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Why Diverse Zines Matter: A Case Study of the People of Color Zines Project

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Abstract Historically, zines have been an alternative outlet for niche topics, or writers and writing, that are ignored by mainstream media. Zines are significant because they offer the opportunity for connection, community, and networking between those interested in these diverse topics. The developments in digital technology have enabled zines to extend into the online sphere: this increased access has resulted in increased participation (by readers and writers). This paper will focus on (digital) zines that are created by people of colour (POC). In recent years, there has been much discussion and media coverage about the lack of diversity in cultural output, and various campaigns, to promote diverse writing have followed. Through a case study of the POC Zines Project—a community-building project that promotes zines by POC—this paper will look at how creators of zines are experimenting with digital formats and social platforms, and will consider what mainstream publishers can learn from this. As Radway (in: Anouk (ed) From codex to hypertext. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2012) outlines "zine-ing is a *social* phenomenon, a form of social action driven by desires for new forms of sociability and new ways of being in the world" (p. 140): this paper will highlight the important of social collaboration and production on opening up the creative process and offering a response to the under-represented in traditional publishing.

Keywords Zines · Alternative publishing · Authorship · Authors · Diversity · Community

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Introduction

The contraction of the book publishing industry, through various mergers and acquisitions, has increased in recent years, and the contemporary book publishing industry is now dominated by five, global, conglomerates: Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Random House, and Simon and Schuster. There are, therefore, fewer gatekeepers to an industry that currently focuses on bestsellers: this means that non-mainstream/non-commercial, and/or experimental, topics, what Bourdieu called the field of restrictive production, can be overlooked and their authors often have to find alternative routes for their writing [7]. For example, in recent years, there has been much discussion and media coverage about the lack of diversity in cultural output, and various campaigns, to promote diverse writing have followed. Consequently, alternative media streams are increasingly important, particularly, as Atton argues, for "offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production" [5, p. 4].

Historically, zines have been an alternative outlet for niche topics, or writers and writing, that are ignored by mainstream media. Zines are significant because they offer the opportunity for connection, community, and networking between those interested in these diverse topics. Despite this, there has been many criticisms that diversity in race, class, and age are underrepresented in the zine community. The developments in digital technology have enabled zines to extend into the online sphere: this increased access has resulted in increased participation (by readers and writers). This paper will focus on zines that are created by people of colour (POC). Through a case study of the POC Zines Project (an online community-building project that promotes zines by POC)—specifically the zines they feature—this paper will look at what POC zinesters are creating and how they are connecting to communities, and will consider what mainstream publishers can learn from this. As Radway [49] outlines, "zine-ing is a *social* phenomenon, a form of social action driven by desires for new forms of sociability and new ways of being in the world" (p. 140): this paper will highlight the important of social collaboration and production on opening up the creative process and offering a response to the underrepresented in traditional publishing.

From Conglomeration to Participatory Culture

Although some publishing historians, such as Schiffrin, Epstein, and Greco, castigate the conglomeration of the publishing industry, linking it to the homogenisation of cultural output, others argue that new technologies and business models actual open up the production process to include a wealth of new and niche

products [1, 22, 27, 42, 54, 67]. Technology developments have lowered the barriers for cultural production, what Shirky describes as the "mass amateurisation of publishing": digital folk culture has grown considerably over the decades [58, p. 60]. The Internet, in particular, has increased the possibilities for affordable cultural production, without the aid of gatekeepers, which can reach a global audience [4, 6, 13, 34, 38, 66]. Community media projects, that support and serve a range of different communities, enable amateur creators to engage in the different processes of cultural production [14, 23, 37, 43]. Mathieu et al. describe how such, small, community publishing endeavours engender the publication of "underrepresented voices", including "people of color, women, working-class radicals, gay and lesbian groups, and homeless advocates, among others" [46, p. 4].

