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Writing Media: Mobile Story-Sharing Apps as New Learning Ecologies

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Education

by

Ksenia A. Korobkova

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor, Penelope Collins, Chair
Professor, Mark Warschauer
Professor, Jonathan Alexander

2017

DEDICATION

To my family.

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

University of California, Irvine Ph.D. in Education Specialization: Language, Literacy, and Technology	2017
M.A. in Education	2014
University of California, Berkeley B.A. in Development Studies; Slavic Literature; Psychology Phi Beta Kappa; Highest Distinction	2008

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Graduate Student Researcher University of California, Irvine: Irvine, CA	2011 – 2017
Policy and Research Associate American Institutes for Research: Palo Alto, CA	2008 – 2011
Letters & Sciences Research Assistant University of California, Berkeley: Berkeley, CA Anthropology Department; Education Department; History Department	2004 – 2008

PUBLICATIONS

Books

Ito, M., **Korobkova, K.A.**, Martin, C., Phister, R., Rafalow, M., & Salen, K. *Leveling Up: Connected Learning in Interest-Driven Environments*. (Under contract). New York: NYU press.

Refereed Journal Articles

- Korobkova, K.A.** Media-ting Adolescent Literacy and Identity: Storysharing Apps in the Digital Extracurriculum. (in submission). *Journal of Literacy Research*.
- Black, R., Alexander, J., & **Korobkova, K.A.** (2017). Flows of Literacy Across Corporate and User-Produced Virtual Worlds. *Teachers College Record* 119(11).
- Korobkova, K.A.** & Rafalow, M.H. (2016) "Managing Digital Publics for Playful Production: A Crosscase Analysis of Two Online Communities." *Digital Culture and Education* 8(1).
- Black, R.W., Tomlinson, W., & **Korobkova, K.A.** (2016). Learning, Play, and Identity in Gendered Lego Franchises. *International Journal of Play* 5(1) 64-76.
- Black, R.W., Tomlinson, W., **Korobkova, K.A.**, & Ivy, S. (2014, July). Learning, Play, and Identity in Gendered Lego Franchises. *Proceedings of the Games, Learning, and Society Conference*.
- Korobkova, K.A.** & Black, R.W. (2014). Contrasting Visions: Identity, Literacy, and Boundarywork in a Fan Community. *E-learning and Digital Media*.
- Black, R., **Korobkova, K.**, & Epler, A. (2014). Barbie Girls and Xtractaurs: Discourse and identity in virtual worlds for young children. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 14(2), 265-285.
- Reich, S.M., Black, R. W., & **Korobkova, K.A.** (2014). Connections and Communities in Virtual Worlds Designed for Children. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 42(3), 255-267.
- Reich, S.M., **Korobkova, K.A.**, Black, R.W., & Sumaroka, M. (2013). "Hey! Can you show me how to do this?": Digital Games Mediating Family Interactions" in *Children's virtual play worlds: Culture, learning and participation*, Burke, A. & Marsh, J. (eds). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Refereed Conference Presentations

- Korobkova, K.A.** & Collins, P. (2017, July). Story-Sharing Mobile App Affordances for Literacy Practices, Skills, and Identities. To be presented at *International Literacy Association*. Orlando, FL.
- Korobkova, K.A.** (2017, June). Media-ting Adolescent Literacy and Identity: Storysharing Apps in the Digital Extracurriculum. To be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Jean Piaget Society. San Francisco, CA.

- Korobkova, K.A.** (2017, April). Writing Media: A Case Study of Literacy Sponsorship, Practice, and Identity in a Story-Sharing App. To be presented at *American Educational Research Association*. San Antonio, TX.
- Nominated for Outstanding Graduate Student Paper Award
- Korobkova, K.A.** (2016, April). Building Blocks of Identity-Making: Semiotic Resources in Story Sharing and Construction Play Sites. Presented at *American Educational Research Association*. Chicago, IL.
- Korobkova, K.A.,** Kozina, D., Black, R. & Reich, S. (2015, April) “Legos for Girls?” Discourses In and of Gendered Lego Franchises. Presented at the NSF-sponsored *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat Workshop*. Philadelphia, PA.
- Korobkova, K.A.** (2014, March). Writing within Fandom as a Genre of Practice. *Digital Learning and Media*. Boston, MA.
- Foliaki, T., Reich, S.M., Black, R., & **Korobkova, K.** (2015, March). Learning, Play, and Identity in Gendered Lego Franchises. *2015 Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development*.
- Korobkova, K.A.,** Carfagna, L.B., Rafalow, M., & Lombana Bermudez, A. (2014, March). This is Learning – How Perceptions of Learning Relevance Matter for Student Success. *Digital Learning and Media*. Boston, MA.
- Reich, S., Black, R., **Korobkova, K.,** & Wheeler, A. (2013, April). Skills for being socially competent in a virtual world. *2013 Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development*.
- Korobkova, K.A.** (2013, July). “Is Blogging ‘Writing’ Writing”? Making Meaning and Sense of New Literacy Practices. *National Association for Media Literacy Education*. Torrance, CA.
- Korobkova, K.A.** (2013, March). “On Imagination: Technologies and Literacies of One Boyband Fandom.” *Digital Media and Learning Conference*. Chicago, IL.
- Black, R.W., **Korobkova, K.A.,** & Reich, S.M. (2012, December). "Workarounds" and "Walkthroughs" as New Digital Literacies: Circumventing Limitations in Virtual Worlds for Youth. *Literacy Research Association*. San Diego, CA
- Reich, S.M., **Korobkova, K.A.,** Black, R.W., & Sumaroka, M. (2012, July). “Forming connections and community on children’s virtual worlds”. *International Conference of Community Psychology*, Barcelona, Spain.
- Black, R.W., **Korobkova K.A.,** Reich, S.M. & Sumaroka, M. (2012, September). “Workarounds” and “Walkthroughs as New Digital Literacies: Circumventing Perceived Design Limitations in Virtual Worlds for Youth.” *Literacy Research Association*. San Diego, CA.

Invited Presentations

Korobkova, K.A. (2014, June). Learning Pathways: Onramps, Lane Changes, and Detours. Connected Learning Research Network Annual Meeting. Supported by the MacArthur Foundation.

Invited Reports

Korobkova, K.A. (2014). Schooling the Directioners: Connected Learning and Identity-Making in the One Direction Fandom. Case report for the Connected Learning Research Network. Irvine, CA: Digital Media and Learning Research Hub.

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Korobkova, K.A. (2014). Tracking “Interests” in Interest-Driven Learning Communities. Connected Learning Research Blog.

Korobkova, K. A. & Rafalow, M. (2013). On Schools, Sackboys, and Sponsors: A Tale of Two Communities. Connected Learning Research Blog.

Korobkova, K.A. (2013). On Design Thinking. Connected Learning Research Blog.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Associate (Instructor of Record)

2014

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- 21st Century Literacies
Guest Lectures: “From Reading to New Literacies”; “Introduction to Media Literacy”; “Tools of Persuasion in Visual Literacy”; “Gaming and Learning”; “Out-of-school Networked Literacies and Identities”
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Guest Lectures: “Video Games as Learning Spaces”; “Technologies + Moral Panics”

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Guest Lectures: “Edutainment, Motivation, and Design”; “Historical Differences in Perceptions of Technological Progress”
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Digital Media and Learning
Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning

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AERA Discourse Studies Panel Planning (2014)
DML Junior Researchers’ Meeting Planning (2014)
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Opportunities for Geosciences’ Education NSF Meeting (2007; 2008; 2009) NSF
Internal Review organizer, analyst, and participant (2009)

Professional Affiliations

American Education Research Association
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Literacy Research Association
Digital Media & Learning
Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning
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Mentorship

Undergraduate students mentored:
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AGS (Associated Graduate Students) Travel Fellowship	2015
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Writing Media: Mobile Story-Sharing Apps as New Learning Ecologies

by

Ksenia A. Korobkova

Doctor of Philosophy

University of California, Irvine 2017

Associate Professor Penelope Collins, Chair

In a three-article format, this dissertation investigates the literate identities and practices of 40 multilingual, dispersed adolescents engaged in production within the newly popular story-sharing apps. Exemplifying the logic of the networked web, these apps foster literate engagement that is mobile, social, multimodal, and public. Story-sharing apps serve as literacy sponsors (Brandt, 2001) for these youth, furnishing a literacy infrastructure that provides affordances and constraints for literate development and participation. Involved youth, on their end, variably take up, contest, and negotiate with these affordances and constraints, leading to new forms of practice in the digital extracurriculum (Shultz, 2010). Data collected for this project over a three-year period include surveys, semi-structured interviews, sustained observations, literacy artifacts, screen captures, and public relations materials. Applying multiple methods of data collection and analysis, this project comprises a mixed-method instrumental case study (Stake, 2005; Tashakori & Teddlie, 2003), offering a telling case of adolescent networked literacy practices.

Findings are presented in three articles that vary in lens, method, and unit of analysis. The first article presents an in-depth content analysis that queries the available print literacy and new literacy affordances of the most popular story-sharing platform, Wattpad. Findings show that hybrid print and new literacy affordances were built into the site infrastructure and that users innovated upon that infrastructure to

develop a wide array of practices. The second article focuses on results from the background surveys of 40 purposively sampled story-sharing app users, which examined users' demographics, identity stances, device use, and practices. Although "adolescents" and "users" get painted with a broad brush, findings from survey analyses show variance in participants' practices, patterns of use, and identity stances with respect to engagement on these platforms. The third article analyzes youth narratives of participation on story-sharing apps. Young authors' discourses reveal that they consider reading, writing, and communicating on these apps as simultaneously self-initiated, audience-centric, and in conversation with the rules of engagement of the specific platform. This article presents a model of syncretic sponsorship to study the digital extracurriculum in a nuanced and power-laden way. Together, the three studies attend to key debates in literacy and media studies and gain new ground in conceptualizing contemporary adolescent literacies. Implications for future research and practice are provided.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Writing Media

The academy and popular culture alike have produced grand accounts of the effects of technology on human life. Thinkers have argued that technical inventions may uproot memories (Wolf & Stoodley, 2008), flatten the world (Friedman, 2005), make us dumber (Leslie, 2014), or destroy younger generations (Twenge, 2017). From the invention of writing to the popularization of smartphones, introductions of new technologies brought along fierce debates about their consequences. In a piece entitled “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” psychologist Jean Twenge catalogs staggering statistics with the aim of showing that young people coming of age now are physically more secure but psychologically more volatile—and that their handheld devices are to blame (Twenge, 2017). In continuity with work such as Turkle’s *Alone Together* and the motion picture *Screenagers* (Jolly, 2016), Twenge concludes that screen-filled lives are less fulfilling and connected. These sweeping claims, echoing those made throughout the history of technology, roused pushback from researchers of youth, learning, and technology. Cavanagh (2017), Davis (2017), and Guernsey (2017) emphasize that Twenge cherry-picks and decontextualizes data, that she frames correlation as causation, and that claims of a ruined generation are overstated and belittling. Davis (2017) beckons researchers to acknowledge complexity and to show nuance in the ways in which adolescents experience digitized life. She cites recent research that found that teens used social media to feel closer to friends and family, to become more informed, and to feel supported (AP-Norc Center, 2016). Long-standing debates featuring both alarmist and celebratory rhetoric connected to new technologies continue to animate our thinking with and about tools. Yet, fewer studies center on young people’s own narratives about technology use and embrace the nuance and complexity Davis (2017) calls for. Questions about new tools and how we use them propel research in the learning sciences and literacy studies.

Changes in technology and literacy. The field of literacy studies experienced sea changes at the turn of the century. These changes were prompted by theoretical innovations within the field and by technological innovations in the globalizing world, prompting new ways of thinking about what it means to learn, connect, and become literate. The 1980s and 1990s saw a shift to viewing literacies as multiple and social, fueled by the popularity of sociocultural and sociolinguistic frameworks and the move to analyzing multiple modes of representation, including audiovisual, tactile, and haptic.

Moving away from visions of learning and literacy as individual and autonomous cognitive skills, scholars have proposed “new” frameworks, such as New Literacy Studies (New London Group, 1996), multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), local and situated literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; 2000). Largely inspired by social linguistics, ethnography of communication, and cultural studies, these branches of literacy studies grasp for a vision of literacy that is more grounded, situated, and tied to people’s real world experiences and purposes.

Such work depends on the expanded definition of text, which lies at the heart of most conceptions of literacy. Texts—broadly construed—do more than communicate meaning. They also function as tools to establish belonging to cultural groups, to enact identity, and to produce knowledge. Some of these concerns have been framed by the New Literacy Studies, a theoretical movement that seeks to recognize and analyze sweeping changes in society brought about by globalization, digital technology, and the increasing recognition of diverse voices and perspectives (New London Group, 1996).

Prominent scholars of literacy such as Gee et al. (1996), Lemke (1999), and Kress (2003) imply that literacy is increasingly social and multimodal. If such changes are indeed taking place, they are rarely reflected in school curricula (Jewitt, 2008). Thus, we must look to new media spaces “in the wild” (Hutchins, 1995) to describe, interpret, analyze, and apply media-inflected literacy

practices. Homegrown literacy practices build on youth home funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) Although youth might not have experience with literacies privileged in the academy, they might experience reading, writing, and communicating practices valued in their community.

Because literacies involve semiotic potentials of different tools, they are plural and intertwined with available technology. Because communication today is increasingly digital, literacies are increasingly digital as well (Alvermann & Reinking, 2003; Buckingham, 2007; Davies & Merchant, 2009; Marsh, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). With the aid of digital technologies, individuals pursue new ways of learning, participating, producing, and collaborating (Jenkins, 2006; Thomas & Brown, 2011). In light of these connections and building on insights provided by New Literacy Studies, some researchers propose studying new literacies afforded by internet-mediated technologies and instantiating a new ethos of a more connected world. Lankshear & Knobel (2006) have argued for a socially situated and contextually grounded approach for studying literacies that are chronologically and ontologically “new.” They argue that the new literacy practices mobilized in digitally-mediated spaces rely on new values, priorities, and sensibilities—these practices put into motion new ethoi. In particular, they delineate new literacies as being more participatory, collaborative, and distributed than the literacies that came before them. In sampling new literacy practices, they analyze video game communities, blogs, photo-sharing communities, and the spread of memes.

Gaming practices and communities have been key in pushing forward theories of literacy in new times. Games – especially videogames – encapsulate affordances of interactivity, multimodality, personalization, and identity experimentation that new literacy researchers spotlight (e.g., Gee, 2007). Games as a medium also capture spirited debates about the influence of new technologies, including moral panics about violence and addiction on the one hand and hopes about conviviality and educational outcomes on the other. Minecraft, for instance, as a block-building adventure game,

has generated attention as a path to affinity, community, and lucrative STEM careers. Learning to code levels in games like Minecraft weaves with ethics of Web 2.0 because players learn how to be producers as well as consumers of digital products. Echoing turn of phrase coined more than ten years ago, users become prosumers (Jenkins, 2006), able to make and take artifacts of interest to them.

These characteristics of new literacies are consistent with observed social learning practices in Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 Spaces (Davies & Merchant, 2009; Benson & Chik, 2010). These spaces rely on user-generated content and informal exchanges of knowledge. In the last two decades, these kinds of media spaces spurred discourses on information revolutions and the democratization of knowledge, as everyone should be able to participate. In the last few years, these claims have been qualified and tempered by empirical research findings (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008).

Another layer to the debates concerning technology and society has been added by the popularization of mobile smartphones. Due to lower costs of these types of devices, there are demographic differences in content producers that create with their phones. The rise of mobile connectivity through smartphones and the immediacy of social media have changed the way youth choose to shape their identities and represent themselves to others (Kress, 2010). Youth shape and reshape their identities as contexts, tools, and audiences shift (Williams, 2014), and these have shifted dramatically with the popularization of smartphones. Mobile media potentiate change in form, function, and content of communication. Schrock (2015) argues that mobile media afford portability, availability, locatability, and multimediality in ways not evident with previous tools historically.

More and more, young people use their phones to remix already existing media and to produce new content (Lenhart, 2010). In part because these tools are more available, affordable, and connected, and because they provide lowered barriers toward artistic and civic participation, inquiry

into mobile phone use has made inroads into conversations about equity in society. For example, Watkins (2009) argues that the demographics of use have shifted with the introduction of these devices and that working-class students and youth of color are using them to produce content at an unprecedented rate. At the same time, he warns that not all media ecologies are created equal, and that although many people use phones for learning, these might not entail rich learning experiences (Watkins, 2009; 2011). Questions remain around the problem of the availability and use of rich learning and literacy experiences that are mediated by mobile phones.

New media and learning to do/be. Because of these theoretical and technological innovations, it is argued that it is no longer possible to study media literacy as separate from print literacy (Snyder, 2001). Both fields involve understanding how people make meanings from available texts. In part due to newly available technologies, these fields have been pushed to re-conceptualize how people draw from available texts to make new ones and in the process design something new (Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Hull, 2008). With design, people expand their repertoires of practice and the range of their identity work.

Learning new content or how to *do* something is always concomitant with learning to *be* something (Wortham, 2006). Thus, inquiry into learning includes interrogating learners' identity stances. Studies of classroom contexts have shown how social classifications of students and the learning of concepts are intertwined (Wortham, 2006). Yet fewer studies have documented the discursive and interactional processes through which learning identities are formed in spaces that combine digital cultures and print literacy.

Literate practices can be considered powerful tools used to claim a space, establish an identity, or provide a voice in various social interactions but also can be used to gain access to a community, power, or the adoption of a particular identity (Finders, 1997; Lesley, 2012; Moje, 2002;

Moje et al., 2008; Purcell-Gates, 2007). Being able to do something affects one's view of who they are, while a certain view of who they are affects what one can learn and do. Laying out different perspectives on identity as an analytic lens in education research, Gee (2001) posits a tension between the institutional identity perspective and the affinity identity perspective. Institutional identities are imparted onto people by institutions (e.g., school) while affinity identities map onto identity stances based on shared interests (Gee, 2005).

Compositionists have long held that writing itself is a kind of technology (Ong, 1986) that makes available different kinds of relationships with oneself, with others, and with the world. However, new media adds a new gloss to this story. Specifically, new media make these social relationships more visible (Baym & boyd, 2012) and render the world more global and interconnected. Sociologists identify a weakening of the distinction between local and global (Wellman et al., 2002) and growing overlap between genres of practice people consider public and private (Barton & Lee, 2012). In part, these social trends connect to the influx of new media technologies. So called "new times" (Gee, 2000; Gee et al., 1996; Hull, 2003; Luke & Etkins, 1998; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011), ushered by the changing social topographies of the world, socioeconomic forces, and the rise of new technologies, rely on and necessitate new ways with texts.

Globalized online spaces serve as conduits for transcultural and translingual literacy activity. Because people using these sites have more opportunities to interact with people different from themselves, who may live in a different country or participate in different community, online spaces hold the potential to foster cosmopolitan identity stances in participating global citizens (Darvin & Norton, 2017). Composition studies scholars (e.g., Fraiberg, 2010) argue that tracing multimodal and multilingual literacy practices that happen in unofficial spaces is key to moving the field into the 21st century. These spaces facilitate the meeting of people beyond borders, linguistic barriers, or existing affiliations and enable these people to see the humanity in 'the other.' Some theorists have argued

that cosmopolitan identity stances, more and more often mediated with global digital media use, are the path forward towards more equitable futures (Bean, 2016). Literacies borne out of these encounters being reimagined as a strategy for reconciling the tensions inherent in a vastly interconnected yet deeply divided world, where we have “obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship” (Appiah, 2006, p. xv). As globalized online spaces infused with Web 2.0 technologies (O’Reilly 2007), story-sharing sites represent a new textual landscape that combine multiple languages, modes, and forms of socialization and communication.

Adolescent literacy studies. Moje (2002) asserts that “to study youth literacy is to study the complexity of literacy’s power” (p. 212). In part, this is because young people are innovators, early adopters, and subverters of new technologies. Equally, this is because young people are a vulnerable population that bears the brunt of society’s differently valued learning and literacy practices.

Adolescence signifies a time when people develop their identities and negotiate their relationships with themselves, the word, and the world. Adolescence is a historically constituted, socially constructed, and always changing phase. Recently, the psychological definition of adolescence was changed to include people up to twenty-five years of age, given new research on the developing brain and changing developmental needs in society. Adolescent literacy, by extension, encompasses a vast array of social practices in which communication is central (Alvermann, 2008; Hinchman & Sheridan-Thomas, 2008).

Adolescent literacy practices, especially reading and writing, are most often studied in the context of school (Moje et al., 2008). These studies track adolescent school achievement gaps, developing epistemic identities and interests, and varying levels of motivation in middle and high school (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003; Moje et al., 2008). Research in this field has documented the

dipping levels of interest in reading and writing in adolescence and inroads into methods to motivate and encourage youth. Chief of these methods has been technology. For example, research studies have shown that youth find writing with laptops highly motivating (Collins et al., 2015) and that technology thoughtfully deployed in the classroom can yield rich project-based learning (Warschauer, 2011).

Many adolescent literacy studies lament alleged crises of youth aliteracy, pathologize youth practices, or focus on youth from a deficit perspective (Moje, 2008). Instead, Moje (2008) advocates that youth culture, literacy, and identity research should focus on literacy practices that matter to youth. In an overview of this research, she argues that such work should focus on the kinds of texts and literacy practices that excite young people and that they engage in of their own volition. These are the practices that inform youth cultures. Increasingly, these practices are multimodal and connected to social media. In sketching out future directions of the field of adolescent literacy, Moje suggests that studies should focus on what young people know, do, read, and write, as opposed to what they “should be able to do” (Moje, 2008, p. 207). Questions remain about what texts youth choose to create on their own accord and why they choose to create them (Alvermann, 2008). In light of this, there have been continued calls to theorize adolescent literacy practices in the digital world (Alvermann, 2008; Moje, 2008).

Scholars of literacy emphasize that literacy learning can happen in official, institutional spaces and unofficial, local spaces. Brandt (1998; 2001) draws our attention to ways in which formal institutions structure, legitimate, provide, and restrict access to literacy. She frames these institutions as sponsors of mass literacy. In contrast to institutionally sponsored writing, Brandt (1998) presents self-sponsored writing, similar to the literacy practices Ivancic (1998) frames as self-generated and Barron (2006) calls self-sustained and parallel to what Moje (2008) refers to youth writing of their own volition—this type of writing is positioned as unconstrained by official institutions.

