From A to Zines: Narrative Threat Modeling in U.S. Reproductive Health Media

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Abstract

Post-Roe, people capable of pregnancy face fragmented reproductive privacy landscapes in the United States (U.S.), with risks spanning legal, digital, and interpersonal domains. These conditions demand new forms of privacy guidance. We analyzed 212 reproductive health zines—a DIY, subversive, and collectively produced media genre—to understand how they communicate reproductive health information. Zines foreground embodied, first-person narratives interwoven with historical context, medical guidance, and activist messaging. We argue their use of subversive or alternative medical knowledge enhanced credibility in contexts of low institutional trust. While some zines offer digital privacy strategies, many focus on avoiding institutional exposure altogether. These emotionally resonant, context-sensitive accounts illustrate threat models attuned to entangled risks of interpersonal betrayal, legal precarity, and surveillance. We conclude with design implications for how zines might better support people navigating reproductive risk through what we call *narrative threat modeling*—a situated practice that communicates privacy strategies through story, tone, and form rather than technical instructions or prescriptive checklists.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; **Empirical studies in HCI**.

Keywords

Reproductive health privacy, post-Roe, threat modeling, feminine HCI, analog media, zines, privacy guidance

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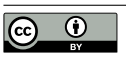

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1 Introduction

Following the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, which overturned Roe v. Wade (the 1973 ruling that guaranteed a federal constitutional right to abortion), many U.S. states enacted new restrictions. As of this writing, 13 U.S. states enforce near-total abortion bans, and 6 additional states ban abortion early in pregnancy, typically between 6 and 12 weeks of gestation [67]. As a result, individuals capable of pregnancy face a fragmented and dangerous reproductive privacy landscape in the U.S.[1] These risks span legal, digital, and interpersonal domains, extending far beyond the well-publicized risks of period-tracking apps [52, 75, 103]. Although much of the public and scholarly discourse have fixated on the hypothetical use of menstrual data to infer abortions [49, 50, 52, 65, 75, 77, 96, 119, 140], no abortion prosecutions to date have relied on period-tracking data [70]. In practice, the most pressing reproductive privacy threats are mundane, relational, and situational. Prosecutors often begin with a tip from a friend, family member, or medical provider, then follow the digital and physical trails that people leave behind: phones are seized during emergency room visits [8, 31, 56, 118]; medical records may be disclosed or subpoenaed [29, 101, 106, 122, 144]; and relatives or peers may initiate investigations that lead to searches of social media messages [69] or cellphone content [83, 121]. Law enforcement may also use location or license plate data to track travel for abortion care [3].

These relational and situational threats often evade dominant privacy frameworks, which prescriptively emphasize user control—typically over app settings and permissions [34, 42]—rather than attending to contextual vulnerability or structural surveillance. In the absence of meaningful protections, people are often left to develop their own ways of assessing how legal, interpersonal, and digital risks intersect in their lives. We conceptualize this everyday practice as *narrative threat modeling* [86, 134]: not in the systems security sense [43], but as a situated, lived form of risk assessment shaped by familial surveillance, geographic location, age, pregnancy risk, economics, and social ties. These assessments influence how

[1] Morgan and colleagues [95] describe this process as reproductive governance: the ways states, religious institutions, and civil society actors mobilize moral regimes and rights-based discourses to regulate reproductive life. Drawing on examples from Latin America—including abortion, contraception, sterilization, and assisted reproduction debates—they show how competing claims to sexual, reproductive, indigenous, and "right to life" rights reorganize political rationalities, a framework that can be applied transnationally to understand shifting reproductive politics.

individuals navigate prosecutorial and social vulnerability in the context of reproductive privacy [68, 84, 86].

Narrative threat modeling foregrounds post-Roe privacy as a practice of survival rather than a technical end-state. It is inherently situated and collaborative, grounded in lived experience and constantly recalibrated in response to bodily transitions, shifting laws, and relational dynamics. Building on participatory threat modeling [126], it emphasizes guidance that helps people imagine and adapt strategies to the specific conditions of their own lives—an orientation we argue is essential in the post-Roe reproductive context.

While no substitute for structural change, this situated risk assessment reflects the fragmented and punitive landscape people in the U.S. must navigate post-Roe. Yet prevailing privacy guidance rarely accounts for such lived contexts—even though they resonate with situated, relational [128], and embodied [41] approaches long emphasized in feminist HCI [11, 12]. For instance, someone prone to miscarriage in West Virginia may face heightened risk of prosecution, since a miscarriage itself can trigger legal suspicion [45].

In the absence of guidance that is both appropriately directed at this expansive risk and also thoughtful about people's acute need—and simultaneous unpreparedness—for threat modeling, we turn to alternative media that bypass the limitations of digital app-centric privacy advice and offer situated, analog forms of care and resistance.

Effective reproductive privacy guidance must be (1) accessible and subversive; (2) attuned to rapidly shifting legal and political conditions; and (3) grounded in lived experience and feminist praxis to support narrative threat modeling.

One such medium is the **zine**: DIY, hand-crafted, and often radically-personal publications rooted in activist traditions. Historically used to share health information, protest injustice, and build solidarity—particularly within queer, punk, feminist, and marginalized communities—zines provide a powerful combination of intimacy, resistance, and material privacy [44, 72, 100].

We see zines as *potentially* powerful tools for *narrative threat modeling* where privacy risks with prosecutorial consequences are understood as situated, highly contextual, and subject to rapid change. Zines' deeply personal and subversive nature allows them to help individuals name risks at the intersections of politics, identity, law, technology, and relationships; surface strategies for navigating those risks; and embed this guidance in stories, metaphors, and aesthetic cues, methods which have also been used to help individuals navigate mental well-being as part of abortion aftercare [78], that feel authentic and trustworthy within specific communities.

We analyzed a collection of reproductive health zines housed in a university library to understand how these artifacts convey reproductive privacy care, threat, and resistance that challenge mainstream information narratives. We ask how zines communicate information related to reproductive rights and broader related issues of bodily autonomy and activism; what visual, narrative, and linguistic strategies—including coded language and metaphor—they use to address these topics; and how privacy itself is framed in within these texts, including what threats, protections, strategies, and values they emphasize.

We contribute a thematic analysis of how zines communicate privacy-relevant information; empirical insight into how rhetorical and aesthetic features support reproductive risk navigation; the concept of *narrative threat modeling* as a way to understand and communicate situated privacy risks; and design implications for feminist privacy guidance that centers analog, contextual, and embodied guidance.

2 Background Related Work

2.1 Reproductive privacy risks post-Roe and the need for new types of guidance

To situate zines as a form of privacy guidance, we first outline the evolving legal and interpersonal risks to reproductive privacy in the post-Roe U.S.

Following the overturn of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization in 2022, which eliminated the constitutional right to abortion in the U.S., abortion is now illegal in 13 states, with 6 more imposing strict gestational limits [67]. With each passing month, new laws are proposed or enacted that criminalize assisting minors in accessing abortion care [138] or helping individuals cross state lines [48, 102] to obtain one. Mirroring practices used even before Roe was overturned [38, 56, 104], women in certain states have been charged with crimes for disposing of miscarried fetal remains [127]. Prosecutors have also warned that women who experience miscarriages could potentially face criminal charges and are advised to report miscarriages to law enforcement for legal protection, as in the case of West Virginia [45]. Increasingly, control and weaponization of reproductive care extends beyond abortion to birth control, ectopic pregnancy care[2][71, 132] and miscarriage care [14]. Some employers and insurers are increasingly seeking to deny coverage for "abortifacient" forms of contraception [6, 142].

Even in the absence of formal state incentives to report suspected abortions—as in Texas, which has both its "bounty hunter" law [19] and a new statute enabling citizens to sue abortion-pill providers, and potentially anyone who assists in obtaining abortion pills [55, 97]—relatives and providers have begun doing so. In Idaho, for example, a woman and her adult son were charged with second-degree kidnapping after the son took his minor girlfriend out of state to Oregon for an abortion without parental consent; the case was initiated when the teen's mother reported them to authorities who used cellphone data to investigate [121]. In the Nebraska case involving a teen's Facebook messages about taking abortion pills, a friend reportedly tipped off investigators [69]. Surveillance and enforcement pressures extend beyond statutory frameworks into interpersonal and familial dynamics, with serious legal consequences even where no formal bounty exists. In this shifting terrain, the adversary is not just the state or platform but often a trusted actor: a healthcare provider [31, 56, 118, 144], a pharmacist [133], a parent [121], or a partner [83]. Legal enforcement often begins not with a dragnet (as in, e.g., immigration), but with a report from someone

[2]Ectopic pregnancies are nonviable and potentially life-threatening without timely medical intervention. However, in some U.S. states with strict abortion bans—even those that include exceptions for the "life of the mother"—physicians report being unable to intervene until a patient's condition deteriorates to the point of severe infection or imminent risk of organ failure, due to fear of legal liability [132].

close, an emergency, or a routine medical interaction that escalates into criminal suspicion [31].

These cases highlight how risks to reproductive privacy stem not only from constant surveillance, but from a broader ecosystem in which digital traces can become evidence. Enforcement often begins with a physical encounter or a tip from someone close. From there, it unfolds through device access or warrants for invisible data trails that prosecutors are increasingly empowered to access. Although it is hypothetically possible to obtain clinic visit data [33, 137] or abortion site visit data [54, 66], most investigations to date have relied on interpersonal reporting.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which governs the sharing of clinical health information in the United States, has never fully shielded reproductive data—both because of its narrow statutory scope and the growing interoperability of electronic health records [144], and because large amounts of pregnancy- and reproductive-related information are routinely shared with third parties who are not covered by HIPAA [31, 86, 114]. These structural gaps are compounded by recent federal clarification that HIPAA does not override state criminal or civil processes: guidance issued in 2025 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services clarifies that covered entities may still be compelled to disclose protected health information when faced with a valid court order or when "required by law," leaving patients in abortion-restrictive states vulnerable to cross-state subpoenas [18, 113]. At least 17 states have introduced bills that expand the circumstances under which providers may—or must—share reproductive records with law enforcement or civil litigants [2]. These structural risks underscore feminist critiques that "notice-and-consent" models of privacy are ill-suited to environments where data are interoperable, traveling across institutional, legal, and interpersonal boundaries outside the data subject's control [130]. As McDonald and Andalibi argue, even in the healthcare context, consent must be reconceptualized to include review of how reproductive health data are shared and made vulnerable, as well as how data produced merely through interactions about reproductive health can place individuals at severe risk [144].