According to Couldry, the participatory nature of alternative media democratizes and progresses the consumption and production of cultural content. Alternative media challenges the corporate realities and agendas [that the mainstream media portrays] by allowing the broader public to create their own versions of reality [13]. Additionally, participation in citizen media can encourage participation in activism [52]. Servaes argues that participatory and alternative methods of communication are "an agent for social change, culture development and democratization" [57, p. 269]. For example, a digital civil rights movement, enabled and shaped by social technology, is currently underway in the USA. The #BlackLivesMatter campaign, which followed the acquittal of a white police officer who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager, [and against racism and police brutality in against African-Americans in general] demonstrates that there are important conversations, particularly from black voices, that are missing from mainstream discourse. Couldry argues that participatory media can challenge the dominance of mainstream media [13]. In the case of #BlackLivesMatter, the movement confronts and discredits the vilification of African-Americans (particularly young men) by some of the right-leaning mainstream media [3, 62]. Such media reinforces stereotypes and leads to the development and extension of inequality: "The media can impose their own logic on assembled materials in a number of ways, including emphasizing behaviors and people and stereotyping" [60, p. 33].

Although alternative media cannot change the corporate structures of the contemporary media/publishing industry: it can empower the public by giving them a space and a voice [8, 15, 25, 37, 52]. However, Sandoval and Fuchs stressed the importance of connected communities, lest individual projects lead to the fragmentation of the public sphere [30, 53, p. 143]:

> Self-sufficient alternative media projects that do not engage in wider political projects will become individualistic spaces of withdrawal, whereas networks of alternative media that develop political visions and practices and act together to form a larger political counter-public sphere have the potential to support larger-scale political change processes.

Della Porta and Diani [16] also argue that collective action is enabled by collective identity. However, it is clear that some alternative projects are so marginal, and reject all corporate structures (for example, marketing/advertising),

that they are not visible at all. It is for this reason that this paper will focus on the POC Project. The POC Project, supported by the zine community, collates and showcases these marginal zines in one digital platform. This helps to raise the visibility of the zines, their creators, and their content, to create "a joint counter-public sphere" [53, p. 143]. This *counter public sphere* makes challenging the dominant conversations, spread by mainstream media, more efficient and effective. Of course, not all zinesters/alternative media producers aim to reach a broad audience, as this research shows [15, 52]

The Diverse Nature of Zines

Alternative forms of written production, such as pamphlets, have been in existence for centuries: the issue of commerce versus culture is one that is weaved through the history of cultural production [18, 48]. As outlined earlier, in the book publishing industry, large, global companies dominate the market so alternative outlets in the sphere of "parallel and unbound literatures", such as zines, play a key role in representing possibilities for counter-hegemonic transformation [17, p. 192].

Zine comes from the term fanzine, a type of publication first published in the 1930s [65]. Zine publishing has become an increasingly common practice, particularly in the USA, since the advent of these science fiction fanzines. This established into something more developed with the popularity of punk fanzines in the 1970 s, and the rise of feminist and queer zines the 1990s[1] [18]. The term fanzine gradually evolved to become zine by the late 1980s. This is a result of zines expanding to include zinesters (people who create zines) that, instead of belonging to a fan culture (such as the sci-fi zinesters), produced zines because they felt misrepresented by mainstream media [18]. Zines are a way for people to come together to build a community, and to share interests and information [12, 28].[2]

In his 1997 study, Duncombe described 'zines as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" [18, p. 6]. Zines have evolved over the decades, particularly with the developments in technology, and now include different types of content, such as literary zines, personal reflections, special interests, and political zines, in addition to fanzines. What unifies all zines is the fact that they are independently produced, written, and designed, and that they exist outside, or on the fringes of, the mainstream. Thus, they often cover issues that are often ignored, or overlooked, by mainstream media [64]. Zines are independent from commercial considerations and, as such, serve a very small audience (usually of like-minded individuals); therefore, zines are typically considered to be a safe space for self-expression [55]. One of the key functions of zines is to be the primary source of information and collective meaning for different subcultures. However, some

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[1] In his 1997 study, Duncombe estimated that the circulation of zines was at an all time high in the mid-1990s: approximately 10,000 different zines were in publication, read by 500,000-750,000 people.