These discourses of unconstrained writing practices have taken root in the study of youth digital cultures. Findings from a long-term ethnographic study aimed to document youth practices with technology indicate that “the digital world lowers barriers to self-directed learning” (Ito et al., 2009, p. 2). After chronicling the ways in which youth hang out, mess around, and geek out with technology, the Digital Youth Project authors found freedom and autonomy in these young people’s practices. Although schools are beginning to incorporate technologies into creative practices, young people mostly create media outside of school. In part due to the prevalence of high stakes testing, emphasis on stringently defined print literacy, and mandated curricula (e.g., Vasudevan et al., 2010), inquiry into media-infused literacies has been relegated to homes, afterschool programs, and the ether of the internet.

The digital extracurriculum. The production and consumption of texts outside of school has gotten the moniker of “extracurriculum.” This term comes from the work of Anne Gere (1994), who studied self-sponsored writing groups that gather in “living rooms, nursing homes, community centers, churches, [and] shelters for the homeless” (p. 76), producing “positive feelings about oneself and one’s writing, motivation to revise and improve composition skills, opportunities for publication of various sorts, the belief that writing can make a difference in individual and community life” (Gere, 1994, p. 77). Echoing strands of research in adolescent literacy studies, scholars of writing demonstrate that reading and writing practices in the extracurriculum serve to create positive literacy identities, learning competencies, and rich connections between the self and the bigger community, local and global.

Although researchers assert that in-school literacies and out-of-school literacies permeate one another (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Erstad et al., 2013; Marsh, 2010; Leander, 2007; Schultz, 2003), the digital extracurriculum has garnered particular attention as a path to understanding what youth

create out of their own volition and how the advent of new media affords new communication patterns and identity stances for them. With new developments of technologies as read-write spaces and increasing regulation of teenagers' lives in and out of school (boyd, 2007; Harris, 2008), new media has become a prime site of adolescent literacy and sociality. In fact, researchers argue that boundaries between home, school, and community are no longer useful in understanding adolescent literacy (Vasudevan et al., 2010), in part because digital technologies help literacies and attendant texts travel.

The extracurriculum, thus, has gone digital. In light of this, there have been calls for sustained inquiry into the nature of young people's practices online, their reasons for engaging in these practices, and the analysis of niche sites of literacy and socialization away from the usual suspects, like Facebook (Moje, 2008; Grimes & Fields, 2012). Literacy researchers appeal for studies that are simultaneously nuanced, anti-deficit, and non-romanticized (Moje, 2015). Research in and on the digital extracurriculum advances by documenting and analyzing youth practices in digitally-mediated, mobile spaces, paying attention to the power-laden and situated nature of these practices, and giving voice to youth to account for what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Purpose of the Dissertation

Taking into account these calls for further research and expanding on previous inquiry in the fields of literacy and media studies, this dissertation illuminates, qualifies, and complicates self-sponsored literacy engagement. By interrogating a new genre of media called story-sharing apps that has gained traction with youth worldwide, this dissertation makes headway in documenting and nuancing contemporary adolescent literacy practices. In a three-article format, this dissertation seeks to remedy existing gaps in the literature by documenting the affordances and uses of this genre of digital media, differences in purposes, identities, and genres of participation youth brings to these

sites, and ways in which these adolescents narrate their own literate engagement. Together, these studies enrich our understanding of the digital extracurriculum, which has become a hotbed of youth development, socialization, and instantiation of literacy and learning stances.

This study takes as its basis a case of literacy learning and production in an online affinity network. Taking a multiperspectival approach to literacy, I examine the writing and reading practices of youth using story-sharing apps in order to make, publish, and circulate original stories. By exploring the reasons behind the sparks, sustainment, and perseverance in these out-of-school literacy pursuits, we might be able to better support students in their in-school literacy pursuits. As such, this case study is aimed to help researchers, policymakers, and practitioners understand the interest-driven learning process in a more holistic way in order to better study and support it in any learning environment.

Although the view of literacies as practices and literacy ecologies as power-laden permeate the field of literacy studies today, fewer empirical research studies apply these constructs to hypersocial, mobile, and networked Web 2.0 environments that might well represent the future of literacy ecologies. The research study builds on previous research by (1) expanding the notion of literacy to include multimodal making and consuming; (2) addressing power dynamics in new learning environments through the framework of sponsorship; and (3) breaking new ground in new literacy research by focusing on the advent of mobile technology and its role in changing the landscape of informal literacy opportunities. Thus, this qualitative case study of interest-driven literacy learning in a story-sharing app aims to remedy these gaps in the literature and address learners' own future selves in the making by investigating the ways the commercial infrastructure of story-sharing apps such as Wattpad challenge the conception of self-sponsored writing, frequently invoked alongside out-of-school literacies. Brandt (2001) uses the term to describe that which belongs to the writer rather than to an institution, such as a school. Other terms in connection to

learning and writing in the extracurriculum include “self-generated,” “self-sustained,” and “independent.” A more grounded approach considers media as powerful sponsors and intermediaries of literacy. A careful look at a newcomer genre of media—story-sharing apps in this case—helps to trace the affordances and constraints of new media and to de-romanticize and contextualize digitally-mediated adolescent literacy practices.

Background

Story-sharing apps are a global novel genre of media that combine writing and publishing platforms with blogging and social media features. Users can read and write fiction, gather feedback, socialize, publish text and pictures, make and update profiles, and link to profiles of already existing social media sites. Most of these sites are accessible via computers, tablets, and smartphones alike. For readers and writers, these platforms offer a supportive, feedback-rich environment with built-in audiences. For publishers and scouts from the entertainment industry, these sites offer fresh, undiscovered content, a way to gauge trends, and a wealth of up-and-coming authors with existing fanbases. There are also differences among the most prominent sites of this genre.

Common Sense Media—a parent-focused organization that rates various media sources on criteria such as educational value, positive messages, violence, sex, and consumerism—provides ratings of free literary-minded websites and applications like Wattpad, Figment, TeenInk, Storybird, and NaNoWriMo Young Writers Program. Common Sense Media analysts maintain that these environments “cover several of the skills that kids need to become strong writers” (Common Sense Media, 2017). However, they are not rated equally.

Table 1.1

Site	Estimation of yearly unique visitors¹	CSM Ratings	Platform	URL
Wattpad	100,485,595	Age 16+; 3/5	Website, App	Wattpad.com

¹ Estimates of global yearly traffic come from Alexa (the Web Information Company)

		Stars		
Figment	964,330	Age 13+; 4/5 Stars	Website	Figment.com
TeenInk	5,718,090	Age 13+; 4/5 Stars	Website, Magazine	Teenink.com
Storybird	1,877,560	Age 6+; 5 Stars	Website, App	Storybird.com
NaNoWriMo	3,997,480	Age 13+; 4/5 Stars	Website, In-person meetings	Nanowrimo.org

These sites vary in the ways in which they frame and market themselves. For example, Wattpad positions itself as the future of storytelling and entertainment, while Figment and Storybird include sections and language for educators, marketing their sites as tools for learning and educational achievement. Such frames bring along design decisions. Wattpad capitalizes on genres like romance and fanfiction, while Storybird and Figment prohibit explicit and provocative content and fanfiction or the use of ideas or characters that belong to others.

All currently active story-sharing platforms thrive on user-generated content and building communal relationships between users. Within the limited purview of the literature available on mobile learning or m-Learning, storysharing apps such as Wattpad, Figment, and Storybird comport with three distinctive principles of mobile pedagogies: personalization, authenticity, and collaboration (Bano et al., 2017; Kearney, 2012). However, in part due to differences in missions and framing, they differ in levels of moderation, norms of discourse, and allowed content. With similarly-stated goals in disrupting storytelling industries, these platforms concentrate on visual appeal and differential marketing techniques to carve out a niche for their product. Some similarities and differences are evident in the visual comparison below.

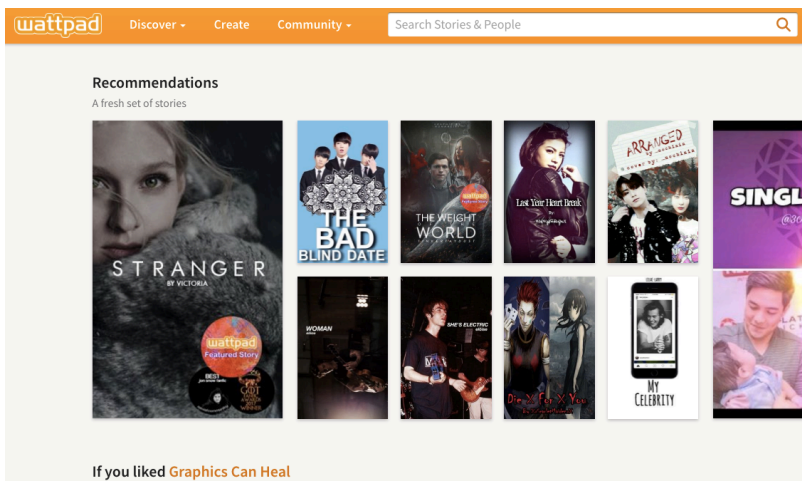
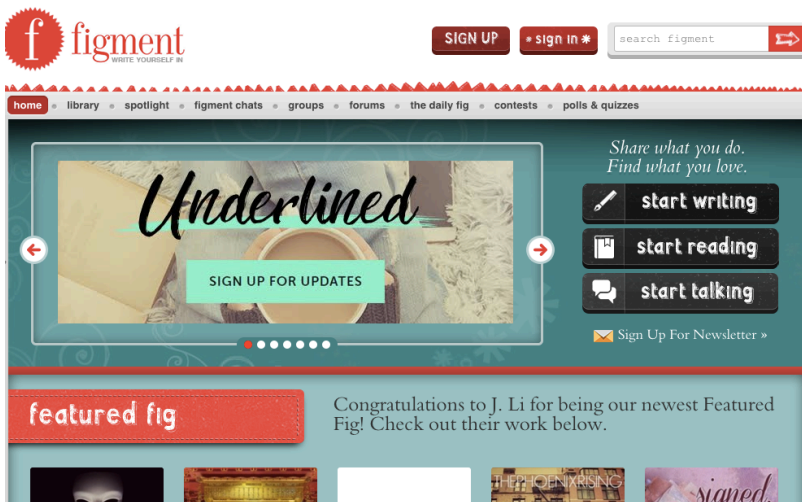
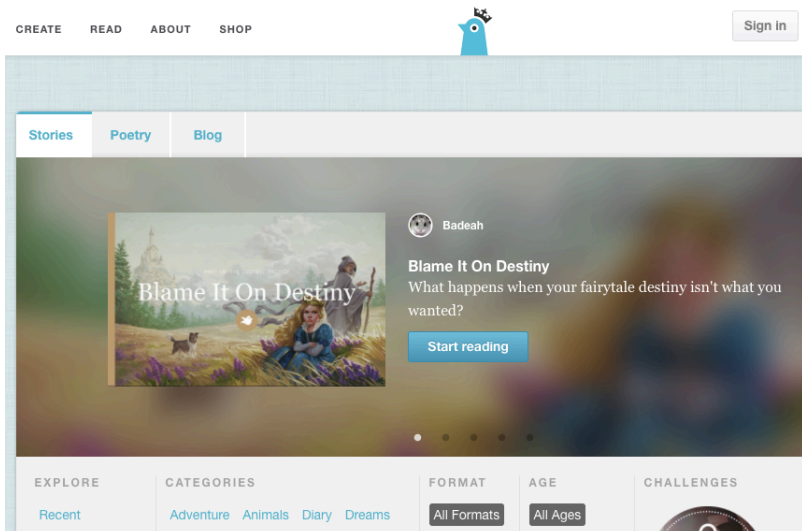


Figure 1.1: Landing pages of top story-sharing platforms Storybird, Figment, and Wattpad.

Wattpad is the most populous and most commercial of these sites, accounting for 40 million unique users worldwide. This site has commercial aspects, in part due to the site's Wattpad Stars program, which pairs writers with brands, such as Chipotle, Target, General Electric, and Coca Cola. Akin to popular social media websites like Instagram and Snapchat, Wattpad provides pathways for young “influencers” to make money by integrating branding and brand narratives into their stories. Another way for users to make money is through gaining a large enough following. Once authors gain enough followers, they are able to place ads into their stories and generate income. By more immersive, mobile, and lifelike advertising, advertisers infuse storytelling with branding (Dave, 2016).

In the last year, story-sharing apps have ventured into chat fiction, which borrows from the text message genre to form stories. These stories go beyond text to integrate media like video, sound, images, voice notes, and “choose-your-own-ending” feature for an immersive and interactive “reading” experience. Wattpad’s chat fiction app, Tap by Wattpad, is currently rated #9 in Apple’s app store’s Books section, as it presents more opportunities for teenagers to draw on their vernacular literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) to develop social connections, publishing cachet, and formal and informal language know-how. Wattpad itself is fifth in the same section of Apple’s app store. The unique features of sites like this provide fertile ground for the examination of media-infused learning ecologies that have come to play a large role in adolescents’ lives.

Alongside claims that teenage literacy is dwindling, stagnating, or losing steam, networked writing spaces stand as testament to the cachet of literacy, even as the forms and modes of literacy evolve. Moreover, the disconnect between different discourses of adolescent literacy and sociality call for extended inquiry into the motivating features of different learning environments and attendant narratives of motivation. Emerging research on storytelling and story-sharing sites such as Wattpad and Figment illuminate productive paths to a range of literacy practices, positive literate

identities, and the status and standing that comes along with authorship (Bonsignore et al, 2016; Padgett & Curwood, 2016). These platforms encourage creation, feedback, and discovery of original stories with a born-digital speed, prowess, and the availability of multiple modalities. Young authors express that being on these platforms is like being a part of a motivated readerly and writerly tribe, communicating that this is the first time they have discovered a place of belonging. Bello (2012), writing of Wattpad, claims that sites like this turn the solitary, exclusive process of authorship into a more social and democratic experience. Armed with cardinal features of networked technologies, such as interactivity, multimodality, portability, and global connectivity, and mobilized by key features of engaging reading and writing environments like rich feedback, authentic audiences, authorly autonomy, and choice, is it possible that these sites are indeed “revolutionizing” storytelling – especially for youth (Bello, 2012, n.p.)?

Research questions

The purpose of this research is to investigate literate practices in networked, mobile social media ecologies. My aim is to describe reading and writing practices on emerging digital platforms that young users engage with as they are working within the affordances and constraints of these media ecologies. Such media ecologies serve as emerging sponsors of literacy. To illuminate the literacy practices of youth writing and reading stories on story-sharing apps, I use an intrinsic and instrumental nested case study methodology in which a particular case is examined to provide insight on issues and the refinement of theory (Stake, 1994; 2005).

The research questions guiding this dissertation include:

1. What literacy practices and identities do new media ecologies such as Wattpad sponsor?
2. How do site participants take up, contest, and/or transform these literacy practices and identities?

Organization of the dissertation

This dissertation proceeds in three studies that are interrelated but differ in analytic lens and methodology. Together, they represent a holistic inquiry into young users' experiences of story-sharing sites and comprise of content analysis, mixed method study, and a qualitative interview-based study that attend to gaps highlighted in the literature. The studies undertake different methodological procedures that instantiate a pragmatic and mixed approach to research design (Denzin, 2010; Morgan, 2014; Stornaiulo, Higgs, & Hull, 2013). The studies are presented as self-contained manuscripts and thus include introductions, literature reviews, methods sections, analyses, and conclusions. Each study attempts to build on and attain new ground within literacy and media studies.

Study 1. Media-ting Literacy: Mobile Story-sharing Apps as New Learning Ecologies. This study presents a multipronged content analysis of the most popular story-sharing app called Wattpad with an eye toward literacy and identity development. This article examines the most popular story-sharing app for its potential to develop literacy skills, dispositions, and identities. With more than 40 million monthly readers and writers, Wattpad.com provisions opportunities for the development of old and new literacies and attendant identity kits. As a globalized online space infused with Web 2.0 technologies (O'Reilly 2007), Wattpad represents a new textual landscape that lends itself to particular practices. Content analyses, affinity space-based ethnographic methodologies, and sustained observational techniques shed light into an array of literacy affordances, the networked, hybrid, and hypersocial writing and reading practices on the site, and the way users take up and negotiate with provided affordances. In addition to documenting the technologies-in-use prominent in this platform, this study brings in theories from infrastructural studies to show that sociotechnical affordances and uses must be studied hand-in-hand.

Study 2. Identities, interests, and investments: Learning ecologies in story-sharing

platforms. This study explores young writers' literacy practices and identities on newly popular story-sharing platforms. These sites of affinity for young readers, writers, and graphic designers represent new media ecologies and rich spaces for the development of authors. With a mixed-method case study of 40 adolescent writers, this article chronicles practices of representation, socialization, and connection in networked, mobile story-sharing apps. These *media*-ted practices prove consequential for the participants' sense of investment in their literacies and identities.

Findings show that these adolescents invest in the paradigmatically “new” literacy practices involving collaboration, multimodality, social networking, and mobile phones, in concert with the “old” practices of publishing, writing chaptered books, and individual recognition. Friendship-driven genres of practice interweave with interest-driven practices, depending on identity stances of writers. Participants took identity stances from “friend” to “fan” to “expert writer” and expressed a wide range of behaviors in accordance to those stances. The article concludes with implications for the research and design of digitally mediated learning environments, given the heterogeneity in identity stances and practices of young learners. Although adolescents—as a group—often get painted with a broad brush and framed within deficit perspectives, this study showcases variance in what different groups of adolescents do with language and literacy and the meanings they take from their practices.

Study 3. When Writing Goes Public: Architectures, Metrics, Literacy Identities and Practices

in Mobile Story-Sharing Apps. This study delves into the framings of the individual narratives of engagement of 40 users on the newly popular story-sharing apps (e.g., Wattpad, Figment, and Storybird) as they represent a novel genre of literacy engagement and a new driver of literacy for connected youth. With more than ten million users worldwide in total, these apps come packaged

with avenues to be part of a networked writing public: both a delimited space and a connected community of writers (Marwick & boyd, 2017). The study chronicled in this presentation follows 40 young authors as they navigate literacy practices and selves on story-sharing apps. Observations, content analyses, and interviews over the course of a three-year mixed methods case study reveal interwoven relationships between the readerly and writerly stances of this networked public. Moreover, these relationships are supported by underlying algorithms and publicly available data that feed into the literacy ecology. The case of these adolescents negotiating various literacy identities helps us, as literacy researchers and sponsors, imagine and design for environments where writing goes public.

Limitations

Although story-sharing apps purport to reach more than 10 million people worldwide, most of whom are adolescents, the studies chronicled here are not attempting to represent or generalize to global youth practices. Instead, these studies contain an in-depth, nested case study approach to carefully selected apps and carefully selected users of these apps to illuminate the potential of digitally-mediated, multidevice, multimodal, and multiliterate practices in a more changing world. The specific apps studied were strategically sampled (Patton, 2005) to shed light on an emergent genre of media and the specific individuals surveyed and interviewed were strategically sampled to showcase a range of identity stances and experiences tendered by these platforms. Necessarily partial, these accounts serve to gain ground in longstanding debates in literacy and media studies.

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CHAPTER 2

Study 1:

Media-ting Literacy:

Mobile Story-sharing Apps as New Learning Ecologies

Abstract

The rise of mobile technologies prompts questions about the affordances of such technologies for youth learning practices. This article examines the most popular story-sharing app for its potential to develop literacy skills, dispositions, and identities. With more than 40 million monthly readers and writers, Wattpad.com provisions opportunities for the development of old and new literacies and attendant identity kits. As a globalized online space infused with Web 2.0 technologies (O'Reilly 2007), Wattpad represents a new textual landscape that lends itself to particular practices. Content analyses and sustained observational techniques shed light into an array of literacy affordances, the networked, hybrid, and hypersocial writing and reading practices on the site, and the way users take up and negotiate with provided affordances.

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed an upsurge of interest in the ways in which new media and new technological tools are transforming the social and learning lives of youth. The popularity of internet-mediated activities alters the way in which youth encounter the purposes and audiences of their literacy practices. In public and academic discourse communities alike, theorists have imagined positive and negative consequences of such technological developments. On the one hand, attention has focused on the antisocial, alienating, and nonacademic uses of new technologies, such as social media, games, and cellphones (Kutner & Olson, 2008; Huesmann, 2007; Weis, 2010). On the other hand, studies shed light on the cognitive, connective, political, and literate uses of these same developments (Green & Bavelier 2008; Davis 2012; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr 2010; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010; Ito et al., 2009). With many diverse viewpoints about the role of technology in the lives of teenagers—sometimes dubbed “screenagers” (Jolly 2016)—we need more empirical research on ways in which new technologies augment opportunities for learning and socialization.

Multiple studies show that an immense amount of learning and socialization happens in networked spaces, including out-of-school, technology-mediated learning environments (Ito et al., 2010; Erstad, 2012; Kafai & Peppler, 2011). Ubiquitously, youth participate in technologically mediated pursuits beyond the classroom walls. Gere (1994) invokes the extracurriculum to refer to officially unsanctioned spaces where literacy is nurtured and practiced—on kitchen tables, in rented rooms. More and more, these compositional practices find homes on phone and computer screens. Young people utilize technology to engage in the world around them through reading, writing, and connecting electronically. The digital extracurriculum (Schultz, 2012) provides opportunities for rich social and literate experiences for teenagers outside of school.

At the same time, standardized test scores (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006; 2013; 2015; Stetser & Stillwell 2014) show that interest and performance in literacy inside of school remain stagnant among American adolescents. Statistics reveal that boredom and lack of interest are among the reasons why high school aged students leave school (Bridgeland, DiJulio, & Morison, 2006). One of the reasons that U.S. secondary students fail English classes is because they are not motivated to write (Darrington & Dousay 2015). Although the stakes and dividends connected to print literacy are increasing in today's educational climate and workplace, test scores and interest in this writing are not rising in schooled environments. As a multifaceted process of making and articulating meaning, literacy of adolescents and young adults is integrally and increasingly linked to academic and social excellence (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008).

