

# Nej Men Hej: A Research Travelogue

Accompanying supporting statement document

## Introduction

*Nej Men Hej* is a research travelogue zine I created during my funded placement in Stockholm in March 2022. I applied for the SGSAH SFC Saltire Emerging Researcher fund in order to discover what the UK could learn from research into Stockholm's female-forward creative industries. It was important to me to document the research trip, especially in the wake of travel restrictions during the pandemic. Thus, I wanted to implement a material, physical representation of the human side of the research to sit alongside and complement the research paper and demonstrate why much of the success of the research was due to it being in-person. Though it is meant to complement the more 'professional' research, zines have been used as research methods and are worthy of research themselves. Thus, this zine is a form of research in and of itself that demonstrates the way complex theories were visualised and put together when reflecting on the trip.

It also acts as a creative output demonstrating the value of arts-based action research. There have been several significant findings from the creation of this zine: zine creation allows for self-reflection of research, tactility and physical creation help condense and visualise larger concepts, and adding a personal touch to research makes it more relatable.

## Research questions:

- How can zines be embraced as an interdisciplinary research method and output alongside creative industries and/or games research?
- How do zines' inherent association with feminism and DIY culture affect the creative industries?

## Method:

This research employed the zine method, which according to Biagioli, Owen and Pässilä, "is an emergent framework that expresses as an active process the subjective engagement with complexity and ambiguity in problem solving" (Biagioli et. al 2016, 3). While on my trip, I took notes about what I did and felt each day with the intention of creating a zine when I got back to Scotland. This was an intended output from the trip. I also told my advisor in Sweden, so she helped me find zines in Stockholm's zine library in the *kulturhuset* as well as find materials and generate backgrounds for the zine while I was in Stockholm.

Zines are "non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (Duncombe 1997, 6). Also known as fanzines, zines are considered DIY (do-it-yourself) publications that express "all variety of personal and political narratives" (Peipmeier 2008, 214). Historically, they have been used as a way for marginalised communities to express themselves and disseminate information. However, zines have also been used as a research tool for action researchers (French and Curd 2022; Robinson 2018). Participatory Action Research (PAR) goes against mainstream research approaches that view "dominant positivist

social science research as the only legitimate and valid sources of knowledge” (Maguire 1987, 10). This research aligns with French and Curd’s assertion that zines can be used as PAR because they act as “visionary tools to articulate, rearticulate, imagine and reimagine how things could be done differently” (French and Curd 91). Thus, I argue that zines can and should be embraced as a research methodology for the creative industries, especially games studies.

## Significance

There have been several significant findings from the creation of this zine: zine creation allows for self-reflection of research, tactility and physical creation help condense and visualise larger concepts, and adding a personal touch to research makes it more relatable.

### Zine-method as self-reflection tool

Through the creation of the research zine *Nej Men Hej*, I found that Biagioli’s zine method holds true; zines are a fantastic self-reflection tool and help visualise relationships between previously disconnected elements (2018, 6). As I reflected on my notes, photos and interviews months after generating them, I realised there were connections that were previously unnoticed. For example, while in Stockholm I interviewed a comics creator who showed me a comic anthology called *Kvinnor Ritar Bara Serier om Mens*” (Kartago 2014) which translates to *Women only draw comics about periods*. It was a feminist response to male comics critics who argued that women only drew comics about menstruation after Liv Strömquist’s publication of *Kunskapens frukt* [The fruit of Knowledge] in 2014 which included images like *Isprinsessa* [Ice princess] which depicted an ice skater with visible menstrual bleeding. In the 2014 anthology, women wrote comics about normalising menstruation and why that is not the only thing they write about.

