MANAGING THE SELF: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BULLET JOURNALING CONTENT ON YOUTUBE

Julia Martínez Nieto
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Department of Language and
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Faculty	Department
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Author	
Julia Martínez Nieto	
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Abstract This study analysed the practice of bullet journaling through its portrayal in instructional YouTube videos. Applying a multimodal critical discourse analysis methodology, the study examined the main characteristics of bullet journaling in terms of its main features and functions, and related said characteristics to the underlying discourses framing the practice. The data set consisted of ten videos on bullet journaling from AmandaRachLee's YouTube channel. The multimodal analysis focused on the journal as a visual canvas as well as on the contents of the videos' voice-overs, where the creator talked about her thoughts on bullet journaling and her journaling process. The study found that the journal's aesthetic dimension, as well as bullet journaling's portrayal as a pleasant activity which allows users to connect to positive emotions, were foregrounded in the videos. The journal's role as a tool for mediating emotion emerged as a central aspect of the practice, which also mediated the practitioner's relationship with the self-work that was performed through the journal. This approach to self- and productivity work resonated with neoliberal discourses on individual responsibility, the nature of emotion, and expectations related to emotional management and the upkeep of a "functional self" in a neoliberal context.

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1   INTRODUCTION

In the late 1990s, Ryder Carroll was struggling to meet the productivity demands of everyday life as a college student. As someone who had been diagnosed with ADD but didn't have access to any specific support resources, he was looking for a way to focus his attention on the things that mattered to him while still keeping on top of his obligations. To deal with this situation, he started to develop his own organisational method, which he started sharing it with others online in 2013 under the name of "the bullet journal method". His method quickly grew in popularity, and is used by thousands of people today. (Mejia, 2017)

One of the unique qualities of bullet journaling is that it allows users to manage and store all of their personal information in a single notebook, making it easier to keep track of everything at once in a simple, organised manner. The method makes use of a blank notebook in which users hand-draw their own organisational modules and set up their own planners following Carroll's methodology. As such, the bullet journal method can be adapted to each person's planning preferences and needs, and is based on the concept of so-called "intentional living", through which users can intentionally focus their attention and resources on what matters most to them in life, thus prioritising the things that are important to them and helping them achieve their goals. (Bullet Journal, 2020; see also Meija, 2017; TEDx Talks, 2017, Waterstones, 2018)

Through bullet journaling, users can e.g. quickly log tasks, ideas, lists and appointments by using a simple, adaptable symbol system which uses bullets to signify tasks, hence the name of the method (a typical example of this symbol system is displayed in figure 1). Tasks, lists, and other elemnts may be organised e.g. yearly, monthly, weekly or daily (see figure 2), or under specific "collections" (i.e. by topic), such as "meal ideas" or "watchlist" (see figure 3).

FIGURE 1   Example of a typical bullet journal key, where the symbols used for rapid logging are displayed. (Shannon, 2018)

FIGURE 2   Example of a so-called "future log", a typical long term spread to keep track of
                  tasks, appointments and events.[1]

FIGURE 3   Example of a collection to keep track of TV series.[2]

[1] Retrieved March 29, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJYI1WYL4XI/>
[2] Retrieved March 29, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BnLPnuWHyAm/>

FIGURE 4   Example of a habit tracker with a module for goal setting on the right side of the page.[3]

Because of its customisable nature, the options for what users can keep track of through their journals are endless, but some popular bullet journaling modules include habit and mood trackers (see an example in figure 4), gratitude logs, and modules for setting goals, intentions and affirmations. As such, and as already mentioned through the concept of "intentional living", bullet journaling is not only about productivity and task planning but is also oriented towards helping users practice intentionality by approaching their planning mindfully and reflexively. (Bullet Journal, 2020; see also Meija, 2017; TEDx Talks, 2017, Waterstones, 2018)

In recent years, bullet journaling has increased in popularity, and communites dedicated to sharing and discussing bullet journaling practices have sprouted across social media platforms (see e.g. Meija, 2017; Ayobi et al., 2018; Tholander & Normark, 2020; Wickber, 2020). The practice of bullet journaling has also become popular on YouTube through so-called 'Plan With Me' (PWM) videos (see e.g. AmandaRachLee, n.d.; Caitlin's Corner, n.d.; Plant Based Bride, n.d.). In these videos, creators record themselves setting up their bullet journals, usually while talking to viewers about the process in a voice-over format. While there is yet no research on PWM videos in

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[3] Retrieved March 29, 2021, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMV_h4wLhIx/>

particular, plenty of studies have been done in the context of YouTube and DIY (Do-It-Yourself) video tutorials (see e.g. Ashton & Patel, 2018; Bhatia, 2018; Cunningham & Craig, 2017; García-Rapp, 2017; Hou, 2019). In DIY content, creators share their knowledge on some specific topic through tutorial style videos, with channels often being organised around a specific topic on which they regularly post content. For example, videos centred around make-up application are a popular type of DIY content, with many studies focusing on these videos' characteristics and the performance expected of creators who make this type of content, as well as the ways in which a sense of community and parasocial relations are developed and maintained by creators through this kind of content (idem).

PWM videos are another example of YouTube's DIY format, with creators setting up their journals from scratch in front of the camera and sharing their bullet journaling techniques and designs along the way. In this way, PWM videos offer an interesting, unexplored analysis perspective for the phenomenon of bullet journaling as it is adapted and recontextualised as a form of audio-visual entertainment. This perspective thus shifts the angle of research away from individualised notions of what bullet journaling means to particular people and communities (see e.g. Ayobi et al., 2018; Tholander & Normark, 2020) and instead looks at it as an example of a cultural practice being commodified for its consumption as a form of entertainment. In this way, PWM videos as a form of popular media content portray a curated, "ideal" version of bullet journaling, as will be further argued in this study's discussion (see p.67-68). As such, the focus of this study will be on the exploration of this curated version of bullet journaling, which remediates this practice in a popular media format. In other words, this study will explore the practice of bullet journaling as it is *portrayed in* PWM videos. Through adopting this specific angle, I expect to be able to discuss two main points. First and foremost, my interest lies in analysing bullet journaling as a practice shaped by specific discourses. In this way, while PWM video may portray an "ideal" version of bullet journaling, they still represent this practice in a way which aligns with users' notions and lived experiences of bullet journaling, as viewers most likely come to these videos for inspiration and a sense of community.[4] Secondly, through analysing this practice as it is portrayed in social media entertainment, I would also like to explore how this practice is represented in popular media content. In order to approach these issues, I will employ a critical approach in both my research design and analysis.

A critical research paradigm combines an ontology of historical realism with a critical approach to knowledge production. Historical realism poses that, while there is an apprehensible reality, said reality is created and shaped by "social, political,

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[4] See previous work on bullet journaling online communities (Ayobi et al., 2018; Tholander & Normark, 2020) as well as work on online influencer culture and the DIY YouTube genre and its characteristics (e.g. Castañeda, 2019; Ashton & Patel, 2018; Bhatia, 2018; Cunningham & Craig, 2017; García-Rapp, 2017; Hou, 2019).

cultural, economic, ethnic and gender-based" power relations, which become natural-ised and taken as truth overtime (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). These naturalised ideas about the world are what I will refer to as "discourses". For critical research, this means that neither knowledge nor reality can be separated from the larger social and historical contexts in which they are embedded, as said contexts are heavily influenced by the power structures in place and have an intrinsic effect in how we see and inter-pret the world.[5] Following this line of thought, critically oriented research puts the focus of knowledge production on understanding the ways in which power relations shape social reality, and views the uncovering these kind of discourses as the most effective way to critically engage with them and trigger change. In other words, critical research believes that "rigorously analysing" how hegemonic discourses are "repro-duced, strengthened and disseminated" in society represents the "first step" in resist-ing said discourses should they be perpetuating any forms of inequality or injustice. (Martín Rojo & Del Precio, 2020, 2-3) As such, in this study I will analyse PWM videos from a critical perspective in order to explore the role they might be playing in the perpetuation and legitimisation of certain hegemonic discourses.

As aforementioned, for this research project in particular I will focus on the way in which the practice of bullet journaling is portrayed in PWM videos. In order to explore some of the discourses being reproduced through this practice as it is recon-textualised within an entertainment context, I will focus my research on the two fol-lowing questions:

- What aspects of bullet journaling are foregrounded in PWM videos?

- What functions does the practice of bullet journaling seem to fulfill for practition-ers as portrayed in PWM videos?

To tackle these questions, I first focused on finding a common thread between bullet journaling, social media entertainment and the general sociohistorical context in which they are both embedded. Through an examination of literature on bullet jour-naling; social media in general and social media entertainment in particular; and the context of creative work as it relates to neoliberal discourses, I found that the fore-grounding of emotion and emotional life was common to all of these areas. As such, in the following section I will lay out this relationship and its general sociohistorical context, while focusing my argument on the areas of bullet journaling and social me-dia entertainment.

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[5] See Fuchs, 2014 (7-24) for an overview of the application of critical theory to social media and a more extensive summary of the development of critical theory and its central concepts.

2 EMOTION, THE SELF AND NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY

Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, there has been an unprecedented intensification of emotional life in modern societies. Emotional projects such as overcoming feelings of depression and anxiety, finding romantic love, achieving inner peace and happiness, or having an emotionally fulfilling career have become "central pursuits and preoccupations of the self" (Illouz, 2018, 5). Similarly, a life without sufficient emotional enjoyment has come to equate a "bad" life, with the market offering consumers endless options to manage and transform emotion.[6] In short, our sense of self and self-realisation has become intimately tied to the achievement of an emotionally fulfilling and enjoyable life. (Illouz, 2018; see also Cabanas & Illouz, 2019) However, when applying a historical perspective to the prioritisation of emotion in self-realisation, as well as to the idea of emotions as phenomena manageable through rational strategies, we find that this hasn't always been the case.

Such foregrounding of emotion and emotional consumption started to develop mostly during the 20th century, backed by certain scientific, economic, and cultural trends. Before the 20th century, emotion was mostly seen as an unpredictable, unconstrained phenomenon "not subject to psychological control by consciousness" (Ellis and Tucker, 2020, 13). However, the advent of certain technological advancements during the 20th century brought on the reframing of emotion as something that could be scientifically studied through its physiological manifestations. In this way, biometric technologies became privileged as inherently more reliable, objective, and truthful methods for the study and regulation of emotion. (Ellis and Tucker, 2020) This also reframed emotion as a measurable, malleable physiological phenomenon detached from socio-cultural circumstance and self-contained within the individual, a conceptualisation which was furthered by the rise and institutionalisation of scientific

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[6] See Illouz, 2018, for an in-depth exploration of the processes which have led to the commodification of emotion (i.e. the transformation of emotions into commodities or "emodities"), as well as for examples of different emodities offered by consumer markets.

fields such as clinical psychology and neurobiology which cemented the idea of emotion as a biological, self-contained phenomenon over time. (Ellis and Tucker, 2020, 12-29; Illouz, 2018; see also Gross 2006 for a socio-historical exploration of emotion)

This shift in the understanding of emotion also mirrored parallel socioeconomic changes towards the privatisation of human life. In post-industrial capitalist societies, processes of economic privatisation started to extend to all areas of life, thus becoming a *cultural* rather than purely economic phenomenon. One of the areas affected by such privatisation processes was our notion of self, which came to be understood as a private, individual, autarkic entity. As such, the self as a concept started to lose its ties to social life, largely detaching itself from context and circumstance in a way which foregrounded individual wellbeing over collective one. (Illouz, 2018; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019, 52-53; see also Ellis & Tucker, 2020, 12-29) These ways of understanding emotions and the self have solidified over time; they have assimilated into our cultural imaginary and become discourses which are rarely questioned or even explicitly noticed. In other words, they have become part of the ideological basis which legitimises and perpetuates specific institutionalised approaches to the governance and understanding of human life. One way of referring to the dominant approach which governs modern society is that of 'neoliberalism'.[7]

The term 'neoliberalism' was originally used to refer to a set of politico-economic practices based on the idea that "human well-being [could] best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, 2). According to neoliberal policies, state intervention should be kept to a minimum, its only role being that of ensuring "the proper functioning of the markets" (ídem). However, despite starting as a set of socioeconomic policies, this kind of free market mentality has ended up permeating all facets of human life, thus becoming a sort of 'prevailing ethic' based on the application of market logic to all aspects of "public and private life" (Martín Rojo & Del Precio, 2020, 1; see also Harvey, 2005, 2-3; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019, 51-52). As Esposito and Perez eloquently summarise in their 2014 article on "Neoliberalism and the Commodification of Mental Health", neoliberal ideology

> downplays the social realm, treats individuals as self-contained agents, [and] pathologizes thoughts and behaviours that deviate from what the market defines as functional, productive, or desirable (…). (417)

Therefore, when talking about the self, it could be argued that neoliberal ideology conceptualises it as something akin to a business. Much the same as a business, it

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[7] In this study, I will use the term "neoliberalism" as a way of referring to the current stage of capitalism, characterised by the extension of economic logic to all facets of human life and culture (see e.g. Cabanas & Illouz, 2019, 51-52).

is expected to be well prepared to meet the demands and pressures of the market, as well as to hold endless potenial for growth (Gershon, 2011). In this way, the neoliberal self is not only supposed to be productive and constantly improving, but also capable of managing its own physical and mental state in ways which align with the "demands of present-day capitalism" (Cederström and Spicer, 2015, 15). In a neoliberal context, normalcy is thus conceptualised according to market values, wherein "attitudes, habits and behaviours that fit market demands are associated with functional/rational behaviour" (Esposito & Fernando, 2014, 416). As such, a functional —i.e. 'normal'— human is an individual who is both physically and mentally fit for work, and who can deal with the pressures and requirements of modern life. This individual also understands their happiness and life satisfaction as individualised and divorced from larger socioeconomic factors. Namely, their sense of wellbeing is a question of personal responsibility detached from cultural and socioeconomic factors. (Cederström and Spicer, 2015; see also e.g. Martín Rojo & Del Precio, 2020, 10-12, Cabanas & Illouz, 2019)

These neoliberal discourses have also affected the way in which we understand emotion. As such, in a neoliberalised context emotions such as depression, anxiety and dissatisfaction have come to be seen as self-contained moral faults, which the individual should be able manage and correct independently. In short, physical and emotional wellness —a kind of wellness which is in turn defined by market rationality— has become a *moral* imperative within modern society, a notion which I will explore further in the following sections. (Cederström and Spicer, 2015; Cabanas, 2018; see also Esposito & Fernando, 2014; Cavusoglu & Demirbag-Kaplan, 2017) However, in a paradoxical way, despite its moralising role, under neoliberalism emotion has also lost its actual *moral* value (Shachak, 2018). In other words, the same processes of emotional objectification which have led to the conceptualisation of emotion as a manageable, self-contained entity, have also led to an 'amoralisation' of emotion. In this way, emotional objectification has resulted in

> guilt [being] detached from blame and fault, […] so as to become 'a sense of guilt' which one can manage through individual mental exercises […]. Similarly, […] suffering and sadness entirely lose their moral meaning to become a pathology one should overcome by individual rituals of optimism; and happiness becomes a positive and optimistic ideal emotional make-up. (Shachak, 2018, 168)

This process of "amoralisation", along with the aforementioned changes in our understanding of emotion over time, point to emotion as a culturally defined concept, shaped by sociohistorical circumstance.[8] In other words, regardless of how much of

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[8] An example of the influence of culture in how we understand emotion would be that of the concept of 'depression' as a pathology not existing until the 20th century, when it replaced the emotional disposition of 'melancholia'. In fact, the word "emotion" didn't exist either in the English language until the 19th century. (Ellis & Tucker, 2020, 17)

emotion is purely physiological or individually contained, the ways in which we *experience* and *understand* emotion are undeniably shaped by our "social and cultural experience", namely our "values and beliefs" (Ellis & Tucker, 2020, 16). As such, in this study I will treat emotions as cultural products that, while tied to people's embodied experiences, are also highly influenced by cultural and experiential factors, i.e. the context in which they are experienced (Ellis & Tucker, 2020, 17).