2.2 Privacy guidance

Against this legal backdrop, we next review research on the effectiveness and limits of privacy guidance.

Prior work shows that there is an overwhelming amount of privacy and security guidance already directed at users [108, 109, 111, 112], but that users often do not implement security and privacy measures because advice is ill-suited for them, not actionable or understandable, or because they have competing needs [46, 63, 64, 108, 110, 143]. These gaps are exacerbated for vulnerable populations with higher consequence privacy and security needs or magnified threats [85, 124, 139], such as immigrants [60, 125, 129], activists [4, 5, 20, 25, 37, 141], journalists [57, 88–90], and people in a war zone [120]. Together, this body of work shows that the dearth of suitable, actionable, comprehensive, and prioritizable privacy guidance leaves individuals—particularly those in crisis—without reliable reference points for navigating privacy threats. There is also work suggesting that while it is tempting to attribute non-use to distrust [73] or apathy [81], the reality is far more complex.

Individuals capable of pregnancy in the U.S. are, post-Roe, part of this vulnerable community without sufficient and suitable privacy guidance. Recent studies suggest that post-Roe coverage of period-tracking apps significantly shaped public perception, even while offering a narrow view of the broader threat landscape [39, 84]. Although researchers have documented how reproductive data flow far beyond period-tracking apps [84], studies show that people capable of pregnancy continue to worry about disclosures from such apps [39, 84, 99], even when they doubt their efficacy [28, 84]. This anxiety is unsurprising given media coverage of commercial femtech—technology designed to address women's health needs [93]—vendors monetizing menstrual, sexual-activity, and hormonal data and potentially exposing users to employer or law-enforcement scrutiny [49, 52, 75, 103, 119]. Privacy incursions via period trackers often symbolize a dystopian form of medical surveillance and bodily privacy incursion [49], even though legal analyses warn that the more imminent threats stem from prosecutors' broad subpoena and warrant powers extending to phone contents [31, 56, 70], search and location histories [17, 26, 117, 121, 131], purchases [27], and messages on chat or social media [69, 83]—often with little notice to the individual whose data are seized and with no clear understanding of their rights [8, 31, 118].

Yet abortion seekers—especially those acting alone or without prior experience navigating digital privacy risks—may require a different kind of support. Effective guidance must help users identify what types of data are sensitive, how that data might be accessed or weaponized, and what protective steps are feasible given their legal, technical, and social contexts. This is challenging without a deep understanding of complex risks and, we argue, requires a narrative approach that situates privacy within relatable stories. Such framing can help individuals understand and act without being overwhelmed by technical detail.

2.3 Feminist HCI perspectives on privacy and care

These gaps resonate with feminist HCI's longstanding critique of individualistic privacy framings. Feminist HCI offers a holistic lens for understanding privacy threats, arguing that privacy is relational, embodied, and situated—emerging from lived experience rather than discrete transactions [11, 12]. For instance, prior HCI work has highlighted the *privacy gender gap*, wherein women feel more negatively about privacy incursions, such as online tracking, than men but are less likely to take protective actions in comparison [32]. The feminist HCI perspective challenges individualistic models of privacy that dominate mainstream design, instead emphasizing the ways privacy is negotiated within relationships, shaped by power, and deeply entangled with care.

Building on this tradition, scholars have examined how femtech tools often repackage surveillance as empowerment, revealing how the datafication of reproductive bodies reinforces gendered and racialized regimes of control [7, 76, 77, 91, 92]. More recent work on algorithmic justice situates these harms within longer histories of medical violence and structural oppression, calling for design practices that center autonomy, context, and collective resistance [15, 16, 47]. Extending this trajectory, Slupska et al. [126] introduced participatory threat modeling as a method to help technology

researchers center "traditionally marginalized and excluded experiences" and engage personal experience in the process of developing cybersecurity threat models. This work reframes threat modeling as relational and community-centered, and asserts that technical "solutions" may be prohibitive or insufficient. It emphasizes the need for structural and communal responses—rather than just relying on new technical tools—to address the lived realities of digital harms.

While feminist HCI has illuminated how privacy is relational, embodied, and power-laden, these frameworks often presume digital environments where users have some degree of choice, agency, or recourse [40] and may fall short in the post-Roe era, where threats to reproductive privacy emanate from an ecosystem of adversaries—platforms, clinics, prosecutors, and even family members—and where vulnerability is shaped by complex contextual factors such as medical history, geography, and access to care as well as race, income, and other demographic factors. In this landscape, technical solutions alone are insufficient.

Our study turns to non-technical, grassroots tools—specifically zines—as a mode of feminist intervention. We explore how zines can support people in articulating holistic threat models that account for both digital and interpersonal risks, and in cultivating networks of care that resist carceral logics through shared knowledge and collective practice.

2.4 Zines as activist health-communication infrastructure

Outside digital spaces, reproductive justice communities—drawing on a lineage of Black feminist organizing articulated by groups such as the Combahee River Collective [30]—have long turned to low-tech, encoded media to circulate sensitive information [98, 105, 115, 116]. Reproductive justice is rooted in examining how social issues, such as race and marginalization status, intersect with reproductive rights. This framework encompasses not only the right to abortion, but the broader Black feminist commitment to bodily autonomy, the right to parent (or not), and the structural conditions required to raise children in safe, sustainable communities [116]. Such analog, community-circulated media also offer forms of ephemeral privacy—remaining offline, circulating outside digital infrastructures, and often obfuscating exact sources while constructing narrative arcs that are nonetheless privacy-ready.

Zines emerge in this context as a historically grounded, grassroots medium for sensitive health communication. Zines, which are self-published booklets rooted in queer, punk, and feminist organizing history reaching as far back as the 1930s [82, 100], offer anonymity, portability, and creative resistance. Zines subvert mainstream publication conventions: they are often handmade by a single person, distributed locally, and rarely profit-motivated [44, 72]. Furthermore, while the limited-run, physical nature of zines restricts how far any individual zine can be distributed and, consequently, how many people can read it, this limitation serves as a boon in the current age of mass digital media; it creates space for zine-makers to tell personal, sensitive stories that are ill-suited for online distribution [100]. At the same time, while an individual zine is unlikely to reach the same readership as mass media, zines' strength lies in the collective common themes they communicate and the empowerment of committing ideas to a physical, indelible form [35], rather than to digital spaces where they can easily get lost or censored. Health-communication scholars find that zine-making supports peer education on topics ranging from sexual health to mental well-being precisely because its DIY aesthetics resist institutional authority and invite personal storytelling [74].

Advocacy groups have leveraged the form to contest anti-abortion misinformation; for instance, Reproductive Equity Now distributes a free zine that teaches readers how to spot "crisis pregnancy centers" and protect their data trails when seeking abortion care [1]. Digital Defense Fund has published a zine-like privacy toolkit [51]. Library science research documents a growing network of academic and public libraries that preserve and circulate zines as counter-archives of marginalized knowledge [13]. Methodologically, zine-making is a participatory, justice-oriented research method that centers lived experience and critical reflexivity. In other words, zines, as both model and medium, offer relational and situated tools that may very well be uniquely suited to this moment in reproductive health privacy.

2.5 Opportunity for zine-based privacy guidance post-Roe

Taken together, prior work indicates a gap between abstract, app-centric privacy advice and the embodied realities of navigating reproductive care under surveillance [84, 86]. Feminist HCI calls for resources that are responsive to structures of power [40] and social orders [12]. We argue that we urgently need resources attuned to the intersecting legal, digital, and interpersonal threats faced in the post-Roe landscape. These calls are also aligned with feminist methodologies oriented toward the transformation of injustice rather than its accommodation [107].

By analyzing existing reproductive-rights zines, our study builds on, and extends, feminist HCI's call for situated, care-oriented interventions, laying empirical groundwork for post-Roe privacy toolkits in the form of zines that resonate with both providers and patients.

3 Methods

3.1 Zine collection and selection

Our collection of reproductive health zines intentionally includes zines covering a range of reproductive experiences. We analyzed these materials for their narrative strategies around reproductive risk and care-seeking, as abortion privacy sits within a broader landscape of reproductive care. Including all reproductive health zines allowed us to develop conceptual insights and design implications relevant to abortion seekers.

Data collection occurred in several stages:

- **University zine libraries screening.** We surveyed 70 U.S. universities and colleges with dedicated zine collections, focusing on catalogs that listed genres such as "reproductive health," "feminism," and "privacy." Because virtually all libraries do not digitize their full holdings or are restricted to members of that university, we prioritized institutions where

team members had existing relationships and could physically visit, ultimately selecting the Zine Library at Barnard College[3] where some authors are students and faculty.

