

Subject-based Zine Finding Aid: Bodily agency & empowerment

Date: February 2025

Contributors: Erin D., Karissa Posthumus, Angelika Joachimowicz, Tsion Mariam Sisaye, Sadie Rushing

This finding aid was created as part of INFS 645: Archival Principles & Practice, McGill University, School of Information Studies, Winter 2025 taught by Prof. Gracen Brilmyer. Contributors for this finding aid are

Introduction

This collection of zines provides a critical, creative, and affective examination of bodily autonomy and resistance to oppressive societal norms. Through feminist, LGBTQIA+, and disability activist perspectives, the selected works challenge dominant narratives surrounding reproductive rights, body image, beauty standards, and health. By advocating for sexual health education, self-care, and resistance, this collection forms a cohesive exploration of bodily agency and empowerment.

In times of political uncertainty, like today—in the wake of Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration—these discussions become ever-prescient. The ongoing signing of executive orders that directly undermine bodily autonomy and restrict sexual health education, particularly for marginalized communities, underscores the necessity of preserving historical records of the movements that have secured these rights. Archivists, therefore, have a crucial role in ensuring that these struggles and their victories are not erased. This urgency is not so surprisingly reflected in Ricardo Punzalan’s 2016 letter, “Dear Students: Becoming an Archivist in a Time of Uncertainty and Unrest,” in which he encourages students to:

Above all, demonstrate that archivists can build communities and elevate people. Some will accuse you of bias when you express solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, advocate for Transgender rights, or rally against a proposed Muslim registry. But always remember, the fight against bigotry and racism is all about equality and is never about superiority (305).

With this in mind, the selected zines celebrate bodies as they are, without conditions, caveats, or concessions. Works such as *Hairy Femmes of Colour* and *BAN SHE* confront oppressive and often fatphobic beauty standards, while others, including *Free to Choose*, *Abortion and its Predecessors*, and *Your Body*, examine

reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, and health education. Additionally, this collection embraces an intersectional feminist perspective, amplifying the voices of Transgender people, disabled communities, and people of color. By centering these diverse experiences, the collection not only preserves critical narratives but also serves as a resource for ongoing resistance and advocacy.

Archives have a significant role in preserving marginalized voices and resisting societal oppression. Traditional archives have historically excluded groups such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color, creating "archival silences" that erase their experience. Zines act as an alternative archive, preserving lived experiences that challenge dominant narratives. Participatory archiving and community-driven records empowers creators to reclaim control over their stories and collectively build inclusive, multifaceted histories. (Cook)

The history of Third Wave feminism and the riot grrrl movement provides crucial context in understanding the themes of bodily autonomy and resistance in this zine collection. Emerging in the late 1980s, these movements used zines as a form of grassroots activism to challenge patriarchal norms, promote reproductive rights, and critique beauty standards. Zines became a powerful tool for marginalized voices, blending personal storytelling with political commentary to reclaim body image, gender identity, and self-expression. (Fraser)

Overall, zines are important because they create spaces for connection, community, and collaboration among people with first hand experience exploring diverse topics. Zines democratize the space of contribution by allowing a participatory nature to exist among communities of people. Alternative media challenges the status quo, specifically what the mainstream media depicts, by opening space for the broader public to create and participate in their own versions of reality. Alternative outlets in the sphere of "parallel and unbound literatures", such as zines, play a key role in representing possibilities for counter-hegemonic transformation. (Ramdarshan Bold)

Overview of Items

As previously stated, the selected zines fit together to form a collection that centres bodily agency and empowerment. All the zines selected were created with the intent of applying an anti-oppressive lens to engage with subjects such as bodily autonomy and Western beauty standards. Whether it be through the exploration of body hair on femmes of color, the fatphobic and ableist nature of fitness culture, or reproductive

