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EXAMINING EVERYDAY LITERACIES:
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS
OF MUNDANE TEXTUALITIES

by

KYLE MAUTER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Computer Science
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and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

As a way of extending perspectives of writing and learning, this thesis explores everyday literacy activities and their role in function in shaping people's activities. Taking up an autoethnographic approach to studying the mundane literacies of everyday life, this thesis offers a fine-grained analysis of the processes and practices involved in two specific literate activities I have engaged in over the two years: creating a mixtape for a friend and streaming my participation in online video games. As key findings, the analysis of these everyday literate activities suggests that the interactions between people and social contexts figure prominently in the production and use of everyday texts, that everyday life is profoundly mediated by digital literacies, and that everyday literacies are often central to people's academic and professional lives. Ultimately, these analyses point toward the need for further inquiry into digital literacies, and to the potential pedagogical benefits of encouraging students to examine the mundane literacies at play in their everyday lives.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING EVERYDAY LITERACIES AND THE REASONS FOR STUDYING THEM

All throughout my schooling I have written about books, plays, and poems that other people created. I have read *1984*, reenacted *Romeo and Juliet*, and memorized "The Road Less Traveled," as well as countless other similar works by famous people of the past. I was never particularly interested in them since I knew that they had been studied by millions of students each year, and that there was virtually nothing new to bring to the conversation. My teachers had read countless versions of the same essays and analyses and knew exactly what to expect before ever glancing at my submission. I understand why schools and teachers have students review these texts. They are important to our culture and will be referenced outside of the classroom, and teachers can assess how well the students are understanding the texts. Because they have this backlog of information on what other students notice, and what can be gleaned from these texts, it is much easier to see if students are making the connections that they should be. But, because of this intense focus on well known, published, and generally male created texts from generations prior to my own, I never considered myself or my writing anything interesting, and I definitely did not consider it remotely worth studying in detail. This predisposition I had of important texts needed to be broken in for me to see otherwise.

Never once had I written about something more commonplace and regular, even though those texts make up much more of people's everyday lives. I was used to studying finalized texts, where only what the author wanted to be seen was seen. It wasn't until my first semester at UCF where I was exposed to the world of everyday literacies, and with that, all of the interesting influences, processes, and parts that go into those finalized texts I always saw. And even more

intriguing to me was the fact that we were going to be studying literacies of our own. A whole world of options had been opened up for me, and I quickly realized something. I thought I disliked writing, but really, I dislike writing about things I am not interested in. Studying the everyday and the commonplace made me realize that it was not the act of writing that I disliked, it was only the topic. In my undergraduate honors thesis, I work to expand research on people's everyday literacies (Barton & Hamilton; Buck; Roozen & Erickson; Tusting & Papen; Yancey, Cirio, Naftzinger, & Workman) by examining two of my own everyday literate activities: a mixtape I made for my girlfriend, and a clip from my Twitch stream where I play the popular video game *Among Us*.

These everyday literacies are often known as vernacular literacies. Kathleen Yancey describes vernacular literacies as "a material practice, one inflected by the technology of a time," as well as something that "circulates across contexts, sites, and media" in her chapters "Everyday Writing: An Introduction" and "Some Concluding Themes Elaborated" in relation to her paper with Joe Cirio, Jeff Naftzinger, and Eric Workman, "Notebooks, Annotations, and Tweets: Defining Everyday Writing through a Common Lens" (6, 2). In "Vernacular Literacies," David Barton and Mary Hamilton note the context and origin of such practices, and what drives people to engage in them. They state that "vernacular literacy practices are essentially ones which are not regulated by … formal rules and procedures," and which "draw on a range of practices from different domains" (247). They also state that the reasons for using or creating a text have an impact on how a person interacts with or produces that text. Jacob Craig builds on this idea in his essay "The Technologies, Environments, and Materials of Everyday Writing" by introducing the idea that not only do "the goals and purposes that motivate and animate writers' activities take

shape in relation to their writing situations, but also in relation to the materials, technologies, and environments" that are available to them (104).

One thing I find is missing from these definitions is the fact that vernacular literacies are in nature, multimodal, as a number of scholars, including digital literacy scholars such as Amber Buck and Ryan Shepherd, have pointed out. Texts created and used in everyday life do not exist in only one form. Yancy touches on the idea that vernacular literacies do not come about only through one process, but fails to mention that these processes are unique and include different processes and different outcomes depending on the person interacting with them. Barton and Hamilton also seem to touch on this, citing that different factors influence a text, but also seems to miss that the creator and user's situations will change over the course of engaging with these texts, and change each time they do. This multimodality brings a unique element to vernacular literacies, and sets them apart from the structured, consistent way that other literacies are created and interacted with. Modern day vernacular literacies are also often very digital (Buck; Roozen, "Mapping Translingual Literacies": Shepherd). This ties into what Craig states about writing situations and using what is available. Because technology is omnipresent in our lives, it is obvious that it will be used to access and create everyday literacies. This digitization of common practices deviates from the processes and environment that are typically associated with many vernacular literacies and is now integral to focus on in order to fully understand them.

The fact that everyday texts and literacies are rarely studied in comparison to formal texts or historical documents makes them much more interesting to investigate. While many texts presented in school have been studied time and time again by students and experts alike, a simple text seen every day may have only been studied in a scholarly context a few times. Often,

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specific texts are only studied once by a single person, whereas the exact same books and poems are repeatedly studied in schools across the country by thousands of students each year. Because I may be studying a genre of text never studied in this context before, it sparks a greater interest, as I could make observations that literally nobody else has. Everyday literacies also tend to have very different processes of creation and uses than those presented in school. Books, poems, and plays are meant to be seen and enjoyed by many people and are expected to have a lifespan after completion. Many regular, commonplace texts are meant to be seen by a much smaller number of people, possibly just one, and may have a much shorter lifespan, depending on their use. There is also a lot more variation in use in everyday texts versus the texts mentioned before.

For different people, everyday texts mean different things. For some it could be a workout program, for others it could be a coding assignment. Scholars have examined anything from campsite signs (Tusting and Papen) to fan-fiction essays (Roozen, "Fan fic-ing English Studies") to Pop Warner football write-ups (Anson) to greeting cards (Hassan) and science textbooks (Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth). My engagement with everyday texts is mine alone, and my view of an everyday text will differ from anyone else's. For this reason, I will pick texts to study that interest me and are particularly useful in my daily life that I enjoy. Studying things that I enjoy and interact with often will encourage me to dig deeper and be passionate about my work. It will allow me to have a new appreciation for things that I take for granted in my everyday life, and to see the importance of some of the mundane things I do on a daily basis. By working to understand some of my daily interaction with literacies, I may be able to take fuller advantage of those literacies, and adapt them or the way I use them to make the most of the time I spend with those texts.

This engagement is not just limited to me and the text. With everyday texts, there are many people involved, and the texts themselves very often have a social importance. Just like a grocery list may be made my just one person, it is important to more than just that. It may be important to the person shopping, if they are different than the writer, and to the family that will eat the food they shopped for, and the for the person making the meal. Everyday texts can also be collaborations, like a schedule, made by everyone following that plan, or even people not following it. With in-school texts and formal texts, they are often the work of one person, and then meant to be interacted with by another. Rarely is there active collaboration, or the involvement of multiple individuals over time shown such a text. The literacies that are important to me in my everyday life are not solely important to me, they are important and often central to the relationships I have with others.

Everyday texts are anything the user wants them to be. If they need to make a to-do list they can write it on a paper, a calendar, a sticky note, a mobile app, or even a drawing if they want to. Everyday texts have no defined structure, the creator can represent their ideas in any form they would like. This is in stark contrast to traditional texts, where the form is clearly defined and expected to be followed. If an author writes a book, they use page numbers, chapters, and publish it with pages, and a front and back cover. Straying from this format is typically not encouraged, as the content of the book is a much greater focus, and the authors must keep in mind publishing companies and their expectations. Everyday texts often have a less defined format, and the creator has greater freedom to express their ideas however they want. This immense flexibility allows the thoughts of the creator to be expressed in the most convenient and useful way in any scenario. If I am making a to do list for myself I may make it

on my phone if I am out, on my wall if I am in my room, in a notebook If I am in class, and so on. I can use whatever I have, wherever I am, to create whatever I want. This incredible diversity of processes leads to a vast array of similar yet different texts, each with their own strengths and weaknesses.

Because of this freedom, everyday literacies also tend to be more creatively focused. Drawing, doodling, making music, playing games, and exercising are all things people do every day that involve a multitude of different texts and interactions, and they are all highly creative activities. They allow the creator and user to express themselves much differently than they would through a paper or notes written for class, or a resume or write up for a job. Often, those creative endeavors are a release and an escape from work or school. The activities people choose to involve themselves in outside of their work allow for expression of the creativity and imagination suppressed by those environments.

For assignments for school, or resumes for jobs, there is a point in time at which what was creative no longer has any use or importance. Assignments no longer matter after they are due, and the information often does not matter after the course is over. Resumes have no use after hearing back from the employer. For everyday literacies and texts, there is no finite timeline for relevancy. If someone wants to create a work of art, they can work on it as long as they want and can continue to make changes and edit it if they choose down the line. If someone enjoys working out, they can continue to create workout plans and go to the gym for as long as they choose, the only time their work and their actions become irrelevant is when they choose to make them so. The everyday has no finite duration, it exists and is important for as long as any person wants.

Everyday literacies and texts are also very flexible with new technologies. They can be morphed, changed, and translated from one form to another to keep up with what the current technological standards are. If I want to listen to music, I do not have to listen from a vinyl or a cassette, I can stream it digitally. I do not have to use a Walkman or an MP3 player, I can use my phone or my computer. With traditional literacies, they are often bound traditional technologies. An English teacher or professor will not assign a writing assignment which their students write and post on twitter, nor will an art teacher expect a work to be submitted as an NFT. New technologies are extremely relevant in our day to day lives, and it only makes sense that the things we do every day should use them.

New technologies are only one of many mediums that everyday literacies embody. While traditional literacies often focus on just one medium, like writing, everyday literacies make full use and derive greater meaning from the focus on multiple forms of media. Digital literacies are present in all parts of life. They appear in entertainment; YouTube videos for instance, make use of acting, sounds, visuals, writing, editing, and more to form a fully fleshed out piece. Video games have chats, a constant flow of images, graphics, descriptions, rules, movement, etc. They appear in online forums, social media, and blogs, where individuals share their ideas, pictures, and craft specific versions of themselves to present. Computer programming, word editors, and other software are just a few more examples of common digital literacies. This makes studying everyday literacies far more interesting and diverse. They often have both more breadth and more depth than a traditional text or literacy, and there is greater variation between different forms with the same purpose.

The focus of the thesis will be a mixtape I created, and all the texts involved, as well as a video snippet from part of a twitch stream, and all the texts involved. For the mixtape, I will be focusing on two main cascades of inscriptions that were involved the creation. One which revolves around the back album art, and the other which revolves around the front. For the twitch stream, I will focus on a 30 second video clip from a stream of mine where I play the video game *Among Us*, and the texts that build and create the environment in which I stream. These are two of my own vernacular literacies that I find important and engage in frequently.