- **Initial screening and codebook development.** Four researchers visited Barnard's Zine Library and hand-reviewed approximately 4,729 titles, labeling each as "include" or "exclude."[4] Each researcher held and visually scanned the zines, flipping through each page, a process that took approximately 1-5 minutes per zine depending on page length. Inclusion criteria can be found in Appendix Table 1 and included topics like pregnancy, abortion, fertility, sexual health, and privacy. Inclusion criteria were developed to address whether a zine supported individuals' reproductive autonomy, including helping someone avoid rape, prevent unwanted pregnancy, or obtain an abortion. This could include zines that offered education through personal reproductive health and abortion narratives; aftercare, birth control, or abortion guidance; and explanations of anatomical terminology. Researchers consulted with each other if they were unsure after a quick visual scan, and erred on the side of *including* zines if they were still unsure. A total of 235 zines were ultimately marked as "include." We scanned all included zines and stored them as PDFs. Four researchers first immersed themselves in the material, writing analytic memos on tone, visual rhetoric, semiotics, and imagined audiences. While our analysis of the zines is deeply interpretive and reflexive [21, 22], our use of a codebook at this early stage served only to establish consistent include/exclude criteria for corpus construction rather than to pursue reliability or constrain interpretation [87].
- **Iterative coding and second stage of inclusion.** After reviewing all 4,729 zines and identifying 235 for potential inclusion, three researchers engaged in an initial round of reflexive coding on a shared subset of 15 zines. This initial collaborative coding was helpful to surface nuanced interpretations and articulate shared analytic commitments. Through discussion and memoing, the team developed a more coherent understanding of how to approach the corpus. These efforts to develop shared analytical grounding were not to establish reliability but rather to support reflexive consistency—e.g., the role of reproductive experiences in shaping perceptions of risk. We then divided the remaining zines among the three researchers. The inclusion criteria and evolving set of codes were applied to the remaining zines, with researchers spending *up to an hour* with each zine to support deep, interpretive engagement. See Appendix Table 2 for illustrative examples of our codes from this process, which are an artifact of our process. During this process, additional exclusions were made in agreement with the team (a total of 20 zines) based on topic. For example, a zine that was initially included because it had a picture of female anatomy was ultimately excluded because it focused solely on pubic hair maintenance. Additionally, three zines had copies both in English and Spanish; we count those zines only once for a total of **212 zines**.

[3] https://zines.barnard.edu/

[4] Approximately 1/3 of the way through the process of initial screening, we began counting the zines excluded; we use this count to create an inclusion percent (5.3%) and project an approximate total number of zines that we screened from the total number included.

3.2 Research orientation and analytic strategy

We adopted an interpretivist, feminist media-studies lens grounded in epistemological commitments to situated knowledge, reflexivity, and meaning-making [61]. Our goal was not statistical generalizability, but surfacing the situated meanings embedded in a diverse—though necessarily incomplete—corpus of reproductive-health–privacy zines. We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis [21, 22], collaboratively memoing, coding, and developing themes across the corpus. Consistent with qualitative best practices, we intentionally did not calculate inter-rater reliability (IRR) statistics nor develop a codebook other than for inclusion/exclusion [87]. While our team compared codes and refined definitions collaboratively, we rejected positivist assumptions that there is a single "correct" interpretation. Illustrative examples of codes developed during our reflexive thematic analysis are in Appendix Table 2.

Codes and themes were developed through memos and visual documents over several weeks. Those connected to abortion—and particularly to privacy—evolved as we reflexively discussed how stories, information, and accounts of experiences or practices related to pregnancy prevention. For instance, being dismissed by medical institutions could profoundly affect one's knowledge about their body or their access to medical information valuable for preventing unwanted pregnancy. Similarly, bodily autonomy plays a crucial role in pregnancy prevention, as do abusive relationships that create adversarial conditions. As these insights surfaced, additional zines came to be seen as essential to constructing this broader narrative about abortion.

Our analytic workflow reflected the ethnographic nature of this study and the archival constraints of working with an offline, minimally cataloged zine collection. We aimed to surface the privacy strategies, reproductive care stories, resistance tactics, and broader cultural logics articulated through these zines. All our zines were in English with occasional non-English text or titles with very few exceptions: One zine was exclusively in Spanish and was translated and coded by a researcher fluent in Spanish; three were written in Spanish but had an English language duplicate.

Consistent with this interpretivist orientation, our approach to reporting also departs from conventional expectations. We avoid quantifying how many zines addressed each theme or offering frequency descriptors such as "few," "many," or "often." Within an interpretivist tradition, themes are not validated by counts but by their salience, resonance, and explanatory power [22, 23]. Instead, we use terms like "some" and "sometimes" to reflect our stance that what matters are the thematic patterns and interpretive insights, rather than the frequency with which they appear.

3.3 Ethics

Zines are not produced for broad circulation, and it is generally understood that they should not be copied or reproduced [59]. We have respected this principle by preserving the privacy of zine makers and working with Barnard's zine librarian on how to ethically conduct this research. We do not publish author names, titles, text,

or images from the original materials. Throughout this paper we provide analysis of the content without quoting it or representing it directly. One author illustrated images evoking the styles and themes we encountered, which we include in lieu of direct scans. These images are composites meant to reflect the spirit of the visual motifs we analyzed; no single image can be traced back to any individual zine.

3.4 Limitations

Although our research team spanned multiple institutions, only one had both a robust zine archive and team members co-located and available to engage in the time-intensive task of gathering, reading, and analyzing the materials collaboratively. As a result, our dataset was limited to one collection. Still, this constraint aligned with our goal of identifying compelling examples and potential gaps in the current landscape of reproductive privacy zines.

By design, most of these zines could only be accessed physically at the library, and while researchers were permitted to photograph them for analysis, they could not be reproduced in this publication.

Our analysis is shaped by the collection and archiving principles of Barnard's Zine Library team. Barnard's collection is self-described as having a feminist emphasis, specifically on *"zines by women of color,"* over a wide range of topics like *"teenage girlhoods, punk cultures, COVID-19, riot grrrl, LGBTQIA experiences, BIPOC identities, travel, comics, physical and mental health, body image, gender nonconformity, discrimination, DIY and crafting, cooking, [and] friendship."*[5] Due to budgetary constraints, the Barnard Zine Library typically purchases zines for $10 or less, which is *"at the lower end of the production level scale"*[5]—and also invites donations. While Barnard's collection offers certain protections and freedoms for articulating reproductive, the very act of institutional archiving and the demographics of academic library patrons can domesticate or sanitize subversive media, shaping what is preserved and how it circulates. Indeed, Barnard's campus is not accessible to the public, and out of ethical obligation to the zine creators, most of the Barnard Zine Library's zines are not digitized. Although there are some zines created by and for academics through classes or internal workshops, the zines themselves largely come from *outside* the campus community, through donations, purchases, and social networks; therefore it is reasonable to assume that many of the zines are (or were) accessible to the public, just not through Barnard. As we note in Section 5, we advocate for expanding zine-making and zine distribution beyond activist and academic contexts, including into clinical and community spaces where reproductive knowledge is urgently needed.

Our analysis reflects the predominantly U.S.-based corpus from which our zines were drawn, and as such, the intersections of race, religion, and migration represented here are shaped by U.S.-specific histories of policing, reproductive governance, and healthcare inequity [24, 56, 115]. A more concentrated engagement with decolonial reproductive justice perspectives [94] would complicate and enrich the interpretive frame we offer. Such perspectives highlight colonial and imperial logics that structure reproductive precarity beyond U.S. borders and point to additional modes of knowledge-making and resistance not visible in our dataset. Future work attending to these frameworks would help situate our results and proposed concept of narrative threat modeling within a broader geopolitical and epistemic landscape.

Although our corpus contains all references to miscarriage that appear in the zines, miscarriage criminalization is only minimally represented. This reflects both the historical timing of many zines that were created before the current escalation of prosecutions for miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy, and the longstanding fact that such criminalization has disproportionately targeted poor women and women of color well before Roe [56]. As such, the absence reflects the zines' authorship and historical moment rather than any screening choice on our part.

Finally, the relative scarcity of zines produced after the fall of Roe at the Barnard Zine Library is a notable and unexplained finding. It may reflect just that this was a non-restrictive state, or shifting political attention, or a turn toward other forms of organizing and media, as researchers observed on campus. This absence itself points to an opportunity.

4 Findings

4.1 Overview

All findings reported in this section refer only to zines we reviewed and not all zines. Our corpus spans a remarkable range of topics: firsthand accounts of in-clinic abortions; step-by-step guides for at-home care and self-managed procedures; histories of abortion rights; present calls to mobilize; critiques of medical institutions; and intimate and instructive narratives about healthcare, relationships, sex, self-defense, and childbirth. These texts were published between 1990 and 2024, with the average date 2009 and the median 2010. Much of this production coincided with the period after Roe v. Wade, when the constitutional right to abortion was increasingly narrowed through cases in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s that upheld waiting periods, informed consent mandates, medically unnecessary clinic regulations, and bans on certain procedures without health exceptions for the pregnant person [58]. True to the form, these zines are written with love, crafting shame-free, encouraging spaces grounded in care and solidarity.

There are multiple ways that zines approach privacy in the context of abortion-related risk and harm mitigation. Some offer indirect forms of bodily privacy by providing guidance on fertility awareness, contraceptive methods, self-defense strategies, and communicating sexual boundaries—while others focus on empowering women with knowledge about their bodies to support informed decision-making. In these cases, the privacy benefit lies in empowering individuals to manage their bodies in ways that may preempt surveillance, coercion, or unwanted intervention. Others focus explicitly on digital privacy, providing advice on how to avoid leaving incriminating traces through online searches, messaging, or purchase records. A third, often overlooked in privacy discourse is interpersonal privacy, where parents, relatives, or acquaintances might disclose information that ultimately generates a digital or legal trail. **Each of these vectors—bodily, digital, and interpersonal—falls under the broader umbrella of abortion-related privacy.**

[5] https://zines.barnard.edu/

Notably, the zines we examined primarily emphasized bodily autonomy and indirect privacy, with comparatively less attention to the more explicit risks of digital or interpersonal exposure. This emphasis is typically not app-centric or prescriptive, but embedded in contextually rich narratives that help readers recognize risk and imagine protective strategies. Some zines also include practical resources—URLs, hotlines, clinic directories, as well as other zines and books—while their materiality (handmade aesthetics, analog circulation) enacts a kind of privacy-by-design, resisting digital traceability and adversarial visibility.