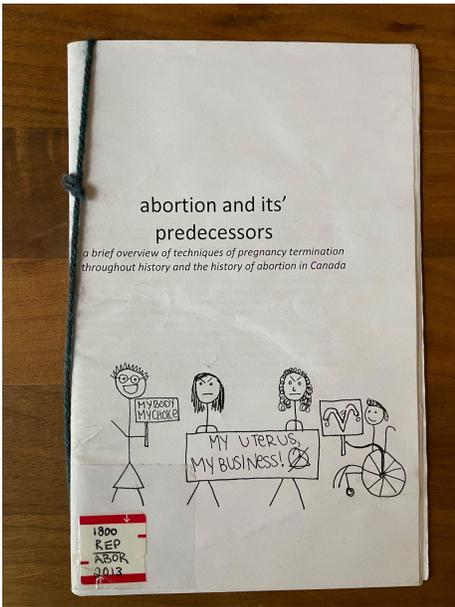
rights education, all of these zines provide readers with views that live outside of the mainstream and information that they might not encounter elsewhere in an accessible manner.

Some of the selected zines are of particular interest such as “Abortion and it’s predecessors: a brief overview of pregnancy termination techniques throughout history and the history of abortion” which discusses reproductive justice, the history of abortion and abortion methods used before medical abortions were widely available as well as the reproductive rights in Canadian context. This zine does not provide any information about the author, creator and/or collaborators which makes sense because of the sensitive nature of the subject content. Maintaining the anonymity of the creator(s) helps keep them safe and though that has always been important, it is particularly important within the current political context and the current challenges to reproductive justice in North America.

Another one of the zines titled “Fit: a zine about sports, fatness, feminism & disability” applies different critical lenses to analyze the idea of “fitness”. The creator, Andrea, made the zine as a creative project for a course at Concordia University titled “Feminist Disability: Theory and Practice”. This zine serves as a good example of the way that work produced within academic classrooms can contribute to community education and create accessible sources of information.

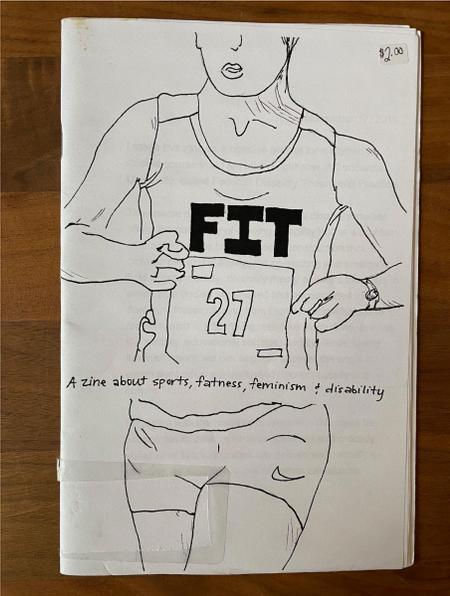
“Hairy Femmes of Color” is interesting as it is a departure from the other zines due to it being primarily illustration-focused. The author provides an introduction discussing their relation to body hair as a genderqueer femme of colour and their aim to provide visibility for hair femmes of colour through representations that deviate from Western beauty standards, and are not depicted in media. That is the only text within the zine, but the focus on illustrations serves the purpose of the zine well. What better way to create visibility for hairy femmes of colour than through literal visual representation?

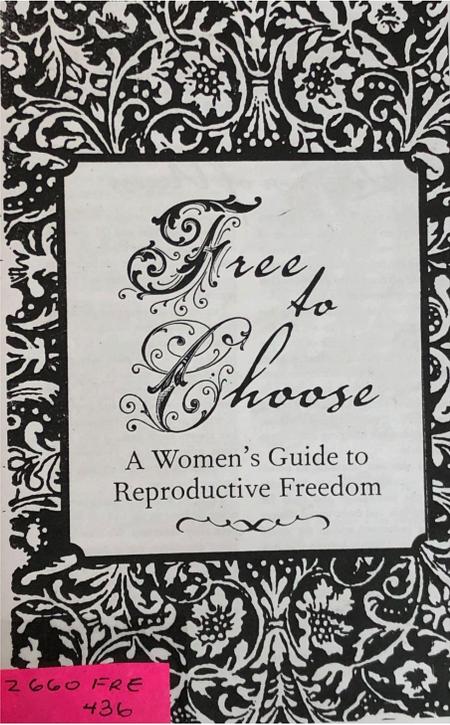
The zines were not arranged but were all labelled and filed within the specific category they pertain to (Bodily Autonomy).