Review of Literature

Vernacular literacies scholarship tends to address 3 key lines of inquiry. A major line of research focuses on "inscriptions" people use every day for everyday purposes. Another covers how the various types of text and language based "codes" are blended by people during their everyday literacies. Finally, another covers why understanding how the creator's culture and the texts construction environment affect a text and make it unique. Below, I will provide an overview on each of these topics, and some of the scholarship surrounding them

In the field of literacy studies, scholars have long been interested in what is called inscriptions. This is a part of literacy studies that is heavily investigated, with two of the leaders being Wolff-Michael Roth and Michelle K. McGinn. In their article "Inscriptions: Toward a Theory of Representing as Social Practice," they define an inscription to be a "representation, which [exists] in material form" (35). The term inscription is meant to distinguish those material representations from mental ones, which do not have the same properties. This can be anything from images and language to graphs and charts.

Komysha Hassan both exemplifies and expands on this idea of inscriptions in her piece "More Than a Marker for the Passage of Time." In it, she examines the greeting cards she makes for her family and friends. She emphasizes the importance of these inscriptions, stating "greeting cards were one of the few mediums where [her] communication was personal" (2) as well as noting that "a $4.00 greeting card was clearly worth much less than the one [she] had spent no money at all on, but rather spent on [her] time and attention" (2). It's through statements like these where she makes it clear that part of the importance of inscriptions is how they are made, and what the creator had in mind while making them. In this way, inscriptions can communicate much more than what is initially seen on the surface. They can carry meaning through their context and through other inscriptions within themselves. Hassan notes that in her greeting cards she is "bringing in other conversations, ideas and symbols into the fray" (3), each of them carrying some meaning important to both Hassan and the intended recipient. Throughout her article, she shows that not only can inscriptions be present in what we typically think of as "mundane" texts, but that the inscriptions present can be complex and full of layers.

Referring back to "Inscriptions: Toward a Theory of Representing as Social Practice," Roth and McGinn call this layering a "cascade of inscriptions." They write that "Inscriptions are often translated into other inscriptions, which are again translated, forming 'cascades'" (38). This causes information to be transferred from one text to another and so on, adding or removing things on the way. This means that "the meaning of any inscription is therefore not an inherent property but . . . arises from the context of its use" (38) as Roth and McGinn state. So, an inscription's meaning depends on the other inscriptions involved in the cascade, as well as the way the current inscription is being used.

Lilian Pozzer-Ardenghi and Wolff-Michael Roth analyze how these cascades work in their piece "Toward a Social Practice Perspective on the Work of Reading Inscriptions in Science Texts," specifically cascades of inscriptions within science textbooks. These cascades can vary in their presentation in many ways and communicate many things, but what they must all do is work with each other properly. Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth note that while not every cascade of inscriptions is the same, "their coherent integration [is] crucial for interpretation" (234). If the reader cannot understand the inscription, it is not useful. Because each one is different from another, they cannot all be interpreted in the same manner. Those that are comprised of multiple inscriptions of the same type must be able to be what the authors define as "transposed," whereas those made of different types of inscriptions must be "translated." While the reader must be able to do these things, the creator must create the cascading inscription in such a way that the intended audience has that ability.

Scholars have also recently become interested in the topic of code meshing. One is Suresh Canagarajah, who defines code meshing as "a form of writing in which multilinguals merge their diverse language resources with the dominant genre conventions to construct hybrid texts" (40) in his article "Negotiating Translingual Literacy: An Enactment." From this, many scholars have expanded upon code meshing and shown its usefulness in communicating ideas.

Karin Tusting and Uta Papen not only exemplify the usefulness of code meshing in "Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices," but also expand upon the idea of it. In analyzing Namibian tourism advertisements, they show that in conjunction with the native language, Namibians "are also advertising in English, a language few [Namibian] people have been formally taught" (16). In order to communicate with the tourists effectively, the advertisers

meshed English into their ads, and were able to be more competitive in the market. Within this study, Tusting and Papen also found that the advertisements meshed not only languages, but also mediums. Information was communicated through graphics, with many advertisements consisting of both "plain writing, and perhaps some paint and drawing" (16). While painting and drawing are not written languages, they do communicate information in a different form to the intended audience. Because the representations serve the same function, it makes sense to think of these images as being meshed with the written languages present.

Kevin Roozen also examines code meshing in his chapter "Polyliterate Orientations: Mapping Meshings of Textual Practice" where he examines a college student, Lindsey, who switches her major from graphic art to English. In it, he observes how she uses a set of sketches to plan a piece of art. She "experiments with different ways to orient the [sketches of] rings in relation to one another, different ways to position the rings within each pane, and different combinations of panes" (215). In her piece, she is trying to communicate something to the audience, with each panel portraying a different portion of that message. In this way, Roozen shows that code meshing is possible without the presence of language, as she is meshing sketches of different importance together to create her art.

Roozen also introduces the idea that not only can texts be meshed, but processes too. When Lindsey creates her piece, she goes through the effort to "rearrange the pieces over the course of [a] few days" (215). However, Roozen observed that this was not an isolated occurrence. He notes that "Lindsey found that she could use a similar process of sketching, cutting, taping, arranging, and rearranging to complete [all of her assignments]" (215). He also shows that the meshing of processes is not limited to genre. While Lindsey is writing an English

paper, Roozen notices that Lindsey "introduced textual practices from art and design into the trajectory of invention and production of the analysis paper at a number of points and in a number of ways" (220) to bring together her paper, showing the existence of meshing processes.

While Sherman Alexie is not speaking directly about code meshing in "Superman and Me" he exemplifies its usefulness quite well. When he was learning to read, he would "read" comic books by looking at the pictures in them. He mentions that from a picture he was able to "assume [the caption] tells [him] that 'Superman is breaking down the door'" (2) and that Superman "says 'I am breaking down the door'" (2). Because of the code meshing of language and image, he can gather more from the text as a whole.

While many of these scholars have investigated cascades of inscriptions and code meshing in their own right (Tusting and Papen with foreign advertisements, Roozen with art and English assignments, Hassan with greeting cards, Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth with science books), there has not been any research relating to the creation of mixtapes, specifically the art associated with it. I intend to explore code meshing and cascading inscriptions on this front and contribute to the conversation through this gap.

Hassan's work also exemplifies the way that many different processes can result in a similar product. In her article, she describes the changes that her greeting cards undergo as she matures and incorporates more and different elements into them. "Throughout the process, the message continues to become more complex, the cues subtler, even implicit, the words more carefully chosen." Even though over time, the messages, ideas, and medium change, the product still remains a meaningful, personalized greeting card. This is true for all kinds of vernacular

literacies. People create similar things with similar goals in very different ways. It is important to look at the processes of everyday literacies in order to gain an understanding of the creator's involvement in the community and culture surrounding the environment of the text.

Understanding a text is understanding the culture and environment that the text exists within. This is something that Fan Shen takes careful notice in his article "The Classroom and the Wider Culture: Identity as a Key to Learning English Composition." Shen contrasts the culture and writing he does in his Chinese background, with the unwritten rules that exist in American writing due to the differences between the countries and their political and social climates. Because of this, he must come to understand the facets of his "American self," in order to compose well written English works. He says that "learning the rules of English composition is, to a certain extent, learning the values of Anglo-American society" (460). This idea reaches much further than understanding the differences of writing conventions. Any literate activity may appear to have the same purpose as another, but the context surrounding that activity matters equally in understanding the full purpose and reasons behind a text.

Not only do processes and use evolve across an individual's life or differ between cultures, they also are unique to individuals within a community. Hassan writes, "for each individual … the way in which [a] medium is manipulated and accessed can make a profound difference" (4). This is an important distinction to make, because just knowing the creator or user's situation, environment, and culture is not a large enough lens to analyze a literacy through. The person themselves must be considered in order to have a full picture of the influences present in a text.

Chris Anson speaks about how focus changes how a text is produced in "The Pop Warner Chronicles: A Case Study in Contextual Adaptation and the Transfer of Writing Ability." In his case "the coordinator's emphasis on naming team players was likely invisible to the editors … yet for Martin it had to be a focal point" (537). If Martin had been given a different focus, he would have likely written the summaries very differently. This focus is also an important aspect to realize when analyzing how different texts come together to form a product. Each part may have a different focus than each other, and the final product, but all of these focuses affect the creation process and use after creation.

Hassan, Shen, and Anson point to various things to consider when analyzing an everyday text. However, none of them apply these ideas in any way to digital texts. I will use their ideas to analyze multiple digital texts in various contexts, and begin to fill this gap in research.

The discussion throughout the remainder of this thesis is organized into 4 chapters. In Chapter 2, I will discuss the autoethnography as a research method, and my choice to use it. This will include the definition, and advantages and limitations compared to other methods. In Chapter 3, I will argue that in the production of mixtapes, the use of code meshing and cascading inscriptions in the art is crucial to provide the creator and audience with an enjoyable experience and a cohesive work. This research is based on data I collected from carefully tracing the processes and practices I engaged in while creating a mixtape for my girlfriend. In Chapter 4, I will argue and demonstrate that the elements that go into creating a successful twitch stream, as well as my interaction with it after completion, can be successfully analyzed through previously known methods of study adapted for digital texts. The research in this section come from the processes, practices, and uses I engaged in and analyzed while creating and using a twitch

stream. Chapter 5 will outline the key findings from my examinations in chapters 3 and 4 and offer implications of my findings for research and teaching. As stated, the next chapter will include the explanation of my research method (autoethnography) and why I found it useful for this study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS FOR EXAMINING VERNACULAR TEXTS

In order to collect the data on the production of mixtapes, and their connection to code meshing and cascading inscriptions, I engaged in what Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams, and Carolyn Ellis call "Autoethnography" in their article "Coming to Know Autoethnography as More than a Method." Autoethnography is a way to study yourself and your personal experiences in a scholarly manner. According to Jones, Adams, and Ellis, they also tend to "make contributions to existing research" (22). By taking this approach, I can use the personal nature of my research to "facilitate understanding of those experiences" (33) and give a deeper meaning to seemingly surface-level observations. It is in this way that I can evaluate the texts I use throughout my creative process and effectively argue my points and give insight into what I was thinking and how that thinking made an impact on the final product of my literate activity.

This is far different than the approach that Tusting and Papen employ in their research from "Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices." What they are doing is called ethnography. They are picking texts that others create to analyze and discuss. This means they must conduct interviews to learn about the process, reasons, and environment that the texts were made in. While this does allow them to discuss almost any text they want, they were not there to see the creation or use by others in action, and so they are limited by what they can gain and understand from others who were.

By using autoethnography I am able to obtain a greater richness in detail that I would be able to through other methods. Because I know what the creator's thoughts and intentions were when creating and using the texts, I can relay and more deeply explain what all the pieces of the

texts mean, and take the readers through every detail, each step along the way. I have much more insight into how something was made or used, and the states the text was in before being presented to others. Like Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, and Arthur Bochner write in "Autoethnography: An Overview," this richness and insight helps me "facilitate understanding of a culture for insiders and outsiders" (277). That culture being people, texts, and media that I interact with in order to gain a full understanding of my works. With other methods of study, I may only be able to gather information about the final product or predict what the intentions of the creator were. Instead, I can know for certain all the minute details that went into the thought and planning, as well as the final work.

By studying my own literate activities, I also have the advantage of firsthand experience. I know what I did to make each text, and how I did it. I can explain the impact outside forces had on the text, or how I used a technology to create it. Ellis et al believe autoethnography is an enhancement of firsthand experience, it makes "personal experience meaningful" to those who would otherwise have no understanding of the situation or culture (277). Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams, and Carolyn Ellis reiterate this when they say that one of the advantages of the approach is that the writer can "intentionally highlight the relationship of their experience to culture and cultural practices" in the article "Coming to Know Autoethnography as More than a Method" (22). Without firsthand experience, most of this information would be left unknown. It would be impossible to know the impact a moment in the creator's life had on a texts creation, and what is known would not necessarily be told to the reader in the way the creator would want. I know each of the decisions I made, and why I made them. Firsthand experience makes the research process much easier to accomplish.

