MAKING ZINES, MAKING SELVES:
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN DIY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A Dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics

By

Ingrid Z. Stockburger, M.A.

Washington, DC
March 31, 2011
MAKING ZINES, MAKING SELVES:
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN DIY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Ingrid Z. Stockburger, M.A.
Thesis Advisor: Deborah Schiffrin, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT
This dissertation examines the relationship between narrative, identity, the life story, and the social and textual practices of zine-making. The data set for this analysis is comprised of qualitative interviews with ten zine writers primarily based in Chicago, IL, in addition to a set of zines produced by these writers.

The first part of the analysis examines a central narrative that emerged in the interviews, what I call the zine discovery narrative. These narratives construed the speakers’ early experiences with zines as “turning points” (Bruner 1994) in their life stories by describing and enacting “aha” moments that immediately led to their zine-making. The analysis focuses five speakers who produced (or did not produce) a discovery narrative performance. For each case, I show 1) whether and how the situated interaction of the interview impinged on the narrative performance, 2) how the speaker used the narrative to make the discovery experience fit into a larger sense of their life story, and 3) how the performance projected a self that was more (or less) connected to a full fledged “zinester” identity and a larger community of discovery narratives and narrators.

The second part of the analysis interrogates how zine-makers construct writer identities in talk about zines. I telescope on the voices of two zine-makers who I interviewed and show the linguistic, interactional, and ideological resources each speaker
manipulated to accomplish “speaking like a writer” and position their zine as a particular kind of autobiographical gesture. I show how these self-constructions emerged locally as situated performances that I collaborated in producing, and globally as larger discursive moves that position the self in relation to imagined others (e.g. English teachers and other zine writers) as well as circulating ideologies about DIY and writing.

The third part of the analysis focuses on the zines themselves and their status as autobiographical “text-objects” (Poletti 2008). Through a close examination of three zines (Proof I Exist, Stream of Consciousness, and Brainscan), I show how zines are emphatically material and embodied objects. I analyze how these writers combine textual and visual elements (e.g. cut-and-paste layouts, use of photographs, and the graphic design of text) to bring off particular “performances of self” (Goffman 1959) while also shaping close and intimate relationships with their readers.

Bringing these three analyses together, this dissertation illuminates the wide array of discursive and interactional resources speakers and writers draw on to construct and project identities as zine-makers. By paying attention to my own turns-at-talk, this dissertation also brings into greater relief the analyst’s role in eliciting, co-constructing, and retelling our participants’ stories and self histories.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe thanks to many people who helped me write and finish this dissertation. I am grateful for the help and support of my advisor and mentor, Deborah Schiffrin, as well as the other members of my dissertation committee, Heidi Hamilton and Deborah Tannen. I benefited from the conversations I had with each of these professors throughout my graduate school career, but especially during the planning, research, and writing stages of this dissertation.

I owe a huge thanks to all of the zinesters who took time out of their busy lives to talk with me and generously shared their zines. Thank you to Alex, Andrew, Bradley, Celia, Liz, LB, Matt, Michelle, and Rachel. I am especially grateful for the help and support of Billy Roberts, who introduced me to his zinester friends, gave me huge piles of zines, and graciously talked with me on several occasions about zine-making and zine culture. Billy got me started in the Chicago zine community and helped turn the gears that got this project off the ground and for that, I am deeply thankful. Warm thanks also go to Sara McCarthy and Jeff Duhigg for Chicago-based moral support and sharing their apartment with me during my data collection trips.

There were also many friends and colleagues in the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown who provided encouragement and support at different points during this project, including Jackie Lou, Jennifer Sclafani, Margaret Toye, Anna Marie Trester, Rebecca Rubin Damari, Lyn Fogle, Aubrey Logan-Terry, Anastasia Nylund and Greg Bennett. I am especially thankful for the friendship of Jen McFadden who was my long-
distance writing partner throughout this entire project. Jen’s careful readings, insightful questions, and general all-around cheerful support helped me at every step of the way.

Throughout the planning, research, and writing stages of this dissertation, my family provided enthusiastic support, encouragement, and good cheer. Each one of my siblings and siblings-in-law helped in their own ways, from long-distance moral support to tasty meals and wine to some much-needed comic relief. Big thanks go to Anya Stockburger, Sunil Khanna, Ellen Stockburger, Jesse Stockburger, Peter Stockburger, and Lily Arguelles. I could not have written the dissertation without the help of my parents, Susan and David Stockburger. I owe both of them a huge debt of gratitude for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my graduate school career, but especially during those final months of dissertation writing.

And finally, I wish to thank Jeremy Hill, who always believed in this project and has been at my side from start to finish. He read multiple drafts, listened to my every idea, asked insightful questions, and kept me fed with home-cooked meals. Throughout the writing of this dissertation, there were many times when I could only see its flaws. Jeremy always rescued me from those moments, reminding me of the good parts and keeping my spirits up, right through to the end. We started and finished our dissertations together. But more than that, we started a life together that goes beyond our academic work and that is what I wish to thank him for the most.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction ..............................................................1

1.1 Introduction ..............................................................1
1.2 Preview of analysis ..........................................................3
1.3 What are zines? ..............................................................9
1.4 Zines as community .......................................................13
1.5 What is DIY? ..............................................................15
1.5.1 A DIY ‘toolkit’ ..........................................................17
1.6 Looking ahead ..............................................................20

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Background ...........................................22

2.1 Introduction ..............................................................22
2.2 The life story ..............................................................23
2.3 Mishler and Bruner ........................................................27
2.4 Looking for identities in the life story ..................................33
2.4.1 Positioning self and other in talk and narratives ...............34
2.4.2 Stances, alignments, and footings ...............................39
2.4.3 Roles, selves, identities ..............................................46
2.5 Situating the life story in a community of others .................49
2.6 Zines as life writing .......................................................56
2.6.1 Visual design, materiality, and self/other in zines ..........58
2.7 Conclusion .....................................................................60

CHAPTER 3: Methodology .............................................................62

3.1 Introduction ..............................................................62
3.2 Looking for zines and participants .....................................63
3.3 Challenges in building a zine data set ...............................67
3.4 The interview as communicative event ...............................69
3.5 Interview order ...........................................................72
3.6 Research-subjects as collaborators ....................................75
3.7 Notes on the transcription process ...................................76
3.8 Conclusion .....................................................................78

CHAPTER 4: Enacting Zinester Identities Through Narratives of Discovery . . .79

4.1 Introduction ..............................................................79
4.2 What is the ZDN? ..........................................................82
4.3 Who tells what and how? ...............................................86
4.4 Matt ..............................................................91
4.4.1 Matt’s second take ..................................................99
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Order of interviews ................................................................. 67
Figure 4.1 Shared meanings and linguistic features of the ZDN ............ 85
Figure 4.2 Who told a ZDN ................................................................. 87
Figure 4.3 Ways of telling the ZDN ...................................................... 88
Figure 6.1 Front cover of Proof I Exist #5 ........................................... 176
Figure 6.2 Excerpt from Proof I Exist #5 ........................................... 177
Figure 6.3 Front cover of Stream of Consciousness #1 ....................... 184
Figure 6.4 Excerpt from Stream of Consciousness #1 ....................... 186
Figure 6.5 Front cover of Brainscan #22 .......................................... 191
Figure 6.6 Excerpt from Brainscan #22 .......................................... 192
Figure 6.7 Excerpt from Brainscan #22 .......................................... 196
Figure 6.8 Alex’s camera phone photograph of her IUD .................... 198
1.1 Introduction

I started reading zines about ten years ago. I discovered my first zine through a column in a feminist magazine I read regularly at the time called *Bust*. The column was called “Mother Superior” and it was written by a woman named Ayun Halliday who cheerfully described her funny experiences living in a tiny apartment in New York City with her husband and two young children. Written in small print at the bottom of each of her columns was a brief blurb that mentioned another publication she wrote, a zine called *The East Village Inky*. I had no idea what a zine was, but out of curiosity I mailed off a few dollars to the address listed to request a copy.

In return, I received in the mail a photocopied small booklet, just under 5 ½ by 4 ½ inches, that had been folded over and stapled together in the middle. It was entirely handwritten, crammed with wandering lines of text that covered every inch of each page, along with illustrations of herself, her kids, her husband and their cat. Ayun wrote about the same type of experiences I would read in her magazine column, but the zine had an entirely different kind of visual energy. I had to twist the zine to read the lines of text that wandered up the sides of the pages and squint to make out the tiny print next to the drawings. Each page was brimming with text and images that made me feel instantly connected, like I was swept into the lively details of her daily family and apartment life. I was hooked.
My discovery of *The East Village Inky* and the larger zine community happened to take place around the same time I started my graduate studies in sociolinguistics. While I was becoming an avid reader of zines, I was also searching for scholarly analyses of them, trying to map out the different analytical approaches taken from a wide array of disciplines. One of the common refrains I encountered in this literature was the idea that zines, especially autobiographical *perzines* (short for “personal zines”), provide opportunities for direct, authentic self-expressions of their producers. This idea is captured by Stephen Duncombe in one of the first book-length studies published about zines. He describes perzines as public forms of diaries: “[they] read like the intimate diaries usually kept safely hidden in the back of a drawer or under a pillow. Personal revelation outweighs rhetoric, and polished literary style takes a back seat to honesty” (Duncombe 1997: 21). Another idea I kept encountering in the zine studies literature was the notion that making a zine was not just a personal act, but a social one as well. Again, Duncombe writes: “zines are as much about the communities that arise out of their circulation as they are artifacts of personal expression” (1997: 44).

As a discourse analyst encountering these ideas, my curiosity was piqued as to how these reported dynamics of zine life found their way into the discourse of zine-making. I began to wonder more about this social type called a “zinester,” a term that I often came across in zines and the scholarship about them. What kind of identity category is this? How might a speaker use language in ways to accomplish a zinester identity performance? What are the ideological resources zinesters have at their disposal to create and project their identities as zine producers? These are the broad questions that eventually led me to plan and carry out this project.
1.2 Preview of analysis

This dissertation investigates how zine-makers use language to talk about who they are and what they do. The data for this investigation are a set of qualitative interviews I conducted with ten zine-makers, along with a collection of zines produced by them. In approaching this data, I wondered about how these speakers discursively fit their zine-making into a sense of their larger life stories, how they described themselves as particular kinds of writers, and how they displayed identities and shaped relationships with their readers in the pages of their actual zines. Moreover, I also wondered about whether and how all of this identity work related to a speaker’s sense of membership in some kind of zine community and a backdrop of circulating zine-relevant discourses (with a capital “D” in Gee’s 2005 terms), particularly the set of ideas and meanings that stem from ideologies of do-it-yourself communities.

This dissertation is organized around three specific investigations into the intersections between narrative, identity, the life story, and the social practice of zine-making. These investigations make up Chapters Four, Five, and Six of this dissertation. I articulate more specifically these investigations below and discuss highlights from the chapters where I provide more detailed analyses.

In Chapter Four, I examine a central narrative that emerged in most of my interviews with zine-makers, what I call the zine discovery narrative. When I asked about their early experiences with zines, most speakers told a narrative that construed the experience of seeing a zine for the first time as a “turning point” (Mishler 1999, Bruner 1994) in their life stories. Through these narratives, the speakers described and enacted
an “aha” or light bulb moment when they first saw or heard about zines and how this internal awakening moment led to their (sometimes immediate) decision to make their first zine. My approach to these narrative performances asks three questions: 1) whether and how the situated interaction in which the telling emerged impinged on the narrative performance, 2) how the speaker used the narrative to fit the discovery experience into a sense of their larger, ongoing life story, and 3) whether and how each narrative performance projected a self that was more or less connected to the identity category of “zinester” or a sense of a community of discovery narratives and narrators.

The analysis focuses on the discovery narrative performances of five speakers. For the first two speakers, I show how they told a full fledged discovery narrative in interviews with me, but then revisited their narratives at later points in the same interview (or during a second interview) and provided a “second take” (Mishler 2004) that projected different versions of their self and their relationship to zine-making and the larger community of zine discovery narratives and narrators. For example, I show how one speaker’s (Matt) retelling served to “restory” (Mishler 1999) his discovery experience and “aha” moment to fit a more personal storyline in his life story about a difficult time in his life when he struggled artistically with a college writing professor. In the other case, I show how the second speaker (Billy) retold the discovery narrative as an instance of “metaparody” (Morson 1989) through which he called attention to the way zinesters “put on” their identity performances through the tellings of this narrative.

I then focus on a third speaker (LB) who tells a brief, yet thickly agentive discovery narrative and show how the situated context of the interview – and the speaker’s attachment to the role of “helpful research subject” – impinged on the narrative
performance. The fourth speaker (Rachel) was a newcomer to zine-making at the time of our interview, having only produced her first zine a few weeks prior to our conversation. This speaker was one of the final interviews I conducted so I was familiar at that point with the shared structural and evaluative features of the discovery narrative. When she didn’t produce a narrative that resembled the others, I found myself shaping my turns-at-talk to try and “pull out” a thicker zine discovery narrative. My analysis shows how Rachel tells what I call a “thin” discovery narrative in support of her self-construction as a newcomer to the zine community and how her newbie status played a crucial role in our interactional positioning during the interview. I close the analysis of the zine discovery narratives with a discussion of a speaker who did not produce one. Instead, I show how this speaker (Andrew) tells a “generic narrative” (Baynham 2006) in support of a larger move to project “role distance” (Goffman 1961) from a full fledged zinester identity.

In Chapter Five, I focus on the way zine producers project themselves as particular types of life-writers through the way they talk about their zine-making. I telescope the analysis on the voices of two zine producers who I interviewed and show the linguistic, interactional, and ideological resources each speaker drew on to accomplish “speaking like a writer” and consequently position their zine as a particular kind of autobiographical gesture. The analysis illuminates the micro-level discursive processes through which each speaker draws up their particular writer “position” (Davies and Harré 1990; van Langenhove and Harré 1999; Bamberg 1997, 2004a; Wortham 2001). I show how these positions emerge locally as situated performances that I more or less collaborate in producing, and globally as larger discursive moves that project a self in relation to imagined others (e.g. zinesters, English teachers, and other writers) as well.
as larger circulating ideologies about DIY and writing. A close, contrastive analysis of these speakers affords an opportunity to look in detail at two cases where a zine-maker discursively constructs themselves as a writer, what kinds of culturally-available ideological resources are recruited in this task, and how the interactional context of the interview, including my own turns-at-talk, contributed to these emergent positions, stances, and identities.

For example, I show how the first speaker (Liz) projects evaluative stances against the DIY flavor of zine-making, and instead aligns her own approach to writing with more mainstream ideologies about writing and publishing. Through this stance work, she draws up a position as a writer who is careful and meticulous, yet also struggles with each stage of the writing process, and positions her zine as a kind of investigative, well-researched autobiography. The analysis focuses on the linguistic and paralinguistic features that work in support of this identity, including discourse markers, referring terms, dramatic shifts in voice quality, and reported speech (or “constructed dialogue” in Tannen’s 1989 terms). With Liz, I also focus on how my own status as writer is made interactionally relevant, and through my turns-at-talk and contributions, I work with Liz to emphasize our shared identities as writers through collaborative stance-taking and reference building. For the second speaker (Matt), I show how he draws up a position as writer that is also connected to larger circulating ideologies about DIY, zine-making, and writing; however, in Matt’s case, his self-positioning as a writer is more grounded in a sense of his self and life history. I show how he evokes his training as a writer (e.g. an advanced degree and his experience as an English major in college) in support of an identity as a skilled, professional writer, while at the same time projecting
stances that emphasize his commitment to the DIY ethic that zines are forms of creative expression free from external and institutional writing ideologies. I show how Matt brings his “epistemic self” (Bruner 1990) more fully into the construction of a writer identity, linking his zine-making and approach to the writing process to a core aspect of his self, his beliefs, and his personal ideological commitments. Ultimately, this contrastive analysis shows how the identity category of “writer” among zinesters is elastic and can stretch to include different levels of investment in underground and mainstream ideologies about writing, self-publishing, and the role of DIY ethics in zine-making.

In Chapter Six, I focus directly on the zine texts themselves. While Chapters Four and Five unpacked different performances of zine-relevant identities in talk, this third leg of the analysis focuses on “how [those] performances can be captured textually” (Sinor 2005: 245). Through a close reading of excerpts from three zines – Proof I Exist (written by Billy), Stream of Consciousness (written by Rachel), and Brainscan (written by Alex) – I show how these writers display identities and shape relationships with their readers through particular combinations of text, image, and materiality in their texts. The analysis shows how these zines are emphatically material and embodied objects, and how textual features combine with visual elements (such as cut-and-paste layouts, use of photographs, and the graphic design of text) to give rise to individual self-constructions and relationships with their readers.

For example, in Proof I Exist #5, I focus the analysis on two self-portrait photographs, along with the textual features and visual design of the pages containing these photographs. I show how the writer combines the modes of text and image to bring
off a “performance of self” (Goffman 1959) that is reflexive, multiple, and dispersed across a set of embedded and embodied self-figures. In *Stream of Consciousness #1*, I focus the analysis on an old family photograph that appears on the zine’s cover, along with the writer’s textual self-presentation on the first few pages of the zine. I show how the information conveyed in the photograph, along with the textual features of the first few pages, work together to show how the writer positions her zine as an intimate offering to her readers, while also projecting a self that is hesitant and anxious about making this offer. Finally, I turn to a third zine, *Brainscan #22*, and focus on how the writer manipulates the affordances and constraints of the text and image modes (along with the materiality of the zine form) to accomplishing shifts in “footing” (Goffman 1981) that support two potentially conflicting “frames” (Goffman 1974) that she balances throughout the issue: establishing a close friendship with her readers, while also informing and educating them about a medical procedure she had recently undergone.

In each of these analyses of the intersection of text, image, and materiality in zines, I show how the social and textual practices of zine-making create an “embodied community” of writers and readers, where the bodies of zine-makers are made salient through the assembly and physical form of zines, but also in places where their actual bodies figure prominently in the constructions of the texts (through photographs and intimate discussions of their bodies).

A thread that is woven throughout all three of these analyses is an interest in my own participation in co-constructing the narratives, stances, and identities I extracted from the interviews as “data” for analysis. Paying close attention to my own turns-at-talk and contributions in the communicative context of the interview, and also my perspective
as reader from which I approach the zine texts, is part of a larger goal throughout this project of throwing into greater relief the analyst’s role in eliciting, co-constructing, and retelling our participants’ stories. The larger question that informs the undertaking of this project is, simply put, an interest in how people use language to construct their identities and shape relationships with others. Moreover, I am interested in the ways these discursive processes “provide glimpses of a more general narrative about a life that is largely implicit – a narrative that almost ‘goes without saying’” (Bruner 1993: 39).

The rest of this chapter is organized around three discussions that will give the reader a sense of the meanings, values, and social practices that make up zine culture. First, I address the simple question “what are zines?” by providing a complicated answer that describes the production, distribution, and social practices that surround these publications (Section 1.3). Then I turn to the sometimes slippery notion of a zine community. I briefly review how others have characterized the connection between zine writers and readers, and then explain my own approach that builds on others’ work that describes zines as an “embodied community” (Section 1.4). Finally, I unpack and explain the notion of DIY because it is an important ideological theme that impinges on the narratives, identity, and discursive work I analyze in the chapters that follow (Section 1.5).

1.3 What are zines?

When I tell people I’m writing a dissertation on zines, the first question they always ask is that of definition. They say “what’s a zine?” and I usually offer a brief description, saying something like “small autobiographical booklets that people write on their own,
photocopy and staple together, and give away to their friends.” The second question that sometimes follows is “so is that like a blog that’s written down?” In these conversations, I almost never feel as though I can adequately describe zines and zine-making without reaching into my bag and handing my interlocutor an actual zine. Even better would be to hand over a pile of zines, so the person can touch them and sift through them. Reading zines is not like reading a blog, a book, or a conventionally published magazine. Others have described the act of reading zines as an “embodied experience” (Poletti 2008a, Piepmeier 2009) because they explicitly engage the reader through their materiality: we touch them, untie the strings around them (in some cases), unpack them from embellished envelopes, twist them around to read what’s written at different angles, and struggle to make out illegible handwriting or a too-dark photocopy.

Zines come in many different sizes, shapes, and subjects. There are zines devoted to just about every possible topic, e.g. politics, different music genres, grocery store shopping, baseball, vegan cooking, parenting, road trips, dumpster diving, feminism, poetry, and so on. The type of zine this project focuses on is the autobiographical personal zine. The smallest zine I’ve found is just under 3 x 2 inches, and the biggest one measures 7 x 8.5 inches. There can be crafty elements like stickers, glitter, or glued-on pieces of scrap cloth; most come stapled together or more creatively bound with ribbon, safety pins, or sometimes the pages are even sewn together with thread. Sometimes the same producer will experiment with different sizes, binding methods, and cover designs for different issues. The lives of zines vary; some titles only appear in a single issue (what is called a “one shot”) while others are published for years and have over fifty issues. In short, the problem of definitions with zines is that any attempt to generalize
qualities of the entire set usually falls short of capturing all of the possibilities and characteristics of these text-objects and the social practices that give rise to their making.

Another question that often pops up when describing zines to people is one of access: “where do you get them?” Some scholars have argued that zines exist in “marginal spaces” (Harris 2003) that are simultaneously public and private: they are circulated among networks and communities in the public sphere, yet also somewhat hidden underground and off the beaten path. In short, one has to know where to look for them or otherwise unexpectedly stumble upon one (which was my own experience as I described in the beginning of this chapter). Once zines are discovered, they are easy to acquire. There is a wide array of distribution practices among zine producers and readers. Some large cities have at least one independent bookstore that sells zines and the inventory usually focuses on locally-produced publications. Zine producers can bring copies of their publications to the bookstore to sell on consignment (although specific selling relationships between bookstores and zine producers will vary). The cost of a zine is typically between $1-5 which rarely even covers the producer’s production and copying expenses. An important social practice in zine culture is gifting where zines are exchanged for no money value (Piepmeier 2009; Poletti 2008b).

In addition to distribution by hand, zines are also exchanged through the mail; they are mailed out directly from the zine producer or by a “distro” (an in-group term short for distributor). A distro is an organization that distributes zines. Distros are usually run by one person, out of their home, where they manage the sales and distribution of a rolling inventory of zines they have collected from other producers. Distros usually have an online presence, where you can scroll through their inventory and find the contact
information for placing an order. Each distro will organize their zine collection based on a theme or whatever zines the distro owner finds interesting (e.g. zines produced by women and girls, political zines, music zines, etc.). Running a distro is a labor of love and not a paid position; distros are usually viewed as a service to the community because they facilitate distribution. One of the participants in my study ran a distro called “Loop Distro” that specialized in Chicago-based zines and many zine writers I spoke with commented on how that distro and the efforts of its owner brought a lot of energy and vitality to the “zine scene” in Chicago.¹

In addition to online distros, there are also zine festivals (or “fests”) organized as a way for zine producers to get together and trade their publications. These zine fests are free and open to the public, where anyone can attend, meet zine producers, and pick up a couple of zines. Zine fests are organized in a number of cities (including Chicago) and usually include different kinds of events, such as a day-long “tabling” session where zinesters display their publications for sale, skill-sharing workshops, and roundtables where more experienced zinesters lead discussions on zine-related topics. In addition to fests, there are also zine reading events, usually organized at independent bookstores, coffee shops, or other public spaces. A zine reading is a public event where a few zine writers (usually three or four) will read excerpts from their work to an audience, usually made up of other zine producers and readers. These readings and festivals are ways that privately written zines are made public, and these events provide opportunities for zine

¹ Distros provide the opportunity for national distribution for zines. Some scholars have pointed to the contradiction between a zine producer framing their work as a personal and intimate publication, yet at the same time trying to achieve a wider readership. For example, it has been reported that some zine producers feel as though they are not “in” the community until their publication has been “distroed” (Sinor 2005: 257).
producers to physically get together in person and participate in practices that help define and shape the community.

1.4 Zines as community

In this discussion of zines so far, I have variously referred to the notion that zine producers and readers create a kind of community, though I have not been very specific about the exact nature of this community. Androutsopoulos (2000) characterizes zines as “socio-textual networks” where members are connected through social links (e.g. zine related get-togethers) and discursive links, e.g. when a zine producer makes textual references to a “zine scene” or writes reviews of other zines in their own zine.

Sinor (2005) describes zines as “an imagined textual community of life writers,” though Piepmeier (2009) questions whether the zine community is only an imagined one. She describes how the connection zine producers and readers feel towards each other seems imagined: “this connection is something akin to Benedict Anderson’s notion of the national imagined community, of which he says ‘it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ [Anderson 1991: 6]” (Piepmeier 2009: 79). Then she goes on to argue that zine communities are more than just imagined; they are “embodied”:

Like the zine community, Anderson’s imagined community is in part realized by reading; however, while Anderson’s newspaper reader has the awareness ‘that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others,’ zine writers and readers feel community in part because they know that not many others are replicating this act. The embodied community of the zine world is intimate rather than extensive, and linked to the body rather than simply to an imagined other (Piepmeier 2009: 79).
Other scholars have also pointed out that zine communities are not only textual networks of readers and writers, but embodied communities of people, ideologies, and social practices (Poletti 2008a; Eichhorn 2001).

My own approach to understanding zines and the type of community that forms around zine-making draws from the notion of “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; but see also Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Thinking about zines as a practice-based community encourages a focus on the shared linguistic and social projects that zine producers undertake that help constitute themselves as a group. The analyses in this dissertation shed light on some of the linguistic and social practices that help define and shape the zine community, such as the shared practice of telling a discovery narrative. This dissertation also illuminates some of the shared social and textual practices of zine production and assembly, such as messy or unedited writing, the use of “old” technologies such as typewriters, or cut-and-paste layout techniques. Importantly, a community of practice framework encourages us to look not only at the central members of a community (and the practices that define this full fledged membership), but also the individual speakers who negotiate a more fluid and flexible membership in the community. The analyses in this dissertation account for this flexibility in the zine community, such as the discussion in Chapter Four of one speaker’s newcomer status to the zine community and the discussion in Chapter Five of two speakers’ overt challenges to a central ideological component of zine culture.

A community of practice framework is complementary to other scholars’ discussions of zines as embodied communities of people, ideologies, and shared social practices (see Poletti 2008a; Piepmeier 2009; Eichhorn 2001). Viewing zines as practice-
based endeavors emphasizes the people who produce, read, and exchange these texts and the social and linguistic practices that they engage in to define and shape the community. This dissertation places an emphasis on the shared linguistic practices that help individual zine producers construct and project themselves as different types of members in the community. While other zine scholarship has focused more on the shared ways of writing, assembling, and producing the texts themselves, I focus my analytical lens on the shared ways of speaking among zinesters that build up a sense of community and help define zine culture.

1.5 What is DIY?

One of the central ideologies that appear to inform, motivate, and characterize zine-making is the notion of Do-It-Yourself (or simply “DIY”). As I will show in the following analyses, the abstract concepts of DIY constitute a crucially important socio-cultural frame relevant for unpacking and understanding projections of identities (self and other) in zine talk. The scholarship on zines has explicitly characterized zine-makers as DIY practitioners. For example, Stephen Duncombe writes that “the idea of just going out and doing it, or as it is popularly expressed in the underground, the do-it-yourself ethic, occupies a position front and center in the world of zines” (1997: 117). Amy Spencer similarly explains that zine-makers “adopt the DIY principle that you should create your own cultural experience” (2005: 16). There are also explicit references to DIY in the self-published literature that comes out of zine community itself. In the introduction to her zine *Stolen Sharpie Revolution* (a how-to guide providing tips and techniques for making zines), the author Alex writes: “This zine is...about DIY (Do It
Yourself) ethics and creative reuse. It is about looking at something and saying ‘I can do that!’ rather than waiting for someone to do it for you. It is about taking control away from corporate consumer influence and creating things on your own terms” (Wrekk 2002: 2).

But what does it really mean to describe zine-making as a DIY activity? And moreover, how does DIY ideology function as a macro-level frame around zine culture that gives rise to particular kinds of identity work? It is helpful to think about the role DIY plays in zine culture in terms of Gee’s (2005) concept of “big D” Discourses. In other words, when zine writers talk about who they are and describe their (and others’) zine-making in particular ways, they are involved in what Gee calls “recognition work” whereby they enact, negotiate, and sometimes challenge DIY ideas that circulate throughout zine culture. When I began researching zine culture, I didn’t recognize the DIY flavor of a lot of the zine discourse (with a small “d”) I was hearing and reading, but I soon realized I was encountering refrains of the same ideological themes.

As my familiarity with these ideological themes grew, I scoured the literature of different academic disciplines looking for theoretical frameworks and discussions that would help refine and sharpen my analysis of the identity work I was observing in zine talk. This search led me to others’ work on DIY history, communities, and ideologies from a range of disciplines: visual design studies (Atkinson 2006, Triggs 2006); literacy studies (Lankshear and Knobel 2001, 2010); cultural studies (McKay 1998, Spencer 2005, Oakes 2009), especially work on the punk movement in music (Dale 2008; O’Hara 1999; Sabin 1999); and critical media studies (Reader 2010). The growing scholarship on zines also provides discussions (although some uncritical, which I discuss below) of the
role DIY plays in zine culture; I refer specifically to some of this work from zine studies below.

In the space below, I bring together key points from this wide set of literature to outline a discourse of DIY (in the spirit of Gee’s “big D” discourse) that is relevant for the analysis of identities and life stories I present in the chapters that follow. This discussion of DIY discourse provides an opportunity to preview highlights from these upcoming analyses because while DIY is an important context for understanding the identity work in zine talk, the abstract concepts of DIY that I discuss below are not always understood or enacted in the same way by all of the participants in my study. In other words, while these key points I discuss below are the relevant ideological themes and beliefs to which zine writers orient their talk, they are not all adopted or taken up in the same way.

1.5.1 A DIY ‘toolkit’

One of the core ideas that emerge in DIY communities is the notion of amateur, non-specialist, and democratic participation in a given aspect of culture, from music production and self-publishing to making objects and home design. Crucial for this notion of participation is the development of the tools, knowledge, and skill-sets for creating these cultural products. For example, Dale (2008) describes how DIY punk communities promote the principal that “anyone can do it” through song lyrics and liner notes detailing production costs, but how advances in recording equipment also created the opportunity for people to record and self-release their own music. For zines, Triggs
(2006) discusses how important the technology of the photocopier was to the development and proliferation of zines.

Poletti writes that, for the zine community, the DIY idea that ‘anyone can do it’ translates into the notion that “all readers are positioned as potential zinesters” (2008b: 62). She goes on to write that one of the ways that zines accomplish this positioning is “by attempting to inspire, educate, and motivate the reader to engage in the production of zines” (63). She highlights that one way zine-makers encourage others to produce zines is through stories about how particular zines motivated and inspired their own zine-making, and specifically how these urges to create are impulsive and direct. Poletti calls these stories “tales of inspiration” and she writes they have two functions in zine culture: “they perform the ideal response to the zine text, which is the production of a zine in response to reading one” and “they aim to demystify zine production for the reader in acknowledging the zinester was not always a zinester – in narrating the time before they made the zine and an experience which led to its production – the accessibility and simplicity of zine-making is established and reinforced” (2008b: 65).

Poletti’s work is focused mostly on the zines themselves, so she only looks for these inspiration stories as they appear in the writers’ texts. My analysis of the zine discovery narratives in Chapter Four shows what similar kinds of stories look like on the ground as situated tellings in interactional contexts. I also add to Poletti’s discussion of the role of inspiration in zine culture by showing how the zine writers I interviewed shaped these narratives to cohere with broader themes in their life stories and a larger sense of self. Like Poletti, I view DIY as a socio-cultural frame that impinges on the narratives found in zines, but I also view DIY as a relevant ideological context for the
kinds of self-making that happens through talk about zines. I zoom my analytical lens a little closer to focus on the micro-level details of language use during zine talk to see whether and how abstract concepts of DIY, such as the ‘anyone can do it’ spirit, become resources for individual narratives and self-making.

Another thematic thread that is woven through DIY communities is the push and pull between the categories of “underground” and “mainstream” and especially the idea that movement from the former to the latter constitutes a kind of “selling out” (Spencer 2005; Duncombe 1997, chapter 7; Oakes 2009, chapter 10; Dale 2008). In his essay on DIY artists and their communities, Reader (2010) found that in the community of artists he interviewed, the distinction between what counts as underground or mainstream can be fluid and the idea of “selling out” can be relative.

This idea that zines should remain firmly within spheres of underground and DIY ideologies is even articulated in the scholarly literature on zines. In her work, Sinor (2005) describes her hesitation to write about zines for the academic community, fearing that she is undermining the “thriving subculture” of zines by bringing them into a more institutional context. Literacy scholars Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear have written extensively about zines and their importance as a youth-based literacy activity that deserves more analytical attention in education research. But they make clear that their work only intends to raise awareness of zines among educators and literacy professionals and does not represent any attempt to bring zines more formally into an institutional school setting. In one of their pieces, they write:

The last thing we would want to see is a zines component within, say, a genre-based English syllabus, or a temporary “zines publication center” in the corner of the classroom. The best of zines are altogether too vital and interesting to be tamed and timetabled. After all, they are a do-it-yourself (DIY) countercultural
form systematically opposed to conventional norms and values associated with publishing views of the “establishment” and “schooled” reading and writing (Knobel and Lankshear 2001: 165).

While I support the authors’ commitment to increase the visibility of zines in the academy while preserving the underground spirit of zine-making, I wonder whether such a rigid distinction between mainstream and underground exists uniformly throughout zine culture. My analysis in this project shows that ideas of what counts as “underground” and “mainstream” in zine culture are not fixed or static, but fluid and malleable.

1.6 Looking ahead

In this chapter, I have provided the story of my discovery of zines and motivated the analytical focus of this study and previewed the upcoming analyses. I also provided three discussions that serve as a starting point for exploring zines and the social practices of zine-making: the definition of zines, what kind of community zine-making creates, and the ideological themes of DIY that provide important context for the projection of self and other identities in zine talk.