Alongside these sobering statistics, many literacy researchers have turned their attention to spaces where young writers and readers seem to be thriving, driven by their interest in reading and writing. Often, these are networked, out-of-school spaces with high technology uptake and social integration (Kajder, 2010; Ito et al., 2009; 2013; Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009; Soep, 2011).

In a large ethnographic study taking stock of youth-led learning and socializing practices, Ito and her colleagues (Ito et al., 2009; 2010) found that technology was an important mediator between youth and their subjects of interest in out-of-school learning and literacy practices. Young people go online to discover more about their topic of interest and to connect with likeminded people who may serve as more knowledgeable others in topic discovery. In fact, according to Schreyer (2012), adolescents' use of online spaces for the creation and sharing of content has become the driving force of adolescent literacy practices.

Similarly, research surveys suggest that young people connect to each other and to their topics of interest through their use of technology (Ito et al. 2009; Erstad 2012). According to large-

scale Pew Internet and American Life Project, 93% of surveyed teens write for fun outside of school, with much of it occurring online (Lenhart, Arafeh, & Smith, 2008). Most of this activity occurs on social networking sites like Facebook and Tumblr, which are increasingly central in adolescents' daily lives and literacy development (Kajder 2010). These sites are among the most studied due to their popularity, but researchers interested in youth literacy practices have started to follow them on other sites, such as Fanfiction.net, Figment.com, and various gaming sites (Black, 2008; Leander & McKim, 2003; Padgett & Curwood, 2015). Moreover, a third of American adolescents publish their creative work online, such as original fiction writing and artwork, and 21% produce remixes inspired by others' words and images (Lenhart et al., 2010). Reading and writing for fun matters for the lives of youth.

Such statistics are amplified by the popularization of mobile devices, such as phones and tablets. The almost ubiquitous nature of mobile devices gives the newly-literate generation the ability to interact with different contexts over the day, and to manipulate and create instances of engagement at any time through graphics, audio, videos, links, and geographical tags (Cochrane & Bateman, 2010; Cook, Pachler, & Bradley, 2008; Luckin, 2010). The proliferation of such devices provoked a research focus on mobile learning or "m-Learning." Research on m-Learning "examines how learning flows across locations, time, topics and technologies" (Sharples, Milrad, Arnedillo, & Vavoula, 2007, p. 4). In addition to the ubiquity of mobile devices for youth, other affordances such as location awareness and the ability to create multimodal texts, share, connect, communicate, collaborate, and co-create through social media provides a powerful 'mobile ecology' for enhanced learning and teaching opportunities (Cochrane & Bateman 2010; Narayan, Davis, & Gee, 2012; Traxler, 2007). Studying the spaces and practices impacted by the uptick in mobile use has much to offer for the growing literature on informal online learning.

According to this accumulating body of knowledge, writing practices in online spaces across platforms afford young people (1) access and affiliation (Black, 2005; Hayes & Gee, 2010), (2) opportunities for collaboration (Fields, Magnifico, Lammers, & Curwood, 2014; Thomas, 2007), and (3) platforms for multimodal making (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013). As young people spend increasing amounts of time interacting with media and technology, literacy researchers continue to call for additional investigation of adolescents' online literacies (Alvermann, 2008; Leu, O'Byrne, Zawilinski, McVerry, & Everett-Cacopardo, 2009; Moje, 2009; Smith & Moore, 2012). Buck (2012) adds to this call that it is imperative for educators and education researchers to valorize and study out-of-school writing in online spaces to understand how such experiences contribute to academic writing.

Multiple studies trace adolescents' out-of-school literacies through participation and engagement in online communities and affinity sites (Black, 2008; Grimes & Fields 2012; Gee 2004; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Lammers, 2013; Magnifico, 2010; 2012). Work on online communities and social networks is focused on social ties between people in networked spaces, while work on affinity spaces examines sites of interaction focused around particular objects of passion or interest. Gee conceptualizes affinity spaces as a "set of places where people can affiliate with others" in ways that are primarily based on shared activities, interests, and goals (Gee, 2004, p. 67). Networked out-of-school sites, such as affinity spaces, allow for the development of expertise and knowhow, while simultaneously supporting the development of identities and interests (Barron, 2006).

Since the inception of the internet, it has been common for online affinity spaces to form around story writing and reading. Recently, several spaces that provide avenues for self-publishing and discussing stories saw surges in popularity. Websites like Figment.com, Writerscafe.com, and Wattpad.com provide built-in writing platforms, feedback and rating mechanisms, communities of

readers and writers, and fora to discuss literate practices and to build relationships. The site with the most widespread reach and popularity is Wattpad. This affinity space has been touted as an emblem of adolescent literacy practices, with one source commenting that contrary to claims that young people don't read anymore, this site embodies "the most literate generation" (Timoner, 2014).

Wattpad -- a website, mobile app, and reading and writing interface -- positions itself as a space that harnesses the potentials of Web 2.0, including user content creation, sharing, and tagging, to develop "storytelling, redefined" (Wattpad, 2016).

By analyzing the design, structural possibilities, available content, and discourses of and about writing in this digitally mediated environment, this study documents affordances of a space that might well represent the future of literacy ecologies. In addition to naming the affordances visible in this affinity site, this study chronicles participant-driven patterns of use and discussion around these affordances, thus pointing to how they are used *in practice*. By so doing, the study at hand adds to the literature on the situated and sociocultural nature of technological use within learning and literacy ecologies.

Background

The site describes itself as the "world's largest community for discovering and sharing stories" (Wattpad, 2016). Boasting a monthly audience of more than 40 million monthly readers, 11 billion minutes spent on Wattpad every month, and 85% of reading and writing activity happening via mobile devices, the site advertises itself as representing storytelling of the future (Wattpad, 2016) due to the presence of social networking features and the uptake of mobile technologies.

In 2016, the Canadian Innovation Exchange named Wattpad the Innovator of the Year. This award recognizes companies that disrupt and transform industries in profound ways (Hiltz, 2016). In part, Wattpad was recognized because it has transformed the industry of storytelling and -sharing.

According to Wattpad (2016), a new age of storytelling is ushered in through connecting readers and writers worldwide and making the process mobile.

Wattpad aspires to be “a YouTube for stories,” in that the content is user-created and that there is ample opportunity for feedback, commenting, and voting on content. Indeed, the site is similar to Youtube since it can function as an object-oriented social activity system (Engeström 1999). Wattpad is dissimilar from Youtube in that it allows inline comments or feedback that is focused on a specific act, line, or word in the story. This positions readers to be able to comment on the story moment-by-moment, as it unfolds. According to Wattpad’s communication manager Nazia Khan, “It’s almost like they’re reading alongside their friends and they can exclaim, commiserate, and react as the story unfolds” (Herman, 2014). Also, although the site specializes in typographical materials and not videos like Youtube, the app moved to integrate multimedia features to complement writing practices. The Wattpad platform now lets writers use multimedia elements like GIFs, images, and videos in stories to create graphic novels, travel diaries, fashion blogs, and more. They can also insert media into existing stories to create a more immersive entertainment experience for readers (Wattpad, 2016).

The site's most prominent promoter is Margaret Atwood, who sees it as a force for democratizing of literacy because it lowers the barriers to participation in the creative processes of writing, reading, publishing, and sharing stories (Flood, 2012). This view is consistent with the notion of "participatory culture," a vision of a more democratic society supported by digital and internet technologies (Jenkins et al., 2009). In its take-up of social and mobile features, Wattpad instantiates the hopes and potentials associated with technological impact on learning, literacy, and participation in society.

Another aspect imbued with democratizing and equalizing hopes is the reliance of these literacy technologies on mobile devices. Although research on computers in education has

highlighted ways in which new technologies might reinforce old power relations and continue to exclude technologically disenfranchised groups (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010), research on mobile devices tells a different story. Watkins (2009) finds that mobile devices might be closing the digital access gap, especially for minority youth. In part, this projection stems from the lower cost of mobile devices and the increasing creative participation via connected mobile devices of youth from typically disconnected groups (Zickuhr & Smith 2012). Similarly, the increase in mobile use has led to changes in the way people access informational and recreational texts, images, and exchanges. The rise of the mobile changes the literacy landscape of users by enabling on-the-go communication, haptic notifications, ease of sharing, and the incorporation of social networking features and links.

Wattpad occupies a unique space as an adolescent-focused site that recruits literate activity mediated by mobile devices, such as phones. It provides a telling case (Mitchell, 1984) of new media writing ecologies that focus on social, collaborative, and mobile affordances of new tools and technologies. Mobile integration has become a key issue in debates connected to digital and participation divides, as researchers have posited that mobile technology has the potential to transform this social dynamic (Hargittai & Walejko 2008; Lenhart et al., 2009; Lenhart & Madden 2007). These researchers have held that although technological participation almost always follows the already-existing cleavages of the haves and have-nots, mobile innovations might serve as a break from this pattern. Consequently, mobile-backed literacy ventures lend themselves to careful examination by literacy and equity researchers.

Story-sharing apps provision an infrastructure for specific literacy practices. For example, they recruit a mix of old and new media composing practices, where users must be proficient in print literacies (e.g., writing chapter books) and multimodal literacies (e.g., putting together appealing book covers) to succeed in these spaces. Such attributes invite inquiry from literacy and technology

researchers because they provide a glimpse into multimodal, technology-mediated, and interest-driven literacy practices of contemporary adolescents.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate literate practices in networked, mobile, social media ecologies. My aim is to describe reading and writing practices on emerging digital platforms that young users engage with as they are working within the affordances and constraints of these media ecologies. To illuminate the literacy practices of youth writing and reading stories on story-sharing apps, I use an intrinsic and instrumental case study methodology in which a particular case is examined to provide insight on issues and the refinement of theory (Stake, 1994; 2005). In this instance, the general and particular case (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) of a story-sharing app called Wattpad provides insight into various aspects of interest-driven technologically mediated learning, comprising a nested, qualitative case study (Yin, 1989).

Steeped in a sociocultural view of designed affordances for learning and socializing, this study asks:

- What are the sociotechnical affordances provided by mobile story-sharing apps?
- What are the literacy practices enabled by these sociotechnical affordances?
- How do users adapt provided affordances to their own needs?

Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes a sociocultural and ecological approach towards literacy, consistent with the theorists and researchers working within the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; Gee, 2003). Rather than seeing language and literacy as purely cognitive behaviors, these approaches focus on the socially, culturally, and ecologically situated nature of language, learning, and literacy. Instead of

conceptualizing language, learning, and literacy as products, researchers working in these approaches see them as situated cultural practices.

An ecological standpoint is a relational one. A learning ecology approach considers how learning, knowing, and meaning-making take place through relations between the learner and the environment (Barron, 2006; 2010). The learning environment—whether it is a classroom, an afterschool club, or a mobile app—avail the learner of various contexts, resources, and tools for learning. The ecological emphasis on relationality complements the sociocultural emphasis on practices embedded in context (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Together, the two perspectives allow for an in-depth, nuanced, and holistic take on literacy practices in learning ecologies.

A central tenet in sociocultural theory of learning is mediation (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991; Warschauer & Grimes, 1997). This concept emphasizes that all human activity is mediated by the use of psychological or physical tools. In this view, learning, literacy, and cognition are powerfully influenced by the tools that surround us. Tools, including new technologies, are not just things to think about, but also things to think with. Tools enable certain actions, but not others, and always exist within the larger context.

Sociotechnical affordances refer to the reciprocal interactions between a technology, its users, and the social context of this use. Coined by ecological psychologist Gibson (1979) to describe qualities designed environments and tools offer to humans, the term has gained popularity in human-computer interaction studies and learning sciences. A sociotechnical affordances perspective pays attention both to the possibilities built into a certain technology and the agency its users exercise. This perspective sheds light on how features of new technologies and intentions of their users interact to form stable practices and activities (Schrock, 2015). In this case, new tools, such as mobile apps, offer new possibilities for engagement in learning and literacy. In turn, the users of these apps utilize built-in features with an eye to their own needs and literacy demands.

Digital technologies provide unprecedented synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for people to network and exchange information about the topics they care about. These digitally-enabled spaces encouraging social and informational talk around topics of interest have been called affinity spaces (Curwood et al., 2013; Gee, 2004; Gee, 2013). As an analytic, "affinity spaces" shift researchers' attention from the common bond of membership among the participants and instead focus it on the common endeavor and activities that surround this endeavor. In addition to being a hub of activity centering on a common endeavor (e.g., playing a certain video game or writing science fiction), affinity spaces invite self-directed participation, engagement with multimodal forms of communication, distributed knowledge, and a variety of media-specific and social networking portals (Lammers et al., 2014). Affinity space participants may have arrived at the site randomly, through a friend's recommendation, through a link on a blog, a web search, or any other potential portal. Similarly, affinity spaces contain various diverse routes to legitimate participation. For example, story sharing sites foster participation by novice and expert writers, readers, photographers, graphic designers, and so on. As such, affinity spaces—mediated by networked technologies—enable a range of interest-powered learning, literacy, and socialization practices with a focal point of a shared passion. Within the frame of social learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), affinity spaces provide avenues to learn from others, acquire specialized language, and develop identities consistent with specific discourse communities. In short, affinity spaces are gateways to powerful literacies.

New tools furnish new literacy ecologies, new contexts for learning and new available literate identities. Literacy researchers agree that naming and studying affordances provided by new digital environments might provide a better understanding of these new learning environments and, simultaneously, inform the design of new learning environments (O'Brien & Voss, 2011). By

analyzing the affordances of popular story-sharing apps for literacy practices and literate identities, we will thus better understand and design technologically-mediated learning environments.

Methods

To analyze the affordances and constraints of mobile apps for literacy engagement, I utilize a multipronged analysis approach, putting to use sustained online observation techniques (Androutsopoulos, 2008), and web content and document analysis (Herring, 2010). I systematically review every aspect of the app and analyze how it adds to the ecology of literacy or the collective practices related to reading, writing, and socializing on Wattpad and the literate identities attendant to these practices. Over a period of three years, I reviewed guidelines, limitations, and conversations formed around the reading, writing, and socializing practices on the site in order to assert the literacy affordances and implications for the development of writing skills and writerly identities of site participants.

To collect information about literacy in new media ecologies like Wattpad and related portals and affinity sites, the first step is sustained, systematic observation of activity (Androutsopoulos, 2008). This kind of observation starts with a careful reading of the guidelines, rules, and publicity releases related to the site. Through bi-weekly visits to the site and its public-facing blog, I got acquainted with the literacy infrastructure of this ecology and how it constrains and promotes specific kinds of literate opportunities and identities.

According to Magnifico, Lammers, and Curwood (2013), sustained, systematic observation aims “to determine the various roles available to participants, to trace how activity is distributed amongst participants, and to answer questions about what constitutes participation and activity for different users” (p. 83). Thus, I use systematic and sustained observations in order to trace the potential roles and relationships that the site makes available to its participants.

To probe the endorsed reading and writing practices on the site, I review the advice provided to writers by the official interlocutors of the app and by fellow writers. This approach provides a glimpse into the kinds of literacies deemed most valued and valuable in the attentional economy of Wattpad. Moreover, the similarities and differences between guidance given to writers by the site itself and by fellow writers highlight tensions between site designers' visions of literacy and sociality on the site and how they are actualized *in situ*.

The coding of the data occurred in two phases. First, the data went through a cycle of open coding (Saldaña, 2009) that identified prominent categories and themes with respect to authoring on story-sharing sites. Public relations materials, advice columns, how-to tutorials, and published materials anchored the categories of affordances for reading, writing, and producing on the site. Next, I analyzed the data with theory-driven coding (Saldaña, 2009), applying the catalog of Wattpad's affordances and practices to current research and theory on print literacy development and habits of mind associated with new, post-typographical literacies. For example, with an eye toward practices connected toward best print literacy environments, active mobile story-sharing apps were examined for opportunities to write and revise, gather feedback, and access authentic audiences. Advice imploring authors to revise their work and develop their characters was coded as revision and character development within typographical literacy environments. Similarly, considering what we know about new literacies and affinity spaces, features of the apps could be coded for the capability to compose in multiple modes. Features like tagging and generating folksonomies were coded as practices within posttypographical environments. Codes for features, observed practices, and conversations around features and practices on story-sharing apps were constantly compared to increase validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Upon chronicling the pathways these popular literacy-based apps hold for compositional and social participation, this analysis focuses on the technology-in-use (Orlikowski & Gash 1994). After

figuring out the sociotechnical affordances for literacy, it is important to document how users take up, modify, and challenge the prescribed use of these affordances. To accomplish this, the content analysis concentrated on actual use of the app, noting similarities and divergences in exhibited practices, conversations, and applications. Instructive in this endeavor were instances when users expressed suggestions for improvement, utilized affordances for their own purposes, or constructed workarounds to achieve goals not provisioned in the design of the app.

Findings and Analysis

Mapping Literacy Features and Affordances

This analysis begins with an environmental scan of all features of the app and the affordances for literacy and socialization that they might hold. Wattpad provides an integrated writing and reading platform. This writing platform (pictured below) lets writers compose, revise, spell-check, and publish their writing with computers or mobile devices. The writing process was scaffolded, as the interface gave tips to the writer, such as “add inline media here” or “put title here.” Before publication, writers are prompted to equip their chapter installation with a title, a description, a book cover, and relevant tags and generic classifications. Readers are able to “follow” writers of choice, get updates and suggestions for further reading in their inbox, “like” and track certain creations, and provide inline comments on stories. There is also a “community” tab on the site where users socialize, form clubs, and exchange tips on topics such as gaining readership and publication.

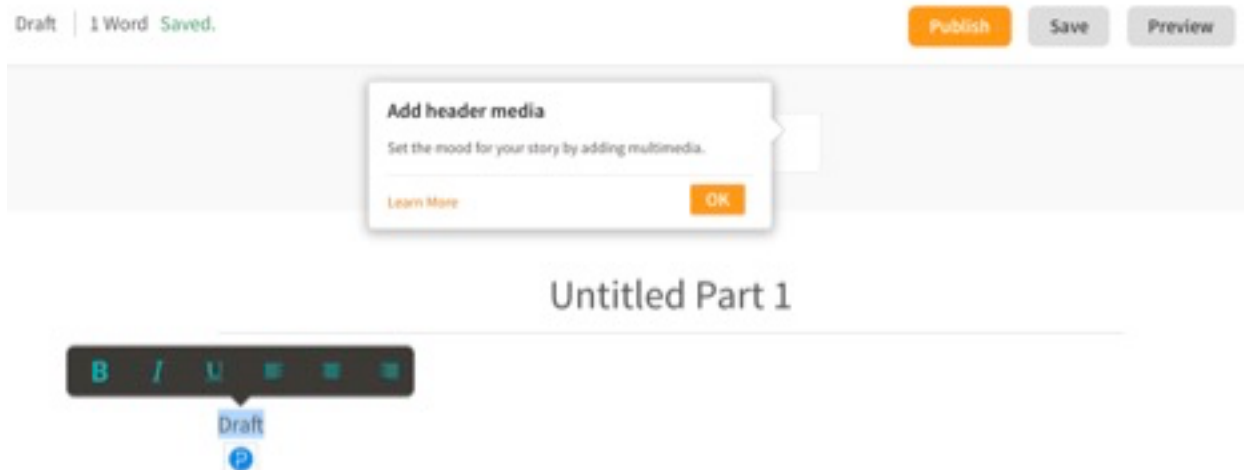


Figure 2.1

These types of functionalities lend themselves to the development of a writing process, a writing environment, and a writing community. Features like the writing interface and the streamlined feedback to the writer shaped the writing process on this app. The social functions, such as comments, profiles, likes, and follows, contributed to the sociocultural environment of this writing. The availability of continuous feedback and discussion in the forums afforded activity and community formation around genres, artifacts, and group identities. For example, a Wattpadder might develop the skills, capabilities, dispositions, and identity stances toward being a science fiction writer, a book cover creator, or a member of a specific book club or fan club. Although some of these functionalities have a long standing in the history of writing, such as classifying your work by genre, others are the result of networked technologies, such as choosing tags to make work optimally searchable on Wattpad and search engines. Some features offered on Wattpad generated a particular kind of writing process, environment, and community on the site.

Theorists of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007) point out that changes in literacy practices are less tied to the creation of new tools than to the ecological changes those tools help usher. For example, the experience of reading a Britannica Encyclopedia article about the Great

Depression in book form might be very similar to reading a text-only version online. However, following links on a Wikipedia page on the same subject might present a different experience than the encyclopedia article: Hyperlinks allow a nonlinear format of reading, Wikipedia hosts pictures and audio files that allow for greater multimodality, and the ability for all users to consume and create content on the site leads to novel practices of participatory knowledge production. Web 2.0 represents a conceptual departure from Web 1.0 that provides greater personalization, avenues to participate in one-to-many or many-to-many environments, and multimodal content (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). A functional content analysis reveals what a given user can accomplish in terms of reading, writing, publishing, and sharing and whether those features track what is known of literate activity (Prior, 2001) typographical and post-typographical environments (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). These features can be heuristically grouped into print or typographical literacy affordances and post-typographical or network technology-enabled literacy affordances and functions as follows:

Table 2.1

	Affordances for the development of a writing process	Affordances for the development of a writing environment	Affordances for the development of a writing community
Typographical literacy functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scaffolded writing and editing interface ● Opportunities for revision ● Spellcheck ● Self-publication ● Writing in chunks or chapters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accessing audiences ● Providing feedback to other writers ● Beta reading or copyediting others' work ● Grouping work by genre ● Entering writers' contests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Choosing pennames ● "Liking" creations ● Participating in book clubs ● Creating writing challenges ● Socializing with other authors
Post-typographical literacy functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tagging ● Incorporating inline multimedia ● Creating book covers ● Using HTML code to change typeface ● Handoff between mobile and desktop devices ● Writing on-the-go 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adding copyright information ● Providing inline comments to others' work ● Asynchronous collaboration ● Sharing work via social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Following" other members to get real-time updates on their activity ● Making multimodal profiles ● Forming avatars ● Adding hyperlinks to social networks on profile

Affordances and functions such as these map onto what we know about best practices in print literacy development. According to researchers, well-designed literacy environments constitute responsive and inclusive learning environments that offer: a choice of texts, opportunities for lively discussion, and many pathways for engagement (Collins, 1996; McCombs & Barton, 1998).