[2] One of the main reasons that fanzines were created, and proliferated, was because they connected geographically-dispersed fandoms.

underground culture, as promoted through different zines, has been appropriated and commercialized by mainstream media e.g. the commodification of Feminism [18, 51]. Schmidt argues that the blurred boundaries between underground and mainstream cultures acted as a catalyst to the evolution, and proliferation, of zines (particularly personal zine/perzines) [56].

Zines and DIY/self publishing have helped to change the way that consumers engage with content: turning passive consumers into active cultural producers [38, 58]. Many scholars have focused on the grrrl zine[3] scene to explore the effects of DIY cultural production in female consumers/creators: namely giving them a public voice and a space to discuss related issues and interests [11, 12, 26, 29, 33, 41, 45, 50, 55]. Making and consuming zines allow female consumers to explore information, and make decisions, outwith traditional hegemonic spaces [11, 55, 64]. However, as Kearney observes, ''the gender deviance displayed by riot grrrls is a privilege to which only middle-class white girls have access'' (p. 65). Duncombe [18, 19] argued that marginalised people used zines to reclaim their identities; however, racial identity is not covered in-depth in his analysis. Consequently, POC zines are often missed out from histories of zine-ing (and from zine archives[4]), despite the wealth of POC being published. There have, however, been several key studies that have appeared in the last decade, which have criticized the lack of race, class, and age diversity in zine production. For example Nguyen's analysis of race in the zine community is one of the most important and influential studies within scholarly discourse [47]. This, lack of diverse voices, is a reflection on mainstream media (especially the book publishing industry): where white male authors, supported by cultural gatekeepers and tastemakers, dominate the marketplace [21, 59].

Hall's [31] study of inferential racism is particularly pertinent in contemporary discourse about the cultural industries where there have been conversations about diverse voices, and faces, being underrepresented and/or omitted [31, 40, 59]. Two recent examples of this are the #WeNeedDiverseBooks and the #OscarsSoWhite [social media] campaigns. The #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign started in 2014 in response to the lack of diverse – covering POC, LGBTQIA+ , gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities – children's books. A 2014 study, by the Cooperative Children's Book Center School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, found that representations of ethnic diversity in children's books had decreased from 1985 to 1995 [9]. A 2004 study found that the UK publishing industry was predominantly "white and middle class" and that the under-representation of BAME employees and authors on the United Kingdom had adverse effects on cultural expression [39]. A follow up report, published a decade later, revealed that the "old mono-culture still prevails" [40, 59]. Additionally, many authors (of colour) felt tokenised, fetishized, and a spokesperson for their specific ethnic background [40]. Such issues also occur in other cultural and creative industries. The #OscarsSoWhite campaign was in response to only

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[3] This term comes from the, much researched, zine *Riot Grrrl*.

[4] Barnard Zine Library partnered with the POCZP and Mimi Thi Nguyen in 2012 to start a collection of zines by POC.

white actors and actresses being nominated for the top four awards in 2016, for the second year in a row. A study by the Institute for Diversity and Empowerment at Annenberg (IDEA) found that the entertainment industry, in the USA, was "a straight, white boys' club" and, as such, POC, women, and LGBTQIA+ were underrepresented [61]. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the [Oscars] academy is primarily comprised of white males [36]. It is, therefore, important to study the culture of POC zine-ing to explore the issues, and creative work, produced by this underrepresented community.

