threads of zine culture and community here; on the other side of this zine, I'll talk about the themes of zine libraries and power. (This section contains information from all three groups—zine creators, zine librarians, and creator/librarians).

what zine librarians learned from being zine creators

In their work as librarians, librarian/creators said they work to ensure that creators are able to maintain their agency over their zines, educate creators about copyright, and have learned about the power and academic importance of alternative literature. As zine creators, multiple people said that they have begun to make zines about books and academic topics that are specifically intended to be shared with academic communities. These creator/librarians also said that they have gained cultural knowledge about the values and norms of the zine community that they are able to put into practice in their role as a librarian, such as respecting creators' privacy concerns when digitizing zines or a creator's desire to remove their name from a catalog entry for a zine they created in their youth.

other trends

While I only directly asked about the research questions I've mentioned so far, I was interested to see that some other trends arose in the responses to my survey. There were four additional topics that people tended to bring up: zine culture, zine libraries, community, and the balance of power. I'll talk about the common threads of zine libraries and the balance of power between individuals and institutions here; on the other side of this zine, I'll talk about the themes of zine culture and community. (This section contains information from all three groups—zine creators, zine librarians, and creator/librarians).

zine libraries

Participants described zine libraries in both positive and negative ways. They are a powerful force for preservation, “essential to not only provide a representation of authors to their patrons, but help maintain a preserved record of their communities, the art form, and literature as a whole.” They “exist in resistance to monoculture, preserving the individual’s voice and supporting the sharing of free thought—true freedom of the press.” They can serve their communities, zine or otherwise, by encouraging them to “write back to the world, not just to experience it as readers.” When they remove zines from their communities, however, they become controlling, exploitative, and extractive. One creator, when describing the importance of relationships between librarians and creators, writes that “relationship building creates authentic and respectful links, at its best helping to avoid feelings of extraction, voyeurism, etc.”

power: individuals vs institutions

A common theme that I had been thinking about in my own work but hadn’t necessarily expected to come up in this research was the complex interactions of power between zine creators, zine libraries, and libraries as institutions.

One of the most common discussions of power was an emphasis on the agency of zine creators over their own work. When I asked participants how important it is for zine librarians to interact with zine creators and why, one creator selected “very important” and said, simply and directly, “We make the content.”

Another often-repeated thread was the discussion of community. Librarians, creators, and librarian/creators viewed community—just like collaboration—as both a method and a goal of building relationships. For these participants, their goal is to join, learn from, support, and expand the wider zine community. They also viewed community as an inherent aspect of zine culture: one creator/librarian wrote, “Zines are about COMMUNITY and interaction between [zine librarians and zine creators] helps build and sustain that community.”

Overall, 51 responses across the survey mention collaboration! Members of each of the three groups repeatedly discussed collaboration as both a method of building relationships and a goal of an ideal relationship. The most commonly mentioned form of collaboration was planning zine fests or zine programs. These events present a way to bring multiple community members together and either introduce them to the zine community or strengthen their ties to it. Collaboration between librarians and creators also gives creators a chance to share their knowledge, acknowledges their expertise, and gives them a place of respect within the zine library.

community and collaboration

their work creating zines has helped them form strong and authentic connections with zine creators. The zine creator is an expert in both their own work and in the knowledge of zine culture, and the way into the culture is to do the work of creating zines!

Still, zine creators are not a homogenous group, and they are not without prejudice. When I asked participants to identify a negative interaction they have had in their work, one zine creator of color described "[b]eing treated like I didn't belong in a zine space because of my skin color" because of "[o]thers' assumptions and presumptions rooted in racial prejudice." That creator also described the joy of attending the first annual Black Zine Fair and "[r]ealizing we were part of the start of something... that was so well supported and drew so much enthusiasm" as well as the power of "being the majority in a space (zine fests) where we're typically the minority." For this creator, being welcome in the zine community is not assured—it is something that must be sought out. For all that zines are alternative, rebellious, often progressive creations, zine creators of color face the same prejudice and exclusion as in the dominant culture at large. If zine librarians want to build relationships with zine creators of color, they will have to acknowledge and act against racism in their institution and in both the library and zine communities.

Zines are ephemeral even for ephemeral creations. Zines and zine makers disappear all the time. The bev of broken links and abandoned zine distros shows that we are, by and large, a transient community. We must be kept up with.