In the following sections, I will explore the role of emotion in the contexts of bullet journaling and social media entertainment and discuss whether said role aligns with the neoliberal discourses outlined in this section. I will then summarise the main ideas presented throughout this literature review before moving onto my methodology section.

2.1 Emotion and the Self in Bullet Journaling: When Self-Work Becomes Fun Work

There isn't yet much research which exclusively focuses on the phenomenon of bullet journaling. Recent studies have looked at it from the angle of human computer interaction (Ayobi et al., 2018; Tholander & Normark, 2020), paying special attention to the self-tracking strategies employed in bullet journaling (Ayobi et al., 2018), as well as to the different practices involved in this activity and their significance in practitioners' lives (Tholander & Normark, 2020). Both studies highlighted the central role that crafting and managing personal information holds in bullet journaling, and found that the processes involved in this kind of information management require a specific kind of self-reflective thinking which is done through a constant tweaking and personalisation of the journal (Ayobi et al., 2018; Tholander & Normark, 2020). Through i.a. selecting which information to include and exclude from the journal, and deciding how to depict and organise said information on the page, bullet journalers engage in a kind of identity work which allows them to "create *personally meaningful* narrative[s]" about themselves and their lives (Tholander & Normark, 2020, 7, emphasis added; see also Sharon and Zandbergen's [2016] work on self-tracking). In this way, bullet journaling represents a "form of deliberate self-creation" (Tholander & Normark, 2020, 9), wherein users' "emotions and experiences (…) become intimately tied" to the journal and the practice of bullet journaling (idem, 6).

This approach to journaling and organising personal information is consistent with the original goal of the bullet journal method, which is described as a "mindfulness practice disguised as a productivity system" (Bullet Journal, 2020). Through a mindful approach to organisation, the bullet journal method strives to help "practitioners live intentional lives, ones that are both *productive* and *meaningful*"

(ídem, emphasis added). In this way, increased productivity is not described as the main benefit of the method. Rather, through a focus on mindful, self-reflective and intentive planning, users are expected to gain clarity on what matters to them in life, thus becoming more efficient at prioritising and organising tasks in a way which aligns with their own needs and values. (see e.g. Waterstones, 2018) As such, bullet journaling is ultimately about enhancing user's mental and emotional wellbeing; it is a practise which fosters "positive" emotions such as joy, calmness and motivation, while helping users manage and reduce "negative" ones, such as stress and anxiety. (Ayobi et al., 2018; Tholander & Normark, 2020; Wickberg, 2020; see also Bullet Journal, 2020). As such, bullet journaling is a practice oriented towards the enhancement of wellbeing through a focus on personal information and self-management strategies.

This description of bullet journaling points to two main underlying notions in this practice. Firstly, the idea that a meaningful life can be achieved through a focus on the self and individual self-work. Secondly, the understanding of emotion as something that can be managed and modified through self-work. And thirdly, the foregrounding of the achievement of personal happiness as a worthy life pursue. These notions thus follow neoliberal ideas on the self, emotion and happiness. However, previous studies (Tholander & Normark, 2020) have also argued for bullet journal as a form of soft resistance against other hegemonic aspects of neoliberalism, such as the expectations it places on individuals in terms of productivity and efficiency. Through my analysis, I expect to gain a better understanding of how these tensions manifest in the kind of bullet journaling portrayed in PWM videos, contrasting my results to those of previous studies and discussing what this may mean in terms of bullet journaling as a practice and the discourses that shape it and that it thus reproduces.

2.2 Emotion in Social Media Entertainment: Legitimising Success and Mediating Consumption

YouTube, unlike other social media sites, is not so much organised around communities of practice but rather revolves around "interest-based affinity spaces (…) for participants interested in particular video genres and the cultural phenomena depicted in them" (Leppänen et al., 2013, 15). As such, and based on previous studies on this platform's characteristics, YouTube is not so much a social media site based on user interaction and the creation of personal networks but rather represents a platform for content aggregation and consumption, through which users with similar interests may interact but which doesn't offer many features for social connection and networking on-site. (O'Riordan et al., 2016; Burgess et al., 2009; Leppänen et al., 2013) To highlight this distinction and my research's focus on YouTube as a space for media

distribution, I will refer to it as a Social Media Entertainment (SME) platform, borrowing from Cunningham and Craig's terminology (2017). I will thus look at YouTube videos as a form of media content produced within the creative industry, i.e. a kind of content oriented towards entertaining audiences and being consumed as a creative media product.[9] Looking at YouTube videos from this perspective, we can identify a few different ways in which emotion plays a role in SME.

Firstly, when talking about media entertainment in general, it is important to acknowledge its dimension as an emodity, i.e. a commodity whose intrinsic value is related to the emotional effects that its consumption affords (Illouz, 2018; Garde-Hansen & Gorton, 2013). In other words, entertainment's ability of eliciting emotion is a key factor in its consumption (Hennig-Thurau & Houston, 2019; see e.g. Gillon, 2017; Schwarz, 2017), even sometimes acting as a tool for emotional regulation (Greenwood & Long, 2009; Schwarz, 2017; see also Hennig-Thurau & Houston, 2019). For example, in their 2019 study, Rosenbusch et al. looked at the phenomenon of emotional transfer between YouTube creators and their viewers. Connected users in social media platforms tend to express similar emotions, and two main mechanisms have been proposed for this kind of emotional transfer: situational emotion transfer (i.e. 'emotional contagion', or emotion A transferring from person A to person B) and homophily (i.e. emotionally similar people flocking together because of their similarity) (ídem, 1028). Rosenbusch et al. found that, while consuming specific videos does cause situational emotional transfer, homophily is the better predictor of viewers' emotions according to the media they consume. In other words, "viewer emotions can be better predicted based on *who* rather than *what* they watch in any given moment", and their "dispositional emotionality (…) is more strongly linked to the overall channel than any individual video" (ídem, 1032, emphasis in the original). This points to an interesting aspect of the role of emotion in creating a personal brand on YouTube, given that audiences seem to expect to get a consistent emotional effect or mood from the media they consume. In other words, producing emotionally consistent content may play a relevant role in constructing a solid brand on YouTube, given that viewers seem to have certain emotional expectations/preferences when consuming content from a specific creator or channel.

Another relevant role of emotion in SME is related to how fame and success are legitimised in this context, where discourses about passionate work are central to achieving legitimised popularity. In this way, creators who work hard and show a passion for what they do —that is, they produce content because they are sincerely passionate about it and not for personal gain— are considered inherently more deserving of fame than creators who fail to convey such attitudes (Ashton and Patel

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[9] See McRobbie (2015), Taylor (2015) and Taylor & Luckman (2018) for detailed, critical explorations of the neoliberal creative industry and its characteristics.

2018; Cunningham & Craig 2017; García-Rapp, 2017). In other words, creators who display the "right" emotions —e.g. passion, thankfulness, sincerity, positivity— are seen as righfully successful, while creators who display the "wrong" emotions —e.g. negativity, rudeness, ungratefulness, greed— are seen as "fake" and undeserving of fame (García-Rapp, 2017, see also Ashton and Patel 2018; Cunningham & Craig 2017). In this way, there is a certain moralisation of emotion also in this context, wherein displaying the right emotions and motivations makes creators "good" and/or "deserving".

This kind of moralising legitimisation of success also draws on a prevalent neoliberal discourse which García-Rapp calls the "success myth" (2017, 128). The success myth is characterised by the framing of success (i.e. achieving popularity and having a large audience in the case of SME) as a result of past effort, which in the context of SME could be summarised as: "if you work hard enough and follow your dreams […] the audience will follow" (ídem, 130; see also Ardèvol & Márquez, 2017). The reason this is called a myth is because it doesn't reflect the reality of making it on a platform such as YouTube, which is characterised by a competitive market in which very few make it to the top (García-Rapp, 2017, 120, 131-132). Yet, this conceptualisation of success also reflects some of the ideas discussed in the previous sections, where through hard work and a focus on individual self-development people can overcome structural barriers and achieve a fulfilling, successful life regardless of contextual factors. Moreover, within the context of SME, adhering to these discourses about passion and success is also seen as a form of *autheticity*, thus making it something highly valued within YouTube communities (García-Rapp, 2017; see also Ashton and Patel 2018; Cunningham & Craig 2017).

Both the demand for emotionally consistent content and the expectation for creators to display an emotionally "authentic" persona highlight the importance of emotional labour in this context. Emotional labour refers to the need for workers to display specific emotions in order to perform satisfactorily in their jobs (see Hochschild, 2012, 18-30). In this way, YouTube creators are expected to display specific emotions which align with YouTube's market demands as well as the preferences of their audiences. Moreover, the consumption of SME as an emodity also points to the affective labour required of this kind of work, affective labour meaning labour done in order to produce or manipulate affective states in others (see Johanssen, 2018). As such, emotions not only play an important role in determining the kinds of content that audiences choose to watch and support but are also intimately tied to the kind of work required of creators working in SME.

2.3 Summarising the Role of Emotion in a Neoliberal Context

The main discourses about emotion which emerged through this literature review in the contexts of bullet journaling and SME can be summarised as follows:

Firstly, there is the prevalent idea that emotional fulfillment is central to personal self-realisation and happiness. This is a kind of emotional fulfillment which valorises certain emotions over others. Moreover, this valorisation seems to be driven by a market mentality through which emotions that allow individuals to cope with modern life and participate in the neoliberal economy are seen as *morally* better and desirable.

This brings us to a second prevalent notion, that of emotion as a moralising tool. In other words, to maintain an "emotionally healthy" mindset is seen as a moral obligation, wherein healthy equals "able to function well in a neoliberal context".

Lastly, we find the basic underlying notion that emotion is an individually experienced, *self-contained* phenomenon, which is essentially divorced from larger contextual, socio-economic factors and can thus be individually managed.

In short, to these three assumptions it follows that emotion is not only manageable but rather *should* be managed. As such, emotion is not only moralising but also appears as essential in attaining personal happiness, thus making the achievement of both an emotionally *healthy* self and an emotionally *fulfilled* self powerful motivators for engaging in different forms of emotional management. Examples of such emotional management strategies would include the kind of self-reflective work done by bullet journalers through their journals, the emotional and affective labour performed by online creators, and the consumption of SME as an emodity by audiences. These are all aspects of the role of emotion which I will return to during my discussion, tying my data analysis and results to the ways in which bullet journaling is shaped by (and relates to) the neoliberal discourses presented throughout this section. In th following section I will present my data and the methods I employed in my analysis, which will continue to follow the critical paradigm for the study of sociocultural phenomena outlined in the introduction.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

I collected my data set through judgement sampling. I decided to look at the most popular videos within the PWM format in order to have a data set which would reflect the kind of content aligning with audience demands and expectations.[10] For this, I used YouTube search function and ran the searches listed in table 1.

TABLE 1   Data search terms and filters.

SEARCH TERMS	FILTERS (applied to all of the searches)
plan with me bullet journal plan with me bujo bullet journal setup bujo setup	Sort by: View Count Upload Date: This Year

Instead of using "bullet journaling" or "bujo" as my search terms, I included the words "setup" and "plan with me" in order to focus my search results on videos dedicated to the journal's setup process, i.e. videos in which a creator is setting up their bullet journal on-camera and talking about the process. The use of more general search terms produced too many unrelated results, such as general tutorials on the bullet journal method, flip-throughs of completed journals, videos on hand-lettering and stationery, etc. Moreover, "setup" and "plan with me" were the most common terms used to label the type of videos that I wanted to focus my analysis on. I noticed this while looking through the results that more general search terms produced, and after

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[10] All of the data used for this project is publicly available data which complies with GDPR's regulations for the use of data for research purposes in the name of public interest.

going through some of the most popular channels which regularly posted content on bullet journaling.

I also limited my results to videos posted in the last year in order to get more currently relevant results, while not applying too narrow of a time window (the other filer options being "today", "this week" and "this month" at the time I ran my searches). I initially intended to collect the first 10 results for each search, but they turned out to be the same regardless of the search terms used. I thus ended up using those ten videos as a my data set, given that they represented a large enough data set for this kind of project.

TABLE 2   Data collection table. All videos were collected on 11.02.2021 and are from AmandaRachLee's channel (AmandaRachLee, n.d.).

TITLE	# OF VIEWS	LENGTH	LINK
My 2021 Bullet Journal Setup	1,317,289	0.18.58	https://youtu.be/VQUH8VLE0YE
PLAN WITH ME | November 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	867,824	0.23.51	https://youtu.be/2cCMUfgQ2tk
PLAN WITH ME | April 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	823,814	0.19.27	https://youtu.be/5svMiARRbr4
Starting a New Bullet Journal	679,868	0.12.19	https://youtu.be/ULXUaAOLptQ
PLAN WITH ME | January 2021 Bullet Journal Setup	656,74	0.18.38	https://youtu.be/EXb3ZZkmxGY
PLAN WITH ME | August 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	576,189	0.20.10	https://youtu.be/adDk6RVfXCA
PLAN WITH ME | March 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	574,461	0.17.08	https://youtu.be/R9VwpWNXEvc
PLAN WITH ME | September 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	559,996	0.16.24	https://youtu.be/HMPgeUjtQ7E
PLAN WITH ME | June 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	540,642	0.20.53	https://youtu.be/TbToF8R468E
PLAN WITH ME | May 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	532,834	0.20.41	https://youtu.be/0suJL0cUWH4

My data set has three main limitations. Firstly, all of the videos are by the same creator, given that her channel seems to be by far the most popular bullet journaling channel on YouTube. As such, all of the top results for my searches produced her videos as a result. Even if I had collected twice the number of videos using the same

search terms, most of the results would have still been from her channel. Secondly, because of the limitations of conducting research for an MA thesis, it is a rather small data set. Thirdly, given that I will be analysing video data from an outside perspective rather than working directly with practitioners, there are limitations on what I can claim regarding my second research question, which focuses on the functions that bullet journaling *seems* to fulfil for practitioners as portrayed in PWM videos. Because of these limitations further research will need to be done in order to assess how widely applicable my results are for PWM videos as a genre, outside of AmandaRachLee's content, as well as how applicable they are outside of the context of SME. In this same way, the findings of this study should be taken as an exploration of the functions of bullet journaling that are represented and discussed in PWM content (i.e. popular media content) rather than as an in-depth analysis of users' perspectives on this topic, as mentioned in the introduction.