A Case Study of the POC Zines Project

This case study of POC Zine Project, and the zines showcased on this digital platform, will give a snapshot of contemporary POC zines, and how they fit within Duncombe's taxonomy of zines (see below), particularly in the context of the #BlackLivesMatter campaign and various other anti-discrimination campaigns [19]. The POC Zine Project (POCZP) was established in 2010 in response to the limited availability of zines by POC. Their mission is to make "ALL zines by POC (People of Color) easy to find, distribute and share".[5] Fundamentally, POCZP is a community building space and a curation project but it has also developed into a platform for advocacy (partnering with universities, educators, activist networks etc.) This paper will concentrate on the 59 zines on the POCZP zine spotlight: chosen by both the POCZP and members of their community. The showcase promoted, mostly North American, zines published between 2012 and 2015: this was during some of the more recent race-related issues in the USA (i.e. #BlackLivesMatter).

Traditionally, print zines have been characterized by simple, hand-made, production values and aesthetics. However, the Internet, and the development of publishing technologies has mean that a spate of digital zines have been appearing in recent years. Some subcultural communities, particularly those surrounding fan culture, have proliferated and found a natural home online. The zine community, was once a "relatively closed underground culture" with limited circulation [and access] and thus small audiences is now more open, and accessible, than ever before [18, p. 230]. The significance of digital zines is that the subcultural issues and themes, that are often ignored by mainstream media become more accessible; thus the possibility for connection, networking, and community building increases. As Eisenstein surmised, "without access there can be no participation" [20, p. 32].

Despite POCZP being an online project, and the eminence of digital and social technologies, only 12% of the showcased zines were solely in digital format. The materiality of zines extends into the digital age: 44% of the showcased zines were solely print, and 44% were available in both digital and print. The digital medium makes it easier for the reader to connect to the zinester through social media or via email. This can cause problems when the zinester is writing about some of the more transgressive issues: this could be why the popularity of print zines continues. The

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[5] See: http://poczineproject.tumblr.com.

POCZP, however, has made many of the zines accessible through ISSUU, which has widened access and visibility.

Genres, Sub-genres, and Crossover Zines

Duncombe [19] categorized the different types of zines as: fanzines; sci-fi zines, music zines, sports zines, television and film zines, political zines; personal zines; scene zines; network zines; fringe culture zines; religious zines; vocational zines; health zines; sex zines; travel zines; comixs; literary zines; art zines and 'the rest' (pp. 15-17). The category is extended, for this paper, to add *social zine*: a hybrid zine, an extension of Duncombe's network zine, that provides a space for likeminded voices to come together through collaborate work. The majority of the zines in the POCZP showcase extend across these different categories and only a few fall under one particular category. For example, there were only two purely literary zines: *The Greatest Most Traveling Circus* (2014) by Jonas. This is a crowd-funded anthology of sci-fi and fantasy short stories, which is available to buy at $6; and *ANANSASEM* by Aida Amoako/KidisAlright: a small print zine, made for Black History Month (UK), featuring two short Ghanaian folk tales.

As outlined earlier, there have been many calls for more BAME literary voices, so zine-ing can be an incubation hub for POC, a potential stepping stone to more mainstream forms of publishing. The oldest zine/literary magazine in the collection, *FIRE!! Devoted To Younger Negro Artists* (1926). This was a literary/political/network/social publication that used creative writing to express the experiences of African-American during the Harlem Renaissance. It covered controversial topics, for the time, such as homosexuality, sexual freedom, and prejudice. *FIRE!!* published the art and writing of many central artist figures in the Harlem Renaissance, such as authors Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Henry Thurman, and Gwendolyn Bennett, poets Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, and artist Aaron Douglas.[6]

The most popular types of zines, in this list, were: political zines (30); literary zines (21); network/social zines (20); personal zines/perzines (16); and art zines (13). The remaining zines were a mixture of health zines, fanzines, travel zines, music zines, scene zines, comixs, and vocational zines. Over half of all of the zines had a clear political, with both a lowercase and uppercase p, message. Some could be segmented into traditional categories, such as Anarchist, Libertarian, Feminist, and Queer etc. but the majority were political and/or cultural critiques through a variety of formats e.g. autobiographical accounts, creative writing, artwork etc.

