

Methods for Change

Collaborative Zine-Making

The Austerity and Altered Life-Courses Team,
*Department of Geography, School of Education,
Environment and Development,
University of Manchester*

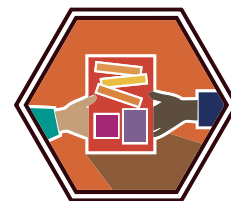
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Inspire Women Oldham

Corresponding Author

sarah.m.hall@manchester.ac.uk

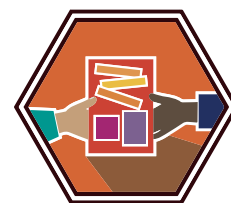
Collaborative Zine-Making



Collaborative Zine-Making involves the creation of zines with others. Zines are a grassroots tool for spreading information in communities, including news, politics, opinions and more.

A zine is often made of paper, folded, stapled or tied, comprising different pages, though it can also be a digital resource. The contents of a zine can vary, too. They can be a collection of writing, of images, a collage, puzzles, poems, and an array of other creative forms often interwoven in various combinations. Significantly, zines are made by and for communities, whether they be geographical, cultural, or social communities (e.g. a neighbourhood, a music scene, or a trade community). Zines do not require specific skills or expertise, and instead are favoured for their free form and inclusivity.

Zines have been used in research in lots of different ways, especially as research data (as a form of information for analysis) or as research dissemination (as a way to share research findings). Collaborative Zine-Making as method draws from this rich tradition to deploy the making of zines with others as a methodological technique – collectively envisioning, designing, producing, and sharing zines. Moreover, there are different ways to go about Collaborative Zine-Making: whether making a singular zine together, making multiple zines on a shared topic, or simply making zines together on different topics.

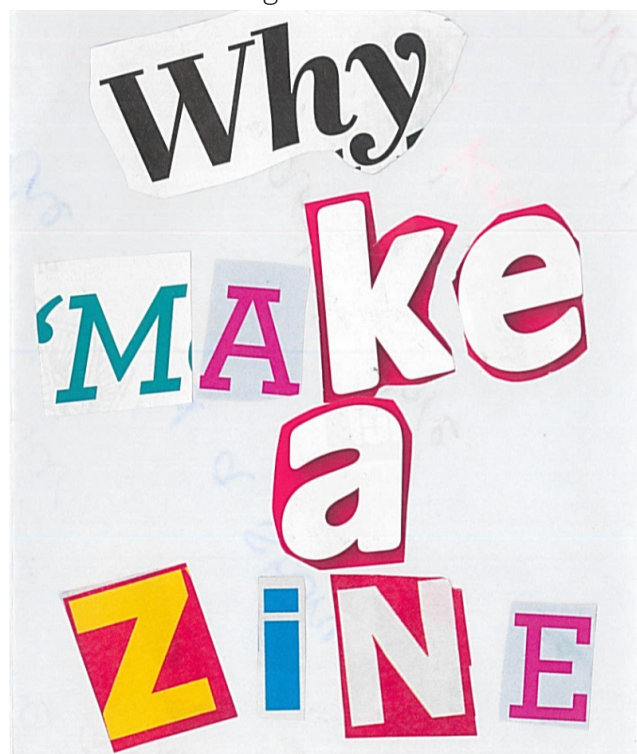


How does Collaborative Zine-Making create or contribute to change?

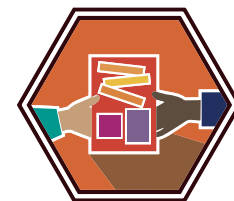
Collaborative Zine-Making as method helps to harness people's experiences and opinions to empower them to share their knowledge, and to teach others new skills and techniques. Collaborative Zine-Making takes place in workshops, where people make zines with or alongside others (see step-by-step section). In these workshops, it is common for a few people to have heard about, read, or made zines before. Therefore, and firstly, one important contribution to change is that the method offers the opportunity to learn something new, about a form of grassroots activism, creative expression, and technique for effective communication. This type of social change can also be widespread: workshops can be held with policy-makers, institutional representatives, academics, charities, cultural groups, activists, or the general public. In this sense, change as knowledge sharing and skill development can be very broad with lots of possibilities.