One zine creator said that the zine library itself can provide an important service for that community by acting as a force for preservation:

In multiple instances, members of each group emphasized the importance of receiving the creator's permission to add their zines to a library collection. They also frequently discussed the process of cataloging zines, with zine librarians reaching out to creators to confirm cataloging details and encouraging creators to reach out to them if something needs to be changed. Still, this agency is not always respected, and there were multiple responses that told stories of zine creators' wishes being overruled.

Another common discussion of power centered on the topic of money. Many participants viewed paying zine creators for their zines as a way to show respect—or, as one librarian wrote, to "extract resources from the state-run institutions I work with and transfer that money & power to marginalized zine creators." Librarians and librarian/creators brought up this view of money more often than the creators themselves.

Librarians and librarian/creators also frequently discuss balances of power between individuals and institutions. One person noted that "many zine librarians are teams of one," and another described a time in which they were not able to provide a zine creator with necessary accommodations because they simply lacked the resources: "When zine work is a passion project it's often just me doing the work." Librarians also talked about the barriers they face when they are trying to work with and for creators, including convincing their administration of the merits of a zine collection, institutional hoops like treating zine creators as vendors and requiring a W9 for purchases, and other "[r]ed tape with being a librarian for the public." While the zine librarians who participated in the study want to work for the benefit of creators, many of them acknowledged that their institutions do not and advised zine creators to proceed with caution in their dealings with zine libraries.

analysis

compare and contrast: librarians, creators, or all of the above

Zine librarians and librarian/creators are more likely to initiate interactions with zine creators than vice versa. They are also more likely to say that they have a working relationship with a zine creator.

Zine creators and creator/librarians specifically talked about creating zines together as a powerful way to build a relationship. People in all three groups described how much they enjoyed sharing information about their own work and learn about the other group's work. Many of these responses came from zine creators (7 responses to the other groups' combined 5 responses). Zine creators specifically mentioned being happy to learn about zine libraries and share information about their own zines and creative processes.

Each group also said that interactions with the other group was especially important to build the cultural knowledge necessary to accurately and ethically work with zine collections. They described the nature of zines as alternative, community-based, ephemeral, and personal—they require intentional and knowledgeable work, not a one-size-fits-all approach. Zine librarians and librarian/creators added a sense of responsibility to this idea, encouraging their colleagues to interact with zine creators in order to avoid doing harm.

Each group also said that interactions with the other group was especially important to build the cultural knowledge necessary to accurately and ethically work with zine collections. They described the nature of zines as alternative, community-based, ephemeral, and personal—they require intentional and knowledgeable work, not a one-size-fits-all approach. Zine librarians and librarian/creators added a sense of responsibility to this idea, encouraging their colleagues to interact with zine creators in order to avoid doing harm.

Zine creators and creator/librarians specifically talked about creating zines together as a powerful way to build a relationship. People in all three groups described how much they enjoyed sharing information about their own work and learn about the other group's work. Many of these responses came from zine creators (7 responses to the other groups' combined 5 responses). Zine creators specifically mentioned being happy to learn about zine libraries and share information about their own zines and creative processes.

The zine creators who answered this survey were less likely to say that they have a working relationship with a zine librarian. They were also less likely to initiate interactions with zine librarians. They were also less likely to say that they have a working relationship with a zine librarian.

compare and contrast: librarians, creators, or all of the above

analysis

confirming what the research says

Zine librarians and librarian/creators focused largely on the importance of respect in interpersonal relationships—of the zine creator's wishes and of zines themselves. Creator/librarians emphasized the importance of being open to questions and suggestions about library processes. Zine creators, by contrast, tended to emphasize more personal aspects of the relationship, such as discussing zines with each other or being personal friends alongside their professional relationship. In terms of a professional relationship, the three groups had more overlap. Across the board, participants mentioned that their ideal relationships between the two groups would be characterized by collaboration, strong communication, and mutual benefits to both parties.

Librarians also put forth practical considerations. In their extended responses, participants wrote that sustained relationships might be more difficult for a librarian to maintain alongside their other duties or simply might not be as necessary, with one participant explaining, "At the end of the day it's about acquisition, organization and access. Sometimes isolated communication is all that's needed."