This research found that POC, particularly women (cis and trans-), used zines to share their experiences of, but not limited to, racism, sexism, contemporary culture, and other issues of marginalization with interconnected communities: 45 zines (76%) explicitly discussed racism or issues of race; 40 zines (68%) explicitly discussed Feminism or issues of sexism; and 33 (56%) explicitly discussed issues of sexuality and/or gender identity. Women created over half (35 out of 59) of the zines and 30 of the zines had multiple contributors, forming interconnected textual

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[6] See: https://issuu.com/poczineproject/docs/poczp_fire_1926_readview.

communities. This confirms that, "zines are a community-building tool of meaning making that can inform coalitional work" [44, p. 60]. With many marginalized communities and groups still facing discrimination and underrepresentation in 2016: these textual communities are more important than ever.

Political and Cultural Issues: Racism and Race, Sexism and Feminism, and Sexuality and Gender Identity

As discussed earlier, a digital civil rights movement is currently underway in the USA in response to police brutality against the black community. Swaine et al. [63] found that African American men (between the ages of 15-34) were nine times more likely to be killed by the police than any other demographic in the USA. There have also been a number of high profile cases of police brutality against black women in recent years, which has resulted in the #SayHerName movement [35]. It comes as no surprise, then, that so many (76%) of the zines on the POCZP deal explicitly with issues of race and racism. For example, political zine, *Black Women Matter: the Zine Edition, Vol. 1* (2014) details the stories of 11 black women who have been killed by law enforcement in the USA. While perzines, such as *Watermelon…and other things that make me uncomfortable as a black person* (2011) by Whit Taylor and network/social/literary zines such as *Ra(i)ze* by "a collection of radical Asians at UNC",[7] deal with racial stereotypes and cultural assumptions. On a more positive note, *Mocha Chocolata Momma Zine: COLLECTION* (2014), by Marya Erinn Jones, is a fanzine series dedicated to the lives of black American women, real or imagined. For example, the Bessie Coleman edition gives the history of the first black female pilot. There are a number of other literary zines, such as literary/art/ political/social/network zine *BDGRMMR* (2014) by Yulan Grant, Justin Allen, and Brandon Owens, that showcase the literary and artists works of emerging creators.

As outlined above, a number of scholars have looked the emergence of feminist zine culture, starting with the Riot Grrrl movement, and its impact of feminism and female cultural production. However, as discussed earlier, the experiences and practices of women of colour (WOC) are missing from many of these major studies. Feminism and sexism are clearly important issues for the majority of the POC zinesters: 68% of all the zines explicitly discussed these issues. Several of the zines deal with issues such as misogyny and the fetishization of WOC. For example, political/literary/social/network zine, *BROS FALL BACK* (2013) by The Secret Society of Femmes is a cultural critique of patriarchal oppression and identity, particularly within the bro/fraternity subculture. While *Ra(i)ze* (details above) and *Not Straight Not White Male* (details below) both subvert the submissive Asian women stereotype while providing experience of being sexualised and fetishized by, largely older, men.

Gender and sexual identity was a topic explored by 56% of the POCZP zines. Despite the rise in LGBTQIA+ stories in the last few years: there is a distant lack of trans protagonists, particularly those written by trans authors [32]. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ people still face discrimination across the world. In 2016, the state of

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[7] See: https://issuu.com/raize/docs/zinelayout.

North Carolina passed an anti-discriminatory law against LGBTQIA+ people, stripping them of many of their rights. The law, which has been protested against by numerous key figures including authors, demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ voices and experiences are not being recognized everywhere and it is, thus, more important than ever that they are heard [24].

For example, *Hidden Expressions Vol .1*[8] (2013) and *Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self Love for Brown Bois* (2011) both collated stories and personal narratives about gender identity. *Hidden Expressions Vol .1* is a political/social/ network/literary, collaborate, annual zine with contributions from incarcerated transgender and gender non-conforming people. Supported by the Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois (TJLP), an advocacy group that supports transgender people, the aims of the zine are to connect the contributing prisoners to friends, family, and likeminded people, help with feelings of isolation, and provide a space for self-representation. *Freeing Ourselves: A Guide to Health and Self Love for Brown Bois* is a multi-genre health guide by the Brown Boi Project, a community and leadership project working across race and gender to promote gender transformative learning for POC. Like, *Hidden Expressions Vol .1* the zine aims to connect people and to help give them a voice; however, it is focused on developing leadership skills for a young, mostly teenage, audience.