Collaborative Zine-Making workshops can also be a space for encouraging participants to deploy and adapt the method for their own work; a way of upskilling. This means that, as a second example of change, Collaborative Zine-Making can be a method that enables and shares creativity, confidence, and collaborative tools. As such, change can be seen in methodological adoption and adaptation, which can be traced through creative evaluation techniques by/with zines (again, more on this below). After all, a key aim with zine-making as everyday practice is to encourage others to make and share zines, too. The workshops can therefore also be a means for researchers and participants to develop new relationships and connections, that may in turn lead to new collaborations and projects.

Furthermore, the zines produced as part of the method are made with the aim to be shared, as an output of the collaboration. This means that a third example of change is in how collaboratively made zines are received and interpreted by others, and the change that is possible via the message they contain in a novel format. Such change can be multi-scalar, as it depends how and with whom the zine is shared. Digital sharing, for instance, can also enhance the sharing of zines through online and social communities. Thus, change and transformation can occur at many points in the employment of Collaborative Zine-Making as method, from the workshops where zines are created, through to the sharing of the zines. The changes can take place at a range of scales from individual to sectoral, depending on participants, messages, and forms of sharing.



The front cover of 'Why make a zine', a collaborative zine made by Inspire Women Oldham. The full zine can be viewed here: <https://tinyurl.com/InspireAALC>



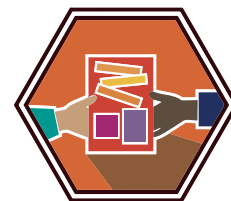
What ideas or concepts influence this approach?

Zines have a deep history as part of grassroots and political movements for change, particularly as they relate to marginalised and disenfranchised groups and communities. This includes within Black, queer, working class and feminist movements globally. Part of underground, often subtle political activism, they've been used in various guises over many years (see [Sou and Hall 2023](#)). As such, collaboration is embedded within zines as a cultural-political tool, which can be readily applied to research too.

Considering Collaborative Zine-Making as method, there are a range of aligned disciplinary and social research traditions. It speaks to creative methods, of which there has been a particular flourishing in recent years across the social sciences. Researchers are now much more likely to be playful, innovative and daring with the methods that they use.

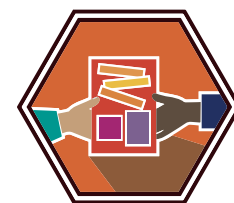
This comes with a recognition that people who take part in research need to be able to express themselves in different ways, and that researchers need to develop and refine different techniques for observing, listening to and capturing these experiences – as well as an acknowledgement that research should be enjoyable to take part in. In its simplest form Collaborative Zine-Making involves the folding and cutting of paper, thinking up ideas for a topic, and imagining an audience you're making for, all of which require creativity. Furthermore, Creative Zine-Making aligns with a growing community of researchers seeking to develop techniques to understand and represent the multitude of everyday life. This means engaging with more-than-spoken methods, to include materials, memories and emotions, for instance (see [Holmes and Hall 2020](#)). The technique of making zines with others as method also speaks to participatory approaches, given the emphasis placed on collaboration, togetherness and sharing.

Collaborative Zine-Making



Why might I want to use Collaborative Zine-Making?

- Collaborative Zine-Making is an accessible activity, which produces interesting conversations and encounters, as well as a zine as an output. The workshops are a great way for people to come together and share life stories, skills and perspectives both in the session, and afterwards by sharing their zine. Often, the act of sitting together, making and being creative can lead to new experiences and relationships.
- By making together and having space to create, the method can encourage a relaxed and trusting environment, especially depending on the topic material. It can be a way of showing that research can be approached in a fun way and can be enjoyable. People who take part in the sessions often comment on how Collaborative Zine-Making gives you permission to have fun with others, doing something that you might not do in everyday life.
- Zine-Making with others can encourage research to go beyond language barriers, since the method does not put emphasis on speaking or performing. Instead, the method aims to building confidence, new skills, and forms of expression through creative and collective activities.
- Collaborative Zine-Making methods can help to reshape ideas about creativity, since the only parameters are the paper. This can be a great opportunity for people who do not consider themselves to be artistic. Participants often find that one of the most fun things you can do is to tear bits of things out of a magazine and stick it on paper, write and draw over it, and then do it some more! Even the notion of making a collaborative zine can be creative: folding, bending and cutting paper, collectively thinking of a theme, and an audience to write for, and how to share your zine.
- The method gives space for expression and flexibility, having no hard or fast rules. The making is just as important as what is produced; drawing on whatever is meaningful to the people making the zine, and whatever they feel inspired to use from the materials on the table in front of them.
- Empowering people to share experiences in new ways is another key reason to use this method. Zines can be about anything, including sensitive or difficult topics, encompassing those that participants might not have spoken to other people about, or feel able to express with words. Participants often feel empowered to learn from others and share their zines as a way of reframing their relationship with an issue or topic.
- Zine-Making with others encourages methods learning from the real world. After all, zine-making did not start as a research method, yet in being an everyday mundane activity it can nevertheless be a tool for understanding social lives and change.