In relation to this last remark, I would also like to include a disclaimer about my primary ethical concern regarding this research. As mentioned, my main goal with this study will be that of exploring bullet journaling as a practice rather than users' personal approaches and perspectives on it. This influenced my decision of looking at the most popular videos on YouTube in terms of PWM content, rather than e.g. collecting a randomised sample of videos in order to explore different practitioners' perspectives. Namely, given that the volume of data I could handle was limited, I decided to focus on the most popular content on the platform in order to look at archetypical portrayals of bullet journaling; portrayals that were popular with viewers and that, while being highly curated, still presented the main aspects of this practice in a format accessible to the wider public. Coincidentally, my data set ended up including videos from a single channel, and so my main concern is for this study to be taken as a critique of AmandaRachLee and her work specifically, or as a critique of Amanda as a creator. As such, I would like to highlight that my goal as a critical researcher is only that of addressing larger sociocultural trends as they are reflected in cultural phenomena. In other words, the ultimate goal of this study will be that of discussing the main sociocultural trends that shape the practice of bullet journaling as portrayed in SME, not that of critiquing the individuals who engage in this practice nor SME creators. In short, through this research I intend to bring awareness to the aspects of bullet journaling which play into the ideological basis which legitimises neoliberal approaches to human life and governance, as well as to point to the ways in which they are present within this practice. However, this does not mean that I see bullet journaling as an inherently bad or harmful practice; rather, it means that there are underlying aspects of the ideological basis that makes bullet journaling "make sense" as a practice which I would like to bring attention to, as they play into the perpetuation of specific ideas and power structures. Additionally, the fact that the analysis in this study will focus

on AmandaRachLee's content doesn't in any way indicate that her approach to bullet journaling is especially susceptible to these ideas, nor that she condones them. In fact, in terms of her involvement in social activism, Amanda has repeatedly used her position as a social media creator to bring awareness to different social issues through her journaling, focusing not only on her content's creative and commercial aspects but also using her position within SME in order to bring attention to important, larger issues. If anything, this just highlights the pervasiveness of the ideologies that I will discuss through this research, as they are rarely noticed unless attention is directly directed at them in order to identify and examine them.

Lastly, I would like to mention that, while I assessed the possibility of this research negatively affecting Amanda's image before proceeding to my analysis, I concluded it to be negligible, and decided against anonymising my data because of two main factors. Firstly, my data included many visual samples of Amanda's work which I couldn't have anonymised reliably, as her artistic style, journaling designs and monthly themes are easily recognisable, popular within YouTube's bullet journaling community and publicly available online. Secondly, and most importantly, I limited my analysis to aspects of her journaling which she has discussed publicly and repeatedly on her channel and within her most popular videos. However, I decided to include a disclaimer in this section in order to clarify my position as a researcher regarding this topic, as well as my perspective on this piece of research, thus framing my analysis as a reflection on the practise of bullet journaling in general as it is shaped by its sociocultural context and not as a moral assessment of the practice nor its practitioners.

3.2 Introducing Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Before delving into the main analytical concepts that will guide my analysis, I would like to situate my methodology within the wide array of multimodal approaches to data interpretation currently employed in research. In this study, I will be using a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MM-CDA) methodology. MM-CDA is an area of academic research which applies a multimodal perspective to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theories and methodologies. As such, and in order to properly introduce MM-CDA, I will first offer a summarised view of the core CDA concepts relevant to my study.

CDA is an interdisciplinary field of critical research derived from critical and applied linguistics which highlights the role of language and other communicative resources in manifesting, reproducing and normalising unequal power relations within society (see e.g. Wodak & Meyer 2001, 11; Machin & Mayr 2012, 2-4). CDA

views language not only as a communication system but as a social practice (Wodak & Meyer 2001, 1; Machin & Mayr 2012, 2-3), and believes that the ways in which we communicate and create meaning not only reflect our social reality but also discursively construct it (Machin & Mayr 2012, 4; see also Locke 2004, 11-12). At the centre of this definition lies the notion of "discourse", or "Discourse with a capital 'D'", as differentiated by Gee (Locke 2004, 13). This is a term "used to describe the broader ideas shared by people in a society about how the world work" (Machin & Mayr 2012, 11). When creating meaning and effectively communicating, people draw on different communicative and cultural conventions that have become naturalised -- i.e. widely accepted as correct, natural or true in society -- to make themselves understood. These conventions, or tacitly understood ways of using language and socially acting in the world is what CDA understands as "Discourses". Therefore, CDA sees the uncovering of these kind of naturalised understandings about the world (i.e. Discourses) through the analysis of how we socially construct and convey meaning as a particularly useful way of identifying and addressing unequal power structures within society (see e.g. Blommaert 2004, 2-4). Following this line of thought, and aligning with Blommaert's (2004) view, I thus see CDA as being about the "analysis of power effects" (1), rather than just the analysis of power itself. As such, my analysis will have the ultimate goal of exploring "what power does to people, groups and societies, and how this impact comes about" (idem, 1-2).

Given that I will be working with video data in which visual and aural elements are crucial to the meaning-making processes at play, a purely language-based approach to data analysis would only be able to offer a relatively limited depth of analysis from a semiotic and communicative standpoint. Because of this, rather than working with traditional CDA methods which focus mostly on written and/or spoken language, I will use a multimodal approach in this research, namely a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MM-CDA) methodology. A multimodal approach to research is concerned with exploring "what happens when diverse communicative forms combine in the service of 'making meanings'" (Bateman, Wildfeuer & Hiippala 2017, 8). As such, MM-CDA doesn't focus solely on spoken and written language when analysing communicative situations and how discourses are employed and referenced in them, but rather takes all kinds of relevant semiotic resources into account (see e.g. Bateman et al., 2017; Jewitt, 2009, 14-27, 31-33; Kress, 2010; Machin & Mayr, 2012).[11] As such, through the use of MM-CDA I will analyse the meaning-making processes at play within my data, as well as the things that are being communicated through said processes. I believe that gaining a better understanding of PWM videos as

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[11] Examples of common semiotic resources that aren't written or spoken language would be gaze and gesture in face-to-face conversation, colour and size in graphic design, and layout and typography in textbooks, to mention a few.

communicative situations will allow me to engage with the underlying discourses that frame them and discuss the ways in which these discourses may be affecting power distribution and inequality within society.

Before moving forward, it is important to note that there is no one standard definition for the concept of "mode", a concept central to the application and definition of multimodal methods. The ways in which modes are conceptualised and applied as analytical tools tend to vary depending on the work at hand and the research approach taken (see Bateman et al., 2017, 15-21). My operational definition will thus use semiotic modes as *heuristic* categories used to identify the elements involved in the production of meaning within a specific communicative situation, and within a specific community of sign interpreters and producers. This is a definition which frames modes and their use as contextualised within specific communities, rather than as rigidly defined categories. In other words, it follows from the assumption that

> the question of whether X is a mode or not is a question *specific to a particular community*. As laypersons we may regard visual image to be a mode, while a professional photographer will say that photography has rules and practices, elements and materiality quite distinct from that of painting, and that the two are distinct modes. It is unproductive to enter into general debates on this outside of the quite specific contexts of social groups and their semiotic practices. (Kress et al., 2001, 43, emphasis in the original)

In short, while we may find the same modes being used in different communities, what said modes are being used for and how they are being interpreted, or even whether they are carrying any meaning at all, may vary between communities.[12] Because of this, I will use "mode" as an analytical category concerning a) what elements are *semiotically relevant* within my data and b) how they are employed in meaning-making processes. To assess this, I will pay special attention to a) whether a mode is *consistently* used within my data and can thus be considered analytically relevant, and b) whether a mode is consistently *used together* with other modes within my data in order to make meaning. This second point is important because the consistent use of different modes in an ensemble may point to them being semiotically *interdependent*, thus needing to be analysed "with respect to one another" rather than as independently operating modes (Bateman et al., 2017, 17).

In a similar way to modes, the other two main multimodal concepts that I will apply for my data analysis ("genre" and "canvas") also need to be contextualised as per the data under study. Because of this, I will include a small part of my data analysis in this methodology section. I will first offer an operational definition of the concepts of "genre" and "canvas" and then provide concrete examples of how I applied

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[12] See Kress et al. (2001) for an example of the application of this multimodal approach in context. See also Kress (2010) and Kress & Van Leeuwen (2005) for a theoretical overview of the social semiotic approach to multimodality in communication studies in general, and in visual analysis in particular respectively. Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2005) work greatly informed the visual analysis portions of this study's data analysis.

them to my data at the start of my data analysis. This will be a suitable introduction for my data analysis and results section, as these are concepts that helped me classify my data in order to assess which would be the best tools to analyse it in-depth and what parts/elements would be useful to transcribe.

3.3 Canvases, Subcanvases and Media: Deconstructing Communication

Working with multimodal data often means having to work with very complex semiotic phenomena. Because of this, having a good understanding of the data at hand can prove crucial in conducting a focused, nuanced analysis. In order to facilitate the break-down of multimodal data in a way that makes it approachable for analysis, Bateman et al. (2017) suggest using the analytical concept of canvas.

Unlike the concept of medium, which is historically and socially situated, the concept of canvas can be used to refer to "*anything* where we can inscribe material regularities that may then be perceived and taken up in interpretation" (idem, 87, emphasis added). In other words, a canvas can be *any* area "where semiotic activity is being displayed" (Jocuns, 2019, 376). For example, a face during conversation, a piece of paper with something scribbled on it, or a blackboard in a classroom could all be considered canvases, as long as meaningful semiotic activity is being displayed on/in/through them. As such, the concept of canvas "places very few demands on the underlying materiality" (Hiippala, 2020, 279) required of sign carriers; "almost anything capable of carrying intentionally-produced signs" (idem) can be considered a canvas, depending on the specific communicative situation in which it is embedded. (see also Bateman et al., 2017, 84-111)

Looking at a communicative situation in terms of canvases and subcanvases through identifying the different areas in which relevant semiotic activity is taking place is helpful in decomposing semiotically complex data into its "smaller, component parts" (Bateman et al., 2017, 101), thus making it more manageable. Each of these parts can then be "described in terms of a medium/canvas with its own materiality and affordances for communication, which may then in turn involve different forms of expression" (ídem). In other words, looking at a communicative situation through the canvases and subcanvases that compose it, i.e. through its smaller constituent parts, allows us to assess each of those parts in their own right, stablishing their *material* characteristics and thus the *affordances* that they provide for meaning-making. In this sense, the term "affordances" refers to the "possibilities for action that [an object] opens up for an agent in an environment" (Bateman et al., 2017, 90). That is to say that, due to their material dimension, certain canvases/media may only support certain

kinds of semiotic activity, or rather may support certain kinds of semiotic activity modes more easily/effectively than others. Because of this, decomposing communicative situations in this way can also be helpful in later assessing the semiotic modes that may be at play within said situation (Bateman et al., 2017, 101).

This is because semiotic modes are also constituted by both a semiotic and a material side, and thus are also affected by the affordances and constraints stemming from their materiality. Depending on the canvas/medium in use, a mode may draw on different material properties of said canvas to represent meaning. It is however the semiotic side which determines "which kinds of distinctions in that material are actually 'meaningful' in and for that mode" (ídem, 113-114; see also the definition of mode offered in section 3.1.). For example, in the case of my data, the fact that the main visual canvas being used is a (paper) journal makes it more likely for some (visual) modes (e.g. colour and layout) to be present and semiotically relevant than others (e.g. modes based on movement and/or sound) simply because of the affordances that paper as a medium provides. This doesn't mean that movement or sound *can't* be represented visually, but rather it means that a paper journal will need to use visual cues and techniques to represent them, rather than using e.g. sound directly. As such, looking at the journal as a canvas with specific material properties and affordances already gives me some clues as to how meaning may be being created through it, as well as the modes that may be in use. In short, when we decompose multimodal data in this way, it divides it into more easily analysable blocks which in turn make it easier to contextualise the semiotic processes at play *within* our data, rather than assuming that certain modes will be present without first assessing it from the ground up.

In the case of my data, I identified three main canvases in terms of meaning-making: Amanda herself (her facial expressions, gestures, styling choices) in the videos' intro and outro sections; the journal (its pages, spreads, and the pages' different sections); and Amanda's voice (her speech and voice modulation). I will explain how I identified this canvases in the following section, where I lay out my preliminary analysis more in-depth.

3.4 Genre as a Framework: Interpreting Communication

The concept of genre can also be useful when trying to situate data within a specific framework for analysis. In fact, genre can be understood as a framework for the production and interpretation of texts in and of itself. The notion of genre relies on the reproduction of specific conventions and practices in the production of texts; it sets specific expectations in terms of form and content, as well as regarding interpretation. As summarises by Swales,

A genre is a class of communicative events that share a recognisable communicative pur-
pose, that exhibit a schematic structure supporting the achievement of that purpose, and
which show similarities in form, style, content, structure and intended audience. (Swales,
1990, as cited in Bateman et al., 2017, 130)

However, it is important to note that genre is not always easy to assess just by looking at a piece of media and the actions being performed within it. Genres are not fixed categories but rather emerge "intertextually and intersubjectively" through the production and consumption of texts, making them "fluid and socially constructed" (Werner, 2012, 26-27). This means that the relationship between genres and the communicative events that they frame is not hierarchical. Rather, it is a relationship that emerges intertextually through the participation of texts *in* genres and thus texts and genres co-constructing each other (see Bateman et al, 2017, 128-135, Werner, 2012, 3-4). With this in mind, in this study I operationalise genre as an intertextually defined category based on my data set and its characteristics.

While this study will not focus on genre analysis, after collecting my data I initially paid attention to aspects such as the videos' formal, communicative, and stylistic elements in order to better assess the basic genre characteristics of my dataset and get a better idea of the communicative conventions it may be drawing on. Through these cues I compared PWM videos to various other types of YouTube videos analysed in previous research and, as mentioned in the introduction, noticed that they shared many similarities with the popular genre of DIY tutorials. I confirmed this during the preliminary assessment of my data, in which I looked at the videos' structural and stylistic characteristics, both visual and aural. Moreover, during this preliminary assessment I also noticed that a) that the central part of PWM videos was the planning itself, i.e. the segment dedicated to showcasing and discussing the setup process of the journal, and b) the importance that the monthly theme held in terms of the stylistic choices made both in the videos and in the journal.[13]

Regarding the structure of the videos, I transcribed the different sections within them both visually trough screenshots taken using VLC media player (2018), and in terms of the duration of each of the sections and their order using ELAN (2020). The videos are consistently organised around three main sections: an introductory segment, a planning segment and an outro segment. The videos' introductory section always follows the same pattern, starting with a sequence in which Amanda opens her journal on her desk, which is decorated with carefully placed bullet journaling supplies, and the video's title appears as animated text over two blank pages. This then transitions into an animated title which takes up the whole frame, where the channel's name is displayed. Through this sequence, the importance of the journal's theme for each video starts to become apparent. As can be observed in figure 5, the

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[13] These aspects will be further explored in my Data Analysis (4) section.

videos' stylistic choices are laregely based on matching the journal's theme, while of course keeping a consistent brand image throughout through the channel's general aesthetic, logo, and the intro sequence itself, which repeats in every video.

FIGURE 5   Examples of the videos' opening segment.