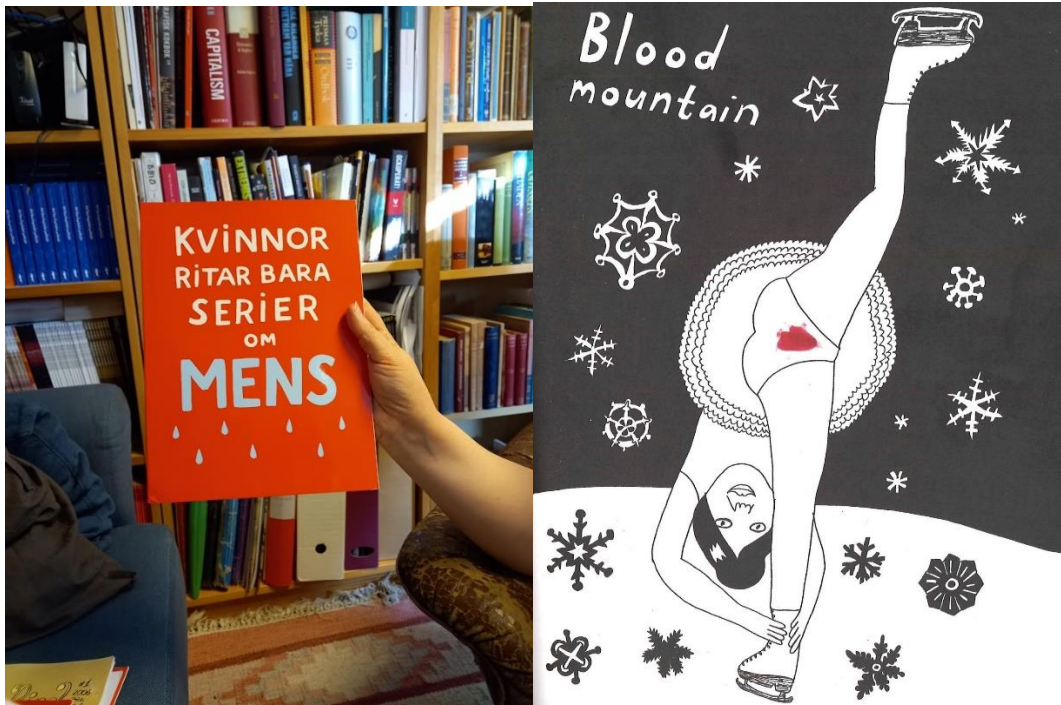


Figure 1 - Photo by Hailey Austin 2022

Figure 2 - Liv Strömquist, 'Blood Mountain', *Kunskapens frukt* (2014), splash page.

I looked through my notes and saw that I wrote about my own menstruation during the trip and how it affected my research. Because of creating the zine, and reflecting on the different aspects of the trip, including feminist zine-making, I included a page about losing a day (and half a life) to menstruation to add to the period discourse in Swedish comics, but to also normalise some people's experiences when doing research. I had created another page, but coloured over it in red. I also had the red seep over to the previous and following pages to demonstrate the effects of menstruation on multiple days of my research trip, which was also something I noted in my journals. Similarly, it fit in with the cultural landscape of Sweden as well as Scotland. In several Swedish games studios, my interviewees noted that period products were freely available and provided in their offices. In 2021, Scotland passed a policy to tackle period poverty through local authorities and education providers' free provision of period products. I wanted to reflect this change toward tackling period poverty and menstruation anxiety in my zine.