Here I give the reader a map for the rest of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I provide a theoretical discussion that brings together others’ work on themes of narrative, identity, and the life story. In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodological issues that arose during the period of data collection, organization, and transcription. In Chapter Four, I begin the analysis with a focus on the zine discovery narratives. In Chapter Five, I focus on the voices of two writers and provide a contrastive analysis of the ways they positioned themselves as writers during the interviews. In Chapter Six, I examine the intersection of text, image, and materiality in zines. Finally, I conclude in Chapter Seven
with a discussion that brings together all three analytical chapters and shows possible connections between these analyses and other areas of sociolinguistics, including the life story.
CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I lay out the theoretical groundwork that motivates the research questions and analyses I previewed in the last chapter. My interest in the life story is woven like a thread throughout all the analyses, so I begin with a discussion of the life story as a discourse unit (Section 2.2). Specifically, I zoom in on the work of two discursive psychologists, Elliot Mishler and Jerome Bruner, whose theoretical perspectives on life, narrative, and identity ground and inspire my own interrogation of the life story (Section 2.3). Next, I turn specifically to the problem of looking for identities in the life story (Section 2.4). I first discuss how other scholars have applied positioning theory to non-narrative and narrative discourse (Section 2.4.1) then I move to a discussion of the related concepts of stances, alignments, and footings (Section 2.4.2) and roles, selves, and identities (Section 2.4.3). Next I review others’ work that illuminates the way life stories can be situated in different communities of others (Section 2.5). The final section of this chapter provides discussion on how zines are forms of life writing (Section 2.6) and how visual design and materiality come together to project self and other in zines (Section 2.6.1).
2.2 The life story

In the field of narrative analysis, a significant amount of attention has been paid to the shape and texture of the life story as a discourse unit. As a starting point, we can begin with Linde’s (1993) description of the life story as a story-within-a-story structure: the life story is made up of “all of the stories and associated discourse units such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her lifetime” (p.21). She goes on to say that, crucially, these stories and associated discourse units must primarily make some kind of evaluative point about the speaker and also have an extended reportability to the extent that they are retold over and over throughout the speaker’s life. The canonical narratives that make up a life story describe landmark events or experiences in the narrator’s life, such as getting married, surviving a car accident, or moving to another city. Linde’s analytical lens is specifically focused on vocational life narratives and the kinds of coherence strategies speakers use to account for their choice of profession and any discontinuities during their professional life, such as a change in careers. Ultimately, she makes the argument that speakers draw on culturally meaningful coherence systems (such as Freudian psychology or feminism) to make their personal vocational histories fit with what she calls the “social demand” of life stories, i.e. that our stories make sense in terms of a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world that is known and shared among speakers.

A similar case is made in Keller-Cohen and Gordon (2003) where the authors show how a speaker uses the metaphor of being “on trial” to create text-level coherence in one of her life narratives but also to create intertextual coherence with other narratives that make up her life story. This metaphor of being “on trial” (and the fact that the
narrator loses the trial in this case) links this individual narrative to others in the
speaker’s life story by indexing a shared theme of victimization. The authors argue that
this thematic thread of victimization represents a “tight frame” that helps the speaker
organize and represent her life experiences in culturally recognized ways of thinking
about the world.

Schiffrin (2000) takes another approach to looking for coherence in a speaker’s
life story by examining how the construction of the life story is supported by temporal
and thematic frameworks that encourage the speaker to recount what happened to them in
their life as time moved forward, but also to create thematic threads that describe
recurring themes and create connections between the different parts of the life story.

While some scholars are concerned with how speakers weave threads of
coherence and continuity into the “big” narratives that make up their life stories, other
scholars are interested in the ways speakers build up, over time, the sense of a self and
life-as-lived through narrative activity that is more fragmented and embryonic. This kind
of quotidian narrative activity is foregrounded in Ochs and Capps (2001), who argue that
everyday storytelling doesn’t always reflect the features of what is considered a
prototypical Labovian narrative, i.e. single teller, detached from the surrounding talk,
high tellability, linear temporal organization, and consistent moral stance. Instead, these
authors suggest that narrative form is best described as a set of dimensions to allow for
the possibility of multiple co-tellers, low tellability, non-linear timelines, embeddedness
in surrounding talk, and shifting or even contradictory moral stances. Their approach
moves our understanding of narrative activity from a “report of a sequence of events…by
a sequence of clauses that correspond to the order of the original events” (Labov 1997) to
a conception of narrative as a sense-making process that doesn’t always include polished narrative performances with single storylines.

The ideas about ordinary narrative activity discussed in Ochs and Capps have recently been expanded upon in the work of scholars who focus on a range of narrative activity captured under the umbrella term “small stories” (Bamberg 2004b; Moissinac and Bamberg 2005; Georgakopoulou 2006, 2007). A “small story” approach to talk-in-interaction widens the narrative analytical lens to include a wide array of underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of shared events, stories of future or imagined events, allusions to previous tellings, and even refusals to tell. This kind of approach focuses the lens on “the smallness of talk, where fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world can be easily missed out on by an analytical lens that only takes fully fledged (‘big’) stories as the prototype from where the analytic vocabulary is supposed to emerge” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 381). A similar approach is found in Hamilton (2008) who identifies another type of fragmented narrative activity she calls “narrative traces.” She focuses on the speech of an elderly woman with Alzheimer’s disease, and identifies fleeting independent clauses that refer to the past and provide only “traces” of a fuller narrative. Even though these traces function as only partial portraits (or “snapshots” as she calls them) of the speaker’s self, they still accomplish important identity work.

While the approach to studying this kind of small, fragmented, and dispersed narrative activity is usually positioned in opposition to an interest in the big coherent Labovian narratives that make up a life story (Freeman 2006), I think it can be useful to bring these approaches closer together. For example, in Chapter Four, the set of discovery
narratives I identified in the data range from full-fledged Labovian narratives that rolled out in a single turn-at-talk to more fragmented tellings that stretch across several turns, and even refusals to tell a personal discovery narrative. My analysis considers all of these different kinds of narrative activity under the canopy discussion of the zine discovery narrative because they show the different ways speakers can manage the interactional task of telling about their coming to zine-making. In other words, if I had only been on the lookout for the “big” coherent discovery narratives, I would have missed the other kinds of relevant narrative activity.

Designing an analytical lens that looks for all kinds of narrative activity as part of an individual’s life story (e.g. small and big, coherent and fragmented) forces us to reshape Linde’s original definition of the life story as made up of narratives and non-narrative discourse that have the quality of “extended reportability.” If we consider everyday narrative activity as life story work, with all of its embeddedness, openness, and fluidity, we should leave open the possibility that a life story can thus take many shapes, at different points in an individual’s life, depending on the audience, the situated context for a telling, and so on. The point that life stories can include unevaluated and non-narrativized discourse units is important to make here because not only do I look for all kinds of narrative activity that points to a speaker’s sense of an implicit life story, I also look for non-narrative activity that works in support of building up a sense of self and life-as-lived. For example, in Chapters Five and Six, I examine stances, positionings, and footings (in zine-maker’s texts and their interview talk) that culminate in a larger portrait of who they are, their relationships with others (including their readers), and what kind of life they have lived.
I now turn to the work of two scholars – Elliot Mishler and Jerome Bruner – whose theoretical frameworks on narrative, life, and identity also motivate and inspire my approach to studying the life story in the context of zine culture. Their work helps fill out the analytical lens we have been building so far for approaches to studying the life story.

2.3 Mishler and Bruner

Mishler’s frameworks on identity, narrative, and the life story stem from research interviews he conducted with craftartists, e.g. pottery artists, woodcutters, etc. (Mishler 1999). His primary interest was in how these speakers shaped and achieved what he calls “adult work identities as craftartists” over time, especially given the challenges of having to maintain their craft work in the face of other demands, such as having to make a living and obligations to their families. Ultimately, he observes how these artists foreground change and discontinuities in the telling of their life stories, and in doing so, create room for multiple and overlapping plot lines and identities.

Of particular relevance to my own work is Mishler’s insightful analysis of the notion of beginnings in the artists’ life stories. For example, he asked each of the artists he interviewed about their earliest memories of an interest in art, but in retrospect, he sees that in looking for beginnings, he was making a problematic assumption about life stories. Many of the artists he spoke with traced their earliest memories as far back as childhood, saying something like “I’ve always been interested in painting since I was a kid,” a move which could be viewed as an identity claim where the speaker positions themselves as a natural born artist. But Mishler’s analysis shows that these compact answers about early memories show only part of the complex processes, which emerge
throughout the interview, through which the speakers account for the development of their adult identities over time. In other words, his analysis brings into relief the idea that “beginnings” can be scattered throughout a life story as speakers continually revise and reinterpret the meanings of past experiences vis-à-vis their current lifespace.

One type of “beginning” that Mishler found in these artists’ life stories was the telling of a “turning point” narrative, where an unexpected or unplanned experience leads to “shifts of course and respecifications of what they are about and who they are” (Mishler 1999: 60). He describes how these turning point narratives support identity work of the speakers’ life stories: “confronted with the unexpected, they reshape and reconfigure their identities – always works-in-progress – either through efforts to maintain a sense of continuity with their previous mode of work or by changing direction” (1999: 60). For example, he reports that some craft artists describe how they simply “happened to” see a flyer advertising a ceramics class, or just “dropped in” to an art exhibit, and how they narrate these unforeseen events as having changed their lives. These turning point narratives are windows into understanding how individuals can foreground a sense of randomness or make room for “accidents” and unexpected changes in the telling of their life stories.

Looking for turning point narratives is part of Mishler’s larger interest in how speakers continually revise and “restory” their life histories in order to make room for multiple, overlapping, or even competing identities. In his (2004) study, he analyzed how a woman told the “same” story twice in an interview, as prompted by the interviewer who, after the first telling or “take”, asked the speaker to retell the experience. The narrative is about an expensive dress the speaker bought for a dance and how beautiful
and special she felt wearing the dress. But she ends up losing the dress (by placing it on top of her car before driving away) and still attends the dance, but in a less-expensive dress. Mishler shows that the second “take” is more personal and introspective than the first telling because the speaker performs not only role of the narrator, but she also positions herself more fully as a character in the storyworld. In this way, Mishler argues that the self is much more present in the second telling, and “the past comes back in a different way” as the speaker tried to recapture what the experience was like for her at the time. This analysis shows us that as analysts, we should always be on the lookout for ways our participants revise their understandings of events in their lives, and how they can display multiple perspectives and selves through different tellings of the “same story.” I highlight this aspect of Mishler’s work here because in Chapter Four, I study the case of two zine-makers who told discovery narratives during the interviews, but at later points, revisited these tellings and re-contextualized them to perform different kinds of identity work.

Related to this idea that speakers restory and revise their understandings of life experiences is Mishler’s discussion of the temporal dimensions of the life story. He suggests that our life stories do not have a linear trajectory starting from a single point in the past and extending straight through to an imagined ending point. Rather, we tell the stories of our lives retrospectively, with a “sense of an ending” that comes from the perspective of our current life circumstances. Life stories display a “double arrow of time” (Mishler 2006), and individuals find themselves in loops whereby they are bringing to bear new circumstances, beliefs, and intentions on previously storied experiences. Ochs and Capps also conceptualized linearity as a fluid dimension of narrative. They
describe the “temporal elasticity” of narratives: “narrative time is human time, and human time flows back and forth from moment remembered, to the unfolding present, to moments imagined” (2001: 200). Like Mishler, they understand these achronological cuts back and forth in narrative as reflecting the most basic and core aspect of human selves: the sense that we have multiple identities and many different plot lines in our life stories, and we are constantly engaged in configuring relations among these. Ochs and Capps write: “nonlinear narration opens narration to multiple truths and perspectives and the realization that certain life experiences resist tidy, ready-at-hand interpretive frameworks” (2001: 45).

Mishler’s focus on the process through which speakers shape, reshape, and continually revise their stories and identities over time complements the analytical focus of another discursive psychologist – Jerome Bruner – whose work also examines the relationship between narrative, memory, and imagination in the life story. The basic concept that provides a starting point for all of Bruner’s work is the social constructionist notion that self- and world-making are ongoing cognitive, cultural, and social processes, and that autobiographical narrative in particular is always a cognitive achievement, not just a recounting of the events that happened. For Bruner, life and narrative are so intertwined that a life-as-lived – and a corresponding sense of self – doesn’t exist outside of the narratives told about it. Life and narrative feed into each other so that eventually our ways of telling about ourselves becomes so habitual, the narratives “finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future” (Bruner 1987: 31). Put another way: “in the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which
we ‘tell about’ our lives” (Bruner 1987: 15). He leaves room, of course, for those narratives to take different shapes over the course of a lifetime. Like Mishler, Bruner is interested in ways that speakers tell narratives from their current lifespaces and revise their understandings of who they are and what has happened to them to make old stories fit new contexts, circumstances, and perspectives. We are continually re-imagining our lives: what has happened, what might have happened, or what could happen in the future. In short: “our very memories fall victim to our self-making stories” (2002: 65).

One of the aspects of life narratives Bruner focuses on is how speakers construct “turning points” in autobiography. Earlier, we saw how Mishler discussed the presence of turning point narratives in his craftartists’ life stories where the speakers described an unexpected event that, in retrospect, was the beginning of their storylines as artists. For Bruner, turning points are almost always present in an individual’s life story (2002: 83), and he makes several observations about how these turning points are usually displayed: 1) they are “thickly agentive”, “drenched in affect” and attributed to something internal, e.g. a new belief, new courage, or a new commitment; 2) they are “vividly particular” and take the shape of an episode of highly-detailed memory retrieval; and 3) they “usher in new and intense line of activity” in the narrator’s life (Bruner 1994: 49-50). Through telling about a turning point, a speaker constructs an “emblem of narrative clarity” in their self and life history (Bruner 1994: 50). Importantly, Bruner also observes that turning points can become almost like a metonymic reference for a whole life; the turning point can serve as a general “gist” for a speaker’s whole life. In this way, our turning points can become more like tropes rather than a literal account of what happened, and ultimately get turned into what Bruner calls “the leitmotif of a life” (1994: 50). In other
words, our turning point narratives can construct a “leitmotif” or thematic thread for interpreting and narrating the rest of our lives, before and after the turning point. This idea pops back to our earlier discussion where I reviewed the work of Keller-Cohen and Gordon (2003) on a speaker’s use of the theme of victimization as a “tight frame” for her life story. We might wonder, now, whether that speaker has in her narrative repertoire the telling of a turning point where this theme grew its roots, and then spread out into her understandings of other life experiences.

It is helpful at this point to sum up what we have discussed so far in relation to the life story as a discourse unit. We started by reviewing the work of scholars who look for coherence strategies speakers use to build thematic threads throughout their life story. Next we discussed ways in which the life story can be expressed not just through “big” stories of a speaker’s life, but also more quotidian narrative activity that is fragmented, embedded, and temporally open. This discussion led us to work by Mishler and Bruner who foreground the role of imagination in the life story, especially the way that speakers can revise their understandings and perspectives on past events and continually restory their selves and lives, focusing in particular on the role of “turning point” narratives.

Throughout this discussion so far we have made reference to the construction of self through narrative in the life story, but we can pause here and ask: but how exactly do narratives provide opportunities for self-making? What are the mechanics and processes through which speakers create and project identities through narratives? How do narratives provide opportunities for discursive constructions and projections of identities? Moreover, if the life story is also made up with ingredients other than narratives, what kinds of units or linguistic features should we look for in non-narrative discourse that can
provide traces of an individual’s life story? In order to build a toolkit for the analyses in
the chapters to follow, I now turn to the work of other scholars who have examined the
micro-level details of how identities can be unpacked in both narrative and non-narrative
discourse units, both of which make up the life story.

### 2.4 Looking for identities in the life story

We have seen in the above discussion how scholars have woven together the
concepts of narrative, the life story, and our ongoing process of self-making. But what are
the mechanics through which speakers accomplish self-and other-construction in
narrative and also other types of discourse that make up the life story?

In this section, I review others’ work that provide theoretical frameworks for
understanding how speakers project identities (self and other) through talk in narrative
and non-narrative discourse. I begin with a discussion of positioning theory, including
specific applications of this theory to narrative discourse. Next I turn to the related
concepts of stance, alignments, and footings to understand how speakers use language to
relate to different aspects of their self, their talk, and others (co-present and absent).
Finally, I address another set of related concepts: roles, selves, and identities. In this
discussion, I attempt to untangle these related concepts in order to build up the tools and
concepts that I will use in my analyses that follow. Following these discussions, I turn to
two additional areas of research related to the life story, narrative, and identity that are
relevant for my investigation: how speakers situate their life stories in communities of
others, and what happens when life stories (or narratives generally) appear in modalities
other than talk.
2.4.1 Positioning self and other in talk and narratives

One approach to analyzing discourse, social interaction, and identity is to investigate how speakers position themselves and others and are positioned by others in talk (Davies and Harré 1990; van Langenhove and Harré 1999). The central idea of positioning theory is that the structure of any type of conversation is based on a mutually-determining triad of positions, speech acts, and storylines. The idea is that any utterance can be interpreted as building up an emergent storyline in which positions are located, and that speakers are continually engaged in locating themselves and others against these storylines through the way they produce and interpret each other’s utterances.

Positioning theory is meant to capture the dynamic and fluid process through which individual speakers continually position and re-position self and other, moment-by-moment as talk unfolds. We can differentiate between initial moves (first order positioning) where speakers locate self/other in a recognizable storyline and follow-up moves (second order positioning) where speakers call into question and challenge first order positionings, thus shifting “the storyline…from its original object to the story itself” (van Langenhove and Harré 1999: 20). Positioning is thus fundamentally intersubjective because when we position others we also simultaneously position ourselves, but also interdiscursive because we can talk about positionings that have already occurred at another time, during another interaction. To add to this, we can also say that positionings and corresponding moves of alignment or disalignment are repeatable, and over time build up a more durable and stable sense of self. Put another way: “positions are resources that subjects can choose and that when practiced for a while
become repertoires that can be drawn on” (Bamberg 2004a: 136). We will return to this idea of built-up repertoires later, but for now, it is important to note that the scope of positioning theory can be expanded to go beyond here-and-now interactions to also capture the repeated positions that individuals can build up over time.

It is also important to note that the process of positioning selves and others in talk is bi-directional: individual utterances are read as socially determinate speech acts in ongoing storylines, but these storylines have a “familiar air” and reflect “narrative forms already existing in the culture” (van Langenhove and Harré 1999:19). Put differently, we can say that the process of positioning moves from inside → out (locally-produced utterances are interpreted as moves that build up larger storylines) and outside → in (the wider cultural context provides these storylines and positions for speakers to invoke and inhabit). In this view, it is the wider cultural context that provides the set of values and meanings within which speakers position each other in discourse. In other words, the positions and storylines that are so relevant to our interpersonal activity with others seem to exist prior to any specific interaction; we enter into a conversation with a set of available positions and storylines ready to be activated, made visible, and appropriated or contested. In this view, positions are pre-existing “slots” or points on a grid that we can evoke and make visible then drop ourselves or others into (or, crucially, resist being dropped into) by the way that we shape our utterances.

Another version of this relationship between culture and storylines is found in Tannen (2008) who differentiates between three levels of narrative: culture-wide master narratives that project shared ideologies; “big-N Narratives” (similar to the concept of storylines) that provide themes based on the shared cultural ideologies; and “small-n
narratives” that speakers tell in discourse in order to evoke big-N Narratives as a backdrop for their self- and other-positioning.

But what kinds of relationships exist between speakers, their audiences, and these culturally-available positions and storylines? Do speakers have a degree of agency in managing and shaping these positionings and storylines as they jointly project identities and accomplish identity work? Moreover, where exactly do these positions and storylines come from? In what ways can we fine-tune this idea that positions and storylines have a “familiar air” and reflect pre-existing “cultural narrative forms”? These are some of the questions that concern scholars who apply positioning theory to analyses of narratives and the situated interactions in which they occur. Below I discuss how work from Bamberg (1997, 2004a) and Wortham (2001) have extended the original formulation of positioning theory to specifically account for how positioning works in narrative. The work of these scholars also helps develop and fine-tune the idea that larger cultural “big D discourses” (Gee 2005) or “master narratives” (Tannen 2008) swirl around positioning activity.

Bamberg (1997, 2004a) differentiates between three levels of positioning to capture the multiple layers of alignments and relationships that emerge through situated tellings. The first level (PL 1) addresses how characters within the storyworld are positioned in relation to one another; the second level (PL 2) addresses the positioning between the speaker and his or her audience during the unfolding narrative-in-interaction; and the third level (PL 3) addresses how speakers ultimately position themselves and others in culturally-recognizable ways. Taken together, these three levels unpack the process through which speakers agentively draw up positions for self and other that are
grounded in culturally-recognized ideologies. For example, in one of his studies, Bamberg analyzed a scene from the film *Stand By Me* where four young boys sit around a campfire and co-construct a narrative about another boy named Davie Hogan who “got revenge” on a group of adults by causing widespread vomiting during a pie eating contest. By addressing each level of positioning work, Bamberg shows how the boys actively worked, through the shared telling of this narrative, to position themselves within culturally-recognizable themes of what he calls “manly unruliness and adolescent independence” (152). Yet while these boys bonded over these themes, Bamberg shows how each boy also drew up a position vis-à-vis these themes that differentiated him from the others. The analysis shows how speakers don’t simply take up positions and identities “off the shelf of preexisting normative discourses” (Bamberg 2004a: 153); rather, speakers agentively draw up situated positions that refer to both normative cultural discourses and their individual sense of self. As analysts applying positioning theory to narrative, Bamberg writes that we should always consider “what we think the world is that impinges on the subject and his/her sense-making activities [and] what we think the subject is, as someone who is bringing a stock of individual uniqueness to narrative tellings and world making” (2004a: 153).

Wortham (2001) also draws attention to the process through which positioning is accomplished in storytelling, and specifically, how autobiographical narratives provide opportunities for what he calls “enacted positionings,” where the speaker foregrounds parallels between the description of a past self in the storyworld and the way they actively position themselves in the ongoing interaction. This approach to narrative self-positioning is rooted in the idea that autobiographical storytelling necessarily involves a
splitting of the self, or as Wortham puts it, “a doubling of roles,” whereby the narrator becomes a character in the described storyworld and also acts as a participant in the unfolding interaction with his or her audience. It is these sets of complex relationships between the described self in the storyworld and the enacted self in the interaction that are crucial for understanding how autobiographical narratives play a role in self-construction.

For example, in his study, Wortham analyzes how a woman named Jane constructed a narrative about a pivotal moment in her life story where she left her newborn son at an orphanage, unsure if she could keep him. She returned two weeks later to fetch him, but she was met with resistance from the woman who worked at the orphanage and she had to become very forceful and demand to have her son returned. In his analysis, Wortham shows how the narrator positioned herself as very passive and vulnerable during the first segment, when she described leaving her son: she took many pauses, had an unsteady voice, and even started to cry. During the second segment, when she forcefully demanded her son to be returned, she becomes more active in the telling, speaking more fluently. His analysis illuminates how she not only describes this shift from passive to active in this narrative (and many others in her life story), but how she also enacts this shift in her interactional positioning with the interviewer, becoming less vulnerable and more assertive and sure of herself towards the end of the interview. By talking like a particular type of person as she was describing a past self, the narrator also began to display those characteristics in the interaction.

Wortham argues that these parallels between the described and enacted self not only help transform the relationship between the narrator and her audience, but also help
partially construct the narrator’s sense of self. He writes that “we are to some degree the kind of people we position ourselves as when we narrate ourselves, especially when we represent and enact parallel positions for our narrated and storytelling selves” (2001: 138). Crucially, Wortham says that people will repeatedly enact these kinds of selves through their narratives over time and that is partly how we come to understand and make sense of who we are and what kind of life we have lived. These autobiographical narratives can be “ritualized events that reproduce or re-create the self” (Wortham 2001: 152). In other words, we see how certain kinds of autobiographical narratives can become part of our repertoire and a resource we draw on to display and project what kind of person we believe ourselves to be. Going back to Bruner, we could say that these “ritualized” narrative events don’t simply describe a pre-existing self; rather, they constantly reconstruct that self and are a way we continually “tell ourselves about ourself...[by] making up a story about who and what we are, what’s happened, and why we’re doing what we’re doing” (Bruner 2002: 64).

2.4.2 Stances, alignments, and footings

Another way of talking about how speakers project themselves and others as particular types of persons in discourse is through the notion of stance or alignment. There is a large set of perspectives and analytical traditions that propose slightly different discussions of what are stances and how participants make use of stances to create alignments to the self and others in talk. While it is impossible to review all of these perspectives in this space, I bring together some of this literature in order to put together an analytical toolkit which I then apply to my analyses of narrative, identity and the life story in the chapters that
follow. Through the following discussions, I make the case that the analysis of stances, alignments, and the related concept of footing, can serve as a rich point of entry into larger questions about how individuals relate their self, experience, language, narratives, and the life story.

As a starting point, Goffman (1981) provides a way of approaching the issue of stance and alignment through his discussion of the production format of talk. Goffman writes that when individuals come together, they can take up various alignments to different aspects of their self, their talk and the talk of others, and the other individuals (absent or co-present) who make up the “participation framework” of the social encounter. He describes these shifts in what he calls a participant’s “alignment…or stance, or posture, or projected self” as a change in “footing” (1981: 128). He writes:

A change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance. A change in footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events. (Goffman 1981: 128)

In this often-cited passage, Goffman describes talk as series of footing shifts and the corresponding frame shifts that happen as a result. In order to examine this notion of footing, Goffman unpacks the notions of speaker and hearer, which he argues are too general to capture all of the ways participants can align to what they and others say during different kinds of social encounters. Goffman argues that utterances don’t carve the world up into two distinct categories of speaker and hearer; rather, there’s a wide range of positions that individuals can take up to establish the “participation framework” of the encounter. For example, he draws our attention to the ways that individuals can become overhearers, bystanders, or addressed and unaddressed recipients of anothers’
words. He also describes audiences for our talk that are not co-present, what he calls “imagined recipients” (1981: 138), yet he limits his discussion of this kind of hearer to specialized speech events, such as radio or TV broadcasts.

For the category of speaker, Goffman pulls apart different entities that are involved in producing an utterance. He writes that an individual can serve as the animator of an utterance (the speaking box through which sound is produced), the author (the person who has chosen the words and the meanings that are being expressed, and/or the principal (the position or belief that is being established by the words that are spoken). In most cases, these three aspects are bundled together in one person: the speaking individual is seen to be animating an utterance that he or she has designed and is committed to the beliefs and positions being expressed by the utterance. Yet these different aspects of the production format can also be dispersed or shared among several individuals, either co-present ones who are participating in the ongoing social encounter, or absent ones who are somehow being evoked as a potential author or principal behind the words currently being animated. Goffman articulates this idea clearly: “it is not true to say that we always speak our own words and ourselves take the position to which these words attest” (1981: 146).

Goffman takes this idea of the production format even further to say that when we represent ourselves in talk through the pronoun “I” we project ourselves as a textual “figure” and create the possibility for embedded animators, authors, and even principals. We can easily find examples of this type of embedded I’s in narratives, where speakers cast themselves both as a textual figure in a displaced storyworld and also as an animator producing the narrative in an ongoing interaction.
This splitting of the self is similar to Bruner’s (1987) discussion of the “shakiness of the [autobiographical] form” due to the inherent reflexive nature of narrative, i.e. that the narrator and central figure are the same (1987:13). Each of these scholars point to the flexibility of talk, and narrative in particular, to represent simultaneous, multiple, and embedded projections of the self. Goffman describes how these shifts between (or embeddings of) different projections of self and alignments emerge in social interaction fluidly, where all the members of the participation framework work to hold up the momentary frame shifts. He captures this fluid collaborative notion of framing and footing through a metaphor: “in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another” (1981: 155).

Another approach to understanding how speakers project alignments to their talk, their self and others is found in the literature on the sociolinguistic notion of stance. One approach to studying stance is found in Du Bois (2007) who describes an interactional approach that focuses on what he calls “the stance act” defined as a three-part process whereby a speaker (1) evaluates an object, (2) positions a subject (self or other), and in doing so (3) creates an alignment with other subjects “with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field” (Du Bois 2007: 163). In other words, he is interested in how speakers project their evaluations, assessments, or epistemic perspectives towards “stance objects” and how those projections consequently shape the relationship between the speaker and others. For Du Bois, positioning and alignment are dynamics of social interaction that emerge from more micro-level stancetaking. For example, he describes alignment as “the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances [and] two stancetakers” (Du Bois 2007: 144).
But what can be a “stance object” to which a speaker may orient his or her words? In Du Bois’ framework, he focuses on stance objects that can be recovered locally and anaphorically (e.g. a previously-spoken utterance in the prior discourse) and only briefly mentions that speakers can also project stances towards “the words of those who have spoken before – whether immediately within the current exchange of stance utterances, or more remotely along the horizons of language and prior text as projected by the community of discourse” (Du Bois 2007: 140).

Other scholars have expanded Du Bois’ framework to show how speakers can take stances towards larger, more nebulous objects, not readily recoverable from the transcript. For example, Shenk (2007) analyzes conversations among bilingual Mexican American friends and shows how they take overt stances to perform what she calls “authenticating moves” to enact or challenge ethnic identities. Her analysis shows that these stances were drawn up in relation to specific ideological themes that were relevant for asserting an “authentic” Mexican identity (e.g. purity of bloodline, place of birth, and fluency in Spanish). Her analysis shows how analysts must sometimes search for the stance object beyond the transcript, by drawing on ideological themes or identity categories that are in play.

Lempert (2009) also interrogates the dialogic nature of stance-taking and widens the analytical lens to focus on the full interdiscursivity of stancetaking. He argues there can be “distal stance objects and subjects” in the stance act, i.e. absent objects and others that are not present in the here-and-now interaction. He focuses his attention on this idea of a distal subject and frames it as a problem of addressivity: to whom and for whom does a speaker project a stance? Moreover, because stance is something that people often
talk about, Lempert urges us to pay attention to “the forms of reflexivity that typify stance and tie it to forms of social identity” (2009: 229). In other words, Lempert is interested in figuring out how people talk about stance and how people categorize others as social types based on their typical stance-taking. In his analysis, he focuses on ways that a politician, John Kerry, projected a position of “conviction” during a presidential debate as a response to critics who had previously branded him as a “flip-flopper.” In Lempert’s framework, both of these social types are typifications of particular kinds of stance-taking, and Kerry’s move to display “conviction” was a move across speech events, a response to the previous charge of flip-flopping, and a “rejoinder in a large-scale argument about presidential personhood” (2009: 239). In other words, the recognizability of Kerry’s “conviction” stance-taking was predicated on interdiscursive knowledge about prior events and shared understandings about social types.

At this point, we can pause to ask: what exactly are the differences between stances, footings, and positions? What kind of theoretical mileage do we get from each of these notions and their corresponding frameworks for analyzing identities, discourse, and social interaction? Schiffrin (2006) differentiates between these three concepts and the different ways they bring self, other, experience, and language into different kinds of configurations. In her discussion, she describes a position as the speaker’s identity projection to what is said; footing as the process through which the utterance has been produced (who are the authors, animators, principals, and figures); and stance as the speaker’s epistemic relationship to the content of the utterance. She uses the notion of stance to capture how a speaker projects their source of information, level of knowledge about the information, and their projected certainty towards the information. So here the
The notion of stance is most useful for my analysis in Chapter Five that compares how two zine-makers position themselves as particular kinds of writers and their zines as particular kind of autobiographical gestures. In this analysis, I bring together the analytical notions of stance, footing, and positioning in order to show how these writer identities are accomplished. Why are these analytical notions useful for this kind of analysis? I argue that when the topic of writing emerges in my interviews with zine-makers, there are particular kinds of identity work that become relevant. For a zine-maker to position themselves as a writer, particularly a life-writer who self-publishes public autobiography, they have to locate themselves in a relevant storyline (or Tannen’s “Big N narrative”) that resonates with larger cultural ideologies (or Tannen’s “master narrative”) about the relationship between DIY ethics, more mainstream ideologies about writing, and zine-making. I argue that this positioning and identity work happens, in part, through moment-by-moment stance-taking, where speakers make salient different aspects of these storylines and ideologies, then use linguistic forms and interactional resources to project individual (and sometimes collaborative) stances towards them. The result of all of this
micro-level stance work is a constellation of different positions, alignments and storylines that ultimately help build up the sense of a speaker’s self and life story.

### 2.4.3 Roles, selves, identities

In the previous section, I discussed how speakers project stances, alignments, and positions in talk to accomplish a sense of self, but I have not been very specific about what the terms “self” and “identity” really capture. Here, I provide more specificity. Narrative discourse – and especially the life story – is a well known site for the discursive construction of identity. Schiffrin (1996) describes this relation between narrative and identity through the metaphor of a self-portrait: “telling a story provides a self-portrait: a linguistic lens through which to discovery peoples’ own (somewhat idealized) views of themselves as situated in social structure” (199). In order to understand how narrators project themselves as social selves and unpack this notion of “self,” it is helpful to turn to Goffman’s (1959) distinction between self-as-character and self-as-performer, and his (1961) discussion of “role distance.”

For Goffman, the self is not an intrinsic thing we are born with; rather, he sees the individual as a “peg” on which a multitude of things are hung which provide the “means for producing and maintaining selves” (1959: 253). He goes on to say that the “machinery of self-production” involves notions of regions (front and backstage), teams, and audiences, and when this configuration comes together smoothly, “the performance will come off [and the] character will appear to emanate intrinsically from its performer” (1959: 253). Ultimately Goffman is interested in how an individual manages these two
aspects of the self, fostering impressions, and putting on and taking off different characters for different roles.

In his discussion of the presentation of self, Goffman makes the point that sometimes a performance can “accentuate certain matters and conceal others” (1959: 67), which is similar to his later discussion (1961) of “role distance” and how an individual can fluctuate their performances to display various degrees of attachment and distance to particular roles.

For Goffman, roles are attached to what he calls “activity systems”: performers find roles “ready-made” to slip into when they come together “for the performance of a single joint activity” (1961: 96). Zine communities are not systems in Goffman’s sense, but we can find situated activity systems within the community. For example, sometimes zine-makers come together to stage a public zine reading at places like independent bookstores or coffee shops. At a zine reading, we find regular situated roles available for uptake: audience members, performers who read selections from their zines, one performer who agrees to act as the emcee for the evening, etc. Performers also oscillate between roles: they return to their roles as audience members after their individual reading, albeit always at-the-ready to put on their performer “hat” if needed (such as when someone approaches them afterwards to compliment them on their reading). While these situated roles are tied to the activity of putting on a zine reading, they are also related to the larger context of the zine community. For example, performers who read selections do so because they have produced zines and regularly inhabit the role of zine writer. So the possibilities for role-taking at a zine reading are governed, in some ways, by the relationship between a participant and the larger zine community. This interlude
discussion of a zine reading is a way to think about how we can apply Goffman’s notion of roles and role distance to communities whose members are not necessarily co-present, but part of an imagined collective.