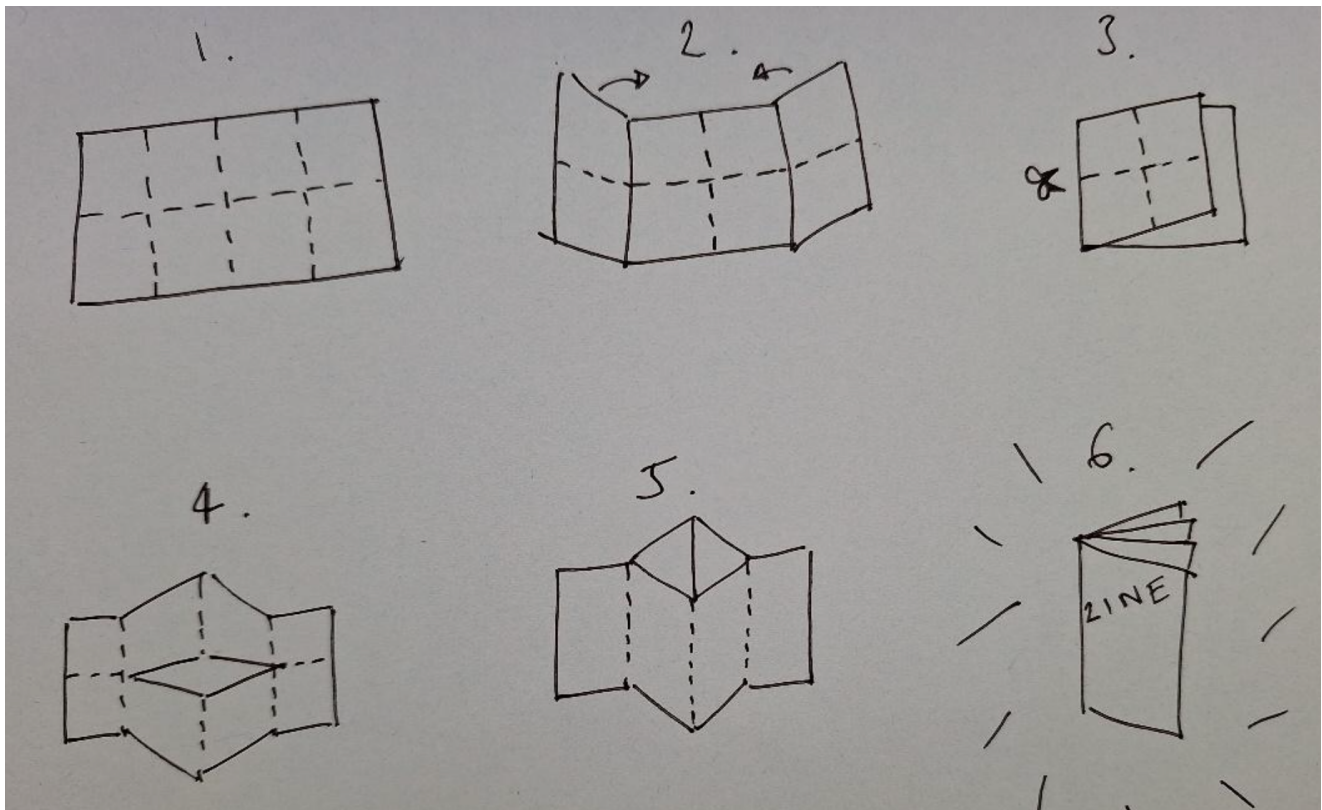
Step by step guide to using Collaborative Zine-Making:

- 1. Choose a space for your Collaborative Zine-Making.** Once you've decided who you are inviting to your Collaborative Zine-Making workshop, the first step is to locate a suitable venue. Find a space that is accessible and comfortable, with room for people to move about, and flexible seating. During Collaborative Zine-Making, people tend to want to sit together. This makes the sharing of ideas and materials much easier. Workshops can include any number of people, and whatever the size make sure there are options to split into smaller groups if the task requires it. It is also possible to recreate workshops online, though this will require participants to have materials to hand (see below) and will change the types of collaborative zines that can be made.
- 2. Provide a variety of materials and equipment.** Having choice and variety of different creative materials and tools is important to make sure everyone can participate in the zine-making in the ways that suit them. Be creative with the materials that you offer people - pens, pencils, crayons and colouring pens are all great. You will need plenty of used magazines, leaflets and brochures to cut and rip from - you can ask participants to each bring along a few of these to help. How about sequins, feathers and patterned sticky tape? Stickers, pipe cleaners and stamps? You will also need glue and sticking tape, and any other adhesive that will help in making the zine. And of course, you will need the paper that forms the basis of the zine. We recommend using A3 paper, though A4 can also work if necessary.

There are never enough scissors in a zine-making workshop! Try to have at least half as many pairs of scissors as you do people. Also show participants that ripping materials, such as from magazines, can give a differently textured look that works well within zines.

- 3. Demonstrate a simple zine template.** To kick off the zine-making, you will need to show or remind participants how to make a simple zine template with one sheet of paper. We recommend demonstrating this twice, with the whole group's attention. The first time is to show the process (slowly), and you can use the second demonstration as a go-along, with participants creating the template at the same time. Making a zine template involves folding the paper three times, straight on the edge, and then making a small snip that then allows the zine to be concertinaed, creating an 8-page booklet (see image overleaf). Please also note that sometimes the last stages can be a bit fiddly, so be patient with people for whom this may take a little longer.

You may also want to bring along these instructions, whether on sheets of paper or to be projected onto a screen, along with a few additional demonstration examples. From experience, we know that people often use these instructions again to make zines in their own time or to share with others, which adds further dimensions to the collaborative nature of the method.

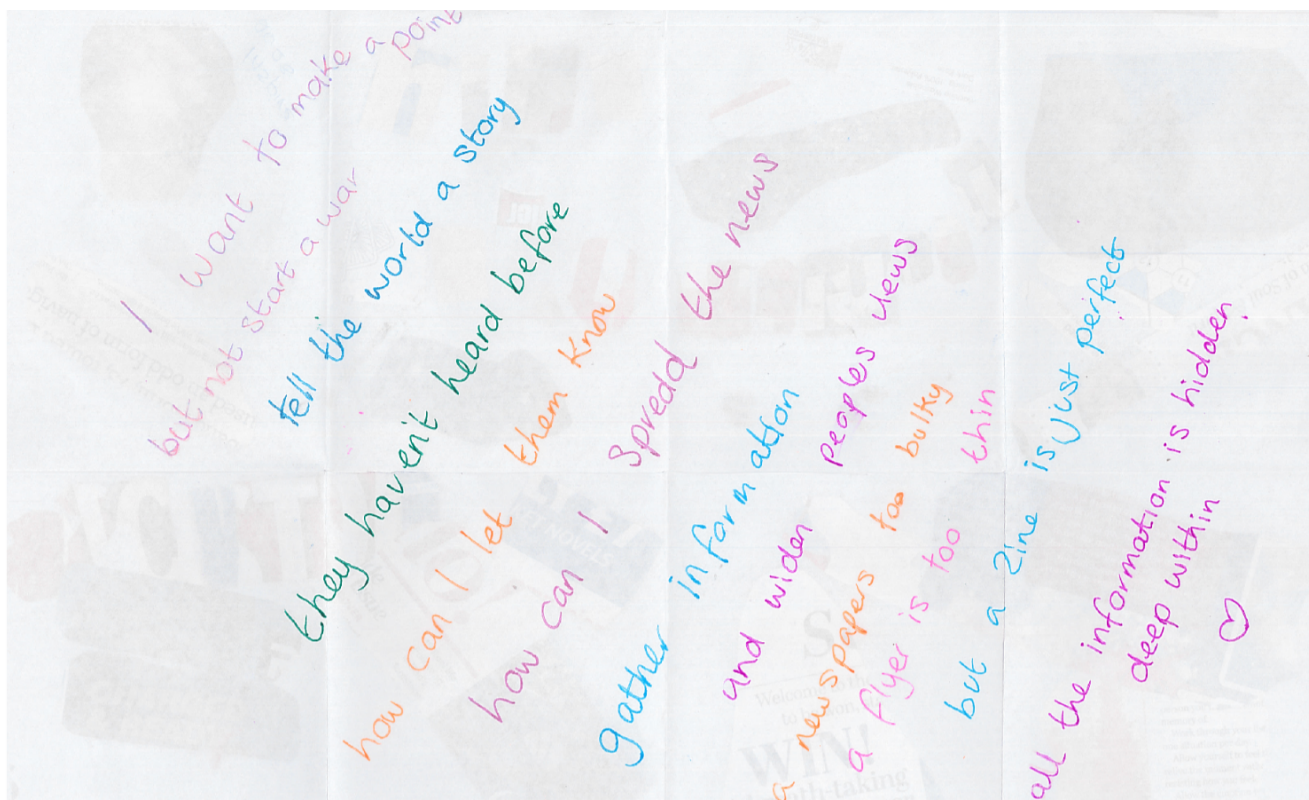
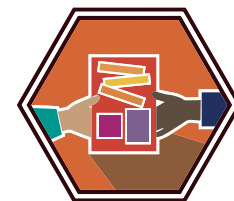