After this, the videos switch to a medium close-up shot of Amanda in her apartment's living-room, always in the same spot and facing the camera directly at eye-level. She introduces the video's theme, addressing her audience directly, and chats about topics such as how fast time has passed, how busy she has been, the month's bullet journal theme, and any updates she might have regarding her online store (such as product releases). At this point of the video, the video's sponsor is also introduced before moving onto the planning segment.
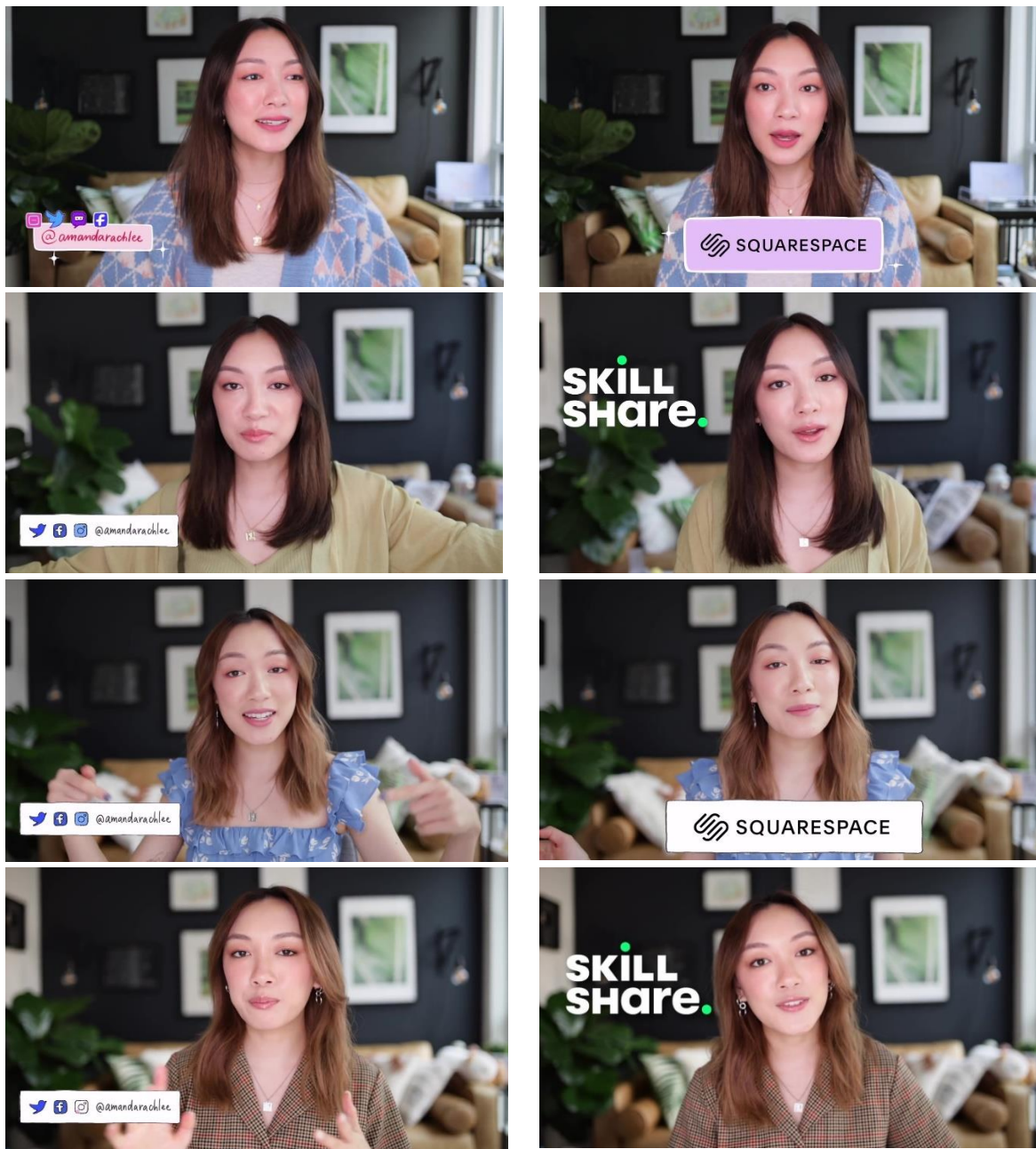
FIGURE 6   Examples of the videos' intro section.

During the planning segment, the frame centres on the journal, which occupies it almost entirely. Some space is left around the journal in order to keep the decorative stationery elements in frame. The journal's theme is also foregrounded here through the visual choices made regarding the decoration on Amanda's desk, which always matches the journal in terms of colour and of the decorative elements displayed, chosen to also match the "vibe" of the theme (see figure 5). Moreover, this carefully planned out decoration also points to one of these videos' main characteristics. Despite being designed to appear somewhat spontaneous in line with other DIY tutorials on YouTube, these are videos which are highly curated in terms of their aesthetics and

their editing. Another example of this is Amanda's use of embedded media, which she often adds to the videos in order to showcase the inspirations sources that she used for each theme. This is an important aspect because it also means that everything that is part of the finished video product is there "on purpose", given that creators can always edit out or re-record parts of the video that they are unhappy with or don't want to include in the finished version.

Every now and then the camera angle changes to add some dynamism to the video and highlight specific areas of the page that Amanda is working on. However, the image is focused on the journal's pages throughout, with Amanda's hands being the only other element consistently in frame as she does the planning. Comparing the different sections comprised in these videos, I found the planning section to be the lengthiest, thus pointing to the setup as being the central part of the videos. [14] Moreover, the more artistic/visually complex pages consistently took up the most time to set up, with cover and quote pages being the most obvious example.[15] This speaks to their complexity but also highlights the visual aspect of these videos, where the aesthetic dimension of the journal gets the most attention.[16]
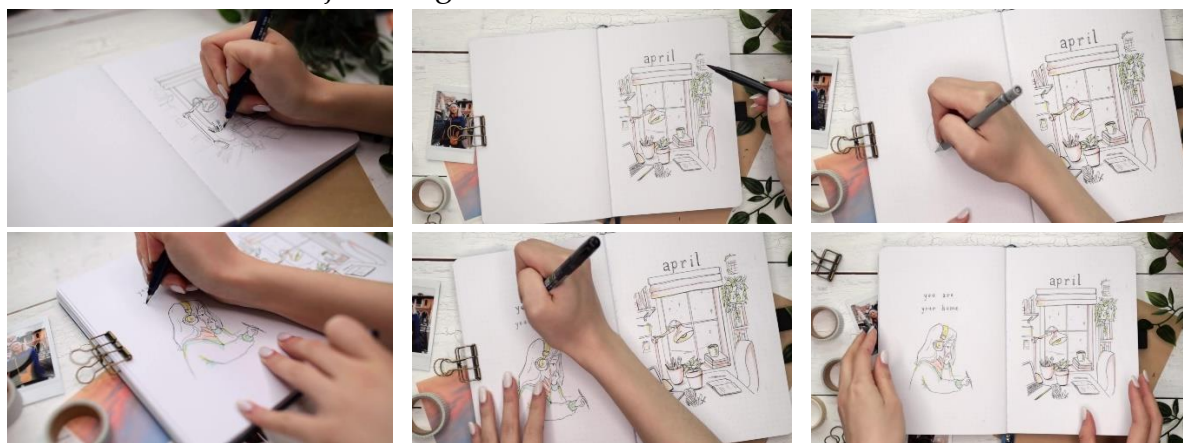
FIGURE 7   Amanda sets up her April PWM cover and quote pages (AmandaRachLee, 2020b).

In the outro section, Amanda does a sponsored segment, then does a flip-through of the completed journal setup, and then outros the video as she shows some of her viewers' recreations of her bullet journal from the previous month's set up. At the end of the video, another animation is displayed which includes the channel's name, Amanda's social media handles and suggestions on other videos by her to watch. Common topics discussed in the outro section include how satisfied she is with the theme, reminders about her posting/streaming schedule as well as about her

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[14] I transcribed the different sections and their duration for half of my data sample through ELAN (*ELAN*, 2020) in order to compare them.
[15] More examples of visually complex spreads will be offered in section 4 (Data Analysis).
[16] This aspect of bullet journaling will be further explored in section 4 (Data Analysis).

online shop's updates, and how much she appreciates her viewers and their recreations of her journal.

FIGURE 8   Example of outro section from Amanda's April PWM (AmandaRachLee, 2020b).

It seems that many communicative purposes are achieved through this structurally consistent organization of Amanda's PWM videos, such as: stablishing a consistent brand image; promoting different products/companies as well as Amanda's own content and work; stablishing a parasocial relationship with her viewers; and, of course, showcasing her bullet journal setups and guiding viewers on how to recreate them. These are just some examples of the kinds of communicative activity present within PWM content; however, for my research in particular, I kept my focus on communicative instances which conveyed information about a) the role of the bullet journal and its features and b) the functions that it fulfils for Amanda. Keeping this focus in mind, I took an ethnographic approach to my data, watching my entire data set multiple times and annotating the videos. I paid attention to the videos' visual aspects, Amanda's narration, and other elements such as the background music and the decoration of the videos' settings. Once I had familiarised myself with the data enough through this ethnographic approach and started to see the patterns and themes present within my data, I started transcribing the parts of my data which seemed most relevant, both visually through screenshots and linguistically through transcribing parts of the voice over. For this, I used VCL for the screenshots (*VLC Media Player*, 2018), and ELAN for transcribing speech (*ELAN*, 2020). I went back and forth many times during this part of my analysis, finding new segments to transcribe as I became more and more familiar with my data and started to identify its main themes more clearly and what was relevant within it. The in-depth portion of my analysis that I present in the following Data Analysis section (4) ended up being focused mostly on Amanda's comments and reflections about her planning process, as well as on a visual analysis of the spreads in which I paid close attention to the different visual modes employed within the journal.

3.5 Note on Transcription and In-Text Citations

In terms of how I transcribed the data, in the previous sections I mentioned the main canvases that I identified within my data: Amanda herself, the journal, and Amanda's voice. In answering my research questions, Amanda's voice (i.e. her speech) and the journal emerged as the most relevant loci of semiotic activity. While I annotated the general characteristics of Amanda's voice modulation when annotating data, I didn't include a detailed representation of this in my transcript, as I mainly used my transcripts *along* with the videos during analysis. An example of a full transcript can be found in appendix 2, along with the transcription key in appendix 1, but for my analysis section I mainly use specific bits of the transcripts in order to offer concrete examples of the phenomena I talk about and how I reached my results. In the examples I use throughout the analysis and results section (4) I also included the fragments' time stamps in the format [hh:mm:ss]. As per the visual aspect of the videos, I again used my screenshots along with the videos themselves during analysis, and the specific screenshots I use through this methodology section and the analysis and results are meant to illustrate my data as well as how I reached my results through my analysis.

In order to make following the analysis easier, I decided to use "added citations" in order to clarify to which video each in-text citation is referring to. As such, I assigned a short title to each of the videos in my data set, which I will use along with the actual in-text citation when referencing videos throughout my analysis (see table 3).[17]

TABLE 3   Added citations to facilitate the referencing of data in-text.

#	VIDEO TITLE	IN-TEXT CITATION	ADDED CITATION
1	PLAN WITH ME | March 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020a	March PWM
2	PLAN WITH ME | April 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020b	April PWM
3	PLAN WITH ME | May 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020c	May PWM
4	PLAN WITH ME | June 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020d	June PWM
5	Starting a New Bullet Journal	AmandaRachLee, 2020e	2020 PWM

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[17] The full data collection table (table 2) can be found on page 16.

6	PLAN WITH ME | August 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020f	August PWM
7	PLAN WITH ME | September 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020g	September PWM
8	PLAN WITH ME | November 2020 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020h	November PWM
9	My 2021 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020i	2021 PWM
10	PLAN WITH ME | January 2021 Bullet Journal Setup	AmandaRachLee, 2020j	January PWM

Lastly, in order to facilitate the reading flow of my analysis section I also highlighted the transcript examples using a blue text box. This is an example of how my transcript samples look in-text:

"Quote 1" [hh:mm:ss- hh:mm:ss]
(Month/Year PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020x)

"Quote 2" [hh:mm:ss]
"Quote 3 … Quote 3 cont'd" [hh:mm:ss - hh:mm:ss, hh:mm:ss - hh:mm:ss]
(Month/Year PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020y)

4 DATA ANALYSIS

In my literature review I touched upon the notion of bullet journaling as practice which transforms users' emotional associations with the work that maintaining a productive, "functional" self in a neoliberal society entails. As such, I expected to find this notion reflected in my data through a mix of elements, some oriented towards self-work and some towards fostering positive emotions and "having fun" with the journal. However, as I started to go through my data I soon realised that bullet journaling's "work" and "fun" dimensions could hardly be divided into clearly defined, separate categories. Rather, it started to become apparent that in the context of bullet journaling, work and leisure seem to blur together, with boundaries between what constitutes journaling as a form of self-work vs. as an enjoyable activity being unclear. In this way, the kind of bullet journaling portrayed in PWM videos doesn't quite make self-work *into* fun-work, but rather seems to *merge* them together through mobilising practitioners' emotional ties to their journals.

I first started to get a sense of this because of the relative lack of separation between the spreads dedicated to work and the ones dedicated to leisure within the journal. In fact, I found that leisure and work spreads were often positioned next to each other. While this could be a way of contrasting both kinds of spreads, the aesthetic dimension of the journal, wherein a consistent visual theme is used for each monthly/yearly period, makes it so that placing these spreads next to each other integrates them due to their visual similarity, virtually eliminating the boundaries between work and leisure within the journal. We can see an example of this in figure 9, where Amanda has placed a leisure and a work spread next to each other and visually integrated them by using the video's monthly theme (Studio Ghibli).

FIGURE 9   A "fun" spread dedicated to entertainment (Studio Ghibli Marathon) and a "work"spread for organising Amanda's online shop launch (Shop ARL Launch) placed next to each other. (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

In this example, the visual aspect ties both spreads together. No visual cues are offered as per which of the two spreads is work-oriented and which leisure-oriented, which creates a sense of cohesion and unity between them, rather than of contrast. Similar motifs, a consistent colour palette and the same lettering style are used in both pages. Moreover, details such as the running illustration at the bottom of the page, which ties both spreads together and creates a sense of continuity, as well as the motion lines used along with the main titles, which rather than being placed in the same spot on both pages, thus mirroring each other, are placed on opposite corners of the titles, thus contributing to the visual integration of both spreads (see figure 10).

FIGURE 10   Notice how the placement of the movement lines contributes to the cohesiveness of the spreads even when other decorative elements are removed. The picture on the right has been edited so that the movement lines are placed on

the same spot in both spreads. The picture on the left is a cropped version of figure 9. (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

FIGURE 11   A spread dedicated to self-work (2021 Goals) and one dedicated to entertainment consumption (Things To Check Out) next to each other. (Amanda-RachLee, 2020i)

Figure 11 illustrates another example of this lack of separation. Despite the theme being more visually simple than that showcased in figure 9, the spreads still do follow a consistent theme as indicated by the use of colour, the lettering, the style of the titles and the other decorative elements on the page, which integrate the spreads. Because of this, there is no visual separation between the work-oriented ("2021 goals") and the entertainment-oriented ("things to check out") spreads. Moreover, despite bullet journaling often being referred to as an effective planning method for establishing clearer boundaries between users' work and personal lives, no clear boundaries between these elements were observable in my data. Amanda does use the journal to help her manage her time and (sometimes) her work-life balance, but within the journal itself there is rarely any explicit separation of what is work and what is personal, just as there is no actual separation of what constitutes work and what constitutes leisure. For example, despite "work" and "personal" being displayed as separate categories in the "2021 goals" spread in figure 11, these categories are nonetheless displayed within the same page and along other, more general categories which lack this kind of work/personal separation, such as "affirmations", "focus of the year" and "manifestations/big dreams" and which are all visually undistinguishable from each other other than by the sections' titles, which are also framed using the theme's colours and cursive lettering style.