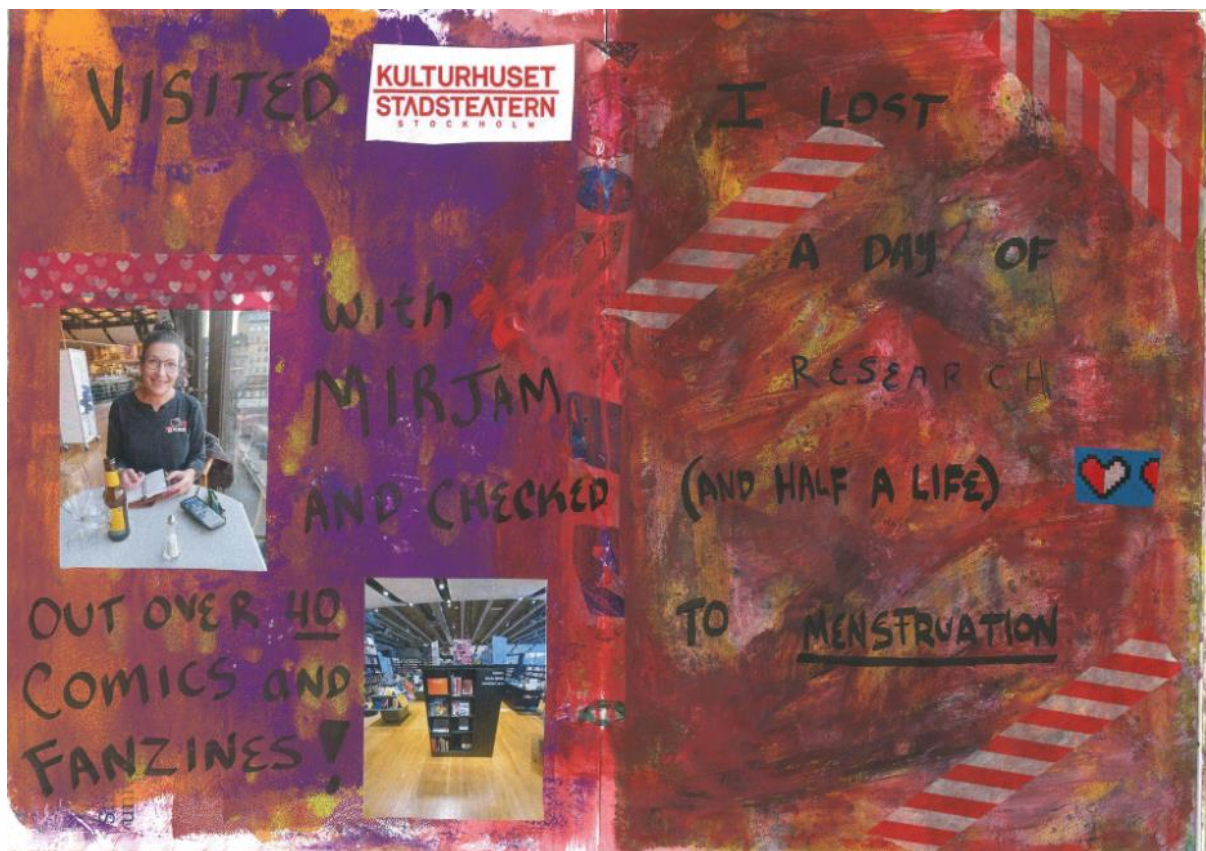


Figure 3 - Hailey Austin Nej Men Hej (2022) excerpt

Biagioli, Owens and Pässilä find that zines can be used as a qualitative research method “so as to maintain a more overall sense of what the experience was for an individual participating in an activity” because “retaining more of a holistic sense of an experience is also crucial at the analysis stage” (2016, 3). For me, this held true. I was able to condense and analyse my trip in a visual form, make previously unnoticed connections, and create a material way to hold these memories and reflections.

### Materiality & Tactility

I begin the dedication of my zine by saying that comics are materials and memories, and memories materialised. Materiality is very important to zine-making as well as the zine method for research.

Biagioli finds that “Via the Zine Method, complex sets of elements can be represented in one package (the zine) letting ideas emerge from the active handling of the paper matter [...] by setting up the zine into a three-dimensional structure that refers to a larger concept taking shape in the mind of the participant.” (2018, 2). The physical creation of the zine is just as important as the finished product (and research) itself. The fact that this zine is physically made out of envelopes helps it to actually hold the notes and images from the trip, as well as the metaphorical memories made along the way. I included real sticky notes and to-do lists on the first page to show how chaotic the planning for the trip was, as well as the dates of the research trip. I cut out pieces of my travel tickets to give authenticity to the representation of travelling for research after the lockdowns. The photographs are all taken by myself or someone else on the trip, giving an air of authenticity.

