

Freaks on the Edges: Transness Through Decades of Queercore Zines

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Background

Queercore is a queer-punk subcultural and socio-political multimedia movement that arose in the mid-1980s and expresses itself through radical and DIY zines, music, films, and more. It is underground, decentralized, leaderless, and built largely on the politics of anarcho-queerness and anti-assimilationism.

Zines are small-circulation, self-published pieces of media typically composed of prose, art, collage, and more. They are a primary resource that I believe is frequently underappreciated in queer, trans, and cultural studies, as they provide a window into underground understandings of individuals and identities that larger and mass-produced publications cannot.

Objective

Queercore was first christened "homocore," and oftentimes the "queer" nature of early queercore zines simply did not consider gender as a potential site of non-normativity. I looked back at queercore zines to examine how transness is represented within them.

How do queercore zines reflect the ways that understanding and representation of gender variance was developing from the 1980s through the early 2000s? In what ways does underground self-published media reveal how marginalized people and groups interact with each other, create spaces for themselves, and theorize their own identities? What can we learn about the politics and intricacies of trans representation when it is not driven by profit?

Methodology

I read 4,931 pages over 142 zines authored by dozens of different people and created from 1984 to 2011. Once I determined that a zine was one born from or at least strongly influenced by the queercore scene, I read the entirety of it carefully, looking for any mention of or reference to gender variance and transness. This includes words like drag, transvestite, crossdress(ing)(er), and trans(s)exual, as well as more specific identity words like the slur trann(y)(ie), genderqueer, and non(-)binary, and, when discussed alongside gender variance/presentation/identity, faggot, dyke, and their many variations. I also looked for figures prominent in queercore including Jayne County, Joan Jett Blakk, Vaginal Davis, and Glenda Orgasm.

Representation Timeline

1980s

I'm not a boy or a girl. Maybe something in between. And I'm not

Homocore #2, 1988, T. Jennings

Jell, the fun never stops. The Frogs don't discriminate, slugging prostitutes, transexuals, lesbians - any difference will do. And why not? When you're free, white, and 21, you can afford to take pot-shots at the freaks.

J.D.s #6, 1989, LaBruce & Jones

1990s

Cross dressing is deviant behaviour because it deviates from the norm, and I'm a deviant person-and proud of it!

Fuzz Box, 1990, Jenkins

queens,remember !! queerness is a vast social and class structure,so we should except everyone in,and throw away, the class,monetry,racist,stereotypical shit,that a lot of us have to face,people should start to express they're gender-less fee feeling,in clothes actions,thought,and be open e to others,at one time queerness,mewant that strange or different,dispite the politics,we are different to

Freaky Queer, 1992, Andy G

Mutate #2, 1999, Milo

The story is about Maggie, who works in gay/lesbian bookstore, and how she falls in love, and has to deal with her mother, boss, closet, etc. Along the way, we get to learn about censorship, transexuality, dildos, and how sometimes coming out is the best thing you can do.

2000s

★what's yr political goal as haggard? i don't think we have one goal, but several come to mind. we are pro sex, pro bikes, pro women, pro queer, pro trans, anti capitalist, anti consumerist feminist out dykes.