Ultimately Goffman argues that to embrace or completely reject a situated role fully and exclusively is unusual and the exception to the rule. Instead, an individual typically “organizes his expressive situational behavior in relation to situated activity roles, but that…[he can] introduce a margin of freedom and maneuverability…between himself and the self virtually available for him in the situation” (1961: 133). In other words, an individual can display a “double stance” whereby our actions adhere to the “definition of the situation” but we can do other activity at the same time that shows we are not fully defined by what is in progress, or that our self is larger than the character currently available to perform.

The crucial aspect of Goffman’s concept of role distance is that the individual must be aware of the role in order to display a degree of investment in it. He writes that when we find displays of role distance, a person “is actually not denying the role but the virtual self that is implied in the role” (1961: 108). Put in a different way, we could say that the performer is avoiding the performance so as not to “put on” the character and its corresponding self. In other words, it’s not a case of role distance if an individual fully rejects the role. It’s possible to convey or “give off” information about oneself by “holding off” the role a little, but it’s not possible to do this if the role is completely thrown out altogether. In the chapters that follow, I highlight moments where zine-makers discursively “held off” the performance of the role of full fledged zinester to achieve different kinds of interactional goals.
Goffman is particularly helpful for understanding what kinds of available repertoires an individual has to “bring off” a self in social interaction and what kinds of movements are possible within those repertoires and social structures to accomplish individual and unique performances. This balance of structure and individual agency is relevant for my observations about zine culture because the analyses I build in the following chapters are grounded in this idea that identities are fluid, malleable, and multiple; that the speakers whose voices and zines I analyze recruit a wide array of linguistic, interactional, and ideological resources to index their investments in and connections to zine culture, but also the ways in which their senses of self are larger than that investment. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of other scholars who have examined the ways in which speakers can orient their personal life narratives to different communities of others.

2.5 Situating the life story in a community of others

Bruner writes that one of the social demands of narratives is what he calls “life story meshing,” the idea that when we tell about ourselves and our experiences, these tellings must mesh in a coherent way with a larger community of life stories (1987: 21), or must be recognizable enough to enter into a larger “conversation of lives” (1993: 43). But what do the relationships between our individual narratives and these larger communities of life stories look like? When we understand ourselves to be members of specific communities or organizations, what are the processes through which we come to shape the telling of ourselves and our lives in ways that “mesh” with our communities? By asking these questions, I’m moving away from thinking about how life stories are
coherent at a macro-level with cultural understandings of the world (e.g. Linde 1993) and towards thinking about how individual life narratives can be shaped by the speaker’s local, everyday participation in groups where members are either co-present or dispersed and part of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983).

Linde (2000, 2009) has examined the functions of narrative in institutional contexts, and the role narrative plays in constructing and maintaining the institution’s collective memory and shaping the individual members’ work identities in ways that align with that collective memory. Results from her three-year ethnographic study of an American insurance company show how employees of this company undergo a process of “narrative induction” whereby they learn to tell their personal vocational narrative in a way that is coherent with the collective memory of the company and the “paradigmatic story” of its founder. Her analysis identifies the different types of intertextual relations between an employee’s personal narrative and the company’s institutional narratives. For example, she differentiates between what she calls “direct citation” where the narrator will explicitly make reference to the close fit between their narrative and the company’s and another relation she labels as “quotation” where specific lexical items and phrases get repeated. Linde writes that the intertextual relationship between our individual narratives and the community narratives is not only a matter of structural similarities, but crucially, that “one’s understanding of the events and meanings of one’s life…is strongly shaped by the stories of the communities of which one is a member” (emphasis is mine, 2009: 195).

One area of work that has illuminated how people’s understandings of the events and meanings of their lives can be shaped by their memberships in communities is found
in studies of narratives known as *stories of conversion* in religious communities (Stromberg 1993; Harding 1992). Conversion stories are narratives which recount how the speaker has undergone an internal change that resulted in their coming to their religious conviction and adopting their new religious identity. A similar process has been found to be at work in recovery narratives told in communities of recovering alcoholics known as Alcoholics Anonymous (Cain 1991; Swora 2002; Warhol and Michie 1996). These studies show that acquiring the AA narrative is part of how an individual acquires a new identity as a recovering alcoholic; the new identity is, in part, marked by a change in language used. The speakers restory their lives and take on new identities as full-fledged members of their communities through telling stories of personal transformation that appropriate their groups’ shared meanings. What’s interesting about the case of AA is that the collective identity of the group as recovering alcoholics is constructed and sustained through the tellings of individual members’ narratives of recovery. Warhol and Michie refer to what they call the “collective protagonist” of A.A.’s master narrative. In other words, the community itself is partly constructed through the tellings and retellings of members’ narratives of recovery, yet each member also finds ways to differentiate their recovery narrative in a way that emphasizes their unique self and life history.

Ayometzi (2007) presents a specific study of a conversion-like narrative that is particularly relevant for my current project investigating narratives, identity, and zine culture. Ayometzi analyzes the function of a shared, conversion-like story in her study of undocumented Mexican immigrants in a small religious community in Texas. She calls this shared story a “witness story,” through which narrators describe their past problems
with alcohol, the decision to migrate to the U.S. and how their drinking problems made it difficult to find steady work. Finally, the narrators describe an encounter with someone from the church (which was very active in this particular town), the realization that their life is out of control, and their subsequent conversion and commitment to the Christian faith. Her analysis identifies how this shared story serves as a resource for community members to make their individual experience fit with the collective religious identity of their community. She goes on to say that through the telling of their witness stories, community members were engaged in “restorying [Mishler 1995] each of their personal stories, thus jointly fitting them into a shared and collective standard master narrative” (Ayometzi 2007: 45).

One important point that Ayometzi makes about this story is that it floated around the community, available for any member to take up: “This characteristic of detachment of the witness story is what allowed it to not be owned exclusively by any particular member of the community, but instead rendered it ‘up for grabs’ by all members” (2007: 46). Yet her insightful analysis reveals that not all members uniformly appropriated this witness story as their own and she discusses two odd cases she came across in her fieldwork where speakers struggled to make fit either their own or their listeners’ personal life experiences with the collective narrative. Ayometzi observes that both speakers, in their own ways, made explicit reference to the role of the witness story in their self-construction and restorying of their lives. In other words, her analysis brings into relief the idea that speakers can explicitly negotiate and refer to the role of master or collective narratives in their constructions of a sense of self and life story.
Interestingly, Linde (2009) also reports she found some company employees that disaligned with the collective identity of the company and explicitly called into question the relevance of the founder’s story to their own personal history in the company. Both Ayometzi and Linde show there can be room to maneuver, that speakers sometimes call attention to and contest the demand of community-specific narratives on the shaping and projecting of their own life histories. Even though these scholars do not apply Goffman in their analyses, we could understand this move by speakers to explicitly avoid adopting a community narrative as an expression of “role distance” where they avoid the performance so as not to fully inhabit the self-character that would emerge from it.

Still another perspective on the relationship between personal experience narratives and communities comes from work on life history narratives told by survivors of the Holocaust (Schiff, Noy, and Cohler 2001; Schiff and Noy 2006; Schiff, Skillingstead, Archibald, Arasim and Peterson 2006). In one study, Schiff, Noy, and Cohler (2001) analyze what they call collected stories where narratives of vicarious experience (at which the teller was not present) come to be told as part of the teller’s own autobiography. These are stories which narrators have “collected” from others’ experience because there is a sense of “fit or resonance” with aspects of the narrators’ own life stories. In later work, Schiff and Noy (2006) reframe this idea of resonance as shared meanings, which they describe as a stock of culturally-available meanings that narrators are exposed to through their communities and social worlds. Their work convincingly argues that studying collected stories or shared meanings is more than a footnote in narrative analysis because life narratives are always a mixture of memories (things that we directly experienced) and non-memories (things from culture or shared
experience that we’ve gathered and integrated into our own story). They write that this mixing of personal and cultural can be intentional and non-intentional in that “some meanings are chosen to selectively fashion a self and others we seem to ‘slide’ or even ‘fade’ into” (Schiff and Noy 2006: 400). Put in a slightly different way: “The social world figures large in the creation and presentation of stories of ourselves and is constantly slipping, sometimes imperceptibly, into our speech and self understanding” (Schiff, Noy, & Cohler 2001: 165). Their emphasis on the accidental slipping of culture into our self-fashioning echoes Goffman’s (1959) distinction between information we intentionally “give” and unintentionally “give off” in social interactions. Though Goffman doesn’t focus on storytelling, we can apply his terminology to say that life narratives have the capacity to “give off” meanings about the narrator’s relationship to his or her communities and cultural world, whether or not the narrator consciously produces or manipulates these meanings.

Looking for places where speakers align and disalign with the “shared meanings” or “collected stories” of others in their communities, or where speakers explicitly reference the role of shared stories in their self-construction, is a window into the inherent tension in all life narratives between balancing uniqueness and representativeness, our sense of individual experience with the imagined experience of the collective. In other words, we always project ourselves as unique individuals with agency and an awareness of the uniqueness of our biographies, but we also construct ourselves as recognizable types of people that resonate and make sense with our understandings of the social world. Bruner sums up this balance: “we nourish our identities by our connections yet insist that we are something more as well – ourselves.
And that unique identity derives in major part from the stories we tell ourselves to put those fragmentary pieces together” (Bruner 2002: 100). This balance between uniqueness and representativeness also harks back to our earlier discussion of the tension between agency and structure in the different kinds of identity work that go on in talk.

In this section, we saw how some scholars have approached studying the relationship between an individual’s life narratives and the communities to which they claim membership. The relationship between the individual and the collective in narrative is important for the analysis of the zine discovery narratives in Chapter Four. I characterize these discovery narratives as “turning points” (Bruner 1993; Mishler 1999) that describe an internal awakening in the speaker’s self and life history where they immediately felt connected to zines, and shortly after the discovery, began their zine-making. In some ways, the discovery narrative functions as a conversion narrative to the extent that narrators recount their transformation into a full fledged zinester. Through telling a “thick” zine discovery narrative, zine writers can reinforce and underscore their attachment to the identity category of “zinester,” their commitment to zine-making, and their understanding of the norms and values of zine culture. What we will see in the analysis, however, is how the narrative can also act as a discursive resource for speakers who want to display a more complicated stance while also distancing themselves from other aspects, or who want to position themselves in more complex ways vis-à-vis the zine community. In other words, some speakers tell “thin” discovery narratives – or don’t tell these narratives at all – that suggest a looser connection to a full-fledged zinester identity. In this way, the zine discovery narrative is unlike Ayometzi’s “witness story” or personal AA narratives because it seems more malleable or elastic in that it can bend and
stretch to fit diverse interactional moments where tellers display stances and identities that are multiple and sometimes in tension with the full-fledged zinester identity the discovery narrative usually projects. The analysis in Chapter Four shows that the discovery narrative is a recognizable and structurally-distinct discourse unit, “up for grabs” by members of the zine community to shape their personal story of how they came to zine-making, but it also is available as a more flexible resource for zine-makers who wish to project multiple and overlapping storylines in their life stories.

2.6 Zines as life writing

In this section, we depart slightly from our previous discussions of narrative, identity, and the life story because until now we have only considered the relationship between identity and narrative in talk. Yet life stories can also be written down in a wide array of forms and mediums. The most canonical form of a written life story is the published autobiography that tells about extraordinary lives, or simply the lives of famous people. There has been a move over the past decade for scholars of life writing and autobiography to expand the canon and focus attention on “the ordinary ways and the ordinary texts we use to narrate our lives (and hence our selves) every single day” (Sinor 2005: 248). Smith and Watson call the study of everyday autobiographical acts “backyard ethnography” where the focus is on everyday practices, rather than the “high culture of published ‘artful’ autobiography” (1996: 17). In their edited collection of everyday autobiographical acts, they include analyses of texts such as the academic CV, medical records, and personal ads (Smith and Watson 1996). This move to expand the canon of autobiography to include not just polished and highly-crafted published work, but also
more everyday autobiographical acts echoes the move among narrative analysts to shift the analytical lens from “cohesive” pre-packaged narratives extracted from their interactional contexts to narratives-in-interaction which can be more fragmented and embedded (for example, see papers in De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2008).

But where can we place zines in these frameworks? The scholarly literature has characterized personal zines as a type of life writing (Sinor 2005; Poletti 2005; and Chidgey 2006), but what kind of autobiographical gesture do they represent, especially given their physical and material form?

Herman writes: “Although narratives in different media exploit a common stock of narrative design principles, they exploit them in different, media-specific ways, or, rather, in a certain range of ways determined by the properties of each medium” (2004: 51). In other words, narrative practices across different mediums are necessarily shaped and affected by the sets of constraints and affordances that are associated with specific semiotic environments (Herman 2010: 196). My analysis in Chapter Six examines the semiotic environment of zines, and the specific question I ask is this: what are the available semiotic tools or resources for creating meaning, constructing and projecting selves, and building life stories in the pages of zines? In the next section, I review others’ work that highlights the media-specific properties of zines that encourage particular multimodal combinations of text, image, and materiality, which in turn, give rise to particular identity performances.
2.6.1 Visual design, materiality, and self/other in zines

While we are still trying to understand all of the media-specific properties of zines, there are two features of zines that occur regularly as design elements: cut-and-paste layouts that present text-image arrangements that look like collages and typographic choices that manipulate or play with the visual design of the zine’s text.

In his study of music-related punk zines in Germany, Androutsopoulos (2000) analyzes the forms and functions of non-standard spellings in a corpus of eighty zines collected over a period of two years. His analysis shows how these spelling choices help writers foreground their affiliations with subcultural communities and, since these non-standard spellings appear so frequently in his corpus, help create an intimate relationship between the writers and their readers. He makes an interesting observation that the regular use of non-standard spellings has actually become a standard convention of punk writing in media discourse. Sutton (1999) also identifies non-standard spellings, along with misspellings or ungrammatical forms, as a genre feature of zine discourse. She argues these non-standard features are part of a larger pattern by zine-makers to flout Grice’s (1975) conversational maxims whereby they assert their own individuality by eschewing conventional forms of writing, but also create closeness with their readers by indirectly indexing a shared community practice.

In addition to non-standard spellings, misspellings, and ungrammatical forms, zine aesthetics are also characterized by the cut-and-paste collage style layouts and arrangements of text and image. The cut-and-paste method involves physically cutting out images or text and adhering them (usually with glue or scotch tape) to some kind of background, resulting in a page that resembles a collage, with layers of images and texts.
placed at different angles, in different arrangements. The cut-out images and text can be sourced from a variety of materials: old magazines, children’s books, clip art found on the internet, personal photographs, pamphlets or flyers, and so on. These cut-out pieces are then arranged on either a simple piece of white copy paper, or sometimes a zine-maker will use a darker black-and-white background image (e.g. the inside of security envelopes) to provide a high-contrast between the cut-out text or image and the background on which its pasted.

The cut-and-paste layout style is iconic and instantly recognizable in zine culture, and some scholars have argued this style can be linked to a larger set of meanings associated with punk subcultures. Sinor (2005) writes: “collaging, layering, and self-drawn comics are part of zine aesthetics, reminiscent of a punk show and critical of the linear” (2005: 258). This linking between the graphic design of zines and to ideologies is worthy of more exploration here: how do we get from the visual aesthetics of zines to the set of meanings one associates with a punk show, or an ideological critique of “the linear”? Triggs (1995, 2006) describes how the iconic cut-and-paste visual design of zines conveys what she calls a “graphic language of resistance” which she traces back to ideologies associated with punk subcultures. In her analysis of British punk fanzines from the 1970s, Triggs (1995, 2006) describes an emerging set of graphic design conventions: the half-page (A4) stapled format, photocopied layouts that mix handwritten and typewritten letterforms, ransom note designs, and cut-and-paste collages. Triggs argues that these visual elements combine to represent a “graphic language of resistance” for punk fanzines and, importantly, this visual design helps differentiate these underground publications from the mainstream just as much as the content does.
Poletti (2008) also examines the use of cut-and-paste layouts, along with the physical form of zines, ultimately concluding that zines are “autobiographical text-objects” that “engage in spatial and physical representations of self” (254). She suggests that the intersection of text, image, and materiality in zines is linked to the writer’s attempts at representing their subjectivity, or way of being in the world, and that the resulting assemblage of the zine page, in turn, affects the reading experience. She writes: “the zine is a mode of life narrative which seeks to most closely resemble the problems associated with trying to represent the experience of being in the world by tacitly intervening in and manipulating the reading experience” (2008: 93). Sinor also describes how the visual design of zines represent something of the writer’s self-construction, but also affect our interpretations: “images and text work together, multiplying possibilities and meaning, disrupting expectations, forcing the reader to consider the consumption of the text” (2005: 258).

2.7 Conclusion

At the end of this discussion, it’s important to make the point that the scholars and theoretical frameworks evoked here represent one possible constellation of others’ work that we could apply to understanding and analyzing the data. As analysts, we pick and choose from others’ work to create a group of voices that resonate with us and the questions we want to ask about our data; however, others might imagine different intersections. In the introduction to the second edition of his book *Discourse Analysis*, Gee writes: “If there is any quality in my work, it is primarily in the “taste” with which I
have raided others’ stores and in the way I have adapted and mixed together the ingredients and, thereby made the soup. Some will, of course, not recognize the ingredient they have contributed, or, at least, not want to admit they do after they taste my soup. If there are occasional inventions, their only chance for a full life is that someone else will borrow them and mix them into new soup” (2005: 5-6).

This chapter has presented discussions of the theoretical themes and frameworks – or the ingredients for my “soup” in Gee’s terms – that serve as the guiding lights for the analyses that follow. In the next chapter, I discuss how I collected the interview and zine data for this study and issues that came up during the collection. I also describe how my approach to the data draws from the analytical traditions of both discourse analysis and interactional sociolinguistics, but also how my approach to the analysis of the zines themselves also draws heavily from the social semiotic approach to visual meaning.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

As I mentioned in Chapter One, this dissertation analyzes the intersection of narrative, identity, and the life story in relation to the social practice of zine-making. The data set for this project is comprised of a set of interviews I conducted, recorded, and transcribed with ten zine writers, as well as a collection of zines produced by these writers. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological considerations and issues that arose during the period of data collection, organization, and transcription. First, I describe the process through which I found, contacted, and interviewed the participants (Section 3.2). I then discuss the problems I encountered when I attempted to build a complete data set of zines from each of my participants, but I show how this methodological problem was actually an encounter with a “rich point” (Agar 1994) in zine culture (Section 3.3).

Next I turn to a discussion of the interview as a communicative event (Section 3.4) and also discuss the methodological and theoretical implications of the order in which I conducted the interviews (Section 3.4.1). I also discuss Mishler’s (1999) notion of asking our participants to become collaborators with us as we reflect on the analysis and interpretation of their stories (Section 3.4.2). Finally, I discuss methodological notes about the transcription process (Section 3.5).
3.2 Looking for zines and participants

When I began my project, I hoped to find zine-makers who lived in the same city as I did at the time (Washington, DC) who would be willing to meet and talk with me. With little luck uncovering a DC-based “zine scene”, I then turned my attention to Baltimore and made several trips to a brick and mortar bookstore called Atomic Books that sold zines. I contacted via email a few Baltimore-based writers whose zines I purchased at Atomic Books but received no responses. I also spoke with the employees of the bookstore about my project and they suggested a few names, but again, zero responses to my inquiries. Having struck out with the DC and Baltimore area, I started thinking about the possibility that the interview component of my project would require travel to another city. I first considered New York City because of its proximity and my earlier research on a NYC-based zine, *The East Village Inky*. But after doing a little digging around online about the zine community in Chicago – my previous home before moving to DC – I decided to send off a few email inquiries to Chicago-based zine writers to test the waters. After receiving some enthusiastic replies, I organized travel to Chicago for a long weekend and began to schedule interviews with as many zine writers as I could find.

The first contact I made in the Chicago zine community was Billy, who became one of my principal research participants. I met Billy through his zine, which I had purchased during one of my earlier trips to Atomic Books in Baltimore. I found out later that Billy sold some of his zines on consignment with this shop. Billy was enormously helpful in gathering more zine-makers for me to interview because, at that time, he ran a distribution service for Chicago-area zines called Loop Distro. He managed the distribution of an impressively large collection of Chicago-area zines, so he was a well-
known figure in the community and was able to put me in touch with other zine producers.

My first contact with Billy was via email. I decided to contact Billy because he seemed to have an organizational role in the Chicago zine community and I hoped he would be able to “get me started” with the community. In my email message, I described myself as a graduate student researcher who was planning a project on Chicago-based personal zines and I invited him to participate in the study. I explained that I would be conducting and recording conversational interviews, and asked if he would be willing to meet with me and introduce me to other Chicago zine-makers. He enthusiastically replied, agreed to be interviewed, and offered to forward my email and contact information to other Chicago zine writers. From Billy’s forwarded message, I met another zine producer named Bradley, who also agreed to participate in my study. By searching through the online inventory of Billy’s distro, I discovered three other zine-makers (Andrew, Liz, and Michele) who also produced perzines and lived in Chicago. I contacted them to arrange interviews and each one of these writers also led me to others. Liz forwarded my email message to a small group of female zine-makers and through this forwarded message, I met another writer named Celia. Both Liz and Andrew recommended a fellow writer named LB as someone I might want to interview and she ended up being the first zine-maker I interviewed. Michele (the third writer I contacted from the inventory at Billy’s distro) recommended another zine-maker named Matt, who agreed to participate in my project. Finally, during my second trip to Chicago, Billy recommended a writer who had just produced her first zine, Rachel, so I contacted her and she also agreed to participate in my project. In this way, Billy was my principal
contact in the Chicago zine community and all of the other writers I met and interviewed radiated out from my connection with him.

There is one zine-maker I interviewed who I did not meet through a Chicago connection. I met Alex during a zine fest I attended in Richmond, VA in April 2007. Alex is a well-known zine-maker who lives in Portland, OR and usually travels to zine fests and events throughout the country. I introduced myself to her at the event in Richmond and invited her to participate in my project.

For this project, I met zine writers primarily through other writers (except for Alex). The internet was helpful for finding Billy through his online distro, browsing his distro’s inventory to find three other zine writers, and making contact via email with all of the writers to arrange interviews. Most of the writers I interviewed did not have an online presence. Since the time of my data collection, however, a website called We Make Zines (www.wemakezines.com) has emerged online that would serve as an excellent resource for finding and meeting zine producers. We Make Zines is a social networking website where zine producers create profiles and participate in message board discussions about zine-related topics. There are different groups that form on this website, including a Chicago zine group where members initiate discussions and post information about zine readings, get-togethers, announce new issues of their zine, etc.

Another development in the Chicago zine community has been the initiation of an annual Chicago Zine Fest, which is currently in its second year. This zine fest takes place in a rented space at a local college, is free to the public, and features day-long “tabling” where zine producers and distros display and sell their publications, meet potential readers, and trade their zines for ones produced by other zine-makers. Even though I wasn’t able to
make use of these resources for my project because they weren’t yet in existence, I mention them here to show the vibrancy of the zine community generally and specifically the active nature of the “zine scene” in Chicago.

Once I had identified zine-makers willing to participate in my project, I made two research trips to Chicago in order to conduct and record the interviews. The first trip I made was in March 2007 when I conducted six interviews, and the second trip was seven months later in October 2007 when I conducted four interviews. During the time between trips, I conducted an interview with Alex, the zine writer who I met at the zine fest in Virginia. During the time between trips, I also listened to the first set of interviews I conducted, took notes about themes and topics that emerged, and started to transcribe. I made this decision to start transcribing some of the interviews before I had collected all of them partly because I was eager to start on the work, but also because I wanted to review the shape of these conversations to see if I needed to make any adjustments to my interview plan for the next set of conversations.

The figure below shows the order of the writers I interviewed, the kind of physical setting where we met for our conversation, and approximately how long our conversation lasted. As we meet these writers in the analyses that follow, I provide a more detailed description of them and their zine-making, as those details are relevant for the analyses.
Figure 3.1 Order of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of Interviews</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Length of conversation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 LB</td>
<td>LB</td>
<td>morning of 3/21/07</td>
<td>coffee shop; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Andrew</td>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>afternoon of 3/22/07</td>
<td>bar; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 24 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Liz</td>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>morning of 3/23/07</td>
<td>coffee shop; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 22 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Billy</td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>afternoon of 3/23/07</td>
<td>coffee shop; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 49 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Celia</td>
<td>Celia</td>
<td>afternoon of 3/24/07</td>
<td>home of interviewee; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 42 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Bradley</td>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td>morning of 3/26/07</td>
<td>university library; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>2 hours, 9 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Alex</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>evening of 4/30/07</td>
<td>home of researcher; Washington, DC</td>
<td>1 hour, 45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Rachel</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>morning of 10/18/07</td>
<td>coffee shop; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Matt</td>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>afternoon of 10/18/07</td>
<td>comic book store; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Billy</td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>morning of 10/19/07</td>
<td>breakfast diner; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>1 hour, 36 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Michele</td>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>afternoon of 10/19/07</td>
<td>ice cream shop; Chicago, IL</td>
<td>58 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Challenges in building a zine data set

My intention was to build a complete set of back issues of all the zines my participants had produced over the course of their lifetime. I soon found out that this would be an impossible task. A good example of how difficult it can be to acquire back issues of zines is the story of the seventh issue of Billy’s zine *Proof I Exist*. When I asked Billy for back issues of *Proof I Exist*, he gladly handed over many of them, with the exception of the first and seventh issues. He told me he no longer had the master copy of the first issue.
and the seventh issue never even had a master copy. He explained that for the seventh issue of his perzine, he creates content, assembles, and makes copies of that issue as needed. He said if I really wanted a copy, he would make one and send it to me. I said I did, and he later sent me that issue, which was made up of a small piece of heavy cardboard, 4 ½ x 3 inches, that was folded over. He had designed a front cover with the zine title and issue number and a back cover with the contact information for his distro. Inside, the small zine contained a short, typewritten piece describing his feelings about a recent break-up. The text had been ripped into two small pieces of paper and pasted on each “page” of the folded cardboard. I found it fascinating that multiple copies of this particular issue were produced with different content and at different times, yet they all existed “out there” as part of Billy’s autobiography. As an analyst gathering a data set, however, this proved to be quite a challenge. Would I need to somehow collect all the different versions of issue #7 he had sent out over the years?

The ephemeral and sometimes short lives of zines present a challenge to those of us wanting to build a large collection of every publication a single person has produced over the course of their lifetime. Is it even a worthwhile pursuit to attempt a complete corpus of zine publications from a single individual? How much of a link should we, as analysts, create between issues? Zine readers often don’t have complete collections of zines and the producers themselves can vary in terms of whether and how their work explicitly makes references to their other issues. From my interviews, I learned that some writers report that they compose their issues with a strong sense of chronology (e.g. where did I leave off in the last issue? What has happened in my life since the last issue?), but others report they take up a more thematic approach to each issue, with
pieces of their life stories that cut across many time zones. Moreover, the story of Billy’s issue #7 shows the immense creativity and non-standard methods of zine publishing. I realized that building a complete set of zines produced by a single individual over time was an impossible task, but also, it missed the point of the kind of ephemeral, fluid, and flexible lives zines can take.

3.4 The interview as communicative event

The interview is far from a neutral or artificial context in which we gather information from our participants and what is said is taken to be representative of some kind of truth “out there.” Rather, the interview is a social encounter in which both participants – the researcher and interviewee – come together to accomplish and perform the interactional event. As many scholars have argued before me, the interview is a speech event where the researcher is always involved in co-constructing the talk and social interaction (Briggs 1986; Mishler 1986; Schilling-Estes 2004; De Fina 2009). One way to critically examine the interview as a communicative event is to think about what kinds of social roles are made available by the research interview setting and how participants may align or disalign with the available roles.

One way that I performed the role of researcher during the interview event was through items displayed as part of what Goffman (1959) calls a “personal front.” There were unavoidable items that I had to display as part of my front that indexed a degree of formality and emphasized that the event was far from an everyday conversation. For example, at the beginning of each interview, I took out my digital voice recorder from my bag and it often became a topic of “small talk” where we talked about where we should
place it and whether the zine writer preferred to wear the clip-on microphone usually ended up being jointly negotiated. In a similar way, the IRB paperwork was another item in my front that was an unavoidable interactional task at the start of the meetings. The negotiations of the paperwork and recording device made salient the formal aspects of a research interview, yet these negotiations also sometimes served as interactional resources for participants (including myself) to downkey the event from a formal interview to a more casual conversation. For example, most of the writers commented explicitly on the digital voice recorder, and some even made jokes about the formality of being recorded and having to sign paperwork. For example, one of the interviewees (Liz) teased me about my “fancy digital recording device” and I responded with a joke back, saying “now everything you say is on record.” This brief exchange at the beginning of our interview ended with both of us laughing. In this case, while the digital voice recorder was part of my formal researcher front, it also triggered a brief exchange of small talk where comments about its formality actually helped to transform the social encounter into a more casual conversation, where we created closeness by sharing a joke.

While I have only been able to provide a brief sketch of these interactional details about the interviews, these details help contextualize the interviews as socially situated speech events. Analyzing the researcher’s “personal front” and ways that aspects of this front can be used as interactional resources to transform participants’ understandings of what kind of social encounter is underway is part of a larger goal of thinking about how, as analysts, we play a role in shaping the data we collect.

Another communicative aspect of the interview context that is important to consider is the way that our participants can bring a set of expectations about the nature
of an “interview” to the social encounter and, in turn, draw on these schemas to help co-design and co-construct the talk. For example, one of the expectations that our participants might have when approaching the social encounter of the interview is that as researchers, we will ask clear and interesting questions that enable them to provide responses that display knowledge and helpful information (Briggs 1986: 56). Similarly, Mishler (1999) discusses how our participants will sometimes reshape or recast a question in a way that they want to answer it.

This dynamic appeared many times in my interviews, but especially in the beginning of the interviews when I asked the writers how they define zines. I planned this general question about zine definitions for the beginning of the interviews as a strategy to “break the ice” and get the writers talking and feeling comfortable with me. But in hindsight I now realize it created some very “sticky” interactional moments. Obviously I know what a zine is given that I introduced myself to them as a researcher who not only studies zines but also is an avid reader of them. So why would I ask a zine writer to tell me what a zine is when that positioning is somewhat artificial and all of the participants know it? Despite the interactional “messiness” of this question, it is interesting to see how each writer transformed this question in a way that made them able to answer it. For example, two writers (Billy and Liz) began their answers by calling their upcoming talk as their “stock answer” to that question. Another writer (Matt) commented on the generality of the question and then cut it up into two smaller questions where he first explained how he would describe zines to his mom, and then explained what zines mean to him (we look in more detail at this section in Chapter Five). For still another writer
(LB) this question and her response provided a trigger for the telling of her own discovery narrative (we will look in more detail at this section in Chapter Four).

### 3.5.1 Interview order

One aspect of the process through which I conducted the interviews that unexpectedly affected the outcome of the conversations – and ultimately what I ended up working with as data – was the order in which I interviewed the participants. The logistical constraints of conducting interviews in another city required me to gather as much data as possible during each trip, forcing me to stack the interviews together, sometimes conducting two on the same day. The order of the interviews (i.e. who I interviewed first, next, and so on) took shape simply as a result of trying to be as accommodating as possible to my participants’ busy schedules and the logistical constraints of my short-term visits to the city where they lived. However, after transcribing the data and working through some of the analyses, I began to realize that the order of the interviews was an important contextual factor that affected the shape of the conversations, especially my own contributions. As I conducted the interviews, my socio-cultural competence in zine culture grew as I became more and more familiar with the norms and values that seemed to saturate the writers’ talk. I found I was encountering the same ideological refrains (e.g. Discourses of DIY ideologies) and even a group-specific discourse type (e.g. what I call the *zine discovery narrative*). The following chapters provide in-depth analyses of these two aspects of zine culture, but here I would like to focus on the methodological

---

2 One exception to this order was my interview with Alex, a zine-maker from Portland, OR who happened to be travelling through Washington DC (where I lived at the time) during my period of data collection. I had met Alex a few days earlier at a zine fest in Richmond, VA. She mentioned she needed a place to sleep for a night in DC, so I invited her to stay at my apartment, and I ended up interviewing her in my living room that night.
implications of my growing familiarity with these two elements of zine discourse as the data collection progressed and how this affected the shape of my final interviews with zine writers.

For example, LB was the first writer I interviewed and I was not yet aware of the zine discovery narrative. When she began her telling, I often interrupted her asking for information to “get the facts right” (e.g. when did that happen? Where were you living at the time?). I am not sure why I asked those questions in those moments, but I wonder how that moment would have proceeded differently had she been one of the last participants I interviewed. Perhaps I would have recognized elements of the discovery narrative and shaped my turns at talk differently in order to let more of her story come out on its own. Although is her discovery narrative “contaminated” data because I asked so many fact-checking questions? Is it better to let our participants roll out their stories without “interference” from us?

Another interesting case comes from one of the interviews I conducted towards the end of the data collection period. When I spoke with Rachel – who, importantly, had only just produced her first zine a few weeks prior to our interview – I was well aware of the discovery narrative as a recognizable discourse unit in zine culture. When I asked Rachel about her early experiences with zines, she did tell a discovery narrative, but one that was very “thin” and strikingly different from the ones I had captured in other interviews. In Chapter Four I analyze in detail my own turns-at-talk in this moment as I tried (in vain) to “pull out” a thicker version of her discovery narrative. Like the situation I described with LB, I wonder what would have happened in that interactional moment if Rachel had been one of the first writers I interviewed. Would I have accepted her thin
discovery narrative as an appropriate response to my question and simply moved on to the next topic? If I had done that, would our dynamic have developed differently than it did when I barraged her by asking the same question multiple times? I’m reminded here of Mishler’s call for narrative analysts to take up “a more reflective stance [because] it is clear that we do not find stories; we make stories” (1995: 117). In my efforts to pull out a thicker discovery narrative from Rachel, did I inadvertently help co-construct her telling?