FIGURE 12   "Monthly Tasks" spread placed next to a "Spotify Playlist" spread. The categories in the "Monthly Tasks" spread read: "shooping_list.doc", "shop_arl.pdf" and "watch_list.pdf". (AmandaRachLee, 2020g)

We can see another example of this in figure 12, where we have another productivity-focused spread (Monthly Tasks) placed next to a "fun" spread (Spotify Playlist). Here the productivity-focused spread also features a mix of work-, personal- and leisure-related task lists which, while separated into different boxes, are all displayed on the same page, with two of the boxes overlapping and the visual theme integrating the different categories and the two spreads through the use of colour, shapes (notice the repeated use of circles in the titles and the background, as well as the repeated use of rectangular computer windows with rounded edges), and decorative motives such as the stars and sparkles present both in the form of doodles and on the strips of washi tape.

It was at this point in my analysis in trying to discern categories such as work vs leisure or work vs personal within the journal that the journal's aesthetics started to emerge as a crucial element for understanding the portrayal of bullet journaling in PWM videos. It became apparent that the journal's aesthetic and design elements played an important role in relativising the boundaries between work and leisure by making them virtually indistinguishable from a visual standpoint. This made me wonder in what other ways visual semiotics might be relevant within bullet journaling, the extent to which the visual may be essential, and the exact functions that it might be accomplishing .

4.1 The importance of the visual

FIGURE 13   Habit and mood trackers from November PWM. (AmandaRachLee, 2020h)

Two of the spreads that first caught my attention in trying to discern the function that aesthetics play in bullet journaling were those displayed in figure 13. Habit and mood trackers seem to be spreads clearly oriented towards self-improvement[18] and emotional management/awareness. However, the design of these two spreads in particular caught my attention because they seemed far from being the most efficient way of going about this kind of management, both in terms of the time and of the skill required to set them up. Many supplies are needed to make these spreads (11 colour markers, a black pen and a black fine liner), and the design of the page is complex in its use of layout (see figure 14) and in the design of the different modules that comprise it, which are based off minigames from the popular internet game "Among Us" remediated to serve as habit trackers (see figure 15). The doodling of 30+ Among Us characters to serve as mood tracker elements (see the right page displayed in figure 13) and as decoration also requires a good control of the pages' spatial features as well as some preparation in terms of the pages' design if a cohesive, usable yet decorative final design is to be achieved.

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[18] Note the categories tracked by Amanda in her habit tracker (vitamins, water plants, workout, eat healthy), focused on keeping a healthy lifestyle and keeping track of tasks.
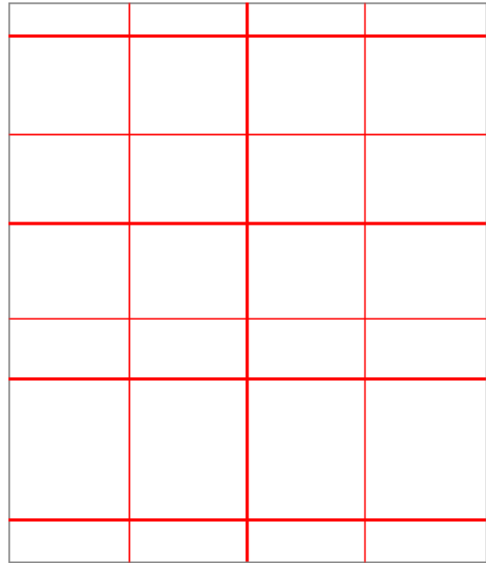
FIGURE 14   Example of the complex use of layout in a habit tracker spread. (Amanda-RachLee, 2020h)
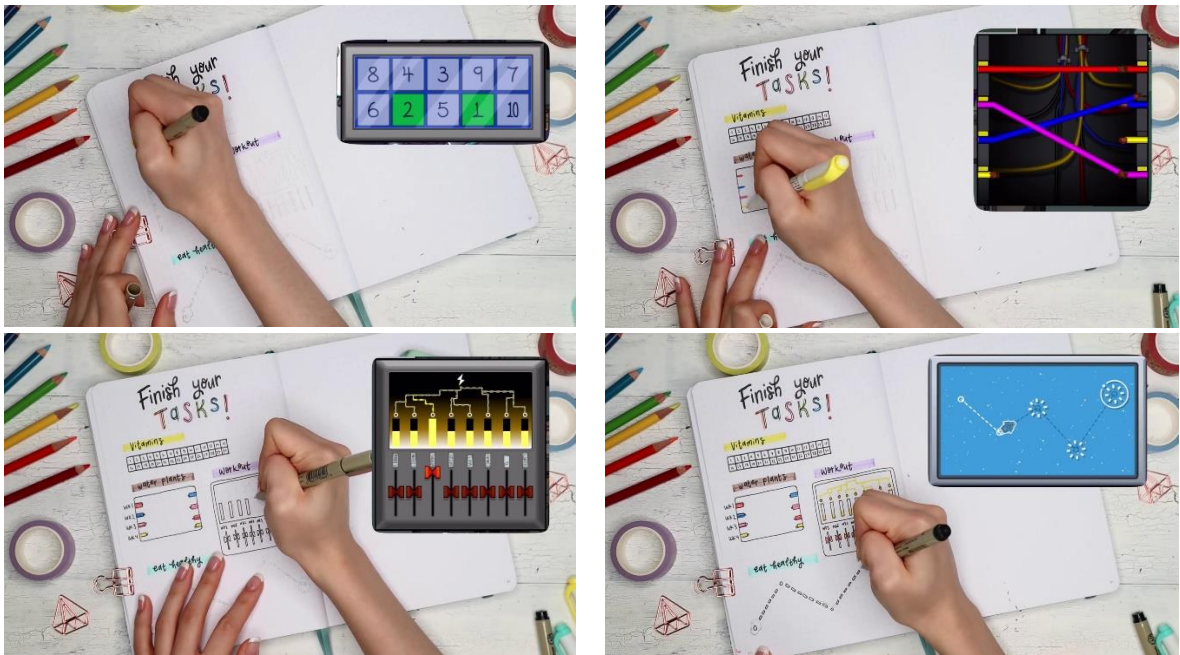
FIGURE 15   Screen captures showing the minigames remediated by AmandaRachLee in her November 2020 habit tracker. She often uses embedded media to illustrate her sources of inspiration. (AmandaRachLee, 2020h)

While these pages represent slightly atypical examples from my data set, in that Amanda usually uses less colours and a simpler layout for her habit and mood

trackers, they illustrate the fact that, while efficiency and simplicity are aspects that she keeps in mind when coming up with her spread designs, they are not the *main* aspects dictating the design of her spreads. Focusing still on habit and mood tracker spreads, figures 16 and 17 showcase some more typical examples of Amanda's design choices for these monthly spreads:

FIGURE 16   Examples of horizontal habit and mood tracker layouts.

FIGURE 17   Examples of vertical habit and mood tracker layouts.

Here we see that, while these spreads could be considered simpler than November's example in their use of layout, colour and space, they all nonetheless feature highly visual, decorative designs which are still quite complex. They require the use of various colours and supplies, such as colour markers, fine liners, washi tapes, craft paper, patterned paper and stamps. They also feature varied decorative lettering styles, drawings and shapes. In short, while these spreads do allow Amanda to track her habits and moods, both the process of setting them up and the final, *visual* result

are also communicating something about the function that the journal fulfils, because if its only function were that of enhancing productivity, the use of complex artistic designs wouldn't be necessary. There are visually simpler ways of keeping track of one's habits and moods that are less time-consuming, don't require as much skill in art and design, and can be set up and filled in with minimal supplies. Moreover, habit and mood tracker spreads are not the only ones that display highly decorative visual designs; it is rather a characteristic of Amanda's journal as a whole, where the aesthetic dimension is highly curated even in the case of simpler themes which don't require as many supplies to set up.

FIGURE 18   Examples of cover pages featuring a quote on the left and the month's name on the right.

FIGURE 19   Examples of weekly spreads. Note that in the spreads where the use colour and layout is simpler, an illustration has been added to keep the spreads visually interesting and aesthetically pleasing.

The use of decorative and aesthetically pleasing designs is consistent throughout Amanda's journal and it constitutes one of its main characteristics. But what makes the journal's decorative/aesthetic dimension so important? What function is it accomplishing? While these questions were not part of my research questions, I believed that exploring the functions of the visual in bullet journaling would be helpful in answering my question regarding the functions that the journal accomplishes for its users, as at this point in my analysis it seemed that the journal's visual dimension played an important role in its functionality. As such, in order to see if there was any relation between the journal's functionality and its visual dimension, I first turned my attention to the functions that bullet journaling seemed to fulfil for practitioners in PWM videos.

4.2   Emotion and Bullet Journaling

In line with what previous studies have observed, mediating the emotions that users have towards their personal data and day-to-day life emerged as one of the main functions of the bullet journal in PWM videos. The kind of emotional management I observed in my data wasn't confined to specific spreads, such as mood tracker spreads, or to specific modules, such as gratitude and affirmations lists, but rather was present throughout the journal. In other words, bullet journaling seemed to transform users' emotions through the emotional connections that users had *with* the journal and that they stablished *through* it, which placed the journal and the practice of bullet journaling themselves as ways of mediating emotion.

The emotions that Amanda expresses in relation to bullet journaling in her videos are nearly always positive. While planning, she constantly mentions the emotions that she associates with working on/through her journal, using descriptors such as "fun", "relaxing", "therapeutic", etc. As such, in PWM videos bullet journaling is

framed as a leisurely and enjoyable activity which brings up positive emotions both through its setup and its use, as will be argued throughout this section and the use of multiple examples.[19,20]

"how epic is this I am obsessed [laughter] honestly it was just really fun for me to make so maybe I'll include more interactive elements in my journal in the future cause it was so much fun" [00:08:08 - 00:08:20]
"I'm kind of excited to fill (my habit trackers) in each day because it feels like a fun game in my bullet journal" [00:13:41 - 00:13:54]
(November PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020h)

"I'm excited to continue doing that for this month we're gonna be making some nice bullet journal spreads for May sitting down relaxing chilling vibing taking some time for ourselves so I'm excited" [00:00:46 - 00:00:58]
"I'm excited to fill out this tracker because it's just so it looks so fun and it will slowly get more and more colourful as the days go on" [00:10:48 - 00:10:58]
(May PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020c)

"you know we're just gonna have fun here making some spreads and doodling" [00:00:44 - 00:00:48]
"I just really like the way this spread turned out I can't wait to come up with more ideas for spreads throughout April I think it's going to be really fun" [00:16:14 - 00:16:21]
"the illustrations they were just such a blast to do and the spreads were fun to make I threw on a lo-fi playlist and it was just very relaxing and therapeutic" [00:17:59 - 00:18:07]
(April PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

Through these comments, the journal's role as a space for emotional enjoyment and as a tool that allows users to connect to specific, desired emotions is foregrounded. Amanda talks about bullet journaling as an exciting practice which helps her relax and have fun and which she looks forward to engaging in because of its positive emotional effects. A more concrete example of this notion would be the idea of moving into a new journal as a way of "starting fresh", which is recurrent in the videos:

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[19] Note how this is also another aspect of bullet journaling which blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, as mentioned at the start of this section.
[20] The aesthetic aspect of bullet journaling also plays a key role in eliciting specific emotional states in practitioners through the use of visual themes. This will be argued more in-depth in the following sections (4.3, 4.4)

"I really need a fresh start I think we can all agree on that that 2020 was like not so great so hopefully a new bullet journal set up will manifest that fresh start energy" [00:00:26 – 00:00:37]
(2021 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020i)

"this is a particularly exciting one because ... I started a brand-new notebook from the second half of 2020 it feels like a fresh start which I have very much been needing and I think I will also transfer that fresh start energy into my August set up and we're gonna try some some fun new things I think" [00:00:20 - 00:00:41]
(August PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

Through starting a new journal Amanda gets a "fresh start" feeling, which allows her to leave unpleasant emotions behind and more easily connect with positive ones. For example, in her 2021 setup she relates setting up a new journal with leaving behind the negative associations she has with the year 2020 and "manifesting" a new start into the new year. She expresses a similar feeling when setting up a new journal for the second half of 2020:

"it's time for a fresh start which feels right I feel like I'm in the need of a fresh start and guys look I dyed my hair back to eh black so new hair new me new bullet journal fresh start" [00:00:46 – 00:00:58]
(2020 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020e)

We find another example of bullet journaling's role in mediating and transforming users emotions in the way that Amanda approaches her planning in her videos, often explicitly mentioning the emotional effects that she expects the month's setup to have and foregrounding bullet journaling's emotional effects in her video introductions, as illustrated also in the example in page 39:

"this month's bullet journal set up is gonna be a little bit different considering all of the things going on in the world I know that a lot of things have been shut down a lot of places schools and all of that so some of you guys might not need the typical to-do list aspect of a bullet journal nonetheless of course do whatever works for you in this time and you know we're just gonna have fun here making some spreads and doodling I feel like what I need right now amongst all this chaos is really to sit down relax and get some planning done and some doodling and all of that and maybe throw on a nice lo-fi playlist"
[00:00:25 – 00:00:59]
(April PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

"the one interesting thing that's come out of all of this is that I've been sort of forced to try new things in my lifestyle like in my routine my daily routine and also in my bullet journal I've been trying a lot of new spreads so I'm excited to continue doing that for this month we're gonna be making some nice bullet journal spreads for May sitting down relaxing chilling vibing taking some time for ourselves so I'm excited to get into it"
[00:00:34 - 00:00:58]
(May PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020c)

As we can also see through these quotes, the function of the journal is not only that or helping Amanda stay organised and productive, but also that of doing so in a way which allows her to relax and connect to positive emotions. For example, when introducing her May PWM Amanda frames being able to try new things in her bullet journal as one of the few good things that has come out of the pandemic for her, and she expresses her excitement about trying more new spreads in her May PWM. In this way, bullet journaling represents a positive, pleasant activity which has helped Amanda cope with a difficult period of her life and reframe some of its aspects in a positive light, while also helping her "retreat" from the real world and the negative emotions prevalent within it through her journal. In this way, she also explicitly associates things like relaxing, having fun and taking time for herself with the planning process in a way which foregrounds its emotional affordances over its organisational ones: "you guys might not need the typical to-do list aspect … nonetheless … we're just gonna have fun here … I feel like what I need right now amongst all this chaos is really to sit down relax and get some planning done and some doodling … maybe throw on a nice lo-fi playlist". As such, the kind of planning that is done through bullet journaling is capable of mediating emotion even at times when productivity demands are lower than usual and/or routines have been disrupted. Planning remains an enjoyable activity which allows users to connect to positive emotions, as aforementioned.

