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Men Writing Their Lives: Situating the Authoring Processes of Zinesters

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Abstract: Research on men's literacy practices, particularly their writing practices, is sparse. The purpose of this study was to examine the writing practices of adult men by focusing on why and how men write autobiographical comic zines and perzines of prose, poetry, and cartoons reflecting online and offline hybridity. A theory of writing as meaning making, a social semiotic perspective, and a view of masculinities as inclusive representations of gender identity informed this study. Using a multiple case study approach, we focused on five middle-class men ranging in age from their early 30s to early 40s who created zines reflecting two different writing genres: autobiographical comic zines and personal zines, or perzines. Data were triangulated by observations, photographs, informal and semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, and examination of the men's zines. Data were analysed inductively by thematic analysis and deductively by principles of the theoretical framework. Findings are drawn about the type of representations, compositional constructions, messages, audience, and community. Men wrote to share life lessons, to express alternative notions of masculinities, and for catharsis. This study provides insight into the literacy practices of adult men that may serve as models to inspire and guide other men's writing.

Keywords: adult literacy, masculinity, men's writing, social semiotics, zines



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Introduction¹

Sitting in a large auditorium are members of a unique literary culture. They are selling their self-published work, promoting their writing to the public mingling around tables where they display their creations – their zines. Zines are self-publications created as alternatives to commercial magazines, focused on whatever topics or themes are important to their makers, written in myriad forms, distributed through Distro or online distribution centers, sold at alternative record stores and bookstores, and shared at annual zine festivals held at art galleries and recreational places in major cities around the world. These zinesters (those who write or edit hard copy and/or electronic zines) come from a diversity of socio-cultural backgrounds, ages, genders, and sexual orientations, but they share one commonality - their passion for zining, for creating their own texts, and for sharing their small, low-budget writings.

The first author, Barbara, met members of the zine community face-to-face by attending the 13th annual Portland Zine Symposium, including 100



Figure 1. Zinesters at the Portland Zine Festival

zinesters who were showcasing their zines as authors and about 1000 attendees browsing the zinesters' tables as readers (shown in Figure 1). She was interested in attending this popular zine symposium to meet zinesters in person and locate their zines since most zines are still considered fugitive literature that are not distributed or available online and are referred to as "quintessentially print texts" (Brower & Licona, 2016, p. 70) that are passed on hand-to-hand. She also wanted to meet and participate in the zine community as a reader and collector.

Some of these zinesters gave their zines away free of charge; others charged for them at cost. Some created supplementary materials, such as flyers, pins, buttons, stickers or posters for sale along with their zines (shown in Figure 2).

Zine symposiums, or festivals like this one, typically include workshops or panel discussions on topics like zine construction, zines in libraries, and directions for future zining. Zinesters attend to meet and talk with their readers, network, exchange zines with each other, and form community. They share resources and information, such as the online community, WeMakeZines that has both a presence on Facebook and a website, (www.wemakezines.com), dedicated to supporting zinesters and their zines.

Barbara collected zines authored by men at the zine festival because although there is a long history of research on girls' and women's zines (Kearney, 2006), particularly studies of feminist zines as vehicles for feminist community building and support (e.g., Bell, 2002 ; Chidgey, 2013; Goulding, 2015; Harris, 2003;

¹ We acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this

article we use pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves.

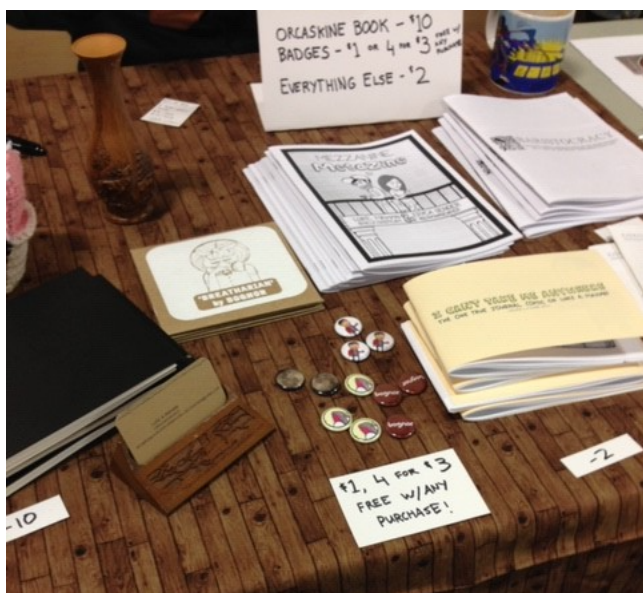


Figure 2. Zines and Supplementary Products

Schilt, 2003, Weida, 2013), relatively few investigations of men's zines have appeared in the scholarly literature (e.g., Guzzetti, 2019; Guzzetti & Foley, 2017; Guzzetti & Lesley, 2017; Rogers, 2014). Because past research on zines in general, and men's zines in particular, has not focused on zinesters' writing processes, we aimed to contribute to the literature that would explain how and why men write past their schooling years, and explicate the ways in which men go about constructing and composing their zines from inception to production that could serve as models to stimulate other men's writing.

Background

The silence in the research field on men's zines is consistent with the observation that contemporary research on men's literacy practices, particularly their writing practices, is sparse. Researchers have tended to focus on boys' literacy practices (Brozo, 2013; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) or those of young men, particularly those of color (Bean & Ransaw, 2013; Drayton & Prins, 2011; Kirkland, 2013a; 2013b). Only a few studies have described men's writing practices or processes in their investigations of men

making media (e.g., Guzzetti, Foley & Lesley, 2015; Hagood, Stevens & Reinking, 2002; Rogers, 2014). While analysis of the textual practices of students engaged in new literacies and creating texts both in school (e.g., Edward-Groves, 2011; Iyer & Luke, 2010) and in out-of-school settings (e.g., Alvermann, 2010; Hagood, 2009) has provided insights into adolescent boys' writing, little is known about how men construct texts beyond their schooling years (Gustavson, 2002). A line of inquiry on men writing in adulthood remains underdeveloped in the literacy research literature.

Studies of adult men's writing both offline and online have typically focused on differences in males' and females' writing styles, forms, or genres (e.g., Ball, 2003; Piper & So, 2016). For example, analysis of opinion pieces in news media indicated that women tend to write more of these articles in new media while men's views dominate "legacy media" of traditional newspapers and college newspapers (Fry, 2012; Yaeger, 2012). Other research had shown that men tend to write less online and author fewer electronic mail communications than do women (Fallows, 2005). Recent research from the Pew Internet Research Center indicates that men are now using social media, such as Twitter and Tumblr, almost as much as do women, and men read or write comments more than women do in online discussion forums, such as Reddit, Digg, or Slashdot (Anderson, 2015).