The order in which we interview our participants matters because our context is different for the last interview than for the first one. This is not to say that the first or last interview is more or less contaminated, or that we get better or worse data as the project progresses. In the case of my project, I was “fresher” in the first interview and often encountering aspects of zine culture for the first time. As I did more and more interviews, however, my perspective changed. I brought new prior texts to each interview, based on the social encounters I had participated in during the previous interviews. The first interview provides a context (for the interviewer) for the next, and so on. As the researcher, I was privy to the intertextual connections between the interviews, while my participants were not (except for the moments I made those connections salient, which I discuss below). Our evolving perspective and knowledge about the community shapes the conversations we have with our participants – and subsequently the “data” we analyze – during the later stages of collection. This dynamic isn’t something to necessarily be avoided, but an awareness of the process and potential outcomes is important.
3.5.2 Research-subjects as collaborators

There were two moments during the interviews where I briefly slipped out of my role and shared some analytical thoughts with my participants about the data I was collecting. During the second research trip, when I talked with Matt and Billy, I shared with them my observations about the discovery narratives I had heard in many of my interviews. I didn’t plan for this to happen and, in some ways, it felt like I was revealing too much, like I was reminding them that our conversation was being turned into analytical data, or that the descriptions of their life experiences were “stories” up for analysis. Yet both of these interactional moments gave rise to incredibly interesting outcomes, which I analyze and discuss in detail in Chapter Four. Mishler (1999) encourages us to see our research participants not just as informants, but collaborators. In his study of the life stories of craftartists, he writes that he regrets that he always took steps to maintain “ownership” of the work, rather than sharing the interview transcripts with his participants for discussion or showing them drafts of his chapters before publication. He writes: “we must find ways to enter into partnerships with our subject-collaborators, reconstructing our perspective on science and research and turning it into a joint enterprise” (1999: 152). These interactions with Matt and Billy were moments where I invited them to collaborate with me on ideas about the discovery narrative. I wonder what kind of “data” I would have ended up with if I had asked the other participants to explicitly comment on the telling (or non-telling) of a discovery narrative and the extent to which a shared template exists among zine-makers for telling this kind of narrative.
3.6 Notes on the transcription process

Transcripts are only partial representations of talk and the decisions a researcher makes about what aspects of the talk to include and exclude can sometimes have theoretical consequences (Mishler 1986; Bucholtz 2000). For the purposes of my study, I approached the process of transforming the audio data into written transcripts through a multi-step process that always involved a degree of “looping” back. The first step I took was to listen to all of the interviews while taking notes where I would jot down my initial impressions of interesting sections of the conversations where I might return later for more analysis. I also prepared a document for each speaker’s interview that listed the topics we talked about and general impressions about the kind of identity performances that were underway during the conversation. Next, I began the process of producing “rough” transcripts for each speaker, where I focused on as much detail as I could with only a few listen, keeping the pace moving so that I could produce enough transcripts quickly to get a general picture of the data.

Next, I started to identify sections from the interviews where I wanted to telescope my lens and produce more detailed transcripts, noting the pause lengths, paralinguistic features that seemed important, overlapped speech, and so on. Of course, once I started to produce more detailed transcripts, I found many new features and sections that seemed important for analysis. At this point, when I began to produce more detailed and narrow transcriptions, I segmented the flow of talk into lines that correspond to what Chafe (1994) calls “intonation units.” According to Chafe, intonation units are spurts of language that correspond to how a speaker’s conscious moves around. These
spurts of language can be separated into individual units (which correspond to lines in a transcript) by looking for a convergence of a number of paralinguistic features, such as pauses, changes in pitch, duration, or voice quality, changes in turn, or terminal pitch contours.

It was at this point in the transcription process where I started to extract the discovery narratives from their interactional contexts and prepare detailed transcripts of them. Extracting these narratives and looking at them as a group was useful in order to compare shared structural, evaluative, and interactional features. For example, I could compare the way I asked the “same” question in many of the interview (e.g. how did you learn about zines?) that produced a discovery narrative as a result. On the other hand, extracting the narratives from their situated contexts also obscured the ways these narrative performances were embedded in the surrounding talk. I found that I had to keep returning to the entire transcript to look for other features of the interviews that informed my interpretation of the narratives.

I also found that throughout the process of analyzing the interview data, I kept returning to the audio files, even though I was working with very detailed transcripts. Re-listening to the interviews helped keep the transcript excerpts fresh, but I also often “heard” different things with each listen, depending on the focus of the particular analysis I was working through. Continually re-listening to our interviews also reminds us that our transcripts are only partial representations of the data. No transcript could possibly represent all aspects of the talk because the amount of detail would make the transcript too cluttered and cramped. But it is important for researchers to always be aware that the transcript is only one representation of the talk and to continually return to the recording
throughout the analytical process. Moreover, the audio recording itself only captures one of the semiotic channels and does not provide a record of the facial expressions, gestures, nodding, etc. that all play a role in how meaning is negotiated in social interaction.

Another issue with the transcripts I became aware of during different parts of the analysis was the knotty problem of deciding on boundaries for excerpts for analysis. This is a common problem for narrative analysts. But this methodological problem turned into part of my analysis, for example in Chapter Four, I show how Matt returned to the discovery narrative at the end of the interview and presented a different evaluation for why zines immediately appealed to his younger self. For life narratives especially, it’s important for the analyst not to remain stuck in the narrative that’s been extracted from the interview context. As analysts, we can easily get stuck in places in our transcripts, where we dig deeper and deeper, but we forget to keep moving around the entire interview to see if the themes and identity work we found in one place emerge again, or are relevant to, what’s going on in other places.

3.7 Conclusion
In this chapter, I have provided a discussion of the methodological routes and pathways my project took during the data collection and transcription process. We are now ready to begin our analysis of the data, and we start in the next chapter with a focus on the zine discovery narratives.
CHAPTER 4

ENACTING ZINESTER IDENTITIES THROUGH NARRATIVES OF DISCOVERY

4.1 Introduction

We begin our analysis by focusing on how zine-makers talk about zines during the interviews. As discussed in Chapter Three, the interviews were designed to elicit reflexive talk – especially personal experience narratives – from the writers about their zine-making experiences. During each interview, I asked the writers to recall their early experiences and talk about the first time they saw a zine. I was looking for “beginnings” for the zine plot lines in their life stories and found that, for many writers, a central narrative emerged as a response to this question, what I call the zine discovery narrative. These narratives described the experience of learning about zines for the first time as an awakening moment in the narrator’s life, which often sparked a passionate urge to immediately make their own zine. These narratives construed the discovery experience as a turning point or pivotal moment in the zine-maker’s life story.

As I listened to these individual narratives, I was struck by the similarities among them, including recurring episodic structures and shared meanings. In many ways, each zine writer seemed to describe having the “same” experience when they saw a zine for the first time, as if there was a shared recipe for telling this narrative. Yet as I dug deeper into the data, I discovered ways these narratives also varied across speakers and the situated contexts in which the tellings emerged.

This chapter is organized as follows. I first present the underlying structure of the zine discovery narratives by describing the recurring episodes and shared evaluations...
found in the data set (Section 4.2). Next, I provide an overview of the mechanics of how the discovery narratives emerged from and fit into the ongoing interview talk (Section 4.3). This analytical overview of the zine discovery narratives gives an aerial view of the data, but I then telescope the analysis on five case studies which illustrate the particular structures and functions of the discovery narratives.

First, we focus on the voices of three zine-makers – Matt, Billy, and LB – who all told “thick” versions of the discovery narrative. But we will see how for two of these speakers (Matt and Billy) the discovery narrative came back at later points in our conversations and how these “second takes” (Mishler 2004) provided opportunities for the speakers to display different stances vis-à-vis the discovery experience. Specifically, I show how Matt told a canonical discovery narrative (Section 4.4), but then later “restoried” (Mishler 1999) the experience to fit a more personal storyline about his artistic struggle with a college writing professor (Section 4.4.1). In another case, I show how Billy also told a canonical discovery narrative (Section 4.5), but then later re-performed it as part of a metadiscursive move where he commented cynically on the stereotypical role this narrative plays in zine writers’ self-making (Section 4.5.1). I characterize Billy’s second performance of the discovery narrative as an instance of *metaparody* (Morson 1989) through which he projects a degree of “role distance” (Goffman 1961) towards one of his regular zinester performances. Finally, we turn to a third writer (LB) to see how she told a brief yet thick discovery narrative, but how her attachment to the situated role of “research subject” impinged on her telling (Section 4.6). All three of these analyses show how the zine discovery narrative functioned as a locally
occasioned telling (Jefferson 1978) in the situated context of the interview, but also as a turning point narrative in the speaker’s life story.

Next we turn to the case of Rachel (Section 4.7), a zine writer I interviewed who was a newcomer to the community, having just made her first zine only months before our conversation. As discussed in Chapter Three, Rachel was my final interview and by that time, I was very familiar with the discovery narrative and was actively “looking” for it during the later interviews. I show how Rachel offered what I call a “thin” version of the discovery narrative and how I found myself trying to “pull out” a thicker version. The analysis shows how Rachel’s thin discovery narrative was in support of her self-construction as a novice in the zine community, and how her newbie status also played a crucial part in our interactional positioning during the interview.

The final part of our analysis considers an interesting case where I didn’t find a telling of the discovery narrative in a slot where we might expect one (Section 4.8). I show how a zine-maker named Andrew didn’t describe his early experience with zines as a turning point; instead, he fit his personal discovery of zines into what Baynham (2006) calls a “generic narrative.” Like Billy, Andrew also characterized the canonical discovery narrative as a stereotype through a cynical mini-performance of the discovery narrative at a later point in the interview. Yet unlike Billy, Andrew never takes on the canonical narrative as his own, so his case presents a slightly different case of “role distance” (Goffman 1961) from a full fledged zinester identity.

The cases of Andrew and Rachel – along with Matt, Billy, and LB – show how the discovery narrative is more than just a structurally-distinct discourse unit in zine culture; it is also a resource that can be appropriated, challenged, or reworked as zine-
makers construct and display different kinds of zinester identities and multiple plot lines in their life stories. Thus in this chapter, I analyze not only the structural and evaluative features, but also the uses and functions of the discovery narrative as a discursive tool available to zine-makers for constructing and projecting situated selves that display different degrees of alignment with or detachment from the salient identity category of zinester. Moreover, Andrew and Billy’s explicit references to the discovery narrative show that this narrative is not only an analytical category I have identified in the data, but also a recognizable discourse type among zine-makers and has a life of its own within the community. Ultimately, I show how the relationship between these narratives and the speakers’ identities is, like all life narratives and identity, “part person, part situation, and part culture” (Schiff and Noy 2006: 401).

4.2 What is the ZDN?

Recall that as part of my data collection, I conducted and recorded interviews with ten zine-makers. As part of the interview design, I planned to ask each zine-maker about their early experiences with zines because I suspected that talk about “beginnings” would produce rich data points for identity and life story analysis. The topic of early experiences with zines came up in each interview, sometimes without explicit elicitation on my part. As stated earlier, when the topic of early experiences with zines became relevant to the talk at hand, a central narrative emerged in nine out of the ten interviews, what I call the zine discovery narrative. All but one writer produced a discovery narrative, and among the nine speakers who did, the narratives fit into the ongoing talk in different ways.
Below, I present an overview of the discovery narrative data, beginning with a look at the underlying structure and shared evaluative features of the narratives.

In this section, I provide a description of the shared episodic structure of the discovery narratives. The narrator often begins the telling of their zine discovery by describing some aspect of their younger self that predisposed them to zines (e.g. a childhood habit of collecting pamphlets) or a literacy activity that was similar to zine-making (e.g. making booklets of jokes to distribute among school friends). We could describe these sections as a type of coherence strategy where the narrator describes some kind of inherent character trait that explains why he or she was immediately drawn to zine-making (cf. Linde 1993: 129). But moreover, these sections describe the narrator’s younger self as somehow “open to” or “waiting for” zines, sometimes encapsulated in an utterance that describes a pre-discovery incomplete knowledge of zines (e.g. I knew about them but didn’t really know about them).

Next, the narrator describes the particular event that led to their discovery of zines. The description of this event – being given a zine for the first time – is extremely detailed, including the specific title of the zine, the person’s name who gave it to the narrator, and details about the zine’s appearance, materiality, and content. We then find the core feature of the discovery narrative: the presentation of an “aha” moment where the experience of seeing a zine for the first time is characterized as revelatory. Narrators usually illustrate this “aha” moment through constructed dialogue where the excitement they describe in the story-world is enacted in the telling. These “aha” moments describe how the narrators instantly felt an immediate connection to the zine format or somehow saw themselves in zine-making. After the “aha” moment, the narrator then provides an
accounting of how they more fully entered the zine community, either by making their own zine and/or seeking out more zines to read. It’s not surprising that discovery narratives include accounts of the narrator’s early zine-making experiences, given our discussion in the first chapter of the DIY concept of participatory culture in the zine community. In other words, the discovery narratives are discursive sites where zine-makers can foreground and underscore this linking between consumption and production in zine culture, i.e. reading a zine can and should lead to making one.

In addition to these recurring episodes, we also find a set of shared meanings and evaluative features in many of the zine-makers’ narratives. Figure 4.1 below illustrates these shared meanings and the corresponding linguistic features typically used to express these evaluations.
Figure 4.1 *Shared meanings and linguistic features of the ZDN*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared meaning</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Linguistic feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The narrator experiences an “aha” moment. | The experience of seeing a zine is transformed into an internal awakening moment in the teller’s life story. | constructed dialogue, e.g. *and I’m like “whoa: these are really cool, this is really cool I can do this y’know”*  
*it was like “that’s the way, that’s how you do it”* |
| The narrator feels a sense of urgency to make a zine. | After the discovery, the narrator describes an immediate urge to make their own zine. | collapsed auxiliary verbs that express obligation, e.g. *I gotta do it, I gotta go* |
| The detailed appearance and materiality of the zine are important. | The narrator includes information about the layout, size, content, and production of the first zine read and/or made. | in-group terminology, e.g. *long-armed stapler, quarter-sized* |
| Zine-making is immediately familiar to the narrator, or the narrator describes him/herself as already “open to” zine-making before the actual discovery. | The narrator refers to a pre-discovery self that was either a) aware yet unaware of zines or b) engaged in literacy activities that naturally pre-disposed them to zine-making | embedded I’s (Goffman 1974) and mental state verbs  
e.g. *I knew they existed but I didn’t really understand*  
*I knew what they were before I knew what they were* |

It’s important to discuss here the degree of fit between the individual narratives and the shared episodic and evaluative features I have just described. Not all discovery narratives contain all of these evaluations, and for the ones that do, the evaluations do not necessarily appear in the order presented in the table. Like all narratives, evaluation in the discovery narratives is a wave that spreads throughout the story-world and we often find
evaluative stances embedded in other narrative clauses (Labov 1972). Moreover, we find many other types of evaluations other than those described here in the discovery narratives. The purpose of this table is to show the most prevalent shared meanings in the zine discovery narratives, keeping in mind the structure is only partially fixed and there is room for maneuvering within it. I borrow the metaphor of “narrative as recipe” from Schiff and Noy (2006) and treat the discovery narrative as a shared script, available for members of the zine community to shape their personal experiences. The recurring episodes and shared evaluative features I have described are the shared ingredients, but each speaker mixes them differently, resulting in slightly different, yet still recognizable, zine discovery narratives.

Another point to make here is that even though we can identify a shared template for the zine discovery narrative, it is impossible to make a claim that all zine discovery narratives in my data are exactly the same. Moreover, my data set—ten speakers, nine discovery narratives, and one absence of a discovery narrative—is too small to support claims that the discovery narrative is undoubtedly a shared story throughout the entire zine community. Rather, each individual speaker’s narrative performance is different and the examples that we look at in this chapter are case studies of individual discovery narratives rather than representative of all possible discovery narratives.

4.3 Who tells what and how?

The question of whether a participant told or did not tell a zine discovery narrative does not always have a straightforward answer. Figure 4.2 illustrates the continuum along which we can place the writers to the degree that their discovery narrative fit the
canonical structure and displayed the core evaluative features I described in the previous section. The group of writers on the left edge of the continuum produced what I call “thick” discovery narratives that contained the shared evaluative features and generally fit the canonical structure. The set of writers in the middle of the continuum – Rachel, Celia, and Liz – produced “thin” discovery narratives that displayed a looser fit to the shared template. Later in this chapter, we will flesh out this idea of a thin discovery narrative by focusing on how Rachel’s narrative performance was similar to, yet different from the canonical structure. Only one writer, Andrew, did not tell a discovery narrative; however, we will see later that Andrew still oriented his role performance to and displayed awareness of the zine discovery narrative, despite a refusal to shape his own experience to fit the canonical episodic and evaluative structure.

Figure 4.2. Who told a ZDN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOLD</th>
<th>DID NOT TELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Celia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>Liz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the group of writers who did tell a discovery narrative, there are differences in terms of how that narrative was “locally occasioned” (Jefferson 1978) by the turn-by-turn structure of the ongoing talk. To capture the differences in the mechanics of how the discovery narratives fit into their interactional contexts, I compare below how the narrative was triggered and whether it rolled out as a compact discourse unit during a
single turn at talk, or stretched across multiple turns and question-answer sequences.

Figure 4.3 illustrates how the discovery narratives are distributed along these dimensions.

Figure 4.3 *Ways of telling the ZDN*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER-</th>
<th>SINGLE TURN</th>
<th>MULTIPLE TURN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELICITED</td>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Liz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Celia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOUCHED-OFF</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bradley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the upper portion of Figure 3, we see that for all but two writers, the discovery narrative was explicitly elicited by the interviewer. In these cases, the narrative emerged as an answer to a question in the interview, where I asked something like “tell me about the first time you saw a zine.” We often find stories embedded in question-answer sequences in sociolinguistic interviews (Schiffrin 1997), and in many ways, these stories are jointly constructed by both the participant and interviewer (Mishler 1999). My question presupposes that the experience of learning about zines is a specific event in the writer’s life rather than a general experience, and moreover, that their affiliation with
zines had a starting point located way back in the past. Some writers (Matt, Billy, Alex, and Michelle) answered this question by producing a compact discovery narrative during a single extended turn-at-talk, where I provided only minimal backchannel responses. This group of writers is represented in the top left quadrant of Figure 3. For others (Rachel, Liz, and Celia), my assumption that the discovery was a specific event in their lives became problematic and it took several turns for their narratives to come out. These writers are represented in the top right quadrant of Figure 4.3. It’s interesting to note that this same group of narratives that emerged over several turns is also the same set that we placed in the middle of the continuum in Figure 4.2. When the discovery narrative stretched across many turns, it becomes more difficult to “pull out” from the transcript a discrete discourse unit that neatly presents the discovery experience. But we will also see in the following analysis that it can be equally difficult to extract a discrete discovery narrative that was told in a single turn-at-talk, because there can be “second takes” or retellings at later points in the conversation. For now, though, I offer this distinction between single and multiple turns-at-talk in order to provide the reader with a general entry point into the data, although I acknowledge this kind of categorization doesn’t capture all of the richness of how each narrative fit in its particular interactional context.

In the bottom portion of Figure 4.3, we see that for two writers (LB and Bradley), the discovery narrative became sequentially relevant “on its own” and required no elicitation or prompting from me. In both of these cases, the beginnings of a discovery narrative were “touched off” (Jefferson 1978) by a more analytical discussions of zines in general, yet in both cases, the narrator self-interrupted the discovery narrative in an effort to keep themselves on track and not veer too much off topic. The analysis that follows
focuses on how one of these writers (LB) initiated her discovery narrative, but then abruptly stopped, and I show how her attachment to the role of “research subject” impinged on this telling.

Having provided an analytical overview of the structural, evaluative, and interactional contexts of the discovery narrative data set, I now turn to a close analysis of five specific cases where zine-makers produced (or did not produce) discovery narratives. The analysis situates each discovery narrative performance within its interactional context, the speaker’s overall life story, and the ways in which each narrative performance is linked to the speaker’s identity work vis-à-vis the larger zine culture.

The five case studies for this analysis were chosen in order to show the full range of possible ways the discovery narratives can be used to accomplish different kinds of zinester identity performances. By choosing to focus on these speakers, however, I have left out the other five speakers and the particulars of their narrative performances. This methodological decision is important to note because it has theoretical implications. In presenting these five case studies, my analysis suggests one possible picture for how to understand the role of the discovery narrative in zine culture; however, it is entirely possible to string together another set of speakers to highlight different aspects of the discovery narratives and present a slightly different picture of their shapes, contexts, and functions. While space permits a detailed analysis of the entire set of discovery narratives, I string together these five case studies in order to show a full range of narrative types (from full fledged performances to “thin” tellings to refusals to tell), while also providing deep analysis of each individual narrative, its various contexts, and its function in the speaker’s larger life story.
4.4 Matt

Matt is a zine writer who lives in Chicago where he owns a comic book store. He had been publishing his perzine *Meniscus* for almost ten years at the time of our interview. About twenty minutes into our conversation where we talked generally about zines and his store, I asked him how he first learned about zines. He answered by telling what I label a “thick” zine discovery narrative that was rich in evaluation, imagery, involvement and agency. Through this telling, Matt characterized his discovery of zines as an awakening moment in his life story. Let’s begin by looking at the opening section of his narrative where he provides orientation details and describes the first set of events that led to his discovery.³

---

³ All of the interview excerpts presented in this dissertation follow the transcription conventions detailed in the appendix (page 204). For example, brackets show overlap (two speakers talking simultaneously), a hyphen indicates an abrupt stop, a colon following a vowel indicates an elongated sound, a question mark indicates rising intonation, and underlining represents a speaker’s emphatic stress on a particular word.
After I pose the question (so how did you first learn about zines) in line 1, I begin to rephrase the question, but drop out when Matt overlaps with u:м and quickly moves into giving an abstract with orientation details. While other writers spent more time negotiating this question and checking to see what I meant, Matt launched into a story without hesitation. His willingness to take an extended turn at talk and tell a lengthy narrative suggests that he has told this story before or that my question was familiar to him and he had a ready-made answer for it.

Matt sets the scene for his discovery in college, specifically during writing classes. He describes that his friend gave him two zines, but the one that really strikes a chord is the zine his friend made. The contrast between the store-bought zine and his friend’s handmade one is made more pronounced by Matt’s contrastive stress on bought in line 8 and made in line 12. Matt also emphasizes the personal connection to his friend’s zine by accelerating his rate of speech in line 12 and producing a marked stress pattern where the third beat falls on made. By talking more quickly here, he builds the intensity of the discovery experience. He then presents a strip of reported speech – or constructed dialogue in Tannen’s (1989) terms – that describes the exchange: she said to me like “I made a zine” (line 14) and I said “what” (line 15). The flat intonation in line 15 describes his initial response to the zine as somewhat indifferent, as though he didn’t “get it” quite yet. By voicing his initial response to the zine in this way, he foreshadows the upcoming “aha” moment where he finally “gets it.” After this opening section, Matt briefly breaks from the sequence of events and produces a short embedded section where he describes the appearance and materiality of his friend’s zine.
and and so she’d made this zine called Ibuprofen which was just like HER writing and little drawings and it was all handwritten it was y’know quarter-size an- and no one had a big stapler so you could- the back- so the whole back half was folded over cause she’d have to bend it to get the stapler over it

This embedded description slows down the temporal sequence of events; we hover a little in narrative time to consider the materiality of the zine. Matt presents a very detailed image of what the zine looked and felt like in his hands by naming its exact title, describing its shape (e.g. quarter-size, folded over), its contents (e.g. HER writing, all handwritten, little drawings), and details of how his friend assembled her zine (e.g. no one had a big stapler, she’d have to bend it to get the stapler over it). Tannen points out that detailed imagery is a form of internal evaluation (Labov 1972) in narratives because it leads listeners to draw the same conclusions as the speaker about what’s going on in the storyworld (Tannen 1989: 138). Here, the speaker’s detailed description emphasizes and encourages his listener to appreciate the special, handmade, and personalized quality of the zine. This detailed description is also a moment where Matt is telling about his experience seeing a zine for the first time from the perspective of his current lifespase. He uses the in-group term quarter-sized and comments on his friend’s amateur stapling job by explaining that no one had a big stapler. The idea that most zine-makers use specialized staplers for binding their publications is grounded in Matt’s current perspective as an experienced zine-maker. In other words, the details Matt describes here are traces of his current self leaking into the storyworld describing the experience of his
past self. In this way, this detailed description makes visible the splitting of the telling “I” and the past “I” of the storyworld.

Following this description of the zine’s materiality, Matt launches back into the sequence of events, describing his intense and immediate reaction to the zine through a number of evaluative devices.

26 Matt and u:h…
27 and it was the coolest thing I’d ever seen
28 it was just like suddenly the scales fell from my eyes
29 and like massive vistas opened up before me
30 and it was like “that’s the way that’s how you do it”
31 a:nd and I I think I made my first zine
32 less than twenty four hours later
33 and I mean I like-
34 I was like “that’s so cool, I have to go”
35 and I like I went home
36 and I was like <whooshing sound>
37 a:nd and then y’know I was-
38 y’know I was down at Kinko’s at by like-
39 and probably still drunk
40 at like ten in the morning
41 after having done this all night
42 and like so excited y’know
43 it was the coolest thing I’d ever seen

This section is saturated with evaluation that helps dramatize the experience of seeing a zine for the first time as an awakening moment for Matt’s younger self. First, we notice dramatic shifts in volume and emphatic stress: it was the coolest thing I’d ever seen (line 27 and 43); I think I made my first zine less than twenty four hours later (in line 31-32); that’s so cool (in line 34); like so excited (line 42). We even find a sound effect in line 32 when Matt utters a “wooshing” sound to illustrate how quickly he made his first zine. In other words, Matt not only describes the zine discovery as exciting and cool (we find
three repetitions of cool in lines 27, 34, and 43), he uses paralinguistic cues such as increased volume and sound effects to enact the excitement his younger self felt at the time.

We also find metaphoric language in line 28-29 when he describes what happened when he saw the zine: it was just like suddenly the scales fell from my eyes and like massive vistas opened up before me. The phrase “scales fell from my eyes” suggests that upon seeing his friend’s zine, some kind of truth was revealed and he experienced what Bruner (1994) calls an “emblem of narrative clarity” in his self history. The use of such hyperbolic language dovetails nicely with the notion that narrative accounts of turning points are “drenched in affect” (Bruner 1994: 50) in that they mark new and intense lines of activity in the teller’s self history.

The actual “aha” moment comes in line 30: and “that’s the way, that’s how you do it.” It is as if the zine has finally answered a question Matt had been struggling with all along, i.e. how to distribute and circulate his writing to an audience. There are two linguistic features of this constructed dialog that emphasize the intensity of the “aha” moment for Matt. First, the use of the pronoun it is striking because the antecedent is presupposed, i.e. before the discovery Matt, as a writer, had naturally been seeking out ways to publish his work. This presupposition is a way for Matt to suggest that he inhabited the role of “writer” long before the actual zine discovery. In this way, Matt displays a younger self that was somehow waiting for zines, as though the discovery was the end of a search. The second feature that conveys intensity is the paralinguistic details of this utterance. Matt doesn’t just describe the discovery of zines as an “aha” moment

---

4 This positioning is further bolstered by the fact that Matt sets the discovery moment during writing classes in college.
for his younger self, he enacts the “aha” feeling by speaking louder, raising his pitch, and using dramatic rising intonation. Following the “aha” moment, Matt describes the sense of urgency he felt to make his own zine. This sense of immediacy is built up through lexical items with emphatic stress (less than 24 hours later in line 32), constructed dialogue (I was like “that’s so cool, I have to go” in line 34), and a sound effect (I was like <whooshing sound> in line 36).

By construing his discovery of zines as an “aha” moment, Matt recasts the external event (reading a classmate’s zine) into an internal experience that makes sense with a larger storyline already in place in his ongoing autobiography. He fits the zine into a sense of self that existed prior to the discovery. From this perspective, the “aha” moment is the most reportable event (Labov 2001) because it signals a moment in the telling (and presumably in the living) where the randomness of the discovery is smoothed out and made coherent with the narrator’s larger life story. By imagining and displaying his “aha” moment through constructed dialogue, Matt brings what Bruner (1990) calls an “epistemic self” more fully into the experience and underscores this moment as an internal awakening in his life story. In other words, he draws on the expressive resources of constructed dialogue to voice his younger self in a way that provides coherence or some degree of alignment between his two “I”s: the younger self who is experiencing the discovery as the events of the storyworld unfold and the current, speaking “I” who is fully engaged in zine-making.

In the next section of the narrative, Matt continues displaying evaluation about the “aha” moment of the discovery experience. He mentions what he didn’t do (i.e. ask his friend how she discovered zines) and then re-presents the central sequence of events (i.e.
seeing the zine and running home to do one himself). He ends the telling with a coda section, bringing a close to the past storyworld and returning to the present ongoing interaction.

In lines 44-45, Matt describes what didn’t happen at the time of the discovery, i.e. he didn’t ask his friend how she learned about zines. The emphatic stress on “she” in line 45 underscores that his discovery experience was so internal, the other character in the storyworld has seemed to drop out, despite her having played such a crucial role by providing the first zine. Next, Matt re-presents the core sequence of events in lines 47-48: *it was she just showed it to me and I was just off and running*. Here, the phrase “off and running” has a double meaning: Matt’s telling describes how he rushed home to make his first zine, but the telling also suggests that from that moment on, he was “off and running” with zines in general. Finally, Matt begins to close down the storyworld in line 50 when he says *and uh and that was and that was it*, but then he briefly opens it back up
again to describe another exchange of dialogue between his younger self and his friend. It’s unclear at what point in the discovery experience the exchange in lines 51-52 took place. Only a few utterances prior, Matt mentioned that he didn’t ask his friend how she heard about zines, yet in line 51 he asks her where’d you get it? Did he ask this when she gave him the zine in class, before he rushed home to make his own zine? Did she tell him about the store that sells zines (Reading Frenzy) when she handed him the zine, or the next day in class? Moreover, when did Matt go to the store to buy y’know thirty zines or something? Did he go after class the day of the discovery, or the next morning after he photocopied his first zine at Kinko’s? Like all life narratives, figuring out what really happened first, then next is far from the point. Instead, the analytical point to make here is simply that it’s interesting Matt leaves this follow-up exchange as an addendum to his discovery experience. Organizing his narrative in this way allows him to display the “aha” moment as immediately leading to his zine-making, without any intervening dialogue or actions between seeing a zine and making one.

In sum, we have seen how Matt narrated the experience of seeing a zine for the first time as an awakening moment in his life story. Through his telling, we saw how he enacted a younger self that felt an immediate connection to the form and appearance of zines and felt compelled to immediately make his own zine. Seeing his friend’s zine is construed a light bulb moment that immediately leads to his own zine-making. Towards the end of the interview, we returned to the topic of zine discoveries and in the next section, we will see how Matt re-stories (Mishler 2004) his discovery of zines to fit a more specific and personal storyline, namely his artistic struggle with a college writing professor.
4.4.1 Matt’s second take

Towards the end of our conversation, the topic of Matt’s early experience with zines came up again, but this time he provided another explanation for why zines immediately appealed to him. Here, the zine discovery is shaped to fit a more personal and introspective storyline that has to do with a struggle Matt had with a creative writing professor during college.

1 Inge: that’s why I think these stories about how people find them [are so interesting y’know
2 Matt: [mhm
3 I really wish I knew how- where Samantha got that zine and and what it meant to her <quieter>
4 cause I never- I don’t think I ever thought to ask
5 cause I was too excited
6 [cause I was just like-
7 Inge: [<laughing> you were off running [on something
8 Matt: [yeah <laughing>
9 I was just like “God I live like 6 blocks away =
10 = I gotta get out of here” <laughing>
11 yeah <laughing>
12 Inge: <laughing>
13 Matt: but yeah it was just it was just so clear
14 and she was-
15 like and I think it was the same for her
16 because like she’d already made one
17 when I- [y’know when she showed it to me
18 [yeah yeah
19 Inge: like I don’t-
20 Matt: y’know it wasn’t like
21 “oh here’s this old zine I had lying around that I found
22 and thought oh maybe I’ll do that”
23 it was like “oh my God look” <louder & higher pitch>

---

5 This second discussion of his discovery experience was “touched off” (Jefferson 1978) by a discussion of what kind of analysis I might perform on the interviews I was collecting. In the section prior to this excerpt, I talked about my idea to focus on stories of how people find zines because they seem to be very dramatic and intense experiences. Matt agreed with me and said that he has heard other people also narrate their discovery experience in that way.
When the topic of zine discoveries comes up again, the narrative that Matt told earlier in the interview becomes activated, which provides context for the reference to his friend Samantha (a previously evoked character from his earlier narrative) in line 3. Again, Matt wonders how his friend learned about zines, but he also wonders about the significance of the zine to his friend (and what it meant to her), a detail that wasn’t part of the narrative he told earlier. In the first telling, a description of his friend’s zine discovery experience was absent, but in this second take, Matt considers the perspective of the other character in the storyworld. He again mentions something he didn’t know (I really wish I knew how- where Samantha got that zines), but also something he didn’t say (cause I never- I don’t think I thought to ask). Both of these utterances are forms of internal evaluation, where he tells about what didn’t happen, but could have happened.

After this introspective moment, Matt and I both re-launch a telling of his “aha” moment and his sudden urge to make a zine immediately after the discovery. In line 6, Matt repeats that the discovery moment was exciting, but drops out when I overlap in line 8 with laughter and the utterance you were just off running on something. Through this turn, I make a move to re-present salient features of Matt’s discovery narrative from earlier in the interview; my utterance in line 8 is a variation on the phrase “off and running” that Matt had repeated twice in his first telling. Matt ratifies my “call back” with an overlapped yeah and laughter in line 9, then re-presents his “aha” moment through constructed dialogue in lines 10 and 12: I was like “God I live like 6 blocks away, I gotta get out of here” Again, I support this retelling of the most reportable event through latched yeah and laughter in lines 11 and 13. Next, Matt continues to evaluate the
experience as an awakening moment in line 14 (*it was just so clear*), followed by yet another re-voicing of his “aha” moment in lines 21-24. Again, we find an instance where he says what didn’t happen (in line 21-23), but this time contrasted with a paralinguistically exaggerated presentation of what did happen (in line 24: *it was like, “oh my God look”*).

What’s significant here is that when the topic of his zine discovery comes back up, Matt re-enacts his “aha” moment twice by voicing himself again, in two different ways, at the time of the discovery. Moreover, I participate in this re-enactment through my turns-at-talk where I recall a salient phrase from the first telling (“off and running”) and latched backchannels and laughter show recognition of his earlier imagination and narrativization of this past experience as a dramatic moment in his life story. Yet we also see here how Matt becomes more introspective in this second telling, wondering whether his personal reaction to zines was shared by his friend. In the next section, we see how Matt continues this introspection as he contextualizes his discovery of zines within the context of a difficult relationship he had with a college writing professor.