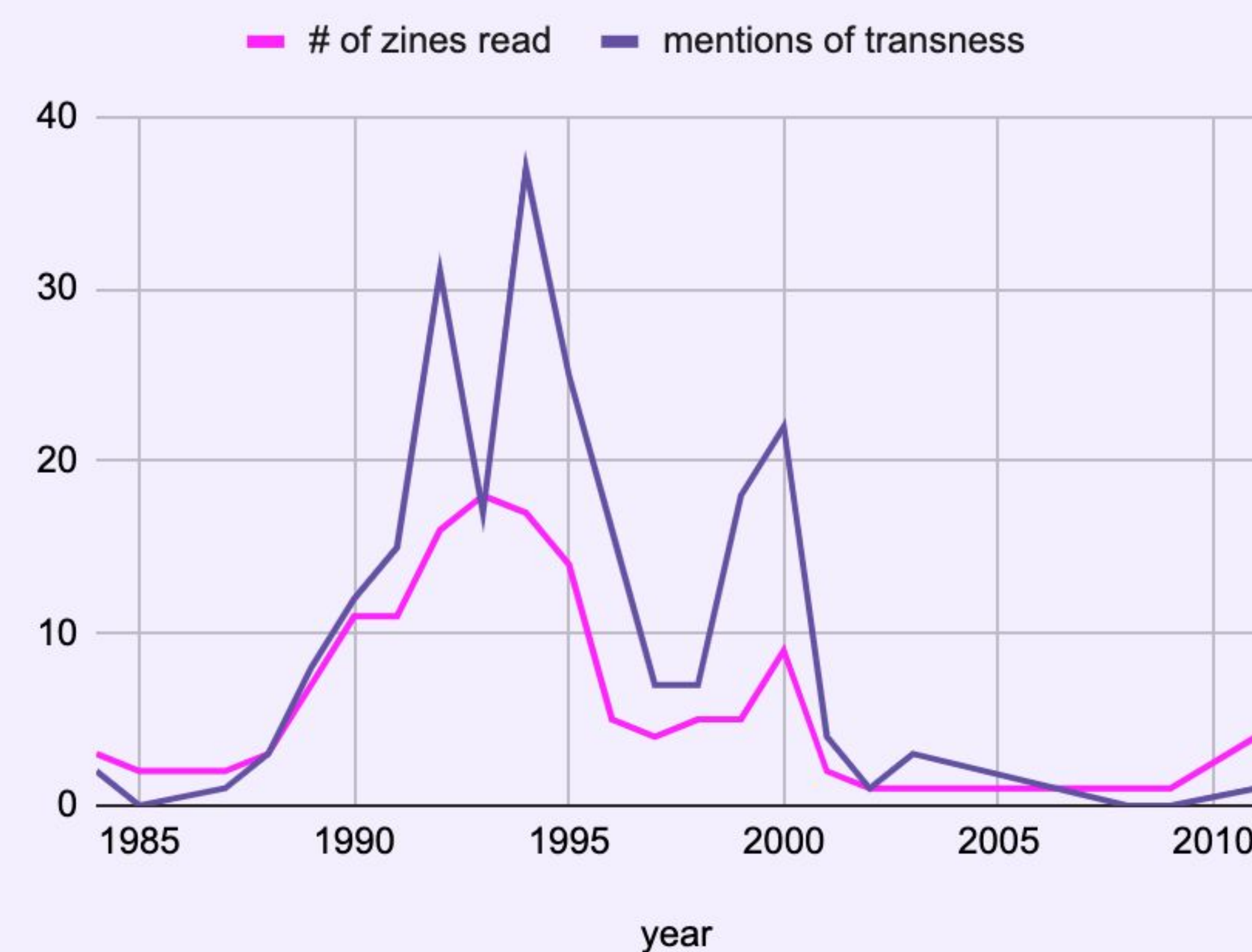
Clit Rocket #2, 2000, Bellistri

How I Learned to Love Myself and Occasionally Other Men, 2003, Dave

Thanks to: Greek Nick, Finnish Nick, Al of Seattle, Jennie Mutation, Kisha (for without, I'd be a total piece of crap) --- and all you sexy, faggy, tough, fabulous, butch, high femme, boydyke, girldick, genderbending queers. We are our own history!

The Present includes plenty of trans-centric zines: *Trans Health Science & You*, Wisconsin Transgender Health Coalition & NONBINARY Zine; *I Think I Might Want to Start Hormones* and *Small Things*, Zine Bean Collective; work by the Mary Nardini Gang, Archie Bongiovanni, S. Mirk, and dozens more!