Likewise, rich and enriching literacy spaces provide frequent opportunities to write, accompanied with feedback, expectations to revise, and opportunities to edit (Alvermann & Phelps, 1998; Cotton,

1988; Langer, 1999; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999). Likewise, research shows that writing for authentic purposes and audiences is more motivating than writing for the teacher for the purpose of assessment (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2007). Wattpad and other mobile story-sharing apps occasion such practices by providing built-in writing spaces with opportunities for constant and consistent revision, feedback, and socializing around the written artifacts—with an authentic global audience.

The literacy practices prominent on online story-sharing apps included interwoven processes of writing, editing, reviewing, commenting, and socializing. It is clear that popular story-sharing applications, like Wattpad.com, support the development of aptitudes, dispositions, and identities of young people as writers and readers. The social features of these applications promote involvement in different kinds of literacies. Analysis shows that specific social affordances of story-sharing apps included: access to authentic audiences, provision of contexts for collaboration, avenues for personalization and identity expression, and gamification. These sites have aspects consistent with what we know about successful affinity spaces (Gee, 2003) and online communities (Kraut et al., 2012). In fact, some users seemed to be motivated to participate primarily driven by their passion for creative writing while others considered the socializing features and finding like-minded peers as their primary interest, which the reading and writing dovetailed. It is the joint availability of these affordances that contributes to the immense popularity of app-driven writing and reading.

Researchers have also detailed the most impactful features in literacy spaces enabled by networked technologies. Characteristics of online spaces that encourage literacies' development include encouragement of active presence through online profiles, facilitation of user modification and personalization, reliance on user-generated content, and encouragement of social participation (Davies & Merchant, 2009). Increasingly, such spaces allow for the combination of modes (e.g., written, visual, aural) to achieve users' rhetorical goals. Wattpad in particular places a premium on

book covers, in-line media incorporation, animated files, book trailers, and the ability to add audio clips to stories in order to narrate an aspect of the story or accompany a book with a relevant playlist. On the forums, the most common piece of advice given to novice writers seeking to expand readership was to secure visually appealing covers for their work.

The inclusion of multimodal elements in composing is congruent with several principles of literacy development. First, it leads to new opportunities for engagement and meaning making (Kress, 2010). Second, incorporating pictures, videos, gifs, links, and comments into blocks of texts can broaden learners' definition of writing and give disengaged writers an opportunity to see themselves as successful producers of different types of texts and adept communicators (Bomer, Patterson, Zoch, David, & Ok, 2010; Luke, Iyer, & Dougherty, 2011; Munns, Zammit, & Woodard, 2008; Demski, 2012; Zammit, 2011). Thus, Wattpad could be seen as harnessing potentials of Web 2.0 technologies to build rich environments for the development of typographical and post-typographical literacies alike.

A New Kind of Storytelling Experience

As mentioned, Wattpad created a particular kind of a writing process, environment, and community. Mobilizing the capabilities of networked technologies, the site markets itself as offering a new kind of storytelling experience. Indeed, the environmental scan of features, affordances, and conversations about app-mediated writing presents a view of literacy departing from the traditional print model. These data point to the notion that Wattpad's reach and cachet with adolescent writers rests on three thematic factors: (1) designed confluence of features that encourage cognitive and interpersonal engagement; (2) hybridity between old and new technologies (i.e., computers and cell phones) and literacies (i.e., print literacy and multimodal composition); and (3) incorporation of

specific social features that encourage competition, collaboration, and networked spread of stories and ideas. The elaboration on these three themes provides windows into the ways technological affordances catalyze new media literacy practices.

Networked Hypersocial Writing

The design of the site constructs a pathway to a literacy practice I call networked hypersocial writing. This means that infrastructurally, every aspect of production on the site is built to encourage sharing. The design of this space supports “forms of sociality augmented by dense sets of technologies, signifiers, and systems of exchange” that are commonplace in contemporary youth culture (Ito, 2005, p.6). Content on this app is almost all user-generated, allowing members to contribute to the library of stories, poems, and nonfiction articles. Writing on Wattpad is funneled by genre (e.g., romance, science, fiction, fantasy, humor), and by characteristics such as popularity (“hotness”), number of comments, and trending hashtags such as celebrity names, franchises, or themes and issues (e.g., #zayn; #lgbt; #feminism). The hashtags are ever-changing to reflect the most popular labels that writers assign to their creations. As Lankshear and Knobel (2007) point out, “Tags provide a basis for patterns of user interests to emerge in ways that enable communities of interest to build and for relationships to develop among members who share common interests” (p. 19). In this view, content organization and meaning are built from the ground up, as users themselves define the trends of content flows in the space through networked, distributed, and social mechanisms.

As a platform, Wattpad offers a scaffolded reading and writing environment that focuses the content producer on the audience. In the “How to write” section of Wattpad, users are instructed to write in bite-sized chunks and “short chapters”, constantly and consistently updating their works-in-

progress (Wattpad, 2016). This way, readers of the stories get notifications in their inboxes about the updates and the traffic keeps flowing.



Post regularly

Wattpadders love stories that are frequently updated with new, short chapters.

“So this is what a real bus smells like,”
thought Clara as she mentally untangled
the rat’s nest of hair on the girl in front of
her. She looked a little older than Clara -
seventeen, maybe eighteen - and she...

Part 1 of 44

Figure 2.2

According to the designers of Wattpad.com, the website is built to cater to today's "7 second attention spans" (Wattpad, 2016). This assumed characteristic reflects and builds particular attentional economies within this literacy ecology. Writers are advised to produce content in short, digestible pieces and to complement each installation with relevant media and communication.

In the same vein, the advice page guides new authors to steadily reply to their readers' comments, votes, and reviews. The page specifies that it's important to engage in conversations using other users' screennames using the @-mention so that they get notified of the interlocution—a common feature in Web 2.0 applications. The site also recommends following other writers, sharing work using outside social networking applications, and entering sitewide contests. Here, the messages around writing converge on serializing, sharing, socializing, and networking.

These messages are reinforced by the ubiquitous use of mobile devices to participate on Wattpad. The website's analytics report that 90% of the traffic to the site involves mobile devices, such as phones and tablets, instead of desktop computers and laptop machines (Wattpad, 2016). The reliance on the mobile is reflected in the design of the app, which includes push notifications for news like new comments on, messages about, and reads of one's previously published story. Updates to the stories and authors' profiles that users "follow" also trigger notifications on users' mobile screens, often accompanied by a flashing banner and haptic vibration. These design features ensure that updates to one's feed, whether by new comments or chapters, stay at the top of users' attentional economies. In this way, the designers of the site focus on capturing the attention of the millennial generation, which they believe has a 7-second attention span, and competing with social networking sites like Pinterest and Youtube, both attending to and reinforcing the fast-paced attentional economy within this particular writing ecology.

Compared to other contexts in which writing can be a solitary endeavor or audiences are imagined, mobile story-sharing apps supply audiences that are real, demanding, and ever-present in all aspects of the writing process. This adds to a particular literacy ecology in which writing is a networked and hypersocial process.

Designed Hybridity in New (Media) Ecologies

New media technologies, implicated in the rise of mobile apps such as Wattpad, help construct new literacy ecologies comprised of hybrid literacies and tools. Although researchers keyed into the changing nature of technologically-mediated literacy practices often call attention to ways in which these practices are historically and ontologically new (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007), it is important to recognize that digital spaces often call for a mix of different literacies. Some literacy

scholars have highlighted ways in which students layer digital and nondigital practices in their rhetorical pursuits (Abrams & Russo, 2015).

Literacy practices afforded by story-sharing apps espoused hybridity and called upon multiple capabilities and tools. For example, composing lengthy chaptered books with an imperative to update or publish the next chapter as soon as possible is part of a century-old print literacy. However, collaborating with a peer graphic designer online in order to create a memorable cover with Adobe Photoshop utilizes new networked literacies. Wattpad also invites hybridity in terms of literate identity (e.g., being a writer, a reader, and graphic designer) and communication channels (e.g., private messaging, public comments, and the use of outside social networks). Lastly, Wattpadders are able to make use of different technologies in the service of their writing, reading, and socializing practices. An integrated writing interface allows for handoff between computers, mobile devices, and uploads from other word processing programs. For example, users would wake up to check reads, comments, and analytics of their work on Wattpad on cell phones. They would also check personal messages and reply on their mobile devices throughout the day, regardless of location. When faced with a solid chunk of space and time, users would continue their craft on desktop or laptop devices to draft and edit new chapters. Multiple users described using both computers and phones simultaneously—for instance, to draft long pieces on the computer while providing inline comments to a peer’s work on the phone. Thus, mobile-backed story-sharing app literacies syncretically combine print literacies and multimodal composition, readership and authorship, different tools, and public and private literate participation.

Networking Features and Events

Particularly productive in terms of inspiring literate production and socialization were designed networking features and events such as site-wide contests, designed recognition systems,

and the incorporation of already existing social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr.

The main writing contest on the site, the Wattys, claims itself as “the world's largest online writing contest” (Wattpad, 2016). This annual contest draws submissions from various categories, such as the best newcomer, and genres, such as poetry. Entry is accomplished by appending the tag “Wattys” and the year to a story’s tags. The winner of this annual contest is chosen by a combination of Wattpad’s editorial team’s preferences and statistical data optics attached to each story such as number of views, votes, and minutes spent reading. The winners gain exposure and recognition, making the contest meaningful, prestigious, and popular for Wattpaders. Other avenues toward popularity and recognition include corporate-backed and user-initiated writing contests.

Although Wattpad was often framed as a social network for readers and writers in various conversations about the nature of the site, it embedded the use of outside extant social networks. Users are encouraged to automatically post about their story update to Twitter. Moreover, Wattpad’s Facebook Quote Plugin encourages users to swiftly share a snippet of what you are reading with their Facebook friend list. The tight integration of existing social networks into Wattpad serves twin goals of publicizing the site through grassroots means and circulating content among users.

These social features work not only to increase the traffic on the site, but also to funnel members’ activity in particular ways and increase user identification with the site. The introduction of designed recognition systems and content circulation mechanisms lead to the creation of new literacy tasks and purposes for participants. In turn, affordances provided by these features cued literacy practices such as announcing story updates across already-existing social networks and entering the prestigious Watty Awards.

The Anatomy of Affordances

Theorists of sociotechnical affordances make clear that the presence of an affordance does not unilaterally produce activity (Gibson, 1979; Barnes, 2000; Norman, 1988). Users perceive, contextualize, negotiate, organize, and act on affordances. In keeping with this perspective, Wappaders assimilated, appropriated, and made use of the provided affordances given their own purposes. Sociotechnical affordances of this story-sharing app built a possible literacy *architecture* but ultimately, it was the users that developed the literacy *practices* in this space. Three observed practices and related conversations on the site illuminate this give-and-take between affordances and users' intentions: (1) user-created mechanisms for the recognition of multimodal and visual creative work; (2) political conversations and affiliation-building; and (3) collaborative literacy practices.

User-created Mechanisms for the Recognition of Visual Creative Work

Just as Wattpad provided mechanisms and pathways for the recognition of certain types of genres, practices, and accomplishments, it did not recognize others. In several instances, Wappaders utilized the forums and external social networks in order to form alternative competitions and acknowledgement systems. In this way, users built workarounds in the literacy infrastructure of the site. One of the most popular user-created contest was the #GraphicWattys contest (pictured below).

lubs > Multimedia Designs > All Discussions > THE #GRAPHICWATTYS2016 (OPEN!)

THE #GRAPHICWATTYS2016 (OPEN!)

◀ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ▶

GuildOfGraphics

1 month ago #1



Joined: 2016-05-11

Posts: 74



INTRODUCING THE #GRAPHICWATTYS2016

THE TIME HAS COME -- THE WATTPAD FRENZY KNOWN AS THE WATTYS2016! USERS EVERYWHERE ARE VOTING FRANTICALLY FOR THEIR FAVORITE STORIES, AND WATTY2016-THEMED INTERVIEWS ARE CROPPING UP EVERYWHERE. THE TAG IS ALL OVER THE "DISCOVER" CHANNEL, AND LET'S FACE IT -- EVERYONE'S EXCITED!

NOW IT'S TIME TO WELCOME THE #GRAPHICWATTYS2016! HERE'S TO ALL OF THE COVER-DESIGNERS, TRAILER-DESIGNERS -- HECK, ANYTHING MULTIMEDIA -- THAT DON'T HAVE A CHANCE TO PARTICIPATE. YOU DO NOW! IN THE #GRAPHICWATTYS2016, YOU CAN TAG YOUR BOOK FOR A CHANCE TO GET RECOGNIZED IN WHAT MAY BECOME ONE OF THE GREATEST GRAPHIC COMPETITIONS ON WATTPAD!

 Reply  Report

GuildOfGraphics

1 month ago #2



Joined: 2016-05-11

Posts: 74



1. COVER BOOKS

Figure 2.3

This contest encourages submissions in the form of bookcovers, video trailers, profile banners, and other multimodal work excluded from the story-focused literacy economy of Wattpad. Decentering the view that graphic design and multimodal composition serve as adorning features to stories, this contest and others like it increase the premium of visual literacy in and of itself. In outlining the rules for submitting in the category of “video trailer,” the owner of the contest, GuildOfGraphics suggests that trailers are often “neglected” on Wattpad and that trailer-makers need to be recognized for their “amazing” work. Trailers are promotional videos that accompany books, most often hosted on Youtube. Creators of trailers often use multiple apps and modes to make book trailers and rely on generic features of preview trailers for movies (e.g. language about this trailer being approved for all audiences).

Although this story-sharing app allowed for composing with multiple modes, it did not afford official avenues for recognition of visual literacy. Because users valued this literacy and wanted to acknowledge it in its own right or uncoupled from a story, they created workarounds of the designed affordances of the space. User-created contests around visual literacy artifacts like bookcovers and trailers increased the reach, visibility, and circulation of such artifacts. Accordingly, these contests bolstered visual literacy practices. Just as the app environment provided the architecture for certain literacy practices, Wattpadders selectively made use of this architecture and made inroads within it to serve their own needs, values, and intentions.

Political Conversations and Affiliation-building

On this story-sharing app and similar spaces fueled by user content production, the nature of content is determined by the interests of the users. In the case of Wattpad, for instance, the most popular genre was Young Adult fiction. Dominant patterns emerged in the ways people structured stories and chose characters. In many instances, Wattpadders would organize against these dominant

compositional and representational practices, emphasizing politics and forming affiliations among themselves. Taking place in the forums, users would start campaigns and self-labeled “movements” to promote different kinds of content creation and effect changes in established literacy practices on the site. This was another way in which the relationship between built-in affordances and actualized practices was negotiated.

Many of these user-initiated campaigns dealt with the politics of inclusion. Writers would organize around nondominant identities, such as being LGBTQ or writing in a non-English language. Several campaigns concerned themselves with representational practices on Wattpad; specifically, the lack of representation of characters from nondominant cultural groups in most stories. For example, the #weneeddiversebooks campaign highlighted the need to include characters of color and those with different abilities and sexualities (see picture below). Multiple authors answered this call, discussed the issue, and made plans to modify their representational practices as part of this campaign. This development showcases ways in which actors make use of environmental affordances and agentially contribute to the literacy ecology of the space.



Questions & Answers

👁 4.7K ★ 204 💬 56



by DiversityinLit

What is it?

The campaign is dedicated to bringing diverse characters into literature. Basically on the official site (external link) it is defined as: "LGBTQIA, religious/cultural/ethnic minorities, people w/ disabilities, and people of color"

How do I know my story fits the tag?

If your main character, sidekick (the best friend), or love interest fall under any of the aforementioned categories, then congratulations you're part of the movement and you can tag your story with #weneeddiversebooks

Figure 2.4

Collaborative Literacy Practices

Another negotiated affordance in this space took the shape of collaborative composition. The Wattpad writing interface allows a single user to be able to compose a story at a time. However, in the spirit of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2007; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007) and new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), users keep demanding avenues to collaborate via the interface on the forums and have devised ways to circumvent the existing system by creating "collab" accounts where the username and password are given out to all intended collaborators.

Although the space supports solitary authorship, as evidenced by the one author/one username design and the copyright options, Wattpaders orchestrate distributed authorship literacy practices. Some collab accounts involve up to ten members that write and edit asynchronously, given a specific theme, with ownership of the writing remaining distributed. Other collab accounts include an acknowledgment of which author wrote which part. Yet others start with a contest that selects the members of the collab account. These activities show that Wattpaders not only design ways to collaborate, but that they create multiple heterogeneous forms and pathways to collaboration.

Once again, site users innovate upon affordances provided by the app. Literacy practices in this site are not a byproduct of the built-in sociotechnical affordances of the technology. Rather, these practices suggest a give-and-take between the designed affordances and user intentionalities.

Conclusion

This article chronicled the sociotechnical affordances of a newly popular story-sharing app and analyzed the literacy practices these affordances helped orchestrate. Promoting itself as “storytelling redefined,” Wattpad—a mobile app, a website, and a reading and writing interface—offers a networked, hypersocial, and hybrid affinity space centered on print literacy practices. This site harnessed the capabilities of Web 2.0 by capitalizing on multimodal and social networking features and events. An ecological and sociocultural framework proved to be generative in the analysis of this mobile story-sharing app in particular and sociotechnical affordances in general. Multipronged content analysis showed multiple literate activities, purposes, and roles available to participants. However, users selectively made use of these designed affordances and innovated upon them depending on their goals. This dynamic lends credence to the idea that affordances *in* tools should be studied alongside practices mediated *by* these tools (Beach & Castek, 2015). Affordances of educational tools—from apps to manipulatives to new curricula—are best studied in use.

Implications

The telling case study outlined here has several implications for designing and researching new learning environments. The interplay of literacies at work in this account point to the fruitfulness of analyzing and encouraging “old” literacies (like writing) in concert with “new” literacies (like web navigation). In fact, teenagers using this popular app employed the sets of literacies synergistically. Part and parcel of Wattpad’s success is the incorporation of traditional craft, such as penning novels, with new habits, such as checking text notifications. Because of this, insights from both sets of literature help to explain the level of engagement exhibited on the site. Factors that encouraged engagement and participation included the presence of learner’s choice, access to authentic audiences, self-expression, personalization and gamification of literacy events and practices.

The proliferation of media-rich composition environments such as Wattpad underscores the importance of including media literacy activities in formal educational environments. In the classroom, functional and critical approaches could be interwoven when working on such platforms (Green, 1988; Schor, 2007). On a functional level, students could learn more about the gains and losses of different forms, types, and effects of media, including print, graphics, sounds, and so on. Consistent with thought from the New London Group (1996), students can apply different narrative and multimedial techniques to reach their rhetorical goals. On a critical level, learners could explore commercial platforms, such as Wattpad, Facebook, and Youtube, to understand the kinds of literacy practices that are encouraged, suppressed, commodified, and reworked in those sites. Effectively, exercises in analysis of platforms facilitate a “tool literacy” disposition in which learners are able to evaluate the affordances and constraints of the tools they utilize in their lives.

For literacy researchers, implications of this study include a shift in focus toward practices-in-use and the consideration of an ecological approach toward literacy development. Literacies are to

be studied in context. In this study, Wattpad represented a porously bounded literacy ecology that wove together Web 1.0 and 2.0 technologies and chunked creative writing processes with quickly paced social networking tropes. As a result, the site made available authorly identities to its users that were tied to productivity, popularity, and analytics. In a similar fashion, literacy ecology analyses could cover environmental affordances, avenues for sociality, and available identities for participants. As the world shifts toward using networked technologies to mediate all relations, it is incumbent upon literacy researchers to understand how various components of systems used for reading, writing, and communicating interrelate. After all, as Wattpad claims, networked spaces hail the future of storytelling.

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CHAPTER 3

Study 2:

Identities, interests, and investments:

Learning ecologies in story-sharing platforms

Abstract

This article explores young writers' literacy practices and identities on newly popular story-sharing platforms. These sites of affinity for young readers, writers, and graphic designers represent new media ecologies and rich spaces for the development of authors. With a mixed-method case study of 40 adolescent writers, this article chronicles practices of representation, socialization, and connection in networked, mobile story-sharing apps. These *media*-ted practices prove consequential for the participants' sense of investment in their literacies and identities. Findings show that these adolescents invest in the paradigmatically "new" literacy practices involving collaboration, multimodality, social networking, and mobile phones, in concert with the "old" practices of publishing, writing chaptered books, and individual recognition. Friendship-driven genres of practice interweave with interest-driven practices, depending on identity stances of writers. Participants took identity stances from "friend" to "fan" to "expert writer" and expressed a wide range of behaviors in accordance to those stances. The article concludes with implications for the research and design of digitally mediated learning environments, given the heterogeneity in identity stances and practices of young learners.

Introduction

History has chronicled multiple literacy crises taking hold in youth cultures (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). From Socrates' warnings about the effects of the writing technology on memory, to fears about television violence, to arguments about today's "screenagers" reading and writing less and less, we have witnessed many a crisis of the written word. In the contemporary landscape of worry about the stagnating literacy test scores and possibly dwindling skills of young people enthralled by digital media, two headlines were surprising. One was the headline of a 2014 edition of *The Atlantic* that reported on a large-scale study showing that young people "outread" older generations (LaFrance, 2014). In the same year, this headline appeared at *The Huffington Post* Blog: "The Most Literate Generation: Wattpad & the Power of Social Reading" (Timoner, 2014). Such pieces disputed the dictum that youth are reading and writing less than their predecessors.

The last article labeled generations 'Y' and 'Z'—or those born between 1980 and 2010—as the "most literate generation" to date (Timoner, 2014). The motivation of the piece was the growing popularity of the story-sharing app, Wattpad, that boasts 20 million users who write and read on the platform (Timoner, 2014). At a time when the public perception of youth reading and writing skills is dim, interest in print literacy is low (Scholastic, 2013), and literacy test scores are not rising (Aud et al., 2012), it is instructive to examine environments that invite large-scale literate participation and investment from youth around the globe.

Research on networked environments built for readers and writers show that such sites can be inspiring for young people (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robinson, 2009; Lammers & Marsh, 2015; Magnifico, 2012). In particular, networked online sites provide opportunities for youth to collaborate, build affinity, create, learn languages, and discover more about their topics of interest. However, most research studies have focused on large social networking sites, such as Facebook, instead of niche sites for authors (Grimes & Fields, 2012). Moreover, the role of mobile

devices in the process and product of writing activities remains underexplored.