When threats of legal prosecution for abortion span interpersonal betrayal, third-party subpoenas, exposure of healthcare records, and even device seizure—compounded by the risk of harassment or violence outside clinics—there is rarely a singular or sufficient digital privacy strategy. In such contexts, zines do more than convey information: they cultivate trust, model situated decision-making, and translate privacy into narrative form.

Zines thus expand HCI's understanding of privacy, design, and resistance by illustrating how analog media can flourish where digital solutions are inadequate, unsafe, or inaccessible. They offer an alternative design paradigm—embodied, relational, and grounded in care—that is critical for navigating complex reproductive threat landscapes where traditional privacy frameworks and interventions may fall short.

In the sections that follow, we trace how zines construct and circulate reproductive knowledge across several interrelated domains. Section 4.2 examines how zines frame reproductive autonomy and institutional navigation, demonstrating how they guide readers through clinical encounters, selective engagement with medical systems and institutions, and elevate alternative epistemologies. Section 4.3 turns to how zines situate abortion within broader struggles of identity, place, and political resistance, highlighting intersectional barriers to care and calls for collective action. Section 4.4 turns to zine aesthetics of resistance, analyzing how visual form, collage, and ultimately materiality communicate dissent and create embodied legitimacy. Section 4.5 looks at how zines rely on lived experiences in ways that afford epistemic authority using personal stories to blend instruction, with first-person narrative. Finally, Section 4.6 considers that zines approach privacy mostly as physical and interpersonal security rather than digital risk.

4.2 Reproductive autonomy as clinical, institutional, and epistemic practice

In this section, we show how zines enact reproductive autonomy and privacy in three ways: (1) orienting readers to abortion within the medical system (Section 4.2.1), (2) modeling tactics for navigating institutions both necessary and unsafe (Section 4.2.2), and (3) elevating alternative epistemologies that contest biomedical authority (Section 4.2.3). Through these practices, abortion knowledge circulates through offline, non-institutional channels that blend clinical advice, home remedies, personal testimony, and political critique. Autonomy is framed not merely as access to services, but as the capacity to make informed, affirmed decisions amid stigma, legal risk, and doubt—offering tools for care alongside discursive space for reflection, empowerment, and reclamation of embodied knowledge.

4.2.1 Abortion and reproductive care within the medical system. Zines orient readers to clinical abortion by coupling procedural clarity with emotional affirmation and post-care support.

Zines describe different forms of abortion and set expectations for in-clinic procedures, such as manual vacuum aspiration (MVA), as well as aftercare. They pair step-by-step explanations of what happens during the procedure with guidance for the days and weeks after—covering topics like bleeding, spotting, and blood clots; timelines for resuming sex or using tampons; and strategies for managing pain (e.g., heating pads, ibuprofen), stress (e.g., yoga), healing (e.g., herbal supplements), and personal comfort (e.g., favorite playlists, time with friends, comforting foods, or relaxing activities). In doing so, these zines blend clinical information with personal, embodied recommendations, creating a narrative space that validates both medical guidance and lived experience.

- **Example: $\mathcal{Z}$64** offers a step-by-step account–e.g., feet in stirrups, speculum in vagina, anesthesia in cervix, insertion of tubes, suctioning, scraping with a curette.[6] It concludes with herbs to boost immunity and reduce clotting.

Alongside practical how-to guidance, zines foreground the emotional and political dimensions of abortion. Abortion-positive coloring books, for example, reassure readers that their reasons for seeking an abortion are valid and self-determined, while others emphasize the deeply personal nature of the decision—even as some narratives acknowledge feelings of deep regret. While all zines are personal to some extent, *perzine* refers to zines centered on the author's own experiences. Perzines were the most common genre in our corpus and when related to abortion, tended to explore feelings of guilt, shame, regret, or ambivalence while affirming the decision.

4.2.2 Strategic navigation of institutions. Zines depict healthcare institutions as simultaneously threatening and indispensable, offering scripts and tactics for critical, selective engagement.

Authors name alienation, dismissal, and abuse, but also provide pragmatic tools for navigating care—advocating for oneself, supporting others, and filing complaints—rejecting binaries of blind trust or total refusal.

- **Example: $\mathcal{Z}$1** includes a complaint template for poor gynecological care (e.g., dismissive or unsterile practices) while acknowledging a sense of powerlessness.

Zines also push back on pathologizing accounts of the body, serving as a counter narrative to institutional knowledge:

- **Example: $\mathcal{Z}$118** normalizes attributes like tipped uteruses, vagina shapes, pain during sex, endometriosis, fibroids, despite some "Western physicians" labeling them abnormal.

In doing so, zines surface non-normative bodily narratives—a theme we return to in Section 4.3 when examining how identity and embodiment intersect with reproductive knowledge.

Taken together, these texts model an ethics of care under constraint: preparing for harm while keeping open the possibility of care through scripts, survival tactics, and emotional preparation that protect agency within flawed systems.

[6] We cannot attest to the medical accuracy of this description. Instead, we are merely documenting the types of detail given.

4.2.3 Epistemic alternatives as practices of resistance. Zines contest biomedical authority by elevating embodied knowledge, herbal practices, and grassroots infrastructures—empowering, but sometimes epistemically precarious.

Some zines explicitly critique mainstream medicine (e.g., contraception, off-label practices), elevating folk remedies and alternative frameworks. Crucially, they blur "instruction" and "account": rather than directives, they present historical ("this has been done") or personal ("I have done this") narratives that convey possibility without prescribing action.

As illustrated in Figure 3, zines describe how to prepare herbs (e.g., steeping in boiling water), how often to consume them, how to administer them (e.g., by mouth, into cervix) and include cautions about potential reactions or interactions with other medications.[7] While zines may list specific herbs, we have refrained from reproducing explicit references that are not medically proven. They also move seamlessly between herbal remedies and at-home medical care.

- **Example (embodied alternatives):** $\mathcal{Z}$**147** discusses seeking and sharing herbal abortion knowledge and ultimately a home "menstrual extraction" using tubes and a syringe.

Zines also interrogate pharmaceutical and regulatory landscapes, critiquing birth control pills, menstrual products—such as tampons containing bleach and other "toxic" chemicals—as well as restrictions on intrauterine device insertion and age-based consent requirements.

- **Example (alternative contraception advocacy):** $\mathcal{Z}$**48** critiques the lack of FDA approval for the morning-after pill at the time, highlights a grassroots emergency-contraception hotline, and ends with a call to action urging OB/GYN participation and donations.

Some claims oversimplify complex evidence (e.g., oral contraceptives "cause cancer," tampons are inherently harmful). While reflecting legitimate mistrust rooted in clinical harm, such statements can obscure nuances (e.g., differential cancer risks and non-contraceptive benefits of hormonal methods [53]). Similarly, non-pharmaceutical contraception (e.g., fertility awareness, herbal alternatives) is framed within bodily autonomy yet not always accompanied by discussion of efficacy or secondary benefits.

In sum, through clinical orientation, institutional navigation, and epistemic contestation, zines enact autonomy as situated practice: they equip readers to interpret bodies and systems, make consequential choices, and sustain agency when formal infrastructures are limited, coercive, or absent.

4.3 Identity, place, and political resistance

Zines in our corpus framed reproductive justice as inseparable from broader systems of oppression—foregrounding how race, class, gender, age, ability, and geography intersect to shape not only the kinds of access people had, but also the forms of resistance that felt necessary or possible. This section traces how zines addressed both structural barriers to reproductive care and the political urgency of reclaiming autonomy in the face of legal, medical, and institutional neglect.

Rather than treating abortion as a standalone issue, these zines situated it within a longer history of marginalization, criminalization, and resistance—particularly for communities historically excluded from mainstream feminist and legal protections. In doing so, they showed how intersecting identities and places shaped the information, strategies, and solidarities people needed to navigate reproductive health.

4.3.1 Identity as a lens for mapping oppression and solidarity. Zines used identity as an organizing lens to map how race, class, gender, age, and disability produce patterned barriers to reproductive care and shape the solidarities people rely on to navigate those barriers. For instance, they recounted the historical and ongoing biases faced by Black women within reproductive health systems. Some critiques are framed within critiques of the feminist movement itself. They emphasized the importance of abortion access not only as a matter of personal choice, but also in cases of rape, incest, or financial hardship which disproportionately affects certain groups.

Sometimes, complex stories of care, misdirection, and doubt in the medical system were interwoven with reflections on identity, set against a broader backdrop of systemic oppression—such as the death of Sandra Bland[8] and other events that exemplify the entanglement of race, gender, and institutional neglect. Some of these connections were not framed as explicit parallels, but rather seemed to emerge as a stream of consciousness—as if the zine authors were processing a flood of thoughts shaped by identity and experience.

- **Example (mapping barriers across marginalized communities):** $\mathcal{Z}$**203** identifies various marginalized populations—including LGBTQ+ individuals, undocumented immigrants, people with disabilities, and people of color—and describes the access, social, and cultural barriers they face. It also provides statistics related to abortion in these communities, outlines legal access and types of abortion procedures, and includes comparative information and other relevant data.

The legal and structural implications of these reflections are significant, as we elaborate below.

4.3.2 Place-based navigation as a strategy for access. Zines also situated reproductive access within geographic and economic constraints, offering advice tailored to location-specific barriers and providing resources such as hospital addresses, hotlines, and websites for finding abortion pills or trustworthy clinics locally or in other states. They highlighted how access was stratified by immigration status, income, disability, rural versus urban location, and even incarceration. To support these readers, zines included guidance on enrolling in Medicaid, particularly for low-income individuals, those under 21, and undocumented immigrants. In that way, zines mobilized place—specific geographies as a way to help people navigate reproductive care.