Part of bullet journal's effectiveness in helping users connect to positive emotions is related to the fact that it is still a practice which aligns with many of the hegemonic, neoliberal discourses about work and personal. In this way, to engage in an activity which helps users enhance their productivity, manage the self, and align with neoliberal emotional expectations may make practitioners "feel better" just by virtue of its role in helping them meet current social standards in terms of productivity and "functionality". For example, in April monthly setup Amanda states:

> "on the side I actually have these two sections for goals and intentions I think with all this craziness and uncertainty in the world I'm sure a lot of you guys' regular routines have been shaken up a little bit um but it's even more important now to set those small goals and intentions and affirmations just to keep your mind sane and give yourself a purpose in the morning and you know just take care of your mental health guys" [00:08:17 - 00:08:40]
>
> "this is my quarantine routine spread … you don't have to follow it exactly but I thought it was really nice to sort of give yourself a ideal layout of the day eh it can be so easy to just sleep in all day or procrastinate or especially when you're at home or in my case I just eat food whenever I wanna procrastinate you know it's not it's not the greatest so I thought it was a good idea to lay out sort of your ideal day at home in terms of productivity" [00:12:47 - 00:13:29]
>
> (April PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

Here she relates accomplishing goals, working on positive affirmations, and keeping a consistent, productive routine to having "good mental health" and staying "sane", thus relating being mentally healthy to keeping up with the aforementioned societal expectations.[21] Moreover, in this example taking care of one's own mental health is framed as a responsibility which can be accomplished through individual, self-focused action ("take care of your mental health guys"), an action in this case realised through the use of self-management strategies common in bullet journaling.

Its alignment with certain neoliberal demands and expectation is not however the only factor influencing the effectiveness of the journal as a tool for emotional management. As previously mentioned, bullet journaling tends to blur the boundaries between work and leisure, making all the activities that are done through the journal feel like leisure. Following this thread, through looking at my data two dimensions of bullet journaling emerged as key in its effectiveness in blurring work-leisure boundaries and transforming bullet journaling into a form of enjoyment: the journal's visual aspect and its connection to users' sense of self. These are the two facets which I will explore in-depth in the last two parts of this analysis section.

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[21] This notion will be discussed further in my "Discussion" section (5).

4.3 Connecting Aesthetics and Emotion

In bullet journaling, the visual is not simply decorative. It integrates the contents of the journal, creating a visually uniform object which is capable of producing cohesive emotional effects through its use. Moreover, its aesthetic dimension is a key aspect in *how* bullet journaling is able to produce said emotional effects in the first place. In this way, Amanda's emotions around using her journal are often mediated through the journal's visual features; it is often how the journal looks (the colours, the illustrations, the lettering) which makes Amanda excited to use it and produces positive emotions for her:

> "I actually really love how this year's set up turned out I feel like every year my bullet journal has a vibe as I mentioned and this year's is kinda simple but a bit bright as well I just get happy looking at it because of all the light colours so that will be a nice energy to bring into 2021" [00:17:16 - 00:17:34]

(2021 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020i)

In this quote, when Amanda says that she likes how the setup "turned out" she is referring to the visual aspect. Moreover, it is the journal's visual features which make her happy to *look* at: its simplicity, brightness, and light colours. Note also how in this example, we can see once more how the journal is acting as a way of mediating and transforming emotion, in this case the emotions Amanda would like to associate with the year 2021: "that will be a nice energy to bring into 2021".

> "I really love the way this turned out I love the minimal colour palette and the illustrations they were just such a blast to do and the spreads were fun to make I threw on a lo-fi playlist and it was just very relaxing and therapeutic"
> [00:17:54 - 00:18:07]
> (April PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

This is another quote which illustrates the importance of the visual in a similar way, while also explicitly mentioning the positive emotions that Amanda connected to through setting up her journal for April. Because this kind of planning allows her to be creative and include illustrations and visually appealing designs in her setups, she can frame the planning through its creative aspect and enjoy it as a fun, relaxing and therapeutic activity. She also expresses similar feeling regarding her journal's looks and the emotions it elicits in her May PWM video:

"something that I really enjoyed about this cover page was the fact that there were multiple types of flowers and multiple colours … which I think give it a very fun and springy vibe and it just makes me very happy to look at" [00:03:52 - 00:04:18]

"I'm excited to fill out this tracker because it's just so it looks so fun and it will slowly get more and more colourful as the days go on" [00:10:48 - 00:10:58]

(May PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020c)

It is also worth noting that even when some of the work involved in setting up the planner isn't enjoyable per se, because of its contextualisation within the journal it is mediated through this practice and often reframed as a fun, relaxing and/or thera-peutic activity:

"next up we have my future log or my yearly overview so for this I thought of the idea of doing it kind of like Dutch door style and I chose to do this mostly because I didn't wanna have to keep re-doing the title but also because I thought it would just be kind of fun to have a mini notebook that I can flip through inside my bullet journal" [00:06:08 - 00:06:29]

"I wrote out my mini calendars this is always a pretty tedious part … but I kind of find it therapeutic to do repetitive tasks like this" [00:07:51 – 00:08:12] (2021 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020i)

Here we can also observe the importance of the positive emotions that bullet journaling fosters for its users, as Amanda frames both of the tasks she mentions in different, arguably opposite ways in order to experience them as pleasant. In the first quote she says that she chose this particular design so that she wouldn't have to re-do the title (a repetitive, tedious task) and that it was the design of the calendars as a mini notebook which made the task fun/worth it. However, in the next quote she states that the nature of writing out all of the mini calendars as a repetitive task is precisely what makes it "therapeutic". Perhaps if the journal lost its effect as a way to connect to pleasant feelings it would also lose its main functionality, thus making it important to keep bullet journal planning "fun". Amanda's comments about the final result of this "Future Log" spread illustrate both the importance of the visual, and of bullet journaling as a pleasant activity, two of the main points discussed throughout this section so far:

"but anyway I really like how this future log turned out honestly it was just kind of fun to make too but I also like the way it looks it's kind of like a mini folder inside my bullet journal" [00:08:33 - 00:08:44]
(2021 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020i)

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In summary, because of bullet journaling's framing as a fun, therapeutic activity, whichever kind of work is mediated through it also becomes enjoyable. Therefore, it is a practice which allows users to connect with positive emotions. To achieve this purpose, the journal's dimension as an aesthetic object is key, and thus constitutes a salient characteristic of bullet journaling as portrayed in PWM videos. In other words, a large part of why the journal is able to accomplish its function in mediating and transforming users' emotions is due to its visual aspect. In this way, in PWM videos the aesthetic and the functional dimensions of bullet journaling merge together, making it hard to discern which of the elements on the page are purely functional and which are purely decorative. Based on my analysis, I theorise that this is because in bullet journaling *there is no separation*. The aesthetic and the functional are the same, because the journal's aesthetic *is* part of its functionality; a journal lacking the aesthetically pleasant and cohesive visuals that characterise the journals featured in PWM videos wouldn't be nearly as effective in helping users connect with positive emotions. As such, without its curated aesthetics, the journal's role as a tool for mediating emotion would lose its effectiveness and thus its functionality would be affected as well. In this way, being aesthetically pleasant is part of the bullet journal's functionality, as it is its aesthetic dimension which transforms things as simple as a habit tracker or a weekly log into something fun, exciting and visually appealing. This connection however isn't solely achieved through making the journal look "pretty"; the elements depicted on the page also carry their own meanings, which are contextualised through the theme that they are a part of. This is the notion that I will explore in the last section of this analysis: the essential role of the bullet journal theme in the kind of bullet journaling portrayed in PWM videos, which helps elicit specific emotions through its adaptation into the journal through visual semiotic resources.

4.4 Mobilising Emotion through Identity

The effectiveness of bullet journaling in fostering specific emotions is also related to its connection to users' identities. As explained in this thesis's introduction and literature review sections, one of the aspects which differentiates bullet journaling from other organisational methods is how extremely personalisable it is, since it makes use of a blank notebook as its base. As such, each user can build their bullet journal from the ground up, making it relevant to them and their lives specifically, and connecting their emotions and experiences to the journal. Amanda is aware of how important this personalisation aspect is in bullet journaling, and constantly offers viewers tips and instructions for adapting her themes and spreads in ways which make them useful/meaningful for them:

"I really recommend you guys to like customize this maybe make it look like your own apartment … I did sort of throw in some elements from my own apartment like my plants and my stationery pots" [00:03:42 - 00:04:05]
(April PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

"obviously you can customise these sections into categories that work for you like work personal school or even by separate subjects" [00:11:19 - 00:11:29]
(November PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020h)

"if you haven't seen Kiki's delivery service or if you don't wanna spend time drawing a a person I actually still think this would look super cute and relatively simple if you recreated the page without Kiki it would just basically be like a nice windy field with the wind blowy plants you can even add more of them" [00:05:52 - 00:06:10]
(August PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

However, the way in which this connection between bullet journaling and the self became most apparent in my data was through Amanda's comments on her own relationship with her journal. These are comments which often reflect on the relationship between Amanda's experiences and how they are reflected in her journal. For example, she often associates the journal with time and memory, talking about it as a "time capsule" which helps her remember the past, which ties the journal to her memory and identity:

"you guys have seen me make playlist spreads like this a lot … but it's kind of like a nice time capsule so that I can see what type of music I was listening to at that specific time" [00:11:16 - 00:11:30]
(January PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020j)

"the last spread that I made was my 2021 in photos or 2021 memories spread I do this every year and it's been a really nice thing to look back on it's almost like a time capsule or a scrapbook and I think it will be even more cool to look back on like 10 years down the line because I'll basically have a photo for every single month for whatever time period" [00:15:32 - 00:15:59]
(2021 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020i)

"I thought I would commemorate this era in quarantine history in my bullet journal … I feel like my bullet journal is a bit like a time capsule in that sense"
00:02:26 - 00:02:37]
(November PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020h)

This function of the journal as a time capsule or as a tool for Amanda to connect with her past and her roots is for example also present in the way in which she decided to approach her bullet journal setups for 2021:

> "I thought it would be nice to do kind of like a little throwback to the very first year that I started bullet journaling which was 2017 ... especially since bullet journaling is something that is special and has changed my life and connected me to so many people … since then my bullet journal has evolved and so have I as a human" [00:02:43 – 00:03:24]
>
> "it was … kind of nice to reminisce a little and bring in elements from my first bullet journal in 2017 cause you gotta remember where you came from you know" [00:17:35 - 00:17:45]
>
> (2021 PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020i)
>
> "I really wanted my overarching theme this year to have some subtle references to that first year where I started bullet journaling on my channel because it was kind of like the beginning of a big journey for me" [00:00:59 - 00:01:10]
>
> (January PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020j)

Through these and the previous quotes we can see how Amanda uses her journal to reminisce, construct specific narratives about her "life journey" and connect her present to her past through her journaling. This notion is also heavily present in the themes that she chooses for her journal, which often tie back to her past somehow or are associated with the specific moods or "vibes" that she wants to recreate. For example, when talking about two of her themes which include anime illustrations (her April and August themes), she explains:

"honestly this was so much fun to draw this sort of like animation illustration style for those of you who don't know drawing anime was how I got into art … but yeah it really took me back to my roots almost and it was really fun to do" [00:06:29 - 00:06:52]

(April PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

"as I was rewatching some of the movies I felt so inspired they kind of re-minded me of my artistic roots in a way" [00:02:54 - 00:03:01]
"the main reason why I got into art in general was actually because of anime … Studio Ghibli definitely shaped me as an artist and they're a huge reason why I even started drawing in the first place I probably wouldn't even be drawing on this channel had I not seen these films" [00:03:02 - 00:03:30]

(August PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

As such, this connection between Amanda's past, her identity and her emotions becomes especially relevant in the way in which her themes help her elicit specific emotional states. Her August PWM, where she uses a Studio Ghibli theme, is a very good example of this. She feels emotionally connected to these films through her identity; she grew up with them, they made her interested drawing and greatly influenced her artistic style.

> "honestly I was hesitant on doing (this theme) for a while mostly because I know that not everyone has seen the films and usually I try to stay away from doing anything that's too niche also because they are so special to me that I honestly just didn't even know where to start" [00:02:15 - 00:02:31]
> (August PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020b)

These films are very meaningful for Amanda because of their connection to her past and how they influenced her development as an artist and as a person, and that is precisely what makes them so effective when adapted as a bullet journal theme. They connect Amanda to specific emotions; the emotions that she now associates with these films as an adult looking back on her childhood:

> "many people including myself consider the films and the characters just really heart-warming and special kind of hard to describe the feeling of the films I don't know I just grew up with these films so they're really special to me" [00:01:53 - 00:02:08]
> "I've been rewatching them and feeling all those nostalgic feels" [00:02:46 - 00:02:53]
> "I know many other people find them very comforting and heart-warming they're filled up with just relaxing scenery music" [00:03:32 - 00:03:41]
> (August PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

In this way, through setting up this bullet journal theme and then using it on daily basis, Amanda's feelings in relation to the work that she is performing through her journal become mediated through the feelings that she associates with Studio Ghibli films. She talks about them as heart-warming, special, comforting, relaxing, nostalgic…

These are feelings that Amanda also tries to visually recreate through her spreads. For example, she uses wind as a motif throughout the spreads in order to recreate the "peaceful feeling" of the films. Her simple use of blue as an accent colour evokes a blue sky and helps the spreads look cohesive and carry this same "peaceful feeling" throughout. The motif of the windy field also serves as a way to visually connect all of the spreads, as do elements such as the lettering styles used or the black dots (which also represent little characters from the films) used throughout the setup:

"in terms of the cover page I drew a scene from Kiki's Delivery Service ... I definitely related to the movie especially rewatching it as an adult many of the things that Kiki goes through are things that I've through and am still going through ... this scene in particular has always stuck out to me" [00:04:18 - 00:04:50]

"one of the things that Miyazaki ... is know for is his use of peaceful landscapes and scenery so I wanted to depict that in this cover page and draw the cloudy sky the windy field ... wind is a recurring theme in many of the films so I wanted to show that" [00:04:59 - 00:05:35]

HABIT TRACKER

WORKOUT
EAT HEALTHY
VITAMINS
PLANTS
WASH SHEETS
GUITAR
STREAM
CLEAN APT
YOUTUBE
NO CAFFEINE

TO BUY   MONTHLY TO DO   GRATITUDE

STUDIO GHIBLI
MARATHON

- princess mononoke
- kiki's delivery service
- spirited away
- my neighbour totoro
- howl's moving castle
- castle in the sky
- whisper of the heart
- ponyo
- the secret world of arietty
- tales from earthsea
- the cat returns
- only yesterday
- from up poppy hill
- when marnie was there
- nausicaä
- the tale of the princess kaguya
- ocean waves
- porco rosso
- pom poko
- my neighbours the yamadas

SHOP ARL
LAUNCH

FIGURE 20   Spreads from Amanda's August PWM with some of her comments on her design process for the cover page. (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

About the completed cover page of her August theme, she says:

"I really love the way it turned out I think it does give off that magical and peaceful feeling that Ghibli films have which was my goal" [00:06:11 - 00:06:19]
(August PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020f)

Here Amanda points out that her goal in making this cover page was specifically that of "giving off" a specific feeling, which is consistent with the role of the journal as an object which mediates and transforms emotion, as has been argued throughout this section. Moreover, through the examples included in this section, the importance of the journal's themes in accomplishing this has been highlighted. There are further examples of this in all of Amanda's videos; the themes are not only crucial in how they connect to Amanda's emotions, thus helping her elicit specific ones through bullet journaling, but also determine many of her visual design choices, serving as sources of inspiration. By adapting different kinds of popular media in her journal, Amanda is also making use of popular culture references in order to more easily connect to her viewers through her journal, as she always tries to use themes that are not only meaningful to her but that also easily recognisable for her viewers, specially through their visual aspect. Themes that don't remediate specific pop-culture media (such as Studio Ghibli, Animal Crossing, Among Us, Lo-fi...) also tap into the public imaginary in different ways. For example, her June PWM is based on the aesthetics of 1950s

America, an aesthetic that is easily recognisable for many people and that makes for a fun, vibrant and somewhat nostalgic bullet journal setup.