Many of the trends in this study align with existing scholarship about zines and zine libraries. Scholarly literature often characterizes zines as fiercely personal, intentionally community-focused, yet unashamedly individualistic, and each of these themes emerges from the data.

Librarians also put forth practical considerations. In their extended responses, participants wrote that sustained relationships might be more difficult for a librarian to maintain alongside their other duties or simply might not be as necessary, with one participant explaining, "At the end of the day it's about acquisition, organization and access. Sometimes isolated communication is all that's needed."

Zine librarians and librarian/creators focused largely on the importance of respect in interpersonal relationships—of the zine creator's wishes and of zines themselves. Creator/librarians emphasized the importance of being open to questions and suggestions about library processes. Zine creators, by contrast, tended to emphasize more personal aspects of the relationship, such as discussing zines with each other or being personal friends alongside their professional relationship. In terms of a professional relationship, the three groups had more overlap. Across the board, participants mentioned that their ideal relationships between the two groups would be characterized by collaboration, strong communication, and mutual benefits to both parties.

confirming what the research says

Many of the recommendations in the Zine Librarian Code of Ethics are supported by the results of this survey:⁸ people repeatedly emphasized the importance of paying zine creators for their work, ensuring (whenever possible) the zine creator's permission before adding their work to the collection, and prioritizing creators' privacy over absolute accuracy or access in the catalog. The question of how best to digitize zines was not mentioned as often as it is in wider zine library scholarship, but when the topic arose, participants discussed the same concerns about creators' privacy and efforts to preserve that privacy over the goal of access through digitization.

The themes of Hays's work are present in this study as well:⁹ participants make efforts to navigate the delicate balance between protecting creators' privacy and agency over their work and providing access to their zines through the library. Also, just as none of the respondents in Hays's survey say they would never want their zines in a zine library (despite previously expressed concerns about privacy), none of the participants in this study say they would never want to interact with either zine librarians or zine creators!

8. Berthoud et al., "Zine Librarians Code of Ethics"

9. Hays, "Zine Authors' Attitudes," 76.

adding to the discussion

(Just like Julie Bartel found that some zine creators resist the term "zinester" because they feel it does not fit their individual identity,⁷ one participant describes a negative interaction with a zine creator that occurred because the creator did not prefer the term and disagreed with the librarian assigning it to them.)

One of the trends that arose from the survey was a discussion of the balance of power between zine creators, zine librarians, and libraries as institutions. I'll talk more about this on the other side of this zine, but I did want to point out here that creators can exercise their own power through the act of creating their zines and their decisions about whether or not to engage with the library at all. They are an equal part of the relationship—as one zine creator states, "the zine librarian caretakes the collection but we are the lifeblood." Zine creators have the right and the opportunity to have an active stake in zine libraries, and their position outside of the institutional bounds of the library can be a strength. One zine librarian wrote, "When you see actions that appear disrespectful to your work, I would implore you to discuss this with a librarian – perhaps they fought for you behind the scenes and lost a battle against funding or other red tape, perhaps they are still fighting, perhaps they need your voice to tip the scales!"

recommendations

interactions and relationships are important!

I was pleasantly surprised at the responses I got to the survey. Based on my experiences as a zine creator and librarian, I thought that relationships between the two groups would be seen as important, but I tried my best not to force people in that direction. Whenever I asked zine creators how they interacted or would like to interact with zine librarians, I gave an option for them to say they didn't or didn't want to. But they consistently said those interactions are important and those relationships do matter. In fact, many people said these relationships are not just important but essential:

- Zine creator: "I can't imagine a zine librarian never interacting with a zine creator"
- Zine librarian: "good zine librarianship requires an understanding and respect of the zine community"
- Librarian/creator: "I think a crucial part of our work is building relationships, trust, and community"

(Though, to be clear, zine creators and zine librarians drew a slight distinction between interactions and relationships, where interactions are slightly more important.)

adding to the discussion

The answers to this survey drew specific attention to the balance of power between libraries, zine librarians, and zine creators. Zine librarians often exist at a tension point between the desires of zine creators and the policies of their institution. For some zine librarians, this tension comes in the form of a lack of resources or a lack of attention or support from their administrators (many zine librarians in this study describe themselves as one-person teams). For others, it stems from active opposition from institutional policies or other library workers (for example, one library's choice to require W9s from its "vendors" or a cataloger's refusal to change a catalog entry at the request of the zine creator and zine librarian). Zine librarians, as members of the library-as-institution, have a responsibility to bend the power of that institution in the zine creator's favor in any way they can (one specific way that many librarians in this study choose to do this is by using their library's budget to pay zine creators for their work).