Studies like these tend to convey the message that men's writing is of interest only in relation to women's writing. These investigations have ignored men's purposes for writing, their writing processes, and the functions that writing can serve well into an adult man's life. Yet, such investigations have potential to inform the educational research community and to serve as models of men engaging in literacy in authentic ways to achieve personal goals. Such models may provide others with

permission to engage in literacy practices that otherwise may not be viewed as masculine pursuits and serve as models of alternative ways to do so (Seitz, 2013).

These constructs of masculinity and of “masculine” pursuits are troubled by current theories of gender and masculinities. In gender studies, masculinity is typically defined as socially constructed and influenced behaviours, demonstrations, or performances of men emerging from constructions of manhood (Dancy, 2011). Masculinity concerns behaviours and performances that result from manhood, consisting of the ways men enact notions of manhood (Dancy, 2011). Masculinity theory posits that masculinity is identity performance or a social construction subject to change and critique with the hope of transforming stereotypical social scripts and their enactments (Bean & Harper, 2007). Therefore, there is no singular masculinity but a range of masculine identities, representations, and performances, referred to as masculinities. Masculinities are fluid, evolving versions of the performance of masculinities. They are discursively constructed and positioned, and subject to being reworked (Archer & Yamashita, 2003).

Zines, Zining and Zinesters

At least partly due to this recent focus on expanding notions of masculinity and advances in theories of masculinities, researchers have begun to explore men writing (zining) alternative texts of zines (e.g., Guzzetti, 2019; Guzzetti & Foley, 2017; Guzzetti, Foley & Lesley, 2015; Gustavson, 2002; Haegele, 2010; Rogers, 2014). Zines are self-publications authored or edited in myriad genres, forms, and styles, characterized by pastiche and collage, and written on a plethora of topics as alternatives to commercial magazines (Poletti, 2005; Ramdarshan Bold, 2017). Zines demonstrate the value of the individual’s own life world (Habermas, 1987) as zinesters take up

topics of personal passion, often covering “issues that are often ignored, or overlooked by mainstream media’ (Ramdarshan Bold, 2017, p. 218). There are many different types of zines, such as fanzines, sci-fi zines, music zines, sports zines, television and film zines, political zines, personal zines, scene zines, network zines, fringe culture zines, religious zines, vocational zines, health zines, sex zines, travel zines, comixs, literary zines, art zines, social zines and others (Duncombe, 2008; Ramdarshan Bold 2017). Autobiographical zines draw upon the zinester’s life experiences. Zinesters may use photographs and/or hand drawn images in their zine to support their story. Chidgey (2013), writing about feminist memory in young women’s zines, believes the autobiographical voice is a staple of feminist zine formats, where ‘autobiographical memory accentuates aspects of mediated life histories’ and ‘the past is not always treated as distinctly ‘past’ but as something that blurs into the present’ (p. 666). She further comments that ‘the norm of citing your own situated knowledges and experiences provides rich data for scholars looking to map individual lives and community scenes’. Autobiographical comic zines use design principles of comic-strips using drawings with and without written text. They tend to follow a narrative form or focus on a theme that is associated with the zinester’s life experiences, for example, phobias.

Personal zines, which in the zining world are known as Perzines, are “written by an individual that discusses personal thoughts, experiences, and everyday events” (Buchanan, 2012, p. 73). Ramdarshan Bold (2017) classifies them as a type of autobiographical zine which provide an insight into subcultural identity construction. She comments that two thirds of all zines published in the USA were perzines. They can be compilations of a zinester’s writing in a variety of genres: narrative, recount or poetic form, or compilation of a number of zinesters’ work.

While zines are stand-alone and complex textual products, zinesters' print texts are often advertised, extended, or supported through their posts to their own websites, blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or other social media, and have been referred to as "new media" or "new literacies" by literacy researchers (e.g., Knobel & Lankshear, 2012). Zinesters create culture rather than consume it (Duncombe, 1997) as they craft their zines to share common interests, represent their identities, and form community and solidarity (Knobel & Lankshear, 2002). As such, they intersect with the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture (Poletti, 2005), because they design, write, draw, construct, choose the paper, do the printing, stapling and publishing of their self-made products for distribution as A5 or copy-paper size booklets. Their zines are printed on paper and folded into booklets with staples in the crease to hold the zine together. Many use a different colour of paper for their zines' covers but

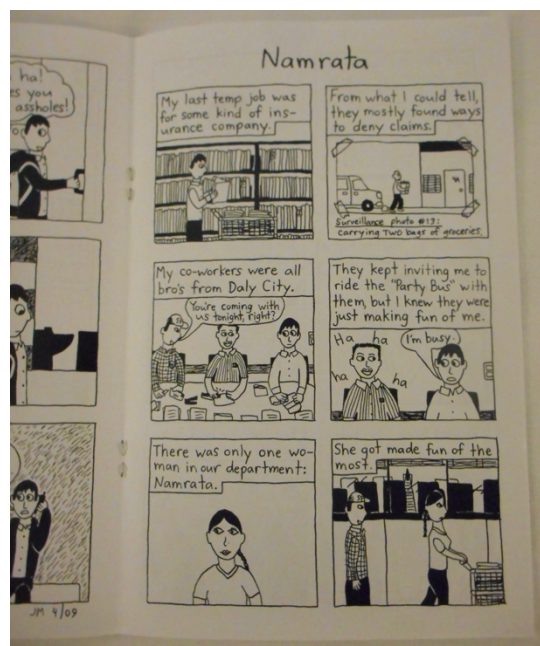


Figure 3. Example of an A5 zine "White Male Neurosis"

some choose to produce their zines as a black and white text: black writing and images on white paper. They typically do not use colour on the inside pages as this would add to the production costs. Figure 3 shows a zine made in this fashion.

In completing their own creations from their imaginations through these processes, zinesters can serve as examples to others that men can be masters of their own creative dreams, providing permission for males to write about themselves and share their voices, and serve as models for other men in constructing spaces for self-representation.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the writing practices of adult men by focusing on why and how men write autobiographical comic zines and personal zines, or perzines, of prose, poetry, and cartoons that reflect online and offline hybridity in writing. The study was intended to contribute to an emerging line of inquiry on men's writing practices by investigating the ways in which they engage in creating multimodal texts from everyday life. We asked research questions related to the zinesters' purposes, writing processes, distribution practices, audience, and the functions zining serves in their lives, including:

1. Why and how do men write zines in offline and online forms?
2. How do multimodal representations in zines enable a man to represent himself and form community?

We anticipated that addressing these questions would lend insight into how men use an alternative textual form that draws on multimodal designs to express their identities and communicate for their own purposes that could serve as models for other men in finding their voices.

Theoretical Framework

To frame the study on the writing practices of adult men creating autobiographical comic zines and perzines, we drew upon theoretical frameworks that contextualise text production as an everyday meaning-making process using written and/or visual modes to communicate ideas. It is in the daily, authentic practices of people that insights can be obtained about how, why, and what influences an individual's literacy practices, processes and products. A sociocultural framework situates the study and our position, with the use of social semiotics to describe the multimodal construction of the zines which connects with the concept of multiliteracies.