[7] We do not make claims regarding the medical accuracy of this description. Instead, we are merely documenting the types of detail given.

[8] Sandra Bland was a 28-year-old Black woman who died in a Texas jail in 2015, three days after being arrested during a traffic stop. Her death was ruled a suicide and sparked national outrage. It was a focal point in the Black Lives Matter movement, raising urgent questions about racial profiling, police brutality, and the criminalization of Black women [123].

- **Example (navigating care through clinical research):** $\mathcal{Z}$**108** offers advice for low-income women in their area with no health insurance on how to get inexpensive birth control and pap smears through participation in clinical research, providing the name and URL of two local clinics, as well as the name, address, and phone number for local aid for domestic and sexual violence.

At times, zines focus on how geographic location created access barriers, often in combination with other intersecting forms of marginalization.

- **Example (intersecting barriers and DIY abortion methods):** $\mathcal{Z}$**147** highlights how lack of access is compounded by multiple intersecting barriers: the nearest clinic is over 100 miles away, translators are not available for non-English speakers, costs are prohibitive, clinics are sites of intimidation, and there is a shortage of providers. In response, the author describes seeking out and sharing knowledge about herbal abortions, ultimately turning to a home-based "menstrual extraction"—a method involving tubes and a syringe used to suction the embryo.

4.3.3 Political resistance as collective defense. Zines treated political resistance as a collective defense strategy, urging readers to understand historical and ongoing legal threats, anticipate changes to the law, and take action through protest, education, mutual aid, or voting. They included accounts of past abortion legislation, access struggles, and legal rollbacks, warning that rights can be easily lost and that the Supreme Court should not be relied upon. Indeed, some zines emphasized the extralegal nature of abortion, communicating that legislation or constitutional shifts would not eliminate the practice—whether legal or not [79]. One zine depicted a protester with a poster stating that making abortions illegal will not prevent abortions, but instead will lead to more deaths as a result of illegal and unsafe abortions.

Zines also addressed the criminalization of pregnancy, highlighting cases where people were prosecuted for substance use, accidents, or even abuse experienced during pregnancy. Often rooted in feminist activism, they framed abortion as part of the broader struggle for bodily autonomy and women's liberation.

- **Example (fighting covert attempts to place abortion restrictions):** $\mathcal{Z}$**204** accuses their state legislature of leveraging COVID-19 restrictions as a pretext for rolling back abortion rights, a strategy of incremental abortion restrictions scholars have acknowledged [135].

In addition to legal and historical framing, zines called readers to action through protest, education, community organizing, or, in some cases, voting—to defend and expand reproductive freedoms. These zines sometimes made appeals to readers to assert their bodily autonomy, framing this agency as a justification for acts of protests as well as acts of resistance in their own lives—e.g., calls for abstaining from sex as a way to reject oppression.

- **Example (historical memory and political struggle):** $\mathcal{Z}$**63** recounts pre-Roe history, including an underground abortion referral service that began in Chicago. It also provides detailed descriptions and hand-drawn illustrations of self-managed abortion practices and instruments akin to examples shown in Figure 3a. While it can perhaps be read as medically instructive—or as a tool for rehearsal—it primarily conveys a political message that to know women's history is to know how to take up the struggle.

These zines implored people to take action and not hope that government officials or legal institutions would continue to resist incursions on abortion freedoms. Sometimes they presciently warned that Roe could not be taken for granted as settled law.

4.4 Aesthetic practices of resistance

Zines resist dominant forms of discourse not only through what they say, but through aesthetic practices. Their aesthetic strategies—handwriting, collage, invented spelling, clashing imagery, and typographic disruption—function as forms of feminist expression, epistemic refusal, and affective communication. In this section, we analyze how zine creators use visual and textual form to communicate dissent, reclaim stigmatized language, and construct embodied, emotionally resonant forms of reproductive knowledge.

4.4.1 Visual tactics and techniques of resistance. Zine authors communicate meaning and resist dominant discourse through their use of content, visual, and textual form. These include handwriting, chaotic imagery, clippings, collage, invented spelling, and visual play with anatomy—tools often used as modes of political and epistemic resistance.

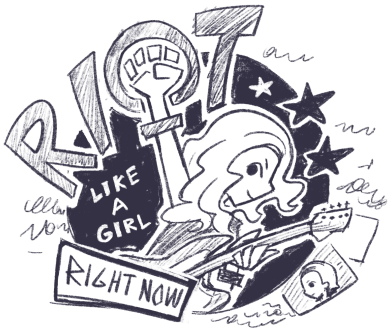
Zines that focused on historical or activist narratives sometimes incorporate archival imagery, timelines, or scenes from feminist history, including protests, that have the effect of situating contemporary struggles within a broader lineage of reproductive rights activism. Riot Grrrl[9] (example in Figure 1a) aesthetics, such as DIY visuals, girlhood imagery, punk rock, and grunge influences, often convey a raw, rebellious style that sometimes signal a feminist political stance and shared sense of collective identity.

Messages of activism and freedom were frequently expressed through eclectic, esoteric collages (akin to Figure 1b and Figure 1c)—both across zines and within individual issues. These included images of protests, Indigenous women depicted in hardship, and ironic religious iconography. At times, images were cut and rearranged to evoke metaphorical commentary on emotional experiences.

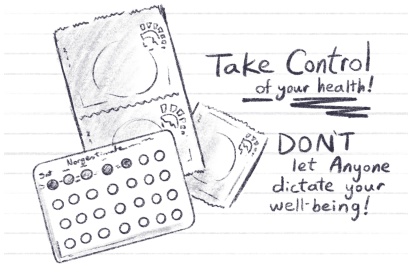
4.4.2 Reclaiming language and imagery. Beyond formal techniques, zines also resist dominant discourse by reclaiming and reframing language and imagery that have historically been stigmatized or weaponized against marginalized bodies. This strategy involves turning derogatory terms, sexualized visuals (e.g., depictions of breasts, muscular men, sex positions, masturbation), and gendered symbols into tools of empowerment, education, and confrontation through sketch and collage. Through irony, exaggeration, and aesthetic boldness, zines transform what might otherwise shame or silence into material for feminist critique and collective identity.

- **Example (reclaiming stigmatized language and imagery):** $\mathcal{Z}$**10** exemplifies how zines can reclaim and reframe stigmatized language and imagery to foster education, confrontation, and celebration. By unapologetically using a historically

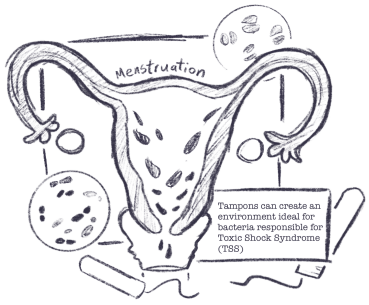
[9] A feminist movement that began in 1990s punk subculture [35, 44]



(a) An example of Riot Grrrl aesthetics.



(b) An example of handwriting and clippings in the form of scanned condoms and birth control medication employed in a zine page.



(c) An example of an anatomical drawing combined with imagery from different sources; in this case, with photos of tampons and microscope slide stains cut and pasted from elsewhere.

Figure 1: Examples of aesthetics, formats, and illustration styles commonly found in zines within our sample. These images, as well as all following images in this paper, were created by one of the researchers based on synthesis across multiple zines, and do not represent any one specific zine in our sample. As discussed in Section 3.3, we opt not to include direct scans of zines in order to respect zine-makers' privacy.

derogatory term as its title, the zine refuses respectability politics and instead centers the vagina as a site of beauty, power, and discovery. It juxtaposes anatomical drawings, pornographic visuals, and floral metaphors to challenge shame and silence surrounding female genitalia. In doing so, it reclaims both scientific and erotic visual languages for feminist purposes, inviting readers to learn, reflect, and confront their own internalized discomfort. This aesthetic and rhetorical boldness positions the zine as not only a tool of education but a political gesture.

Zines often include deeply personal narratives and are visually eclectic, featuring a wide range of sketches, photos, clippings, and collaged images. Some include playful or provocative visuals—such as breasts, nude women, pictures of sex toys and dildos, or muscular men in Speedos—critiquing or mocking cisgender stereotypes. Across zines, sketches of reproductive organs and vaginas are common.

- **Example (aesthetics of covert resistance):** $\mathcal{Z}$**8** and $\mathcal{Z}$**9** show how visual and textual form can operate as a mode of feminist resistance. Their collage-based design is fragmented and chaotic, layering clippings, handwriting, and typographic disruption to evoke both emotional intensity and epistemic refusal. Feminine-coded imagery—pin-up figures, cosmetics—is redeployed with irony (similar to Figure 2a), critiquing the systems that demand gendered performance while simultaneously weaponizing those tools.

Some zines also adopt espionage themes that invoke secrecy, camouflage, and resistance, suggesting that navigating gendered and medical institutions may require forms of covert dissent. Zines also playfully mock sexist vintage advertisements with scribble and critical metatext, akin to Figure 2b.

Through subversive visuals—juxtaposing taboo images, including feminist depictions of female bodies, reclaimed sexualized imagery of women from the male gaze, and portrayals of men, alongside empowering and sometimes militant reappropriations of patriarchal themes (e.g., espionage, guns), as well as more educational depictions of diverse vulva and labia—these zines educate, empower, and help normalize a wide range of female bodies.

4.4.3 Medical and healer-coded aesthetics. Some of the zines that offer guidance about medical or in-clinic care are visually restrained and medically oriented. These include anatomical drawings, depictions of medical instruments, and illustrations of herbs used for healing, akin to those in Figure 3b.