One zine librarian described the institutional barricades they face and encouraged zine creators to lend their voices to help overcome those barricades:

When you see actions that appear disrespectful to your work, I would implore you to discuss this with a librarian – perhaps they fought for you behind the scenes and lost a battle against funding or other red tape, perhaps they are still fighting, perhaps they need your voice to tip the scales!

As some participants cautioned, libraries are institutions first, and they should be treated with caution, but by working together, zine librarians and zine creators can accomplish more than either could on their own.

recommendations

interactions and relationships are important!

I was pleasantly surprised at the responses I got to the survey. Based on my experiences as a zine creator and librarian, I thought that relationships between the two groups would be seen as important, but I tried my best not to force people in that direction. Whenever I asked zine creators how they interacted or would like to interact with zine librarians, I gave an option for them to say they didn't or didn't want to. But they consistently said those interactions are important and those relationships do matter. In fact, many people said these relationships are not just important but essential:

- Zine creator: "I can't imagine a zine librarian never interacting with a zine creator"
- Zine librarian: "good zine librarianship requires an understanding and respect of the zine community"
- Librarian/creator: "I think a crucial part of our work is building relationships, trust, and community"

(Though, to be clear, zine creators and zine librarians drew a slight distinction between interactions and relationships, where interactions are slightly more important.)

The results of my survey also affirm existing research about zines and zine communities—participants view zines as community-based yet individual creations and an important (and alternative) source of information.

what do zine creators want?

Put simply: personal connections and collaboration.

Zine creators who answered this survey showed a strong interest in interacting with zine librarians. They listed "donating or selling zines" as the top way they would like to interact with zine librarians, which shows that not only do they want their zines to be included in zine libraries, but they want to be involved in the process. Their second highest choice was through attendance at events or programs, which they chose more often than organizing events, showing a strong emphasis on not just professional collaboration but joint community membership. In other words, zine creators want to see zine librarians be part of their community! They also value collaboration—many creators from this study say that they would like to collaborate with librarians on both small-scale events like classes or workshops and large-scale events like zine festivals.

When I asked zine creators to describe their ideal relationship with a zine librarian, they repeatedly mentioned the importance of a personal connection. Where librarians tend to think in terms of professional tasks and interactions, many zine creators specifically discuss interpersonal qualities like respect, courtesy, and friendship.

Overall, relationships between zine librarians and zine creators should be based in community, not transactions. Not every librarian can have a relationship with every creator—as multiple participants point out, sometimes a simple interaction is enough, and relationships take time that one or both parties may not have. Even these interactions, however, should be respectful and personal, not treating the creator as a source of content without personhood. Zine creators deserve courtesy, and they also deserve to exercise their agency as community experts and knowledge creators.

Interestingly, though many participants discussed the practice of paying creators for their work, zine librarians or librarian/creators tend to bring it up more often than creators (money was mentioned in open-ended responses 12 times from zine librarians, 10 times from librarian/creators, and 5 times from zine creators). This could be due to the anti-capitalist, anti-profit values of the zine community and/or the librarian and librarian/creators' understanding of money as a tool of power in their institutions. This doesn't excuse libraries and librarians from paying zine creators for their work whenever possible, but it should be a reminder that money might not be more important to zine creators than other forms of connection, courtesy, and respect.

In a professional context, creators often asserted their own agency and express a desire for input on how their zines are incorporated into the library, particularly in the catalog. Zine librarians should have open discussions with creators about how their zines are processed within the library. If the librarians have the ability to put the creators' desires into action, they should do so, if not, they should be open about the reasons why.

The results of my survey also affirm existing research about zine libraries—both ethical and practical questions abound, and the agency of the zine creator over their work is a central concern. Still, zine creators view zine libraries largely positively—none of the participants in this study say they would never want to interact with either zine librarians or zine creators.

what do zine librarians want?