A theory of writing as meaning making (Andrews & Smith, 2011) informed this study. In this view, writing is a means of making sense of the world and the self, and a way to communicate with others. This perspective focuses on developing writers, and the functions and purpose it plays in people's lives. Studying why and how people write is intended to assist others of all ages in developing their writing. Through investigating the writing practices of men beyond their schooling years it may be possible to gain insights that can be used to encourage boys, youth, and adult males to take on a writerly disposition, to see value in the creative process in their own lives and provide an avenue for them to express their opinions and experiences. This view of writing as meaning making is consistent with a sociocultural framework (Street, 2014) which considers all texts as socially constructed and representations of specific socio-cultural contexts. A sociocultural perspective underpins the new literacies with its ethos of

participation, collaboration, and distribution of content (Knobel & Lankshear, 2001).

A social semiotic view (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) also informed the study. This perspective draws on the work of Michael Halliday's (1978, 1994) theory of functional grammar that views texts as simultaneously encoding meanings across three meta-functions through which the social functions of language are manifested. These include: what is occurring or language for the expression of experience (the ideational or representational), how the text engages or develops a relationship with the reader/ viewer for interplay between the producer and the perceiver of the text or how the text positions individuals in relation to each other (the

interpersonal or interactive), and how the elements are organized to create cohesive and context-sensitive texts (the textual or compositional). A social semiotic perspective focuses on the process of making meaning through situated practices and interpretation, the design of a text using resources from multiple modes, and

representational features in daily life (Jewitt, 2014; Jewitt & Kress, 2010). In this view, text and social context are equally important in interpreting meaning (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000).

Multimodality expresses the intricacies and interrelationships between more than one mode of meaning, including visual, color, sound, and/or language. Mode is at the centre of multimodality and "refers to an organized set of semiotic resources for making meaning (image, gesture, writing, for example)" (Jewitt & Kress, 2010, p. 343). It is through the selection of resources available in a mode or modes, choice of modes and associated semiotic resources that meaning is encoded by the creator of

"Multimodality expresses the intricacies and interrelationships between more than one mode of meaning, including visual, color, sound, and/or language."

a text in a particular context. Multiliteracies scholars, including the authors, consider all meaning making as multimodal (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012), and requiring the navigating of multiple modes of communication. Scholars exploring multimodal texts have taken up these meta-functions (e.g. Anderson, Stewart, & Kachorsky, 2017; Cope & Kalantais, 2000; Kalantis & Cope, 2012; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Zammit, 2018) in examining what can be done or meant with a set of semiotic resources drawn from different modes.

Finally, our personal beliefs about gender and masculinities informed the study. Masculinity theory posits that masculinity is identity performance or a social construction subject to change and critique with the hope of transforming stereotypical social scripts and their enactments (Bean & Harper, 2007). In gender studies, the plural “masculinities” replaces references to “masculinity” as a gender identity to acknowledge many forms of masculinity. Masculinities are typically defined as socially constructed and influenced behaviours, demonstrations, or performances emerging from constructions of manhood (Dancy, 2011). Masculinities are fluid and are constantly under construction; evolving versions of the performance of masculinities are discursively constructed and

positioned and subject to being reworked (Archer & Yamashita, 2003).

Methods

A qualitative paradigm was employed in the study to build a deeper understanding of the writing practices of male zinesters, using a naturalistic approach and purposive sampling. As part of the qualitative paradigm we took a critical self-reflexive stance regarding our relationship and engagement with the participants, the data, and the analyses. The study employed data collection and data analysis techniques that provided thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973/ 2000) of each zinester.

The Zinesters

The study focused on the authoring practices of five middle-class men ranging in age from their early 30s to early 40s who created zines reflecting two writing genres. These zinesters included three men who wrote autobiographical comic zines: Tom, Jason, and James, and two men who wrote perzines, collections of their own and others prose or poetry: Ross, and Jonas (see Table 1).

Table 1: *The Zinesters*

Name	Background	Zines
Tom	Age: 41 a White heterosexual man from Portland, Oregon	Autobiographical comic zines: <i>Nightlife</i> (4 issues) Stories told from both his dreams and his conscious experiences
Jason	Age: 36 a White heterosexual man from San Francisco, California	Autobiographical comic zines: <i>Laterborn</i> based on his birth position in his family and his personal relationships
James	Age: 37 a White heterosexual man from Portland, Oregon	Autobiographical comic zines: <i>White Male Neurosis</i> (3 issues). Stories selected from his life experiences focusing on people's quirks or odd habits.
Ross	Age: 31 a White gay man from Portland, Oregon	Personal or perzines: <i>Summer and my Louder Thoughts</i> . A compilation of his poems.
Jonas	Age: 36 A Black heterosexual man from Chicago, Illinois	Personal or perzines: <i>Cheer the Eff Up</i> (6 issues). A collection of his and others' poetry, prose, and illustrations.

We use their real names rather than pseudonyms at their request. We focused on these particular men as a purposive sample due to their diversity in backgrounds – the variation in their races, ethnicities, and their cultural and sexual orientations; the variety of their writing genres, and their eagerness to participate in our study. We draw comparisons across these men's zines of their textual practices. From the interviews we can compare the reasons they write, their distribution practices, their target audiences, and involvement in the broader community. From the interviews and their zines, we can compare their writing processes and the written and visual composition of their texts.

The Researchers

As researchers, we recognize that we are both white, heterosexual, middle class, female scholars. Like several of our colleagues (e.g., Hinchman & Alvermann, 2019), we entered academia at a time when women were becoming more prevalent in the academy, and we each have witnessed and experienced resulting gender discrimination and biases toward difference. Yet, we have also experienced the privilege of our racial backgrounds. Our understandings of these men and their messages were unavoidably limited by these experiences.

We also acknowledge that there are aspects of this study that positioned us to become more intimate with our informants than we have typically experienced when conducting research in institutional settings. The first author's meetings with these men in informal settings of zine festivals, hotel lobbies, and cafes where interviews were conducted and zines were collected may have resulted in zinesters revealing personal disclosures that they may not have shared in more formal settings. Our participation in their social media,

becoming “friends”, “liking” their posts, and following them on their social networking sites also may have influenced our perceptions of them and our insights into their writing practices. These extended informal communications also may have led us to view them as peers or knowledgeable others rather than strictly as research informants.

Data Collection

The first author observed these zinesters at an annual zine symposium held in Portland, Oregon as they discussed and distributed their zines. She conducted in-situ interviews with them, took their photographs, and collected their zines. Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews were conducted with each of these men by Skype or telephone following the national zine festival. These interviews focused on the zinesters' intent, inspiration, writing processes, messages, audience, dissemination, supporting media, reader feedback, and their trajectories for zining and were transcribed to written record. These data were triangulated by demographic questionnaires focusing on the men's backgrounds and their history with zines and by informal interviews conducted by electronic mail for elaboration on, or clarification of, their ideas. We also examined their zines' supporting blogs, websites, videos, and other social media. We followed the zinesters who were on Tumblr (www.tumblr.com) and Twitter (www.twitter.com) and we became Facebook “friends” with those who established Facebook pages to support their zines.