Since I am studying my own activities, I get to study things I enjoy. This keeps me driven and interested in what I am researching. If I were to study someone else, and the literacies that they engage in, there would be no guarantee that the things they are interested in and do daily, would be interesting to me. By also studying things I enjoy, I have the benefit of being knowledgeable on the topic. If somebody I was studying spent a lot of time on an activity that I do not know the ins and outs of, I would have trouble explaining it thoroughly to my audience. On the other hand, explaining things I do for fun and spend hours on each day is much easier, and much more enjoyable to do.

Autoethnography also has the benefit of providing me with easy access to materials and the relationships the creator has with others. This allows me to look at each iteration of a text whenever I want so I can reassess my conclusions or get another perspective. No easy access means more time wasted. Without it, it will be hard to "produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience," as Ellis, Adams, and Bochner state (277). If I cannot easily and instantly access texts I need, I have to contact someone who can, and have them send me picture or copies of whatever it is. This doesn't necessarily hinder the content, but it definitely slows down the progression of the project. Having access to the relationship status between the creator and others is also a huge help. I know what my relationships between others are like. If the focus was on somebody else, I would need to interview the creator and the other persons I want information from. This takes time and even after doing so, I may not have a full picture of the interaction and importance of the people.

Limitations of Autoethnography

Although autoethnography is extremely useful in studying literacy, and the activities and texts surrounding them, it does not come without limitations. For one, I can only study things I do and interact with. In this case, that works great, as I want to study those things, but if I was very interested in something that I did not personally do, autoethnography would not be the best choice. Instead, I should use some form of study that allows me to interview and investigate others and has a focus on the understanding of something previously not fully understood.

Another downside is that I have a preexisting view of the activities and literacies I engage in. I already have things in mind that I think are important and should be focused on. However, someone else who wanted to study my everyday activities may be drawn to a different aspect of my life, and would not come in with any preexisting notion of what they believed was most crucial to focus on. This bias that I have drives me away from activities I don't enjoy engaging in, and encourages me to home in on things that I already enjoy. This also has an effect on my studying of my literacies. It is hard to be completely objective about what I am doing, and what importance something has, because I already have in my head what I believe the steps I am taking are, and the purpose of them. An outside researcher may see something that I cannot, just because I have been doing it for so long.

This idea of outside researchers' opinions is also an important one. With autoethnography, we cannot get a sense of what any other researcher may think, or any third party in general. Because "autoethnographic texts typically feel more self and socially conscious," this may cause a gap in how I describe true nature of an activity (Jones, Adams,

Ellis, 23). While I know what my views are, and what I think other's views and interactions are with my work, I can never know the true nature of anyone else's perspective. These other perspectives would allow me to bring more depth and a greater understanding to my audience. Without them, they only get to hear what I believe everyone, including myself, thinks.

Because autoethnography studies my self-generated texts and self-performed activities, it lends itself more readily to recently engaged in literacies. It is easy to find, think about, remember, and study things I do currently or recently. The things I can study are right in front of me, my memory is good, and I can easily access the materials and thoughts I had when working with something. Picking something from further in the past is not out of the question, but it does not have the same dynamic as something much more recent does. It will be much harder to get as much depth and understanding of my interactions around the texts from that time, as I do not remember what I was thinking, or exactly what I did.

While I can write "to show how the aspects of [an] experience illuminate more general cultural phenomena," I also cannot know how other people interact with the same texts, or the texts other people use to engage in the same activities (Jones, Adams, Ellis, 23). This makes it impossible to generalize my experience in my activities, and to know if the way I do things is a commonality, or an outlier. Autoethnography really only allows for specific conclusions relating to my personal experience with an activity. I cannot gather information from others who do the same, and I cannot perform any sort of quantitative analysis of how a literacy is typically interacted with. All being said, these limitations should not prove to be a reason for not choosing autoethnography. In this case, it is a very good choice for what I want to do.

The texts included in this piece were chosen for a specific reason. Each of them is a crucial part of what makes the pieces what they are, but each contributes in a different way. Some texts can be directly seen, while others' influences are present beneath the surface. Each text in Chapter 3 is part of a cascade of inscriptions, and each one meshes with the others in different ways. I can examine every part of the process and understand what went into it and what becomes of it. Not only does this timeline of texts show how each one is related to the next, it also shows how I am able to inject more meaning into the final piece. By showing two cascades, I can show how each is unique, but also how they are related, and how the final pieces come together cohesively. The texts in Chapter 4 come from a diverse set of processes and are a diverse set of media. From sounds to animals, each text follows its own unique path until becoming one with everything else. Highlighting the diverse way these texts are created, used, and understood emphasizes the importance of all kinds of vernacular literacies, and how they interact with each other in a digital context.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I will argue that in the production of mixtapes, the use of code meshing and cascading inscriptions, and the understanding of the culture and environment surrounding the creation, are crucial in providing the audience with an enjoyable experience and a cohesive work, and equally important in properly analyzing a commonplace digital literacy.

CHAPTER 3: EXAMINING A MIXTAPE FOR MY GIRLFRIEND

<u>Music and Me</u>

To me, music is special. Because of the environment I grew up in, it holds a special place within me that nothing else does. It is a place that has been carved out over many years and through many different experiences. One of these influences is my relationship with my dad. As a child, he would play music for me and my family. He would play it at home and in the car; wherever we were there was a strong chance he was on DJ duty. I have distinctly fond memories of listening to music with him in the car, on the way to and from soccer practices and games. He would play his favorite songs from then or from his childhood and, looking back, I appreciate it immensely. I loved having his music shared with me, as it gave me an insight into what he likes and brought us closer. I was able to enjoy the new songs he'd play for me and request personal favorites, and as I began to develop my own taste, I started to share with him too. Over time, we would share our musical discoveries with each other, always in the car, and always on the way to or from soccer. It became a long-standing tradition of ours, and what I now remember as my personal favorite part of soccer. Because of moments like this, my experience with music is unique, and its meaning to me is defined in this. Just as he shared his music with me, which means so much to him, I aim to do the same. Music has also become a way to bond with my mom in recent years. Because she didn't listen to much music in her free time, or look for anything new, I always loved playing her my favorites. In high school, I would sometimes take my portable speaker out to the family room and play music. I would just sit on the couch while she was making dinner, or finishing up some work for the day. As my interest in music rose

throughout the years, there was always something she would do to connect with me. She gave her old big speakers to me that they never used anymore and helped me build shelves for them on my wall. And now I've started to give back. For the past few years I've made her a Mother's Day playlist of songs I like, and songs I think she'd like, and I like to think it's a nice way for us to connect. Things like these are why I make mixtapes, and this is why I find it so important that I am able to provide a cohesive and enjoyable experience for those I share them with.

In this piece I will be focusing on two main cascades of inscriptions that were involved the creation of this mixtape as a gift for my girlfriend, one which revolves around the back album art, and the other which revolves around the front, both of which appear below in figure 1.

Figure 1: Mixtape art, back and front

The Journey

The creative journey began with picking the songs. When I was searching for songs, I was looking for a couple of things. Primarily, they needed to be songs I wanted to share. This means I probably enjoy the song myself, or I believe my girlfriend will enjoy it. It also needs to fit the vision I have for the mix. In this case, I had decided that each of the songs chosen would

be associated with a color, and that the mix would be divided up in this way. All of these criteria have many aspects to them and will be more intimately examined through one of the songs I selected for the mix: Jeremy Zucker and Chelsea Cutler – Please.

"Please" exemplifies all of the qualities of a song that I am looking for. For me, the song has a lot of personal value. Chelsea Cutler was one of the first artists that I followed closely. I watched her career grow from what it was when I found her to what it is now. She's also one of the artists I introduced to my girlfriend when we first started dating, who she is now a bigger fan of than even me. The other artist, Jeremy Zucker, is also an artist we both enjoy listening to. However, I decided to share this song not because we were both so familiar with it, but because it is a less popular cut from both of them that I think deserves to be listened to. This meshing of interests allows both me and her to enjoy the song together. The song also nicely fits into the pink color category I've created. Songs in that category I described as "sweet, lofi, soft." "Please" is exactly that. It's a quiet song, with a watery guitar loop throughout, accompanied by only their voices and some distant percussion. And while the lyrics aren't too sweet, the singers' mellow voices and production are. By realizing what goes into the selection of songs, I am able to more appropriately choose ones that come together cohesively.

Songs such as this then go onto the inscription shown in Figure 2. This inscription allows me to easily divide the songs I've chosen into their categories based on the descriptions I've given each color. It also serves to ease the ordering process, with

Pink (sweet, lofi, soft)
- Magic 4.
- Sweatshirt 2.
- Monday 3.
- Please 1.

Red (harsh, loud)
- Teeth 6.
- Checkmate 7.
- I don't think I can do this again 5.

Orange (upbeat, lovey, glowing, soft, synthy)
- Fine 10.
- //Phases
- Same old 9.
- Good things fall apart 8.
- Bad ideas 9.5.
- //In disguise
- //firefly

Yellow (fun happy, summery)
- Happiness 10.
- About you... 11.
- Bright side of the moon 13.
- Acid dreams 12.

Green (flowery, clean production)
- Small talk 14.
- Giving up on us 15.
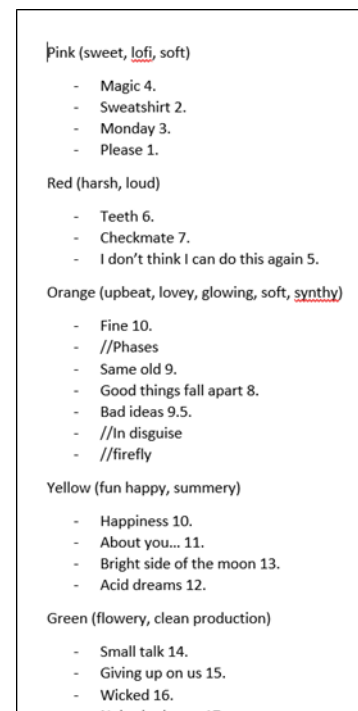- Wicked 16.
- Nobody home 17.

Figure 2: Organizational document

songs being given a number to denote its place in the mix, and others being marked by the symbol //, signifying that I have decided to leave those songs out of the mix.