"for the lettering I didn't do a typical cursive calligraphy style that I would normally do I tried to connect the letters at the bottom almost like it was neon sign lettering" [00:03:11 - 00:03:22]

"you guys know I always love making playlist spreads which I thought was perfect for this month because when I think of the 50s I think of jukeboxes and music from that time and dinners and all of that so I obviously had to do a jukebox doodle that sort of coincided with my playlist spread" [00:10:49 - 00:11:09]

"in my August 2019 bullet journal setup the 80s one I drew a cassette tape for the playlist spread and then this year for April 2020 I drew a record player ... so at this point I've drawn all types of vintage music players um they definitely have a feeling about them that current day music players do not have" [00:12:30 - 00:12:57]

(June PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020d)

As stated, examples of the importance that themes have in helping users connect with different emotions through their meaning and aesthetics can be found throughout. Amanda's January PWM video illustrates this well, for example, as Amanda explicitly discusses the reasons why she chose to do this theme:

"so for my January 2021 theme I decided to go with a minimal paper crane theme and the main reason why I decided to do this is the meaning behind it I have a very vivid memory from elementary when my teacher read us the book Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes … I remember learning about this in fourth grade and it just really stuck with me our class even decided to try to make a thousand paper cranes by the end of the year … I remember folding a lot of tiny ones with sticky notes or any piece of paper I could find" [00:01:29 - 00:01:44, 00:03:37 - 00:03:45, 00:03:56 - 00:04:07]

"I think (this explanation) gives a lot more context as to why I chose this theme for the start of 2021 I think we could all use some good luck or a wish this year and since it's also a symbol of peace and healing I feel like it's the right energy to bring into the new year" [00:04:17 - 00:04:33]

(January PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020j)

In this way, this paper crane theme is strongly linked to Amanda's memories, while the meaning behind paper cranes in Japanese culture are the kinds of emotions and values that Amanda wants to connect to through the theme (good luck, peace, healing). As with all of the other themes, the aesthetics that Amanda uses for her January PWM are derived from the concepts behind the theme and try to evoke the emotions and concepts associated with it (e.g. peacefulness, elegance, simplicity):

"I haven't even really talked about the cover page but I did keep it really simple because I wanted to feel kind of peaceful and for the focus to be on the actual meaning behind it … I also kept the lettering pretty simple [00:04:59 - 00:05:08, 00:06:03 - 00:06:05]

"next up we have my monthly tracker spreads and this month I did a chart layout for both my habit tracker and my mood tracker I know usually I do like individual mini calendars for my habit trackers but you know to keep in line with this simple theme that I had going on I wanted the layouts to be really easy and quick" [00:07:35 - 00:07:56]

"I actually didn't use that many supplies for this month it was pretty much only the one fine liner the one colour marker and my notebook and a pencil of course but yeah minimal theme minimal spreads and also minimal supplies" [00:09:13 - 00:09:28]

"again in keeping with the minimal layout and theme I did a similar style to the monthly calendar where I only drew the horizontal lines doing this gives you a lot of like negative space you know kind of just makes your spread look really open um which I think matched the vibe of this theme" [00:12:13 - 00:12:32]

“I really love how this turned out it's so simple and elegant which I wanted to do for the new year and of course I love the meaning behind all of it” [00:15:18 - 00:15:27]
(January PWM) (AmandaRachLee, 2020j)

To conclude this analysis, I would like to highlight once more the fact that the journal's themes, which are adapted into the journal through their visual and aesthetic dimensions, act as a framework for the productivity work done through the journal. As mentioned in relation to the merging of work and leisure within the journal, the use of themes in bullet journaling not only helps connect journaling and productivity work to practitioner's feelings and identities, but also does so in a way which ultimately frames the work done through the journal through the themes' connotations. So, for example, a fun, exciting theme such as November's frames the productivity work done through the journal as fun and exciting; a chill, relaxing theme such as April's frames it as relaxing and therapeutic; etc. Moreover, this is something that, as argued earlier in this section, is largely done through the aesthetics of the journal and through its potential as a visual canvas, with visual choices being determined by the theme and the emotions that practitioners wish to foster and remediate through their set-ups.

FIGURE 21   Side-to-side comparison of two different themes' habit and mood tracker
                   spreads.

The side-to-side comparison offered in figure 21, where two contrasting themes have been picked as an example, highlights the importance of multimodal visual dimension of the journal in effectively "translating" specific themes, and thus specific emotions and moods, into the page. The left-side image (AmandaRachLee, 2020h) displays the trackers from Amanda's November PWM, which is based off an online multiplayer video game and presented as fun and exciting in her November PWM video. The right-side image (AmandaRachLee, 2020j) displays the trackers from January's PWM, which is based on the symbolism of paper cranes in Japanese culture and presented as a simple, elegant, and peaceful theme. In these examples, different visual modes are used together in order to give off a specific "feeling" and draw on different associations for each theme. For example, in these themes we can also observe a very different use of colour. While November's uses a bright, rainbow palette, January's uses a single accent colour; a warm pastel orange that is combined with black detailing and plenty of white negative space (see figure 22).

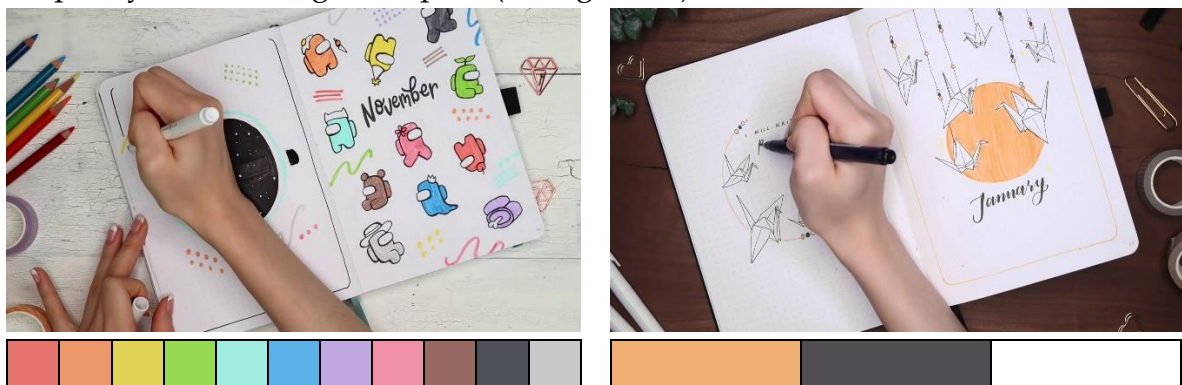FIGURE 22   The themes different colour palettes as extracted from the cover pages.

Notice also the use of shapes and layout, which is much more complex in November's theme, giving the spreads a playful and dynamic feeling which contrasts with January's peaceful and clean spreads, where the page is divided in quarters, providing a sense of stability and simplicity (see figure 23). This is enhanced by the

use of simple shapes (circles and rectangles) as decorative elements, simple shapes which contrast with those used in the November setup (wiggly lines, sets of dots, stripes), more irregular, dynamic and playful.

FIGURE 23   Comparison of the complex, dynamic use of layout in November's theme and the simple division in quarters used in January's theme, where a sense of horizontality and stability prevails.

Moreover, not only the use of layout but also the use of space is quite different in both of these themes. While January's setup focuses on keeping an open, decluttered, simple and peaceful design through the use of empty space, a single decorative motif (the hanging paper cranes) and a single acccent colour (orange), the space is much more crowded in November's setup, which makes a heavier use of colour, doodles and shapes throughout.
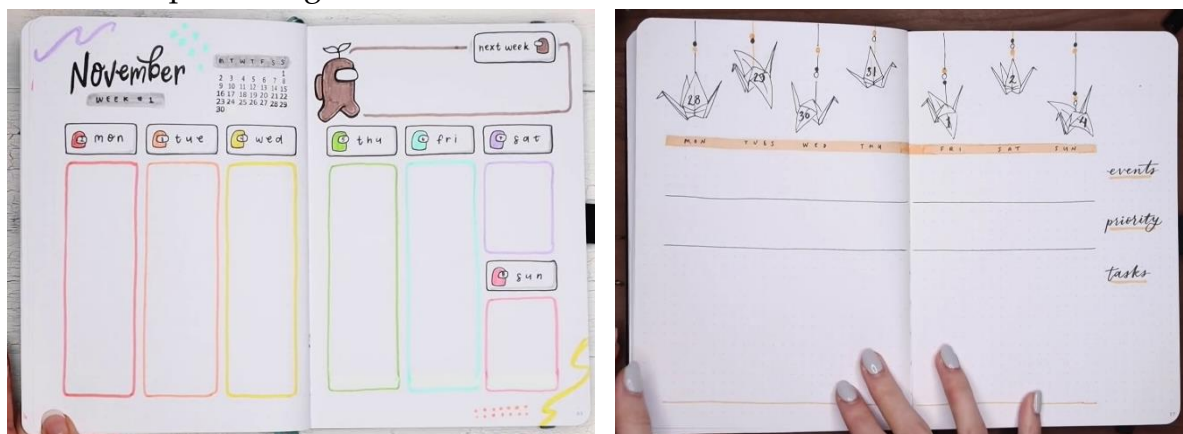
FIGURE 24   Note e.g. the different use of space (and negative space), colour and shapes in both themes' weekly spreads.

This is contrast between dynamism and peacefulness can also be appreciated in the lettering choices for each theme, as shown in figure 25. In these examples, we can see how the Among Us theme uses an irregular, bubbly, dynamic and thick lettering font highlighted with different colours which appears almost child-like at times, while

the paper crane theme uses an elegant and evenly spaced cursive font for the titles, plus a simple, thin lettering font for the subtitles.
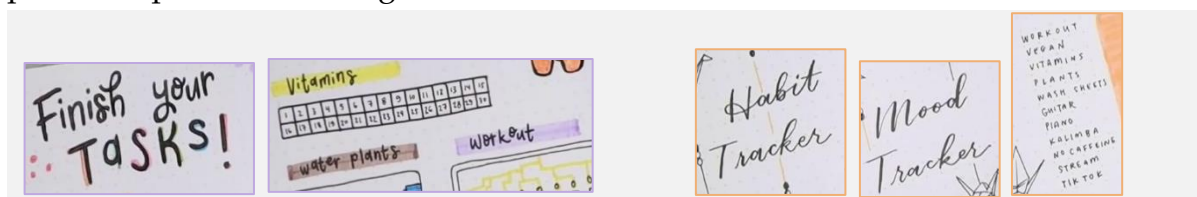

FIGURE 25   Comparison of the lettering styles used in November's (left) and January's (right) themes.

Looking at these titles we can also see how the playfulness of the Among Us theme is present in the title used for the habit tracker, which reads "Finish you TASKS!" instead of the more typical "Habit Tracker". This title is another reference to the Among Us game, in which different in-game tasks need to be completed in the form of minigames in order to win, thus giving the title a playful, funny quality, which is enhanced by the remediation of the minigames as the habit tracker modules on the page. Note how this is reflected in the videos' background decoration, i.e. the decorative elements on Amanda's desk.

In short, while bullet journal themes allow users to connect to different emotions through their journals, it is in the visual translation of those themes into the journal that the potential of these themes is realised. Through offering examples of two contrasting journal themes from my dataset, my intention has been that of exemplifying how different modes (mainly colour, shape and layout) are employed in the context of my data to tap into different associations and communicative conventions in order to convey each theme and its qualities. These are techniques which were present in all of the bullet journal designs in my dataset, of which further examples have been offered throughout this section.

5   DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In PWM videos, bullet journaling is framed as an enjoyable activity through which users can connect with specific emotions. Moreover, the aesthetics of the journal are portrayed as an essential part of the practice. As such, and regarding the study's first research question, two main aspects of bullet journaling are foregrounded in PWM videos: bullet journaling's role as a practice for mediating and transforming emotion, and the journal's dimension as a visual canvas. This portrayal of bullet journaling also relates to the functions that the journal seems to accomplish for practitioners in PWM videos, which was the focus of the study's second research question. The main function accomplished through bullet journaling seems to be that of mediating and managing emotion. Moreover, it seems that as users mediate their general emotional disposition through the journal, they also mediate their relationship with the self- and productivity work that they perform through it, thus constructing said work as a form of leisure rather than as a form of work.

Future research could engage further with questions related to the functions that bullet journaling fulfils in practitioners' lives, addressing the limitations of this study by working directly with practitioners in order to investigate their own perceptions of the journal's role in their lives, as well as the relationship between their emotions, their identities, and the journal.[22] The importance that the aesthetic aspect of bullet journaling has for practitioners could also be investigated further through this approach, along with the relationship between aesthetics and emotion that I outlined through my analysis. How do users employ this connection in their practice? Is it present and/or relevant for most practitioners? If so, in which ways? Etc. Lastly, subsequent studies could also work with participants who practice bullet journaling outside of

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[22] While these aspects have been explored in one of the studies referenced in this thesis through participant interviews (Tholander & Normark, 2020), no other studies have yet worked directly with practitioners, and so this is a research direction that remains largely unexplored, especially in critical research.

internet communities, given that all of the research that has been done on bullet journaling thus far has only included perspectives from practitioners who participate in online environments.

Moving now onto the discussion of the implications of this study's findings, I would first like to comment on a few notions related to bullet journaling's role as a tool for emotional management. Firstly, I would like to talk about the blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure in bullet journaling through e.g. the framing of self-work as a form of leisure connected to practitioners' identities and feelings. This relativisation of the boundaries between leisure and work is a tendency also present in the current stage of capitalism, with which this aspect of bullet journaling resonates. Under neoliberal capitalism, workers are expected to engage in self-improvement and self-monitoring activities in their leisurely time in order to stay mentally and physically fit for work, enhance their productivity and resilience and, in essence, meet the demands of modern work-life. Moreover, in this context individual happiness is understood as a basic life-pursuit achievable through an individualised focus on the self, which contributes to the framing of productivity and self-work not only as ways to optimise oneself in terms of work, but also as activities intrinsically tied to the achievement of personal happiness through self-management and self-improvement. In other words, through promises of a "happier self" if one engages in these practices, neoliberalism co-opts citizens' leisurely time while framing the distress caused by socioeconomic factors as a personal problem which can be (and should be) individually managed. Through my analysis I have illustrated some of the ways in which bullet journaling can mask self- and productivity work as a form of leisure. While merging work and leisure in this way can help users cope better with the demands of modern life, it is a practice which also reproduces neoliberal discourses about i.a. individual power and responsibility, and the pursuit of happiness in a neoliberal society. In this way, bullet journaling contributes to the normalisation of practices which responsabilise individuals for managing socially induced distress, while also expecting them to do so in their leisurely time, making this kind of distress a "personal problem" which should be kept outside of work environments and dealt with individually. In this way, the normalisation of self-management practices and their framing as a form of leisure ultimately perpetuates power imbalances which further self-exploitation, as well as a neoliberal organisation of human life characterised by and individualistic outlook and a preoccupation with the maintenance and pursuit of an optimised, "happy" self.

