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Interviewer: What online platforms do you use?
Anonymous: I use Reddit, and Instagram, and yeah, that's my main
I: So reddit and Instagram are your primary. And do you recall what your username is for those two?
A: Segaman098, that's my username for every online platform I ever use
I: Okay, so it's easy to remember?
A: Yeah, I started using it in 1998 because my brother made my first email for me in 1998 so I just stuck with it. The first online platform I really used was I think in the 2000s was game FAQs, that was my username on game FAQS and then life, that was one of the first message boards that was popular, so as other social media came out much later like MySpace and Facebook, I just kept the username.
I: Wow, you've been at it for a while, so you said 98 was because of the year you started using it. What about Segaman, where did that come from?
A: I liked playing sega genesis as a kid.
I: So you were like - alright, that's gonna be my name.
A: My brother made it so I thought yeah why not.
I: Oh yeah, so he helped you with it, so if he hadn't helped you do you think you'd have come up with something else?
A: Yeah, probably. Idk what it would've been, my go-to video game name is areo, I don't remember where I got that from but like for old video games, there was a 4 character limit for character's names, so I just picked one and stuck with it. Before I used that I just used [redacted], my name without a letter.
I: Now if you were starting a new platform, would you ever use your real name?
A: Um, like on a professional platform, so on Linkedin, I am (redacted). 098. But any other platform, if it's not professional, I usually use segaman098.
I: Why?
A: It's just, it's like my name you know. I have a connection to that username, like it's like in all gaming communities I'm segaman - like in Discord, there I am segaman098 for any of the Discord communities, like Playstation network, Nintendo network, all the other networks, I'm segaman098, it's like my gamer tag but more than that, it's my nonprofessional name. On the internet, to me it feels like it's my online personality name.
I: So people know you as ... if you have any ppl you talk to consistently they know you as segaman098.
A: Yeah, like anyone I've connected to in real life first will know me as [redacted], but anyone I just know online, they would know me as segaman098.
I: That's interesting.
A: I guess the exception is when you play online games you name your character and you have an account name and you name your character so on an online game, you have to know my character name, but on online games like Final Fantasy 14, where you have multiple characters and ppl can search for you by account or by name, they'd probably search for me by account name .
I: Okay. You keep saying it's your name online. Is that, would you say - it sounds like a different identity, or seperate?
A: I mean, it's like an extension of my identity.
I: okay
A: I mean you know, people who do know me online but who only know me as segaman098 and they would know me ... like if you only knew me through my Reddit profile, you'd have a very different view of me because I mostly lurk, and when I do post, it's super random, I've

commented on SF politics and video game stuff, and organizing meetups on the gay gamer subreddit, so - it's very eclectic.

I: So it'd be sort of a sparse version of whatever your whole self is.

A: Yeah. But it's interesting, I remember in my studies we talked about this idea of [similockra??] where a simulation becomes more real than the actual thing, like your Facebook profile, I don't have Facebook but people's Facebook profiles for a while, that represented their life to people more than their actual life did. So it's like a simulation of your life but it's actually more than that because it's replaced your actual life. That's what I would think of it as.

I: Mhm, but you mentioned it as an extension rather than a replacement, right? There is a distinction.

A: Yeah, for me personally it feels more like it isn't a replacement of me, it's just a part of who I am. It's like my online persona I guess.

I: And do you feel like that online persona bleeds into your real life self ,like in the other direction if that makes sense, is there a connection at all in the real world?

A: I think sometimes they overlap, especially back when I used to organize reddit meetups, that was ppl from reddit meeting me in person and so, I think, I think once you meet in person they kinda get this different view if you that they didn't get to see before, but like, their initial view of you is definitely colored by what they see online. For example, the meetups were gamers, there was gay gamers so like everyone I met in that group was like, we are nerds. We like talking about nerdy video game stuff and we're queer so we talk about queer stuff so that was definitely the glue that held those bonds together, whereas some ppl who I met in real life were connected more through work or through school, so they might know I'm a nerd but we're not gonna talk about that stuff, as much, we're going to talk more about our work and our school, things like that.

I: Mhm so it almost sounds like the name, the online name you have serves as sort of a way to… like a niche, it creates a niche version of the extension of yourself that allows you to focus on certain things that are of interest to you that maybe you don't have as much exposure to in real life?

A: Can you repeat that?

I: The personality you have, the name segaman is associated with like you said, nerd culture, gaming or things, whereas outside life is more professional, or things that happen in person, so it sounds like that name or that online life allows you to focus or explore interests you otherwise wouldn't necessarily have as easy access to in real life.

A: Yeah, I would definitely say it represents to me the nerdier side of my life and personality, there are times where that's not true, so on Instagram lots of people I'm connected to on Instagram, not all of them are nerds, but through game FAQs or Reddit, it's mostly nerd fandom culture and stuff. So I would say most of the time yes.

I: Why do you think that's ... you don't have that as easily as in real life?

A: I think I do have friends that I made in real life that are also nerdy um I think it's just online, the things I comment on and express myself on,it's mostly nerdy subculture. I think that's just the nature of the internet, the things I seek out online are nerdy. I'm not seeking out as much - i'm not trying to talk about work or anything online besides Slack or whatever.