Each part of this initial inscription has influences from a multitude of meshings. As I previously focused on, one of these meshings is that of the songs. Each song that I carefully selected fits into one of the categories I created around my theme. Having this central idea and categories within allows me to more easily create a cohesive work and helps me see where songs fit, rather than leaving a mess of songs to organize after the selection process. The theme and categories also aim to pique my girlfriend's interest by giving her a premonition of what's to come, without giving it all away, leaving the interpretation of the mix open and enhancing her experience. Meshing is also present through the symbol I use to mark omitted songs, "//." I use them in a similar way to Lindsey, the college student that Kevin Roozen studies in his chapter "Polyliterate Orientations: Mapping Meshings of Textural Practice." He states that "the rich set of textual practices she used to assemble [her] paper were the very same ones she'd used in executing her projects as an art and design major" (218). Just like what she learned in art and design is transferrable to English, what I learn in other areas of my life is transferrable to my mixtapes. The // symbol comes from my coding background, where // marks a comment, something the computer ignores when running code, but that the programmer can still see. Often it is used to remove something from code, without actually removing it, making it easier to revert if the programmer changes their mind. It's use here mirrors that exactly. When finalizing my tracklist, I will ignore the tracks preceded by //, but I can still see them if I decide to include them later on. Through meshings within this inscription, I feel, just as Roozen states, that "meshing

[affords me] a way to maintain a literate identity" (221) It allows me to combine my interests together and share all parts of me with others, whether they see it upfront or not.
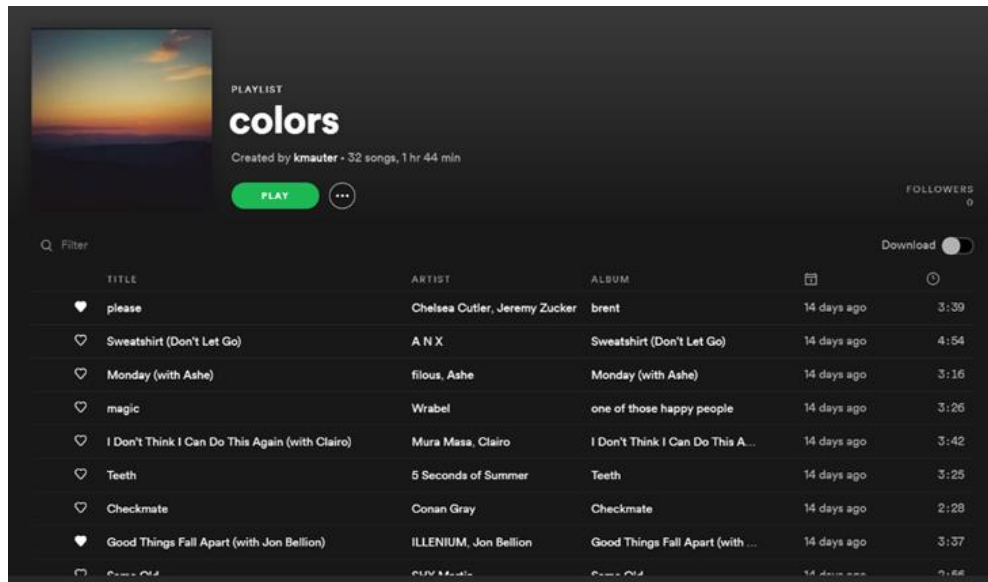

Figure 3: Drafting/adjusting/ordering playlist

What I begin to do next is take this tracklist, and convert it into a Spotify playlist, as seen here in Figure 3. This "translation" that Roth and McGinn mention in their piece "Inscriptions: Toward a Theory of Representing as Social Practice" that is occurring here enables something to happen. I am now able to interact with the same ideas within the bounds of a new medium. Spotify lets me listen to the songs together, which I was previously unable to do. By doing this, I can adjust the ordering of the songs to account for how they "flow" from one song to the next. To do this, I listen to the beginning and ends of adjacent songs and try to match characteristics like tempo, mood, instrumentation, and topic, in order to find the most appropriate position in the listening order. This is very similar to the way Roozen observes that Lindsey can "experiment with different combinations . . . different orders" (219) with her papers. This playlist representation of the mix brings together the initial ideas and brings to light the beginning of

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some new ones. The change in medium, and the continuation of this cascade allow me to focus

on different aspects, which help me design an immersive musical experience for my girlfriend.

This narrowing of focus cleans up the tracklist, and eliminates those that were marked to be

ignored, giving me the opportunity to focus on a different aspect of the mixtape in the next
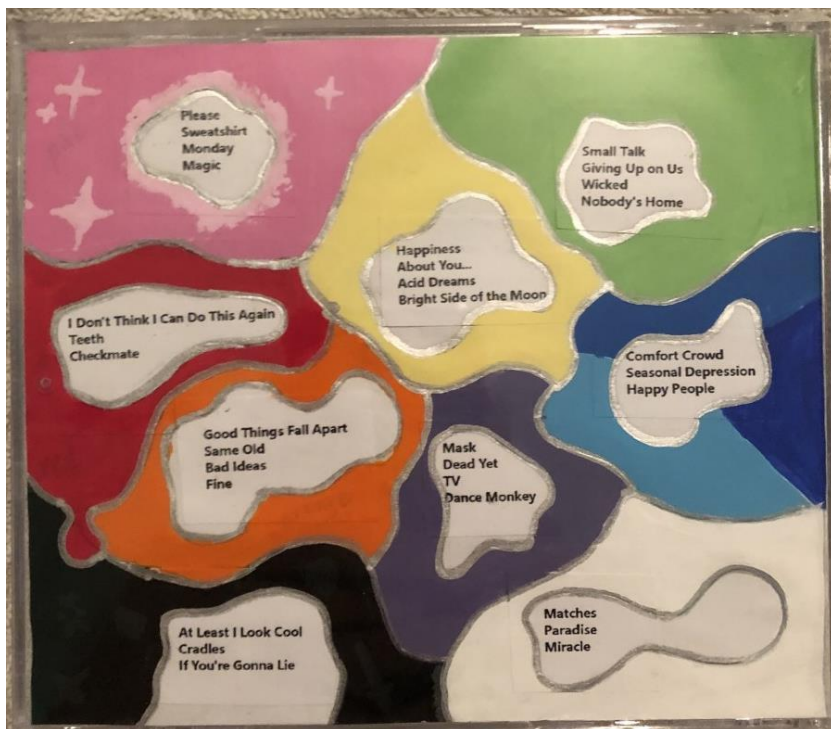
iteration of the cascade.

Figure 4: Mixtape-back art

This next iteration is the final in this cascade. Shown in figure 4 is the album art for the back of the mixtape. To create it I printed out the tracklist for the mixtape and cut it into pieces, arranging them on a piece of paper that I cut to the size of the CD case. I then glued the small scraps in their desired positions and sketched out the regions, marking the color they were to be painted. I proceeded to paint each section, adding embellishments to some, and outlined them all with a silver paint pen.

Because this is the final iteration in the cascade, it involves meshing of the ideas that

make up the previous inscriptions. It draws clear influence from the categories, once again

physically putting the songs into their corresponding regions of color, as well as using the songs

and order stemming from the playlist and draft. By interconnecting the texts in this way, the

piece feels more cohesive, and it gives my girlfriend a better experience, letting me share the music in an engaging and interesting way. This is because as Roth and McGinn mention, inscriptions' meanings often arise from "the context of other inscriptions" (38). Without the songs and the draft and the playlist, the album art wouldn't make any sense. It is only when all the parts come together that the purpose of the existence of the piece becomes clear. The album art also allows me to bring in and mesh painting, which I enjoy as a pastime. It lets me bring my experience with painting and enjoy it as part of my work. It also gives me a connection to my girlfriend, who I paint with often. It makes the work more personal and shows that I want to foster the connection we have through the recognition of the things we enjoy together. Overall, the art in figure 4 allows me to express myself, and hopefully interest my girlfriend in the gift. My hope is that it creates a greater connection between us and that I provide her the best experience with the gift as I can.

While the front album art may not seem as complex on the surface, it has a lineage of inscriptions just as meaningful and important to the mixtape as the cascade that led to the back. It begins with the pictures seen here in figure 5. These pictures were taken to remember those moments we shared together, and as a reference to look back on and remember fondly. The first was taken at her house

Figure 5: Pictures of myself and my girlfriend

before driving to the beach one morning over summer, and the other was taken while we were

hanging out at my dorm one evening after purchasing matching pajamas. My girlfriend takes lots

of pictures like this, as she likes to collect all of our memories through these photos and compile

them together in photo albums. In a similar way, I wanted to use these pictures to collect our

memories too. In "More Than a Marker for the Passage of Time," Hassan says this: "I didn't just

cherish and value [the cards], I thought of them as a gift and a memento, each with an individual

meaning" and "as I look back, those cards remind me of events and mental states – a

documentary of transitions for both the author and recipient" (2). By using these images in

conjunction with the rest of the mixtape, I am able to amplify the memories associated with the

songs I've chosen. I can connect the mixtape to memories we have and memories we'll make

without saying it outright. I've also chosen pictures of us that I know she likes, as there is a

greater chance she will be drawn to looking at the mix if it displays images that she likes, rather

than ones she does not.
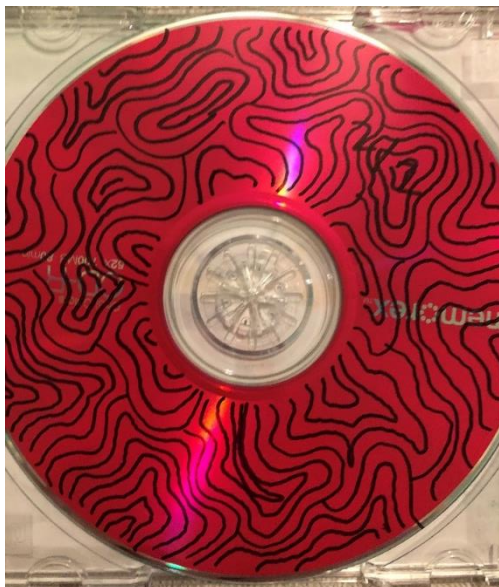
Figure 6: A CD from the mixtape

Another text that influences the front album art is the CD that the mix is burned onto. I first decided on a color for the disc, as well as if I was going to change it in any way. Clearly, as seen in figure 6, I chose to edit a pink disc by drawing lines all over it in a simple pattern. I don't normally put designs on the discs, but because I wanted this gift to be different and special, I tried doing something I don't normally do in order to bring more value to the gift. I hoped it would once again make the

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mixtape more interesting and draw my girlfriend's attention to it, and how much work I put in. It also offers me a creative outlet, as I can mesh it with something I enjoy and have mentioned before, art. The fact that the CD is not directly displayed lets me experiment more, as the presentability of the piece as a whole will not be affected. So, I can try different types of styles and mesh more of my interests into the project, increasing my enjoyment in creating the piece. As evident in the image, in the northeast segment of the CD, there is a marking that reads "2/2." This is because the mixtape actually spans two CDs, as it did not fit on one. The other CD is blue with the same style of design, and a marking denoting that it is the first of two. By having easily recognizable differences between the two discs, it becomes easier to identify which is which. This gives a slightly more enjoyable experience because my girlfriend will not have to guess or keep track of which of the CD's is which.

Figure 7: Mixtape-front art

These two texts converge in this cascade to become what is seen above in figure 7. Figure 7 is what is displayed on the front of the mixtape. To create it, I took the images from figure 5 and imported them into an image editing software. From there I edited slightly the colors and

other features of images and arranged them in a way I found aesthetically pleasing. I proceeded to print my arrangement out and cut it to the size of the CD case. I then doodled on it and inserted it into the front of the case.

Some of the meshing present within this inscription is clear. Centered and upfront are the pictures my girlfriend and I took together. By making them the main focus of the front cover, I can emphasize what the mix means to me, and will hopefully mean to my girlfriend. Also clear are the doodles present all around the images. These doodles echo the designs on the CDs within the case, and bring an element of cohesion to the project. This inscriptions also involves the meshing of something unseen, the image editing software. The software allows me to do things with the images I wouldn't be able to do otherwise, just as Spotify does with the songs. I can bring out the colors within the images, I can rearrange and adjust the positioning, I can enlarge and stretch the images, etc. These features let me bring more emphasis to the images, and create a more cohesive and impactful cover. Overall, each of the inscriptions and meshings in this cascade allows me to create a more cohesive, enjoyable gift for my girlfriend, one that she will hopefully enjoy as much listening to as I did making it.