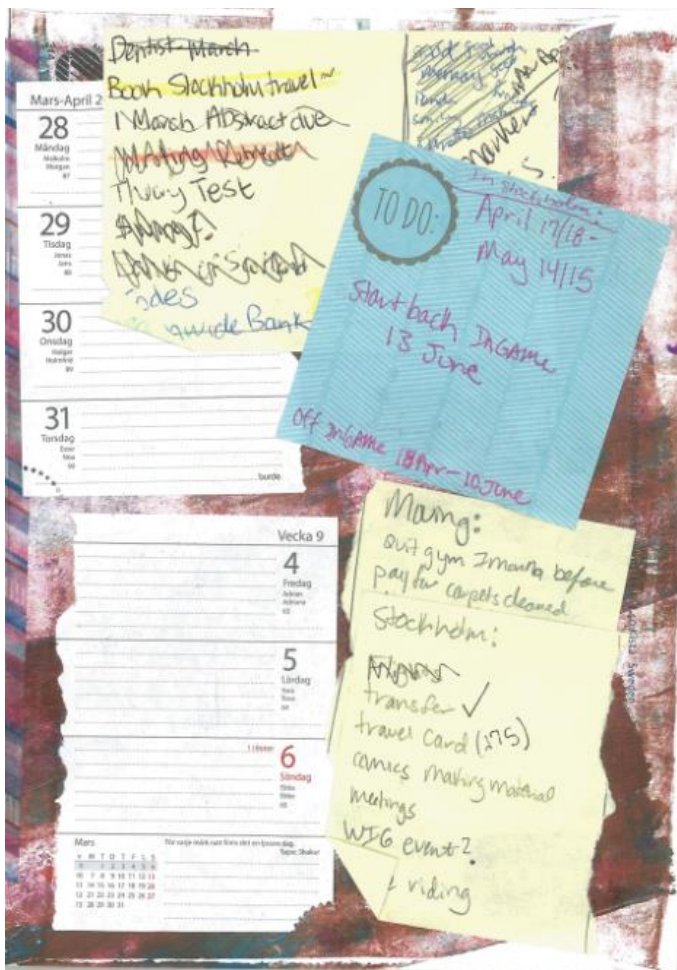


Figure 4 - Hailey Austin Nej Men Hej (2022) excerpt

The backgrounds of the zine are just as important as the text and images pasted to the top of them. I created them during my trip while at my advisor’s art studio, so the materials are intrinsic to the trip itself and my artist journey while there. We mixed painting and monoprinting on a Jelli-block to create unique, one-of-a-kind prints (as opposed to screen prints that can be done multiple times). Together, we created over 50 pieces of art in one day. Many of mine were used for the zine, while others have been used as envelopes or for other purposes. Just as the prints could not be perfectly recreated, neither could my time in Stockholm. Much of the zine is in chronological order, but something things fit better narratively when moving the dates or times different things occurred, like my partner visiting.

For me, the colours within the backgrounds of the zine tell their own story even without the added images and text on top. In this project, the materials mattered - the materiality mattered as did the tactility alongside the main research project.

### Personal, Relatable Research

By creating a zine about my experiences of the trip, I added a personal touch to research project. Data and papers by themselves only give part of the whole story of research, losing many important elements like “tacit engagement, experiential knowledge and individual judgement” that human creative input can capture through creative outputs. (Biagioli et. al 2016, 3). I added photographs of myself (and horses) to the front and back covers to literally add a face and name to the research project and make it more personal and relatable than black text on a white page. It also bookended (literally and metaphorically) my trip and my zine.

The title is “Nej Men Hej” which is pronounced *neigh men hay* in Swedish, and means “No, but hi” in English. This phrase is used in Sweden as a greeting towards someone they have not seen in a long time. While in a comics store, I found a very popular meme there where a woman responds to an unseen man saying this to her, by responding this saying “Hej men nej”, or “hi, but no”. In doing so, she is essentially rejecting the advances of the man who has not seen her in a long time by flipping the phrase around.