Data Analysis

The interview data and zines were analysed inductively by thematic analysis (Patton, 2002). The data were read and reread, annotated, coded, and

categorized. Reoccurring categories in the interviews became themes or assertions [See Table 2 for a list of codes and categories in the Appendix]. Data were also analysed deductively by examining, coding, and categorizing the data for illustrations using the principles from the theoretical framework, including relevant codes identified by other researchers who have conducted semiotic analyses of multimodal texts (Anderson, Stewart & Kachorsky, 2017). Categories and themes were also informed by the research questions using codes related to purpose, reason, process, audience, distribution, and subject matter.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) analytical framework was employed for the semiotic analysis of the construction of the zines.

The zines were coded according to the meta-functional resources associated with representational meanings, compositional meanings and interactive meanings. Representational meanings were coded based on the subject matter conveyed in the words and/or images which

focused on the theme/s of the zine, and how each mode contributed to conveying the theme.

Compositional meanings were associated with codes based on placement of image and words on a page, the use of colour, framing, and style, e.g. comic, and typography. Interactive meanings were coded according to type of shot, angles, colour and use of 1st, 2nd or 3rd person in the writing. Choice of fonts, size of letters, style of font, and how letters on a page are displayed contribute to both compositional meanings and interactive meanings. Colour is also used as a design feature for compositional meanings as well as interactive meanings, as choice of colour or lack of colour engage with the reader on an affective, emotional level.

“They intended for their readers to question their own experiences and actions by reacting to their zines’ characters and their messages.”

Comparisons could be made based on the categories across the five zinesters’ products and processes enabling cross-case analysis to be undertaken of the data. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were conducted by returning interview transcripts and manuscript drafts to participants for their approval, clarification or modifications. This process resulted in the men correcting spelling errors of proper names or completion of inaudible sections from the transcriptions.

Findings

Although each of the zinesters used the alternative forms of zines and digital media to write on topics that typically were not taken up by the commercial

press or mainstream media, the five men wrote for diverse purposes. The three men who crafted autobiographical comic zines wrote to share their memories and life lessons they had learned from their experiences, and to provide social commentary. They intended for their readers to

question their own experiences and actions by reacting to their zines’ characters and their messages. These men crafted multimodal texts that addressed subjects of personal significance to tell a story with a unifying theme drawn from their own lives - from dreams, a past memory, or a pivotal time or event. The two men who authored perzines wrote for catharsis – to share a quarter-life crisis, to process painful thoughts, struggles or conflicts, or to provide a sense of purpose, accomplishment, creativity, and community. Their texts served as windows into the men’s lives in which they shared how they coped with life, their fears, their morals, and what they viewed as socially acceptable or unacceptable behaviours. They used poetry, prose, visuals and digital texts to convey their messages.

Below we describe their zines' content or subject matter (Representational meanings), construction (Compositional meanings) and connections (Interactional meanings), zinesters' creative processes, targeted audiences, and broader community. We draw comparisons across the five men's zines and related social media. In doing so, we focus on the reasons they write; how they crafted their print, visual, and digital texts, and their distribution practices.

Topics and Subject Matter (Representational meanings)

Tom's *Nightlife* autobiographical comic zines consisted of stories based on his dreams, combining them with waking events that he recorded and placed into organized sequences with one dream or event morphing into the next. Tom viewed his zine as art and as a surreal exploration, including intertextual references to other artists in the art images he created. His influences were the artists Escher, Van Gogh, and Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice in Wonderland*, drawing in geometrical shapes and incorporating mystical or magical imagery (see

Figure 4). Tom wrote his zines primarily for himself, stating "Zinesters write about anything they are passionate about. ... I make stories that I respond to in some way that amuse or disturb me... [as] an act of personal fulfilment."

Like Tom, Jason's autobiographical comic zine included multiple events from his life in each issue of *Laterborn*, titled after his position in the family order, and shown in Figure 5. In crafting his zine, he made intertextual references or ties to other texts. In doing so, he intended to create a zine that showed, and not just narrated, images, a stimulus for his decision to author comic zines. His influences were other cartoonists, including John Porcellino, a popular creator of mini comics. Jason wrote to process the lonely times in his life and to express his identity—his interests in music and his personality as a sensitive and caring friend, a trait not commonly associated with men. Jason commented, "I am most interested in telling stories so I guess it helps me represent myself because I am a shy person." Zining allowed Jason an alternative way of

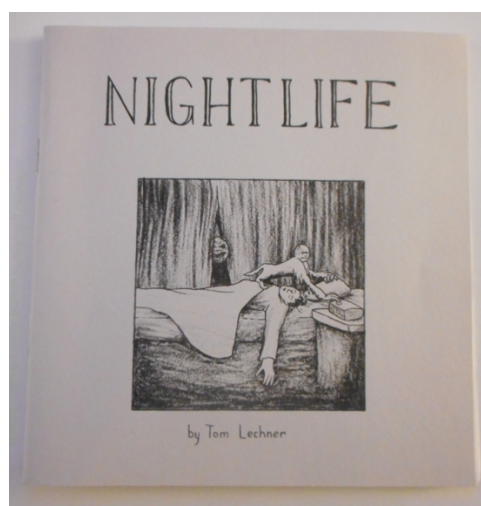


Figure 4. Tom's "Nightlife"



Figure 5. Cover of Laterborn[zining]

expression in form and format and a way to share his voice in a safe space.

In comparison, each issue of James' autobiographical comic zines, *White Male Neurosis*, focused on a single topic reflecting a memory or event in his life. As an artist, James focused his zine on his drawings crafted in comic strip-style. He wrote his zines because he believed others could relate to his topics as social commentary. James considered it to be a model for others that sent the message: "It's okay to dive into your own personal life and write from experience." James' stories reflected his observations during his life journey and the characters he met along the way, highlighting his and their idiosyncrasies, explaining, "I try to poke fun at myself and other people." For example, James wrote about eating with others, describing his phobia about watching people eat and being watched while he chewed. To avoid this situation, he described and illustrated surrounding himself with cereal boxes to hide behind as he consumed his breakfast with his family members so no one would see him eat and so he would not see others eating. His zine cover illustrated how he accomplished this, enhancing his words with the visual (See Figure 6).

In explaining his covert eating habits, James confided:

It disgusted me to watch others eat. I would hum tunes to myself so I could not hear the slurping and smacking sounds of food being chewed and broken down into slimy particles of mush. Listening to people eat was really much worse than watching them (Issue 2, p. 6).