Together these two cascades encompass the production of the entire mixtape. They involve the initial selection of songs all the way through to the finished piece. When they meet, they bring together all the ideas, influences, and meshing into one, creating what I consider a well constructed, enjoyable, coherent piece. The front and back album art showcase different, but connected, equally meaningful messages. One shows the time and dedication that I put into the project, all of the minuscule details that I spent so much time tweaking to get just right, and the other shows that same time and dedication I give to her, through the memories we make and the

moments we share. Together, they show our connection and all of the interests we share and moments we enjoy, and bring in things from all across our time together. Because of the way these meshings and cascades of inscriptions function, I believe I have produced a largely enjoyable and well thought out coherent work, and I believe this text will prove to be long-lasting because of it.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the each of the elements that make up my Twitch stream, and how they all interact when I'm live and playing *Among Us*. The inscriptions and cascades forming each text will be analyzed, and I will use that information to argue that the multimodality and interaction between texts and people, and understanding the culture and environment surrounding these texts and their uses are crucial in seeing how digital vernacular literacies are important in everyday life and how they are important to providing a unique and engagine experience for myself and my audience.

CHAPTER 4: TWITCH AS A VERNACULAR LITERACY: EXAMINING *AMONG US* AND THE TEXTS THAT SURROUND MY LIVESTREAM

A Brief Overview: Twitch

Twitch is an online platform on which content creators livestream games, events, contests, cooking, music production, and more. This means that content tends to less scripted, and more impromptu, giving the platform a greater feeling of closeness between viewers and creators, since everything is being seen in near-real time. The large variety brings tons of range in who uses it. From politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez playing *Among Us* and speaking on current events to rapper Snoop Dogg playing *Madden* to wide receiver Tyreek Hill playing *Fortnite* to professional gamers to people like me, anyone can make content. And with a seemingly infinite number of things and ways to stream, every streamer has their niche, and every viewer has theirs.

Because of how easy Twitch is to use, this means individual creators must stand out through their personality, content creation abilities, talents, and uniqueness. If hundreds of people are playing a game, a creator needs to make sure that what makes their content special shines through. Twitch is highly customizable; almost anything is possible in terms of layout, theme, and staging. It should be used to highlight the streamer and their personality, and make their stream unique.

Anyone can watch a creator and interact with whoever they are watching through a text chat. Viewers and streamers interact constantly, and it should not be understated how the community and people that surround a creator affect their content. They set the tone and

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encourage streamers to talk, or do things that they might not normally do, and make the streams more interesting. They can also support the creator monetarily through subscriptions and donations, both of which usually reward the subscriber or donator with something in return.

I was introduced to Twitch a few years ago, when I began to get recommended clips from popular streamers on YouTube. For a while, this is all the interaction I had with Twitch. I did not watch streams live or think about streaming, or even really seek out the videos on YouTube. That is, until about 8 months ago, when one of my friends became very interested in Twitch through the rise of Minecraft streamers on the platform. She watched the streams live, followed the streamers on other social media platforms, bought merch, and subscribed to their channels. While hanging out with her and some of my other friends she mentioned how much fun she thought it would be for us all to stream together. For some reason this really interested me, and it sounded like a fun creative outlet to explore. It did not really catch the rest of my friends' attention, and it turned out the friend who suggested it could not run the software on her computer smoothly, so I ended up pursuing it by myself. I have only been streaming for few months now, since November of 2020, but I have learned a lot. Most of what I have learned has come from watching other streamers, or from YouTube tutorials. I have looked up things ranging from what software download and how to use it, to getting the best lighting possible and filtering out background noise. For this chapter I will be focusing on my own stream of *Among Us*.

A Brief Overview: Among Us

Figure 8: This is what Among Us looks like

Among Us is a multiplayer social deduction game similar to existing games such as *Town of Salem* and *Mafia,* released on November 16th 2018. Social deduction games revolve around talking to other players to gather information, and putting it all together in order to eliminate a player or group of players. It consists of up to 10 players, depicted as little astronauts, moving around a series of two-dimensional environments such as a spaceship or foreign planet. Each round takes place in just one of these environments, all of which have various areas and rooms. There are two teams. One is the crew, and the other is the imposters. The goal of the imposters is to kill all the crewmates. When imposters are close to a crewmate, they can kill them, but they have to be careful since other players might see them kill or know that they were with that person last. Because of this disadvantage, and the fact that they are outnumbered, imposters have the added bonus of being able to "vent," which allows a player to teleport between parts of the map,

and "sabotage," which forces crewmates to divert their attention from the imposters. The goal of the crewmates is to find out the imposters. To do this, they must use deductive reasoning and teamwork to figure out which person is lying. The group has a chance to vote out the imposters after a body is found, or an emergency button is pushed. The person with the most votes after the discussion between players is voted out of the game. The crewmates can also perform tasks. Each player has a number of tasks assigned to them to complete, and if every crewmate completes all of their tasks, they also win. When one of these win conditions is met, the game ends, and one team wins.

The game did not become popular until the summer of 2020, when a few Twitch streamers with large followings began playing it. It quickly exploded, as more and more people began to discover it, and had nothing else to do since COVID-19 was forcing everyone to stay inside. It was everywhere. Every streamer seemed to be playing it, every YouTuber, everyone.

In the next section, I will begin discussing each of the parts that go into one of my streams of *Among Us*. This includes the program, an image of a turtle, alert sounds, interaction with viewers, the Discord overlay, and the in-game map.
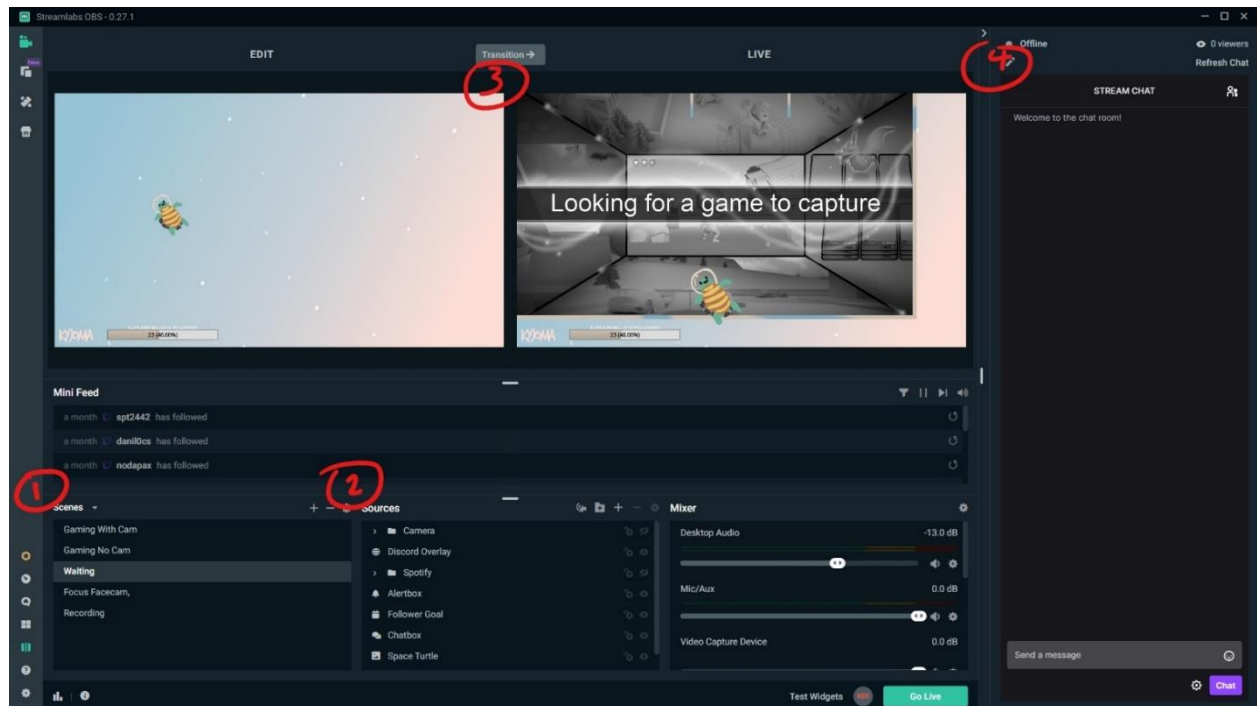
The Program (Streamlabs)

Figure 9: What I see in Streamlabs while streaming.

In order to stream to the platform, a user needs some program to capture their camera, their screen, and whatever else they want to display to their viewers, as well as something to organize all of these elements. Thankfully, there are plenty of accessible programs that do all of this, including Streamlabs, which is what I use. Figure 1 shows the Streamlabs window as I see it while streaming. The interface is made up of multiple elements, each with their own specific purpose. In the section labeled 1 (at the bottom left of Figure 9) are the scenes. A scene is a customized set and layout of sources, shown in the section labeled 2 (at the bottom middle of Figure 9). Each scene is customized for a specific purpose. For example, the scene selected titled "Waiting" is shown above in the left box. It consists of a background, the name of the channel

and a goal bar denoting how many followers are needed before reaching some reward for the viewers. The purpose of this scene is to fill the time in between different games as not to show everything on my computer. The scene titled "Gaming No Cam" is also visible above in the left box. Evidently it maintains some of the same elements, but noticeably gains more as well. The "Looking for a game to capture" screen takes up most the screen now, as that is what I want the viewers to focus on.

The section I mentioned earlier labeled 2 is the sources. These are the components that make up a scene. That could be a camera, an image, or twitch integrated elements like a chatbox, which displays what viewers are typing in the chat on the stream, or an alertbox which signals an alert to pop up somewhere on the screen when a viewer follows, subscribes, or donates. While the chatbox and alertbox serve very specific purposes, video feed and images can serve many. An image may be a background, like in the "Waiting" scene, or an embellishment, like the border around the "Looking for a game to capture" screen. It may also be used to cover up something that the viewers should not see like the turtle is the right pane (I will explain this later).

The two feeds shown under the label 3 (located at the top center of Figure 9) are the next scene and current scene respectively. What I want the viewers to see / what the viewers DO see is shown on the screen on the right. What I want to change the screen to (if I want to change screens) is shown on the left. I can edit either one in the moment as to change what is appearing or will appear to the viewers.

Under label 4 (positioned in the top right of Figure 9) is the chat box. This is where I can read and interact with viewers of the stream. I can type responses or just respond aloud to what people are saying or asking about what I'm doing.

The combination, design, placement, and use of each of these elements is crucial in standing out in what is an oversaturated market of streamers. Simply picking the easiest and simplest elements to use and maintaining the popular styles will only make the channel blend in, and not in a good way. To me, this meant designing my own set of assets to keep an overarching theme to my channel, and taking things from my real life as inspiration for my online appearance. I created a color palette based off of a profile picture I had recently made and chose this as a way to stand out among the crowd. Where most people have very bold colors and logos, I chose more of a soft color palette, which is a good contrast, and I think is truer to me, my personality, and my content as well.

Turtle

The turtle seen in Figure 10 is a prominent motif throughout my channel. He appears on my "Waiting" screen and often over the *Among Us* window as shown earlier in Figure 8, as well as appearing on my channel banner (an image that goes across the top of the page when entering the

Figure 10: The turtle mascot for my channel

channel), and originally, in real life. The turtle's main purpose is to cover up the game code during games of *Among Us*, but also serves as a sort of mascot for the channel. I intentionally try to keep him on the screen no matter what I am doing.