Sexuality, particularly in less liberal communities and countries, was also discussed in several zines: perzine *Korea: The Queer Edition* (2013) by, mixed-media artist, Estella Miyuki Baker documents her experience of attending various LGBTQ demonstrations and rallies in South Korea; *Vănguard: Issue #1* (2014) by Aiden Nguyễn and Thanh Mai, a literary/art/social/network zine, provides a space for self-expression for the LGBTQ community in Vietnam; *Gaysi Zine* (2011), a literary/political/social/network zine, by Gaysi, also providing a space for LBGTQ in the Desi community in India; and *Totally Radical Muslim Zine* (2014), a literary/ political/social/network, zine with contributions from multiple authors deals with Islamophobia and homophobia.

All of these zines, and many of the others in the POCZP, aim to empower their contributors and readers by giving them control of their stories. Zines, and self-publishing in general, allow creators to control how they represented because the content is not created to serve the interest of others: zinesters do not have to bend to, or tap into, market trends and pressures. This is especially pertinent for marginalized people and groups [33].

Perzines and Network Zines

Over a quarter of the zines in the POC Zine showcase were perzines (but often with political, literary, or artistic slant). Perzines, personal zines, are "diaries open to the public; shared notes on the day-to-day life, thoughts, and experiences of the writer" [18, p. 11]. This type of autobiographical zine gives an insight into the subcultural identity construction of POC (both individually and as a collective). Perzines are a popular genre of zines. According to Schmidt, approximately two thirds of all zines

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[8] See: http://tjlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Hidden-Expressions-volume-1.pdf.

published in the USA are perzines: a higher percentage than the number of perzines in the POCZP showcase [56].

Chidgey [10] argues that perzines "provide valuable qualitative data documenting the micro-histories and situated knowledges of lived experiences" and they should, subsequently, "take their place among other sources such as letters, diaries, oral history interviews, as offering a unique narrative demonstrating the *effects* of history, as experienced by its living participants". Zine-ing, and self-publishing in general, removes the barriers to self-expression and enables these, traditionally private formats, to become semi-public (printed) and public (digital). Although many of the POCZP zines had a political context, this was usually based on identity rather than ideology: the phrase *the personal is political* is particularly relevant to many of the perzines in this collection.

For example, the political perzine, *Light Skinned Tears* (2014) by Lena F-G-M is an autobiographical essay that looks at issues faced by people of dual ethnicities in what she calls, "our white supremacist culture"[9] In her description of the zine, the creator explicitly writes, "Please pass it on to other folks that are interested in talking about mixed race identity! Please don't pass it on to people with the intent to derail conversations about other, related struggles against white supremacy!" Another example is, perzine, *Not Straight Not White Male* (2012) by Rosi: an autobiographical zine that deals with gender, sexual, and ethnic identity. Rosi writes, "I wrote this zine because there is a lack of media that I can really, truly relate to. It is glaringly obvious that this radical scene is comprised mostly of heteros, of whites, and of males. I am Asian, I am hella gay, and I am female." *The First 7-inch Was Better: How I Became an Ex-Punk* (2008), a political perzine, by Nia King was also created in response to the lack of inclusion of POC, women and LGBTQIA+ people in some subcultures, primarily the anarcho-punk. All of these zines have a strong political message, and despite Rosi writing, "I wrote this for me a lot more than I wrote it for you", it is clear that they are intended to contribute to ongoing discussions about identity and racism.