James' stories like this one were intended to convey humour while providing commentary on people's foibles that are not publicly discussed. His zining was a way for him to make visible the underlying thoughts and emotions that precipitate his own and others'

WHITE MALE NEUROSIS

THIS ISSUE:

When I was a kid I used to build a wall of cereal boxes around me when I ate cereal.



Figure 6. James' Cover Art

quirks. James observed, "We're all sort of flawed and have weird things we do [like this] and I think that's why everyone can relate to it [my zine]."

James viewed his designs and writing as "a good way to capture who I am." He wrote and sketched to identify and process his fears, past and present. For example, he confided in an informal interview how he was once terrified in his childhood by a frightening character from the movie, *PeeWee's Big Adventure*, concluding:

Fear can be a destructive force, but it doesn't have to be. We've all had scary moments and other fears through life. Fear can play a role in your life and you have to find a way to control it. I put it into my zine [James, personal communication, March 4, 2015].

In his reflections like this one, James focused on the commonalities he shared with others in coping with emotions resulting from experiencing life situations. By writing of his anxieties, James was enabled to find comfort in and connection with humanity.

Identifying his qualms in print became a way to position his fears as part of the human experience rather than an individual idiosyncrasy that distanced him from others.

In contrast, the other two zinesters authored and/or edited perzines of poetry and prose to process conflict. In *Cheer the Eff Up*, Jonas, an African American man, penned missives to his infant son, wrote to other zinesters, and authored messages to those like him who were also experiencing a quarter-life crisis (see Figure 8). Each of Jonas' issues had a theme of personal struggle, including reconciling the past with a troublesome adolescence to a restless but complacent present, defining oneself after a traumatic experience, coping with depression and mental health issues, and dealing with loss.

According to Jonas, there was one central theme in each of Jonas' six issues: "Be true to yourself. You don't have to live your life according to the generalizations and stereotypes that others place on you" [Jonas, personal communication, March 10, 2015].

Much of Jonas' writing focused on his own unresolved conflicts, particularly in attempting to reconcile the lifestyle he is passionate about as a zinester, an activist, and an anarchist with his existence working a mundane job that he kept for practical reasons despite hoping for a career in the teaching profession. In Issue 5, he wrote of writing zines on the sly at work while stressing about losing his job, referring to himself as "an office drone & a 30-something middle class chump" or "another sucker that staggers into the office at 6:30, overloads on caffeine, and fakes it through the day" (Issue 5, p. 26).

Jonas wrote to his son about another of his conflicts - concern about how he models parenting and his future relationship with his son:

You are going to get older & have a whole world of thoughts & emotions & you might not want to share them with me. ...Maybe you will keep to yourself & lay in bed wishing that someone understood you, that someone could relate to you so that you wouldn't feel so alone. Meanwhile, I'll be in the other room, not knowing how to approach you, wondering if you've made it to 'that age' so that I could swoop in & be everything that my father wasn't for me, wishing you'd reach out to me & knowing you won't. I don't know if I'm more worried about you turning out to be just like me or not like me at all (Issue 5, p. 4).

This excerpt illustrates how Jonas used zining to process persisting issues that were on his mind. He worried that his son would be unable to resist

"The joy I have found in poetry has kept me alive."

expectations to live his life according to the expectations and stereotypes that others, including himself, might place on him. He expressed his

apprehension that his adolescent son would perceive him as noncommunicative, distant, and uninvolved, becoming a negative role model of a father as his own father had been to him. Jonas' fears alluded to the stereotypical notions of masculinity associated with African American men as being cold, distant and hypermasculine, images perpetuated by popular culture media (Kirkland, 2013a; 2013b). These stereotypical representations of gender affirm masculinity by men avoiding behaviours that are traditionally considered to be feminine (Bean & Ransaw, 2013), such as engaging in reading and writing practices (Archer & Yamashita, 2003), considered among some African American males as not acting "cool" (Bean & Ransaw, 2013).

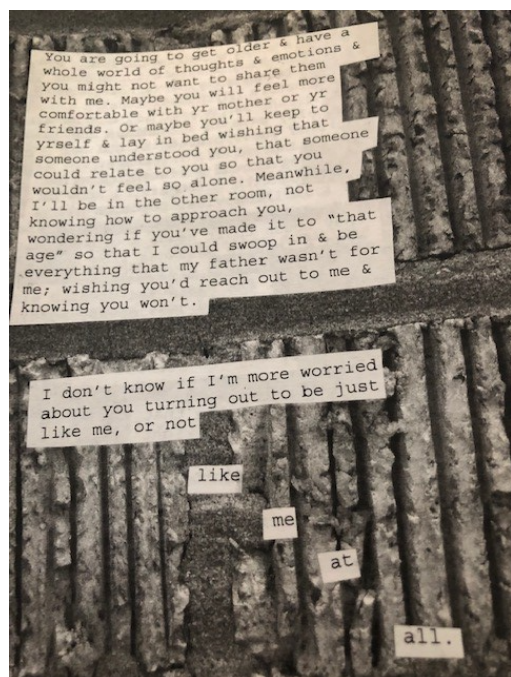


Figure 8. Jonas' Juxtaposed Text

Writing of his fears about his son to his son allowed Jonas to convey alternative notions of masculinity for Black men and communicate with him in the future in a less confrontational way than by direct conversation. Jonas' words allowed him to indirectly connect with his son by offering an intimate dialogue that his son could read in future years.

In a comparable way, Ross' zine, *Summer and My Louder Thoughts*, allowed him to process his struggles with mental illness, alcoholism, and depression. Having been institutionalized in a mental hospital in his 20s, Ross turned to poetry as a catharsis for his emotions. Ross confided, "The joy I have found in poetry has kept me alive." He characterized his poems as "language poetry" or "poetry that dissects language and experiments with diction and syntax", modern free verse, and prose poetry without line breaks. He included poetry patterned after John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, a style he invented of 18-line poems, three six-line stanzas each with an irregular rhyme scheme. Ross penned this alternative poetry to process painful

thoughts and to provide a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and community. One example of how he used poetry to process his struggles was reflected in his poem, "These Things I Promise You":

[I] will objectify straight men just to give them a chill...Will wear a skeleton key around my neck like some 1850's latch key kid. Will tell people it's a reminder of a friend from whom I grew apart and also a sobriety symbol, but over time it will *mean less and look cool more* (p. 11).

In this excerpt, Ross fantasized about achieving a form of retribution for the times when heterosexual men marginalized him, causing him to feel "less than" others. Ross' poetry allowed him to reflect on his personal growth in gaining control of his emotions while providing the ability to distance himself from the turmoil of his past. He wrote of his hopes for the future that evolved as he reflectively penned his life trajectory. Ross' zine allowed him to express alternative and inclusive forms of masculinity performance that allowed for emotionality and intimacy among men, a characteristic of his writing not commonly associated with men's literary styles (Shamir, 2002). Zining enabled him to express alternative and inclusive representations of masculinities as a gay man rebelling against narrow constructions of masculine performance.