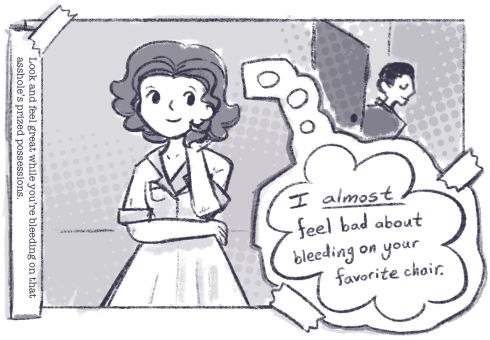
As recreated in Figure 4, some pages are adorned with floral borders, reminiscent of medieval medical manuscripts that evoke ancient knowledge and embodied, "healer"-coded authority. Notably, such imagery can evoke a range of reproductive, feminist, and resistance-oriented associations. Collage is a dominant aesthetic mode: images and text are layered, fragmented, and often askew—whether due to photocopying or intentional design—creating a sense of visual disorientation that reinforces the zines' DIY ethos and resistance to institutional formality.

4.5 Lived experience as epistemic authority

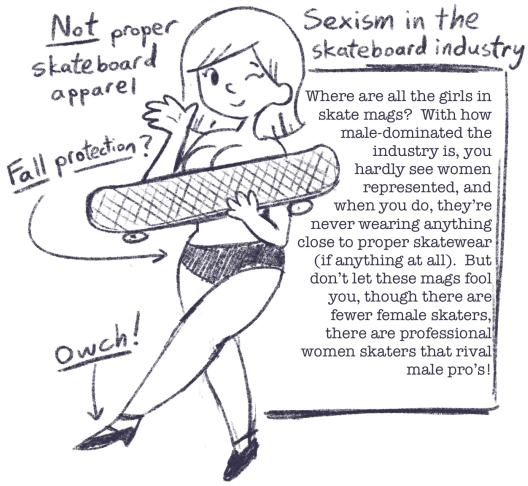
Zines positioned lived experience as a primary source of reproductive knowledge. In this section, we show how personal stories—told in the first or third person—function as epistemic strategies, blending instruction, critique, and emotional release.

Most powerful were narratives that lent emotional weight and conveyed care strategies, often combining practical guidance with self-reflection.

- **Example (practical + personal):** $\mathcal{Z}$**12** combines a personal account of menstrual cup use with practical advice

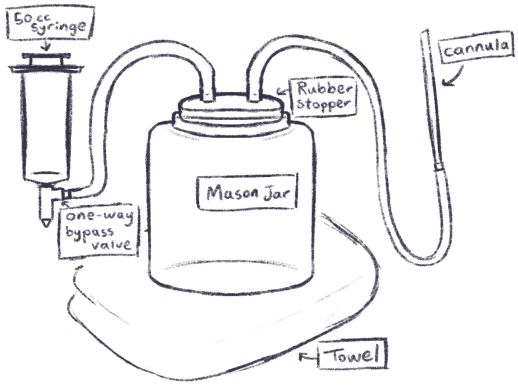


(a) An example of a vintage photograph with commentary.

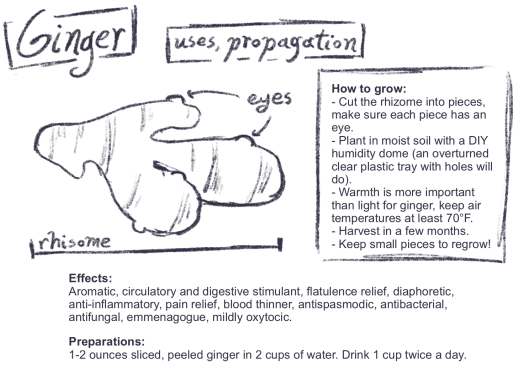


(b) An example of a sexist advertisement repurposed as critique.

Figure 2: Examples of vintage advertisements and photographs with commentary and spins added by zine authors (recreated by a researcher).



(a) An example of a hand-drawn diagram of tools used for menstrual extraction. We do not make claims regarding the medical validity of menstrual extraction as an abortion method.



(b) An example of hand drawn herbs displayed for medicinal recipes. We do not make claims regarding the medical benefits of ginger or any other herb in relationship to pregnancy or abortion pain.

Figure 3: Examples of medical- and healer-coded aesthetics used in zines (recreated by a researcher).

about getting comfortable with your vagina, normalizing trial-and-error as a legitimate form of learning, and touting the benefits for your body (e.g., avoiding the pain of using a dry tampon) and for the environment (e.g., reducing waste from disposable products).

- **Example (composite perspective):** $\mathcal{Z}$**5** blends a doula's reflections, including experience of sexual assault and talks about feminism with her dad, with client birth stories—accounts of violence and hope that lent credibility to the zine.
- **Example (narrative + tool):** $\mathcal{Z}$**8** explores body shame, rape, and queer identity while including a worksheet for personal goals such as acceptance of one's "natural" body.

What distinguishes these narratives is not just their content but their stance: authors emphasized that experiences were partial and situated, not prescriptive. This claim of positionality allowed stories to function as both intimate disclosures and dialogic offerings, inviting readers to engage critically rather than passively receive information.

These accounts treat the personal as legitimate knowledge, especially where institutional trust was low or professionalized care was inaccessible. In doing so, zines asserted an alternative epistemology grounded in embodiment, storytelling, and experiential authority.

4.6 Privacy as physical security, rarely digital

Compared to earlier themes that highlighted autonomy, bodily knowledge, or relational dynamics, here we return to many of the same zines but focus on how they came closer to engaging privacy itself—though still not always in explicit terms. In these instances, protection was typically framed through practices of physical security or interpersonal safety, with digital risks only occasionally mentioned.

Figure 4: Example of a hand drawn rendering of floral borders, reminiscent of medieval medical manuscript (recreated by a researcher).

Most zines, written before Roe was overturned in Dobbs, foregrounded threats such as clinic protests, sexual violence, or reproductive coercion. When protection was discussed, it was about shielding the body or concealing one's identity in face-to-face encounters, not about data or apps. In this sense, "privacy" often surfaced only as part of broader concerns with embodied safety rather than as a distinct technical or informational problem. Moreover, because these zines predated today's landscape of ubiquitous digital surveillance, concerns about data privacy are unlikely to appear as discrete or pressing issues.

There are exceptions, however:

- **Example (digital guidance, post-Roe):** $\mathcal{Z}$**203**, a guide for medical students in a safe state produced after Roe, gave information about using privacy-preserving browsers, secondary phone numbers or email addresses, VPNs, and end-to-end encrypted (E2EE) messaging apps to protect people from creating an insecure, broad, and personally linked digital footprint—echoing general purpose privacy advice [111] as well as advice by some advocacy organizations post-Roe.[10] This zine gave privacy advice in concert with instruction about legal privacy rights and medical details of different types of abortion procedures (including instructions on how to take certain medications). In this context, privacy emerges less as a technical configuration than as a struggle for protection from the state.
- **Example (technical steps for privacy):** $\mathcal{Z}$**133** lists a number of technical steps people can take, including using E2EE messaging, VPNs, wearing a mask, sunglasses, and/or hoodie to visit clinics, and notably alternative transportation that does not have a license plate (e.g. bike).

Some zines used advocacy materials for their digital privacy content.

- **Example (advocacy on digital bodies):** $\mathcal{Z}$**115** adapted advocacy materials from a reproductive access organization around protecting digital bodies. It emphasized that data about women's bodies and locations can be tracked by apps.

Zines also explore the role of partners as either supportive or adversarial, which carries implications for interpersonal privacy. When partners are depicted as adversaries, they are imagined as potential reporters to authorities over suspected or known abortions. Relatedly, some zines collapsed harassment and sexual violence into broader warnings about threats to bodily autonomy. Zines created in collaboration with advocacy organizations tended to portray partners as supportive, whereas personal zines often depicted partners as coercive or absent.

- **Example (supportive):** $\mathcal{Z}$**160**, written in collaboration with a reproductive access organization, depicts a supportive partner accompanying them to their abortion.
- **Example (coercive):** $\mathcal{Z}$**200** is a personal story of being pressured by a boyfriend into having an abortion because they lacked money, and carrying the pregnancy to term would have required dropping out of college.

As noted earlier, zines often approached privacy indirectly through logics of prevention and body awareness. Guidance on avoiding pregnancy or managing abortion at home without medical intervention implied strategies for remaining outside the gaze of institutions. For example, instructions for abortion pill use functioned as privacy practices by reducing reliance on emergency room visits, which have historically triggered legal scrutiny and even criminal charges in restrictive states [31]. Even when zines engaged privacy more explicitly, it was most often framed in terms of bodily safety rather than surveillance or digital traces.

5 Discussion: Designing reproductive health privacy zines post-Roe

This section reflects on what the zines in our corpus can (and cannot) contribute to contemporary reproductive privacy, and translates those insights into design considerations for a post-Roe landscape. We argue that while zines are not sufficient as standalone guides to abortion access, they model crucial qualities—*embodied legitimacy*, institutional skepticism, and aesthetic intimacy—that can inform the design and circulation of future reproductive health privacy resources.[11]

Our findings show how zines already practice a form of situated threat modeling, surfacing adversaries (e.g., partners who may be untrustworthy, providers who may dismiss or endanger care, institutions that may document sensitive encounters), articulating contextual vulnerabilities (e.g., creating medical records), and offering relational and embodied strategies for minimizing exposure (e.g., scripting clinical conversations, avoiding institutional encounters, or relying on trusted networks or home practices for information and care). These strategies also include forms of

[10] Here and throughout, we do not list resources by name, as our goal is not to give guidance in this paper because privacy needs and technologies change over time, and so guidance may become outdated.