mentions of gender variance over time

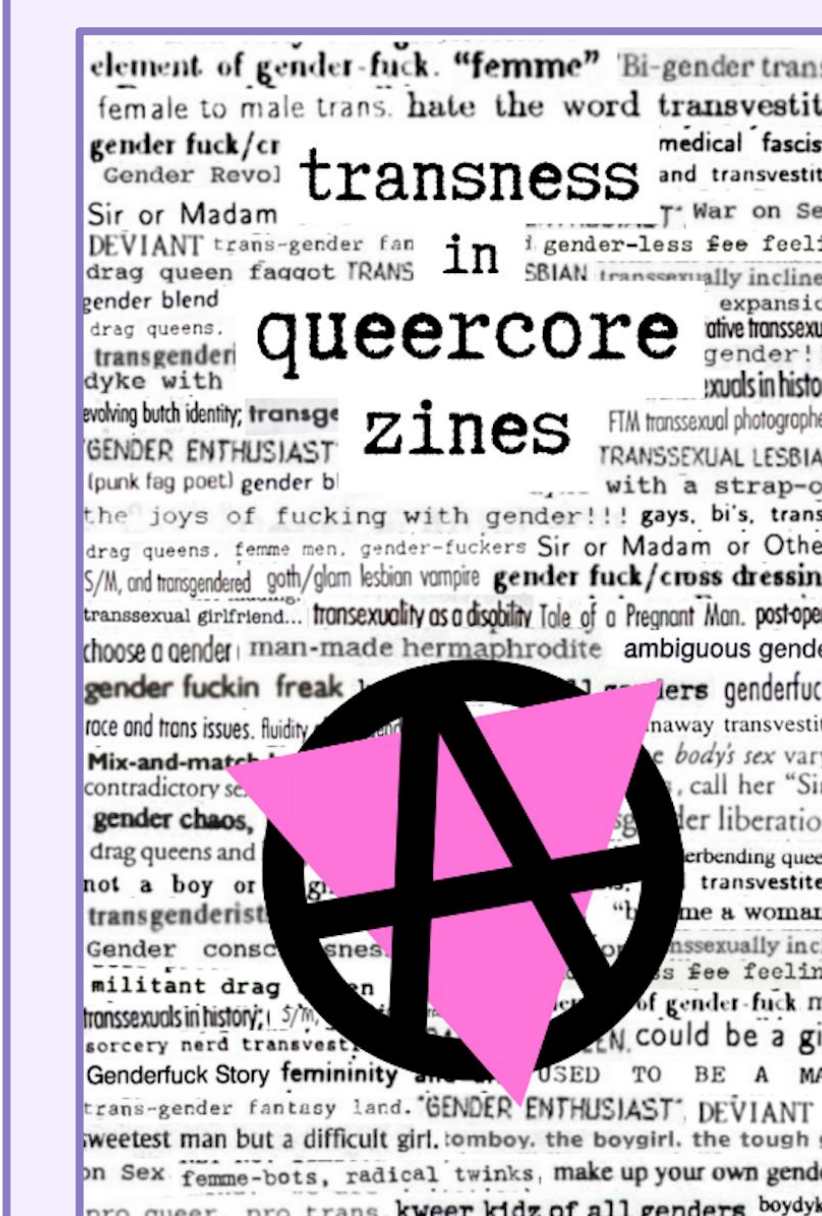


Discussion

Queercore zines have always overlapped with direct action and mutual aid practices. *Holy Titclamps* frequently featured a pen-pal section dedicated to finding pen pals for incarcerated queer people. *Homocore* also often published letters from incarcerated queers looking for connections, and a lot of queer zines (*Fanorama*, *QT*, *Society of Crossdressing Hardware Engineers*, and others) marked themselves as free to prisoners. Similarly, various AIDS-focused zines were "free to the infected." These practices let incarcerated and/or disabled queer folks meaningfully connect with others like them, in the same tradition as the work of queer abolitionist organization Black and Pink today. Contemporary zine culture can feel elusive. Queercore as an idea lives on in the radical actions of many anti-assimilationist queers. Although the explosion of the 90s has passed, queercore zines are still being created and shared, and are oftentimes very deeply entangled with politics of trans liberation.

Conclusions

While the space and the idea of queercore are on their own freeing, I believe queercore zines themselves hold a possibility to continue to be materially beneficial for many marginalized people. Knowing the rich history of queercore zines, the various ways they have been used to support and enact mutual aid practices, and how queercore's anarchist, anti-assimilationist heart can become entangled with zines to create meaningful art and writing, I hope, could help bring more people into the subculture that holds so much potential. The position of queercore as a subculture rather than a community, as a scene imagined and created as a queer method of combating queer/punk alienation, and as a set of ideas intertwined with direct action and mutual aid, is a fertile ground for politics and practice of trans liberation.



You can find my own zine discussing more examples and trends here: <https://linktr.ee/queercorezine>

Thanks to the Queer Zine Archive Project, Duke University's Rubenstein Library, the Gerber/Hart archives, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, & NYU's Fales Library & Special Collections.