The zinesters creating perzines shared in the commonality of processing challenges and issues through writing. Like Ross, Jonas found that creating a perzine was not only a creative outlet, but a means of emotional release as a step toward resolving personal issues. He remarked:

Making zines... is a wonderful way to process more of the painful things that are on my mind... kind of like the final process. I think

about something and I cannot deal with these huge issues and then when I write about it is the final steps of processing it of really learning from an experience. It helps me understand myself and how I felt about a lot of the things that take up space in my mind [Jonas, personal communication, March 10, 2015].

Construction and Connections (Compositional and Interactional meanings)

Construction techniques and interaction styles differed between the two genres of zines with both the placement of words and the alignment of the visuals. The autobiographical comic zines were told in first-person narrative with the zinester as the main protagonist because the texts represented self-reflections. The issues were each created in black ink on white paper except for the covers of Jason's *Laterborn*. James and Jason incorporated frames to encompass each segment of their narratives, fashioning their zines after mainstream cartoons and comic strips while Tom chose not to use frames because "each page in one of my comics acts as a single drawing." Despite this difference in construction, the three men included multiple scenes on a single page in comic-strip style.

Each zinester drew on different semiotic resources to create the narratives, including strategic layouts or placements of images and words on a page and their selection of shots and angles for the illustrations. As artists, Tom's and James' zines included very detailed visuals. Tom did not distinguish between the written and visual texts, viewing the page as a single unit with each of the elements combined that contributed to the story's flow. Tom's images in *Nightlife* carried the narration with one story morphing into another, creating surrealistic events captured as a journey or "dreamscape." The written text was minimal,

presented only in speech bubbles. Tom made intertextual references in both his written and visual texts to the films, *Star Trek* and *King Kong*, by mentioning or modifying these stories.

Tom also included a range of illustrations that positioned the reader (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2013). These ranged from close-ups with cartoon characters looking at the viewer at eye level to create an intimate relationship with the reader, to long shots that shifted the social relationship with the reader from an intimate view to a public view. In some illustrations, the reader was distanced from the action by seeming to be looking on from a distance. These shifting levels of involvement through illustrations assisted in positioning the reader to take the perspective Tom intended at strategic points in the storyline.

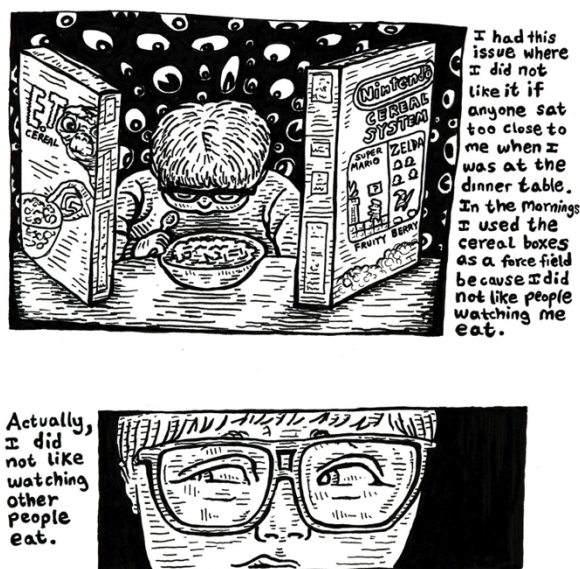


Figure 7. Inside page,, "White Male Neurosis"

In James' three issues of *White Male Neurosis*, the visuals and written text complemented each other within the narrative. The images contributed significantly to the narrative, not simply illustrating the words, but extending the text (Barthes, 1977) as

shown from an inside page of *White Male Neurosis* in Figure 7.

As a single narrative, James deployed a variety of illustrative perspectives from close-ups to long shots. The long shots portrayed humans in context with James' younger self as part of the action. The close-ups drew the reader into engaging intimately with the characters and ideas in the zine by enabling the reader to clearly see the characters' facial features and physical aspects.

In contrast, Jason used the written text as the primary means of communication in *Laterborn* by incorporating both speech bubbles and captions. Images accompanied the writing, illustrating the text, despite Jason's desire to develop his style to have no written narration and use only images. His images were not as detailed as Tom's or James' visuals. Most of the strongly framed events in his comic were drawn as mid-shots at eye level with the reader to lend an intimate perspective. Jason's choice of perspective for these visuals developed a more direct relationship between the reader and the protagonist (himself) than other angles of images

The perzines varied more in their construction patterns and relied more heavily on words to convey their messages than did the autobiographical comic zines. Each one of Jonas' zines, *Cheer the Eff Up*, was created in black and white with hand printed or typed text strategically placed in cut-and-paste style on the pages in collage form. Minimal graphics of photographs and hand-drawn illustrations contributed by a female friend made the zine "text heavy." His black-and-white imagery conveyed the tone of severity and reflected the stern demands of fathering Jonas' words alluded to, complementing the typed text. The photographs of his friends in Issues 5 and 6 were close ups positioned in the middle of the page with the subjects looking straight at the reader, creating a tone of solidarity and

intimacy. Jonas' illustrations conveyed the theme of resisting becoming an emotionally distant and physically removed parent by cutting and pasting his typed words onto a background photograph of a brick wall. He emphasized his greatest fear – that his son would be nothing like him – by singling out those words in the last line, placing them apart from the others in stair-step position. In doing so, Jonas, juxtaposed varying representations across the two modes.

In contrast, Ross' perzine, *Summer and my Louder Thoughts*, consisted only of typed text in stark black with contrasting white backgrounds. His zine contained no illustrations, photographs or graphics. The absence of visuals conveyed a severe tone that matched the sombre nature of his subject matter, suicide and mental illness.

Both zinesters creating perzines saw writing as an opportunity for ingenuity and a testament that the authoring process can be accomplished by and speak to anyone. Jonas saw zines first and foremost as a way of creating by "using your own words and not feeling like the process to write and be published is on a pedestal that only exists at the celebrity status." He perceived that zines made ideas accessible to everyday people. Ross echoed these sentiments, observing, "if you speak to people in their own language, they are more likely to listen."

Creative Processes

Each zinester used a different creative process depending on his inspiration and whether his ideas were written or visually focused. Tom kept several notebooks beside his bed to record his dreams for *Nightlife* and memorized humorous events that occurred during his waking hours so he could develop storylines for them later. Tom created his stories by taking approximately 15 of his dreams and/or life events and arranging them into an order

that flowed to tell a coherent story, constructing his titles after completing the storylines. Tom used his computer to do the layouts by writing software he created for that purpose to avoid the time-consuming process of doing layouts on paper, remarking, “The software takes a bunch of images and lays them out into a comic book very easily.” Tom viewed each page as a single drawing with the words and illustrations as visual elements arranged in relation to each other. The placement of words and illustrations occurred at the same time as he created a flow for each page that moved from left to right and top to bottom.