[11] By embodied legitimacy, we mean the physicality of zines—which are safer in that they are not exposed to online surveillance infrastructures—and the meaning-making practices they enable. This aligns with Dourish's account of embodiment in HCI as situated and socially meaningful action rather than abstract information processing [41]. Relatedly, feminist media scholars (e.g., [44]) have emphasized how zines' material form produces credibility and intimacy precisely through their limited circulation and handcrafted aesthetics. We also use embodied here to highlight how zines engage readers through the body: their guidance, instruction, and sense-making operate via tactile, aesthetic, and affective forms of bodily meaning-making.

ephemeral privacy—for instance, being offline, circulating outside digital infrastructures, or deliberately obfuscating exact sources while crafting a narrative arc that is nonetheless privacy-ready. Yet these revelations occur across narratives, aesthetics, and accounts of care rather than being consolidated into explicit, "checklist"-style privacy guidance. In Section 5.2, we draw these threads together to propose narrative threat modeling.

We organize our discussion in three parts. First, in Section 5.1, we diagnose limitations of dominant privacy advice in post-Roe discourse, which tends to reduce reproductive risk to app settings or digital hygiene. Second, in Section 5.2, we introduce *narrative threat modeling* as a way to leverage zine practices into privacy guidance that foregrounds lived experience, bodily risk, and relational care. Finally, in Section 5.3, we identify attributes of zines that make them ideal for narrative threat modeling and identify implications for advocacy groups, educators, and care providers who might commission, co-create, or distribute zines as part of broader reproductive justice initiatives.

5.1 Limitations of traditional privacy advice

Offering meaningful privacy guidance in the context of reproductive care is uniquely difficult because threats to reproductive privacy are urgent, amorphous, and deeply embodied, often emerging from intimate relationships, medical unpredictability, institutional infrastructures, and shifting legal contexts simultaneously.

Mainstream media and scholarly work have overwhelmingly focused privacy guidance on period tracking apps, which appear to signal broader conversations about digital surveillance. It is likely that they are embraced because they are concrete, emotionally charged, and easy to grasp, making them headline-friendly even when they represent very little, if any, of the actual threat landscape; the risk isn't in these apps.

However, as discussed in Section 2.1, threats to reproductive autonomy and privacy are situated, embodied, relational, and shifting. Interpersonal threat vectors are compounded by the forensic nature of digital life. Browser histories, location data, purchase records, license plates, and text messages form a narrative that can be weaponized by law enforcement. While individual use of privacy tools and settings can offer piecemeal protection, the threat landscape is too expansive and personal for individual action to adequately protect people. For example, E2EE communication prevents app providers from seeing and therefore turning over messages. They do not, however, protect against phone seizures without other measures like disappearing messages or privacy settings that hide or lock certain chats or apps (which are unusable for casual users and place burden on users [10]) or warrants that allow law enforcement to access phone data via the physical device. Additionally, in some contexts, simply having an E2EE app may be suspicious [9].

Zines offer an opportunity to tie together threats through narrative threads. In this next section, we describe our concept of narrative threat modeling and then follow with design implications that are rooted in our findings.

5.2 Narrative threat modeling as a tool for navigating the post-Roe landscape

Navigating the intersecting risks of legal precarity, digital traceability, and interpersonal surveillance is not simply a matter of legal or digital literacy—it is, fundamentally, a matter of storytelling. In the post-Roe landscape, people facing pregnancy-related risks must weigh digital exposures alongside emotional loyalties, institutional policies, and medical uncertainty. Perfect privacy and security do not exist, so harm reduction, realism, and technical and situational empowerment are critical. Purely technical advice falls short; what people need are narratives that help them imagine their own circumstances and anticipate the threats that matter most.

This is where zines matter. We call this *narrative threat modeling*: an approach that treats privacy not as a technical end-state, but as an ongoing, situated negotiation of survival that must adapt to urgent contextual shifts, including bodily changes. Our notion builds on participatory threat modeling [126], which reframes threat modeling as a situated, collaborative practice grounded in lived experience, but extends it by emphasizing storytelling as a mechanism for sense-making and strategy-building.

While zines surface interpersonal, institutional, and embodied risks with vivid, idiosyncratic detail, they discuss digital privacy far less explicitly. This absence should not be read as a lack of awareness. Although many of the zines in our corpus were created before 2010, their authors still wrote from within a political economy of reproductive surveillance—one that has only intensified as data brokers and platform logics increasingly shape what information feels actionable, imaginable, or even safe to articulate. In this sense, narrative threat modeling must be situated within the material infrastructures that constrain narrative agency, revealing how people prioritize relational and embodied risks in environments where digital surveillance is both pervasive and opaque. Notably, the very fact that zines can circulate through non-digital channels is itself a form of epistemic resistance, allowing reproductive knowledge to move outside the datafied infrastructures that govern so much contemporary communication.

Our findings demonstrate that zines already practice a form of situated threat modeling that, through storytelling, surface adversaries, articulate contextual vulnerabilities and risks, and offer relational and embodied strategies for minimizing exposure. These practices are dispersed across narratives, aesthetics, and accounts of care rather than consolidated into explicit privacy guidance. Their situatedness and their presentation as a personal narrative and self-styled theory is helpful to show the importance of this process. We draw these threads together to propose narrative threat modeling as a conceptual and design framework that captures how readers make sense of reproductive risk through story, affect, and embodied knowledge.

Our concept of narrative threat modeling builds directly on feminist reproductive justice and participatory threat-modeling work which seeks to highlight the marginalized and intersectional voice in a more holistic way. Whereas Slupska et al.'s [126] threat modeling foregrounds community-centered identification of harms emerging from lived experience, our analysis shows that zines already enact this work through narrative, aesthetic form, and embodied

storytelling. Zines model threat identification not through structured elicitation but through situated accounts of institutional distrust, interpersonal coercion, and contextually specific reproductive risk. This analog, narrative mode of modeling threats aligns with feminist HCI's commitments to relational, situated, and embodied understandings of technology [11], while extending participatory threat modeling beyond digital-security contexts and into everyday practices of navigating reproductive precarity.

Narrative threat modeling treats story—rather than structured workshops or elicitation—as the primary vehicle through which people come to understand, anticipate, and rehearse privacy decisions that are relevant to them. It also emphasizes adversaries and vulnerabilities that dominate the post-Roe landscape, be they relational, institutional, or bodily. Narrative threat modeling is not a replacement for participatory methods so much as an analytic lens that explains how zines already enable readers to conduct threat assessment through narratives, aesthetics, and testimonials.

Zines make this orientation tangible. They tell stories about trust, harm, and survival—how data can be interpreted in court, how subtle cues can trigger suspicion, and how choices ripple through relational networks. They illustrate not only what to avoid, but how to recognize red flags, script safer interactions, and make informed compromises in high-stakes moments. Their power lies in being largely non-prescriptive: rather than dictating digital behaviors, they invite readers to imagine and adapt privacy strategies to their own lived realities.

While individual technical strategies may be actionable, they are often overwhelming, contradictory, or insufficient without the narrative grounding that zines provide. We argue that threat modeling can have parameters—an understanding of the limits of HIPAA, state restrictions, case law, data flows, and relational risk—but that these parameters should ultimately help people tell their own stories and build strategies responsive to their specific contexts.

For example, a person at high risk for an ectopic pregnancy may include advance planning for emergency care and awareness of HIPAA limitations in their threat model, while someone living in a criminalizing state may incorporate strategies such as discreetly and safely obtaining medication abortion or using trusted intermediaries for support. Each story is different, and zines and zine-making help surface those differences in ways that technical lists alone cannot.

Of course, preventative strategies such as avoiding devices, limiting disclosure, or preemptively deleting content are difficult to enact and may not be possible for everyone. People experiencing ectopic pregnancies, fetal anomalies, or miscarriage may face life-threatening situations where time is short and secrecy impossible. In these cases, no amount of privacy advice can mitigate the systemic injustice of delayed or denied care. Even here, zines can help by sharing real experiences, exposing institutional logics, and preparing people to recognize and respond to risks as they unfold. Ultimately, this orientation resonates with prior work that reimagines threat modeling as a lived, relational, and emotionally charged practice, particularly in healthcare contexts [86]. Reproductive threat modeling begins in conditions of legal ambiguity and personal precarity. Reproductive healthcare privacy zines embed threat models into stories, acknowledge relational vulnerability, and offer guidance that is emotionally, socially, and legally attuned. The goal is not perfect security, or even prescriptive technical strategies, but realistic, situated practices that allow people to manage risk. This raises important questions about how zines achieve these effects—through voice, content, format, tone, authorship, and aesthetic choices.

5.3 Zines as tools for narrative threat modeling: Design implications for zines and beyond

In this section, we examine the specific qualities of zines that make them effective tools for narrative threat modeling, based on our study of 212 zines, and explore how they might be further leveraged to support people navigating reproductive risk. We provide design implications specifically for advocacy groups, educators, and care providers who might commission, co-create, or distribute information—including through zines—as part of broader reproductive justice initiatives. They offer guidance that can be interpreted more broadly by the CHI community, including for designers of other (potentially digital) artifacts that similarly aim to surface the situated vulnerabilities and narrative forms of sense-making that zines offer. However, we note that digital systems and artifacts are at odds with some of the key properties that may make zines so *powerful* as privacy tools, particularly in this space of expansive, ever-changing, and unpredictable legal landscapes: they are analog, not distributed widely, deeply personal and intimate, and can be hyper-local and identity-based.

To address the politics of circulation that have historically shaped who zines reach, we call for expanding the circulation of zines beyond traditional activist or college contexts, including their deliberate use by healthcare providers to reach more diverse audiences.