Literacy researchers argue that naming and studying affordances provided by new digital environments might provide an understanding of how adolescents engage with them and inform the design of new learning environments (O'Brien & Voss, 2011). Analyzing the affordances of popular story-sharing apps may shed light on how students engage in these writing spaces, the practices they adopt, and the role of identity in writing communities. To date, few empirical studies have applied these constructs to hyper-social, mobile, and networked Web 2.0 environments that might well represent the future of literacy ecologies.

The rising popularity of new textual environments, such as Wattpad, demands greater attention from the perspectives of those interested in literacy and media—fields that are quickly growing intertwined (Snyder, 2001). Drawing from the linked literature on literacy and media studies, this article explores new media and new spaces for representation, socialization, and connection. There are historical developments that make the inquiry into literacy, media, and technology particularly salient. These include the rise in mass writing, social networking, and media production.

Literacy scholars propose that we are seeing a rise of mass writing and publishing (Brandt, 2001; Laquintano, 2016). People are writing at an unprecedented rate, prompted by changes in work economy and new life demands. In a large-scale survey, American teachers ranked “writing effectively” at the top of the list of essential skills for students (Lenhart, Smith, Macgill, & Arafah, 2014). The internet provides new opportunities for practices connected to writing and for students to become authors and audience members. Within the classroom, teachers see exposure to a wider audience as a means of improving student writing, both through increasing feedback and through the greater investment students have in their writing with peers as their audience (Lenhart et al., 2014). Outside of the classroom, the online world presents as a digital extra-curriculum. The rise in

social networking is concomitant with the explosion in media production and text generation as part of youth pastime (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). However, although people may be writing more than before, most of the social activities related to penning words and texting messages are not considered writing by adolescents, who tend to consider “writing” to be limited school-based assignments (Purcell, Buchannan, & Friedrich, 2013). Thus, studies focusing on self-reports of writing per se might underestimate the volume of text produced digitally and published online.

It is incumbent upon literacy researchers to document the rise in digitally-mediated literacies and identities, in school, at home, and in-between (Alvermann, 2008; Leander, 2007). The internet has become a conduit for socializing and literacy work. Thus, it is important to understand how digitally-connected adolescents come to the practice of writing and to an understanding of themselves as writers. Constructs within sociocultural theory and findings from studies of adolescent literacies are especially useful when researching networked literacy practices of global youth.

The purpose of this research is to investigate literacy practices in networked, mobile, social media ecologies. The aim is to describe reading and writing practices on emerging digital platforms that young users engage with as they are working within the affordances and constraints of these media ecologies.

Such media ecologies serve as emerging sponsors of literacy. To illuminate the literacy practices of youth writing and reading stories on story-sharing apps, we use an intrinsic and instrumental case study methodology in which a particular case is examined to provide insight on issues and the refinement of theory (Stake, 1994; 2005). In this instance, the general and particular case (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) of a story-sharing app called Wattpad provides insight into various aspects of interest-driven, technologically-mediated learning, comprising of a nested, qualitative case study (Yin, 1989). The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What literacy practices and identities do story-sharing apps as new media ecologies sponsor?
2. How do site participants take up, contest, and/or transform these literacy practices and identities?

Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural Theory: Tools, Mediation, and Web 2.0

According to the sociocultural view of literacy, as new tools and technologies are developed, new literacy ecologies are born. We can better understand the new literacy ecology through careful investigation of the new tools and the way adopters make meaning and knowledge from them. Young people's living, learning, and socializing is increasingly mediated by technological tools and networked, more capable others (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Ito et al., 2009; Langer, 2011; Schmar-Dobler, 2003). This study sheds light on the role newly-popular story-sharing apps play in young people's literacy practices and identities. More specifically, we will explore the mediation of adolescents' reading, writing, and communicating practices through prominent story-focused applications.

Grounded in sociocultural theory, this study engages with literacy as a set of cultural practices mediated by tools and linked to identities. Scribner and Cole (1981) define literacy practices as "socially developed and patterned ways of using technology and knowledge to accomplish tasks" (p. 236). The sociocultural approach foregrounds the ways in which people use psychological or physical tools, such as symbols, pen and paper, and technological devices, to live and learn (Vygotsky, 1981; Warschauer, 1998; Wertsch, 1991). That is, the ways in which adolescents think, learn, and communicate are shaped by the tools that are available to them, as these tools permit particular uses but not others, and always exist within the larger context. For example, a typewriter might come packaged with the affordance of the rapid production of print text, but it does not offer

multimodality, interactivity, or global connections—in contrast to computing machines today.

Sociotechnical affordances refer to the reciprocal interactions between a technology, its users, and the social context of these uses. Coined by ecological psychologist Gibson (1979) to describe the qualities designed environments and tools offer to humans, the term has gained popularity in human-computer interaction studies and learning sciences. A sociotechnical affordances perspective pays attention both to the possibilities built into a certain technology and to the agency its users exercise. This perspective sheds light on how features of new technologies and intentions of their users interact to form stable practices and activities (Schrock, 2015). In our case, new tools, such as mobile apps, offer new possibilities for engagement in learning and literacy. In turn, the users of these apps utilize built-in features with an eye to their own needs and literacy demands.

With the concept of mediation, socioculturalists show how human beings act in their surroundings using tools, from hammers to mobile phones. Within literacy and writing studies, researchers have paid close attention to the impact of new technologies on student learning, development, and communication (Bavelier, Green, & Dye, 2010; Bruce, 2003; Chandler-Olcott & Maher, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Purcell et al., 2013). For example, many studies chronicle ways in which the introduction of computers affects student writing and development of selves as writers (see Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). These studies often show positive associations between the introduction of new technologies and writing output. For example, the introduction of laptops into English and Language Arts classrooms has benefits for student writing in terms of quantity and quality (Collins, Allen, Szvedo, & Schad, 2013). Such results are not unilateral and depend on many different factors. Collins and her colleagues (2013) suggest that the benefits associated with laptop use may be diminished if students find tasks at hand uninteresting. Indeed, local contexts, mindsets, and environments around implementation matter when analyzing tools as

mediators of literacy.

New media tools, often grouped under the umbrella term “Web 2.0,” provide new avenues for meaning-making, knowledge production, and participation in society (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007; Shirky, 2008). Web 2.0 energizes user participation to create content across channels. For example, Wikipedia, rather than *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is widely used in part because it allows participation through user contribution. Does Web 2.0 carry with it literacies 2.0? Many researchers argue yes. Specifically, researchers show that new tools enable new kinds of literate participation (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Merchant, 2009; Vasudevan, 2010). Within studies of developmental writing, research has shown the dramatic impact of authentic audiences, consequential contexts, and immediate feedback on student writing (Magnifico, 2010). Likewise, the rise of Web 2.0 technologies has immense potential for student voices. As social media and other Web 2.0 functionalities allow them to speak by writing (Cope & Kalantzis, 2012; Jones & Hafner, 2012; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010), literacy has become even more essential in claiming the right to speak (Janks, 2010; Moje & Luke, 2009; Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Motivation, Investment, and Sponsorship within Old and New Media Spaces

New media environments provide new avenues for motivation, investment, and sponsorship for learners. These new learning environments have motivating features, such as built-in authentic audiences and social networking features. Technologically-mediated environments can be highly motivating for their users (Heafner, 2004; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). As a complementary construct to motivation, some theorists have proposed the construct of *investment*. In addition to psychological aspects of being motivated, investment addresses ways in which people give of themselves to tasks and expect something in return (cf. Darvin & Norton, 2015). Lastly, the construct of literacy sponsorship (Brandt, 2001) describes ways in which distal and local sponsors (e.g., districts,

bookstores, teachers) provide and withhold literacy resources for different reasons, with intended and unintended consequences. For example, churches in the 18th century would teach their parishioners, some of whom were slaves, how to read, for the purposes of participating in the religion and reading the Bible. In turn, many of the parishioners used their newfound reading and writing skills for their own ends—sometimes even liberation (Brandt, 1998; Cornelius, 1983).

As we live in the age of digitality, literacy sponsors are often digital. New media ecologies have become powerful sponsors of old and new literacies, and the popularity and reach of story-sharing sites stand as testament to that fact. In concert, the constructs of motivation, investment, and sponsorship allow us to better understand how media-infused literacy environment invite certain types of participation from their users and, in turn, how users choose to participate. With an increasingly more restrictive and regimented outside world, many youths turn to the online world for opportunities to self-express, experiment, and develop.

Adolescent Literacy Practices and Identities

Constructs explored in sociocultural inquiry are made particularly salient in the study of adolescents. In society, adolescence is viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. The cultural purpose of this period is the preparation of children for adult roles (Larson & Wilson, 2004). One of the key drives in adolescence is the development of a sense of identity, self-esteem, and authorship (Erikson, 1968). As such, adolescents are working out who they will become, the things they will write, and the worlds they will build. This period, then, is prime for sociocultural analysis with an eye toward literacies and identities. Within adolescent literacy studies, literacy has been framed as a space for youth “to begin to understand their emerging independence in relation to the world around them as they begin to take their own stances, express their own opinions, and establish their unique identities” (International Reading Association, 2012, p. 11). To

understand the experience of adolescence, researchers increasingly have to grapple with public writing and social media participation as mediators of this experience.

Public writing and social media participation play critical roles in introducing teens to new friends and connecting them to their existing friend networks. Some 76% of teens ages 13 to 17 use social media and report using digital networks to make new friends and to reify existing friendships. Likewise, 64% of teens who have met at least one new friend online report meeting a friend through social media (Lenhart, 2015). Digital media and learning research (see Gee, 2009; Buckingham & Willett, 2013) have shown the importance of digital media in teens' friendships in helping to create "always-on" intimate communities. Lastly, the growing prominence of public writing and social media use mediate young people's sense of self, completing the circle of relationships between literacies and identities.

Although adolescents get painted with a broad brush, studies suggest that there are multiple, culturally specific, overlapping groups of adolescents with specific developmental needs (e.g., Scales, 2001; 2010). In the last century, research in the social sciences has come to differentiate between children, adolescents, and adults (Hall, 1902). Similarly, in the last decade, researchers began distinguishing between early and late adolescence, showing that there are developmental differences between individuals in the two groups (Caskey & Anfara, 2014; Chango, Allen, Szwedo, & Schad, 2015; Curtis, 2015). Despite being used as a simple heuristic, differences between older (>15) and younger (<15) adolescents have been applied successfully in psychological research and have been used to respond holistically to young people's specific needs in classrooms and beyond (Caskey & Anfara, 2014).

Younger adolescents—or those between 11 and 15 years of age—are undergoing rapid developmental change. In the West, this stage is marked by curiosity, growing interpersonal connections outside of the family, and expanding metacognition (Caskey & Anfara, 2014). Older

adolescents—or those over 15 years of age—often experience a movement toward independence and self-direction (Spano, 2004). These developments are characterized by increasingly stable interests, a firmer grasp of identity, the ability to set goals and follow through, and greater self-regulation (Erikson, 1959; Rice & Dolgin, 2002; Spano, 2004). Thus, younger and older adolescents might use literacy for different purposes and in the service of different developmental tasks.

As scholars of literacy and learning posit that social positioning and opportunities to learn mutually shape one another (Bartlett, 2007; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Wortham, 2006), it becomes incumbent on literacy researchers to understand the identities of adolescent writers. These identities give shape to how they learn, what they learn, and the learning spaces they inhabit.

Study Purpose

This study investigates a new genre of media and literacy technologies: mobile story-sharing apps. Although many technologies facilitating adolescent literacies have been covered in the research literature (see Alvermann, 2010), these technologies have received less attention, despite boasting more than 10 million users and harnessing mobile devices. By focusing on users of the most popular story-sharing apps—Wattpad.com and Figment.com—this study provides a window into the tools, affordances, constraints, uses, practices, and discourses of this new media genre. Using strategic sampling techniques, these apps and users were chosen to illuminate features of this genre salient to adolescent literacy and development.

Methods

Data Collection

Presented here is a mixed methods instrumental case study of youth involved in publishing stories on story-sharing apps ($N = 40$), sampled through a purposeful, theoretical sampling design

(Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This method involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). To ensure fidelity in sampling for active participants in the focal age range, participants were recruited from the forum section of Wattpad with personal messages detailing the study. This mixed methods research study collected information from the following data sources: (1) content of the app itself; (2) background surveys of focal participants; (3) interviews with focal participants; and (4) literacy artifacts (e.g., stories and profiles) of focal participants. Multiple sources of data served as one strategy of triangulation for the generation of theory.

Through biweekly visits to the site and its blog, I examined the literacy infrastructure of this ecology and how it constrains and inhibits specific kinds of literate opportunities and identities. For example, the site guidelines for writing include strict categorization into available genres (e.g., science fiction, romance) that aids the indexing functionality of the site but inhibits writing in hybrid genres. According to Magnifico, Lammers, & Curwood (2013), sustained, systematic observation in online learning spaces aims to “determine the various roles available to participants, to trace how activity is distributed amongst participants, and to answer questions about what constitutes participation and activity for different users” (p. 83). Surveys and interviews implemented in this study worked to describe participation and activity systems in which users took part.

The background surveys, administered via an online survey service, were used to gather demographic and usage information for the participants. This information included demographic data (e.g., age, class, ethnic and linguistic background), available technologies in the household, rules around these technologies, and a closed-ended inventory of the participants’ activities on Wattpad (e.g., writing, reviewing, making book covers, participating on the forums or contests). The background information collected with this survey contextualized the interview and built a profile of the literate practices, identities, and roles of each individual participant.

The primary method of procuring information about participants' literate practices and identities was semi-structured interviewing that added to the survey data. According to Kendall (2008), interviews and observations of practice, conducted in tandem, produce deeper insight into the makeup and functions of the studied site. All survey and interview participants were chosen with purposive, maximum variation, and sampling methods (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) to ensure that data reflected a range of experiences with story-sharing apps. Hour-long interviews, conducted via the method that participants chose, prompted narrative descriptions of interest discovery and development and its manifestation on story-sharing sites. In order to elicit rich narratives of interest discovery and detailed descriptions of literacy practices, questions were open-ended (e.g., "Tell me about hanging out on Wattpad.>").

I also collected and analyzed artifacts created by study participants, focusing on media objects such as the stories posted by participants, forum postings, book covers, trailers, and participants' profile pages. These literacy artifacts are laden with important insights into the participants' literate practices and identities. For example, a well-constructed multimodal book cover reveals an author's new media know-how, while profile pages are often peppered with users' references to self-identities, such as being a writer, a student, and a fan of particular franchises. Furthermore, I studied background surveys, interviews, and objects created by participants across and alongside each other in order to look for differences and similarities in the experiences of study participants. According to Creswell (1994), concurrently triangulated data, or data collected and compared with different sources and methods, ensures well-validated and substantiated findings. These triangulation strategies work to increase analytical trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Data analysis for this study involved analyzing emerging patterns through different types of coding, content analysis, and discourse analysis. Data sets, generated through observation,

interviews, artifact collection, and surveys, will be coded using top-down and bottom-up approaches (Saldaña, 2009). To analyze the interviews, forum conversations, and literacy artifacts, I use in-depth content and discourse analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Gee, 2010). In coding the data, I use iterative open-ended, axial, and thematic coding techniques (Saldaña, 2009). This means that I take several “passes” at the data: the first pass to see what kind of recurring topics emerge, and the following passes I perform to trace themes identified in the data and in the literature. I use mixed-methods analytic software Dedoose to follow and derive overarching thematic categories that emerge with regularity across the different data sources.

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2009), I reference each participant’s data on his or her literate practices and identities (e.g., profile page, background information, stories, and interview data) to each other, to that of other participants, and to data on sponsored literacy practices collected through observation and content analysis, in order to gain insight on literacy sponsorship and uptake. For example, the Wattpad writing interface allows a single user to be able to compose one story at a time. However, in the spirit of Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2007; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007) and new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), users demand avenues to collaborate via the interface on the forums and have devised ways to circumvent the existing system by creating “collab” accounts where the username and password are given out to all intended collaborators. Although the sponsored literacy practice here is one of singular authorship, the users rework and transform this practice to make space for collaborative authorship.

Although this study cannot be generalizable to the adolescent population as a whole, it aims to provide a detailed, descriptive, and nuanced account of how different users within the age group use this new genre of new media in the service of their own needs and purposes. In order to highlight various forms and patterns of use, participants were chosen for maximum variation (Patton, 2005).

Participants

Participants varied in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, linguistic background, and geographic location. Most have lived in multiple countries and speak multiple languages. In keeping with the official statistics reported by Wattpad describing average users, most participants were young women that published works in English. Most participants were currently living in the United States, Canada, Australia, India, France, Britain, Uganda, South Africa, and the Philippines. A map representing current countries of residence for most participants is shown in Figure 3.1.

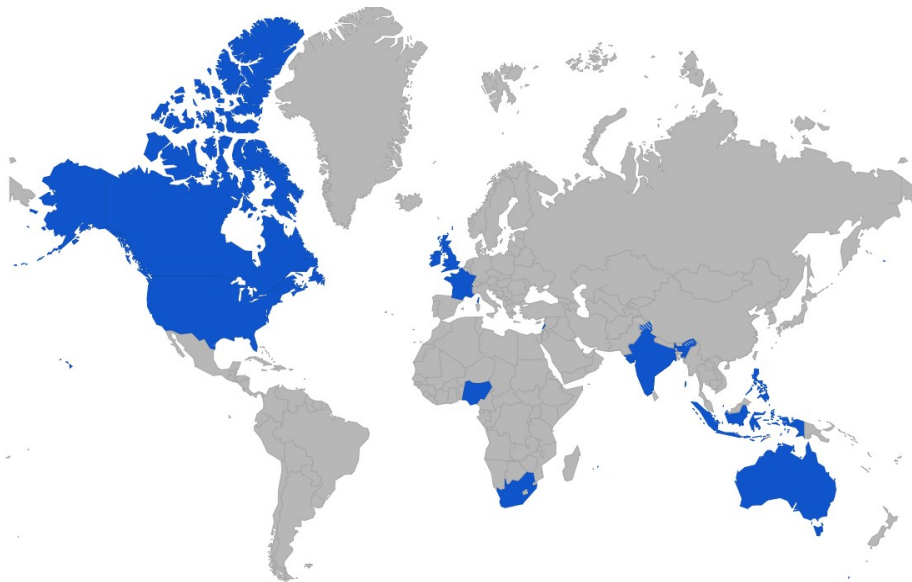


Figure 3.1. Map of participants' countries of residence.

The average age of participants was 16, and they varied from 11- to 26-years-old, in keeping with the current definition of adolescence (Curtis, 2015). About a quarter of the participants were younger adolescents (<15 years old; $N = 8$), and three-quarters were older adolescents (>15 years old; $N = 31$). The majority of participants were White and Asian/Pacific Islander, with 16% identifying as Black and 8% identifying as Mixed race. Because many of these participants came from outside of the U.S., many other racial and ethnic categories might have been more meaningful

within their national cultural context. Still, U.S. census ethnic categories are used to show the demographics of the study participants, as shown in Figure 3.2.

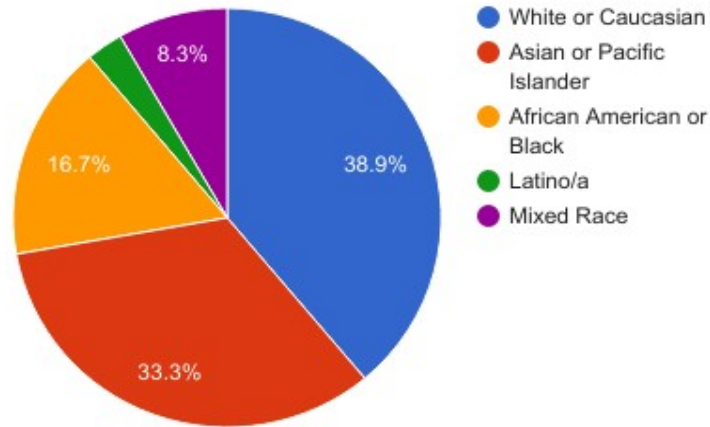


Figure 3.2. Ethnic background of participants.

The adolescents in this study had a range of technologies that they used on a daily basis. About a third (32%; $N = 13$) used a laptop computer on a daily basis, and about a third (31%; $N = 12$) used a mobile phone on a daily basis (see Figure 3). Other participants also had access to gaming devices, cameras, tablets, music players, and smartwatches. Many participants used their devices in tandem or synchronously, for example, using a phone to check notifications, updates, and friend requests while using a laptop to type up new chapters of their stories and to publish them online.

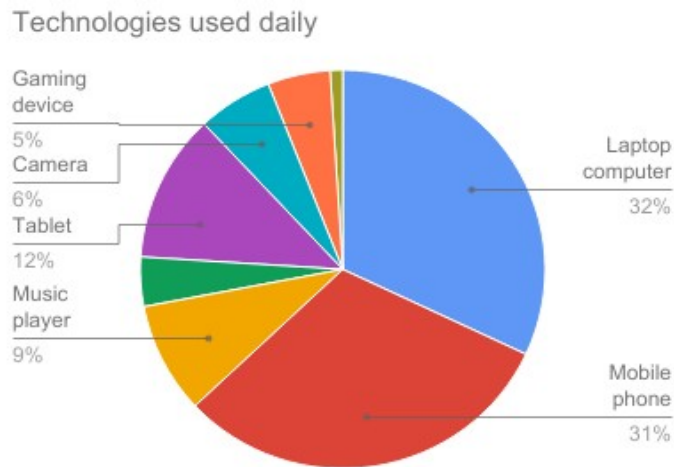


Figure 3.3. Technologies used daily by participants.

Thus, the participants that informed this analysis were, for the most part, tech-savvy teenagers with high access to multiple technological tools. Most of them (85%; $N = 33$) were adolescent girls of different ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds. In addition to demographic differences, analyses showed variation in patterns of use, identity, and literacy practice.