In contrast, Jason wrote notes on his Smartphone for *Laterborn* as ideas occurred to him because he could summarize ideas faster by using his phone than by recording them in a notebook. Jason described a sequential process for creating his zines by writing the text first and then adding descriptions in parenthesis of what he intended to draw later as illustrations. Next, he would draw a sketch, a step in the writing process that he referred to as “the thumbnail stage”, to assist in judging how many panels would be needed on each page and what would be drawn in each panel. His third step would be to pencil the final comic, and the fourth step would be to ink it. He revised at each step of this process. Jason sometimes shared his draft with a female friend for her feedback and editing before inking and finalizing the written text.

James related his writing process to “a stream of consciousness” as ideas came to him as a visual from his experience. When he saw an image that he wanted to share, he “fiddled” with the visual in his mind, determining how to draw and insert it into a developed storyline. In doing so, James anticipated what others might find interesting about his autobiography. When creating his autobiographical comic zines, he began with the layout to “visually think about the format and frame(s)” and “throw a

little humour into the title.” He played with the stereotype that, “White people are crazy or weird.” For example, his story, “People on the Bus”, drew attention to distinctive characters he met while riding the city bus who illustrated diverse representations of personality and gender, including a “dangerously obese” woman and an attractive woman who stimulated his erotic fantasies. He hoped that his story would convey the message that although individuals may have different identities, “people are just trying to get through life.”

The zinesters crafting perzines were written when they felt inspired to do so. Ross was stimulated to write by beauty, life, and death. He carried a notebook and typically would “start writing aimlessly until something concrete takes shape by picking out bits and pieces of meanderings and turning it into something.” He generally did the writing first and then created a title. Ross remarked that to produce “decent writing” he had to force himself to write often. To improve his writing, he also read poetry and books about writing poetry, such as *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo and *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke to assist him with form and technique in crafting his poems.

In contrast, before writing *Cheer the Eff Up*, Jonas’ ideas would stay on his mind for several months to nearly a year. When Jonas was ready, he would obsessively begin writing. He would write at “a free moment at work, on my lunch break, after work, going to work or from work, in the evening, every chance I could, I would write a little more.” When he completed a draft, he would spend another month to three months editing, then finally doing the layout in less than a week and copying the finished product.

Audience and Community

Each of the zinesters solicited and reached their audience by distributing their zines in multiple ways. For example, Jonas sent his zine to other zinesters, Distros or online distribution centers, like [Pioneers Press](#) and [Antiquated Future](#) and to local bookstores, including Quimby's in Chicago, eventually sharing his zines at national zine festivals in Chicago, Portland, and Los Angeles. Tom attended comic festivals, including Line Works NW in Portland, the Short Run Festival in Seattle, and the Olympia Comics Fest in Washington.

All the zinesters used social media to advertise their zines; solicit an audience; prompt and reply to their readers' questions; share extensions of their zines; and reflect on authorship. Tom used Flickr and YouTube, sharing video tutorials of his open-source software that runs on Linux. Tom maintained a website, www.TomLechner.com, to promote his zine by posting local events where he can be located, such as the East Portland Holiday Bazaar, where he sells copies of his zine, and shares excerpts of [Nightlife](#). Jonas has a Facebook and Twitter page, [The Greatest Most Traveling Circus](#), titled after a book he authored that was published by Sweet Candy Press. Ross uses his personal Facebook page to invite people to attend readings of his poetry at Powell's bookstore where he has sold 250 copies or at coffee shops in Portland, and he advertises his zine on [Tumblr](#). James posted his zines for sale on his website and Facebook page. When his zine was selected as the zine of the month by the Independent Publishing Resource Center, he sold 80 copies of it.

Each of the zinesters saw their zines as a way to make connections with others. Ross created his zines for an audience of other poets, people in his own circle, or other zinesters. Jason wrote for an audience of other zinesters, cartoonists, and friends.

Jonas wrote not only for his son, but also for those who have similar thoughts or are experiencing the same trials, speculating that they might find his words "warm, familiar and comforting." He wanted to reach an audience of those both inside and outside of the zine community, particularly any individual who happened to step into a bookstore and was going through a crisis or feeling a bit lonely at the time. Jonas considered himself to be part of the global zine community, sending copies of his zines to others for their feedback, receiving comments like, "this really resonated with me" or, "I really connected to this part." His readers might talk about his zines, buy out his issues on Distros or go on Tumblr and take a picture of or copy a section and repost it there or make a fanzine about the zines they liked and list his. Reading others' zines inspired Jonas to create his future zines, including a collaborative zine, *Surviv*, that he edited by contacting his favourite zinesters and asking them to write a piece on what gets them out of bed in the morning, compiling their contributions into a themed perzine.

These zinesters each spoke of the power of zining to form community. For example, when asked what he would tell people about zines, Tom replied, "If you are passionate about something, chances are others are, too. You can find people who are interested. That's the strength of DIY [do-it-yourself]." Jonas reflected, "To really start the creative energy, it's a powerful and rewarding community."

Discussion

This investigation provided insight into the literacy practices of adult men by examining their writing purposes, processes and products. In doing so, the study contributes to an initial line of inquiry on men's literacy practices and provides insight into why and how men write beyond their schooling years, situating men's writing as an important focus

for research on its own. Similar to others who have explored multimodal meaning making (e.g. Anderson, Stewart, & Kachorsky, 2017; Cope & Kalantais, 2000; Kalantis & Cope, 2012; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Zammit, 2018), the study also illustrates the interconnectedness of a theory of social semiotics and multimodality, as analytical tools for describing zining as a practice of the new literacies that encompasses writing as meaning making but in alternative ways.

A social semiotic analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) of the construction of the men's zines enabled a description of their meaning making strategies via their selection of (multiple) modes and associated semiotic resources. Four of the five men created complex multimodal texts which were compositionally diverse as they created their zines for themselves, as well as to engage their perceived readers. Through the combination of image and writing, or writing only, the zinesters designed texts that conveyed their intended meanings explicitly as well as implicitly: they were involved in meaning making. The zinesters who wrote multimodal zines designed their zines by using a range of culturally available modal resources as a means to recontextualise their ideas in a manner 'most apt' for their context (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt & Kress, 2010). Each zinester drew on different resources to design their message.

Jonas used white space, an absence of colour, representational images, and words displayed in architectural presentations as multimodal collage, conveying together the austere tone of resistance to perpetuating an aloof parenting style. Jason crafted thumbnail sketches of pencil and ink and wrote dialogue in speech bubbles as complimentary modes of communication that helped convey his emotions of alienation and marginalization. James employed perspective as an artistic element by strategically positioning his illustrated characters' gazes to

engage his readers, drawing them into each persona through image and words. Tom juxtaposed his singular comics and their words of explanation into a coherent storyline, combining sketches and interpretations of his dreams as sequential art with words and illustrations arranged in relation to each other, flowing together into a single narrative he called a "dreamscape." In creating their multimodal texts, these zinesters were engaged in doing semiotic work.

