

Too Long; Didn't Read: The Case for Academic Zines

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There are many ingrained issues in traditional academic publishing, including writing, editing, and reviewing for free; the lack (until recently) of open access journals, and the high cost of journal subscriptions for institutional libraries. Even without the structural problems of academic publishing, writing well is time-consuming, difficult, and a task far too easy to procrastinate. The struggle of citing everything read in order to get to the point of making a contribution and communicating new knowledge to peers means that the tone of academic writing is often stiff and full of jargon.

Academic zines can't solve all these problems. They can, however, open up the access to research beyond the very small percentage of the general population who read journals. Academic zines are a refreshing way to share knowledge broadly, and are particularly well-suited for community-based projects, research that tells a narrative, or explaining something that people could apply to their lives (Creasap, 2014; Tkach & Hank, 2014; Stanley, 2015).

Homemade, free, anti-establishment photocopied zines emerged from the punk music scene in the 1980s. They have now been largely replaced with full-colour creations, as photography and printing have improved and become more accessible. They have been distributed at a growing number of small-press and zine fairs. Academic zines can also be given out at a talk, conference, or workshop. They can be left out at a library, community centre, or research hub. In summarizing a research project in plain language

to friends and family, the academic can make knowledge into a little gift. The beauty of it is whatever the author decides with respect to audience, format, and distribution.

In the academic publishing process the people the research is done with (or on) are rarely included, and many research participants are not connected with or even interested in the article output. Research impact should not only be measured by a journal rank, citations, and major grant funding. Who does the research impact in practice, policy, behaviour, and lifestyle?

It is with the subjects, participants, front-line workers, friends, and general public in mind that *TL;DR: A Thesis in a Zine* was created. *TL;DR* is a co-created summary of my 168 page master's thesis in human geography entitled "Moving Home: The Art and Embodiment of Transience Among Youth Emerging from Canada's Child Welfare System" (ameliamerhar.ca). All art has remained the property of the artist co-researchers; digital copies of photos, videos, and songs remain in a *Moving Home* archive.

Half of youth in care in Canada are Indigenous, and half of co-researchers in the *Moving Home* project also self-identified as Indigenous. The racism of the child welfare system also shifts geographically across the country—for example, in Toronto, co-researchers self-identified as part of the 40% Black over-representation of youth in care (Contenta, Monsebraaten & Rankin). This is an exploratory Canadian case study model, using Toronto to represent urban-suburban experiences, and the Yukon to represent northern/rural experiences.

The thesis was written mainly as a support for current youth in care, those who work with them, and those interested in arts-based research and in creative and accessible research dissemination overall. The thesis also makes a contribution to the scholarship on embodiment (Blackman, 2012) and mobilities (Cresswell, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006), particularly with the idea of embodying transience itself by considering work on space-time compression, and bringing it to the scale of the body.

For those readers who want more theory, the research was approached using a framework of the mobilities paradigm, children's geographies (Evans, 2008), and emotional geographies (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). The methodology was a combination of arts-based; participatory action research; and Indigenous methods (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2010).

The built-in community action part of the participatory action research project included four public art shows, two in the Yukon and two in Toronto in 2016 and 2017. These public art shows were all voluntary for the participants, with the ability to identify using artist names, Indigenous names, initials, or as anonymous—whatever the co-researchers decided worked best for them. There were ten co-researchers with lived experience in displacing systems such as child welfare (often overlapping with justice and shelters) in the Toronto project, and five co-researchers with similar experiences in the Yukon.

The *TL;DR* zine launched August 2017 with a corresponding art show at Critical Distance Centre for Curators and a talk at the office for the Ontario Advocate for Children and Youth. Over 500 copies of *TL;DR: A thesis in a zine* were printed and distributed, which is more real-world research impact than a thesis only available online and in the library stacks. Consider who could be interested in a creative and accessible version of what you have been working on, the next time you have something to say.

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