

Circulating Zines

Ziba Pérez

INTRODUCTION

I developed an interest in zines at Long Beach Polytechnic High School during the late 1990s. My friend Reena Rosales was making zines and asked friends to get involved. Each friend contributed a segment, and then Reena put them all together and called it “Luna in Tuna” (Rosales 2012). In 2012 I started my own zine called “ZebraRadar,” a scrapbook I had already been making for three years (Z 2019). I realized that it was a zine, a scrapbook, a collage of things I like and photos and stickers from my life. It was fun to participate, and it really got me involved in the local zine community. Years later in 2015, “Luna in Tuna” by Reena Rosales was the zine I used to start the Long Beach Public Library’s zine library. Long Beach was where I grew up, and it was really important to me to bring back the zine that had started it all for me and my friends, in my hometown. That original zine was the inspiration for the zine library.

Currently I’m with the Los Angeles Public Library system. I started there in 2017, and at that time our seventy-three-branch system didn’t have any zines circulating (LAPL Zine Library 2021). It had zine programs for teens that had been funded by an Ideas grant. Ideas grants are mini-grants our system has for librarians to try new things and get funding, so I knew that zines were supported in part. I didn’t see them circulating, as in other systems I had visited or worked for, though, and because zines were so important to me, I wanted to get more zines circulating in our library system. So, in July 2017, I decided to get our zines circulating at the branch where I was working. That

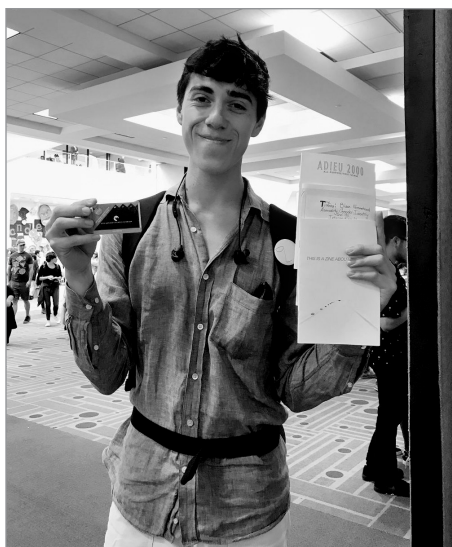


FIGURE 10.1
An enthusiastic attendee
at LA Zine Fest 2018

branch, Baldwin Hills, became the first to circulate zines in our system. After we had paved the way, other branches began to follow, so now we have seven branches that circulate zines with a library card.

My coworkers and I have promoted our circulating zine collection at the Los Angeles Zine Fest for the past two years, and the public attending the festival, as well as the other zinesters tabling there, have become more aware of our collection because of this outreach. Circulation and promotion are connected because if the public doesn't know there is a circulating collection, they will not come to borrow

the zines. Tabling entails promoting the collection at the festival by bringing a pop-up zine library for checkout on the spot. And if attendees don't have a library card with us, we have applications to sign them up and give them a library card as well.

REASONS TO CIRCULATE ZINES

Libraries, unlike archives, want to get materials into people's hands that they can take home, take to school, or take on vacation. We want to let people experience zines outside of the building, not just as a special collection or reference, so it's very important to give them the ability to take zines and other materials home. It is important that people can hold these items physically in hand, in order to promote access to alternative publications and give a voice to the voiceless. We also want to make sure that zines are searchable in the catalog, so if patrons are not at a branch that has zines, they can see what we have and we can then send it over.

Zines themselves are important to have in the collection because they are the voice of the unvoiced. The people writing them are generally people who

are not being published by mainstream commercial entities, so the zine world is really underground, non-mainstream, and noncommercial. They're doing it because they have something to say, or they want to share a hobby. The content of the zine could be political, or it could be personal. If the author is from your own library community, then by acquiring and circulating their zine you are really giving voice to the library patron and to your community. Now their voice is in the library, and anyone has access to their zine. I had an adult patron come and give me a zine of poetry she had written. She was

very proud, so we took a picture of her with her zine. We made copies of her zine and gave it to the other six branches as well. Putting these zines in the catalog is giving them power, and the fact that anyone can take a zine home with a library card is important. Zines should have the ability to circulate. Figure 10.2 shows library patron Rachel-Erva Johnson holding her mini-zine of poetry, "Madness in the Depths of a Bleak Winter" (Johnson 2018).



FIGURE 10.2
Library patron holding her
mini-zine poetry collection

CIRCULATING VS. NONCIRCULATING ZINES, AND REPAIR/REPLACEMENT DECISIONS

Unless it's something from another country that's truly irreplaceable, almost all of your zine collection should be circulating because the public library is meant to be borrowed from. We did have some foreign zines in Long Beach that were noncirculating because the cataloger realized that they were really rare. They were zines from Cuba, such as "Cuchillos en el aire" by Alfredo Zaldivar. I was lucky to go with the American Library Association's librarian tour to Cuba in 2016 and I purchased some zines while there. They could be considered *cartoneros*, or art books, and I've seen some libraries put them in special

collections or archives, but I brought them back as zines to the Long Beach Public Library. Those few zines were reference only and did not circulate because they're so unique. They could be considered archival museum pieces, even though we consider them zines.

We decided to keep the circulation period for our zines the same as for everything else, which is three weeks at a time, with two potential renewals, so potentially you could have a zine for nine weeks. We got rid of late fees, so the only reason someone would need to pay for a zine is if they lost it. When a zine goes missing, I try to find the zinesters at the local area zine fest in order to repurchase the zine.