Previous studies (Tholander & Normark, 2020) have argued for the role of bullet journaling as a form of soft resistance insofar as it allows users to put emotion and personal values before rationality and productivity, and to reclaim ownership over their personal information and time. However, these strategies could also be seen as ways of individually managing the consequences of these factors without necessarily

questioning their causes. So, on the one hand, "bullet journaling could be interpreted as a form of critique (…) towards the dominant and unavoidable technologies and infrastructures" which have made us lose our sense of control over our time and personal information, "such as search engines, cloud technologies, and messaging systems" (ídem, 8). However, on the other hand, it could also be seen as a practice which doesn't question such infrastructures but rather exists *alongside them* as a way of managing their effects without critically angaging with the ideological basis that make such infraestructures possible. In fact, bullet journaling and digital technologies are not opposites, but rather coexist and compliment each other in practitioners' lives, as indicated by previous research, all of which used data collected through online social media sites (Ayobi et al, 2018; Tholander and Normark, 2020).[23,24] Moreover, it should also be noted that, regardless of whether bullet journaling is considered a form of soft resistance against digital capitalism or not, it is a practice that does contribute to the perpetuation of a specific understanding of what "normalcy"and happiness mean and how they can be achieved. In this way, it is a practice which makes neoliberal self-management and self-improvement work into enjoyable pursuits tied to practitioners' emotions and personal narratives, and in doing so plays off specific ideas about what things like healthy, productive, and normal mean. In other words, as a method which helps practitioners cope with the pressures that maintaining a productive, physically and mentally functional self entails, bullet journaling allows practitioners to adapt to current socioeconomic expectations through individually focused self-management strategies without directly addressing the source of those expectations. Such an approach stems from neoliberal discourses on the power of individual choice and self-work, the importance of personal self-realisation (and of what self-realisation means in the first place), as well as the moral need to take responsibility for one's own circumstances.

As part of this discussion, it is also worth noting that the portrayal of bullet journaling as a way of mediating emotion, both as it relates to users' general emotional disposition and to how they emotionally relate to self-work, also reflects a sociohistorical trend in the foregrounding of emotion and the increasing commodification of the "symbolic and immaterial" (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019, 52). In this way, emotion has become one more aspect of human life to be managed and commodified in favour of

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[23] See e.g. Wickberg (2020) for a theoretical exploration of the relationship between digital techologies and handwriting. See also Ryder Carroll's comments on the topic in his interview with Waterstones (Waterstones, 2018). Also, note that both Ayobi et al.'s (2018) and Tholander and Normark's (2020) studies are based on data collected through social media platforms and/or interviews with participants that actively participated in said platforms.

[24] This complex relationship between the analog and the digital also opens up possible directions future research, for example regarding the ways in which bullet journalers employ each format in their practice, the kind of boundaries they stablish between them and how, and their perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of these environments and how they shape their lives in meaningful ways.

maintaining a "functional" self, i.e. a self able to meet the demands of a precarious neoliberal economy, with self-management being framed as a moral obligation. Emotional management has also become intimately tied to consumption, with the emergence and solidification of emodities as a way to manage the self and emotion and cope with modern life (see e.g. Illouz, 2018). In this way, I theorise that bullet journaling as an activity, as well as the supplies commonly used for it, also act as emodities insofar as they afford users an "escape"' from emotions such as anxiety while helping them transform their emotional disposition in ways which align with neoliberal expectations. In a similar way, as a practice which fosters positive (i.e. productive) emotions while regulating and minimising negative (i.e. unproductive) ones, this kind of practice can also play into the dismissal of the importance of negative emotions and their functions, framing them simply as "undesirable" within a healthy person. In this way, "good" mental health is associated with the presence of certain emotions and the absence of others, playing into the amoralisation of emotion discussed in section 2 as well as into its subsequent "re-moralisation" by framing certain emotions as morally desirable or inherently better than others. In other words, the normalisation of this moralising aspect of emotion, the inherent rejection of "unproductive" emotions, as well as the underlying idea that human distress can be managed through individual rather than collective action, is also an aspect of the ideology underlying the practice of bullet journaling which can be argued to resonate with neoliberal discourses.

In summary, and as previously mentioned regarding the co-opting of citizens' leisurely time in favour of fostering a "functional" self, this kind of ideology also co-opts emotion as a way of constructing and legitimising a self which can function within a neoliberal context, framing this "functional" self as the "normal" self. As such, by removing the actual moral value of emotions it becomes difficult to see emotions such as anxiety, sadness, guilt, etc. as indicators of anything else than a "dysfunctional self". In the same way, when these emotions become something to be corrected, their moral value is stripped away, and feeling these emotions becomes a cause of distress in and of itself because it indicates that something is wrong with the person experiencing them rather than with their environment. As such, addressing large-scale socioeconomic issues becomes difficult not only because of the framing of human distress as self-contained and individually manageable, but also because managing said distress on the individual level is seen as the most pressing issue. In this way, while bullet journaling can help users not become overwhelmed with feelings of worry and negativity, it generally does so in a way which perpetuates these ideologies and the framing of certain emotions on the individual level as undesirable or pathologic.

Following the topics raised in this discussion, future research could also explore perspectives on bullet journaling which focus on its potential as a tool for coping with neoliberal structures in critical ways. Moreover, prospective research could also

investigate whether different social groups have different approaches to bullet journaling insofar as their critical engagement with the aspects of the practice discussed here, as well as regarding the different approaches to and uses of bullet journaling that may emerge. More quantitative approaches could also be valuable in this context for the investigation of the demographics of bullet journal users, as well as the differences in practitioner's approaches to bullet journaling and whether they are influenced by demographic factors, as these are topics where qualitative data is still completely lacking.

Talking now about the ways in which the portrayal of bullet journaling in my data may have been affected by its embeddedness in SME, it is not surprising for bullet journaling's aesthetics and positivity to be foregrounded in such a context, where these are aspects that are highly valued and where specific emotional dispositions are seen as preferable over others (see section 2.2).[25] However, it is also worth noting that, as explored through my literature review, this is not a kind of preference which is exclusive to social media environments. Rather, and as already mentioned in this discussion, achieving an emotional disposition which aligns with market rationality, whether that be in the context of SME or elsewhere, is largely seen as a moral obligation, with strategies for emotional and bodily management being essential to "properly function" in a neoliberal society. Because of this, and also based on the results of previous studies which focused on bullet journaling in different contexts, it seems that the portrayal of bullet journaling in PWM videos is not so much detached from users' day-to-day experiences of bullet journaling but rather represents an *ideal* or *archetypical* vision of this practice and its affordances. In other words, popular PWM videos may be attractive to audiences because they offer a portrayal of the ideal bullet journal and its desired effects in practitioners' lives, whilst providing a model on how to achieve said ideal through their instructional side.[26] Moreover, through my observations I theorise that another attractive aspect of PWM videos may be that they remediate some of the functions of bullet journaling in and audio-visual entertainment format. Namely, given that this type of content is constructed *around* the journal, with e.g. the sets' decoration and the videos' background music matching the monthly themes and recreating their "atmosphere", I theorise that PWM videos may be remediating bullet journaling's effects through visual and aural semiotic resources.

[25] While I didn't critically engage with relationship between the concept of "authenticity" in SME and the moralisation of emotion, given that my research focused on the portrayal of bullet journaling in SME and not on the characteristics of SME in itself, this is a relationship which could also be explored in future research on PWM content, since social media authenticity is a concept that seems to be heavily influenced by this moralising aspect of emotion in a neoliberal context, as outlined in section 2.2.

[26] This view would be consistent with the generalised importance of representing some sort of ideal or archetype in social media in order for content to be attractive to audiences (see e.g. Castañeda's work (2019) on self-representation strategies and self-curation in social media). This is also an aspect of PWM content which could be explored in future research.

Watching these videos may thus have a similar emotional outcome to bullet journaling for audiences, indicating these videos' role as emodities which can be used for emotional regulation through situational emotional transfer. Future research could explore this aspect of PWM content and focus on audience motivation and the role of PWM videos as emodities, for example by looking and the multimodal resources at play in terms of the videos' strategies for emotional transfer, and the creation of specific moods and/or atmospheres through visual and aural semiotic resources in PWM content. The role of creators' brand image in the consumption of these videos as emodities could also be studied, exploring homophily as another mechanism for emotional transfer in this kind of content.

6 CONCLUSION

Modern life is full of contradiction. It is characterised by a precarious, unstable economy rigged with inequality on a global scale and based on unsustainable models of production and consumption. However, modern life is also characterised by a foregrounding of emotional life in which personal happiness is seen as the standard and the goal of human life, with a focus on individuality which makes addressing global, systemic problems challenging to say the least. Reconciling these aspects can be difficult, and it is in this difficulty that the incongruency of the modern organisation of human life lies. Under current conditions, which are based on a neoliberal ideology that applies the economic principles of profit, competition, and perpetual growth to all facets of human life, the development of just, equal and sustainable societies is becoming increasingly difficult. However, discourses about individual responsibility and power, and the prevalence of consumption as a way of dealing with social problems and human distress, simultaneously make addressing such issues increasingly difficult. Because of this, it is important to approach the study of social and cultural phenomena from a critical lens, given that these phenomena are inevitably shaped by our cultural beliefs and the naturalised discourses through which we make sense of reality.

Through this study on PWM videos and the practice of bullet journaling as it is portrayed in mainstream media, I have tried to shed some light on the pervasiveness of these kinds of discourses, as well as on how they can be reproduced and disseminated in subtle ways even through a practice such as bullet journaling, which in principle is simply about helping users life happier, more meaningful lives. Through this analysis and the ways in which I have related bullet journaling as a practice to neoliberal discourses, I do not however intend to demonise this practice or its practitioners. Rather, my intention has been that of bringing awareness to some of the discourses that this practice draws on in an effort to provide a critical analysis on aspects such as where the effectiveness of this practice lies, and the ways in which it co-opts

practitioners' identities and emotions in specific ways. In this way, while bullet journaling is very effective in helping individuals manage their negative emotions and cope with the demands of current-day capitalism, in doing so it is also reproducing specific discourses which lie at the core of some of the main issues of neoliberal society and the ways in which it fosters inequality and perpetuates an unsustainable economy. As such, this analysis is meant to highlight the ubiquity of such discourses, pointing at their prevalence and the ways in which they have become integrated into our cultural landscape. In line with a critical approach to research, I hope this study can contribute to the questioning of our current systems and ideologies and bring more awareness to the small ways in which they are reproduced and strengthened in our daily lives.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – TRANSCRIPTION KEY

…   omitted text
()   replaced/added text for clarification
[]   extra-linguistic annotation, e.g. [laughter]

APPENDIX 2 – SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

ELAN transcript of AmandaRachLee's video "PLAN WITH ME | April 2020 Bullet Journal Setup" (2020b). Only the most relevant utterances were transcribed.

this month's bullet journal set up is gonna be a little bit different
considering all of the things going on in the world I know that a lot of things
have been shut down a lot of places schools and all of that so some of you guys
might not need the typical to-do list aspect of a bullet journal nonetheless
00:00:25.282 - 00:00:40.875

of course do whatever works for you in this time and you know we're just gonna
have fun here making some spreads and doodling

00:00:40.875 - 00:00:48.410

I feel like what I need right now amongst all this chaos is really to sit down relax and get some planning done and some doodling and all of that
00:00:48.410 - 00:00:59.812

then one night inspiration struck me
00:01:25.153 - 00:01:27.888

and I've always loved the aesthetic I think it's so cosy
00:02:26.640 - 00:02:29.162

I would categorise them as cosy aesthetic
00:02:40.806 - 00:02:43.633

I thought it was really really great and I was honestly so inspired
00:03:11.530 - 00:03:14.283

but all those illustrations were slightly more complicated than what I normally do for a bullet journal set up
00:03:23.150 - 00:03:28.704

I really recommend you guys to like customize this maybe make it look like your own apartment
00:03:42.607 - 00:03:47.446

but I did sort of throw in some elements from my own apartment like my plants and my stationery pots
00:03:59.848 - 00:04:05.941

I thought it was so so fun and even though it looks complicated guys I promise it's actually not too hard to draw
00:04:07.059 - 00:04:14.027

just have fun with it
00:04:17.764 - 00:04:18.816

they use sort of warm tones a lot to signify that cosiness
00:05:34.027 - 00:05:38.601

that could be a fun element to add as well I kind of based this off myself
00:05:57.000 - 00:05:59.495   00:06:16.396 - 00:06:18.788

but honestly this was so much fun to draw this sort of like animation illustration style for those of you who don't know drawing anime was how I got into art
00:06:29.553 - 00:06:40.959

but yeah it really took me back to my roots almost and it was really fun to do
00:06:48.404 - 00:06:52.655

I thought it was a fun thing to sort of picture all of my bullet journaling spreads as if it was a decorative item that was in study girl's apartment
00:07:28.788 - 00:07:37.820

I think with all this craziness and uncertainty in the worlds
00:08:17.914 - 00:08:21.396

but it's even more important now to set those small goals and intentions and affirmations just to keep your mind sane and give yourself a purpose in the morning and you know just take care of your mental health guys

00:08:25.423 - 00:08:40.250

this spread I was so so excited to make I think this is such a fun spread
00:08:47.852 - 00:08:50.378   00:09:43.010 - 00:09:44.655

I also had fun adding a bunch of other decorative things
00:09:56.390 - 00:09:59.852

it's just a fun spread I think I think you guys are gonna have a lot of fun
making this
00:10:16.295 - 00:10:21.632

this is my quarantine routine spread
00:12:47.609 - 00:12:51.010

you don't have to follow it exactly but I thought it was really nice to sort of
give yourself a ideal layout of the day eh it can be so easy to just sleep in
all day or procrastinate or especially when you're at home or in my case I just
eat food whenever I wanna procrastinate you know it's not it's not the greatest
so I thought it was a good idea to lay out sort of your ideal day at home in
terms of productivity
00:13:02.451 - 00:13:29.382

a nice heart-warming short quote
00:16:05.882 - 00:16:08.263

and I just really like the way this spread turned out I can't wait to come up
with more ideas for spreads throughout April I think it's going to be really
fun
00:16:14.855 - 00:16:21.983

I really love the way this turned out I love the minimal colour palette and the illustrations they were just such a blast to do and the spreads were fun to make I threw on a lo-fi playlist and it was just very relaxing and therapeutic 00:17:54.687 - 00:18:07.800