After our joint re-construction of the “aha” moment, I ask a question that encourages Matt to continue talking about why zines immediately appealed to him.

25 Inge: so at that point though you had been writing
26 and was just kind of looking for a place..
27 Matt: yeah it was-
28 I think that that-
29 one of the things that was happening at that time
30 is we were both in in creative writing classes
31 Inge: right
32 Matt: and we actually both ended up writing novels for our theses?
33 Inge: yeah
Matt: um but at my college there is not a permanent creative writing professor um it’s a two year rotating position a:nd the new guy who had arrived that year we were butting heads with him

Inge: mm

Matt: and it wasn’t y’know it wasn’t just us but I think I think myself more than anyone else and then there were a few other students who were just- were having a really hard time working creatively under this guy

Inge: mhm

Matt: and I was just really desperate to find some sort of satisfying outlet for writing that in no way involved showing it to Ron Hill

<omitted section where Matt provides more detail about this professor’s approach to teaching writing>

Matt: and so I would give him stuff that I was working on and he just hated it and seemingly hated me y’know maybe not maybe it was just an inability to separate the two

Inge: mhm

Matt: but but it was really really difficult and as soon as I saw the zines I was like, this is how I can I can go from A to B or y’know A to C just avoid B entirely I can do what I want to do and then I can I can print it and I can hand it to people and they can read it and none of them will be Ron <laughing>

My utterances in lines 25-26 suggest a reason why zines immediately appealed to him (you had been writing and was just kind of looking for a place). Here, I’m inviting Matt
to take the floor to talk again about the “same” experience he narrated earlier. In Mishler’s (2004) words, I’m providing Matt the opportunity for a “second take” where I ask a different version of the question, inviting him to take a different perspective vis-à-vis what happened. In his response, Matt opens up the possibility that there was more than one set of circumstances that led to his coming to zine-making when he says one of the things that was happening at the time in line 29. He goes on to link himself with his friend Samantha (who gave him the zine) with the collective pronoun we in lines 30 and 32, explaining that they both took writing classes together and both wrote novels for their theses. Then Matt introduces another character into the zine discovery narrative storyworld: a creative writing professor at his college. We find a first-mention in line 37 (the new guy), which is linked to the prior mention of a two year rotating position in line 36. Next, there is a sequence of utterances that join Matt with other students in opposition to the new professor: we were butting heads with him (line 39); it wasn’t just us (line 41); there were a few other students (line 43). Matt also presents himself as the student who felt the most singled out by the professor’s criticism: I think myself more than anyone else (line 42). Matt presents the criticism he felt from the professor: he just hated it (line 52) and seemingly hated me (line 53).

Throughout this second take, Matt emphasizes the intensity of the situation: he was having a really hard time working creatively (line 44-45), became really desperate (line 47), and describes the situation as really really difficult (line 57). These types of descriptions of his life circumstances at the time of the discovery are absent from the first telling. In this way, Matt construes the zine discovery as less of a turning point in his life story, but as an experience that rescued him from a difficult time in his life.
From the perspective of Mishler and Bruner, we are always engaged in trying to figure out how our different life experiences are related to each other and what are the connecting themes of our life stories. In this second take, we see more of Matt’s efforts to fit zines into a coherent storyline in his personal life story. So we see how the first telling was shaped in such a way to align his personal narrative with the collective experience of the imagined community of zine-makers, but the second take became an opportunity to frame the zine discovery in a more personal way, as an experience that helped him get through a difficult time in his life.

A brief summary of what we have seen in this analysis of Matt’s discovery narrative activity. In the first telling, Matt presented a “thick” discovery narrative brimming with evaluation, imagery, involvement, and agency. Through the analysis, we saw how Matt’s narrative included many of the shared meanings and episodes that make up the recipe for the canonical zine discovery narrative. The first telling construed the discovery experience as a highly-evaluated turning point which opened up a zine-making “arc” in Matt’s life story. When Matt returned to the discovery experience at a later point in the interview, I joined with him to re-construct the dramatic “aha” moment, but we also saw Matt take a more introspective stance towards his discovery experience. In this “second take” Matt gave a fuller picture of why the discovery of zines meant so much to his younger self in the context of a more personal discussion of his past struggle with a college writing professor. In this way, Matt situates the discovery experience more concretely in his personal life story in the second telling.
We now turn to our second case study – a zine writer named Billy – who also told two versions of a zine discovery narrative, but in different interactional contexts and with different results than the case of Matt’s two tellings.

4.5 Billy

Recall that Billy is a very active and well-known member of the zine community in Chicago and he has been publishing his zine *Proof I Exist* for eight years. Like Matt, Billy told a discovery narrative during a single turn at talk, as a response to my question about his first experience with zines. But unlike Matt, Billy started his narrative by explicitly linking his experience to the larger zine community by saying his coming to zine-making was similar to the experiences of others.

1  Inge: so um what what was your first experience with zines I guess
2  like how’d you learn about them
3    [an-
4  Billy: [um well uh my stock answer to that question is..
5  Inge: ye:s [<laughing>]
6  Billy: [that um like a lot of people
7  I was doing it before I knew what they were
8  Inge: uh-huh
9  Billy: um in one way or another

After my prompts in lines 1-3, Billy overlaps in line 4: *um well uh my stock answer to that question is*. His pause after this utterance creates a small moment of suspense, which I mirror with an elongated vowel in line 5 (*ye:s*) followed by laughter. Billy’s utterance in line 4 frames his upcoming story as a rehearsed narrative told many times before and
casts my question as a typical, standard one that Billy has encountered many times before. It is interesting to note that while Matt’s narrative also felt like a pre-packaged unit that he had produced at other times, he did not make this explicit like Billy does here.

Next, Billy produces an abstract in lines 6-7: *that um like a lot of people I was doing it before I knew what they were*. In this utterance, Billy makes the interesting claim that he was making zines before he actually knew about them. His subsequent narrative then functions as a kind of evidence for his personal claim, i.e. how he made zines before he knew about them. This statement displays a “loop” in Billy’s life story where he tells about his past from the perspective of his current lifespace (cf. Mishler’s “double arrow of time”). In other words, he retrospectively imagines his earlier activities (which he describes in more detail after this turn) as zine-making, even though he hadn’t yet formally encountered zines. Moreover, by imagining that his pre-discovery activities were zine-like, he constructs a younger self that was predisposed to, or even waiting for, an actual encounter with zine culture. The utterance in lines 6-7 also frames his upcoming narrative as an exemplary case that represents the typical discovery experience of others, i.e. *a lot of people* made zines before they knew about them. In this way, Billy explicitly links his personal narrative, and specifically his younger self’s predisposition to zines, with a larger community of zine discovery narratives and narrators.

With Matt, we saw that he located a beginning for his discovery narrative in a college writing class, thus creating a sense of coherence between his pre-zine self and the start of a zine-maker arc in his life story. Billy goes back further in his past to locate a
beginning for his discovery narrative, describing zine-like publications he used to make and share with his friends in seventh and tenth grades.

10 Billy: when I was in maybe ninth or tenth grade
11 uh I started-
12 I mean actually even before that
13 I was on various levels publishing things
14 um like I remember when I was in like seventh grade
15 like I made like like different little books of jokes =

16 Inge: mhm
17 Billy: = and things that I would give to people
18 but like kind of like in tenth grade
19 I started like what was actually a publication
20 um where I would just write stories
21 or I would have my friends give me poetry and like-
22 whatever I would just like get a lot of stuff from friends
23 and I would just put it together
24 and photocopy it
25 and staple it like in the corner
26 just like y’know eight and a half by..uh eleven sheets of paper stapled

27 Inge: mhm
28 Billy: and I would just like print off like fifty copies
29 and give them to all my friends

In lines 10 and 11, Billy initially locates a starting point for his discovery narrative in ninth or tenth grade, but then revises this proposition in line 12 to locate a starting point even further in the past. The utterance in line 12 is prefaced with two discourse markers (I mean and actually) that signal Billy is shifting his orientation to what he’s just said. He goes on to describe joke books he used to make in seventh grade (lines 14 and 15) and then gives a longer description of the publication he created in tenth grade. He describes in detail the production process for his tenth grade publication: he wrote stories himself, collected written material from others, assembled the content, photocopied and stapled it,
and distributed it to friends. Throughout the description of this publication there are a
cluster of hedges, which I highlight below:

but like kind of like in tenth grade
um where I would just write stories
whatever I would just like get a lot of stuff from friends
and I would just put it together
just like y’know eight and a half by..uh eleven sheets of paper stapled
and I would just like print off like fifty copies

I argue that these hedges work in support of Billy’s identity performance as a zine-maker.
By hedging the descriptions of his early, pre-discovery publication, he draws our
attention to its simplicity and amateur qualities, e.g. he “just” used regular-sized copy
paper rather than transforming it into a zine style booklet and he only had a small print
run. On the other hand, describing the details of how the steps he went through to
produce this publication shows that he had some kind of inner knowledge of the stages of
zine production, even before the actual encounter with a zine. In other words, these
details about the production process, content, size and shape of the zine (he even
mentions where he placed the staple) are important because they suggest that Billy was
already assembling, photocopying, stapling, and distributing his writings before he
acquired outside knowledge of zines. The details are also important in Billy’s narrative
here because they focus our attention on the form and materiality of his tenth grade self-
published text.
Directly after this section, Billy continues his narrative (in the excerpt below) by describing the series of events that led up to the moment someone handed him a zine for the first time.

30  Billy:  so I was doing that for awhile
31   and then u:m I think it was in may-
32   I I was living in Iowa..
33   I think it was in maybe um..like ninety-eight or so?
34   uh I went to like this big music festival in Ames Iowa
35   and there was all these like ska bands and punk bands and stuff
36   and I met someone that like gave me a copy of his zine

37  Inge:  

In line 30, Billy sums up the description of his tenth grade publication (*so I was doing that for awhile*), then starts the description of the actual event where he saw a zine for the first time. He begins with orientation details, by situating the experience spatially (*I was living in Iowa* in line 32, but we also get the name of the town in line 34) and temporally in (*it was in...like ninety-eight or so?*) in line 33. He then switches to the simple past tense when he begins the sequence of narrative events: *I went to like this big music festival* (line 34) and *I met someone that like gave me a copy of his zine* (line 36). It is interesting to note that I take a turn in line 35, directly after Billy describes the event of being handed a zine. My turn is only a small backchannel that encourages Billy to “keep going”, but its sequential placement is important. With this small turn, I help construct the actual moment of being handed a zine as a reportable event, worthy of reaction from the narrator’s audience. In the excerpt below, Billy continues the narrative.
Billy: and it was called Happy Goat
and Happy Goat is like..one of the best zines ever
and it was in Iowa-
it was like really big in Iowa

Inge: mhm
Billy: and I was like-
it blew my mind
cause I was like “whoa: this person’s doing the same thing I’m
doing only like way better”

Inge: mm
Billy: and so it’s sorta like that’s how I got plugged into like zine culture
is just from like that zine

Inge: mm

In this section we find one of the core evaluative features of the discovery narrative, the “aha” moment. First this moment is presented in line 44 with external evaluation “it blew my mind”, but then re-presented in line 45 through constructed dialogue that represents the experience as an inner turning point moment. The elongated vowel on “whoa:” in line 45 helps construct the intensity of the moment, as if the narrator’s younger self was almost stopped in his tracks upon seeing his first zine.

The coda in line 47-48 is interesting because it displays Billy’s awareness that through the telling of this narrative, he is describing his entry into a community. But the coda also harks back to the opening abstract where Billy framed his upcoming narrative as a “stock answer” to the question of how he came to zine-making. In this way, Billy presents a neatly-organized narrative that casts his discovery experience as a frequently told tale, but also one that aligns with many others in the zine community.
4.5.1 Billy’s second take

In Chapter Three, I mentioned that Billy was the only zine writer I interviewed twice. Our second conversation took place about five months after the first interview, over breakfast at a neighborhood diner. I hesitate to call the second time we spoke an “interview” because I didn’t prepare any questions in advance; I simply asked whatever questions popped into my mind while we talked. In some ways, the second conversation took the shape of two (new) friends catching up on each others’ lives. Yet the researcher-participant relationship and the interview frame always seemed to be waiting in the wings, ready to be foregrounded and made salient, depending on the way our talk unfolded.

Just prior to the excerpt below, I had shared with Billy my observation that most writers I spoke with seemed to describe having the “same” kind of zine discovery experience. I told him that I was considering a focus on these narratives in my dissertation. In Mishler’s (1999) words, in this moment I was inviting Billy to take the role of “researcher-collaborator,” or in Tannen’s (1984) words, I was initiating a modified version of a playback session. Billy was completely nonplussed about my observation and even suggested that I choose something else to analyze in my dissertation because, he said, “all those stories sound the same”. I politely protested and suggested that the shared structure was, in fact, interesting. What happened next was remarkable: in his next-turn, Billy provided evidence for his claim that “all those stories sound the same” by performing what he considers the stereotypical zine discovery narrative. I present the performance below, and then analyze the details of how it unfolded and what function it may serve in Billy’s overall self-construction as a zinester.
In lines 2-4, Billy and I negotiate a “story preface” (Jefferson 1978) in order for Billy to take an extended turn-at-talk (let me, let me take a stab in line 2) while I position myself as a recipient (yeah tell me what you think in line 4). Before he launches into the narrative, he explicitly brackets his upcoming talk as performance in line 3 (most zine stories- discovery zine stories go like this) followed by laughter. Through this brief exchange, Billy and I have rekeyed our interpretations about what activity is taking place
in the current moment to foreground two dynamics: 1) that Billy is about to “only” animate the upcoming text, and 2) that he has temporarily slipped into the researcher-collaborator role, providing analytical observation and commentary on zine culture. His repair of the term zine stories → discovery zine stories is a trace of his playful “sliding into” the researcher role as he tries to get my analytical terms right. My turn in line 4 provides full supportive uptake of our rekeying and his upcoming performance.

After the joint negotiation of the story-preface, Billy launches into the narrative and we find implicit cues throughout his extended turn that position himself as “only” the animator. For the duration of the performance (lines 5-27), Billy speaks at a higher pitch than his regular speaking voice, uses a sing-song intonation contour, and includes literary lexical items marked in conversational discourse such as thus in line 25 and the end in line 27. Through these implicit and explicit cues, Billy is poking fun at this “paradigmatic story” (in Linde’s 1993 terms) and its status as a stereotype of how zine-makers talk about their coming to zine-making. In other words, Billy is doing more than simply animating the narrative performance, he’s also commenting on it as well. This moment reveals a process of what Bucholtz and Hall call “denaturalization” whereby “what is called attention to is the ways in which identity is crafted, fragmented, problematic, or false” (2005: 602). Here, Billy calls attention to the ways zinesters “put on” their identity performances through the telling of a discovery narrative.

During our first interview, Billy told me his personal discovery experience, which we analyzed in the previous section. His performance here shares many of the same plot points as the narrative he told as his own during our first interview. In this way, we could see this stretch of talk as an extraordinary moment where Billy lets his zinester mask slip
a bit, and shows his awareness of the self-as-performer. He becomes a “cynical performer” (Goffman 1959:18-21) where he reveals that he’s not entirely taken in by one of his own regular performances; that he can differentiate his role and his commitment to the principal. In other words, in this moment, Billy is showing that his self is larger than just the role of zinester; that he is aware of the routinized aspects of one of his regular performances and that his belief in this performance is somewhat cynical. He displays a “double stance” (Goffman 1961: 133) where he embraces his expert role in the zine community by displaying emic knowledge of shared texts, yet simultaneously displays a cynical self that is separate from this role.

This performance is a moment of parody where Billy is poking fun at the stereotypical discovery narrative and the speakers who produce it. But importantly, Billy’s performance is also situated in a particular context of an interview with a researcher who is outside zine culture, and crucially, in the turns prior to this moment, had just shared her analytical observations about a shared text in his community. In one sense, Billy breaks into this performance as part of a challenge to my research claim (e.g. that the set of discovery stories are interesting data). His performance is part of a demonstration to me that he’s already made the observation I did about the discovery stories, namely that there are shared structural and evaluative features of them. In this way, I argue that Billy’s performance of the discovery narrative in this moment is an instance of metaparody (Morson 1989: 67, quoted in Coupland 2007: 175). A “metaparodic” performance is one that “mocks not only a ‘target’ text but also [the speaker’s] own superior reworking of that prior text” and moreover, “the effect of metaparodic representation is often that audiences laugh with rather than at performers’
representations” (Coupland 2007: 165). Here, Billy is not only “denaturalizing” one of the aspects of the performance of a zinester identity, but this is also a moment where Billy is showing me, in this situated moment, his awareness of this text. In analytical hindsight, however, I now realize that this performance was actually foreshadowed by Billy’s own discovery narrative in the first interview because even then he framed his telling as a rehearsed performance of his coming to zine-making (e.g. his description of his story as a “stock answer” and the coda “that’s how I got into zine culture”).

4.6 LB

Like many of the interviews, I began my discussion with LB by asking if she could provide a definition of zines. Like most of the writers, LB ended up transforming this question in the way that she shaped her response to it. In this case, she used my generic question of zine definitions to open up a more analytical topic of the diversity of voices in zine culture, which in turn, “touched off” (Jefferson 1978) the topic of how she personally came to zine-making. The case of LB’s discovery narrative is interesting to analyze here because it shows how the interactional context of the research interview impinged on the telling of her discovery narrative. On one hand, the interview context gave rise to her telling to the extent that she controlled when she brought up the discovery experience and to what topics she linked this discovery experience. On the other hand, I show how her attachment to the role of “helpful research subject” led her to a self-interruption of the telling, worrying that she was veering too much off topic.
The excerpt below presents the first part of LB’s answer to my question, where she provided a brief definition (*self-published booklet*), but then brought up the topic of what kinds of social groups participate in zine culture.

1. LB: um..well.
2. I would say it’s a self-published…booklet
3. as as you have to write on um Post Office forms
4. but um self-published booklet..
5. that gives u:m the author..
6. complete control over.. what can be in it
7. and usually it’s allowed for a lot different voices to be heard
8. well I wouldn’t say there’s a large um
9. like zinesters of color of community?
10. which is really problematic I think in terms of zines
11. but like in terms uh-
12. it’s given voice to a lot of uh–
13. especially Riot Grrrls like back in the day
14. feminists and trannies and queers

It is interesting to note that as she begins to answer my zine definition question, she begins with the phrase *self-published…booklet* and then casts that phrase as an institutional definition provided on Post Office forms. In lines 13 and 14, LB sets the stage for her own discovery narrative when she provides a short list of the types of people who make zines: especially *Riot Grrrls like back in the day, feminists and trannies and queers*. The self-initiated topic of diversity in zines, and also a list in which LB brings together a collection of zine types, “locally occasions” (Jefferson 1978) a narrative about her first experience with zines, presented in the next excerpt.

---

6. The postal service is a frequent topic of discussion in zine culture because zines are largely distributed through the mail (cf. Poletti 2008: 245). It is not surprising that this speaker brings up post office regulations since she runs a distro and frequently mails zine orders.
In lines 18-19 we find a short “story preface” (Jefferson 1978) where LB offers to tell a story about her early experiences with zines (yeah just thinking back to it) and I eagerly respond with a latched yeah encouraging her narrative to come out.

LB then begins her narrative with a series of utterances that describes how she came to know about zines. I re-present these utterances below, highlighting in bold the verbs that indicate her epistemic knowledge of zines:

and not knowing-
like I read about it?
or I heard about it actually on a uh a uh talk show
and then I knew that the Riot Grrrls were doing that in Olympia
but I had never seen a zine

15 LB: and that’s where-
16 that’s why I’ve always liked zines um
17 I got in-
18 yeah just thinking back to it <laughing>

Z

19 Inge: yeah
20 LB and not knowing-
21 like I read about it?

Z

22 Inge: uh-huh
23 LB: or I heard about it actually on a uh a uh talk show
24 or like a radio talk show
25 they were interviewing some m-male zinester
26 and then I knew that the Riot Grrrls were doing that in Olympia
27 but I had never seen a zine
28 so I -I was like “I have to make my own
29 cause I-I love the Riot Grrrl through and through
30 I gotta do it.” <determined voice>
31 so I did it.
32 and it was-
33 I don’t know-
34 oh sorry I keep going on <laughter>
With these utterances, LB is describing her general epistemic stance towards zines at the time of the discovery. She specifically focuses on presenting the source of her knowledge, which shifts from reading about zines to hearing of them on a talk show. She describes her general knowledge of zines pre-discovery as dispersed, collected from an array of different sources, but incomplete (she never saw a zine). Here, LB is negotiating one of the shared evaluative features of the discovery narrative: the description of the level of knowledge about zines before the discovery event. She projects a pre-discovery self that knew about zines from a variety of sources, but hadn’t yet seen a zine in person. This differentiation between types of knowledge of zines harks back to Billy’s discovery narrative that we analyzed in the previous section, where he began his narrative with the claim that he made zines before he knew about zines. We will also see this same evaluative feature negotiated, but in a very different way, in another speaker’s (Rachel) discovery narrative later on.

In LB’s short discovery narrative we also find the “aha” moment displayed through constructed dialogue in lines 28-30 where she voices her past, younger self making the decision to produce a zine. She presents her coming to zine-making as a very intense experience, as though she felt an inner compulsion or some obligation to make a zine: I have to make my own; I love the Riot Grrrl through and through; I gotta do it. The collapsed verbal expression “gotta” in line 30 is a brief moment where her current, speaking “I” breaks into enacting her younger, determined self. This enactment is felt even more so because in the following utterance she switches back to simple past: so I did it (line 31). Then, her narrative is cut short when she self-interrupts, switches back to the here-and-now of the interview context, and apologizes for talking too much (oh sorry
I keep going on) followed by laughter. Yet even in this embryonic version of the discovery narrative, we still find two of the shared meanings: the narrator’s negotiation of pre-discovery knowledge about zines and a strong “aha” moment displayed through constructed dialogue.

4.7 Rachel

Rachel is a newcomer to the zine community and had only produced the first issue of her zine, Stream of Consciousness, a month prior to our interview. Rachel’s lack of experience as a zine writer was negotiated right away in the interview when I asked for her definition of zines. As discussed in Chapter 3, I opened up most of the interviews by asking the writers to talk about how they define zines.

1  Inge:   so so I guess um..what I’ve been –
2  so I’ve talked with a couple zine writers from Chicago
3  and I’ve just kinda started by asking them to-  
4  like how you define a zine what- 
5  I mean I’m sure you probably get that question [sometimes or  
6  Rachel:                         [u:m
7  no cause it’s pretty new all of this [so
8  Inge:              [okay
9  Rachel:   how would I define a zine?  
10 Inge:                           yeah I mean- I mean what are
11 Rachel:  zines or
12 Rachel:  I mean
13 Inge:    to you anyway
14 Rachel:  all I can really say is like...the definition that I’ve heard
15 everyone else say
16 Rachel:  just like..an independently published…pamphlet type of
17 thing
18 Inge:     yeah

119
Rachel: that you just like write on your own

Inge: yeah

Rachel: do it yourself

Inge: yeah

Rachel: and I don’t know <quieter, laughing>

After asking the question in line 4 (like how you define a zine what-) I suggest to Rachel that she must answer this question often. This is a strategy I used in many of the interviews to acknowledge that asking a zine writer “what is a zine?” is a standard, expected question. But by asking Rachel to define zines, and then suggesting this would be an everyday task, I inadvertently put her in a face-threatening position to reveal her lack of experience with zines. She first explicitly marks her newcomer status in line 7 (it’s pretty new all of this), asks for clarification in line 9 (how would I define a zine?), continues to hesitate in line 11 (I mean) and then hedges when she begins to formulate her answer in line 13 (all I can really say is…). She ends in line 21 by speaking in a quieter voice, with another hedge (I don’t know), followed by laughter.

I include this excerpt here not only to show Rachel’s self-positioning as a newcomer to zines, but also to show the interactional style in which the majority of our interview took place. When Rachel initiates the repair sequence in line 9 by asking for clarification, I quickly latch my next utterance I mean- I mean what are zines or. Rachel begins to answer the question in line 11 with I mean, but I quickly latch again with to you anyway in line 12. The machine-gun style (Tannen 1984) of my latched utterances in this repair sequence could be interpreted as aggressive and impatient, especially since I already suggested to Rachel that this is a common question zine writers easily answer. Moreover, I’ve already positioned myself as an experienced interviewer of zine writers in
my opening, when I comment that I’ve already talked with a couple of zine writers from Chicago (line 2). In retrospect, it’s not surprising that Rachel’s turns in this section are truncated and filled with hedges, given that her conversational style was being attacked by such a pushy interviewer.

After this somewhat awkward interaction, I switched tactics and tried to elicit her discovery narrative with a question:

22   Inge: so what- so how’d you like find out about zines
23   Rachel: [u:m
24   Inge: [how’d you learn what they were
25   Rachel: like I had known what they were before I knew what they were <laughing>
26   Inge: uh-huh

As a response to my question, and possibly a narrative abstract, Rachel produces an utterance common to zine discovery narratives in line 25: like I had known what they were before I knew what they were. Like Billy and LB, Rachel projects a past self that had some kind of incomplete knowledge about zines. What’s most interesting about these kinds of utterances is that they position the speaker’s younger self as being primed for the discovery of zines: she was somehow predisposed to knowing about zines. We might expect a narrative to follow that exemplifies how Rachel learned about something she already knew. At this point, our conversation is interrupted by a side-exchange with a server at the coffee shop, but Rachel picks back up afterwards by mentioning that she had some copies of zines “back home” before she came to college and that there has recently been a lot of publicity about zines. In the next excerpt, I ask Rachel about this publicity.

27   Inge: like what kinds of stuff have you read or seen
well like in the spring there was a documentary showing at my school about zine writers and they had a zine forum [with um local zinesters]

and so I actually knew one of the guys on the forum Billy

oh yeah <acc.>

um..so there was that

and then I actually did a research paper on zines

oh [okay]

mass media class last semester

just cause like I guess that little event kind of inspired that idea

and then..I’m just like “well I’ll try it” <quieter, high-pitched>

In this stretch of talk, Rachel lists and connects a set of related events to form a causal chain leading up to her decision to make a zine. She attended a documentary film and a forum discussion on zines at school and wrote a research paper on zines for a class. She also mentions that she knew one of the participants in the forum (Billy, whose discovery narrative we analyzed earlier). While most writers presented a single event as the impetus for their zine activity, Rachel constructs a more gradual introduction to the zine community that took place over time and across different sites (school, her friendship with Billy). After presenting this chain of events, Rachel displays her decision to make a zine in line 40: and then…I’m just like “well I’ll try it.” This is an “aha” moment, but certainly lacking in intensity. The way that Rachel voices her decision to make a zine harks back to her earlier hesitancy in embracing the role of zine writer when I asked for her definition of zines. This hesitancy is mirrored in the way that she linguistically presents this moment in line 40: we find a hedge (just) and a quieter, more timid voice
quality. The linguistic presentation of a soft “aha” moment is a way for Rachel to enact her newcomer status to the zine community.

At this point in the conversation, I become audibly flustered, producing a next turn filled with disfluency, to which Rachel then responds with *u:m* and an elongated pause. This section is presented below.

41 Inge: yeah so um so you..
42 so when..so when was-
43 I mean do you remember like the first time that you-
44 like did you see one
45 did you read one
46 or did you like know about what they were
47 before you actually read one
48 Rachel: *u:m…*
49 well like I said I had some copies from back home [that-
50 did you get those-
51 like did friends give those to you
52 Rachel: no they were just like at the record store
53 that I went [to: all the time
54 Inge: [okay
55 Rachel: just like in the pile of pamphlets
56 and like flyers and stuff for free
57 Inge: okay

In lines 41-46, I attempt to ask Rachel again about her discovery experience. I attempt for more specificity (*do you remember like the first time*), I offer options (*like did you see one, did you read one*) and I even repeat the claim she made earlier (*or did you like know about what they were before you actually read one*). By asking again about how she came to zine-making, I send Rachel the metamessage that her response the first time did not count and I still needed to find out the information. Rachel hesitates to reply (*u:m* and elongated pause in line 47) and then begins her utterance by signaling that she is about to
repeat something she’s already said (*well like I said* in line 48). Clearly, there is some kind of communicative trouble brewing, but despite this, I continue to take turns that try to “pull out” a narrative about a more specific discovery experience. In line 49-50, I overlap (and Rachel drops out) to ask for more specificity about the zines she had back home with more stacked, machine-gun style questions: *and how did you get those- like did friends give those to you.* Again, I take more rapid fire turns in lines 52 and 54 with backchannels that signal my eagerness for Rachel’s story to come out.

After this section, I switched tactics and asked Rachel about her research paper she wrote on zines. After a lengthy where she told me about the details of her paper, I then produced yet another attempt at eliciting a personal discovery narrative, which we see below in the excerpt below.

```
1  Inge:  and so that-
2    how did you start-
3    I mean how did you decide to do a zine yourself
4  this is the first one you’ve every done
5  Rachel:  yeah

6  Inge:    yeah so
7  Rachel:  yeah I just thought I would try it out and like-
8  cause I mean the whole thing is like you can do it so you should
9  Inge:  yeah
10 Rachel:  like they’re really like anyone can do it =

11 Inge:                      yeah
12 Rachel:  = like they encourage everyone to..um contribute

13 Inge:                        yeah
14 Rachel:  if they want to

15 Inge:  yeah
16 Rachel:  I’m just like “well I’ll try it and see if I actually do it” <laughing>
17 just like as a goal for myself over the summer
```
In lines 1-4, I produce a third attempt at eliciting a specific discovery narrative. I begin to repeat Rachel’s earlier claim that her research paper prompted her zine-making (and so that-), then rephrase the question about her discovery experience twice (how did you start- and I mean how did you decide to do a zine yourself) and finally repeat what both Rachel and I already know, i.e. that she just produced her first zine (this is the first one you’ve ever done). Rachel responds to all of these questions with yeah in line 5, and then I signal (again!) that this response is insufficient with yeah so in line 6, encouraging her to say more.

At this point, Rachel handles my repeated turns where I continually rephrase the same question by simply repeating her discovery narrative, though with small additions in this second telling. In line 7 she rephrases her decision to make a zine (yeah I just thought I would try it out). In her next moves, she displays another explanation that led to her zine-making, drawing explicitly on the DIY idea that everyone can and should make zines. She projects this idea as something external and attributes it to others (like they’re really like anyone can do it and like they encourage everyone to..um contribute). Here we see Rachel explicitly reference the DIY idea that everyone is a potential zine-maker as part of her description of how she came to zine-making. The discovery narratives we analyzed from other speakers (Matt, Billy, and LB) displayed this idea as an internal compulsion to make a zine, whereas for Rachel, it’s more external.

Finally, Rachel repeats her “aha” moment via constructed dialogue in line 16, but this time displays a degree of uncertainty, by adding and see if I actually do it. Moreover,
she then positions the decision to start a zine as a short-term personal goal, a summer project. Rachel constructs her coming to zine-making in a way that is strikingly different from the writers’ narratives we analyzed earlier. Matt, Billy, and LB’s narratives described their coming to zine-making as almost inevitable, their “aha” moments expressed a sense of obligation, immediacy, and especially an internal pull towards zine-making. Rachel’s narrative, however, displays a gradual chain of events that led to her zine-making and constructs her first experience making a zine not as an unequivocal “aha” moment, but rather as a short-term writing project.

4.8 Andrew

Andrew is another zine writer I interviewed who lives in Chicago, is a graduate student in ethnomusicology, and produces a zine called Living Proof. When I asked Andrew early on in the interview how he first learned about zines, he linked his early exposure to zines with the kind of music concerts he attended in high school. He then offered up a general accounting of how attending such concerts naturally results in a familiarity with zines. After providing this general account, I pressed further and asked if he remembers a specific moment when he first saw a zine, which he does not.

1  Inge: so what—what was your first experience with zines
2  Andrew: um
3  Inge: like how did you learn about them
4  when did you first see one
5  Andrew: I grew up in Northern New Jersey [um =
6  Inge: [yeah
7  Andrew: = and starting in like ninth grade
8  I started going to local punk and hardcore shows
9  so my first exposure to zines were fanzines that focused on /?/ this scene in Northern New Jersey
10 or kinda like something larger
11 New York New Jersey Pennsylvania music zines

126
that type of thing um

Inge: mhm
Andrew: it- so it - I mean I did- all throughout high school I was y’know just
you keep running into people
and meeting people at these kinda local scenes
and you end up knowing people that live four towns over
and everyone does something
so you end up y’know just getting all that, all that stuff I guess
yeah primarily I would say primarily through the
independent music scene =
Inge: yeah
Andrew: = in high school and then in college

Inge: so did somebody give you
Andrew: I’m sure, I mean I don’t remember what my first zine ever was
Inge: yeah
Andrew: yeah

After I pose a series of stacked questions in line 1 and 3, Andrew begins a response by
calling into focus a past time and place, particularly ninth grade while growing up in New
Jersey. He gives orientation details in lines 5 and 7, and then what could be an abstract in
line 9-10:

9 so my first exposure to zines were fanzines that focused on /?/
10 this scene in Northern New Jersey

These utterances could serve as an abstract previewing a story about his “first fanzine,”
but a narrative about a particular memory never emerges. Instead, Andrew takes a more
analytical stance and talks about his “exposure” to zines, followed by a string of disfluent
bursts in line 15: it-so it- I mean I did- all throughout high school I was y’know jus-. I
initially transcribed the false starts as a single line, but we could also consider each burst
its own (truncated) intonation unit:

(a) it-
(b) so it-
(c) I mean I did-
(d) all throughout high school I was y’know jus-

Transcribed this way, we see how each false start gradually builds in length and also the switch in perspective from “it” to “I” as Andrew searches for how to describe his early experience with zines. In Chafe’s (1994) framework, the self-interruptions and string of repairs suggest a shifting back and forth in Andrew’s consciousness.