We've really only had one zine get seriously damaged. I noticed that one was literally torn up into five different pieces, big pieces, but they were all right there. So I thought, wow, that's a shame, but of course all kinds of things happen. Since everything seemed there and not that dirty, I just put it back together like a five-piece puzzle, taped it up with scotch tape, and put it back on the shelf.

LAUNCHING THE CIRCULATING COLLECTION

To launch our circulating collection of zines, we got our head of cataloging and acquisitions to meet with all of the appropriate people to get the project started and made "official." That way, we had a process in place before cataloging started, and everyone was on board. It was really exciting. If you can get support from other branches, that can also be helpful. I think our biggest supporter was the city librarian, John Szabo. He was very supportive, and came to our booth at the Los Angeles Zine Fest and actually donated some zines.



FIGURE 10.3
Zinemakers in Cuba hard at work



FIGURE 10.4
Ziba Pérez, John Szabo, and Angi Brzycki, librarians from
Los Angeles Public Library, attending LA Zine Fest 2018

Having the city librarian already aware of zines and supportive of their inclusion in our library system was incredibly helpful.

Since all of our zines are in the catalog (lapl.org/zines), people can browse our zine titles from any of our branches. Then, they can request them from other branches with circulating collections, even if their local branch doesn't have a zine library. When we get holds for zines, the staff follow a procedure to make sure that the zines stay protected. The staff put the zines in clear folders which say "zine" and include the patron hold slip. Attending the Zine Librarians unConference (ZLuC) in 2018 with coworkers from our library system reinforced the importance of having zines cataloged, since that way patrons are able to search for zines and request them from any of the branches in the city.

At the Long Beach Public Library, after we had more than 1,000 zines in the adult circulating section, we wanted to go back with our cataloger and head of acquisitions and really decide what is specifically a zine, so that we keep only zines in our zine collection, only graphic novels in our graphic novel collection, and only magazines in our magazine sections. There is a lot of grayness in

what one defines as a “zine” in our public library. So we went back and wrote up our collection development policy and our criteria for what qualifies as a zine in our collection. We looked at other zine libraries around the world to see what we liked in their policies and what we wanted to replicate.

GETTING THE ZINES ON THE SHELF

To get our zines ready for the shelf at the Long Beach Public Library, we keep processing to a minimum. We place a barcode and a location sticker on the back of each zine. If it was donated from the Long Beach Zine Fest, we have a special sticker that indicates the year (L.B. Zine Fest 2019). Every year, as a partnership, the zine fest would collect and donate zines to our library, so we like to document that on the zines themselves. Once the zines are processed, we give them to the cataloging librarian. Our cataloging is also fairly minimal: name, author, size. Then we double-check that everything is in the catalog correctly, and then the zine goes on the shelf.

We wanted to keep the collection in the adult area so that we wouldn’t get too many complaints about teens or children accessing inappropriate content. A lot of the zines are adult material. There are some teen zines and children’s zines, so we’re now looking at creating a separate section for youth zines, which will also help with our outreach to schools. We didn’t even consider sorting by age at the Long Beach Public Library until we had about a thousand zines.

We separated the mini-zines from the larger zines so that they wouldn’t get lost among the larger-size ones, and then we filed them alphabetically by title. To display zines on the shelves, we would use some of the clear pamphlet displays that are usually used in the lobby or at the front desk to hold library pamphlets or brochures. We didn’t shop around for anything special to hold the zines at first because we just wanted to make the collection available right away. There were some clear magazine racks in use in the library and some that were in storage that nobody used. We tried to think out of the box, and so we looked at the available options and asked ourselves, “Could that hold a zine?” Later on we looked for more specialized furniture or display materials. You really don’t need anything special to get started, though. I’ve seen libraries just use cardboard boxes.

When local zinesters hear about our circulating collection, they're really excited. We frequently hear, "Oh, I have the library by me and I'm going to request a zine when I go to my public library next." So we know we're getting new library patrons who wouldn't typically think to visit the library because they didn't think there was anything there for them. The library collection is also a great way for patrons to find zines outside of zine festivals. When zines are otherwise hard to find, you can count on your public library having zines.

Of course, every library system is different. The first time I tried to start a circulating zine collection at a public library, it failed. I was a librarian in the Orange County Public Library in 2014 when I was inspired by the zine collection at the Salt Lake City Public Library. I brought the idea of a circulating zine collection back to my administration, and they made a presentation at their policies meeting. Everyone liked the idea, but they said they didn't want to be the first in California to do this and thus have to develop all the policies and processes that would be needed. Instead, they wanted to come back to it at a later date when it might be better established at other libraries. I was able to do zine workshops and zine displays, but not actually catalog and circulate zines within the system.

ADVICE

My advice on starting a circulating collection is to just do it, don't wait. Since zines are so DIY, I think a zine library can be DIY too. Even for a display or a zine workshop, don't overthink it, just go for it. If you have zine fests you can go to, attend as many as you can for inspiration, and you'll see how doable it is. If you can convince other people in the library to join you, that's even better. Then work on getting them cataloged, and get them on your web page. It's important to remember that there is professional support out there. If you go to an ALA annual conference you can join the Zine Pavilion—we're there every year (ZineLibraries.info 2019). The Zine Pavilion raffles off a starter zine library kit to one lucky potential future zine librarian. If starting a zine collection at your library is something you'd like to do, don't think it's impossible; just see how you can do it.

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