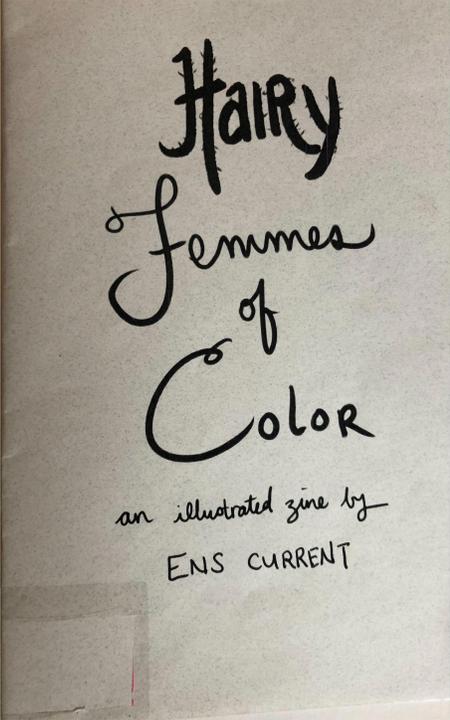
Title	Abortion and its' predecessors ; a brief overview of techniques of pregnancy termination throughout history and the history of abortion in Canada	
Date	2013	
Author/s		
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	1800 REP ABOR 2013	
Subjects	abortion ; reproductive rights ; pro-choice movement ; medicine ; history ; Canadian history	
Description	This zine explores abortion and pregnancy termination throughout history, including societal implications, followed by a particular look at abortion access and activism in Canada. Written from a reproductive justice standpoint, it includes both typed text and images as well as hand drawn comic-style illustrations and a list of further reading resources.	
Pages	25	
Dimensions	5.5 x 7 in	
Number of Copies	1	