Findings and Discussion

Differences in Focus on Sociality and Writing Product

The analysis of background survey data, literacy artifacts, and semi-structured interviews revealed variation in the activities and practices the 40 participants joined on story-sharing sites. Although story-sharing sites represent their writers under the unitary category label of “user,” fine-grained analysis shows a multiplicity of user types. Background survey analysis indicated patterned differences within participants’ literacy identities and practices. These surveys asked users about what kind of reader, writer, and designer they imagined themselves to be and provided a list of literacy activities in which they could indicate involvement. Analysis showed that certain activities clustered together as more socially-oriented, such as liking others’ works, making friends, joining

clubs and conversations, while other activities clustered around the production of manuscripts, such as typing, editing, and getting critiques. More than three-quarters of interviewed users relied more prominently on social networking features of the sites, such as following and chatting. The majority of users (85%; $N = 33$) reported participating in those activities sometimes or often. Other users focused on the writing-intensive functionalities, such as revising, critiquing, and reviewing. About a fifth of participants (20%; $N = 8$) reported engaging in the writing product-focused activities sometimes or often. The socially-oriented and writing product-oriented groups of participants rarely overlapped.

These differences were especially prominent in users whose primary identity on the site was “friend” or “fan,” versus users whose primary identity was “writer” or “graphic designer.” Those who represented their identity on the site as being a “friend” were more likely to say they go on Wattpad to chat with people ($N = 19$ to 7) and comment on stories ($N = 17$ to 7) than those who did not identify as a “friend.” Those that identified as “friends” were also more likely to say that they use story-sharing sites “to connect” ($N = 15$ to 4) and “to follow” other users ($N = 18$ to 7). Chosen identities within this space tracked purported practices. Those who chose the label of “friend” to describe themselves engaged in the literacy features of the site that resembled social networking features of sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr. For example, 17-year-old Faith² explained:

I have several friends on the site, all who are writers and readers like me... When I'm not chatting with friends, I'm reading. I have several authors who I'm completely dedicated to ... Even if I wanted to suddenly drop off the face of Wattpad, I would still log in whenever I get an email notification about one of their story updates.

Although all participants engaged in a hybrid genre of practice, with social, cognitive, and developmental functions of their literacy activity, there were distinct subtypes of users: those more concerned with networked sociality (85%) and those more interested in writing outcomes and

² All participants' names are pseudonyms.

products (20%). Only about 5% of participants reported being equally interested in more social activities and writing products.

Rosemary (age 15), an example of a writer for whom publishing was prime, said of her dispositions:

My main goal is to be published and making money off of my books. Quite possibly on the *New York Times* Best Selling list. That last one is the highest thing I can ask for. Even if I do get that done, I'll still be working my full-time job.

Participants discussed different patterns of participation on story-sharing sites in their survey responses and semi-structured interviews based on whether they identified as more socially-oriented or more writing product-oriented. Users that placed a premium on sociality engaged in interpersonal activities, such as “connecting,” and tasks, such as “following,” at a higher rate. Conversely, users who revealed a focal interest in writing products engaged in tasks directly related to completing their current manuscript, such as getting edits. Thus, participants’ interests shaped their architecture of participation, even though on a surface level they were engaged in the same web-mediated activity.

Differences in Novice, Emergent, and Expert Writers

Moreover, those who labeled themselves primarily as writers exhibited variation in their literacy practices. In terms of identity categories, teens who identified as novice writers, emergent writers, expert writers, or non-writers had different patterns of use. Novices approached story-sharing apps differently from expert writers. Those who saw themselves as novices were more likely to report asking for help, incorporating visual elements in their stories, and mining the reader forums for writing advice. For example, more participants who identified as novice writers said they create book covers sometimes or often ($N = 12$ to 1). Likewise, identification as a novice writer was linked to increased participation on the forums ($N = 17$ to 6). Tellingly, those who saw themselves

as novices sought out different avenues for showing and developing expertise, such as visual communication. Consistent with the views of media-enabled “participatory cultures” (Jenkins et al., 2009), story-sharing apps provided low bars for artistic expression and participation and varied routes toward expertise and performance. Again, despite being similarly-aged users of the same site, adolescents called upon different genres of participation in relation to the identity stance they assumed.

Developmental States and Patterns of Use

Although the literature frequently treats adolescents as one singular group, there are significant differences between younger and older adolescents in terms of developmental needs, tasks, and stages (see Caskey & Anfara, 2014). For this reason, we examined the patterns of engagement for adolescents under the age of 16, or “younger adolescents,” and those 16 and older, or “older adolescents.” Younger adolescent writers were more likely to use story-sharing sites with an eye toward the afforded social networking functionalities. That is, younger adolescents relied on social networking features to expand their friend networks beyond that of the family in their use of story-sharing sites. In contrast, older adolescents emphasized individuality and independent intellectual pursuits, as they were more focused on writing product-related features, such as critiques, reviews, comments, and writing contests. This variation in focus on affinity varied with the developmental stage of each participant. In keeping with stage-specific developmental tasks outlined above, younger adolescents focused on social features, as their primary concerns included finding friends outside of the family.

By contrast, older adolescents emphasized individual pursuits, such as polishing and publishing their manuscripts and artwork. For example, Megha (age 16) is focused on publishing her second award winner, while Connie (age 17) ran the graphic design club, delegating art design tasks to budding artists and publishing finalized designs onto the website. Thus, our findings are

consistent with the view that adolescents use these platforms in keeping with their developmental needs, with younger adolescents relying on socialization and customization features and older adolescents focusing on individual intellectual pursuits (Caskey & Anfara, 2014).

The survey results showed that younger adolescents were more likely to take on specialized identities, such as “fan” and “expert writer.” In contrast, older adolescents were more hesitant to take on specialized identities and were more likely to identify in non-specialized roles, such as reader and novice writer. Potentially, this variation is due to developmental differences in the discernment with which adolescents take on specialized stances.

Surprisingly, older adolescents were more likely than younger adolescents to consider themselves novice writers, $\chi^2 = 3.79, p < .06$:

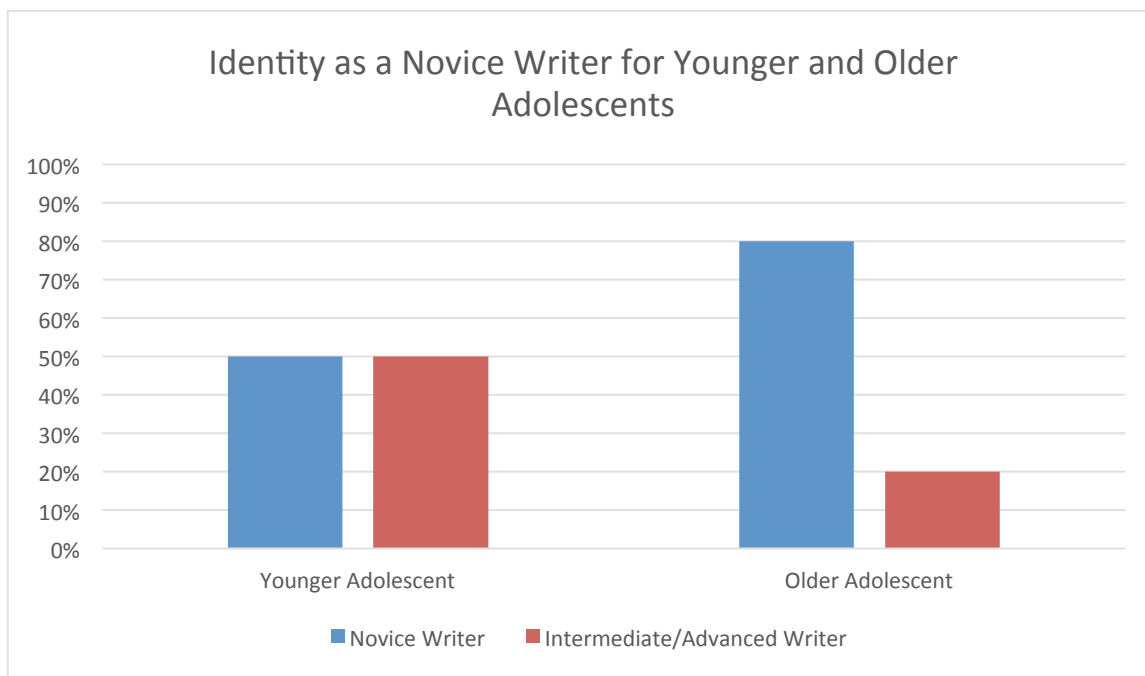


Figure 3.4. Identity as a Novice Writer: Younger vs. Older Adolescents

About 80% of older adolescent survey participants identified as “novices,” with about 50% of younger adolescents doing the same. This may reflect developmental differences in their interpretations of what it means to be a writer. For example, older adolescents may be using

professional novelists as their reference group, whose expertise far surpassed that of our respondents. In contrast, younger adolescents, who were more likely to use Wattpad as a social platform with like-minded peers, may be using their peers as their reference group. Using less-experienced, amateur writers as their reference group may lead young adolescents to consider themselves intermediate or advanced writers. Similarly, older adolescents were more likely than younger adolescents to consider themselves readers, $\chi^2 = 4.68, p < .05$:

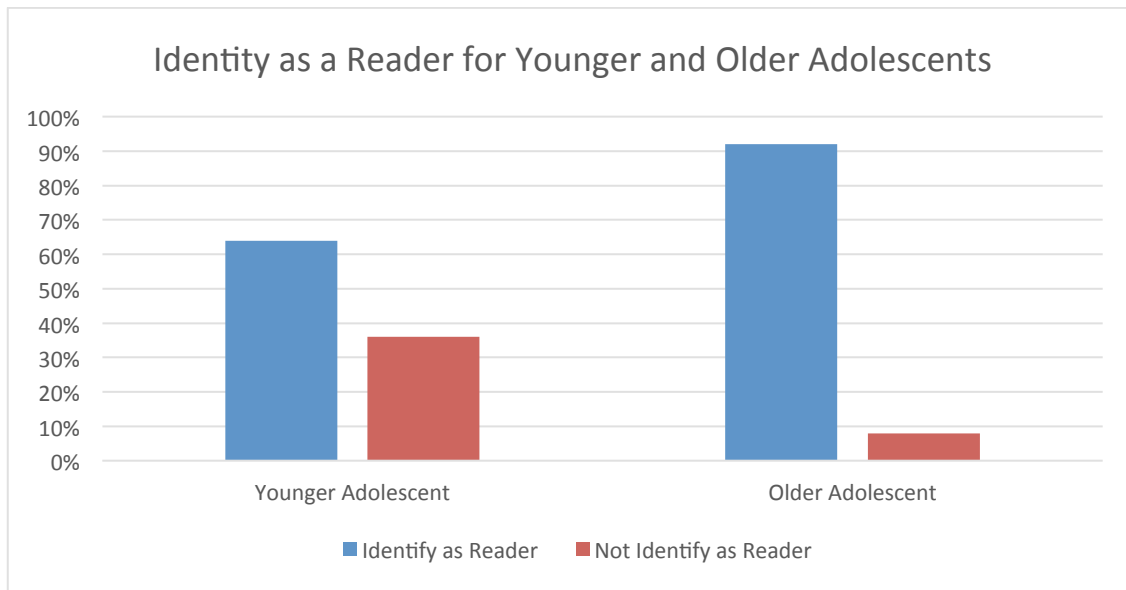


Figure 3.5. Identity as a Reader: Younger vs. Older Adolescents.

Almost all of the older adolescent participants identified as readers, with 60% of younger adolescents doing the same. Lastly, while it wasn't statistically significant, perhaps due to the small sample size, older adolescents tended to be more likely to consider themselves fans, $\chi^2 = 2.73, p < .10$:

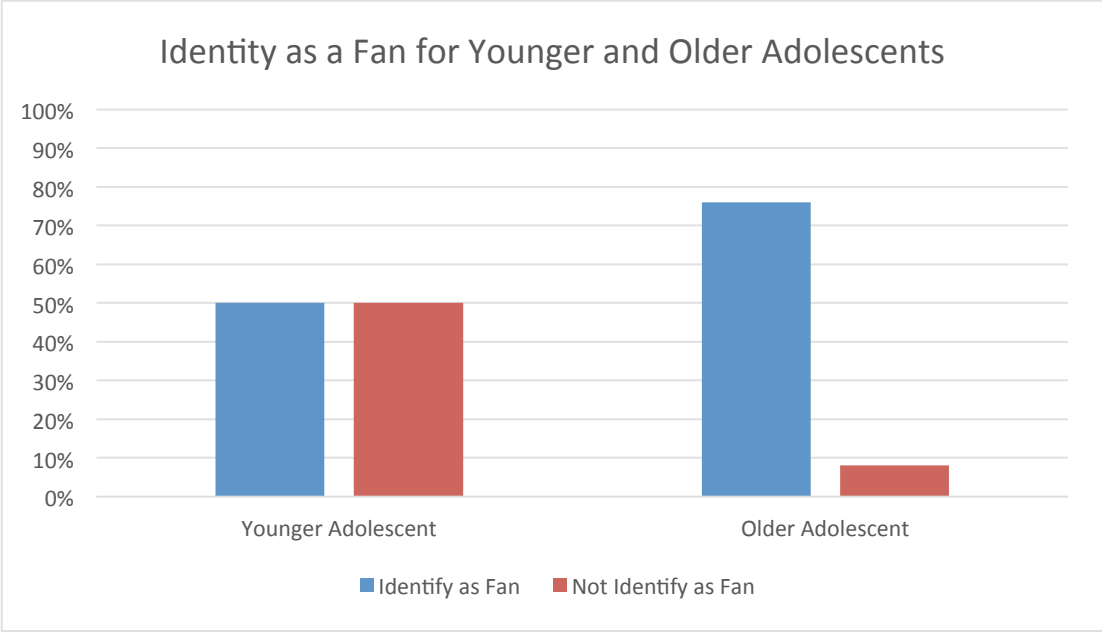


Figure 3.6. Identity as a Fan: Younger vs. Older Adolescents.

On the whole, older adolescents seemed to be more judicious about taking on expert roles, thus being more likely to identify as a reader and novice writer, as opposed to designer and expert writer. These differences in the likelihood of taking on literacy identities—as a novice writer, expert writer, fan, and reader—call for further investigation about the ways that adolescents flexibly understand and take up literacy identities.

Device Diversity

In addition to variations and synergies between literacy identity stances that participants assumed, they also reported variations and synergies among the technological tools they used for those tasks. Instead of using a singular device to engage in story-sharing, participants reported a handoff of devices. For instance, the majority reported resorting to the mobile for networking with audiences and using their laptop to write large chunks of text. Thus, participants used the affordances of different devices in terms of their participation cues (Keating & Sunakawa, 2010).

Twice as many participants who identified as novice writers reported using computers sometimes or often ($N = 16$ to 7). Thus, the device that users chose to engage in story-sharing apps was related to their literate identity stance.

Those who labeled themselves as “friends” were also likely to report using their mobile phones to access the site more often than those who did not identify as “friends” (19 to 8). Participation cues associated with mobile phones structured and facilitated the use of story-sharing sites as social networking sites. Thus, participants made sophisticated choices about the right tool for the job ahead of them, opting for mobile phones for social network-style purposes and using the word processors on computers for extensive editing and the writing of prose. Just as story-sharing users inhabited a multiplicity of roles and identities within their focal sites, they also used a variety of devices that they had access to. These sites and multiple devices that held within them specific architectures of participation provided different affordances for youth needs including literacy and social development.

Young people reported using the phones for more instantaneous needs like “checking notifications” while employing the computer for longer-term reading and writing functions:

As of recently, I first check how my newest book, *Listen*, is doing. Then I open up my works to start writing and I also open up the forums to go through. (Emily, 16).

It feels so good when I see someone commented or voted on any of my books. Again, it's very exciting to see, someone added my books to their reading list or followed me, so I always check the notifications. (Megha, 16).

Time-delimited action verbs like “checking” were used in discussing the affordances of the mobile phone, while longer-term tasks like writing, reading, and designing were associated with a laptop computer. Story-sharing app users called upon the affordances of the devices available to them in different ways and often in tandem.

Participant Profiles: Three Studies within the Study

1. Sandra: Self Identity Stance as Novice Writer

Sandra, a 13 year-old teenager from California, explains in her interview that she uses a combination of smartphone, tablet, and laptop to participate in her storysharing platform of choice: Wattpad. For example, during the day of the interview, she received a notification that her favorite story about mischievous chickens got an update on her phone. She then goes on to check out the update with a tablet. After the interview, she says, she is thinking about uploading a picture she took or a story she wrote for class originally to the Wattpad platform via a laptop.

Sandra self-identifies as a novice writer in this space as she focuses on friend-based and fan-based applications of the site much more than the publication of original chaptered fiction. In fact, her genre and scope of participation on Wattpad revolves around fandoms of which she is part. For example, Sandra follows a particular tag on Wattpad that is used to classify content about her favorite alternative rock band. This content includes fanfiction, pictures, song lyrics, and animated gif files connected to the band members. Sandra notes that many of the users that contribute and consume this content are also participants on related social networking sites like Tumblr and Instagram and continue the conversations and connections that have to do with the band in a multiplatform, multidevice hybrid practice.

Sandra also uses Wattpad to discover new objects of fandom, ranging from bands to anime shows that in turn inspire tags, content producers, and threads that she then begins to follow. There exists a feedback loop between her current interests, friendships, and affiliations and the platforms and networks she uses to keep abreast of related content. For example, it was her best middle school friend that introduced Sandra to Wattpad during a lunchbreak. After hanging out on the site for a

couple of months and following new content produced about a rock band, she has begun a friendship with a teenager from out of state that shares her music taste and current set of interests. Unlike many other participants in this study, Sandra's primary goal on Wattpad is not mass publication of original fiction. She uses the site to post visual content, essays and poems she has produced for school, or engaging in interactive practices, such as taking questions from her friends and followers on the site. Thus, the locus of her Wattpad practice is social interactivity, rather than the production of long works of fiction and narrative. This is why the texts Sandra publishes are large in quantity but low in their word count.

Although she often publishes work that she originally composed for school, Sandra reasons that the textual production she engages in for class is quite different from that on Wattpad and fan-based pockets of social networking sites that she uses. In particular, she highlights that school work is structured with teacher-given prompts and evaluated with grades, while work in the digital extracurriculum can be multimodal and adjudicated with likes. She notes offhandedly that Wattpad has also given her more laughs than schoolwork.

For Sandra specifically, social interaction-based practices and content that dovetails her interests motivate her to participate on storysharing platforms. Although she identifies as a novice writer when it comes to Wattpad, she is a prolific producer of texts on the site and off. Sandra's set of investments into the storysharing platform experience cluster around the need for social interaction, which is consistent with other participants around her age.

2. Connie: Self Identity Stance as an Emergent Writer and Graphic Designer

Connie (15, Asian) is a busy high school student taking a full load of math and engineering courses at her high school. However, she has a busy extracurricular life before and after school, as well. The bulk of her extracurricular engagements is mediated by storysharing platforms Wattpad

and Storybird. Her days start and end with her administrative duties on these sites. She wakes up at 5AM to facilitate requests and bookings for a multimedia-oriented thread she runs on a Wattpad forum. The purpose of her thread is to pair multimedia designers with people that are looking for help with their projects such as bookcovers, video trailers, and profile background pictures. Because visual appeal can make or break the success of works on these sites, requests for help with multimodal design keep coming in. As “payment,” users who get help via threads like Connie’s in turn promote the work of these artists. Connie spends her mornings before school compiling requests, matching projects to available graphic artists, editing the queue of requests and working on new requests that she has assigned to herself. She explains that due to her thread’s popularity and the increasing status of visual work on Wattpad, she has about 7 requests going at any given time. Due to the time spent organizing the logistics of her graphic design collective, Connie often ends up writing fiction deep into the night: usually a combination of romance and poetry.

Connie’s engagement with storysharing platforms is not all business, however. She also writes stories and plays roleplaying games on the forums – these are discussion threads where participants pretend to be their favorite character and answer in kind. As she plays to her strengths, Connie loves adding graphics and animated gif files to her stories. In fact, she prefers using Wattpad to Storybird because she can upload original graphic content to her stories on the former app. In connection to school, Connie credits her participation on storysharing platforms with increasing her reading comprehension skills, which she struggled with after moving to the U.S. from the Philippines. She explains in her interview that her success as a writer, designer, and club organizer on Wattpad helped her gain confidence in school endeavors.

Connie sees herself as primarily a graphic designer and places herself in between novice and expert writers. Consistent to patterns found in other participants’ interviews and surveys, Connie’s reference group for not seeing herself as an expert writer consists of the popular writers on Wattpad,

which often have millions of followers and fans. Yet, Connie is cognizant of the fact that her wheelhouse is different. For her, the multiplicity of routes to legitimate participation on the site is a boon and she deems herself a successful graphic designer and as a manager of a successful graphic design collective.

3. Jenn: Self Identity Stance as Expert Writer

Jenn (20, Mixed Race) is a Wattpad Star, literally and figuratively. Literally, she is part of the Wattpad Stars program that provides opportunities to Wattpaders with a large following to pair with brands, publishers, and advertisers. Famous members of the Wattpad Stars program have received monetary compensation for ad placement and some have been commissioned to publish and turn their work into films and ongoing series for companies such as Warner Brothers. The thinking on behalf of Wattpad is that established authors have built-in fanbases that can be leveraged in service of media companies' goals and, likewise, support from advertisers and media conglomerates can be leveraged to jumpstart these authors' careers (Wattpad, 2015).

Jenn spends most of her time on storysharing apps – she writes for several – responding to comments, fostering discussion, and moderating fora. She prides herself on helping onboard new members and can be found in popular threads on Wattpad fora giving advice about how to gain a large following, status, and standing on the site. Jenn often posts curated multimodal lists for people interested in “making it” on Wattpad. Common pieces of advice include joining book clubs to gain exposure, commenting on other user's works to attract traffic, investing time into the production of a visually appealing cover, and avoiding Wattpad faux pas like flagrant grammar mistakes and overreliance on clichés. Underlying logics of the advice Jenn doles out seem to be that amassing a large fanbase is the main metric of success on story-sharing sites like Wattpad. By the same token, that aspect interests most new members that participate in the Clubs Jenn moderates.

Jenn's profile reveals that she has been on Wattpad for six years and has finished and published 20 works in her tenure there. Prior to Wattpad, she participated on a now-defunct fiction site Quizzilla. She has about 70,000 regular followers and her first published work – tagged as a work of romance – includes 17 chapters or installments and has gained more than 8 million reads. Despite having achieved popularity and standing, given the metrics she herself provides to newcomers, Jenn spends more time on social and organizational features of the sites rather than updating her books or writing new ones.