Figure 5 - Jan Stenmark "Hej men nej" <https://www.comicsheaven.se/prylar/magnet-jan-stenmark-hej-men-nej>

This not only fit what I learned about Swedish feminist culture in the creative industries, but also worked as a self-reflection tool that brought together the large take-aways from my work. I also loved what the words sounded like in English and their connection to my experience. Nej means no, but sounds like neigh, the sound that horses make, relating to all the horse games I played and horses I rode while in Sweden. It further captured the gendered focus of my research with men, meaning but, being spelled and sounding like the English word men, or male. Finally, hej meaning hello and sounding like hey and hay in English has multiple meanings. For me, it related to a level of familiarity. In English, I would only say “Hey” to someone I knew, where as I would say “hello” to someone I did not know. Having people all around me say “hej”, which also sounds like the

beginning of my name, made me feel a level of familiarity with those around me. It also sounded like hay, the food that horses eat, which fit well with my horse theme. For me, the title captured the ambiguity and familiarity of my research trip, while also referring to the feminist comics and horse games I encountered there.

This personal touch came across in the presentations of my research. At the Scottish Funding Council's Team Saltire Awards, my Flash presentation (or 3 minute thesis) was shortlisted for Public Engagement in the Culture and Creative Industries category. It was the personal touches I added as well as the way I was able to relate my research effectively to an audience that won me the People's Choice award for Public Engagement that evening. This was not only from my research as a whole, but largely because the zine rooted my research in the personal as well as the professional.

## Originality

Zines have been used in research and as research methods as described by Biagioli (2018), French and Curd (2022), and Biagioli et.al (2016) in the previous sections. Additionally, Lucy Robinson finds that "punkademics produce (aca)zines rather than conference packs to match form with content in the history of subcultures" (2018, 49). Thus, zines have been used as part of academic research, especially with marginalised groups before. Additionally, I have also used zines and creative outputs in my PhD research. I created a comic or zine to accompany each chapter of my PhD thesis to demonstrate the theories I was proposing. I created *BOUND-aries: A Super/ Erotic/ Academic Zine* to untangle part of my thesis around gender and genre conventions in a condensed and visual way.

While I have used zines in my research before, I have not used the zine format as travelogue or means of recording my research experiences. This research is original in that I have not found any academic sources where travel zines are used to accompany research.



Figure 6 - Hailey Austin "BOUND-aries: A Super/Erotic/Academic Zine (2019) as part of PhD thesis

## Rigour

This zine was proposed from the outset of the funding as a means of capturing data. In order to create the zine while on my trip, I took notes in a notebook each day, detailing a daily diary and journaling what happened each day. I also took photos of significant things around me to include in the zine.

While on my trip, I took notes about what I did and felt each day with the intention of creating a zine when I got back to Scotland. I also told my advisor in Sweden that this was an intended output, so she helped me find zines in Stockholm's zine library in the *kulturhuset*. She also helped me source materials and generate backgrounds for the zine while I was in Stockholm.

After capturing the trip in my notes, photographs and the backgrounds for the zine, I went home to Scotland to go through my interviews and create the zine. It allowed me to reflect on my time in Stockholm, condense my experiences, and make connections. The materials used to create the zine (envelopes) physically hold the artefacts of my trip and symbolically hold the memories made while on the trip.

## Results and Dissemination

This zine was uploaded on the SGSAH funding website to demonstrate a digital output of the awards as well as a research profile for the Saltire Emerging Researchers.

<https://sgsahresearch.com/portfolio/hailey-austin/> There is also a recording of a talk given on my research, including the zine.

Part of the funding of the project went into the physical printing of the zine for dissemination at comic conventions and academic conferences. I took copies of *Nej Men Hej* to the 2022 Thought Bubble Comic Convention and gave it out to comics creators around the world as examples of comics being used for research.

As part of this research, I also created a 3-minute thesis flash presentation for the Saltire Scottish Funding Council. At the Team Saltire Awards, my public engagement presentation was shortlisted in the Culture and Creative Industries category. I later won the People's Choice Award out of all the shortlisted presentations.

In 2023, I will be presenting on my research and running a zine-making workshop at Nordic DIGRA, demonstrating how zines can help games studies in general and how zines can effectively round up conference. There are plans to run more zine-making workshops for games studies academics using *Nej Men Hej* as a case study.

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