The turtle shown on my channel and in Figure 10 began from a painting session my girlfriend and our friend had a while ago. While looking at inspiration photos, one containing turtles in space caught her eye and she chose to paint it. Whether it be because I had just got a pet turtle for my birthday, or she just felt drawn to the image, that is what she chose. I then received the finished painting as move-in gift before the start of school and hung it on my wall above the tank that my turtle lives in. When I was beginning to think about how I wanted to channel to look I knew I wanted a logo or a symbol or a mascot and I love my pet turtle, so I settled on that. A picture of my real turtle didn't quite fit with the aesthetic that I had planned for myself, and I knew I had the painting. I began to think about how I was going to digitize the painting, so I took a picture of it and emailed it to myself so I could access it from the computer. I then imported it into gimp (a graphic design software) and traced the most important lines the best I could. I used the lasso tool in additive mode to select parts that were the same color, and then the color dropper tool, a tool that copies a color, to select a color from the original painting to use for each color section. I then filled each section in on a different layer so that when I finished, I would be able to take away the painting and leave behind a traced copy with a transparent background. The transparent background was important to me because I needed the image to be versatile and fit wherever necessary. Having a background on the image would make it look extremely out of place in many circumstances.

Alert Sounds

On Twitch, when a user follows, donates, subscribes, etc., small image pops up and a sound is played. Typically, a small streamer such as myself, will simply use the default sounds

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included on Streamlabs or whatever other streaming software they use. I decided, as way to stand out and just for fun, to make new sounds to replace the default ones. It's important to look at these sounds, as they bring character and uniqueness to the streams, and alert myself and viewers when something important happens. Oftentimes, sounds are easily overlooked by literacy scholars due to their abstract nature. However, we cannot study the entirety of the Twitch stream without recognizing their importance.

To begin making these sounds I opened a program called FL Studio, which is a digital audio workspace that allows for the creation, patterning, and structuring of sounds and music. I opened a plugin that I knew how to use to create a sound I liked, which ended up being a sort of squeaky happy synth, and created the first sound that would be replacing a default sound.
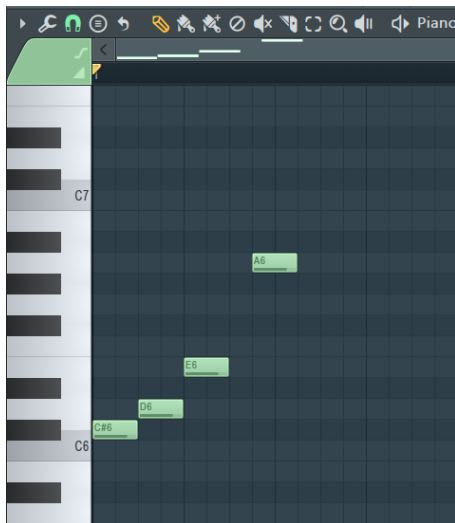

Figure 11: Follow note-pattern

That first pattern, shown in figure 11, is the sound that plays when a user follows me. This is the most common occurrence that will trigger an alert, and I designed the pattern with this in mind. It is short, sweet, and happy. It rises up, which gives the pattern more of an uplifting tone. The sound is short because it will play fairly often and should not be a disruption to the stream, but should still be noticeable so that I can thank the user for following and they feel like they made an impact on the stream. The sound is also sweet, as I want the return for following to be something that feels good and rewarding. I also wanted the pattern to be happy and uplifting, as each follow is important to my growth as a channel and it is fun to see, hear, and be a part of that growth.
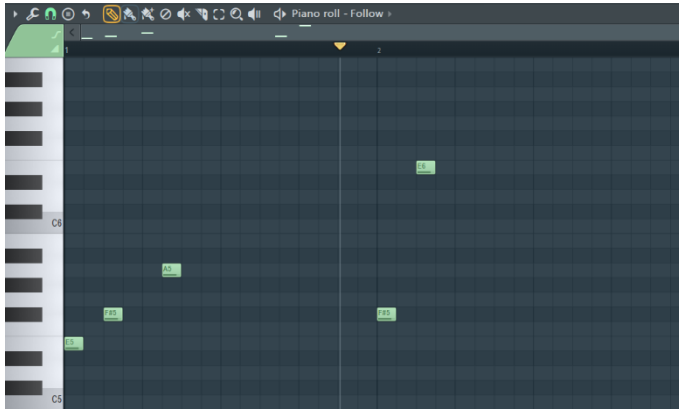
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Figure 12: Subscription note-pattern

The next pattern I will focus on is the one I created for when a user subscribes to me. This is a less common occurrence but is more important. A subscription on twitch costs they user money, and some of that money will go to the streamer that user subscribes to. In relation to a follow, a subscription is similar, but is more important and means more to both the person subscribing and the streamer receiving the subscription. So, I wanted this pattern to have a similar feel, but bring some more importance to the moment. The pattern is lower on the keyboard, so it feels like it holds more weight, just as the things that someone with a lower voice say appear more important. But, it follows a similar uplifting pattern to bring that same fun feeling of growth. The pattern also consists of two parts and is about twice as long as the follow pattern. This gives it that step up I wanted from the follow sound, and makes it sound like a greater moment in relation to a follow.

The last pattern I wanted focus on is the sound that will play if another streamer hosts my stream. On twitch, a host means that another streamer is essentially broadcasting your stream for their viewers. This is a big deal. One of the hardest parts of growing on twitch is the acquisition of returning viewers who will consistently watch your stream. A host gives a streamer a chance to pitch themselves (through their content) to those viewers, and potentially gain more returning
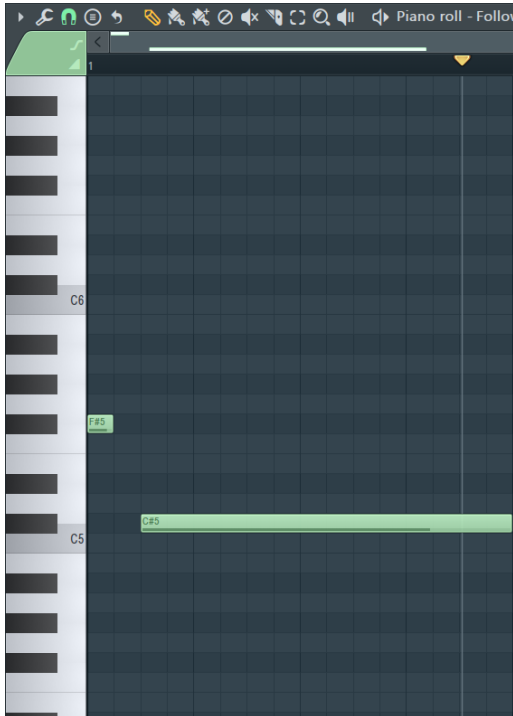
Figure 13: Host note-pattern

followers. It is an opportunity that does not come around often and when it does can greatly further a streamer and their channel. So, what I wanted to focus on with this sound is that urgency and power that a host holds. It is just one note and then a long low tone. The sound is almost like a warning alarm, which I think appropriately represents the situation it is signaling. It is meant to get my attention and alert me of this big opportunity. It also goes down, unlike the other two which go up. This is because unlike the other two, nothing has been achieved yet. Instead, it gives the opportunity to achieve, in the form of follows and subscriptions. If users decide to do either of those things, those sounds will play and relieve some of the tension that the host sound may create.
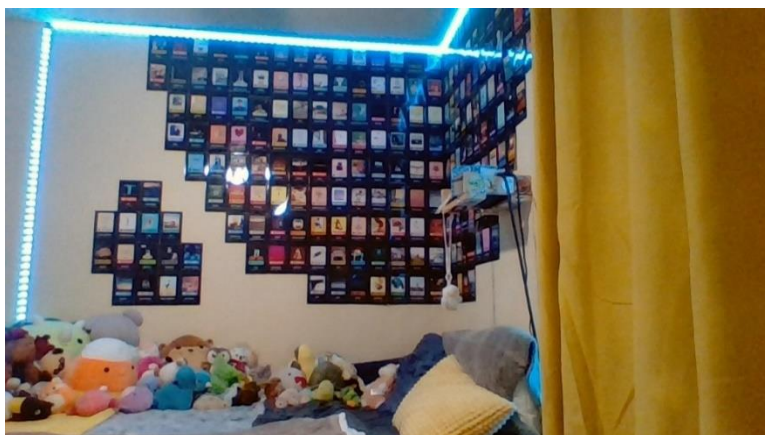
Interaction with Viewers

Figure 14: The wall of album art

However, not all interactions with viewers are meant to separate us. Most of the time, the goal is to include them in the stream and keep them interested and engaged. If they ask

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questions, I will answer them, and if they want to talk about something, I tend to oblige. In one stream, a viewer asked me about the wall of pictures seen behind me in Figure 14 when my camera is on.

The album art featured on the wall come from the music that is on my main Spotify playlist. I also received them as a move in gift from my girlfriend, who meticulously went through the playlist and picked out the art she most liked and thought I would want on my wall. This idea came from something I had seen online and mentioned to her before in passing. After moving in, I put up the pictures in a pattern I had designed and sketched out beforehand to make sure I had the appropriate number of pictures and would be able to use them all (actually in Minecraft, my guess is this will not be relevant, but I thought it was cool). The order of the actual pictures is mostly random, determined by which ones caught my attention in the immediate moment of putting them up.

In response to the viewer's question, I told them it was album art from songs, to which the responded by asking more specifically, what songs. So, I asked if they would be interested in my creation of a playlist to view or listen to the songs that they so often see behind me. They said yes, and I created a playlist of each and every song that appears on the wall. I then chose a cover photo for the playlist, which is the image seen in figure 3, exactly what the viewers sees when I stream. From there I posted it on my Twitch main page where viewers are lead after first entering my channel, as well as on my channel twitter, where people who may follow me will get alerted.

Discord Overlay

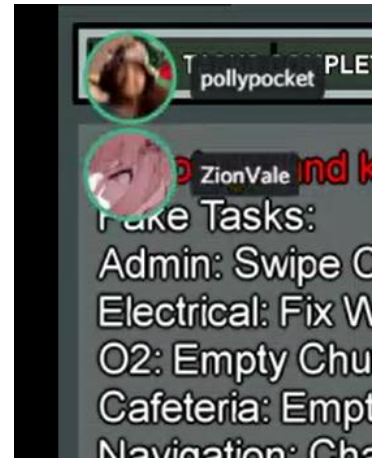Figure 16: Among Us with Discord Overlay   Figure 15: Discord Overlay zoomed

There is also a Discord overlay, which can be seen in the top left as circles with images inside them and names next to each one. To make this, I used a website called Streamkit, shown in figure 16, that allows me to select a server and a voice chat within Discord (an application I use for talking to my friends), and display it on Streamlabs, and in turn, Twitch. I set it so that it will only show speaking users and names, and adjust the size and opacity of the icons and names.

From here I use the link the website generates and paste it into a browser display component of streamlabs. I then place the component where I want it and it is finished. This element brings value to the stream because viewers can tell who is talking, and understand the conversations
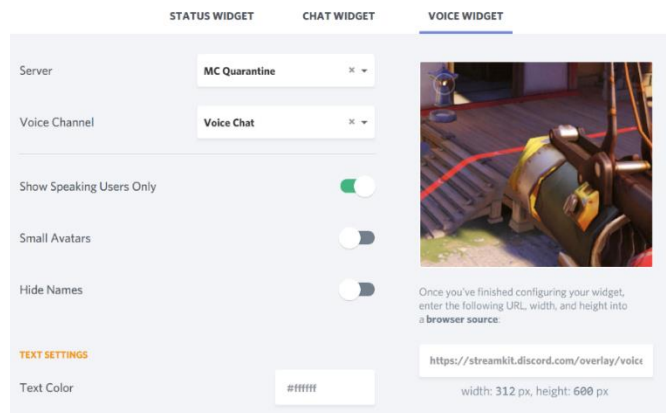

Figure 17: Streamkit's Discord Overlay settings and customizations

much better. They can tell when I am playing with someone I have played with before, or if somebody they like is playing with me.