The men created texts that provided them with a means to share their lives, their ideas, and their dreams with others. Similar to young women's zines (Chidgey, 2013), the men's autobiographical zines provided them with a voice where their histories could be heard. For Tom and his *Nightlife* series, it was about sharing his dreams drawing on his artistic talent; for James and his *White Male Neurosis* series, it was sharing his personal life and experiences; and for Jonas in *Cheer the Eff Up*, it was about sharing his personal struggles. They were creators of culture not just consumers (Dunscombe, 1997).

These men's zines serve as examples of the functions that literacy can serve in an adult man's life and as models to inspire other men's writing and guide their efforts. The descriptions of the creative processes demonstrate that writing and publishing can be accomplished by those who are not professional authors or professional artists. These men used new technological tools of Smartphones, digital cameras, software, and computers, as well as traditional instruments of ink pens, paper, and pencil to create their texts. They were part of what Poletti (2005) would call the DIY (do-it-yourself) culture.

The male zinesters used different creative processes which were driven by their preferred mode of meaning making: either the visual or the written mode. The descriptions of their construction

processes, of how, when, and where they write provided insights into the stages of their writing and self-publishing processes that may stimulate other men's creative efforts. These men's composing processes represent a range of models of how men can author their life stories and express their identities on paper and how they can share and disseminate their writings. These zinesters lend insight into the types of stimuli that can motivate a man to write; how and when men can make time to record their ideas and write their stories; how they can process their ideas, some starting with or including only words, while others beginning with sketches, adding words to enhance their drawings.

These men demonstrate the various writing genres men can engage in to craft their representations, including poetry, prose, comics, and comic strips. By using words and images as background and decoration, breaking free from traditional left-to-right and top-to-bottom ordering of wording and breaking the rules of writing such as the five-paragraph essay, the zinesters in this study allow other men to engage in more creative forms of authoring. Their zines illustrate how multimodal forms of text can extend and enhance a personal message. In doing so, these men provide examples of how Web 2.0 tools and technologies can convey personal messages, create an audience, and solicit readers' feedback.

These zines provide models of men processing their emotions through authoring their lives, asserting alternative representations and performances of masculinity, expressing their conflicts, genres of emotionality that are atypical for their gender (Ball, 2003), giving other men permission to write for similar reasons. Ross discovered that zines allowed him a safe space to express different representations of masculine performance as a gay man. Jonas defied gender and racial stereotypes perpetuated by the media of Black men as hypermasculine, cold,

and distant (Kirkland, 2013a; 2013b), and his writings refuted notions of Black males as uninvolved and physically absent fathers (Ransaw, 2012). James confronted fear of difference in his cartoon stories. Tom authored narratives conveying humour and the disruption of reality by blending the conscious and subconscious. Jason wrote stories of sensitivity and caring, demonstrating an ethos of friendship and fellowship. These men each demonstrated agency to challenge hegemonic views of masculinity (Bean & Ransaw, 2013) and contested stereotypical notions of gender and literacy performance (Kirkland, 2013a; 2013b) in their zines. Their writings represent resistance to restrictive notions of masculinity and the tendency for men to interpret masculine performance as avoiding behaviours considered to be feminine (Bean & Ransaw, 2013), like engaging in literacy practices (Archer & Yamahita, 2003).

These men advance zine making as masculine pedagogy and practice. These zinesters may serve to encourage and guide other men's writing as their voices become heard beyond the zine community. Through their zines and associated media, these men legitimized their life worlds and the value of their experiences which are not often present in mainstream media, writing on subjects drawn from their own life experiences they wanted to share with others as life lessons. Jonas wrote of his hopes and fears about fathering and his apprehension about becoming a father who enacted fatherhood as his father had done, having learned how not to perform parenting from his father's example. James authored his own and others' personal foibles and quirks to characterize humanity, concluding that despite individuals' distinctive personas, everyone has the same common goal - to live their best lives. Ross processed his misgivings and accomplishments in his physical and mental health through zining, realizing that others also experience moments of despair and transitions in their journeys to healthy lives. Tom analysed and interpreted his recorded

dreams in his zines, relating their meanings to his waking-life experiences, using them to make sense of life. Jason wrote as a distraction from his pent-up feelings of loneliness, discovering that expressing emotionality and sentiment facilitated freedom from negative moods. They demonstrate how to be writers using their own life worlds and covering topics, which as Ramdarshan Bold (2017) noted are often overlooked in mainstream media.

In these ways, these men each wrote for catharsis – as a way of understanding their lives, as an emotional release, and as a step toward resolving personal issues. Each were immersed in “creating their own narratives which subvert and challenge mainstream viewpoints and realities, countering the hegemonic stronghold of cultural production and expression” (Ramardshan Bold, 2017, p. 226). These men’s zines represent an agentive force for a participation in literacy practices that advance not only the reproduction but the creation of culture, encouraging an ethos of creative production for cultural representation and construction.

Conclusion

Research on men’s literacy practices, particularly their writing practices, is sparse. Through describing and explaining how and why men write past their schooling years, this investigation assists in filling this gap in extant research. While our understandings of these men and their messages were possibly influenced by our own socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences, the investigation provided insight into the literacy practices of adult men by examining their writing purposes, processes, and products. In doing so, the study situates men’s writing as an important focus for research on its own.

More importantly, the study demonstrated how men enact their literate identities through constructing

and composing zines from inception to production that could serve as models to stimulate other men’s writing. In creating their zines, the men drew on different resources to design their messages and were engaged in doing semiotic work. In doing so, they were involved in meaning making processes. These men’s zines represented a range of models of how men can author their life stories and express their identities on paper and how they can share and disseminate their writings. These men demonstrate how men can resist restrictive notions of masculinity, and as such, this study contributes to validating and valuing men as literate beings.

These men’s zines have implications for writing instruction beyond serving as motivation and stimulation for boys and young men to author their life stories. Although we do not advise that zines be made writing assignments in schools, institutionalized, or graded, zines that are school appropriate can be shared with students to demonstrate the functions that literacy can serve in a young man’s life. Zining has enabled men to share their passions for and knowledge about a discipline like science or social studies (Guzzetti, Foley & Foley & Lesley, 2015); to communicate across generations (Guzzetti & Lesley, 2017); to discover and preserve their cultural heritage (Guzzetti, 2019); to author their life stories (Dunkerly-Bean, Bean, Guzzetti & Morris, 2019; Rogers, 2014), and to express alternative gender identities and roles (Guzzetti & Foley, 2017). Zines can be used as examples of the different forms and formats writing can take beyond traditional forms with their juxtaposition of words and illustrations, graphic designs, alternative placements of words on a page, and their varying genres and mixes of comics, comic strips, poetry and prose. The ethos of freedom of self-expression, writing for personal purposes, and the do-it-yourself nature of zines can inspire and enable others to emulate these principles in their own authoring practices.

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