Put simply: they want collaboration and partnership.

Zine librarians want creators' input and partnership in acquiring zines, cataloging them, and planning zine events like workshops and festivals. Zine librarians value a close and open working relationship where both parties share information about their work. They are aware of the balance of power between libraries, librarians, and creators, and they want creators to be aware of their work behind the scenes and to lend their voices to the struggle against library policies when necessary. They also work to use their position within the institution to offer creators monetary support and a platform to share their expert knowledge with the public in the form of classes and workshops.

Zine librarians in this study viewed zine creators as valued partners. They repeatedly expressed their desire for feedback and input from zine creators about the library and its processes, from cataloging to events. Zine librarians often work as teams of one, so while they do their best to provide resources, plan events, process zines, and preserve their connection to their community,

they welcome assistance and partnership from zine creators. Librarians, especially creator/librarians, are aware of the importance of understanding and enacting zine community values in their work.

Still, a few librarians advised that zine creators use caution when interacting with a library—the values of the institution (or, indeed, of the librarian) might not line up with the values of the community, and zine creators should not trust a librarian simply because they are a librarian. These participants' choice to offer caution in this way rather than encouraging all creators to trust all librarians shows the respect and appreciation they hold for zines—they place the good of the zine creator and the zine community over the concerns of librarianship as a profession. As a whole, however, zine librarians believe that partnerships between librarians and creators benefits not only the individuals involved but the community that the library serves.

where do we go from here?

As I've said a few times now, I'm not trying to make a statement that the results of this survey are the final answer to any of the questions I've posed. I do, however, think they are strongly indicative of some useful directions to go in.

Zine librarians want to know and respect the wishes of zine creators, and they are thoughtful about the struggles they face to protect the interests of zine creators against the wishes of their institutions. They also mentioned that zine creators can help in this struggle and encouraged them to speak out against harmful institutional practices where the zine librarian's voice might not have been enough.

For researchers, we should respect zine creators as experts in their own work and in the zine community. Zine library scholarship is still growing, and directly asking zine creators for their input (as I did in this project) is a good start, but we should also respect them as knowledge creators and work to do this research alongside them.

Zine creators are passionate about their work, and the community values of zine culture mean that many of them are happy to collaborate with librarians. Zine creators and zine librarians can start by reaching out to each other! If you're a zine creator, try visiting your local library to see if they have a zine collection (or if they'd like one). You can also suggest a zine-related workshop or event!

As I've said a few times now, I'm not trying to make a statement that the results of this survey are the final answer to any of the questions I've posed. I do, however, think they are strongly indicative of some useful directions to go in.

where do we go from here?

finally...

Zine libraries are amazing places of collaboration between so many different skilled and passionate people. They are also amazing because of the opportunities they represent: not only can zine librarians and zine creators learn more about each other, but library users who have never even heard of zines (like me, once upon a time!) can find out about this powerful and incredible culture.

finally...

Ultimately, my goal with this research was to learn more about how (or whether) zine creators and zine librarians want to work together, and I think I accomplished that goal. I want to say a huge THANK YOU to everyone who answered my survey and shared their thoughts; I hope this work helps to bring our community closer together, and I'm so excited to see what we can do together in the future!

Zine creators and zine librarians can start by reaching out to each other! If you're a zine librarian, try attending a local zine fair or starting a conversation with a creator who adds their work to your collection. Also, zine culture is participatory—if you want to understand and connect to zine creators, try making some zines!

For researchers, we should respect zine creators as experts in their own work and in the zine community. Zine library scholarship is still growing, and directly asking zine creators for their input (as I did in this project) is a good start, but we should also respect them as knowledge creators and work to do this research alongside them.

Zine libraries are amazing places of collaboration between so many different skilled and passionate people. They are also amazing because of the opportunities they represent: not only can zine librarians and zine creators learn more about each other, but library users who have never even heard of zines (like me, once upon a time!) can find out about this powerful and incredible culture.

Ultimately, my goal with this research was to learn more about how (or whether) zine creators and zine librarians want to work together, and I think I accomplished that goal. I want to say a huge THANK YOU to everyone who answered my survey and shared their thoughts; I hope this work helps to bring our community closer together, and I'm so excited to see what we can do together in the future!