How to make a simple zine template. Image by Professor Sarah Marie Hall

4. Decide on your collaborative zine topics.

As noted earlier, there are different types of collaborative zine-making. Whether you want people (including the researchers) to make one zine together in a group, or people to make a zine each on a shared topic or make individual zines on personally-chosen topics within a group setting, there are collective elements to all of these. Regardless, time should be given to decide on the theme of the zines. This can be led by the themes of the research topic or be opened up to be decided by participants; it depends on how participatory and flexible your project is. It can be helpful to bring along prompts for topics, such as images or words on projected slides or printed out and distributed amongst participants. We also suggest bringing along examples of zines made by others, so participants can get a feel for just how varied and creative zines can be!

5. Make the zines. Allocate the most amount of time to this activity. In our experience, at least 30 minutes is needed for people to make a good start on a zine (which they can take away and finish in their own time, if that suited the research and participants). If possible, giving an hour to the activity is best (making the whole workshop at least 90 minutes or 2 hours in total). People enjoy chatting while making, sometimes moving around to find materials and tools, or to speak to new people. Be available to help, answer questions, offer tips, and remind people that they have free rein on how to make their zine. It can also be a good idea at this point to check if people would be willing to share and talk about their zine amongst the whole group at the end of the session.

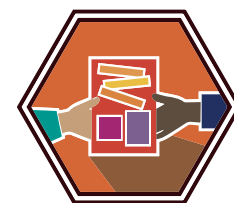


A poem on the poster in the centre of the 'Why make a zine', a collaborative zine made by Inspire Women Oldham. The full zine can be viewed here: <https://tinyurl.com/InspireAALC>

6. Reflect on the activity. Taking time at the end of the session to reflect on the activity can be a good way to round off the workshop, as well as to gather feedback on the activity. Experience tells us that time for reflection is also important for participants to feel empowered to share their zines. You can ask people to pass their zines around the room for others to look at as well as asking some questions to encourage group reflection and discussion. You may want to ask how they felt making the zines, what they might do again or differently, and how the method might be used in their own work and practice. You may want to ask permission to take photos of the zines, or to take them away to be photocopied/scanned and returned, or to keep the zine.

Researchers can either make notes of this reflective discussion or can ask participants to leave the back page of their zine empty. This can be a great way to gather feedback – asking participants to spend some time filling the back page on how they felt about the zine-making activity.

7. A final note. These step-by-step instructions have started from the assumption that the group of participants for the Collaborative Zine-Making workshop has been already selected, and that participant information and consent processes have been shared. We recommend reiterating these at the beginning of the workshop, especially if you expect confidentiality to be retained within the session, and anonymity within the zines produced. These will be context-specific, and we advise observing disciplinary and institutional guidance on ethical research in group settings.