After this string of disfluent bursts, we find a general “you” in lines (16-20), coupled with very vague references to “people,” “everyone,” “something” and “stuff:”

16       you keep running into people
17       and meeting people at these kinda local scenes
18       and you end up knowing people that live four towns over
19       and everyone does something
20       so you end up y’know just getting all that, all that stuff I guess

Here Andrew presents a story-like sequence of events, temporally ordered through the connective “and.” However, this isn’t a narrative of personal experience. The “you” and indeterminate referrals paint Andrew’s introduction to zines as a very generic one: this experience could have happened to anyone and actually did happen to a lot of people. In Baynham’s (2006) terms, what Andrew tells here is a “generic narrative” where a speaker recounts “events that happened regularly, repeatedly, to a particular group of participants over time…what is emphasized is typicality, iterativity” (382). On one hand, describing his experience as typical of many is a way to make his life story coherent with a larger community of life stories. On the other hand, if the norm is for zine writers to narrate their early experience with zines as a highly agentive turning point, we can read Andrew’s generic narrative here as a refusal to tell the canonical discovery narrative. On the other hand, in this generic narrative, we do find the terms show (line 8) and scene
(line 17) which are lexical items frequently used in the punk community (O’Hara 1999). So while Andrew doesn’t tell a specific discovery narrative, he does use linguistic features that index alignment with an underground and subcultural community. After he tells this generic narrative, I follow up with another question that asks for more specificity in line 24 (so did somebody give you a zine or did you). His reply in line 25 is interesting because it implies that there might be a narrative lurking just below the surface here about his discovery experience, but that he no longer remembers it.

Andrew is the only writer I interviewed who did not tell a personal narrative that characterized his early experiences with zines as a turning point in his life story. One way to understand Andrew’s refusal to tell a canonical discovery narrative is as an expression of “role distance” (Goffman 1961) from a full-fledged zinester identity. While the discovery narrative served as a discursive resource for other writers to express their deep investment and commitment to their zine-making and zine culture, the absence of a discovery narrative serves as a resource for Andrew to drive a wedge between his sense of self and his zine-making. In other words, he avoids the performance so as not to “put on” the self that would emerge from it. Yet how do we know that Andrew is aware of the canonical discovery narrative in order to perform role distance from it? At a later point in the interview, Andrew explicitly comments on the clichéd way most personal zine writers talk about their early experiences with zines. In the excerpt below, we see how he performs a mini-telling of a condensed discovery narrative.

1 Andrew: there’s actually a cliché around perzines
2 like “oh my God I just found out about perzines
3 and now I get to do my own
4 isn’t this a great thing”
5 and yeah it’s great you’ve discovered
what it’s like to write and produce your own work
and to distribute it
and to realize there are people outside your very small circle
who are interested in what you have to say
y’know that’s wonderful
whether or not that makes good reading
is entirely a different story <laughter>

Like Billy, Andrew performs the discovery narrative as a way to comment that it has become a trope in the zine community. But unlike Billy, Andrew doesn’t take on this trope-like template as a structure for his own personal experience. Bruner says that turning points in individual life stories are often trope-like and end up serving as a general statement about the life as a whole rather than a literal account of what happened (1994: 50). It is important to emphasize that I am not suggesting that Andrew hasn’t integrated his early experiences with zines into his life story – in a psychological, internal sense – or that he didn’t experience a light bulb moment when he was first handed a zine at one of the underground concerts he attended in high school. Bruner (1993) makes the point that an individual’s autobiographical narrative is an extension of imagination, rather than experience. My analytical point here is that Andrew doesn’t imagine or narrativize his early zine experience as a turning point during the interview with me, and that avoidance of the turning point narrative projects a self that is less attached to a zine-maker identity than the writers who did tell a “thick” discovery narrative.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented an analysis of a central narrative that emerged in most of my interviews with zine-makers, what I call the zine discovery narrative. I showed how these narratives construed the speaker’s early experiences with zines as an “aha” or light bulb
moment in their life stories which (sometimes immediately) led to making their first zine. To interrogate these narrative performances, I asked three questions: 1) whether and how the situated interaction in which the telling emerged impinged on the narrative performance, 2) how the speaker used the narrative to shape their discovery experience as a turning point in their life story, and 3) whether and how each narrative performance projected a self that was more or less connected to a full fledged zine-maker identity and a larger community of discovery narratives and narrators.

I first discussed the overall shared structure and evaluative features of these narratives and the mechanics of how the narrative performances were situated in the ongoing interview talk. Then we considered the case of two speakers (Matt and Billy) who told “thick” discovery narratives, but then later recontextualized these narratives as part of very different identity performances. Next I analyzed the case of another speaker (LB) who told a brief, yet thickly agentive discovery narrative, but how her attachment to the role of “helpful research subject” impinged on this telling.

Finally, I discussed that case of two speakers who used their discovery narrative telling (or refusal to tell) to project selves that are more loosely connected to a full fledged zine-maker identity. First analyzed how a newcomer to zines (Rachel) told a “thin” discovery narrative in support of her newcomer status, despite my repeated attempts to elicit a thicker version. Finally I analyzed another speaker (Andrew) who avoided telling a personal discovery narrative and instead construed his discovery experience as a very generic and typical one. I argued that Andrew’s refusal to tell a personal discovery narrative was a way to perform “role distance” from a full fledged zine-maker identity.
In the next chapter, I continue to focus on how zine-makers talk about their experiences with zines by analyzing the way two zine-makers positioned themselves as writers during the interviews.
5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined a central narrative that emerged in my interviews with zine-makers and discussed how this narrative functioned as a discursive resource for the construction and performance of different kinds of zinester identities. Our analysis of the Zine Discovery Narrative was part of a larger inquiry into how zine-makers display bits and pieces of their life stories – and, in doing so, project identities and selves – through talk about their zine and zine-making.

In this chapter, we continue our analysis of the interview discourse by examining the kinds of characterizations and identities that emerge when zine-makers talk about writing, broadly defined here to include discussions of the writing process, ideas about what constitutes good and bad writing, descriptions of imagined audiences, and claims about what kind of life-writing perzines represent. People who make zines obviously do a lot of writing, and moreover, creating and publishing a perzine is clearly some kind of public autobiographical gesture. Scholarly analysis has characterized zine-making as a form of autobiography and life-writing (Sinor 2005; Poletti 2005). Yet how do zine-makers themselves understand and enact their role as life-writer? What does it mean to “speak like a writer” in zine culture, and moreover, what kinds of ideological resources might help a zine-maker accomplish this kind of positioning work?
In this chapter, I telescope the analysis on the voices of two zine-makers – Liz and Matt – to show the linguistic, interactional, and ideological resources each speaker uses to explicitly and implicitly take stances towards ideologies about writing and DIY, and ultimately, position themselves as different types of writers. A close, contrastive analysis between these speakers affords an opportunity to look in detail at two cases where a zine-maker discursively constructs themselves as a writer, what kinds of culturally-available ideological resources are recruited in this task, and how the interactional context of the interview, including my own turns-at-talk, contributed to shaping these emergent stances, positions, and identities. Paying attention to my participation in co-constructing these life-writer identities is part of a larger goal throughout this project of throwing into greater relief the analyst’s role in eliciting, co-constructing, and retelling our participants’ stories.

In the first case, I show how Liz positions her zine as a kind of investigative autobiography, where each issue is organized around a well-researched theme, and carefully planned, written, and designed for a specifically-imagined external audience. She positions herself as a writer who is careful and meticulous, yet also struggles during each stage of her writing process. She projects stances against the DIY flavor of zine-making, and instead aligns her own approach to writing with more conventional ideologies about writing and publishing. The analysis focuses on the linguistic and paralinguistic features that work in support of her identity work, including discourse markers, referring terms, generalizations, dramatic prosodic contours, and especially constructed dialogue. Specifically, I show how Liz takes on the voices of absent others, such as the stereotype of the anti-authoritarian zinester and an imagined English teacher
figure, in order to evoke and project stances towards ideologies about writing and zine-making that are wrapped up in these recognizable social voices. I also show how, through my contributions and turns-at-talk, I helped build up Liz’s projection of a writer identity through shared stancetaking and collaborative reference building.

Next, we turn to the voice of Matt, a writer who we met in the previous chapter where we analyzed his discovery narrative and his later re-evaluation of the discovery experience. In this chapter we focus on the way Matt constructs a strong writer identity for himself and positions his zine as tightly connected to his sense of self. I show how he draws up a position as writer that (like Liz) connected to larger circulating ideologies about DIY, zine-making, and writing; however, in Matt’s case, his self-positioning as a writer is more grounded in a sense of his self and life history. The analysis shows how he evokes his training as a writer (e.g. an advanced degree and his experience as an English major in college) in support of an identity as a skilled, professional writer, while at the same time projecting stances that emphasize his commitment to the DIY ethic that zines are forms of creative expression free from external and institutional writing ideologies. In this way, Matt brings his “epistemic self” (Bruner 1990) more fully into the construction of a writer identity, linking his zine-making and approach to the writing process to a core aspect of his self, his beliefs, and his personal ideological commitments.

When zine-makers discursively position themselves as types of writers, they are also making claims about how ideas about writing – that stem from DIY principles and also mainstream ideological sites of writing – can and should be understood and enacted in zine culture. To put this idea another way: when zine-makers talk about the writing process, there are culturally-relevant D/discourses and social figures associated with
recognizable social voices that swirl around this talk. My analysis shows how zine-makers pick out and arrange these D/discourses and voices in particular configurations in order to draw up positions as writers. In other words, I show how these writer identities and stances emerge *locally* as situated performances that I more or less collaborate in producing, but also *globally* as larger identity moves that draw up positions vis-à-vis imagined other zine-makers and writers and D/discourses about DIY and writing ideologies.

What is particularly interesting is that both Matt and Liz are experienced, long-time zine-makers and yet we find diversity in how they enact their role as autobiographer, approach the writing process, imagine their audiences, and understand the perzine as a public or private autobiographical gesture. This analysis shows how the identity category of “writer” in zine culture is elastic and can stretch to include different levels of investment in underground and mainstream ideologies about writing and self-publishing, and project diverse stances towards the role of DIY ethics in zine-making.

I chose to focus on Matt and Liz for this analysis because the topic of writing was a particularly salient focus for our conversations. This could have been the case for a number of reasons, perhaps especially because they are both long-time zine producers and thus, over time, have formed more durable and stable stances and positions towards writing ideologies relevant to zine-making. It is important to acknowledge that by choosing to focus on these two speakers for this analysis, I have left out the other eight speakers I interviewed and the ways those speakers may or may not have constructed writer identities or positioned themselves vis-à-vis ideologies about writing and DIY. By focusing only on two speakers, this discussion provides a micro-level contrastive analysis...
of two possible writer identities in zine culture, though it does not account for all of the ways a zine producer might engage with and negotiate stances, positions, and identities vis-à-vis mainstream and underground writing ideologies.

5.2 Liz

We begin our analysis with Liz and the linguistic, interactional, and ideological resources with which she positioned herself and others in the zine community as different types of life-writers. We zoom in on sections where our collaborative negotiation of writer identities and stances towards writing are especially salient. The analysis focuses on the linguistic features that work in support of these identities and stances, such as discourse markers, referring terms, generalizations, dramatic prosodic shifts, and especially, constructed dialogue. I show how Liz takes on the voices of others – the stereotypical voice of the anti-authoritarian zinester and the imagined voice of the English teacher figure – as a way to evoke and evaluate ideas about DIY zine-making, but also more conventional and mainstream ideologies about writing and publishing. I show how Liz ends up projecting stances that ultimately challenge some aspects of DIY self-publishing ideologies and instead align with more prescriptive and conventional ideas of what constitutes good and bad writing.

This analysis also shows how my own contributions and turn-taking in these stretches of talk become an interactional resource for Liz’s identity work. I show how my own status as writer is made interactionally relevant, and how Liz and I work together to emphasize our shared identities as writers through collaborative stance-taking and
reference building. Through all of this stance work, Liz ultimately draws up a position that characterizes her as a careful and diligent writer, but one who also struggles with each stage in the writing process.

5.2.1 “who cares really y’know what you title it”

As discussed in Chapter Three, I began most of the interviews by asking for a definition of zines. The zine definition questions, despite their methodological messiness, turned out to open up some particularly rich interactional moments. For some writers, the topic of how to define zines led to more analytical discussions where the writers produced evaluative utterances that projected critical stances towards canonical zine definitions, and this is what happened in Liz’s case. First, she quickly replied to the question with what she called her “stock answer” since she often gets asked this question at the bookstore where she works. I followed up with a second, related question about the different subgenres of zines, encouraging Liz to elaborate on her stock answer. Her reply to this second question about zine subgenres appears below as Excerpt 1. Here, Liz explains that it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between a zine and magazine, but then projects a stance against this type of rigid distinction when she says who cares really y’know what you title it in line 5.

Excerpt 1

1 Liz: not only are there different subgenres of zines
2 but then there’s things that are straddling the line
3 between zine and magazine
4 and in the end like…
5 who cares really [y’know what you title it
Z
Liz’s utterances in lines 2-3 (but then there’s things that are straddling the line between zine and magazine) evokes a recognizable opinion in the community that some zines are best described as magazines because of their “slicker” appearance or production process. For some, distinguishing between the labels of zine or magazine is important because it reflects a larger tension between underground self-publishing ethics and mainstream publishing and editing practices. In other words, one of the tenets of the Discourse of DIY that swirls around zine culture is the idea that zine-making is a social practice that should stay underground and remain separate from the mainstream. When Liz mentions that some texts straddle the line between underground and mainstream, she is referencing this tension between what counts as underground vs. mainstream publishing and the idea that it’s important to demarcate the boundaries. Put another way, her utterances in lines 2-3 are not factual statements; rather, they are ideologically informed statements that reference a set of ideas that circulate among the zine community. She articulates a recognizable stance that is associated with the zinester who is deeply committed to DIY ethics and principals.

Next, Liz makes two moves that together project a second stance – a “stance follow” in DuBois’s (2007) terms – against this idea. First, in line 5 (who cares really y’know what you title it) where she suggests the label isn’t important, and then in lines 7-8 (if it’s a compelling read that’s really all I-I am concerned about y’know) where she suggests that the quality of a zine’s content is more important than its status as a full-
fledged underground publication. Through these two moves, Liz responds to the first stance by claiming that well-written content is more important than deciding whether a publication has more or less of an underground or mainstream flavor. She linguistically presents this stance in a way that suggests common ground or shared knowledge, or at least that her listener would be sympathetic to her claims. In line 5 the phrase *who cares really* suggests that Liz is speaking for more than just herself and the general pronoun ‘you’ in *what you title it* marks the stance as a general comment about all zinesters. The repetition of the discourse marker *y’know* in lines 5 and 8 also invites me to collaborate with her and I do, in fact, offer supportive backchannels during this stance display, in line 6 (an overlapped *mhmm* and a latched *uh-huh*) and line 9 (another overlapped *uh-huh*). These small turns provide uptake of Liz’s stance against a sharp distinction between zines and magazines, but moreover, these backchannels also encourage the type of turn Liz is taking in lines 5 and 7-8. In other words, my overlapped and latched backchannels not only help create involvement, but also ratify Liz’s turns where she expresses her own opinions and makes ideological claims about zine culture.

5.2.2 “*what the most important thing is*”

In the next turn following the talk in Excerpt 1, I encourage Liz to continue her ideological stance work by asking what others think of the magazine/zine issue. The way this question came out provided Liz with concrete textual resources with which to continue building her stance against the canonical zinester stance that all zines should remain firmly underground. Specifically, my question introduced a referral (*people out there*) and a description of their actions (*policing*), both of which Liz then adopted and
expanded on in her next-turn. First, let’s consider the question I posed in Excerpt 2 below.

Excerpt 2

1  Inge: do you feel like there are people out there though
2  that are kind of policing [like
3  Liz: [yeah yeah

In line 1, I evoke a first-mention of a referent by using the pragmatic prototype there are (Schiffrin 2006) to introduce the general referral people, and I fix a location for this referent group with the phrase out there. This referral calls into focus a group of other zinesters who believe there should be sharp distinctions between what counts as mainstream vs. underground publications. The design of this referral makes it look like a first-mention, yet the referent – people who make sharp distinctions between underground and mainstream publications – is related to Liz’s earlier utterance that some texts are straddling the line between zine and magazine (line 2-3 in excerpt 1) and her projected stance against this claim. Put another way, Liz’s stance-work displayed in Excerpt 1 activates (Chafe 1994) a generalized type of person (or zinester) which I then call into sharper focus with the NP people out there. The NP people out there is a general referral, but it also brings into the conversation a more concrete textual figure that Liz is then able to animate via constructed dialogue (we will look more closely at this constructed dialogue in the excerpt below).

In addition to introducing the referral NP, I also describe this group’s actions as kind of policing like. The term “policing” encodes a strong characterization of this group, yet my hedges (kind of and like) function to soften this claim and encourage Liz to take a
turn and continue discussing the topic. The analytical point I wish to make here is that through this referral, I’ve joined with Liz in constructing an imagined group of other zinesters, characterizing their stances and actions in particular ways, and projecting a shared stance against them. We begin to see how this stance is being interactionally negotiated across speakers and turns, and also how a group of absent others – a “distal stance subject” in Lempert’s (2009) terms – can be made more concrete through a referral, and then become a textual resource available for participants to project a stance for/against.

In her next-turn, Liz agrees with my characterization (yeah yeah in line 3), repeats the referral (there’s people in line 4), and then expands our joint characterization by animating their imagined voice via constructed dialogue, shown below in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3

3 Liz: yeah yeah
4 there’s people–
5 the same people that police like
6 “oh y’know that’s not a zine that’s a ma:gazi:ne”
7 Inge: mhm
8 Liz: are the same people who police like
9 “what you did your zine on a compu:ter [and not handwrite it out?]
10 Inge: [mm
11 Liz: what kinda like obsessed with corporate- typing- the man=
12 Inge: <laughing>
13 Liz: =type of writer are you”
14 Inge: yeah
15 Liz: y’know it’s just so ridiculous
16 Inge: right

142
In this exchange, Liz voices the referent “people” that I introduced and animates this group by dramatizing the voice that would constitute what I described as “policing” activity. Liz performs two utterances of imagined dialogue in lines 6 and 9-12. Both instances of constructed dialogue are introduced with the NP the same people who police and the quotative like. The repetition of these items, along with the dramatic shift in voice quality when she speaks in the imagined voice, reinforces the change in voice and also helps foreground the quoted material itself. In line 6 (oh y’know that’s not a zine that’s a magazine), she performs the entire piece of dialogue with a mocking accusatory tone and uses emphatic stress, vowel lengthening, and sing-song intonation on the word magazine. These prosodic tools – especially the paralinguistically exaggerated magazine – work together to poke fun at the idea that calling one’s publication a magazine is a serious accusation in the zine community. We also find discourse marker oh in this piece of constructed dialogue. I interpret the oh in line 6 as doing two things: it helps marks a shift in voice (from Liz’s own to an imagined voice of other zinesters), but the oh also does some stance work by indexing evaluation. Oh-prefaced constructed dialogue can be a linguistic resource for speakers to project negative evaluation and affective stances towards the quoted material (Trester 2009). Here, the oh works in concert with other prosodic features to negatively evaluate the quoted material.

We find the second instance of constructed dialogue in line 9 (what you did your zine on a computer and not handwrite it out?) and line 11 (what kinda like obsessed with corporate- typing-the man type of writer are you). Here we see the zine/magazine tension mirrored in another distinction: handwriting vs. typing. Liz is constructing an imagined
utterance whereby one zinester critiques another for creating his/her zine on a computer rather than by hand. The prosodic cues in these utterances – the vowel lengthening on computer in line 9, the emphatic stress on the phrase the man in line 11, and the continuation of the mocking accusatory tone throughout – are linguistic resources Liz uses to implicitly offer negative evaluation of the quoted material and the imagined speaker (or, in Goffman’s [1981] terms, the principal) to whom the dialogue is attributed. The phrase the man is also doing important work here because it carries the flavor of the canonical anti-authoritarian stance associated with DIY communities such as zine culture, and Liz attributes this phrase to the zinester stereotype she is voicing here. The way she linguistically presents the constructed dialogue offers implicit evaluation, but Liz also explicitly projects a stance and negatively evaluates this imagined dialogue with the term ridiculous in line 14.

What Liz is commenting on here is the (perceived) link between a zine-maker’s production method or tools and his or her ideological stance. The concept of “selling out” is a critique that often floats around DIY communities (Dale 2008) and Liz is poking fun at the idea that typing one’s zine on a computer is evidence that the writer has abandoned his or her ideological commitment to the underground press and “sold out” to the mainstream. She jokes that zinesters are overly-attached to handwriting as a symbol of the DIY anti-authoritarian independent spirit and computers as symbols of the corporate mainstream. In other words, the “distal stance object” (Lempert 2009) for Liz here is not just the stereotypical anti-authoritarian zinester, but also, crucially, the typical stance that this zinester takes up towards mainstream and underground publishing practices. In this way, Liz is projecting a stance by talking about other stances that have been projected at
other times and by other speakers. My ethnographic knowledge of zine culture helped me understand that Liz was referring to something larger than just the handwriting/typing distinction in this interactional moment, and I provided supportive uptake of Liz’s move with overlapped laughter in line 12, and a latched *yeah* in line 13 and *right* in line 15.

Following this stretch of constructed dialogue, Liz continues to makes her stance more explicit in lines 16-21 (below in excerpt 5) where she makes overt claims that “good writing” in zines is more important than mode of production. We also continue our collaborative stance work in this excerpt: at the completion of an explicit stance display from Liz, I join with her to perform choral repeats of overlapped *y’know* and *yeah* in lines 17-18 and 20-21.

Excerpt 4

16 Liz: it’s like the content is not any different
17 whether you handwrite it or type it [y’know
18 Inge: [yeah
19 Liz: what the most important thing is y’know what-
20 how good how good the writing is [y’know
21 Inge: [yeah

My small overlapped turns in this excerpt continue to show supportive uptake of the particular evaluations she is making about writing and zine-making, but also help create involvement where I encourage her to continue making these stance-saturated moves.

To sum up, in this example, we saw how Liz recruited many linguistic resources – discourse markers, dramatic change in voice quality, and constructed dialogue – for the purposes of evoking a recognizable stance that is linked to the stereotype of the anti-authoritarian zinester, and then projecting her own, second stance in response that
challenges this typical stance. We saw how Liz used linguistic resources to both implicitly and explicitly project these stances, and how I provided a referral that became a textual resource that also helped move along and expand her stance work. In the next example, we see how Liz continues to critique the stereotype of the anti-authoritarian zinester by drawing on others’ voices – this time, an English teacher figure – in order to project stances for herself that challenge canonical DIY ideas about what kind of writing should happen in the pages of zines.

5.2.3 “the rules you learn in your English class”

In a different section of my interview with Liz, I asked her what constitutes a good perzine and mentioned an older perzine (Cometbus) that I had heard other zine-makers describe as a classic example of the genre. In response to my question, Liz talked a little about Cometbus (and, interestingly, disputed its status as a “classic perzine”) and then moved into a discussion about general writing rules that all zine-makers should follow. In this stretch of talk, we begin to see Liz’s projection of a writer self emerge more fully as she evokes and aligns herself with prescriptive writing rules associated with the canonical English classroom and the English teacher figure.

Excerpt 5

1  Liz: and also in reference to the question
2       y’know what makes a good zine
3           I think-
4           and this part of me is like
Inge: [yeah]
Liz: I still feel like a lot of the rules that you learn in your English class apply to writing whether it’s like zine writing or magazine writing

Inge: uh-huh
Liz: or writing for a journal or whatever y’know

Inge: uh-huh
Liz: like proofread your shit

Inge: uh-huh
Liz: do more than one uh..version of it y’know

Inge: uh-huh
Liz: do more than one draft

Inge: uh-huh
Liz: maybe have someone else write it- or read it out loud to see how it sounds

Inge: [uh-huh
Liz: y’know use your spellcheck [dadada

Liz: y’know all that shit
Inge: uh-huh
Liz: y’know because my pet peeve is people who are like ‘I’m not bound by the man of proofreading’

Liz: <laughing>

At the start of this excerpt, Liz implies there is a contrast between her ‘radical’ ideas and her opinions about zine writing. The emphatic ‘still’ in line 7 (I still feel like) presupposes that people with “radical” interests, who participate in underground and alternative social
practices (like zine-making), usually eschew conventional and prescriptive ideas about writing.

She then produces a sequence of utterances that build up a list of these English class rules. She begins the list with “like” in line 15 which frames the upcoming utterances as examples of the type of writing rules she’s evoking. The items in the list are designed as imperatives, which positions Liz in a somewhat authoritative position as she rolls out the rules for others to follow: *proofread your shit* (line 15); *do more than one uh..version of it y’know* (line 17); *do more than one draft* (line 19); *read it out loud to see how it sounds* (line 21); *use your spellcheck dadada* (line 22). I argue that the mention of the English classroom, coupled with the list of directives, supports a small footing shift where Liz has taken on an authoritative role and is orienting her talk to an imagined group of other zine-makers. It is as if the mention of the English class has provided the possibility for Liz to borrow the authoritative aspects of the prescriptive teacher figure we normally associate with the normative site of the English classroom. Yet she still maintains her own voice throughout this list with non-standard lexical items, such as *shit* in line 15 and *dadada* in line 22. In other words, Liz has evoked ideologies associated with the English class (i.e. conventional notions of how to write well and produce quality written work) in order to critique the typical writing style she finds in zines, and importantly, evokes the authority of the English teacher figure in order to do so.

But Liz isn’t only addressing an absent group of imagined other zine-makers here; she is also involved in an unfolding interaction with a co-present recipient. We find a number of discourse marker *y’know* (lines 13, 17, 22, 24) which suggest shared epistemic stance. In this stretch of talk, I also provide a number of latched *uh-huh* backchannels at
the ends of Liz’s turns where she lists the writing rules. The sequential positions of my backchannels are unmarked because we find them at transition-relevant places; however, I argue that my turn-taking in this section does more than help manage flow of talk and Liz’s control of the conversational floor. My quick succession of *uh-huh* backchannels show that I recognize these rules and share Liz’s assertion that they are relevant to all kinds of writing. In other words, my turns-at-talk here help Liz co-construct this unfolding list of prescriptive writing rules in that each backchanneled *uh-huh* helps “check off” each item in the list and encourage her to continue building the list.

Moreover, my backchannels are also part of a larger move to become a co-principal, displaying alignment with Liz, her move to make the English classroom relevant to zine writing, and her emerging stance towards mainstream writing conventions and zine-making.

One question to ask here is why does Liz take this kind of stance, in this way, and at this particular interactional moment? By mentioning the English class and constructing the list of writing rules, Liz positions herself as a writer who is aligned with the most normative and prescriptive site of writing. But moreover, the kind of stance work Liz displays here helps build an alignment with me, bringing us closer together by highlighting our shared identities as writers. This move is important because she is directly challenging the DIY aspect of zine culture that says “anything goes” in terms of zine content and form, and moreover, the idea that zine-making is often tied up with anti-authoritarian, or at least anti-mainstream, ambitions. In other words, she could have said something like “it’s important to proofread and do drafts when you make zines.” By designing the list of rules in the form of directives, I argue that Liz is inviting me to join
with her in speaking authoritatively to a group of imagined zine-makers. She is drawing on my own status as a writer, and someone who is familiar with more conventional “schooled” writing techniques, in order to position herself as someone who aligns with these sets of meanings. In other words, the participation framework gives rise to Liz’s identity work here, and her move to list these writing rules does work on two levels: she positions herself as a writer who aligns with more conventional and prescriptive norms about writing while also emphasizing our shared identities as writers.

Slipping into the voice of the English teacher here helps add credibility and authority to her stance, and perhaps Liz is able to slip into this authoritative voice because of her own status in the zine community. She produces a long-running zine, works as a manager at a local bookstore that sells zines, and helps to organize zine-related events. Her experience with zines and participation in the community – especially in her role as bookstore manager where she manages the consignment sales of other writers’ zines and speaks to school groups about zines – provides the possibility of slipping into an “expert” role and the English teacher figure becomes a textual resource for doing so.

5.2.4 “they’ll say stupid stuff”

This next excerpt comes directly after the previous stretch of talk where Liz and I co-constructed the list of writing rules. In this excerpt, Liz takes on the voice of the zinester stereotype again (similar to what we saw in excerpt 5) in order to critique the approaches to zine writing she describes as typical.

Excerpt 6

1 Liz: y’know or like people who are like y’know
2 like..haven’t really done like a thorough investigation of the topic
and a lot of time in their introductions they’ll say stupid stuff like “I kinda came up with this all at the last minute and I don’t really know what I’m trying to communicate and I know this is really messy

Inge: <laughing>

Liz: and I know it’s been a long time since I published a zine” like anybody gives a shit <acc. & lower pitch>

Inge: yeah

Liz: um y’know and it just-

y’know like well if you have not investigated your topic why the hell would I be interested in what you have to say or write about

Inge: mm

Liz: so…you can tell that’s my pet peeve <laughing>

Inge: <laughing>

Here we see another example of how Liz uses constructed dialogue to voice other zine-makers and negatively evaluate the quoted material. Here she makes strategic use of discourse markers and dramatic shifts in prosody, including pitch, volume, and rate of speech. The discourse markers, combined with these prosodic and pitch contours, not only help differentiate the voices, but also give off information about how Liz feels about the content of what’s said and the people who’ve said it.

To begin, Liz repeats the referral (people) and quotative (are like) in line 1, yet she backs up to supply more information about this group of people before voicing them. Her utterance in line 2 is a description of the others, but the terms “investigation” and “topic” also foreshadow the writer-as-researcher identity she is constructing for herself.

The reported speech is marked off with a quotative verb (will say) in line 3 and also the discourse marker like in line 4. Whereas the like in line 1 functions as a
quotative, the *like* in line 4 functions as a focusing particle to draw attention to the upcoming talk. Liz attributes the voice in this excerpt to a collective *they*, which is similar to “others.” She evaluates their speech in two ways: explicitly with the phrase *stupid stuff* (produced loudly with emphatic stress) and implicitly through a mocking and sing-song voice quality. But Liz is doing more here than just critiquing poorly written zines. In his work on underground punk music scenes, Pete Dale (2008) talks about an inherent tension in DIY independent cultures between the “anyone can do it” spirit that encourages maximal participation and the goal or purpose of this participation. He writes of the DIY music scene: “Putting out a single…was and remains fairly easy and cheap: why, it remains worth wondering however, should we go and do it? What, exactly, is the aim of this ‘doing it’?” (2008: 176). While Liz is talking about zines and not music albums, I think she is asking a similar question here about the goals of zine-making. It’s true that zines can be produced quickly and easily, but what is the larger communicative goal of zine-making? In this interactional moment, Liz isn’t just responding to other zine-makers; rather, she’s responding to a larger set of ideas about zine-making that swirl around zine and other DIY cultures. In other words, when Liz takes stances about what kind of writing should appear in zines, she’s also making claims about the usefulness of zine-making as a social practice.

The imagined interaction between Liz and the zine writers is partly constructed by the representation of speech (hers and others) but also by the set of discourse markers used to structure this portion of talk and dramatic shifts in pitch, volume, prosody, and rate of speech. After Liz puts on the collective other voice, she responds to this voice in line 9: *like anybody gives a shit um y’know*. This footing shift is accomplished through
accelerated speed and lower pitch in line 9. Then we find a markedly higher pitched “well” in line 12 used as a response marker (Schiffrin 1987) to orient this utterance as a response to the zine-makers she previously voiced.

5.2.5 “yeah get it out”

This next excerpt comes after Liz had been talking about an extended break she took from writing because of health problems and how she recently started writing again. She briefly mentioned a fun experience she had at a go-go dancing competition, and how that experience re-sparked her interest in writing. I asked her if she plans on writing about the dance competition in her zine (lines 1-2 in Excerpt 7 below), and in her answer, she describes the different stages of her writing process, including drafting and revising.

Here, I focus the analysis on how Liz speaks like a particular kind of writer in this stretch of talk, and also how she recruits me as an interactional resource for positioning herself as a writer who is not a “genius” and has to produce multiple rounds of drafts and revisions.

Excerpt 7

1 Inge: so are you writing-
2 have you written about that
3 Liz: yeah
4 so I’ve started I’ve started writing a lot of stuff
5 but the way that I write is typically like I’ll write-
6 like I’ll speed through a first draft
7 and then-
8 which is like a: wfu:l
9 and shit needs to be moved around
10 and like I’ve just taken it for granted that..
11 the first draft of anything just sucks
In the first part of this excerpt, Liz talks about her own approach to writing. She emphasizes her descriptions of her personal style of writing: *I’ve started writing* (line 4); *the way that I write* and *typically like I’ll write* (line 5); *like I’ll speed through a first draft* (line 6). She then provides self-deprecating remarks about the poor quality of her first drafts: *which is like a:wfu:l* (line 8) and *shit needs to be moved arou:nd* (line 9). The emphatic stress and elongated vowels on “awful” and “around” help add to the feeling of self-deprecation. Then Liz makes more of a general statement about writing in line 11: *the first draft of anything just sucks.* She designs this utterance as a factual statement about a general truth about writing, and interestingly, this is where I take my first turn in
this strip of talk (a latched *mhm* in line 12). In other words, during the prior section where Liz was projecting claims about her personal style of writing, I didn’t take a turn, but when she switches to make a more general statement about the nature of all writing, I chime in. This pattern continues for the next several lines where Liz produces utterances that project general statements about writing in general and I take small turns that provide supportive uptake. Our shared stance finally culminates in a moment of repetition in lines 24-26. In line 24, Liz describes her goal for first drafts *is just to get all the shit down* and I latch with an utterance that repeats this idea: *yeah get it out* (line 25). Liz doesn’t skip a beat and immediately latches on with a repetition in line 26: *yeah get it out*. Our turns mirror each other in the same way that we’ve drawn up writer identities for ourselves that reflect the same stances. In this way, Liz and I again are emphasizing our shared identities as writers by co-constructing a shared stance towards general knowledge about writing. This exchange here is similar to our co-construction of the list of English class writing rules in a previous example.

To sum up our discussion of Liz: the analysis showed how she used constructed dialogue, shifts in voice quality, discourse markers, and lexical items such as “the man” to evoke, voice, and project a stance against a recognizable zinester figure. We saw how Liz effectively dismantled some of the core DIY ideas that circulate throughout zine culture and, at the same time, asserted that more conventional approaches to writing and publishing actually have a place in zine-making. Moreover, we saw how my own implied position as writer served as an interactional resource for Liz to build up these stances and draw up her own position as a careful and thorough writer. Specifically, we saw how I joined Liz’s stance and identity work through collaborative referral building,
backchannels that provided uptake of her stance displays, and an instance of cross-turn repetition that emphasized our shared identities as writers. The analytical point I wish to make here is that by looking at the micro-details of Liz’ moment-by-moment stance work, we see how she discursively plots her own position as a writer against a broader backdrop of role-relevant discourses (with a capital “D” in Gee’s 2005 terms) and social figures that float around zine culture. So, we see how stance displays can be mechanisms through which speakers position themselves and others along storylines that are connected to larger cultural Discourses.