<u>In-Game Map and Task List</u>

Figure 17: The in-game map fills the screen.   *Figure 18: The list of tasks at the top left.*

The map is what is seen in the first image above, and the list is what fills up a large

portion of the left side of the screen in the second image. The map is a very simple representation

of the environment, with the rooms and hallways connecting them. The dark blue shapes with

labels are the rooms, and the light blue paths are the hallways. The yellow exclamation points

represent the locations of tasks I still have left to do. However, since I'm not a crewmate, I do

not actually need to complete them. Instead, I can use these a guide for where to go to pretend to

do tasks, as not to be suspected by the other players.

The map is closely related to the list, which shows the locations, names, and number of

tasks left to complete. The locations correspond to the rooms on the map so the player can easily

tell where to go. The names help the player identify what task they need to do, and help to

communicate what they were doing to others when the time comes. The number of tasks left

allow the player to know how close they are to completing all the things they need to do. The

Map and Task List go hand in hand to help the player understand the context of the environment.

Among Us Livestream Analysis

For this study, I will focus on a 30 second video clip from a stream of mine where I play the video game *Among Us.* It begins with what is seen in figure 20, with my Cyan colored character (labeled kyjoma)

Figure 19: The clip begins here

and my friend's white colored character (polly) in the room called Electrical. Behind us are a series of boxes and wires where tasks can be. Both of us are imposters this game, so we don't need to do any tasks, indicated by our names appearing red. It can be seen in the top left corner in red above the regular tasks on the task list that our objective is to "sabotage and kill everyone." There is also some dialogue here. Polly is heard saying "do keys," and then I respond with "yeah that's what I do." This is the back end of a conversation that was reference to a task

on another map which is commonly faked. Next, I pull up the map briefly, shown in figure 19, to see where I can go to fake tasks. I am in the room labeled "Electrical," with two exclamation marks on it, so I know I am not particularly close to

Figure 20: The map that is pulled up briefly

any other tasks right now. I then "vent," which enables me to move around the map quickly without being seen. I do this to see if there are any other players in the surrounding rooms that I

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can easily kill. I then vent back to the room I was in and move toward the exit of the room. We

then hear JawBonez say "I'm getting stuck on walls" as indicated by the discord overlay, to

which ZionVale responds with "teleport," and Polly with "just tell them no" followed by "just

use vents." These are both joke responses, since the game does not allow teleporting, walls

cannot be told "no," and only imposters can use vents, so this is assumed to be out of the

question as well. As I am leaving the area, a notification appears in the top right of my screen

with the text "DylanPowers is now

following" and the follow noise

plays loudly, signifying that a

viewer has followed my Twitch

account. I then continue to the left

through a hallway, then up, then

right into another room called
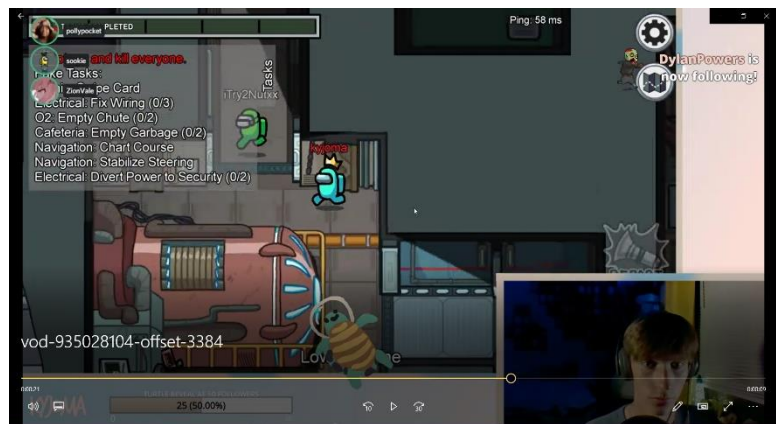
Figure 21: The moment when the follow notification plays

security. This is what is happening in figure 21. Along the way the conversation continues, with

JawBonez saying "I can't do that either" about all the previous solutions to her problem.

ZionVale begins to speak but then cuts himself off, seemingly unable to get his sentence out

saying "never mind I'm going to stop talking." During this, I pass by another player iTry2Nutxx,

flash my map for a moment to refresh my memory on where everything is, then pass JawBonez

as I enter the security room. When I pass these players, they are highlighted in red, meaning I

have the ability to kill them, but I don't as I am not confident about where the other players are

and do not want them to see me. In security, I then open what is essentially a CCTV for the map

by using the computer desk and see four screens with players walking about. Each screen is a

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different part of the map, and the players moving in them are there in game. At this point I ask "Which task should I do first?" This is a joke, as the other players at this point assume that I am a crewmate,

Figure 22: The CCTV that is opened

however, the viewers can see that, since I am the imposter, I cannot do tasks. DQ responds with "your mom" and ZionVale responds with "kill uh…" which are both jokes as well. Then I close the CCTV and the clip ends.

All of the parts that I previously described can be seen interacting and bringing value to the stream in just this short clip.

<u>Program / Layout</u>

Streamlabs and the resources it provides, as well as my general stream set up have important parts in constructing an entertaining stream. Specifically, in this clip, Streamlabs allows me to do a couple things. As seen in the above image, I am able to display both my face and the game. This gives the content more personality since viewers can see my reactions and gameplay at the same time. It also allows me to emphasize elements that I want. Because the focus of the stream is on the game, the game takes up a larger portion of the screen than my face, or any of the other smaller elements scattered about. I am also able to place my camera above the game, since it is important for viewers to see my face clearly, rather than the small part of what

is going on in the game. Specifically I chose that area of the game to cover because it does not

have anything significant to viewers, just a button that performs an action that the audience can

already see happening. Streamlabs also offers me unlimited customizability by importing my

own images, so I am able to customize the colors and background to make my channel stand out

and be unique. It also allows me to place the turtle over the game code.

Turtle

To join a game of *Among Us,* a player must have the unique code for that lobby. The

turtle provides an unobtrusive solution to stop unwanted players from joining the game, and

gives the stream a little more character. The reason the code must be covered is to prevent

viewers from joining what are supposed to be private games. If I am playing with friends, I do

not want random people from my stream joining the game and potentially ruining it. For one, it

would be an awkward experience, and they would be able to see everything I am doing and take

advantage of that unfairly.

Figure 23: The turtle is seen at the bottom center of the stream

This clip from the video segment I described earlier shows the turtle drawing in it place over the game code. The game code is six letter code that allows a user to join a specific game, and by covering it, I can basically guarantee that match will remain private, and only people I want to join can join. This idea is not mine, in fact, a lot of streamers do the exact same thing using their logos or characters related to their channel. My main inspiration to make something channel personalized comes from a streamer called 5up. They have a custom character which represents their entire channel, and they use it throughout their content including over the game codes for *Among Us*. In the context of my channel and the video clip, it serves the same purpose. Another factor that lead me to digitizing this character instead of just covering up the code with a black bar or something was my enjoyment in expressing my creativity. While I do not consider myself an artist of any sort, I enjoy undergoing creative endeavors for leisure, and this seemed like a fun opportunity to be creative.

Sounds

In the top right corner, there is a notification reading "DylanPowers is now following!" When this notification appears, the follow sound shown and described earlier plays simultaneously. In the clip I am focusing on, the notification plays as I leave the electrical room, and I do not mention it. Normally I would acknowledge the message and thank the viewer for following, but in this case I was focused on the game and did not mention it, and continued to play. The notification
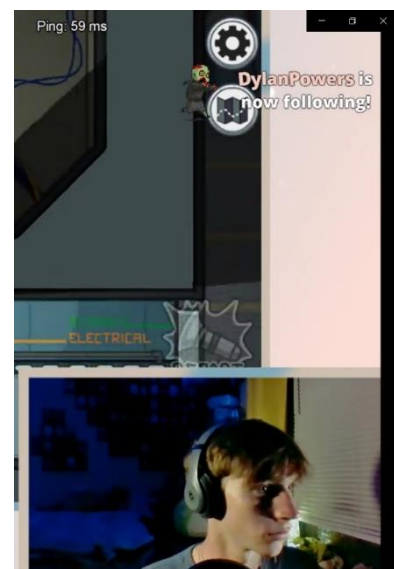

Figure 24: A clear view of the notification

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lets the viewer feel seen by both me and the community, and the sound I created is what makes

this notification stand out. Without it, the notification may be easily missed since it is away from

the real focus of the stream. While the sound is loud on the viewers' end, other players in the

game cannot hear it, and it does not take away from their focus on the game.

Interaction with Viewers

While the interaction with the viewers is not direct in this clip, the way we play the game

changes a bit when there are viewers present. For example, all of the dialogue and chatter that is

going on is not typical in a off stream game. Normally, all the players stay silent during the

game, and bring all the information up to each other when the meetings are held. The banter and

conversations make the stream more interesting, so this type of gameplay is encouraged on

stream. They also influence how I play specifically. On stream, it is more fun to go for more

outrageous and inconsistent strategies, or to make riskier plays. That is much more fun to watch

than when I play safe and try to be as careful as possible. The environment, with my lighting

behind me, and the bed made are also affected by the viewers. If I know that I will be streaming,

I do my best to clean up for it. Although no viewers chatted during this clip, they can also

directly affect gameplay. If someone in my chat sees something that I don't they can point it out

and help me play a better game.

Discord Overlay

Specifically in the context of Among Us and the clip, it is extra useful. For viewers to

understand what is happening, it is important to know which players are which characters in the

game, as well as which voices go with which players. For Among Us specifically, I ask that my

friends change their Among Us and Discord names to match, so that anyone watching or playing

for the first time is able to enjoy the experience and understand what is happening. In figure ??

there are two users talking, pollypocket and ZionVale. Pollypocket is polly in Among Us, and

ZionVale is ZionVale in among us. A viewer can see this and connect the voices and players

together so they can understand the game, and who is doing or saying what.

Map / Task List

In the clip, viewers can see what tasks I have left to do and where to do them, as well as myself. From my movement in the game and the tasks that appear, the viewers are able to figure out where I am going and understand my thought process and plan for the game's future. In the clip I also talk about "which task should I do first," giving viewers even more context to my viewing of the map and list, and to my movement and interactions with the other players.

Figure 25: Here we see the map again.

Figure 26: The task list is in the upper left.

By bringing all sorts of genres of texts and literacies together, I can create a unique and

entertaining experience for myself, my friends, and my viewers.