Example of Collaborative Zine-Making in social science research:

Creative and Authentic Co-Production Methods: Zine Workshops

Researchers:

The Austerity and Altered Life-Courses Team (University of Manchester) and Inspire Women Oldham

Within the Austerity and Altered Life-Courses Team and at Inspire Women Oldham we have used zines in lots of ways in our individual and collective research. The example we share here is from workshops we co-led on creative and authentic co-production methods, which also included a collaborative zine-making workshop within it. The workshops were part of an NCRM Innovation Fora, with additional funding from UKRI and The Ideas Fund.

The rationale for the workshops and our collaboration was that creative techniques are increasingly being adopted by researchers seeking to elicit lived and personal experiences of issues such as poverty, inequality, mental health, environmental change and more. This includes academic, community, peer and policy researchers alike. Co-production methods are also commonly applied in this field, working creatively with those facing these everyday struggles to ensure their experiences are central to methods and data collection, and that their voices are amplified and shared.

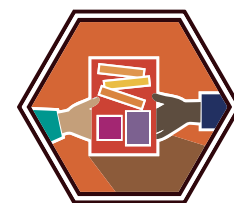
The aim of the research was to develop a series of workshops promoting creative and authentic co-production as method. Co-creating the workshops, from design to delivery, also highlights our research praxis of commitment towards developing our work together and sharing what we know with a wider community of interested groups.

This lies at the heart of what we mean by 'authenticity': doing collaboration with openness and purpose.

Collaborative Zine-Making was the first workshop that we ran in the series (later followed by collaborative poetry and collaborative podcasts). It involved bringing together academic and community researchers to design and deliver the sessions, as well as further capacity-building for volunteers within Inspire Women Oldham. We met online twice before each session to develop the workshop material, and then once in person to visit the venue. We also met online after the workshop to share reflections on the process. This proved to be a great structure for the series, meaning that team members were able to participate in the delivery research in a supportive environment, and to develop their confidence and skills to co-run similar workshops in the future.

Each member of the team – whether academic researcher, community researcher or volunteer – had a specific role and remit for the workshop. For some this was delivering the core content (researchers), for others it was to support participants (researchers and volunteers), and for some it was to keep notes of the session and support with providing feedback (volunteers).

Collaborative Zine-Making



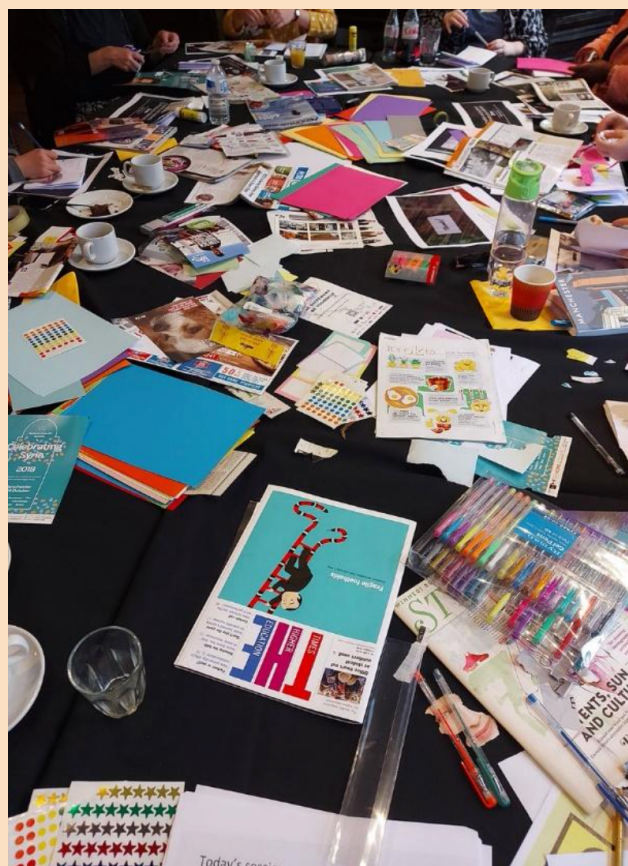
We invited a range of stakeholders (around 15 total) to take part in the workshops as participants. We selected people who we felt would enjoy the workshops and would be inclined to introduce the method into their research and practice. This included people from across policy, academia, third sector and activist groups.