5.3 Matt

We now turn to a second speaker (Matt) who also projected alignments and disalignments towards various DIY aspects of zine culture. What’s important here is the ability to keep both alignments “alive” simultaneously. We saw with Liz the importance of the idea of an audience and a writing process that involves traditional stages such as drafts, revisions, and peer review, but Matt frames his zine-making and approach to writing in a different way. His idea of an audience is more nebulous and the functions and goals of zine-making are more tightly connected to his sense of self history. In this next section, we will see how Matt’s stance-taking vis-à-vis DIY, writing ideologies, and zine-making project a writer identity for himself that is tightly connected to a sense of self.
5.3.1 “a way of circumventing the obstacles”

In the talk prior to the excerpts below, I had just asked Matt to describe his definition of zines. Like other writers, Matt first commented on the nature of the question (in this case, he evaluates the ineffectiveness of it by saying “that’s super general”), then transformed the question in a way that made him able to answer it. He cuts the question up into two parts through his response, first describing how he explained zines to his mom, and then describing what zines mean to him. In other words, he took my “super general” question and through his next-turns, reshaped it as two more specific questions. First, let’s consider his first answer, where he describes zines to his mom.

Excerpt 8

1 Matt: when I described it to my mom for the first time [for example
2 Inge: [yeah
3 Matt: my mom used to read a lot of comic books when she was a kid
4 Inge: yeah
5 Matt: so for her I I was able to-
6 because I I self-publish comics as well
7 Inge: yeah
8 Matt: and so I was able to say it’s basically- it’s just- y’know it’s- I-
9 my own drawings
10 my own stories
11 a:nd I print them myself
12 and I staple them myself
13 and I give them away
14 and then that that was all it took for her
15 Inge: yeah
In line 1, Matt reshapes my general question about zine definitions as a more focused task to describe zines to his mom. After a string of false starts in line 8 where Matt seems to be searching for a focus or a starting point for his next move, he finally settles on a compact description of zines in lines 9-13 that emphasizes the content (drawings and stories) and steps in the production process (print, staple, give away). The shape of this definition of zines is a list (Schiffrin 1994) where he strings similar items together into a single discourse unit. Here, the list format is particularly striking given its sequential placement, directly after the cluster of disfluent bursts. It’s as if the list format becomes a cognitive organizational tool to help the speaker arrange different foci of his consciousness in a coherent way (cf. Chafe 1994).

The list description is also evaluative because by presenting the description in this way, each item in the list builds on the previous one, resulting in a fuller picture of all the steps Matt takes to make each issue of his zine. In this way, the list description helps display an aspect of his “agentive self” (Bruner 1990) that focuses on his goal-directed actions in making a zine. Not only the form of the list, but the way each item is syntactically presented also contributes to this. For example, there are a cluster of linguistic features in this compact description that emphasize the zine’s personalization and Matt’s agency in producing it: my own is repeated twice in lines 9 and 10, we find a cluster of repeated “I”s and myself. So in addition to displaying a piece of Matt’s agentive self, the list description also positions the zine as an action-oriented activity.

It’s interesting to note the absence of a specified audience in this description. Matt mentions that he gives them away in line 13, but to whom? The idea of a readership or audience is backgrounded here, while Matt’s agency in making the zine’s content and
form from scratch is foregrounded. Following this excerpt, Matt goes on to provide a more introspective description of what zines mean to him. We will see how this second description of zines displays a different aspect of his self, and ties the zine to a more concrete identity as a writer.

Excerpt 9

16 Matt: um I guess
17 I mean to me wh-what zines are is just um...
18 they’re just a way of of…circumventing the obstacles?
19 that..are between sort of y’know you and getting your..
20 [voice or work out there
21 Inge: [uh-huh uh-huh
22 Matt: [because you have complete creative control <acc. falling intonation>
23 Z
24 Inge: mhm
25 Matt: and that’s that’s what it is to me

There are a number of linguistic features in this excerpt that come together to accomplish this positioning and stance work. First, we find I guess (line 16) and I mean (line 17), which work together to focus attention on the speaker’s modification or re-orientation to what he has just said. Both of these phrases bring the speaker’s epistemic self into sharper focus, and help bracket the upcoming stretch of talk as more introspective than what came before. This focus on the self is also foregrounded in Matt’s emphatic stress on me
in line 17 and then the coda-like utterance in line 25 that re-emphasizes the personal nature of this description: and that’s that’s what it is to me. In addition, we find a number of hedges in this section (just, sort of), elongated pauses in lines 17-19, and even raised intonation at the end of line 18. All of these features are in striking contrast to the compact list description Matt produced in the previous excerpt. Here, we see a more fragmented description, dispersed over several turns, with linguistic and paralinguistic features that frame it as more personal, reflective, and introspective than the previous list of agentive actions.

Whereas his first description displayed his agentive self, here Matt describes zines in a way that brings his “epistemic self” (Bruner 1990) into sharper focus. Here, the zine is not just the product of Matt’s actions, but is linked to something more personal; the zine provides a pathway to fulfilling a personal need or desire, which Matt describes as circumventing the obstacles (line 18) and getting your voice or work out there (line 19). The use of general “you” (your voice or work) and the definite article “the” on the obstacles assumes shared knowledge, as if this was a general statement about the nature of our world and the kinds of struggles all writers face. Moreover, talking about one’s “work” and “voice” has the flavor of the voice of an established writer, but the phrase “circumventing the obstacles” resonates with the DIY idea of participating in social practices that are outside or in opposition to the mainstream. So what we see in this interactional moment is the beginnings of an identity construction that situates Matt as a writer who finds some usefulness in zines as a vehicle to produce and distribute the work he’s already producing as a writer. Thus we see in this excerpt how Matt contextualizes his zine within this broader idea that writers are creative people who have individual
“voices” and it is often difficult to find outlets for making their work and voices public. He evokes this storyline and positions himself as a figure within it.

We also find another fuzzy description of his imagined audience: just like it went unmentioned to whom Matt “gives away” his zine, here we are left unsure what constitutes the nebulous *out there* in line 19. It is important that the work is given away and distributed “out there,” but how does Matt imagine this public? At this point, the imagined audience or readership for Matt is a vague and fuzzy concept. While there are mentions that the zine does, in fact, get read by others, who these others are doesn’t seem to be important. But we will see in the next few examples how Matt eventually does evoke the sense of an audience, albeit a very different one from the kind that Liz imagined for her zine.

5.3.2 “I have a responsibility to me ten years from now”

In the talk prior to this next excerpt, I commented that Matt has been publishing his zine for a long time (almost ten years at the time of our interview). His response is shown in Excerpts 10 and 11 below where he reflects on the different reasons why he has continued to put out issues of his zine, despite having started and stopped other self-publishing projects along the way. In excerpt 10, we will see how Matt imagines his future self as an audience for his zine, and in excerpt 11 positions his zine-making in opposition to other forms of autobiography (e.g. diaries, journals, and blogs).
Matt: I guess cau- because *Meniscus* was the first thing that I did more than once y’know?

Inge: mm

Matt: and so so it keeps pulling me back

<laughing>

Matt: like I have-

it feels like I have a responsibility to it? y’know?

Inge: mhm

Matt: or-or to-

like.. [I have a responsibility to this-

[huh <high-pitched>]

Matt: y’know like a phantom idea of an audience

Inge: mhm

Matt: or if I have a responsibility to to me ten years from now

Inge: [mhm

Matt: [that’s going to wonder like what exactly was I doing then y’know?

Inge: mhm

In this stretch of text, Matt continues to describe his zine as a very personal writing project for himself. There’s a link between his zine and a larger, more continuous sense of self (*Meniscus was the first thing that I did more than once y’know*) in line 1; the zine is described as having tight grip on him, that it keeps “pulling him back.” Zine-making is positioned as a thread that is woven throughout his life and deeply connected to his self. We also get a fuller description of his imagined audience here: he mentions a *phantom idea of an audience* (line 11) or an imagined future version of his self (*me ten years from now* in line 13).
This section where Matt reflects on why his zine-making is so important to him is very introspective. In addition to the reflective content of what he is saying, the linguistic details of how he is saying it also contribute to this feeling of reflection and introspectiveness. One of the ways Matt creates the feeling of an introspective moment here is through his use of discourse marker *y’know* (lines 1, 6, and 11), sometimes coupled with rising intonation (as in lines 1 and 6). In these cases, *y’know* works to focus the speaker’s attention, as well as his listener’s attention, on the information that’s being expressed (cf. Schiffrin 1987: 290). In this way, the clusters of *y’know* help emphasize this stretch of talk as speaker-focused, where Matt’s epistemic self is foregrounded. His sense of self is also foregrounded twice when he uses emphatic stress on *me* in lines 3 and 13.

My contributions in this section also help focus the attention on what’s being said and encourage Matt to continue taking turns that are reflective and introspective. In other words, I could have not contributed at all in this section as Matt imagined the reasons why he continues to publish his zine. But I do take a number of turns that provide feedback: a number of latched *mm* and *mhmm* (lines 2, 7, 12, 14, 16), which occur at places where Matt has completed an utterance that projects an imagined reason for his zine-making. These small latched backchannels signal my focus on what’s being said, but also encourage Matt to continue taking this type of turn. In line 10, I overlap with *huh* produced with a high-pitch voice. This marked backchannel helps build the feeling of introspection by signaling “this is interesting new information” and again, encourages Matt to continue this reflection.
After this section, Matt takes a turn that produces a small list of other types of life-writing and then positions his zine as his own version of autobiography.

Excerpt 11

17 Matt: because I-I can’t keep a diary↓
18 I can’t keep a journal↓
19 [I can’t keep up with a blog↓
20 Inge: [mm Z
21 mhm
22 Matt: like I-
23 for-
24 all of those things are too regulated?
25 Inge: hm <low-pitched>
26 Matt: um and so Meniscus is my-my version of that Z
27 Inge: yeah

In lines 17-19, Matt presents a brief list where he groups together other types of life-writing texts, i.e. diaries, journals, and blogs. He strings the items together and creates the list through repetition in syntactic structure (I can’t keep + X) and phrase-final falling intonation. The falling intonation seems like a marked pattern of intonation for list-making, but here I argue that listing each item with falling intonation helps build the evaluative work the list is performing in the discourse. The falling intonation is also in stark contrast to the rising intonation in line 24 where Matt projects an explicit stance against these types of autobiography, describing them as too regulated. The stance Matt explicitly projects against these texts (i.e. they are too controlling and rigid) is mirrored in the way he linguistically presents these texts, i.e. with repetitive syntax and phrase-final falling intonation, which is markedly different from the surrounding utterances. Matt
implicitly encodes his stance against these types of autobiographies by his way of linguistically producing the list of text-types.

Through this discursive work, Matt ultimately positions *Meniscus* as an autobiographical act, related to other types of autobiographies (diaries, journals, blogs), but in a form that offers Matt more personal freedom of expression. *Meniscus* is positioned as something very personal to Matt: it’s his version of these other forms of more structured autobiography.

5.3.3 “I supposedly have like a Master’s degree in writing”

In this next excerpt, Matt and I are talking about his approach to the writing process when he works on his zine. In line 1, I ask him whether he does drafts or rewrites when he is working on an issue for his zine. By asking this question, I make the assumption that Matt knows about these stages of the writing process, and that he might have opinions about whether these writing stages are relevant to his zine making. This point might be obvious, but it’s important to mention it because the design of my question here shows that I have taken up Matt’s self-positioning as “writer” and we are now fully engaged in writer “shop talk” at this point in the interview.

Excerpt 12

1 Inge: so do you do drafts..[and rewrites and stuff
2 Matt: [I do I do it’s-
3 not on everything
4 Inge: uh-huh
5 Matt: but but yeah
and part of it is is-
on any longer pieces
I’m more likely to kind of pay more attention to to-
cause I mean- <quieter>
cause I supposedly have like a Master’s
degree in writing <laughing>
so like I feel like I should use it [y’know
and so I go back and and work on stuff
but it it-
also it’s y’know it’s a zine <acc.>

Inge:          [uh-huh
Matt:         and so I go back and and work on stuff
Z
Matt:         so I feel like I’m not as obligated
Z
Inge:           [yeah [yeah
Matt:           y’know meet y’know a professorial
expectation [y’know <laughing>
Inge:           [yeah yeah

After I ask Matt whether he produces drafts, he responds by saying that he does produce drafts, but not for every piece (lines 2-3). He explains that he pays particular attention to carefully crafting longer pieces, and then offers an explanation for why this is the case. In lines 9-11, he evokes his institutional training in writing by mentioning his advanced degree, and suggests that he “should use it” for his zine writing. In one sense, this is an explicit presentation of his trained, “schooled” writer self, but he coats this presentation with hedges. In line 9, we find the phrase I mean and a softer speaking voice, which frames the upcoming utterance almost as though he’s revealing a secret piece of information about himself. Next, he mentions his advanced degree in line 10 but saturates the utterance with the hedges supposedly and like along with laughter. These linguistic details help Matt “back off” a little from the performance of self that would emerge from a clear statement (without hedging and laughter) of his advanced degree.

Why would Matt do this discursive work to project a small degree of distance
towards his training as a writer? Here Matt is accounting for why he does drafts and carefully crafts his zine writing, and drawing on his “schooled” training as a writer to explain why he does this work. One of the central tenets of the DIY ideology relevant to zine culture is the idea that zines are amateur publications, written by people without specialized training or a lot of experience writing or editing. The amateur status of zines is extremely important in zine culture and writers who make their zines appear too slick or professional are accused of “selling out.” When Matt evokes his advanced degree in writing, it is almost like he’s walking on a tight rope, careful to keep one foot grounded in the ethics of zine culture while also projecting a writer self that is trained and experienced.

This balancing act continues in line 15 when he increases his rate of speech and says *also it’s y’know it’s a zine* to which I quickly latch *yeah* in line 16. Our brief exchange in this moment underscores a joint understanding that zines are usually separate from more “schooled” forms of writing. Matt reinforces this understanding in line 17 when he mentions that he doesn’t feel obligated to meet what he calls *a professorial expectation*. In this moment, Matt indirectly refers back to his discovery narrative, which we analyzed in the previous chapter. Recall that during his “second take” of that narrative, he contextualized his coming to zine-making as a way to eschew his college professor’s critiques of his written work. Here, Matt positions the zine again as a form of writing that is outside of a professor’s purview.

In the next example, Matt continues talking about his process of drafting and the degree to which his training as a writer shapes his zine-making.
5.3.4 “it’s just like the English major in me”

This excerpt below directly follows the talk we analyzed above. Here, Matt refers to “the English major inside of me” as an explanation for why he carefully constructs his zine writing.

Excerpt 13

19 Matt: but I do I mean I I-
20 because I –
21 cause it’s just like the English major in me
22 Inge: yeah
23 Matt: like you can’t-
24 I can be I can be loose and conversational
25 Inge: mhm
26 Matt: sloppy y’know
27 Inge: mhm
28 Matt: and if it’s sloppy
29 it’s not acceptable
30 and I have to [I have to fix it
31 Inge: [mhm mhm

When Matt says cause it’s just like the English major in me (line 21), he’s drawing on this aspect of his self as an explanation for why he takes time to edit and revise the pieces he writes for his zine. Like Liz, he brings up the site of the canonical English classroom, but he displays a self that is more connected to the meanings associated with this
normative site of writing. For Liz, the English classroom writing rules were designed as shared general knowledge that she reproduced and directed towards the stereotypical zine producer who produces messy, unedited writing, but the list of rules also had the effect of creating closeness and emphasizing our shared writer identities. With Matt, his attachment to the English classroom is more personal, as though it is something inside of him he can’t keep down. In other words, this is an interactional moment where Matt could have said something similar to what Liz did, something like “I believe approaches to writing that you learn in English class apply to my zine writing.” Instead, he linked his approach to writing to a deeper, more personal piece of his sense of self that stems from his experience as an English major in college.

Matt’s utterance in line 21 is a discursive move that highlights the nature of identity as multiple; that we carry around bundles of different selves and we can bring particular ones to the foreground to accomplish different kinds of interactional work. In this way, he frames his approach to zine writing as something personal, that is grounded in his experience as a trained writer, but is something that emanates from inside of him. For example, in lines 23-24, we see Matt begin to make a broader claim with the general pronoun “you” (like you can’t-) but then switch to a narrower claim with the personal pronoun “I” (I can be I can be loose and conversational). This small repair is important because it signals that while Matt has evoked the English major as a relevant explanation for why he edits his zine, he frames this as a personal self-regulation. Whereas Liz framed the English class rules in terms of generalizations (and I collaborated with this list of rules through my turns-at-talk), here Matt presents his approach to writing as something more personal. It is interesting to note that while he described earlier how the
zine offers freedom from the “too regulated” forms of traditional autobiography (journals, diaries, blogs), he still projects a writer self here that self-edits; the English major “in him” regulates his writing, in a way, by requiring edits and drafts.

We can also make connections between Matt’s self-presentation as a writer as I have discussed and analyzed it here and our earlier discussion of Matt’s zine discovery narrative in the previous chapter. In the discovery narrative, we saw how Matt (in the second take) ultimately contextualized the beginning of his zine-making within a difficult time in his life when he was struggling with his creative writing professor in college. So in the discovery narrative, zines were positioned as separate from his training in writing in that they were a way to circumvent an institutional figure that he perceived as an obstacle to fully inhabiting or filling out a writer identity. Yet in this analysis, we saw how Matt evoked his institutional training as a writer and explicitly brought it to bear on his zine-making. Yet it was not quite a tight fit between his schooled training as a writer and his zine-making, because he coated the mention of his advanced degree in writing with hedges that helped him “back off” a little from a strong presentation as a trained writer. Moreover, when he mentioned his experience as an English major in college, he projected this as a core aspect of his self that compels him to revise and edit his zine writing.

5.4 Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking the question “what does it mean to ‘speak like a writer’ in zine culture?” I approached this question by zooming in on the voices of two zine-makers, and analyzing how each speaker made use of linguistic, interactional, and
ideological resources to project stances and draw up positions as writers. We saw in the
analysis that the interactional context of the interview, including my own contributions,
turns-at-talk, and self-identification as a writer, had an effect on these stances, positions,
and identities. This analysis provides only a partial answer to the question I posed at the
beginning: I have shown how two zine-makers accomplished “speaking like a writer”
with their interlocutor who was also known to be a writer, a point which was variously
made (and not made) relevant, during the specific context of our sociolinguistic
interviews. Ultimately, we saw how both Matt and Liz positioned zines in this ambiguous
place between underground and mainstream ideologies about DIY ethics of writing and
self-publishing and more mainstream and “schooled” approaches to writing.
CHAPTER 6
CRAFTING A SELF THROUGH THE INTERSECTION OF TEXT, IMAGE, AND MATERIALITY IN ZINES

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is a small departure from the previous analyses because we now focus our attention on the construction of life stories and identities in perzines, which is different from our discussions about the narratives, identities, and stances that emerged from talk about zines. But this chapter is also a continuation of our previous discussions because we will continue to look for and unpack the linguistic, ideological, and interactional resources that zine-makers use to create and project identities, but this time in their zines themselves. Additionally, this chapter builds on previous ones because we can bring to bear what we now know about zinester identities, cultural discourses that swirl around zine-making, and zine-makers’ descriptions of imagined audiences and the writing process to a fresh analysis of the visual design and materiality of zines.

This chapter has an important connection to our earlier analysis of the zine discovery narratives in Chapter Four. One of the shared meanings we noted in the discovery narratives were detailed descriptions of the appearance and physical form of early zines the speaker either read or made. We found descriptions of the sizes and shapes of these early zines, comments about their handwritten text and illustrations, and details about how they were photocopied and stapled. In Chapter Four, I suggested that these details had several functions in the context of the narrative performance and the speaker’s life story: they slow down the temporal sequence of events in order to emphasize the
uniqueness of the zine and the technical terms used to describe these details (e.g. long armed stapler, quarter-sized, etc.) display moments when the speaking “I” who is an experienced zine-maker leaks into the story-world “I” who is new to zines. But we can also see how including detailed descriptions of early zines is a way for tellers to show their immediate attraction to the physical form of zines. In other words, by honing in on the physical appearance of their early zines, the writers emphasized the importance of and their affinity for the materiality of these small objects: what they feel like in your hand, how they were assembled, what you see as you flip through their pages. These little detailed descriptions in the discovery narratives become a springboard for a more thorough investigation of the visual design and physical form of zines in this chapter.

Through a close reading of excerpts from three zines – *Proof I Exist* (written by Billy), *Stream of Consciousness* (written by Rachel), and *Brainscan* (written by Alex) – this chapter shows how zines are emphatically material objects. I focus on these three zines because they provide some of the richest examples of how textual features, visual elements, and the physical form of the zine itself come together to create meanings. Specifically, I show how visual elements, such as cut-and-paste layouts, use of photographs, and the graphic design of text are crucially important for how we might usefully read and interpret the life narratives and presentation of identities contained within them. These visual elements and design choices shape zines as particular kinds of autobiographical gestures. Throughout this analysis, I show how the position of the reader and the relationship between the zine-maker and her audience are shaped by the specific combinations of image-text-materiality we find in zines. Like previous chapters, this analysis of zine layouts and visual design is also rooted in a larger project of
investigating how zine-makers draw on available semiotic resources – in talk and in their zines – to construct and display identities and bits and pieces of their life stories.

My approach to analyzing the intersection of text, image, and materiality in zines draws from a social semiotic approach to analyzing multimodal texts, as outlined in Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and further developed in Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) and Kress (2003). In this chapter, I use the tools of a social semiotic approach to analyzing visual design and communication in order to interrogate how layouts, use of photographs, and other visual elements contribute to self-making and life story building that goes on in perzines.

This chapter is organized as follows. First I focus the analysis on two self-portrait photographs from *Proof I Exist #5*, along with the textual features and visual design of the pages containing these photographs (Section 6.2). I show how the writer combines the modes of text and image to bring off a “performance of self” (Goffman 1959) that is reflexive, multiple, and dispersed across a set of embedded and embodied self-figures. Next, I turn to another zine called *Stream of Consciousness #1* and I focus the analysis on an old family photograph that appears on the zine’s cover, along with the writer’s textual self-presentation on the first few pages of the zine (Section 6.3). I show how the information conveyed in the photograph, along with the textual features of the first few pages, work together to show how the writer positions her zine as an intimate offering to her readers, while also projecting a self that is hesitant and anxious about making this offer. Finally, I turn to a third zine, *Brainscan #22*, and focus on how the writer manipulates the affordances and constraints of the text and image modes (along with the materiality of the zine form) to accomplishing shifts in “footing” (Goffman 1981) that
support two potentially conflicting “frames” (Goffman 1974) that she balances throughout the issue: the establishment of a close friendship with her readers, while also informing and educating them about a medical procedure she had recently undergone (Section 6.4).

In each of these analyses of the intersection of text, image, and materiality in zines, I show how the social and textual practices of zine-making create an “embodied community” of writers and readers, where the bodies of zine-makers are made salient through the assembly and physical form of zines, but also in places where their actual bodies figure prominently in the constructions of the texts (through photographs and intimate discussions of their bodies).

6.2 Two self-portraits in Proof I Exist

We begin our analysis with a look at issue #5 of Billy’s zine called Proof I Exist. This particular issue is picture heavy; on every page we see a different photo along with handwritten text that has been cut into small pieces of paper and arranged on top of the photo. The size of the issue is 4 ½ x 7 inches, just about the size of a small photo album for 4x6 prints. The size and shape of the issue coupled with the fact that a photograph is displayed on each page creates the sense that you are flipping through Billy’s personal photo album as you read the issue.

Our analysis here focuses on two pages of this issue where we find photographs that depict the zine-maker himself. The cover of this issue (shown below in Figure 6.1) contains an extreme close-up shot that shows only Billy’s head and face which is made-up like a clown. In addition to the clown photo, we also find bits of information that Billy
includes on all his issues’ covers: the zine’s title, issue number, publication date, and price. This information is handwritten in thick black marker on top of the photo. Upon opening the issue, we immediately find another snapshot of Billy (shown below in Figure 6.2), but this time our perspective has zoomed out: we see both his head and shoulders, he’s no longer in costume, he’s dressed in simple clothing and staring directly at the reader. I discuss both photographs, along with the visual design of the pages on which they appear, in turn below. Through an analysis of the visual composition of these photos and the pages on which they appear, I unpack the stances and positions Billy projects for his self and his relationship with his readers.

Figure 6.1 Front cover of Proof I Exist #5
Figure 6.2 Excerpt from Proof I Exist #5

The first point to make about the cover photograph is the very close distance at which we see Billy. In their social semiotic approach to analyzing visual communication, Kress and van Leeuwen draw on Hall (1966) to explain that this kind of close-up shot (head only) creates the feeling of an intimate relationship between the person in the photo and the viewer (1996: 130). In other words, this snapshot of Billy corresponds to our field of vision as if we were standing in front of him at a close and intimate distance. In this way, the photo shapes our relationship with the represented participant as a close and personal one. The handwritten title and other bits of information add to this sense of closeness with the zine-maker by foregrounding the zine as a handmade, amateur, and personalized publication.
But does the fact that we see Billy only in costume complicate the sense of intimacy suggested by the close-up shot? The back cover (not shown here) also features a photograph of Billy in this costume and we find something of an explanation on the last page of the issue where he writes: “The pictures on the front + back covers were taken by Allison. She also did my make-up + costume for Halloween. I was a dead pregnant clown.” Without the explanation on the last page, would readers even recognize Billy’s face in this cover shot? If readers don’t recognize Billy on the cover, does the costume create a small degree of distance between Billy and his audience? In this way, is the costumed self-portrait in tension with the claim for authenticity announced in the zine’s title, *Proof I Exist*? To be sure, the clown photo creates an eye-catching cover and makes us curious about the person’s identity (perhaps more inclined to read the issue), and including a similar image on the back cover creates a sense of symmetry. But I suggest that we can also read the covers’ visual designs, along with the second self-portrait we see in Figure 2, as a playful push and pull between the notions of authenticity, performance, and identity, which I discuss in more detail below.

On the next page of the issue (Figure 2) we see another self-portrait of Billy, this time without a mask of make-up, in the center of the page and framed on either side by blocks of text. Again we see him at a close distance, this time head and shoulders, creating the sense of a close and personal relationship with his readers. More striking is his gaze, which is directed straight towards us. This kind of direct gaze and strong eyeline directed towards the viewer creates what Kress and van Leeuwen call a “demand” whereby the viewer is pulled into some kind of imaginary relationship with the participant in the photo (1996: 122). But what kind of relationship are we drawn into with
Billy? The size of frame (the head and shoulders shot) suggests a personal relationship, as though we are friends. We also see him at eye-level – he’s not looking up or down at us – a point of view which creates a feeling of equality. His facial expression is difficult to pin down; my own interpretation reads it as calm and serene, yet challenging and intense. The expression coupled with the direct gaze creates the sense that we are being forced into some kind of interaction. The simple clothing Billy wears in the photo (a t-shirt and hooded sweatshirt) implies the photo has captured Billy in a backstage or unguarded moment. His style of clothes in this photo is especially salient when we juxtapose this page with the cover shot of him in costume. In contrast to the cover photo, here we see him without costume and in everyday clothing; he appears offstage, although he is still gazing directly towards an imagined audience. The analytical point I wish to make here is that all of the visual elements in the photo – gaze, facial expression, point of view, size of frame – work together to create the sense that Billy is revealing a backstage and unmasked self and that we are positioned as his equal and friend. Yet the self that is constructed through the photo is still performed. Is this more natural photo of Billy a staged self-portrait taken by himself? Or was this a snapshot taken by another person, capturing an everyday moment from Billy’s life?

Another important visual element on this page are the blocks of handwritten text that (we assume) Billy has physically cut-out himself and arranged on top of the photo. I argue that the linguistic and graphic features of text work with the photo itself and the meanings potentially conveyed through the photo. The text functions visually to help frame the central image in the photograph: the two blocks help crop the image, so to speak, and draw our attention even more to Billy and his penetrating stare. We also notice
that the pieces of paper have been unevenly cut out. The method of handwriting text, physically cutting out lines or blocks of text, and pasting them against some kind of background image is an iconic layout style in zine culture called “cut-and-paste.”

I suggest that we can read the handwriting and cut-and-paste layout as features that emphasize the materiality and personalization of the zine, and, in doing so, create a sense of closeness between the zine-maker and his readers. As we hold this issue in our own hands, we see traces of the writer’s hands through his personal style of handwriting and the uneven boxes of text that he physically cut out. In other words, the author’s handwriting, the imperfect cut-out boxes of text, and even the scrap of paper in the corner used as a page number reminds us that we are holding an art-object that was designed, crafted, and assembled by the writer. The self-portrait photograph emphasizes this feeling even more: not only are we holding something in our hands that the zine-maker has made with his hands, the zine-maker is also staring directly at us. The self-portrait works with the handwritten cut-and-paste layout to construct the zine as an “embodied” text where not only is the material form of the zine emphasized (through the labored and hand-crafted production process), but the zine-maker’s physical body is also made salient.

The blocks of text are more than just graphic elements on the page; we also read the content of what Billy wrote. This is the first content page of this issue and typically zine-makers will begin their issues with an introductory page to greet their readers, sometimes apologize for being late with the issue’s publication, and describe details about where and when they wrote the issue content. On this page, Billy writes an introduction that describes how he struggled to get the issue written. Interestingly, he
makes an allusion to his discovery narrative in this introduction. I re-present the text from this page below and add line numbers to make it easier to refer to in the analysis.

(1) I have been making zines since I was in 10th grade. (2) “Back before I even know what a zine was,” or so they say. (3) In the years since then, I have developed a certain style and method for creating my zines. (4) But, for whatever reasons, that method hasn’t been working for me. (5) So, I’ve been frustrated. (6) Enough frustration. (7) Time to switch methods. (8) Time [to] break out the pen and paper. (9) Write, write, write, (10) and we’ll just have to see what comes of it.

In lines 1 and 2, Billy alludes to his zine discovery narrative by mentioning that he has been making zines since high school, and that, like others, he made zines before he knew what they were. In one sense, this is a way that Billy asserts his status as an experienced zine-maker and frames his personal experience as similar to others. He repeats almost exactly the shared meaning he produced in his discovery narrative performances (the canonical one and his own) in line 2: “Back before I even knew what a zine was,” or so they say. However, like we saw in Billy’s interview tellings of the discovery narrative, here we also see how he comments on the trope-like quality of this shared feature. Here he puts the phrase “back before I even knew what a zine was” in quotes and attributes the authorial voice to a vague “they” in or so they say. In Goffman’s (1961) terms, we can say here that Billy is the animator of the utterance in line 2, but uses the quotation marks to show that he is also evoking another’s voice (a possible co-author) and adding the sarcastic “or so they say” is a way to project some distance between his self and the commitment (or principal) expressed in the utterance. The quotation marks signal that
this phrase is being evoked from another context or another’s voice and Billy is marking some kind of distance from his current speaking/writing “I” and the “I” inside the quotation. The quotation marks also signal Billy’s cynical stance towards the use of this phrase as a stereotypical way to display a self that is tightly connected with zine-making, but in doing this meta-discursive work, Billy is also displaying a self that is steeped in zine culture and familiar enough with an emic cultural text to critique its use in regular identity performances.

How can we read the identity work conveyed through the linguistic features of the text with the visual meanings we discussed in the photo? If the photo, constructed with Billy’s pose and direct stare at his reader, works to create the feeling of an intimate moment, the text helps build up this feeling because he lets his mask slip a bit and reveals his awareness of the “constructed-ness” of his performance as an authentic and experienced zine-maker. In this case, the meanings conveyed in the photo and text combine to draw up a position for Billy whereby he builds a connection with his reader and asserts his experienced status as a long-time zine-maker.

But there is also a tension between the idea that Billy is presenting us with an authentic, unmasked self while also commenting on how that sense of authenticity is a performance itself. Ultimately, the placement of these two self-portraits almost side-by-side, coupled with the textual content that surrounds the second photo, is a way that Billy tangles together notions about the authentic self and identity-as-performance. Perhaps by juxtaposing these two images, Billy asks his readers “who is the real me?” or “what is the real performance?” He also implicitly asks these questions in the textual content of his introduction page where he characterizes one of the features of the discovery narrative as
a trope in zine culture, e.g. something that’s often used when zinesters perform their identities. In this way, he calls attention to the performance aspect of zinester identities and the textual scripts that are often rehearsed and repeated. He brings this tension between identity, authenticity, and performance to the surface by manipulating the resources available in the textual mode (through quotation marks and sarcastically attributing the quote to an undifferentiated “they”) and the image mode by juxtaposing the two opposing images of himself (masked and unmasked) and arrangement of the elements in the second photo (his physical stance, gaze, clothing, facial expression, etc.). The analytical point I wish to make here is that all of these meanings are happening simultaneously on the page: the textual and visual modes interact in such a way to give rise to many possible selves and project an identity for Billy that is multiple, reflexive, and fragmented.

6.3 A family photograph in Stream of Consciousness

As a point of contrast, it is interesting to compare Billy’s use of photographs in Proof I Exist #5 with the appearance of a family photograph in the first issue of Rachel’s zine, Stream of Consciousness. On the cover of this issue, we find an old family photograph of her grandmother (shown below in Figure 6.3).
The cover shows much of the same information that we saw on Billy’s: handwritten title, publication date, and issue number. We also see an unattributed quotation handwritten in cursive lettering at the bottom of the page. In the center of the cover, we see a photograph of a woman dressed in a wedding gown sitting between two other women in bridesmaid dresses. All three women are looking down at the bride’s hand, their gazes focused on the bride’s hand and (we assume) ring. There is no direct engagement with the viewer; instead, this photograph “offers” the represented participants as objects to contemplate.
“as though they were specimens in a display case” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 124).
In fact, we do not know the identities of the represented participants in the photo until we open the zine and read the writer’s introduction, shown in Figure 6.4. In this introduction, on the bottom of the right page, the writer captions the photo by writing “P.S. The cover picture is of my grandma on her wedding day.” So how might we usefully read this family photograph in the context of Rachel’s zine, what kind of autobiographical gesture it represents, and how it plays a role in shaping a particular writer-reader relationship?
While the visual arrangement of the elements in the photo does not demand our attention or directly engage us in the same way as Billy’s self-portraits, we do feel as though we are catching a glimpse of a private and special moment shared between these three women. The visual arrangement of the elements in the photo depicts us as outsiders looking in, but we might also feel a sense of closeness with the zine-maker because of her choice to share this old family photograph with us. The meaning of a photograph isn’t located only in the depicted image; instead, photographs are memory-objects (Edwards 1999) whose materiality and forms of presentation are central to understanding their meanings. Even though the photo we see here is a photocopy of the original, we can still see the features that mark it as old: the size is marked at just under 5 x 4 inches and it’s a little grainy (although it’s difficult to tell if this is a result of the photocopy process).