I: Yeah, interesting. And when it comes to that separation I guess of online/offline, I guess you seek out a specific thing online as opposed to in real life depending on the specific platform you're using but are there things that ... do you limit what you allow yourself to do online, or see or reveal, or about yourself online. Is there a difference between what you would share about yourself online versus in person?

A: I think it depends on the platform and how I've connected to the person. If I was sharing stuff with people on Reddit I would definitely be much more guarded because with Reddit there's no verification process, they can be anywhere in the world, I don't know anything about these people, and there's no one on Reddit that i've built a really good rapport with. A long time ago I

did and then we met in person and so, I guess meeting in person is one thing that could kind of convince me, however though on Discord, Discord is interesting because it's like it tends to be for communities that I'm part of online or offline, and I'd say the offline ones - I'm part of this coworking space right now, and they have a Discord, it's like Slack, that's how you communicate with the working space and with other people and stuff, they have diff channels and things, and most of the people I haven't met in person because not all of them go into the space, but I'm pretty comfortable with just that space in general so I would be much more willing to talk about my life on that Discord but I'm not exactly sure why. I think it's just because I haven't met the person but I've met the community itself. In person.

I: Yeah, so you wouldn't get that same thing from the first two platforms you mentioned at the start which was insta and -?

A: Also a lot of my insta connections are ppl I've met in real life first.

I: Mhm

A: And some of them are good friends I've met in real life and we just connect on Instagram because we connect on anything, others are like, I've met this person once at a party and I add them on insta because I wanna talk to them again. Those people, I guess it's intereting because they know me more through Instagram than real life, because I only met them once at a party and all they ever see are my stories and my posts and my updates.

I: Mhm, and what was the other app?

A: Reddit.

I: So it sounds like every platform is just, it's not even... you have a name that you use, that's an extension of yourself online and then within that online space, every single platform has its own vibe or intention that changes, so it's breaking that identity up even more based on what you're interested in, based on what the interaction is meant to be, or -

A: Yeah depending on the platform so Instagram, there's only one persona because it's just everything, whereas with Reddit there's subreddits, so every subreddit I'm gonna interact on a little differently depending on the sub, same with Discord, it's different channels.

I: Mhm, and when it comes to your name segaman098, do you give that out freely, do you want people to be able to find you, do you give it out sparingly?

A: I'll give it out, I wouldn't say I advertise it, like if someone asks what's your Insta, then I tell them it's segaman098, I dont think anyone's ever asked me what my Reddit is because most people don't use Reddit as social media, they mostly use it for other reasons and then Discord i've added people, if they ask for it. It's more about like yeah i'm willing to share but the reason I share it is because i'm willing to connect with someone. Not just 'cause like I wanna get my name out there and become popular.

I: So if you have the same name for all your platforms and you do give it out on one specific platform, that means that people who do have your name on Instagram would probably be able to find you very easily on other platforms if they wanted to.

A: Theoretically yes, I feel like because I don't use that many platforms… most people, what they're gonna do if they had my username they'd probably search it up on Instagram, most people I don't think are gonna search it up on Reddit, like those don't really intersect that much. And then Discord is kinda complicated where they could search for segaman098 but you have to know these 4 other digits or whatever. No one is gonna search me up on game FAQs. But it is interesting like if you typed in segaman098 onto the internet, you see this interesting history of my online personality.

I: Yeah, so there's this whole catalog of all the sites you've ever used with that name.

A: Yeah, I guess the one time liam guarded is every now and - I used to work with kids a lot in the past, I was a teacher, I worked for summer camps and stuff, and so then I was very careful to be like, never giving that out to the kids, or if I was gonna play a game with them, making sure my gamer tag was hidden, things like that, 'cause I wouldn't want the kids to look me up.

I: Kids are curious

A: Yeah.

I: Is there anything you felt, you wanted to mention I didn't ask about that you felt was relevant?

A: Something to mention would be dating apps. I don't use segaman098 on those, I use my name. A/ because it's for dating. But they're connected to my Instagram. And I guess that's, that's just another interesting thing to think about, those people like really only know me through what i've put on the profile, and then my Instagram posts. That's interesting because eventually we might meet up and they'll get to know the actual me, but until then it's like, well what was my most recent Instagram post, a lot of insta posts are like cooking, so I feel a lot of people think i'm this really good chef, and it's like no i've made a handful of bentos and a handful of recipes. I like cooking but I wouldn't consider myself a cooking enthusiast. But I feel like from my Insta you'd probably be like, wow this guy loves cooking!

i: Yeah, so it'd be like your dating app would have whatever you chose to put on your profile, to present yourself and then they'd go look at your Insta and you'd present yourself as a cook, so it's like two sort of identities there. That's interesting.

A: I wonder about that a lot.

I: Is what you would put on a dating app what you say to someone in person out loud ideally or is it something that would connect more with the stuff you talk about online?

A: Mmmmm, I would say I try to put - I try to communicate that i'm into nerdy subculture, whatever video game or anime i'm into at the time, but I also try to come off a little less nerdy, like i'm into that stuff, but i'm also into ice skating, juggling, going on hikes, and to read, so I try to like portray myself as a normal person.

I: You portray both sides of yourself.

A: Yeah. Whereas online I feel like it's less of the normal side.