Jenn explains that her school grades were mostly Cs and that she did not see herself as a successful student. However, she has always seen herself as an agile storyteller – a perception often reinforced by her family members. Now, well on her way to becoming a professional writer and making a living from her writing, Jenn considers herself an expert writer, in part due to the recognition and monetary compensation she has gotten from Wattpad and Quizzilla. Still, just like Connie and Sandra profiled above, she does not gain much personal satisfaction from the number of reads her stories get. Instead, she derives the most pleasure and joy from the social interaction with other storysharing platform members, as she strives to help them achieve “expertise” or “status” in this space.

Conclusion

This study chronicled variation in use, device choice, and literacy identity stance adoption in adolescents on sites that fuse social networking and textual production. This inquiry found variation in social use and purpose, despite similarities in identification per the survey, as “readers,” “writers,” and “fans.” The adolescents in this study flexibly constructed their literate identities, in accordance with the devices they used, the label they were using for the practice, and their developmental stage. Such variation in literacy practice and identity calls for sustained study into adolescent literacies, more and more mediated by current technologies and mobile media.

Implications

This research holds implications for researchers and practitioners in the field of adolescent literacies. In terms of research, the observed variance in users and usage of adolescent story-sharing app participants suggest the importance of treating study participants and adolescents as a heterogeneous group. Moreover, the developmental differences in participant responses to questions about their readerly and writerly identity stances point to the important of testing survey questions and empirical observations to supplement surveys of usage patterns.

Theoretically, this research shows the fruitfulness of tracking patterns of use over time, and in-depth investigations of youths' investments into their own learning, identity, and literacy practices. The elicitation of participants' own narratives about their literacies played an important role and challenged long-standing assumptions about adolescent literacy, such as an either/or approach to technological devices and friendship versus interest-driven genre of participation.

The variation in users and patterns of usage also serves instructive purposes for literacy practitioners, such as teachers and coaches. On story-sharing sites like Wattpad and Fimfiction, users are able to differentiate their identity stances, goals, and practices and gain self-efficacy and a positive disposition toward literacy as a result. Formal and informal learning environments can be designed for diversity and differentiation. As an exemplar, a framework like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be applied to scaffold learners in achieving their personal "why" of the learning task. Salient features of story-sharing apps provided differential paths to legitimate and successful participation by many different users. Participants in this study emphasized affinity, authenticity, and affect as the "why's" of their involvement in reading, writing, publishing, and socializing around original manuscripts. These same principles could animate lively literacy spaces.

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CHAPTER 4

Study 3:

When Writing Goes Public:

Architectures, Metrics, Literacy Identities and Practices in Mobile Story-Sharing Apps

Abstract

What happens when the line between writers and audiences erodes and both become part of a larger networked literate public? Technology-mediated spaces, from social media to online forums to writing apps, provide opportunities for people to engage in simultaneous reading, writing, critiquing, and communication practices without distinctions between "readers" and "writers." This article examines several newly popular story-sharing apps (e.g., Wattpad, Figment, and Storybird) as a novel genre of literacy engagement and a new driver of literacy for connected youth. With more than ten million users worldwide in total, these apps come packaged with avenues to be part of a networked writing public: both a delimited space and a connected community of writers (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The study chronicled in this presentation follows 40 young authors as they navigate literacy practices and selves on story-sharing apps. Observations, content analyses, and interviews over the course of a three-year mixed methods case study reveal interwoven relationships between the readerly and writerly stances of this networked public. Moreover, these relationships are supported by underlying algorithms and publicly available data that feed into the literacy ecology. The case of these adolescents negotiating various literacy identities helps us, as literacy researchers and sponsors, imagine and design for environments where writing goes public.

Introduction

As our tools change, so do our capabilities to make meaning from and with tools. The intersection of literacy and technology affects meaning-making practices. The last half-century saw a rise in research on the impact of technology on literate societies and individuals (Baron, 1999; Castells, 2002; Graff, 1986; McLuhan, 1967; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Reinking, McKenna, Labbo, & Kieffer, 1998; Selfe, 1999; Snyder, 2001; Warschauer, 2001). In particular, the rise of computer and information technologies have had documented effects on writing, reading, and communication practices (Andrews, 2004; Burnett, 2009; Collins et al., 2014; Crystal, 2006; Labbo & Reinking, 2003; Sefton-Green, 2006; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). Digital literacy environments are continually redefining the relationship between reader, text, activity, and the sociocultural context (McEneaney, 2006; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Reinking, Labbo, & McKenna, 2000). Today, multimodal communication has become vital for individuals expressing themselves and connecting with others (Buckingham, 2008; Jewitt, 2008; Kafai & Peppler, 2011; Sefton-Green, 2006). Rapidly globalizing technologies allow learners to pursue self-interest and cosmopolitan practices greater than the self (Beck, 2012; Darvin & Norton, 2017)

With the rise of social media, internet-mediated publics, and the variety of metrics and analytics available to authors, writing practices have shifted toward being more public, multimodal, visible, and explicitly social. This shift in writing practices and related identity stances has been especially salient for adolescents, as adolescence is a time ripe for negotiating one's stance in the world and because young people often become the earliest and most resilient adopters of developing communication technologies (Watkins, 2010; Arum, Beattie, & Ford, 2014). Young people are increasingly forging social connections and composing their words and worlds through networked means (Lenhart et al., 2008; Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010; Lammers, Magnifico, & Curwood, 2014). In response, literacy researchers call for sustained theorization of connected adolescent

practices in new times (Alvermann, 2008; Moje, 2009). Questions arise about what happens when writing goes public.

Brandt (2001) argues that writing has gained a new primacy as a mass literacy, in the context of information capitalism. Writing now carries more value and advanced writing competencies are spreading. Although much has been said about the traditional gatekeepers of literacy, like churches and governments, left unexplored are informal and often commercial entities that structure literacies considered “self-sponsored.” Considering the changing hands of sponsorship in contemporary literacy ecologies, we are tasked with understanding how seemingly self-sponsored or self-generated literacies are too situated within local and global forces.

In the past decade, online writing and publishing increasingly follow genre conventions set by social networking sites, such as incorporating avatars, links, likes, reads, shares, and other kinds of audience engagement metrics. This paper uses data from a longitudinal study tracking the participation narratives and documented practices of forty young authors who write and publish stories using mobile apps. This article aids our understanding of writing, publishing, reviewing, and socializing within networked new media architectures. Bridging literacy studies, the learning sciences, and cultural studies of education, this project contributes to our understanding of data-infused and digitally-mediated selves and practices of young people coming of age today. By chronicling the variety of literacy practices enacted on newly popular story-sharing sites (including Wattpad, Penana, Tablo, Figment, Storybird, and Lithive) and analyzing youth narratives woven about their participation, this study contributes to our understandings of new writing practices and literate identities, new rhetorical and compositional contexts, and novel conceptions of audiences and publics.

This study is animated by the following research questions:

- What literacy practices and identities are sponsored in story-sharing apps?

- How do participating youth engage in and narrate these practices and identities?

Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural Theory: Changing Tools and Ways of Participation

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1994; 2005) is anchored in the sociocultural tradition, which sees language, learning, and literacy as socially situated and tool-mediated practices (Street, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Rather than ends in themselves, literacies provide paths to participate in larger social structures and discourse communities (Gee, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Participation means involvement in some kind of shared purpose or activity and is simultaneously the goal and means of learning practices (Dewey, 1916; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Sociocultural frameworks posit that as our tools change, new media and learning ecologies come to life. Digital technologies enable children and youth to engage in new genres of literacy practices, driven by interest or friendship rather than imposed by school (Ito et al., 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

In light of changing tools, digitally mediated learning and socializing environments call for sustained attention from literacy scholars, as they furnish new lived literacy environments. Literacy researchers argue that naming and studying affordances provided by new digital environments might provide a better understanding of these new learning environments and, simultaneously, inform the design of new learning environments (O'Brien & Voss, 2011). By analyzing the affordances of popular story-sharing apps—which have steadily gained attention for user-generated stories, social media features, and affinity for mobile integration—for literacy practices and literate identities, we will thus better understand and be able to design new learning environments.

Literacy involves more than cognitive abilities dealing with reading and writing print texts. More and more literacy researchers position this set of practices as repertoires of symbolic communication, semiosis across media, and participation in discourse communities (Alvermann,

2008; Gee, 2003; Prior, 1998). The sociocultural framework has informed New Literacy Studies, a branch of literacy studies that recognizes that reading and writing are always positioned within social contexts, and that it is these contexts that give meaning to literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Kress, 1993; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Street, 1998). Moving away from “autonomous” models (Street, 1984) that view literacy as a cognitive ability, emphasis is placed on literacy within a sociocultural context, which reflects particular worldviews and valued practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981).

Increasingly, scholars have tracked the relationship between the proliferation of new technologies, media, and interaction between local and global forces and young people’s ways with words.

The Whys of Participation: Motivation, Investment, and Sponsorship

Although youth produce and share texts, especially multimodal texts, ubiquitously, there remains a need to look at those practices that are motivating and engaging and explore the reasons why these youths participate in literacy practices (Moje, 2008; Pytash, 2016). In conceptualizing motivation from a sociological viewpoint, Darvin and Norton (2014) argue that we can understand social motives for engagement with the concept of “investment.” According to them, investment demonstrates the socially and historically constructed relationship” between learner identity and learning commitment. Investing in a particular practice means having stakes in the endeavor and persevering in the endeavor (Darvin & Norton, 2014). Although mostly applied in the field of language learning, *investment* proves useful in the sociological and ecological studies of literacy development. Investment is conceptualized as a person’s expending of energy for specific goals and capital gain amidst affordances, constraints, and systems of control. As they spend time on story-sharing apps, youth are acquiring linguistic and social capital by learning how to write in certain ways

and present themselves as members of certain literate communities. For Darvin and Norton (2014), investments into learning are deeply steeped in fields of capital, identity, and ideology. The desire to learn to speak English, for example, leads one to position herself and to be positioned as an English learner, consider the benefits and drawbacks of learning this language, and to be situated in systemic patterns of capital and ideology.

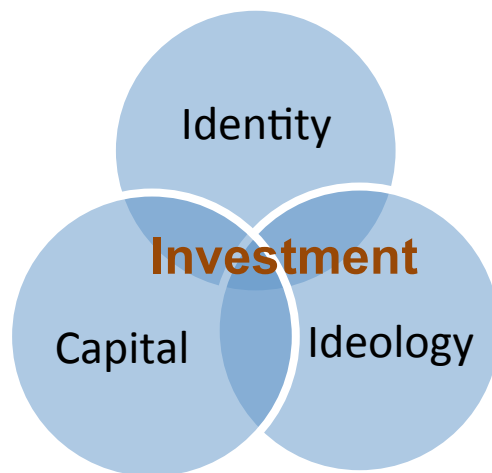


Figure 4.1: Investment in learning. Adapted from Darvin & Norton (2014).

Theorists of youth investment consider youth identities being wrapped up in larger social systems and ideologies. Although less focused on literacy development, Darvin & Norton (2017) point to new technologies as imbued with the potential to develop cosmopolitan sensibilities in young people that are now able to connect with others from very different backgrounds at the click of the mouse. Sociologically grounded theories of why youth engage in “glocal” technologized literacy practices remain at the forefront of these research projects.

According to Barron (2010), one way to advance ecological research of motivation and interest development is by conducting longitudinal case studies that focus on the biographies of learning of individuals. She argues that future research needs to document “the varied ways that learners exert agency to advance their own learning and the conditions under which the resources

they develop sustain engagement” (Barron, 2010, p. 124). Studies attempting to capture the dynamic compositions of in-school and out-of-school learning ecologies must be able to account for the learners’ interests and narratives of engagement.

Public Writing: from Audiences to Networked Publics

Digital media ease the process of making literacy public. Laquintano (2016) reports on writing in open systems and circulating their writing for free to acquire audiences (e.g., Alexander, 2006; Black, 2008). He positions his work within the ‘hyperabundant’ mass publishing culture; the year 2013 alone produced 500,000 self-published books while story-sharing and publishing sites like Wattpad reported billions of minutes per month spent on the site (Laquintano, 2016). Looking at self-publishing as a literacy practice, Laquintano finds continuities and disruptions between print and digital book cultures, where concerns about authors’ vanity, books’ quality, and the hyperabundance of writers (Eco, 1998) are trumped by the desires of authors and their audiences and the affordances of the platforms they use to self-publish. Heralding Amazon and Wattpad as the future of online publishing, this work in composition studies stresses the need to look at publishing environments in concert with author’s purposes, desires, and motivations.

Social media features, incorporated in writing apps, blur ‘audiences’ and publics, and alter what it means to engage in public life. The nature of publicness online is shaped by the architecture and affordances of social media, but also by people’s social contexts, identities, and practices (Baym & boyd, 2012). Digital media renegotiates the private and public spheres and invokes new identity stances and reading and writing practices that are at once public and private.

Language and composition scholars have long imagined writing practices as being parts of larger conversations (Bakhtin, 1981). Still, the way in which writing becomes public has changed

with the advent of the internet. Researchers argue that the public nature of social media perpetuates and makes visible processes that have always been at play, while warping them in ways that call for new literacies and strategies (Baym & boyd, 2012). The contemporary field of composition incorporates the author as a networked audience member (Laquintano, 2016) and a discourse community participant (Gee, 2003). This socially-mediated publicness may be a source of support and empowerment for participating authors, but simultaneously presents potential risks and vulnerabilities.

The Where of Writing

Out-of-school literacy studies often highlight the work youth do with technology. These studies range from accounts of children and teens playing, learning, or socializing, in afterschool clubs, games, virtual worlds, and online communities. These practices are positioned as unconstrained by official institutions, unlike public schooling. Literacy researchers refer to out-of-school literacies as self-generated, self-sponsored, and self-directed (Moje, 2008; Brandt, 1998; Ito et al., 2010; Yi & Hirvela, 2010). Less often are the entities facilitating these practices examined as sponsors or intermediaries of literacy (Laquintano, 2016). Because self-directed youth literacy practices do not occur in a vacuum but depend on a variety of structures and relationships, these intermediaries require attention.

In fact, not-for-profit and for-profit platforms that enable youth literacy practices are designed with particular values and affordances. Programs and sites come with built-in architectures that support and constrain flows of literacy. Thus, out-of-school literacies tend to get painted with a broad brush (Hull & Schulz, 2002), with little consideration of larger structures that enable them. For example, in their study of vernacular Web 2.0-imbued photo-sharing practices on Flickr, Barton & Lee (2012) acknowledge that Flickr's parent company, Yahoo, can be seen as a private,

commercial company that sponsors particular practices. Yet, they do not see Flickr as an example of structured, imposed, or contained writing. At the same time, Flickr, like all commercial platforms, comes packaged with specific affordances and rules of engagement that shape practices, identities, audiences, and publics. It comes with a vision of what counts as success or failure on the site. There remains a need for more nuance in the treatment of situated out-of-school literacies and a respectively nuanced view of purposes people bring to sites and meanings they take away from sites.

One unexplored factor in digitally mediated composition studies has been the abundance of data and analytics that inform literacy practices. As theorists of social media have argued, digitally-mediated sharing is self-consciously public. Sites like Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Academia, and, indeed, Wattpad provide authors with detailed analytics of views, likes, comments, and shares each composition has attracted. Social media-infused sites publish different statistics for the authors that motivate particular forms of engagement and participation. In these sites, attention is highly prized and frequently monetized. Indeed, the start-up Wattpad frequently publishes the quantified amount of time users have spent on the site and on individual stories. Currently, the company reports that users spent about 30 minutes browsing the site in an average session (Wattpad, 2017) and the top ten stories of 2016 collectively were read for 295 million minutes (Wilson, 2016). Within a complex and competitive attentional economy (Goldhaber, 1997), authors negotiate their literacy identities and practices in relation to data and various publics of which they are part.

Methods

The study chronicled in this article follows 40 young authors as they navigate literacy practices and selves on story-sharing apps. Observations, functional content analyses, and interviews over the course of a three-year mixed methods case study reveal interwoven relationships between

the readerly and writerly stances of this networked public. Moreover, these relationships are supported by underlying algorithms and publicly available data that feed into the literacy ecology.

Young story-sharing app users were recruited through a purposeful, theoretical sampling design (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). This method involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). This mixed-methods research study collected information from the following data sources: (1) content of the app itself; (2) background surveys of focal participants; (3) interviews with focal participants; (4) literacy artifacts (e.g., stories and profiles) of focal participants. Multiple sources of data served as one strategy of triangulation for the generation of theory.

Through biweekly visits to the site and its blog, I examined the literacy infrastructure of this ecology and how it constrains and inhibits specific kinds of literate opportunities and identities. For example, the site guidelines for writing include strict categorization into available genres (e.g., science fiction, romance) that aids the indexing functionality of the site but inhibits writing in hybrid genres.

According to Magnifico, Lammers, & Curwood (2013), sustained, systematic observation in online learning spaces aims to “determine the various roles available to participants, to trace how activity is distributed amongst participants, and to answer questions about what constitutes participation and activity for different users” (p. 83). Surveys and interviews implemented in this study worked to describe participation and activity systems in which users took part.

The primary method of procuring information about participants’ literate practices and identities was semistructured interviewing. According to Kendall (2008), interviews and observations of practice, conducted in tandem, produce deeper insight into the makeup and functions of the studied site. Such interviews prompt narrative descriptions of interest discovery and development and its manifestation on story-sharing sites. In order to elicit detailed descriptions of literacy

practices, I asked exploratory, open-ended questions about users' participation (e.g., "Tell me about hanging out on Wattpad.").

I also collected and analyzed artifacts created by study participants, focusing on media objects such as the stories posted by participants, forum postings, book covers, trailers, and participants' profile pages. These literacy artifacts are laden with important insights into the participants' literate practices and identities. For example, the quality and complexity of a Wattpad "book cover"—a multimodal design artifact combining images and text—reveals an author's new media know-how; while profile pages are often peppered with users' references to self-identities, such as being a writer, a student, and a fan of particular franchises. Furthermore, I compared background surveys, interviews, and objects created by participants across and alongside each other in order to look for differences and similarities in the experiences of study participants. According to Cresswell (1994), concurrently triangulated data, or data collected and compared with different sources and methods, insures well-validated and substantiated findings. These triangulation strategies work to increase analytical trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Data analysis for this study involved analyzing emerging patterns through different types of coding, content analysis, and discourse analysis. Data sets, generated through observation, interviews, artifact collection, and surveys, were coded using top-down and bottom-up approaches (Saldaña, 2009). To analyze the interviews, forum conversations, and literacy artifacts, I utilized in-depth content and discourse analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Gee, 2010). In coding the data, I used iterative open-ended, axial, and thematic coding techniques (Saldaña, 2009). This means that I took several "passes" at the data: the first pass to see what kind of recurring topics emerge, and the following passes I perform to trace themes identified in the data and in the literature. I used mixed-methods analytic software Dedoose to follow and derive overarching thematic categories that emerge with regularity across the different data sources. A total of 142 codes were created for the 40

interviews that took place, with an average of 35 code applications per interview and totaling 1415 code applications for this study. See Appendix A for full table of codes and application counts.

Examples of parent codes and child codes include:

Table 4.1: Examples of parent and child codes from the interviews

Activities	Motivations	Structural features of texts	Discourse around texts	Technologies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking notifications • Collaborating • Playing games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activism • Improvement • Recognition • Increasing social network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serialization • Suitability for contests • Genre • Readership counts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popularity • Development of skill and self • Model texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smartphones • Laptops • Portable music devices

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2009), I reference each participant’s data on their literate practices and identities (e.g., profile page, background information, stories, and interview data) to each other, to that of other participants, and to data on sponsored literacy practices collected through observation and content analysis, in order to gain insight on literacy sponsorship and uptake. For example, the Wattpad writing interface allows a single user to be able to compose a story at a time. However, users leveraged the website’s forum to demand features to collaborate via the interface, and devised ways to circumvent the existing system by creating “collab” accounts where the username and password are given out to all intended collaborators. Although the sponsored literacy practice here is one of singular authorship, the users rework and transform this practice to make space for collaborative authorship. The actual literacy practices are negotiated between the app and its users.

Participants

Participants varied in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, linguistic background, and geographic location. Most have lived in multiple countries and spoke multiple languages. In keeping with the official statistics reported by Wattpad describing average users, most participants were young women that published works in English. Most participants were currently living in the United States, Canada, Australia, India, France, Britain, Uganda, South Africa, and the Philippines. See Figure 4.2 for a map of the countries where the participants

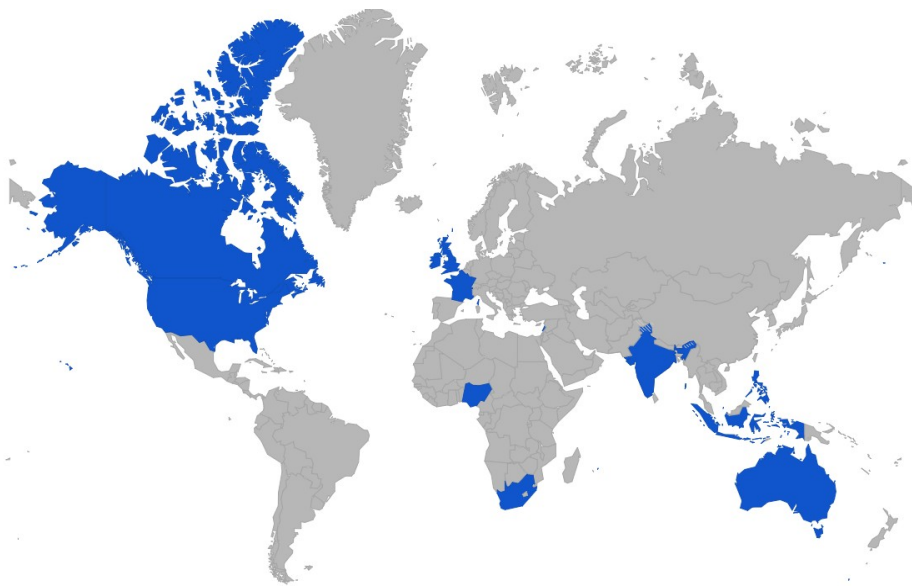


Figure 4.2. Geographic Range of sample. Countries of study participants are in blue.

