

Peter and Ana Lowens University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections Student Fellow
Project Proposal by Tiegan Suddaby, Faculty of Fine Arts

**IDENTITY IS THE CRISIS: Redefining later twentieth-century feminist material culture
and riot grrrl zines as avant-garde art**

Background:

Based on the book *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century* (ed. by Bly and Wooten, 2012), my project intends to apply archival practice to the various self-published zines in the University of Victoria's Special Collections and Archives. The connotations of self-published works as being firmly subcultural, as well as low-brow, non-academic, personal, and otherwise "non-canonical" art compared to the avant-garde contributions to literary and artistic history limits the priority in researching zines as material culture. Inciting sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of "cultural fields," contributor Kate Eichhorn in her article "Archiving the Movement: The Riot Grrrl Collection at Fales Library and Special Collections" argues that public institutional preservation of cultural artefacts, such as self-published zines, is required in authorizing artistic and literary movements as part of their cultural history (Eichhorn, pp. 25-26). For people who experience gender-based oppression, the pressures to rely on an already delineated identity in mass media can frustrate and further alienate outsiders of their gendered expectations. Affordable access to paper, glue, a photocopier, and a desire to express yourself is an immensely liberating act in a conformist world.

Project objective:

Identifying zines as artefacts or forms of material culture is a highly debated topic in archival studies and something I personally want to explore. As an accessible form of public engagement for voices otherwise unheard in major publishing, zines and other forms of self-publication build local communities and discourses through the act of creating. I intend to fulfill the calls to action writers and academics make in defense of riot grrrl zines and other self-published works by curating an in-person exhibition featuring the Special Collections' items. Among the featured items proposed, including fanzines such as *Mad Planet*, I also hope to investigate the material's significance. This includes preserving and learning how to handle rare materials, and exploring the digital possibilities that zine culture evolved to in the early 2000s.

Approach:

The world of zine-making and self-publication has stayed alive to this day for both collaborative groups and individuals. My project will observe the experimental and abundant creativity shown through self-published materials in the late 1980s up to today. Along with curating a selection of visionary zines made by otherwise marginalized people, I want to physically engage with the material by making my own self-publications and bringing the craft to a public audience. Zine and DIY workshops alongside an exhibition space will help both show the public the expanse of the UVic Collections and validate zines as a form of culture.

This research fellowship will help give me the experience of working with primary sources and materials in an immersive setting. This is also a valuable opportunity in both public engagement and making a creative research output, especially given my background in the arts. I hope to gain a multifaceted understanding in how to approach a long-term project in the Special Collections, as well as refine my research skills in material culture.

Proposed Materials:

Andrea. *Screaming Mimi*. Ellwood City, PA. 1995?

https://search.library.uvic.ca/permalink/01VIC_INST/71bv5b/alma9937572263807291

Bly, Lyz., and Kelly. Wooten. *Make Your Own History : Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century / Co-Edited by Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten*. Litwin Books, 2012.

Dyer, Sarah. *Mad Planet*. Staten Island, NY, 1992(?).

https://search.library.uvic.ca/permalink/01VIC_INST/71bv5b/alma9945341263807291

Femzine. Toronto, Ont., Canada. 199?

https://search.library.uvic.ca/permalink/01VIC_INST/71bv5b/alma9914179843807291

Wolfe, A. "GRRRLBLUD | Archiving Riot Grrrl's Zine History." *Broken Pencil*, no. 46, Broken Pencil, 2010, pp. 4-.