Network zines, according to Duncombe, help to publicize underground culture. The community aspects of zines is a safe space for POC and/or LGBTQIA+ people to come to come together to share their stories. The aforementioned, *Vănguard: Issue #1, Ra(i)ze, Gaysi Zine,* and *Totally Radical Muslim Zine* were created specifically for this purpose, as a place for a place for "participation among equals" [18, p. 12]. In fact *Vănguard*'s mission statement is:

> We hope to establish a safe platform where LGBTQ individuals can freely express themselves and have their voices heard. Lastly, we aim to foster solidarity and unite the LGBTQ community through art, literature and activism.[10]

The participatory nature of these collaborative zines allows communities to come together and form a strong, collective identity. For example, there were several zines that concentrated on reproductive health and justice: *Muchacha Issue 8:*

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[9] See: http://issuu.com/flyoverdistro/docs/lst_web_version/21?e=11861756/10052942.

[10] See: http://www.vanguardzine.com/#!about/cazn.

Nuestros Cuerpos/Our Bodies (2013) and *RAIX Zine (Vol. 1, issue 2.)* (2015) are both health/political/social/network/literary a multi-author, multi-genre zines, which focus on reproductive activism in the Americas. While *The Radical Doula Guide: A Political Primer for Full-Spectrum Pregnancy and Childbirth Support* (2012) by Miriam Zoila Pérez is a health/political/vocational zine that tackles issues such as class, race, gender, and identity within the contexts of this vocation.

Conclusion

This research found that there is a diverse and thriving POC zine culture, as showcased by the POCZP. Political zines, particularly those focused on issues of racism and race, feminism and sexism, and gender and sexual identity, dominated the POCZP showcase. Network zines were also popular, more so than perzines, which, in previous studies, were the most popular type of zine. This shows that POC zinesters, as spotlighted by POCZP, were more concerned with connecting with others and showcasing the work of likeminded people than writing individual, autobiographical narratives. These larger networks form a *counter public sphere* that allows POC zinesters to self-represent, as a collective, outwith the confines of mainstream media. This reemphasizes the social nature of zine-ing, as described by Radway [49].

The question remains, what can mainstream media, particularly the publishing industry, learn from this? While there have been some initiatives to support emerging authors and to open up the publishing process—for example, independent publishers are increasingly turning to crowdfunding to fund more risky projects and to build to establish reading communities—Unbound are one of the only publishers to do this on a regular basis (and only two of their fully-funded projects deal explicitly with issues surrounding racism and race).[11] This is where zines fit into the publishing ecosystem and how they can help shape diversity in publishing: they can be indicators of new genres, subgenres, developing markets, and audiences; they can provide a space for these areas to enroot; and they can allow authentic, and diverse, voices to develop. As outlined above, zines (and self-publishing) enable zinesters to create content that is not covered by mainstream media and to express themselves freely without the constraints of cultural gatekeepers and market demands. As marginalized communities congregate around shared experiences and identities, non-mainstream and or difficult topics grow in popularity and become integrated into mainstream culture. This means that zines are often the first space, to support and promote, areas of culture that are emerging. A recent example of where these emerging topics, as written about on the POCZP, have entered the mainstream is the spate of Young Adult novels that explore race and police brutality being published by major publishing companies (e.g. THE HATE U GIVE by Angie Thomas, published by HarperCollins: this book was inspired by the #BlackLivesMatter movement) [2].

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[11] See: https://unbound.co.uk.

Duncombe argued, twenty years ago, that zines could be used as "a model of participatory cultural production and organization": they have, at least, the potential to make the cultural industries more democratic [18, p. 129]. It is clear that zinesters, and those reading zines, have redefined and are redefining the way we produce, exchange, and consume cultural products. It is relatively easy to start zine-ing, particularly with the advancements in digital technologies, and anyone—no matter what their background or skill—can create their own their own zines and thus participate in literary culture. This more collaborative, participatory, approach to cultural production is changing the way that people, especially marginalized communities, see themselves situated within wider social contexts. Zinesters are creating their own narratives, which subvert and challenge mainstream viewpoints and realities: this counters the hegemonic stronghold of cultural production and expression.

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