

27 September 2022

Dear Reader

I started this essay out not really knowing what to write about, struggling to put words on a page, until a friend I usually hang out with listened to me complain for about half an hour. After listening to me, he thought for a moment and said very simply: “It sounds like you want to write about culture”. His simple explanation blew me away, for how could he describe my issue so neatly? It’s nothing so amazing I’ve come to learn, merely another step in the writing process: peer review. I wrote so rarely before coming to college that I constantly forget what those steps were.

I had originally decided to use a very minimalist approach to adding quotes and supporting evidence from source material. I have this overwhelming urge to only add the bare minimum; It always feels like I’m just stealing someone else’s work or just padding my own word count when I quote someone. However, both my peers and my instructor think this is silly; and after some convincing arguments, I decided to add a few more to make my claims more valid or cogent.

I’d also like to take this time to thank my instructor. Every time I talked to them, they summarized my process and gave me very acute advice that propelled me forward, like “Give more than a definition”. They were referring to my lack of supporting arguments from a text I used to help make my claim. Or “Your conclusion should answer the ‘so what’ question”. I hope I’ve summarized my own claim in the conclusion well enough, and I’d Like to think I’ve made a good argument to support my claim. So without further ado, here’s my essay.

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My Life Has Been Cattywampus

From the beginning, I've always been enthralled by two things: music and stories. In my younger years, my grandparents took me to a church 3 times a week where a pastor would preach and the hillbillies would sing. I learned about kid-friendly verses, I learned religious sing-along songs, and I learned songs on the radio my grandparents would set. I loved these things, so when I tried to learn more and reach out for extra stories and music, my grandparents severely limited what I had access to. Paraphrasing Deborah Brandt, "sponsors of literacy" include people or things that have changed our outlook or perception on our reading and writing (165). All of my literacy sponsors reflect things that I've picked up or sought out while I grew up, and because my young age granted me only a limited access to media, all of them cost nothing and have a high availability such as the bible, radio music, video game lore, and fanfiction. I believe these things are just as valid for culture as more popular and "educated" works.

When I was growing up, the Bible was all I had immediate access to. I read it often and repeatedly. I'm pretty sure I've read the King James version cover to cover about 10 times.

While I did have some access to other stuff, everything else from childish books with very silly stories to advanced conflict stories with enormous socio-political dramas were locked behind my grandparents bedroom door, to which I only had access to if I did well in school or behavior.

These occasions I experienced few and far between so I really had to look for something else and anything would do. Most of my early days "branching out" I spent in my father's Ranger with the radio on just listening to whatever played on the country radio station. If I tried to switch stations when I listened alone, I'd risk my father's ire and he'd punish me if he found me listening to anything that wasn't country music. I can say I know most country songs from the

early 2000s by heart. The biggest problem with the radio was the sheer amount of commercials I had to sit through. In fact, most of my time spent in this fashion forced me to listen to ad spots.

However, it gave me a good basis for storytelling, word flow, and much more modern ways of speaking than the Bible. It allowed me to talk to my peers in such a way that they could understand me; they all heard the music too. When I wrote anything in the future, long after I progressed past solely country music, I could fall back on the word choice, the witticisms, the articulation that I learned from great works in their own right such as Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise", or Dio's "Stargazer", or Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven". I learned a lot from these songs and to discount them, and by extension really, any song as a learning experience does them a great injustice. These songs teach English, they teach slang, they teach poetry, they're good (admittedly, some songs less than others) for allowing anyone to express themselves, much like any works of writing, and, above all else, I had access to them. In her article, Deborah Brandt said:

This analysis of sponsorship forces us to consider not merely how one social group's literacy practices may differ from another's, but how everybody's literacy practices are operating in differential economies, which supply different access routes, different degrees of sponsoring power, and different scales of monetary worth to the practices in use (Brandt 172).

I find this completely and accurately describes my young life's conundrum; 'how do I consume more media that I enjoy?'

The friends I gained from talking about music introduced me to a new type of media: fanfiction. Now, I've gone through this enough times to go ahead and curtail the normal reaction. I started when I was 12, before I had any interest in relationships. I didn't want to read about lovey-dovey nonsense, I wanted to read about what rocked, like sword fights, spaceships, fast cars and dragon slayers. I lucked out in that my parents didn't know what the internet was and what it could grant access to. I liked reading cool stories about cool things I

knew nothing about. The best part was, and to this day is: it's all free. Nameless people decided to write amazing works not bound by a publisher's rules but only their imagination and patience. Sometimes, naturally, you will have a heap of low-quality stuff that you'll have to sort out. I would contend, however, that that is true of any type of work in a time period. Everyone knows a surface level of Shakespeare, but you'd have to have knowledge in playwriting to learn of other names in the same time period. This remains true of any type of media. You have the "gold standard" and you have the stuff that's forgotten about. It is the culmination of the whole system of media, be it books, songs, whatever. All that matters is that they contribute to the culture they pertain to, and by default, the overall culture of the area/group.

Video games arrived relatively recently, introducing a new type of media, only existing for about 50 years in force. However they have been more influential on the culture of today than any other consumed type of media. This follows what Deborah Brandt said about the development of literacy: "Where once the same sponsoring arrangements could maintain value across a generation or more, forms of literacy and their sponsors can now rise and recede many times within a single life span" (178). Video games can dominate the topic of any conversation between people who aren't in a retirement home, (though some are) whether it's on the topic of "video games are ruining this country!" to "have you played that new video game?" To deny their influence would be a bold faced lie, and a detriment to the development of what effect video games have on culture, and how rapidly it can grow. One can find out what groups they could belong to. In the early stages of my life, my first game was a very simple and basic one :*MX vx. ATV: Offroad Fury*. It not only defined my teenage years, but my whole families' life for over a decade. It told my father to buy himself, my siblings, and I recreational vehicles to play around on. It affected my extended family too, my uncles and aunts, my grandparents (not the Bible

ones) all got their own rides and we would have a family excursion roughly every month for over a decade that lasted for at least 5 hours. All of this because of a single videogame.

Think of the changes video games have made on people's lives whether they be internal and esoteric: like a child playing a basketball video game and decided to change his life to be an all star basketball player, or the controversy over the idea that video games cause violence. True or not, it has led to a much more solid awareness over the contents and the development of video games from the problematic to the more self-aware game.

In conclusion, you cannot write off video games, music, and fanfiction as ineffective on the development of culture. To do so would present a misunderstanding of what literacy is. Video games over just the past few decades have changed society to highlight awareness and allowed awful topics to be brought to light in a much safer way than to introduce them in reality. Music, much more now than before due to radios and streaming services, have uplifted and inspired billions all over the world and from any financial background. Fanfiction and other fanworks — despite their low popularity— have introduced a safe, free way to start growing your own ideas, learn how to write in a fun and entertaining way, and allow you to meet the community that enjoys the same media you do. Culture is the sum of its parts, and every part should be considered valid and respected.

Works Cited

Brandt, Deborah. "Sponsors of Literacy." *College Composition and Communication* vol. 49
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