Sharing a photo of her grandmother’s wedding day locates Rachel’s zine in an interesting temporal space by connecting the zine and its contents that describe her current life experiences to a past moment in her family’s history at which she wasn’t present. In her zine, Rachel describes her life experiences during the summer between her first and second year of college: she writes about her summer job, the excitement of
renting her very first apartment, and the difficulties of re-adjusting to life back home when she returns to visit her parents. At times, the zine’s content is intensely personal where she reflects on her stage in life, the shape her past has taken, and what the future might hold. The photo on the cover isn’t of herself, though, but of her grandmother when she was young. In this way, we could read the photograph on the outside of the zine as a way to contextualize the pieces of her life story she displays inside within a broader network of people, characters, and events in her family biography.

Figure 6.4 *Excerpt from Stream of Consciousness #1*
In her introduction to the issue (shown in Figure 6.4), Rachel also explains that the quote written in cursive lettering on the front cover was taken from a phrase she wrote in her journal. It is interesting that she uses quotation marks for her own voice, but perhaps they signal that the words come from another textual source or that the words were originally spoken by a past “I” who is different from the “I” who assembles this issue. In either interpretation, the quotation marks create a small degree of distance between the zine-maker and her words, although displaying a quote from her journal is a way to position her readers as close and intimate. While the visual elements of the photo partly position the reader as an outsider looking in, the quotation textually marks the writer as somewhat of an outsider to her own words. It is as if the cover photo and quotation are both artifacts from the writer’s past and she joins her readers in looking back and remembering them.

This back and forth between closeness and distance, the current self and a past one, insider and outsider is echoed in other parts of the text Rachel writes in her introduction. I re-present two sections of text from her page (with line numbers) so that we can unpack the details of this section more closely.

(1) I’ve never made a zine before, (2) and I’m honestly pretty shocked that I am sitting in front of it right now. (3) Considering that this project was done mostly for myself (4) and that my procrastination may have affected its overall quality, (5) I won’t be surprised if you don’t make it to the last page.
(6) But I hope you do. (7) And I would love to hear your opinions. (8) Tell me what’s good. (9) More importantly, tell me what sucks. (10) Tell me if you think there should ever be an Issue #2.

In this introduction, Rachel unequivocally positions herself as a newcomer to zine-making (line 1) and projects a self that is somewhat hesitant about offering her zine up for consideration and evaluation by her readers. She anticipates a reader that may not like what she’s produced. She directly comments on the quality of her work and gives her readers an excuse to not even read the zine (lines 4 and 5). She positions the zine as an object she created for herself (line 3), without a particular audience in mind, but then also directly asks for her readers’ opinions and feedback (line 7). She gives her reader a lot of power when she asks for criticism and leaves it up to her reader to decide whether she will produce a second issue. These kinds of statements are strikingly different from the way Billy opened his issue, where he asserted his long-time status as a zine-maker and confidently told his reader he was “trying a new style” and would see what happens. With Rachel, there seems to be more anxiety around how her zine will be received by an audience. This section of her introduction positions the zine as something offered to her readers, to be examined, evaluated, and possibly judged. These meanings are mirrored in the photograph of her grandmother on the cover. Both the photograph and Rachel’s text in this introduction position the zine as an intimate offering for her readers, an opportunity to have a peak into the details of her personal life. We might think of this hesitancy and anxiety in offering up her first zine to a public readership as a way that Rachel mitigates the intimacy of such an act. Is she reaching out to us, asking us to come
closer? Or does she keep herself at a distance by suggesting that the zine was only a personal project and gives us an “out” to stop reading?

On the bottom right page, Rachel gives her reader a suggested soundtrack for this issue, listing four band names and song titles. In her work on Australian zine culture, Anna Poletti suggests that soundtrack lists in zines create a sense of closeness between the writer and reader by “creating a sonic and cultural space in which the reader and zinester can meet; by suggesting albums, artists or particular tracks to listen to while reading the zine, a zinester suggests common ground, or grounds for further exploration, which indicate particular musical tastes” (2008b: 120). In other words, presenting this list of songs is an identity move whereby Rachel seems to say “I am the type of person who listens to this kind of music” We can also see the soundtrack list as a type of artifact from the zine-maker’s everyday life that makes it into the zine. Perhaps one of the media-specific constraints of print zines is the difficulty of incorporating actual sound (although we could imagine the possibility of a zine-maker distributing a mixed CD with issues of their zine). But soundtrack lists circumvent this problem and afford zine-makers the opportunity to include song titles that serve as a representation of what kind of person they see themselves to be via what kind of music they listen to. The soundtrack list also contributes to the sense of closeness between Rachel and her readers.

In sum, the analytical point I wish to make here is that the different ways Billy and Rachel design their zines, use photographs, and create text-image configurations show different subjectivities at work. With Billy, we saw how he used two self-portraits, along with the textual content, to evoke many possible selves and emphasize the “constructed-ness” of identity performance. With Rachel, we saw how an old family
photograph on the cover of her zine worked with the textual content to project a self that was hesitant and anxious about offering up her first zine to an outside readership. We also saw how both zine-makers also manipulated the affordances of the text and image modes to create an intimate and close relationship with their readers. We now turn to our third case study, an issue from a long-running zine called *Brainscan*, written by Alex. Like Billy, Alex also uses cut-and-paste layouts, and like Billy and Rachel, she also includes a photograph. My analysis of Alex’s zine focuses on the way she manipulates the constraints and affordances of text and image modes to accomplish micro-level footing shifts that “keep alive” two potentially conflicting frames: creating a close connection with her readers and informing them of the details of a medical procedure she recently experienced.

6.4 Messy imperfections, layouts, and materiality in *Brainscan*

Similar to the layout design we saw in *Proof I Exist*, another zine-maker named Alex also uses the cut-and-paste technique, albeit with less photographs, to create pages of her zine *Brainscan*. Issue #22 of *Brainscan* is dedicated to the topic of women’s reproductive healthcare and birth control, specifically Alex’s personal experience of getting an IUD (Intra Uterine Device). The cover of this issue is shown in Figure 6.5 below.
This issue is small in scale, only slightly smaller than 5 ½ x 4 ½ inches, and 32 pages printed in black and white on standard copy paper. The front and back cover of this issue is made with a heavier light pink cardstock. Glued to the cardstock on the front cover is a smaller piece of white paper with a laser printed color image of a pink uterus, the zine’s title and issue number hand-stamped in silver metallic ink, and the subtitle – *a practical body modification* – printed in a calligraphy-like font. We can immediately see how the design of the cover is crafty and personal: the writer has physically glued the image of the uterus and stamped the title and issue number on each individual copy. The picture of the uterus also makes the cover of this issue intensely intimate and gendered.

Alex divides this issue into two sections (we see how she breaks from one section into another later), but for now, we focus on the first section where she writes about the information she has gathered from her research about IUDs. Consider the following two pages where she describes what the experience of getting an IUD is like:
First, let’s consider the overall visual design and choice of typography for these pages. The layout is arranged with three chunks of typewritten text pasted against a darker background. Similar to Billy’s layout in *Proof I Exist*, here we see uneven boxes of text that have been physically cut out, we assume by the zine-maker herself. But instead of handwriting, the text on these pages has been produced with a typewriter\(^7\), a tool that Alex uses frequently in her zine-making. We know that the technology of the typewriter has its own sets of affordances and limitations. For example, typewriters make it difficult to erase mistakes or go back and edit a text once it’s been typed out. Here, we find several places in the text where some words have been covered over with X’s while other small grammatical “mistakes” are left unedited, e.g. a missing plural ending on “two

---

\(^7\) The typewriter is a technology that is often used in zine-making. The use of typewriters fits with the DIY ethic of creative salvaging or recycling of “old” technologies and production materials for zine-making rather than relying on corporate word processing programs (cf. Eichhorn 2001).
week” or a non-standard spelling “divice” for device. One way of analyzing these small imperfections in the text is to contextualize them within a discussion of the limitations of the technology. Instead, we could suggest an alternate reading of these mistakes as part of the affordances, or meaning potentials, of the typewriter. These imperfections and small mistakes are little “bumps” in the writing that give the text its texture and emphasize its handmade and amateur quality. These messy imperfections help create a connection between Alex and her readers; she seems closer to us because we see her unedited and imperfect text. Chidgey (2006) writes: “sometimes zines leave a ‘trail of revision’ in crossings out and qualifications, which show the making-subject and identity process in motion, and add to the self-reflexivity of the author’s presence in their zine” (6). Here, Alex draws on the semiotic affordances of the typewriter to leave these “trails of revision” and help shape this kind of relationship with her readers similar to the same way Billy and Rachel used the meanings associated with photographs to position their readers as close friends, outsiders, or a mixture of both.

In addition to the visual design and typographic choice, we also find linguistic features on these pages that shape the relationship between Alex and her readers, specifically referring terms and alternation between passive and active voice. Through an analysis of these two linguistic features, I show how Alex shifts between two footings vis-à-vis her text, her self, and her readers. Specifically, I show how she fluctuates between positioning herself as knowledgeable and authoritative about the medical issues surrounding the experience of getting an IUD, while at the same time positioning herself as a close friend with her reader. These two frames – informing her readers about a
medical issue and creating a close connection – are potentially in conflict with each other
(see, for example, Tannen and Wallet 1993).

First, we can look at the referring language Alex uses for medical terminology to
find traces of these two frames. For example, we notice that some medical referring terms
are introduced with the phrase “an instrument called X” as a way to link an unfamiliar
term (like tenaculum) to a more familiar category (that it’s some kind of instrument):

The cervix is held by an instrument called a tenaculum
Then another instrument called a “sound” is inserted into the cervix

That Alex designs some referrals in this way implicitly shapes the reader as someone
unfamiliar with medical terms. Yet she also uses other medical lexical items freely,
without anchoring them to a familiar referent, suggesting an assumption that her reader is
familiar with the term. For example, we find an unanchored first-mention of a device
known as the speculum.

You put your feet up the same way you would in a pelvic exam
and a speculum is inserted

Alex also often mixes medical and non-medical language throughout the text. For
example, when describing the device through which the IUD is inserted, Alex uses the
term a surgical tube but then switches to the straw in the next-mention.

A surgical tube is inserted containing the IUD causing more discomfort and the
folded up “T” is pushed through the straw
In another example, she describes the paper robes patients wear as *one of those annoying paper dresses*, but throughout the entire text refers to the experience of getting an IUD as *the insertion*. Another interesting mixing happens with reference to body parts: Alex explicitly makes salient her readers’ body parts (*your stomach, your vagina, your feet*) but then uses more distancing terms for the internal organs (*the cervix, the cervical canal, the uterus*).

These referring terms are manifestations of the interactional work being accomplished in these two pages. Alex is juggling two different frames: she’s educating her readers about the procedure of getting an IUD by providing detailed information in an objective way, but she’s also involved in constructing and maintaining a sense of closeness with her readers. These two frames uneasily bump up against with each other because highly specific medical language could be off-putting to a non-medical audience, but using specific medical terms helps build a sense of authority and credibility. By using the technical terms, Alex is displaying her well-researched knowledge about the topic. On the other hand, we find linguistic features that emphasize a closeness with her readers, where she seems to say “we are both girls and we share the same bodily experiences.” For example, she assumes a shared knowledge about *those annoying paper dresses* or that her reader knows how to put her feet up *the same way you would in a pelvic exam*.

We can also characterize non-medical terms like *the straw* or putting quotation marks around a medical term like “sound” as ways that Alex keeps her reader close by taking up her reader’s imagined, non-medical perspective.
In sum, while the visual design of the text (through the messy imperfections from the typewriter and the cut-and-paste layout) emphasized a close and personal relationship with her audience, the picture is more complicated when we look carefully at the linguistic features of the text. On the next page of the issue, Alex announces to her reader that she is breaking from a clinical description of IUDs to write about her own experience of getting one.

Figure 6.7 Excerpt from Brainscan #22

One the left page, we see a very different arrangement of text than the earlier pages. Here, the text is cut out into six lines, arranged as six different blocks of text on the left side of the page. We also see an image of a hand holding a small T-shaped object, which given the topic of the content, we can interpret as a graphic representation of an IUD. There is also a large arrow at the bottom of this page that points to the following page on the right. The arrow helps to structure our reading path, moving from left to right.
Another important design feature here is that the text on this page is larger and appears
darker than the text on the surrounding pages.

By altering the size of the letters, their color saturation, and spacing between text
lines on this page, Alex creates a different kind of layout than we see in the previous
pages and the pages that follow. This different arrangement of text and image creates the
feeling of a break or a pause between sections. Indeed, the content of what she writes on
this page has a metadiscursive function; she explicitly frames what came before as a
clinical explanation and what comes next as a description of her personal experience
from a particular time in her life, April 2006. In addition to the explicit marking of this
section as personal, we also find linguistic features that characterize this account as
personal, including the switch from general “you” to “I” and “we”. But crucially, it’s the
combination of what is written and how it’s graphically displayed that accomplishes the
discourse-organizing function. She addresses her reader directly here, giving us specific
instructions for how to interpret and understand what came before and what’s coming
next. Another way to put this point is to say that Alex uses the resources and affordances
of both the text and image modes to explicitly key a frame shift from information-
educational discourse to personal experience narrative. However, we noted that the
boundary between these frames is porous as Alex balances the demands of presenting an
objective, medical explanation of the procedure and constructing a close and personal
relationship with her readers.

Finally, on the last page of this issue Alex includes a photo she took on her
camera phone of her actual IUD during her appointment (shown below in 7). Below the
photo she handwrites a caption: “A camera phone picture of my actual IUD before it was inside me… weird hu?”

Figure 6.8 Alex’s camera phone photo of her IUD

The photo is blurry and requires the reader to squint to make it out; the image is almost completely unidentifiable without the caption Alex wrote. She directly addresses her reader here: the question weird hu? is a first-pair part of an imagined adjacency pair, opening up a conversational slot for her readers to respond in agreement. Including this photo is an intensely personal gesture: she shares photographic evidence of her actual experience, bringing her readers into the exam room with her. Throughout the issue she juggled the medical information frame with efforts to sustain a personal connection with her readers, but on the final page she ends by reinforcing a feeling of closeness and intimacy.
6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused my analytical lens directly on the zine texts themselves. Through a close reading of excerpts from three zines – *Proof I Exist* (written by Billy), *Stream of Consciousness* (written by Rachel), and *Brainscan* (written by Alex) – I showed how these writers projected identities and shaped relationships with their readers through particular combinations of text, image, and materiality in their texts. The analysis showed how these zines are emphatically material and embodied objects, and how textual features combine with visual elements (such as cut-and-paste layouts, use of photographs, and the graphic design of text) to give rise to individual self-constructions and relationships with their readers.

Specifically, in *Proof I Exist* #5, I analyzed the information conveyed in two self-portrait photographs, along with the textual features and visual design of the pages containing these photographs. I showed how the writer combines the modes of text and image to bring off a “performance of self” (Goffman 1959) that is reflexive, multiple, and dispersed across a set of embedded and embodied self-figures. In another zine, *Stream of Consciousness* #1, I focused the analysis on an old family photograph that appears on the zine’s cover, along with the writer’s textual self-presentation on the first few pages of the zine. The analysis illuminated how the information conveyed in the photograph, along with the textual features of the first few pages, worked together to show how the writer positions her zine as an intimate offering to her readers, while also projecting a self that is hesitant and anxious about making this offer. Finally, I turned to a third zine, *Brainscan* #22, and focused on how the writer manipulated the affordances and constraints of the text and image modes (along with the materiality of the zine form) to accomplish shifts in
“footing” (Goffman 1981) that supported two potentially conflicting “frames” (Goffman 1974) that she balanced throughout the issue: the establishment of a close friendship with her readers, while also informing and educating them about a medical procedure she had recently undergone. Yet we also saw how she ended the zine with a gesture that emphasized closeness and intimacy with her readers.

By bringing these analyses together, I showed how the social and textual practices of zine-making create an “embodied community” of writers and readers, where the bodies of zine-makers are made salient through the assembly and physical form of zines, but also in places where their actual bodies figure prominently in the constructions of the texts (through photographs and intimate discussions of their bodies).
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I organized my examination of narrative, identity, the life story, and zine-making around three specific investigations that made up Chapters Four, Five, and Six. In this final chapter, I first provide a discussion that reviews the highlights from the analyses (section 7.2) and then discuss how these analyses can be brought together to show a fuller picture of the repertoires and practices zinesters draw on to accomplish their identity performances (section 7.3). Next, I revisit the theoretical discussion of the life story and describe how the ideology of DIY provides a coherence system for members of the zine community to draw on as they construct their life stories (section 7.4). Finally, I review some of the methodological implications of my study (section 7.5) and offer thoughts on ways to extend this analysis of zine culture into studies of other types of communities (section 7.6).

7.2 Summary of findings

In Chapter Four, I examined a central narrative that emerged in most of my interviews with zine-makers, what I call the zine discovery narrative. I showed how most speakers narrated their early experiences of seeing a zine for the first time as a “turning point” (Mishler 1999, Bruner 1994) in their life stories. Through these narratives, the speakers described and enacted an “aha” or light bulb moment when they first saw or heard about
zines and how this internal awakening moment led to their (sometimes immediate) decision to make their first zine.

The analysis focused on the discovery narrative performances of five speakers. We saw how two speakers told a full fledged discovery narrative in interviews with me, but then revisited their narratives at later points in the same interview (or during a second interview) and provided a “second take” (Mishler 2004) that projected different versions of their self and their relationship to zine-making and the larger community of zine discovery narratives and narrators. Specifically, I analyzed how one speaker’s (Matt) retelling served to “restory” (Mishler 1999) his discovery experience and “aha” moment to fit a more personal storyline in his life story about a difficult time in his life when he struggled artistically with a college writing professor. I analyzed how the second speaker (Billy) retold the discovery narrative as an instance of “metaparody” (Morson 1989) through which he called attention to the way zinesters “put on” their identity performances through the performance of this narrative.

We then met a third speaker (LB) who told a brief, yet thickly agentive discovery narrative and showed how the situated context of the interview – and the speaker’s attachment to the role of “helpful research subject” – impinged on the narrative performance. The fourth speaker (Rachel) we looked at was a newcomer to zine-making at the time of our interview, having only produced her first zine a few weeks prior to our conversation. Since this speaker was one of the final interviews I conducted, I was familiar at that point with the shared structural and evaluative features of the discovery narrative. I show in the analysis that when she didn’t produce a narrative that resembled the others, I shaped my turns-at-talk to try and “pull out” a thicker zine discovery
narrative. Ultimately, I show how Rachel told a “thin” discovery narrative in support of her self-construction as a newcomer to the zine community and how this “newbie” status played a crucial role in our interactional positioning during the interview. I closed the analysis of the zine discovery narratives with a discussion of a speaker who did not produce one. Rather, this speaker (Andrew) told a “generic narrative” (Baynham 2006) in support of a larger move to project “role distance” (Goffman 1961) from a full fledged zinester identity. Ultimately, I showed how the situated interaction in which all of these tellings emerged impinged on the performances, how each speaker used the narrative to fit the discovery experience into a sense of their unique life and self history, and how each narrative performance projected a self that was more or less connected to the identity category of “zinester” or a sense of a community of discovery narratives and narrators.

The analysis continued in Chapter Five, where I focused on the way zine producers project themselves as particular types of life-writers through talk about their zine-making. I telescoped the analysis on the voices of two zine producers who I interviewed and showed the linguistic, interactional, and ideological resources each speaker drew on to accomplish “speaking like a writer” and consequently position their zine as a particular kind of autobiographical gesture. The analysis focused on the micro-level discursive processes through which each speaker drew up their particular writer position. Ultimately, I made the case that these positions emerged locally as situated performances that I more or less collaborated in producing, and globally as larger discursive moves that projected a self in relation to imagined others (e.g. zinesters,
English teachers, and other writers) as well as larger circulating ideologies about DIY and writing.

For example, I showed how the first speaker (Liz) projected evaluative stances against the DIY flavor of zine-making, and instead aligned her own approach to writing with more mainstream ideologies about writing and publishing. Through this stance work, she drew up a position as a writer who is careful and meticulous, yet also struggles with each stage of the writing process, and positioned her zine as a kind of investigative, well-researched autobiography. The analysis focused on the linguistic and paralinguistic features that work in support of this identity, including discourse markers, referring terms, dramatic shifts in voice quality, and reported speech (or “constructed dialogue” in Tannen’s 1989 terms). In these excerpts, I show how my own status as writer was made interactionally relevant, and through my turns-at-talk and contributions, I worked with Liz to emphasize our shared identities as writers through collaborative stance-taking and reference building. For the second speaker (Matt), I showed how he drew up a position as writer that is also connected to larger circulating ideologies about DIY, zine-making, and writing; however, in Matt’s case, his self-positioning as a writer was more grounded in a sense of his self and life history. He evoked his training as a writer (e.g. an advanced degree and his experience as an English major in college) in support of an identity as a skilled, professional writer, while at the same time projected stances that emphasize his commitment to the DIY ethic that zines are forms of creative expression free from external and institutional writing ideologies. In this way, Matt brought his “epistemic self” (Bruner 1990) more fully into the construction of a writer identity, linking his zine-making and approach to the writing process to a core aspect of his self, his beliefs, and
his personal ideological commitments. Ultimately, this contrastive analysis shows how
the identity category of “writer” among zinesters is elastic and can stretch to include
different levels of investment in underground and mainstream ideologies about writing,
self-publishing, and the role of DIY ethics in zine-making.

In Chapter Six, I turned my analytical lens to focus directly on the zine texts
themselves. Through a close reading of excerpts from three zines – *Proof I Exist* (written
by Billy), *Stream of Consciousness* (written by Rachel), and *Brainscan* (written by Alex)
– I showed how these writers projected identities and shaped relationships with their
readers through particular combinations of text, image, and materiality in their zines. The
analysis showed how these zines are emphatically material and embodied objects, and
how textual features combine with visual elements (such as cut-and-paste layouts, use of
photographs, and the graphic design of text) to give rise to individual self-constructions
and relationships with their readers.

Specifically, in *Proof I Exist* #5, I analyzed the information conveyed in two self-
portrait photographs, along with the textual features and visual design of the pages
containing these photographs. I showed how the writer combines the modes of text and
image to bring off a “performance of self” (Goffman 1959) that is reflexive, multiple, and
dispersed across a set of embedded and embodied self-figures. In another zine, *Stream of
Consciousness* #1, I focused the analysis on an old family photograph that appears on the
zine’s cover, along with the writer’s textual self-presentation on the first few pages of the
zine. The analysis illuminated how the information conveyed in the photograph, along
with the textual features of the first few pages, worked together to show how the writer
positions her zine as an intimate offering to her readers, while also projecting a self that is
hesitant and anxious about making this offer. Finally, I turned to a third zine, *Brainscan* #22, and focused on how the writer manipulated the affordances and constraints of the text and image modes (along with the materiality of the zine form) to accomplish shifts in “footing” (Goffman 1981) that supported two potentially conflicting “frames” (Goffman 1974) that she balanced throughout the issue: establishing a close friendship with her readers, while also informing and educating them about a medical procedure she had recently undergone. By bringing these analyses together, I showed how the social and textual practices of zine-making create an “embodied community” of writers and readers, where the bodies of zine-makers are made salient through the assembly and physical form of zines, but also in places where their actual bodies figure prominently in the constructions of the texts (through photographs and intimate discussions of their bodies).

### 7.3 Zinester identity repertoires and practices

By bringing all three of these analytical pieces together, this dissertation sheds light on the wide array of available discursive resources speakers can draw on to construct and project their identities as zine-makers. These separate analyses come together to provide a fuller picture of the repertoires that people who make zines draw on in order to discursively accomplish their identities as zinesters and show their degrees of membership in a larger zine community. This dissertation illuminates the shared ways of speaking and some of the textual practices of zine-making that produce recognizable zinester identities.

For example, the zine discovery narratives that I analyze in Chapter Four appear to be a shared social and linguistic practice, part of a zinester’s repertoire, that can be
appropriated or “taken on” as speakers do zine-relevant identity work. The discovery narratives also appear to be a ritualized practice in the zine community where the DIY principle that anyone is a potential creator of culture – or specifically a potential zinester – is actively articulated and reinforced. In Chapter One, I discussed the idea put forth in Poletti (2008b) that one way this DIY principle emerges in zine culture is through individual stories of inspiration where zine producers will describe how they were inspired to make a zine after reading one. My work on the zine discovery narratives shows how these narrative performances function not only to maintain this DIY idea, but also to produce a recognizable zinester identity that links the speaker’s presentation of self to a larger community of zinester selves and life stories. By articulating this principle through a narrative, the speaker is able to not just tell about their decision to make a zine as a result of reading one, but to show these moments of inspiration, through dramatic and linguistically exaggerated enactments of “aha” moments. In other words, a speaker might respond to the question “how did you learn about zines or decide to make a zine?” by simply saying “Someone gave me a zine and reading it made me want to make one myself.” While this brief account describes the core sequence of events (reading a zine leads to making one), it does not construe the experience as a pivotal “big” moment in the speaker’s life. On the other hand, my analysis shows how the speakers I interviewed described their coming to zine-making in narrative form, which provided the possibility to perform and dramatize their moments of inspiration through the use of constructed dialogue and other linguistic and paralinguistic evaluative devices (e.g. adverbs, collapsed auxiliary verbs that express obligation, emphatic stress, increased rate of speech, etc.). By narrating their individual zine discovery experiences in similar ways, the
speakers reinforce their membership in the same community, help “keep alive” one of the core ideological principles that make up the community, and also integrate their zine-making into a sense of their larger, coherent life story.

The writer identities and stances that I analyze in Chapter Five also highlight shared linguistic, ideological, and social practices that help individuals construct their membership in a larger zine community. The analysis shows how the linguistic practice of “speaking like a writer” in zine culture requires speakers to navigate big “D” discourses (Gee 2005) about mainstream and underground ideologies of writing. I showed how positioning oneself as a writer in the zine community is part of a larger interdiscursive move to make claims about how ideas about writing – that stem from DIY principles and also mainstream ideological sites of writing – can and should be understood in zine culture. In other words, the practice of “speaking like a writer” in zine culture can be tied up with other social practices and ideologies that help define and shape the community. Similarly, the analysis in Chapter Six sheds light on some of the shared textual practices of zine assembly that are part of a zinester’s repertoire, such as using “old” technologies like typewriters, or cut-and-paste layouts and messy writing. These shared practices can be seen as a way the zine-maker produces a recognizable zinester self and connects their text to a larger community of texts and other zine producers.

Yet while this dissertation provides a fuller picture of the resources and practices for doing identity work in zine culture, the details of the analyses actually complicate this picture. At many points during the analyses, I brought out moments when speakers were critical or cynical of the way these resources and practices typically get used in
performances of zinester identities. For example, in Chapter Four we saw how the zine
discovery narrative can be reworked and shaped to fit very different kinds of identity
performances, not just a full fledged zinester. In Chapter Five, we saw how the two
speakers Liz and Matt positioned themselves in ways that showed not everyone in the
zine community is in agreement on how mainstream and underground ideologies about
writing should be applied to zines. In this way, this dissertation shows that the identity
category of zinester is not at all static and monolithic; rather, like most identities, it is a
fluid and multifaceted state of being whose set of meanings and ideological
underpinnings are continually being worked out and negotiated by the speakers who
claim membership in the community. In this dissertation, I have only been able to provide
a preliminary sketch of some of the linguistic and social practices that make up zine
culture and a larger and longer ethnographic investigation would be necessary to uncover
and examine the full life of these practices in the community.

7.4 Revisiting the life story

The analyses in this dissertation underscore the idea that we can find glimpses of
a person’s life story in discursive practices that go beyond the big, tidy, and pre-packaged
Labovian narratives that typically make up the ingredients of the life story. Instead, other
kinds of narrative activity, such as “second takes” (Mishler 2004) or refusals to tell, and
other kinds of discursive work, such as clusters of stance-taking and interactional
positioning moves, can also provide traces of identity work that build up a larger, long-
term sense of self.
More than this, however, these analyses also provide in-depth and detailed pictures of the ways individual speakers orient their talk – and the bits and pieces of their life stories that emerge from this talk – to a larger socio-cultural frame of zine culture, namely the big “D” discourse (Gee 2005) of DIY. In this way, we might think of DIY ideologies as constituting a coherence system (in Linde’s 1993 terms) that speakers draw on in order to make their personal self and life histories fit with a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world that is known and shared among members of the zine community. In other words, by narrating their discoveries of zines in similar ways and also by drawing on shared practices for producing and assembling their zines, speakers create intertextual coherence between their individual narratives and a larger set of zine-relevant life narratives and narrators. Yet the analyses in this dissertation also show ways the individual speakers shaped their identity performances to project different degrees of distance from the set of typical performances in the community. For example, in Chapter Five we saw how two speakers overtly challenged ideas about the necessary messiness of DIY writing in zines. In this way, we see how speakers can draw on culturally-meaningful coherence systems while still leaving room to maneuver within those systems in order to present a self and life history that is unique and personal, yet still tied to the larger community. My analysis shows that while coherence systems provide contexts and frames for speakers to tell their personal life stories, they do not necessarily produce mechanical outcomes where all speakers narrate and understand the events and experiences in their lives in the same way.
7.5 Methodological implications

Throughout this dissertation, my discussions paid close attention to my own participation in co-constructing the narratives, stances, and identities I extracted from the interviews as data for analysis. Paying close attention to my own turns-at-talk and contributions in the communicative context of the interview, and also my perspective as reader from which I approach the zine texts, is part of a larger goal throughout this project of throwing into greater relief the analyst’s role in eliciting, co-constructing, and retelling our participants’ stories.

Another important methodological point that my study highlights is how my activities as interviewer strongly affected the shape of the conversations and the resulting data I analyzed. For example, the order in which I conducted the interviews became important to note in the analysis because as I talked with each zine producer, I became more familiar with the ideological themes and discursive practices in the community. Each interview provided a context for the next one, and so on. It is important to note, however, that my activities as interviewer during the later conversations were influenced by my earlier conversations and consequently I ended up asking questions and providing opportunities for certain kinds of talk to emerge that were simply not possible in the earlier conversations. For example, when I prompted Matt and Billy to revisit their discovery narrative performances, I was actively drawing on my knowledge and awareness of the culturally-shared practice, information that I didn’t have during my first few interviews. While my prompts resulted in rich data that gave me new insights into the functions of the discovery narrative performances, it is important to acknowledge my role in eliciting and co-constructing these second performances. Moreover, there are possible
disadvantages to this method of interviewing to the extent that the contexts for each conversation are so different, it becomes difficult to compare and group together the “same” types of discourse from different speakers and interviews.

### 7.6 Beyond zines

For the set of emerging scholarship around zines and zine culture, this present study is useful because it critically examines the identity category of zinester and unpacks some of the discursive and textual practices for accomplishing performances of that identity. Yet this analysis of zine identities and practices can also be relevant for scholars who are interested in discourse analysis and social interaction more broadly defined. In this final section, I describe some of the ways my work in this dissertation can be extended or provide starting points for further studies of language, discourse, and social interaction.

Throughout this analysis, I have shown ways that members of the zine community maneuver their individual identity performances in and around larger big “D” discourses (Gee 2005) that swirl around zine culture, sometimes evoking and appropriating aspects of these discourses and other times overtly challenging and contesting their role in zine culture. In this way, zine communities might be like other communities with both an assumed allegiance to a particular ideology and tensions between how that ideological commitment should play out in the social practices that define the group. For example, the discovery narratives I analyzed in Chapter Four provided a rich discursive site in which to unpack and examine how speakers actively produced and maintained important ideological components of zine culture through the way they narrated their individual beginnings and entries into the community. In this way, it would be useful to examine how members of other types of communities narrate their beginnings and pathways into
the group as part of a larger inquiry into how speakers come to narrate the personal
events in their lives – and even come to understand the significance of these events – in
ways that cohere and mesh with the ideologies of the communities to which they claim
membership.

Another way to extend this analysis of zines and zine-making is to consider other
types of communities which share an orientation to material and handmade culture with
the goals of documenting a life-as-lived. For example, do zine communities share
something in common with present-day scrapbooking communities? What are the
linguistic, ideological, and interactional resources a scrapbooker might draw on to
construct and present their identities in ways that align or disalign with the norms and
values of the community? This is only a brief example to make the point that this
dissertation opens up questions about other participatory and creative communities and
the sets of linguistic, social, and cultural practices that have come to shape and define
them.
APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

(Adapted from Schiffrin 1987, Tannen 1989)

[ Brackets show overlap
[ (two speakers talking simultaneously)

the letter “z” placed between two lines
Z shows latched utterances where there is no perceptible inter-turn pause

underline indicates emphatic stress

? indicates rising intonation

\ indicates falling intonation

´ accent indicates primary stress

: colon following vowel indicates elongated vowel sound

\indicates a marked increase in speed of talking

- hyphen indicates glottal stop, abrupt stop

.. indicates pause (number of dots roughly corresponds to length of pause)

= equal sign at right of line indicates segment to be continued after another’s turn; equal sign at left of line indicates continuation of prior segment after another’s turn

/!/ indicates an inaudible segment

“” quotation marks highlight constructed dialogue
REFERENCES


Ayometzi, Cecilia Castillo. 2007. Storying as becoming: Identity through the telling of conversion. In Michael Bamberg, Anna de Fina, and Deborah Schiffrin (eds.) *Selves and identities in narrative and discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 41-70.


Dale, Pete. 2008. It was easy, it was cheap, so what?: Reconsidering the DIY principle of punk and indie music. *Popular Music History* 3(2): 171-193.


Schiffrin, Deborah. 2006. *In other words: Variation in reference and narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Tannen, Deborah. 2008. ‘We’ve never been close, we’re very different’: Three narrative types in sister discourse. *Narrative Inquiry* 18(2): 206-229.