Vernacular literacies in the present are deeply online, and profoundly digital. This is clear in the studies I do in Chapter 3, and particularly Chapter 4. In Chapter 3 many of the texts are physical, like the painting or the CDs, but the digital literacies present are equally important. Word helps me plan and tweak which songs will be on the mixtape and where, and Spotify allows me to search for, organize, and preview the songs I intend to burn onto the CDs. The absence of these literacies would throw a massive wrench in the procedures that I engaged in. In this chapter, a large percentage of the texts and interactions take place exclusively in a digital landscape. Twitch, Among Us, Discord, Streamlabs, FL Studio, and Gimp all exist in an almost entirely digital space. In fact, only a few parts of the literacies discussed in Chapter 4 have their roots in the physical world. Without any of these, this vernacular literacy would cease to exist. Twitch is a digital platform that I have created an environment on using Streamlabs, FL Studio, and Gimp, where I can play the online game *Among Us* with friends by talking through the application Discord. This is something that often gets overlooked or intentionally avoided in the field. For example, Tusting and Papen do a great job analyzing material texts in "Creativity in Everyday Literacy Practices: The Contribution of an Ethnographic Approach" with their in-depth descriptions of the processes and details of texts including a church bulletin and a campsite sign. Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth dive into science textbooks, Hassan examines greeting cards, and Anson shows the underbelly of his football write-ups. None of them even touch on the world of digital literacies, or mention the impact it has on physical ones, even though they are ingrained in our daily lives.

Everyday vernacular literacies are also incredibly social and collaborative compared to a typical school or work project. This builds on the idea the Fan Shen brings up of the creator's environment influencing the way a text gets created. Because many texts are created and used in order to interact with others, or created and used *with* others, vernacular literacies are not such as much of a solo act. In Chapter 3, the outside influences could be seen, but were not a prominent feature of the literacy. My dad influenced my interest in music and CDs, and my girlfriend influenced how I constructed the mixtape, but neither of them took part in the actual creation, nor are crucial to the existence of a mixtape (however, they are crucial to the existence of *that* mixtape). With this chapter, collaboration and social interaction take a front seat. While some people play similar roles to my girlfriend or dad, like my friend who introduced me to Twitch, others have a much more prominent role in its existence. My girlfriend painted a picture of my turtle; without it, I may not have considered creating that graphic. Playing *Among Us* is nothing without people to play it with, and Twitch is a platform built around sharing yourself with others. The way I see it, without the community around streaming, there is no literate activity to study. The essay still exists without the classmates and the email to the boss still exists without the co-workers. Vernacular literacies are nothing without the people around them.

Often, when the term "vernacular" is used, people think of side projects, things that are not a person's focus. Grocery lists, notes, or to-do lists, and recipes, emails, or video games are some things that people do on the side, when they need to or have time. The creation of my mixtape fits this mold as well. However, my interaction with Twitch and the time and effort I put into each and every one of the parts is much more than what I would consider a "side project." Just as Chris Anson often "spent most of his afternoon on [the] otherwise simple [summaries],"

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people spend plenty of time, dedicated time, on their choice vernacular literacies every day

(528). Hobbies that garner hours upon hours of learning, creating, and interaction deserve to be

respected and studied. Often, people are more passionate and interested in their hobbies as

opposed to work or school, so examining these literacies reveal a clearer image of how people

work on texts that they deem important. I spent hours learning how to use the software involved

with streaming, hours deliberating and building the image I wanted my viewers to perceive, and

hours enjoying and improving my streams each week.

In Chapter 5, I will outline the key findings from my examinations in chapter 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 5: LOOKING BACK AND THINKING FORWARD: CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTION ON METHOD, AND IMPLICATIONS

The research I have done for this thesis has shown the ins and outs of my creation of a mixtape for my girlfriend and the production and use of a Twitch stream by myself and others. All the work I have done for this thesis led me to a greater understanding of my everyday literacies, and vernacular literacies in general. The next few paragraphs will outline my findings from chapters 3 and 4.

In Chapter 3 I began to find that my initial ideas about writing and literacy being a solitary, monomodal activity need to be revised. Examining my engagement with making the mixtape showed me that writing does not just mean sitting at a desk with a pen and paper or laptop. Through analyzing the practices and processes involved in my creation and use of the mixtape, I have come to realize that texts come in all different forms, from an amalgamation of resources flowing one into the next. From this, I have come to realize that texts can be influenced by people, mediums, and subconscious choices every step of the way, and that it is important to spend time and focus on the influences and people that unintentionally make the text what it is and give it its importance and meaning. Recognizing that the outside influences are often what make a text special is part of studying everyday texts, and taking the time to notice the personal connections between the creator, their work, and others brings out the flavor and fleshes out the picture of what a text is really about.

My analysis for Chapter 3 also illuminated how, contrary to my typical classroom research experiences, there is a wealth of value in looking at each of the elements and phases in the production and use of everyday texts. The inputs and processes contribute to the creation of a

text in a way that enable me to use it fluidly. I find that the saying "the sum of the parts is greater than the whole" is true for thinking about how we make and use texts in our everyday lives. Without studying the inscriptions that go into the finished product, and each of the texts that came before, so many of the details and decisions of writing cannot be seen or understood. Like looking under the hood of car, one cannot appreciate how a text functions until they look at the inner workings. The intentions and ideas are much more clearly broadcast when looking at the sum of the parts, and not just the whole.

Chapter 3 also hints toward a digital component to everyday literacies with its inclusion of Spotify as a utility for creation. This is also gestured to in Chapter 4, which shows that vernacular literacies can be prominently digital and that ignoring them is ignoring a large portion of people's day to day activities. Researchers in this field of study have long been avoiding, whether it be intentionally or not, activities that take place in majority digital mediums. Given the untouched depth of material in digital literacies, researchers would be remiss to not begin seriously pursuing digital literacies as a productive direction for future inquiry.

The key findings from Chapter 4 should also be reiterated. My analysis of the texts and textual practices involved in my streaming exhibits how communal, collaborative, and socially important vernacular literacies are. Most vernacular texts are not made solely by or for one person. They take direct and indirect influence from the people around them, shaping, molding, and solidifying them as something meaningful or useful to the people involved. It is important to realize that everyday literacies exist in this environment so that when they are studied, researchers can take note of the friends, family, and community involved in an activity. While Chapter 3 certainly points to the influence of others on a text, some texts may have more social

influences than others, and the examination done in the Chapter 4 shows just how socially involved an everyday literacy can be, with people involved in every aspect: my friends influenced me to stream and participate in the games, my girlfriend helped in bringing my mascot, the turtle, to life, and I aim to make entertaining content for my viewers.

Both analyses highlight activities in which my engagement is sustained for an extended period of time. Unlike a sign made for a campsite, or a science textbook, I have enjoyed these activities continuously and I see myself creating more mixtapes and continuing to stream going forward. There is not a limit to the lifespan of these activities. If I want to keep working on and interacting with those activities that I enjoy, I will. This is in contrast to school and work literacies, where something is important only up until the deadline, and then it is immediately forgotten about, or soon after. Vernacular literacies are sustainable in nature. They are used for as long as the creator wants them to be used for, and can be designed to be used indefinitely.

Both chapters 3 and 4 have sections which analyze the sounds of their respective texts. This is not common in the field of literacy research, as most often with music the lyrics are the focus of the study. While in chapter 3, the lyrical themes and content do have importance to their placement on the tape, the instrumentation and aesthetic of each song plays a significant and arguably more important part the decisions I made. In chapter 4 I go further into sound, with my creation and arrangement of notes to create unique sound effects. Clearly here, lyrics play no part in the analysis, and the literacy being examined is limited to purely the sounds that I create. While sounds have a part in almost every literacy, they are rarely examined in conjunction with the other elements. Sounds get overlooked, and in my analyses I try to bring a bit of light to them.

<u>Implications for Research</u>

For any researchers wanting to study literacy with an autoethnographic approach I can provide a bit of insight.

For one, I would suggest that researchers do not overlook any activities. When I began my venture into my own literacies for the first time, I had a conventional vision of what a literacy was. In my head I pictured concrete texts, writing, pictures, and things that more obviously fall under the common definition of a text. Researchers should aim to see all available options. Games, sounds, conversations, movement, videos, and pretty much everything else is capable and worthy of being studied next to books, pictures, homework, and recipes. This of course does not mean that something of this nature must be chosen, but researchers should not intentionally limit their scope.

I would suggest that researchers gather the absolute greatest amount of data as possible after deciding on the focus of their study. Not everything will be used, and there will be more discoveries as the research gets under way, but having as much to work with as possible to start will help illuminate the directions they might want to take their research. For example, in Chapter 4 I collected the Streamlabs texts, Turtle texts, and my Background to talk about, as well as *Among Us* pictures from stream. What are not seen here are the data I collected from my setup, what a stream looks like from a viewer's point of view, pictures of my actual turtle and the painting, and a few others. This does not mean these are not important, instead that there is more to study here. However, I decided that other texts were more important to what I wanted to cover in my analysis. Along the way there will be texts encountered that have not yet been collected. In

Chapter 3 this was the CD and the raw images of myself and my girlfriend; in Chapter 4 this was the map, sounds, and Discord overlay. As I continued my analysis of these activities, I recognized that there were texts I had not thought of that I would need to include to make my examination complete. I encourage researchers to embrace this process of discovery and to be open to including things they may not have initially believed important or overlooked. Had I neglected to collect as many texts as I did in the beginning, I may not have had enough to build my points from, and I may have missed a lot of the depth in the Chapter 3, and much of the width in Chapter 4. Without understanding and accepting that my audience may need additional texts, I would not be able to communicate what is happening, and therefore the readers will likely miss some of the points and observations I am trying to make.

Regarding the storage of all this data I would recommend being meticulous with what is collected. Any physical data, such as the mixtape and CD, I advise should captured on a camera, with pictures taken from all angles and of get all parts in case something happens. As for storing physical data, try to convert it to digital forms, as they are much less unwieldy and easy to keep track of. I organized my digital data into folders. One large folder holds all the data, with subfolders holding the images from the individual chapters. In the cases where I have lots of data for one part of a chapter I have gone as far as to create a sub-subfolder for that. For example, in Chapter 4, there are many pictures from the video clip that I reference throughout the back half of the analysis. I stored theses in a separate folder from the rest of the content in that chapter. While I understand that everyone will have their own preferences and amount of data, it is necessary to keep good track of the data you are using, as you will come back to it often to observe it and reanalyze bits and pieces. From my experience, without good organization, there

is a chance that crucial pieces of information may be lost, and that is not a chance I recommend taking.

Implications for Teaching

As I have mentioned, I was not interested in writing much at all in school until I was introduced to everyday literacy in college. I imagine that lots of students are like me, and are unaware that there is more out there than writing about books, plays and poems. My guess is that there is a chance that they might be more interested in writing if those involved in writing and literacy instruction open the doors for them to explore everyday literacies. I find that there is so much diversity within vernacular texts that students are bound to find something that interests them, and from experience, I know that when students are interested in something, they will be more engaged and produce better work. This is not to say that some students are not interested in studying traditional literature, but to say that those who are not are being neglected. Hopefully, going forward, teachers will begin to include opportunities for students to investigate and learn about everyday literacies, and more students will develop a greater appreciation for writing and literacies in general, and possibly find something they are passionate about.

I will also suggest that teachers consider the benefits of students studying their own literate activities, whether that be everyday or otherwise. Since people tend to do the things they like, having students analyze their own activities will give them something to study that they are passionate about. I also think it is important that instructors help students realize that there are topics and texts that they can explore that have not been written about by anyone before. Typically, my English classes assigned readings that many students have read before, and so the

opinions and observations that we could make have almost certainly been made by plenty of others before. If teachers can give students a chance to explore literacies in their own lives, they will find more meaning in the observations they make and understanding they gain. For me, knowing that what I am doing is new and novel is fun and much more interesting. It makes me feel like I am doing something unique. I know that what I am saying has not been said before, and that I might be pointing things out that others have truly never thought about or noticed.

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