5.3.1 Privacy beyond prescription. The vast majority of zines in our corpus were created before the overturning of Roe. We speculate that in the post-Roe era, zines might include more explicit references to abortion restrictions across states and strategies for protecting one's privacy—especially digital privacy. Yet, the strength of zines lies not in offering prescriptive advice, but in their capacity to model privacy through narrative. Zines often embed implicit threat models in stories grounded in lived experience and emotional reality.

Importantly, privacy is not only addressed at the level of content—it is also enacted through zines' material practices. Some zines freely share URLs, contact information, or clinic lists; others imply discretion through tone, visual design, or omission of traceable details. The medium itself affords a kind of ambient protection: unlike websites or social media posts, zines are difficult to index, scrape, or algorithmically surface. Their analog, informal, and often handmade qualities provide privacy by design. This makes them particularly well-suited to environments of reproductive criminalization, where discretion, trust, and material control are essential.

Design implication: In a landscape marked by shifting laws, uneven enforcement, and expanding surveillance, privacy cannot be reduced to fixed settings or tools. Zines should not attempt to replicate app guides or legal FAQs. Instead of (or in addition to) listing tools like VPNs or encrypted messengers, they can cultivate flexible, situated practices of narrative threat modeling—helping readers anticipate harm, evaluate context, and make informed decisions under uncertainty. In this framing, privacy is a story one learns to tell about habits, data, tools, people, and institutions that are

both supportive and potentially harmful. While there is a place for technical tools to address reproductive privacy concerns, overemphasizing technical tools risks fostering a false sense of security, just as overemphasizing risk can slip into privacy nihilism [62], leaving people feeling that meaningful action is impossible.

Some of the most prominent reproductive privacy cases—those involving criminalized use of device data [8, 31, 118], medical refusals under vague state laws [36], or arrests over miscarriage disposal [45, 127, 136]—can be reframed not just as isolated events, but as cautionary narratives. Told in accessible, context-rich ways, these stories can guide readers through the emotional, technical, and legal contours of reproductive risk. In this way, zines become vehicles for narrative threat modeling, embedding privacy strategies within stories that resonate, teach, and adapt to the realities of local contexts.

5.3.2 Challenging institutions and epistemic tensions. Zines are often premised on a deep mistrust of institutions, especially those that constrain reproductive autonomy through bureaucratic gatekeeping or denial of care [105]. Across our corpus, zine authors express skepticism toward the legitimacy of legal, medical, and government institutions that define the terms of reproductive access. This mistrust is not monolithic, however. While some zines depict the medical system as negligent or harmful—citing dismissal, coercion, or racist treatment—others present more pragmatic or even appreciative accounts. For instance, **Z3** includes a reflective narrative of miscarriage care that highlights moments of compassion, while **Z1** offers a complaint template as a tool for confronting harm. Other zines document networks of care that include healthcare workers who resist institutional norms by facilitating access to abortion through underground or extralegal means. Zines also frame historical moments of resistance as lessons or visions for the future, warning not to take Roe for granted. Yet, as with social media, the line between alternative expertise and misinformation is not always clear. While some zines offer accurate historical and legal context, others adopt an authoritative tone that can be difficult for readers to evaluate—particularly when it is unclear how information was sourced or how it should be interpreted. For example, a zine might rightly critique FDA delays in approving emergency contraception, but also minimize the legal risks of physicians who decline to prescribe it off-label. Or, zines might provide helpful accounts of clinically-tested medical treatments, but also suggest unproven remedies without caveats. The zine form's strength as an affective and improvisational medium can also pose challenges for navigating the complexities of reproductive risk.

Design implications: Zines can and should acknowledge the institutional betrayals that shape reproductive care experiences—while also recognizing the healthcare providers and systems that act in solidarity with those seeking care. Future reproductive health zines might incorporate navigational tools such as complaint templates, scripts for clinical encounters, or "know your rights" content. Crucially, they must also help audiences recognize disinformation, navigate risk, and assert agency within hostile systems. This means striking a careful balance between information and empowerment, storytelling and strategy, so that readers are not only informed, but prepared.

To that end, we argue that zines could take on a role of helping readers recognize disinformation within hostile systems—for instance, crisis pregnancy centers or misleading content on social media. This could be accomplished by drawing on the same language of self-affirmation used elsewhere, which conveys that abortion is right precisely because it is chosen. We are not suggesting that zines necessarily take on the work of directly countering misinformation, though some might. Rather, we argue that they could help ground readers in organizations that provide trustworthy information, while continuing to affirm people's capacity to find their own path when armed with knowledge.

5.3.3 Aesthetic epistemics: authority and refusal. Zines do more than narrate experiences of reproductive care; they also construct knowledge through visual and textual form. Their aesthetic strategies both confer authority and enact resistance, modeling ways of knowing that defy institutional standards.

Aesthetic authority. Many zines adopt a DIY medical aesthetic, such as hand-drawn diagrams of reproductive organs, illustrations and photos of vintage medical instruments, and annotated herbal recipes that evoke the sensibility of a healer's notebook or medieval herbarium. This visual language borrows from folk medicine and alternative health cultures, establishing a kind of embodied, feminist credibility distinct from institutional expertise. Riot Grrrl-era reference and typography [80], collage, and irreverent humor often surface alongside serious guidance, layering feminist punk ethos with practical instruction. These choices allow zines to assert a distinctive epistemic stance grounded in lived experience, collective memory, and embodied knowledge.

Aesthetic refusal. At the same time, many zines resist dominant norms through purposeful aesthetic subversion. Elements of collage, anatomical play, nudity, stylized or illegible handwriting, and the reclamation of slurs (e.g., **Z10**) confer authority outside institutional standards of decorum and legibility. These gestures do more than signal punk attitude—they challenge normative assumptions about what counts as legitimate knowledge, who gets to speak, and how care is communicated. We interpret aesthetic disobedience as a form of political critique and also as a way to avert attention. It is indeed hard to read these zines, which confers a kind of obscurity.

Design implications: Experimental or "improper" forms can be embraced not as mistakes but as meaningful rhetorical and cultural interventions. Zines may lean into discomfort, informality, distortion, or even offensiveness as strategies that embody rage, grief, or refusal to be easily read. At the same time, integrating clearer navigational tools—maps of legality, clinic availability, or timelines of legal change—could complement this refusal by offering readers practical orientation in moments of crisis. Even if these visuals struggle to keep pace with a rapidly evolving legal landscape, they serve a dual purpose: offering critical orientation in moments of crisis and modeling practices of localized information-seeking that help readers develop epistemic self-defense. Together, these strategies show how aesthetics can be mobilized both to confer embodied legitimacy and to enact epistemic resistance.

There is room for all types of zines; no single zine can, or should, speak to everyone. For some, collage and bold, subversive messages

may feel most compelling, while for others, a clean, typewritten style with anatomical accuracy might be the most trustworthy.

5.4 Conclusions

We set out to explore how reproductive health zines communicate about reproductive privacy. We found that zines—particularly their ability to model advice through narrative rather than prescription, to challenge institutional authority while building epistemic trust, and to leverage aesthetics that combine activism, irreverence, and embodied expertise—offer compelling foundations for narrative threat modeling. By weaving lived experience, emotional resonance, and localized knowledge into their pages, zines help readers recognize risks, anticipate harms, and imagine actionable strategies grounded in their own realities.

We believe that a promising direction is to co-develop zine-inspired materials with those navigating reproductive care and with healthcare professionals, advocates, and educators. Such collaborations can retain the DIY ethos of care, trust, and resistance that defines the zine form, while incorporating timely, context-specific guidance for the rapidly shifting post-Roe landscape.

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A note about the title: A number of zines, books, and articles about zines use "A to Zine" in their title as an alphabetic pun. We gesture to that sensibility here, while also using "A" to carry a second meaning: abortion.

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A Inclusion Criteria Codebook

Inclusion Criteria
Abortion
Abortion history
Bias in healthcare
Birth control
Body autonomy/awareness
Crisis pregnancy centers
Fertility
Menstruation
Pregnancy
Privacy
Sexual health
Rape crisis centers
Reproduction
Reproductive health care clinics (e.g., planned parenthood)
Reproductive-related (health)

Table 1: Our inclusion criteria codebook for the zines in our study. We included overlapping terms as felt appropriate and in the spirit of inclusion.

B Illustrative Code Examples

Categories	Codes	Topics/Sub-Codes
Metadata	Creative/design decisions	Stylistic choices made by author(s) (e.g., art/drawings by hand, collages)
	Vocabulary/spellings	Unique ways to re-write existing words (e.g., grrrl, womyn)
	Authors	How many people were involved in making the zine (if mentioned)
	Year	Time zine was written and/or published (if included)
	Other metadata	Information presented in zine (e.g., references to books, URLs)
Topic	Barriers	Issues with obtaining an abortion (e.g., legal, social, financial)
	Bodily autonomy	Threats to making own decisions (e.g. assault, genital mutilation)
	Healthcare	Medical-related experiences (e.g., anatomy, STD/STIs, reproductive health care clinic)
	History	Significant past events (e.g., abortion court rulings)
	Identity	Information about a person obtaining an abortion (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, marital status)
	Menstruation	Discussions of periods (e.g., menstrual cycle, ovulation, period products)
	Pregnancy	Conditions of someone carrying a child (e.g., unplanned pregnancy, health scare during pregnancy)
	Pregnancy termination	Information and the methods by which an individual aborts (e.g., medical abortion, home abortion)
	Privacy	Strategies employed to protect (e.g., offline privacy, online privacy)
	Religion	Relating abortion to faith (Y/N)
	Sex	Discussions of intercourse (e.g., contraception, safe sex, consent)
Zine Structure/Type	Narrative	Zine point of view (e.g., 1st, 3rd)
	Informative	Provides data, facts, statistics, resources (Y/N)
	Prescriptive	Gives tangible advice (Y/N)

Table 2: Illustrative code examples for the zines in our study.