The content of the workshops followed a simple structure of 'what', 'how and 'why'. This firstly involved providing a brief background on zines and sharing examples of hard copies with the group. The middle section of the workshop involved each participant making a zine, based on a topic that was chosen within small groups of 4-5 people. To support this, we offered some suggestions including: Northern life, cake, activism, money, buttons, mansplaining, and fake news. These helped to generate an enthusiastic discussion within small groups. Following the making of the zines, we discussed how this collaborative making process was a creative research method and why it might be chosen. This included a discussion of benefits for participants of Zine-Making with others, and of sharing additional resources for participants wanting to learn more. Participants were then invited to give feedback on the process, including verbally and by using the back page of their zine (as per the step-by-step instructions). We took photographs of these feedback pages for our own records and for evaluation purposes.

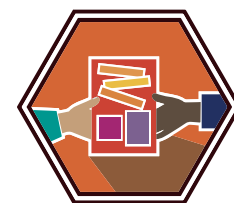
Following the sessions, we sent participants a simple feedback survey based on their experiences of the workshop. From this, and other communications, we learned that participants had shared their zine and the method with other people, made other zines for themselves, and were finding ways to implement this method into their work.

We were also asked to run the sessions for other organisations and are looking to continue co-delivering the workshops in different settings as a regular offering.

We later replicated this same workshop format with a wider community of Inspire Women Oldham, during which a group collaboratively made a zine – about Collaborative Zine-Making as method! You can digitally flick through the zine here: <https://tinyurl.com/InspireAALC>. If you wish to have a hard copy of your own, you can print out and recreate this zine yourself. Go onto the Austerity and Altered Life-Courses website and look under the 'Sharing our Findings' tab: www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/austerityalters/



A photograph taken during the Collaborative Zine-Making workshop. Image by Sarah Marie Hall.



Where else could Collaborative Zine-Making be used?

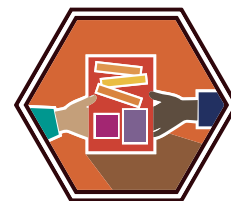
Collaborative Zine-Making is a flexible and creative technique that can be used in a wide range of research settings. It can be used to explore many different topics and themes, including those that might otherwise be difficult to articulate. Collaborative zine-making can be used:

- With a variety of stakeholders, including policy-makers, civil servants, community groups, activists, businesses, charities and more. Collaborative zine-making is an inclusive and accessible method that cuts across interests, skills and abilities.
- In a range of spaces and formats, including in-person or online. If using Collaborative Zine-Making online, you can follow the step-by-step instructions to enable participants to make individual zines on a shared topic, or simply making zines together on different topics.
- For different purposes, whether to gather data on experiences, stories and opinions; to empower participants, support ongoing activities, and to encourage activism; to evaluate processes; or in teaching and training about research.

Top Tips

There are lots of possibilities for running Collaborative Zine-Making workshops, and here we share some top tips that can help make the process smoother. For instance:

- Prepare materials and equipment well in advance, making sure there is enough for everyone to really get stuck in.
- Think ahead about small group sizes within the workshop. If you want participants to make a shared singular zine, this might be best done in groups of 2-3 people. If you want participants to create zines on a shared topic, then groups of 4-6 can work well. We have found that, while there are no specific limits, the workshops run especially well with 10-15 people attending in total.
- The room can get quite noisy during the collaborative zine-making activity, usually because people are having fun! This means that recording discussions is logistically difficult, and so making time for the reflective discussion is vital.
- Be generous with copies of instructions and guidance. We have found that participants often go on to share collaborative zine-making methods with others, including family, friends and colleagues.



Further reading

For more on zine libraries in the UK:

- Salford zine library: <https://salfordzinelibrary.co.uk/>
- Glasgow zine library: <https://www.glasgowzinelibrary.com/>

For more about how zines have been used in academia:

- Bagelman and Bagelman (2026): <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1257>
- Sou and Hall (2023): <https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/2120>
- Velasco et al. (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2020.1814161>

For more on zine ethics:

- Zine ethics: <https://www.zinelibraries.info/code-of-ethics/>

To reference:

'Austerity Alters and Inspire Women Oldham (2023) Collaborative Zine-Making' in Rodekirchen, M; Pottinger, L; Briggs, A; Barron, A; Eseonu, T; Hall, S.M and Browne, A.L (eds) *Methods for Change Volume 2: Impactful Social Science Methodologies for 21st century problems*. Manchester: Aspect and the University of Manchester.

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