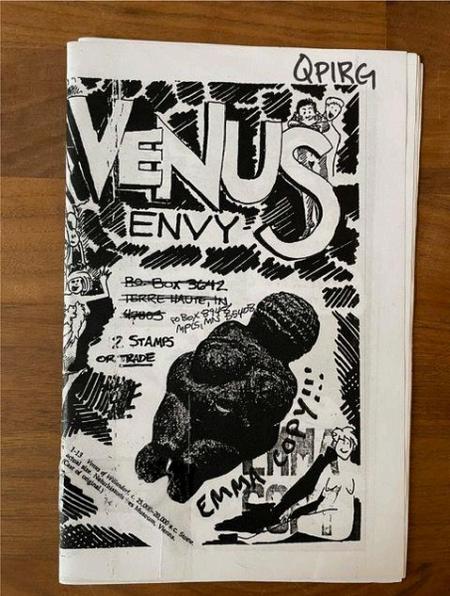
Title	Ban She (Vol. 1)	
Date	2012	
Author/s	Amina, Chris, Shannon, Sheehan, Tina	
Publisher	Ban She Zine	
Language	English	
Call No	Z 250 BAN 262	
Subjects	body image ; body positivity ; fat positivity	
Description	<p>This zine contains a collection of writings, art and poetry (“screeches and shouts” as they are described in the table of contents), by different authors about body image, fat solidarity/liberation, bodily autonomy, and resisting beauty standards. It includes typed text, digital illustrations, as well as a list of resources and definitions at the end of the zine.</p>	
Pages	27	
Dimensions	8.5 x 8.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Fatty Fatty Boombalatty ; a zine about weight + gender + feeeelings	
Date	2012	
Author/s	Clara Bee Lavery	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 502 FAT	
Subjects	body image ; fat phobia ; fat positivity ; body positivity ; eating disorders	
Description	The author explores her and her partner Oz's relationships to their own bodies and each other's through a fat positive lens. It challenges fatphobia and promotes self-love, focusing on reclaiming fat identity and resisting societal pressures around body size through collaged typed text and hand drawn illustrations.	
Pages	26	
Dimensions	4 x 5.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Fit ; A zine about sports, fatness, feminism & disability	
Date	2011	
Author/s	Andrea	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 230 FIT 2011	
Subjects	Sports ; feminism ; fat phobia ; queer ; disability	
Description	<p>This zine explores the author's experience being on Concordia's cross-country running team while taking a Feminist Disability Theory and Practice course. Through handwritten notes and illustrations, photographs and typed quotes from academics like Kathleen LeBesco, Heather Sykes and Margaret K. Bass, Andrea critiques and interrogates heteronormativity, the gender binary, fatphobia, ableism and diet/fitness culture in the varsity running world.</p>	
Pages	29	
Dimensions	4.5 x 7.5	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Free to Choose ; A Women's Guide to Reproductive Freedom	
Date		
Author/s	Esther Eberhardt	
Publisher	Eberhardt Press, Portland, OR	
Language	English	
Call No	Z 220 FRE	
Subjects	abortion; reproductive rights; pro-choice movement; women's rights; women's health	
Description	Free to Choose discusses alternative reproductive health techniques, particularly menstrual extraction, as a means of reproductive autonomy. It explores underground feminist health movements and global perspectives on abortion and contraception. It includes the five following sections: A Question of Access, Let's not go back to the bad old days, The abortion handbook, "This is Jane" from Women's Liberation, and Menstrual Extraction: A Note to the Reader.	
Pages	23	
Dimensions	8.5 x 5.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Hairy Femmes of Color	
Date		
Author/s	Ens Current	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 230 HAI	
Subjects	body hair; femme; body positivity; race	
Description	Hairy Femmes of Color explores the intersections of race, gender, and societal beauty norms, focusing on how femmes of color navigate body hair expectations and self-image. The zine contains an introduction, and 9 illustrations by Ens Current.	
Pages	12	
Dimensions	8.5 x 5.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Venus Envy	
Date		
Author/s	M@ce	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No		
Subjects	fat; fat phobia; anorexia; body image; feminism	
Description	Venus Envy critiques traditional conceptualisations of femininity and explores feminist perspectives on gender, beauty, bodies, and sexual expression. The zine contains a comic by M@ce, poems, and writings on fatness, beauty, and eating disorders by Ken Hecht, Cindy Headley, jeff Sub-humyn, and Naomi Wolf.	
Pages	22	
Dimensions	8.5 x 5.5	
Number of Copies	1	

Title	Your Body	
Date		
Author/s	Lily Hoffman	
Publisher		
Language	English	
Call No	Z 230 YOU	
Subjects	fat phobia; self-harm; eating disorders	
Description	Your Body serves as a sort of guide to understanding and caring for one's body, empowering readers with knowledge about health and self-determination. It contains a collection of writings on bodies, disordered eating, fatphobia, and self-harm by various authors, including Julie Christine, Allekse Viens, Ali Brooks, Nicole, and Catherine Labelle.	
Pages	20	
Dimensions	8.5 x 5.5 in	
Number of Copies	1	

References:

- Cook, Terry. 2011. "‘We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are’: Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future." *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32 (2): 173-89.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00379816.2011.619688>
- Fraser, M. L. (2002). ZINE AND HEARD: FRINGE FEMINISM AND THE ZINES OF THE THIRD WAVE: A QUARTERLY OF WOMEN'S STUDIES RESOURCES. *Feminist Collections*, 23(4), 6-10.
<https://proxy.library.mcgill.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/zine-heard-fringe-feminism-zines-third-wave/docview/922365555/se-2>
- Punzalan, Ricardo L. 2017. "Dear Students: Becoming an Archivist in a Time of Uncertainty and Unrest." *The Library Quarterly* 87 (4): 303-5.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/693486>.
- Ramdarshan Bold, M. (2017). Why Diverse Zines Matter: A Case Study of the People of Color Zines Project. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 33(3), 215-228.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-017-9533-4>