The average age of participants was 16 and they varied from 11 to 26 years old, in keeping with current definition of adolescence (Curtis, 2015). The majority of participants were White and Asian/Pacific Islander, with 16% identifying as Black and 8% identifying as Mixed race. Because many of these participants came from outside of the U.S. context, many other racial and ethnic categories might have been more meaningful within their national cultural context. Still, U.S. census ethnic categories are used to show the demographics of the study participants:

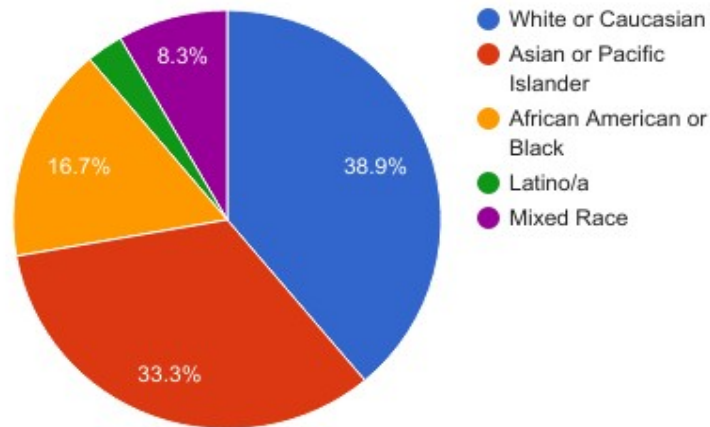


Figure 4.3.

The adolescents in this study had a range of technologies that they used on a daily basis. About a third (32%; $N = 13$) used a laptop computer on a daily basis and about a third (31%; $N = 12$) used a mobile phone on a daily basis. Other participants also had access to gaming devices, cameras, tablets, music players, and smartwatches. Many participants used their devices in tandem or synchronously, for example, using a phone to check notifications, updates, and friend requests while using a laptop to type up new chapters of their stories and to publish them online.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of the 40 interviews, profiles, and participation logs suggests that users engaged in a varied range of literacy practices on Wattpad and had different patterns and narratives of investment in these practices. Some participants saw themselves as prolific writers, others considered themselves as fans and lurkers, and a smaller group of people did not write for story-sharing apps, but rather engaged in criticism and graphic design.

Functional analyses reveal that story-sharing apps host functions that aid the development of a writing process, a writing environment, and a writing community. Features like the writing interface and the streamlined feedback to the writer shaped the writing process on this app. The

social functions, such as comments, profiles, likes, and follows, contribute to the sociocultural environment of this writing. The availability of continuous feedback and discussion in the forums afforded activity and community formation around genres, artifacts, and group identities. Interviews with the young authors provide narratives of constant navigation between private and public stances. The study participants narrate writing at once for “themselves” and for the networked learning publics of which they are part, lending voices to new theories of literacies that are at once mediated by audiences and new tools.

The open-ended coding stage of the interview transcripts established two umbrella codes that comprised the majority of excerpts: (1) motivations and investments (N= 231 code applications) and (2) literacy activities and practices (N = 149 code applications). In the in-depth interviews, participants mostly talked about the what and the why of their engagement. The literacy activities indexed by participants ranged from graphic design to chatting with other members. The reasons for engaging in activities, as narrated by participants, ranged from positive feelings to wanting recognition to honing their craft.

Table 4.2: Most frequent coding categories

Coding category	Number of Code Applications	% of Total Code Applications
Literacy activities and practices	149	10%
Motivations and investments	231	26%

Within these umbrella categories, representative codes for motivations and investments included process codes, such as “chatting” (N = 13), “exploring” (N = 10), “giving and getting feedback” (N = 30), “joining clubs” (N = 17), “socializing” (N = 41), “reading” (37), “writing” (N = 60), and “helping” (N = 14). Within the umbrella category of motivations and investments, the main codes for narratives were of audience matters, family support, inspiration, recognition, affect, community,

and publication metrics. Discourse analysis and sentiment analysis techniques were used to group participant narratives into patterns that provided insight into the “whys” of participation. Table 5 shows the subcodes for narratives of the general categories of literacy activities and practices and motivations and investments within the interview transcripts in receding order, from most frequently observed to less frequently observed in terms of the number of applied codes.

Table 4.3: Subcodes of most frequent codes

	N	%		N	%
Literacy activities and practices	149	100%	Motivations and investments	231	100%
Writing	60	42.25%	Creativity	35	15.15%
Socializing	41	28.87%	Improvement	35	15.15%
Reading	37	26.06%	Inspiration	35	15.15%
Giving and getting feedback	30	21.13%	Writerly Community	33	14.29%
Joining clubs	17	11.97%	Family Support	26	11.26%
Helping	14	9.86%	Metrics	23	9.96%
Chatting	13	9.15%	Audience	22	9.52%
Exploring	10	7.04%	Affinity	22	9.52%
Designing	8	5.63%	Recognition	21	9.09%
Fanning	6	4.23%	Writing for the self	19	8.23%
Checking notifications	7	4.93%	Affect	18	7.79%
Playing games	4	2.82%	Choice	13	5.63%
Publishing	4	2.82%	Diversity	10	4.33%
Making music	2	1.41%	Leadership	5	2.16%

Emergent Practices and Identities

Participants mentioned writing for themselves and to fulfill their public duties almost equally. In the interview narratives, the young authors weaved together investment in the development in their own selves and the cultivations of larger writing networks or networked publics (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Common reasons authors cited for engaging in their work included wanting to improve, feeling inspired, craving recognition, demands of the community, familial support, writing about topics they cared about, and writing for themselves and others.

Writers' narratives of investment were interwoven in complex ways with the affordances of the site's architecture, which paved paths for certain identities, practices, and textual products. For example, Rosemary, 15, articulates her reasons for drafting and publishing stories as follows:

I really write for myself. There are some times that my family makes me feel like I have to prove myself that I can make it as an author though, so I guess it's for them too.

In her narrative of investment, Rosemary explains that she simultaneously writes for herself and her family. In other narratives, participants led with the justification that they produce books for themselves but followed up with invocations of friends, siblings, parents, and real and imagined audiences. Far from being a self-sustaining and self-sponsored set of literacy practices, these teens read, wrote, and published to enter into a larger conversation.

Audience concerns remained center stage at all aspects of the writing process for teens in the study. Participants evaluated their writing and success on story-sharing apps in relation to audience reception. Some of the authors explicitly maintained that their published works have nothing to do with topics that are trending and generating controversy and readership. Other authors explained that they are inspired by their fans that their writing is informed by the readership's preferences. The relationship between authors and readers, as members of one networked public, was mediated by the sites' designs and infrastructures.

Writing Mediated by Algorithms and Metrics

Despite the fact that almost all interviewees mentioned that they write for themselves, many invoked audience—real or imagined—in terms of site metrics, algorithms, and quantified analytics. Indeed, Laquintano (2016) traces the transition from the editorial to the algorithmic system of judging the quality of writing as authors are constantly negotiating with ranking and recommendation

systems online. Interviews revealed prominence of readership statistics in narratives of engagement and investment. Users often quantified their numbers, in terms of reads, comments, and votes:

Some of my friends think that it's 'cool' how I've published books and *that one of them has received 1.4K reads* so far. (Tammy, XX).

I wish that the What's Hot List were configured different. I dunno, *it is just really depressing seeing featured stories or stories with like 50K votes on them being ranked*. I mean, I get why, since it is an algorithm that goes off of how much attention a book has, but still. Many people get dejected when they see the same books with over 50K votes/reads winning Watty awards or seeing them Featured- again. (Daphne, 15)

Because these numbers impacted these authors and their relationship to their writing, algorithms that counted up those reads, likes, comments and enabled “What’s Hot” and “Trending” lists became especially salient. As Gillespie (2014) argues, algorithms become increasingly important in a world connected by digital media. These sociotechnical systems separate trends and direct attention in public discourse. Digital algorithms not only help us find information, they provide a means to know what there is to know and how to know it, to participate in social and political discourse, and to familiarize ourselves with the publics in which we participate. They are now a key logic governing the flows of information on which we depend, with the “power to enable and assign meaningfulness, managing how information is perceived by users, the ‘distribution of the sensible.’” (Langlois, 2013). Similarly, the power of algorithms to distinguish work, workers, and streams of information seeps into literacy ecologies.

Users with a large following and those participating in the Watty Awards (Wattpad’s annual recognition contest) were particularly in tune and concerned with the developing ranking algorithms of the site. Because Wattpad changed its ranking algorithms in 2016, the changes were fresh in the minds of interviewees:

The algorithm used to only work on how many votes, reads etc a book got but since it's been worked on, completed books can now rank and books with low stats can rank as well (pretty easily now). *A book with 200,000 reads will rank lower than a book with 1000 reads if say the book with 200k reads got 2% of its stats today and the book with 1000 reads got 30% of its stats that day*. (Angel, 18)

To me, when I was new to the whole concept of reads and readership, *a thousand reads seemed gargantuan to my own read count, a meager 32 with 3 votes and no comments. But now that I've had my own time in the spotlight, from high-ish rankings in the mid-100s, to being awarded for my work in contests, to nearing five thousand reads on my longest-worked-on book, that perspective has changed some* (Alicia, 14).

Angel and Alicia underscore the importance of ranking algorithms to sort writers into popular and unpopular and to grant to authors their time in the “spotlight.” They are both able to cite their readership statistics offhandedly, without referencing their profile pages, highlighting the defining role these numbers played in their authorly identities. As the relationships between writers and audiences are evolving and both are becoming part of a larger writing networked public, algorithms become the switchboards that animate this literacy infrastructure. In digital media spaces, algorithms become a key technological component of these environments, as they structure the publics that emerge with technology.

Textual and Structural Features of Writing on Story-sharing Platforms

The various identity stances and literacy practices enabled by story-sharing apps informed the texts participants produced. In addition to sponsoring particular identities in relation to being a success and failure on the site, story-sharing apps placed a premium on particular kinds of texts. For example, all story-sharing apps emphasized serialization, or publishing parts of “books” in a bite-sized, multimodal, public fashion. Stories came along with tags and genre identifiers. Popular genres on Wattpad included romance, science fiction, and urban fiction. To be placed on “What’s Hot” ranking lists, it was important for stories to be identified within a specific generic category, building a rigid yet shifting generic infrastructure (Devitt, 2004). Users are able to argue for the introduction of new features and new genres on specified forums. For example, users were able to legitimate the insertion of “vampire fiction” as a subgenre, which now exists as a possible generic identifier on the site. Still, some questions about the generic identifiers were hotly debated. For instance, some users

pushed for an “LGBT fiction” identifier while others resisted the idea, explaining that all genres should include characters of varying sexualities and identities and that genres should not serve as silos for representation. These kinds of conversations between users and producers and among participants exemplify the political and consequential nature of literacy infrastructures, even with features as seemingly innocuous as genre drop-down menus to classify work. Despite researchers framing Wattpad as open to emerging genres and self-tagging work with any identifiers (Bold, 2016), all story-sharing sites provided a closed list of genres to choose from and additions meant debates and tweaks to ranking algorithms. Although users often framed their participation on sites like Wattpad and Figment as imbued with freedom, often in contrast with writing for school, interviews revealed multiple rules that governed the production of successful texts on these platforms:

I write the same way I do for Wattpad for other sites. They all work with serialisation (posting one chapter at a time). Wattpad is just a lot more social. I started writing more often back in high school because I had a problem with formal written English. (Tammy, 14).

There's really not much of a difference apart from me writing stories for Wattpad while I write essays, compositions or course sheets for school. I read and write more because of Wattpad so I guess I'm a lot faster at writing my school essays, compositions etc. (Angel, 18)

In the interviews undertaken for this project, participants exhibited reflexivity with writing practices in structured environments like schools and story-sharing apps. Although participants reflected on the rules of engagement, importance of standing, and stringent definitions of success and failure in both kinds of places, they prized the freedom and choice they experienced in their extracurricular writing. In a way, participating on story-sharing apps gave these teenagers critical distance and language to critique the infrastructure of literacy practices in formal environments.

Sponsorship, Investment and Identity

Research on literacy practices differentiates between self-sponsored and institution-sponsored flows of literacy to show whether participants are inspired to read and write on their own accord or by a more formal institution, such as school or church (Brandt, 2001; Yi, 2008). However, almost all youth in the study explained that they write for themselves and are also motivated by their audiences. Furthermore, features of the platforms themselves mediated ways in which participants read, wrote, communicated, and socialized. For example, the layout, organization, and rules of the forums within each site structured the conversations users were able to have. On Wattpad, forum moderators removed any content that could be viewed as promoting one's work, which some users saw as prohibitive of constructive talk about specific stories. On Figment, interaction around branded products or related fanfiction was similarly banned. Within the interview narratives, participants explained that they invest their time and selves into the writing process due to complex coordination between self-sponsored, platform-sponsored, and audience-sponsored writing.

Whether youth narrated the writing endeavor as primarily self-sponsored or other-oriented, the role of the audience mediated investment in literacy practices on the sites. All but one participant mentioned the active audience in their construction of writing selves. In particular, on Wattpad.com and Figment.com audiences were other participating authors. The audience-turned-public made a difference to the interviewed youth, as the interviewees mentioned the fact that writing for other writers was at once more challenging and more rewarding than writing for readers. Participants explained that writing for audience members who identify as writers raises the expectations for one's own production of text, where you pay more attention to grammar, narrative structure, and flow. Social features of these sites, such as always-on communication and networking abilities, facilitated relations between audiences and authors and lead to greater output of writing that is more visible, public, and creative, in the young writers' minds. Floods of comments urging authors to update their

story or post the next chapter of their book heightened awareness of a live networked audience. App-mediated patterns of participation helped youth establish identities as readers, writers, networkers, and creators of multimodal content. Users talked of writing for oneself as the main source of affective engagement, with networked audiences playing an important social role and distinguishing between school-based reading and writing and those on the internet:

On [Wattpad and Figment], I can write whenever inspiration strikes and it doesn't matter. In school we write when we are compelled to. (Megha, 16).

I write for myself and I share my works in the hopes that I can make other people just as happy too. (Jade, 16).

These youths spoke of writing for themselves, with an eye toward their networks of fellow readers and writers. Although youth culture research literature distinguishes between interest-driven and friendship-driven genres of participation (see Ito et al., 2010), youths interviewed for this study saw the two genres of participation go hand-in-hand. Indeed, youth pointed to multiple entry-points to participation in reading and writing on the sites in which a friendship orientation and an interest-driven dimension sustained one another. Participation on sites like Wattpad and Figment enabled the development of a critical lens on the part of these youth toward schooled literacies. For example, Alicia (14) explains contrasts between schooled and storysharing apps as follows:

There isn't any sort of restriction like there is with English class assignments. I can write whatever genre with every creative liberty allotted to me, whereas writing a short story infused with the teenage culture of being informed about drugs and sex isn't quite acceptable or tolerable in school. I'm able to utilize the same tools that real-deal authors do: the freedom to write what I want, no matter the teachers or the unspoken rules. (Alicia, 14)

Alicia's narrative reveals a generic awareness keyed into the rules of engagement on storysharing apps and in schooled spaces. Although she speaks of participation on Wattpad in positive terms, highlighting choice, freedom, creativity, and uptake of "teenage culture," elsewhere she talks of Wattpad's algorithmic ranking systems. She lists topics and ethoi to contextualize the differences

between the digital extracurriculum and the official curriculum. Moreover, she uses insights from her engagement in the extracurriculum to critique the infrastructure of her official curriculum. This rhetorical move is consistent with what Hull & Zacher (2004) calls meta-literacy and what the New London School (1996) considers in line with design: the ability to situate and apply certain tools and ways with words to relevant rhetorical situations.

Multilayered Sponsorship of Literacy

This work lends credence to seeing sponsorship lenses as multilayered, coexisting, and syncretic, or building upon one another. The young people interviewed in this study considered their extracurricular literary labor as being at once for themselves, in consideration of their public, and filtered through the norms and rules of the writing environment. This model of syncretic literacy sponsors could be a fruitful model to provide fine-grained and holistic analyses of power-laden literacy practices. As with syncretic approaches to learning (Gutierrez, 2008, Gutierrez, 2012), unlikely fields do mingle and commercial sponsorship practices coexist with what youth considered to be empowering.

In concert, the affordances, algorithms, and audiences of story-sharing apps themselves served to bolster some types of writing and repress others. Highly prized is serialized fiction that follows genre conventions, keeps with current trends, and comports with tagging and marketing rituals on each individual platform. In interviews, participating users explained that following these schema is what it takes to get “discovered.” Young authors narrated their literate experiences in schooled spaces as restrictive, and experiences in the digital extracurriculum as more free in terms of content. Still, they showed awareness of strict rules for “success” applicable to both kinds of spaces.

Collected data indicate that the app specifically sponsors corporate-backed, networked, “on the go,” and social story-writing and -sharing literate experiences. The app encourages hand-off

between mobile and stationary devices through its interface. Moreover, it engages in *literal* literacy sponsorship by collaborating with brands and franchises such as Kraft and Chipotle in sponsoring product placement in stories and corporate-backed writing contests. These monetized practices serve to mediate authorship and status among story-sharing users. For example, authors that want to make money through ad placement have to gain a large enough following to be invited into the program. The app sponsors particular writing ideologies that reflect commercial interests and contemporary attentional economies, such as serialized publication and on-trend content creation. Users invested in literacy practices and identities and their investment was then routed in particular ways by these emerging sponsors of literacy.

The app gave specific writing advice to the users, such as asking them to upload their writing in chunks or chapters and to constantly update their work and profile. This way of intermittent consumption and production of stories caused the users to constantly check their phones for new updates from their favorite authors. As is common with corporate websites, sponsored literate practices consisted of directing attentional energy back to the app and directing traffic throughout the app. Many users took this practice up and grew highly invested in the constant updating of their own and others' stories. Some participants took a different approach and redirected attention to other websites and networks, circumventing the sponsored literate practices of the app producers. Specifically, they would set up accounts on other social networking websites such as Tumblr and Kik to communicate directly with their readership and bypass the official messaging mechanisms of the Wattpad interface. Thus, official literacies were always negotiated between producers and users.

Echoing the sociocultural concept of literacies as sponsored practices, this study has begun to chronicle the ways in which commercial sponsors model, recruit, enable, regulate, and suppress (Brandt, 2001) literacy practices and, how, in turn, participants take up, reinforce, reshape, and resist those practices. Thus, the lens of literacy sponsorship proves useful in providing a nuanced and

complex analysis of the literate practices in corporate-backed, technologically-mediated learning environments.

Conclusion

This study hones our understanding of teen writing practices online. The case of these forty adolescents foregrounding divergent literacy practices and negotiating various literacy identities helps us, as literacy researchers and sponsors, imagine and design for environments where writing goes public.

This project adds to the historical and cultural theory of literate engagement in the digital extracurriculum, as one example of an adolescent literacy practice. By enriching our understanding of youth literacy practices in relation to proliferating streams of data, we also deepen our understanding of the data-informed production and consumption of the contemporary subject as a quantified self. The internet is sometimes referred to as the Wild, Wild, West (Levy, 2017) where anything goes and choice is king. This logic has animated much of the inquiry into the digital extracurriculum of young people. Research on digitally-mediated youth practices has framed them as self-sponsored, self-sustaining, self-generated, and—generally—free. Yet, this research has extended the inquiry into ways in which specific commercial platforms can act as infrastructure and gatekeeping mechanism for literacy and identity development. Participating youth narrated their practices on story-sharing apps like Wattpad and Figment as filled with choice, volition, and agency—in contrast to their experience of school. At the same time, they foregrounded the role of the audience and incorporated talk of infrastructural, algorithmic, and ranking features that determined success on these sites. These narratives show the importance of nested models of sponsorship and investment. Despite dominant frames in literacy studies, writing and socializing is not either constrained or unconstrained, online or offline, and for the self, for institutions, or for others. Against either/or models of infrastructuring literacies, it is possible to understand

sponsorship and investment into various literacy practices as multiple and mutually dependent. Just as participating users invest into reading, writing, and socializing on story-sharing platforms, the design and infrastructure of each site invites some types of investment and contains others. Akin to the relationship highlighted in the field of economics, literacy sponsorship and investment are powerfully linked.

The syncretic approach toward understanding youth investments, practices, and textual products in conversation with the affordances and architectures of their learning environments constitute a way forward for current debates in literacy studies (see New London School, 1996; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Jacobs, 2013). Observed phenomenological practices are put into conversation with individuals' investments and environments' sponsorships. This way of conceptualizing ways with words in the digital extracurriculum does not paint practices as unmediated and instead foregrounds the power-laden, situated, and mediated nature of all literacy practices.

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CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The studies presented in this dissertation comprise an in-depth nested mixed methods case study (Yin, 1994) of literacy activities and identities mediated by a new genre of media called story-sharing apps. These are platforms, sites, and mobile applications that combine aspects of fiction publishing, social media, and smartphone affordances. As an emergent media genre, these platforms have gained the attention of millions of young users and are beginning to garner that of researchers (Alexander, 2017; Korobkova, 2014; Laquintano, 2016; Padget & Curwood, 2016; Tarbox, 2013). Research positions sites within this emergent media genre as places of learning, affinity, publishing, and cross-cultural exchange. Anchored in the sociocultural tradition and expanding on inquiry in youth, literacy, and digital culture, this dissertation inspects apps that are touted as newcomers, gamechangers, and drivers of adolescent literacy worldwide (Bello, 2012; Schreyer, 2012; Timoner, 2014). With three studies varying in focus, scope, method, and unit of analysis, this work aims to conceptualize this new genre of media and its place in contemporary adolescent literacies. Inquiry into an emerging media genre serves as a glimpse into the future of socially-, digitally-, and mobility-mediated literacy and sociality.

Study 1 traced the affordances of Wattpad, the most prominent story-sharing site, mapping them onto theories of print and digital literacy practices on the one-hand and empirically-observed literacy practices on the platform, on the other. As an integral part of the case study, the first article traced the opportunities and drawbacks for literacy development involved on Wattpad and related platforms. Affordances included features like the presence of an engaged, always-on, authentic audience, while the drawbacks—as expressed by the uses—pointed to lacks in the design such as the

absence of a collaborative interface. Building upon the existing site infrastructure, users created their own paths to collaborate and produce the literacies and identities of their own choosing. This study both chronicles the practices made available on story-sharing apps and shows how users innovate upon existing designs, lending credence to the technology-in-use trend of studies in informatics and literacy studies.

Study 2 reported results from surveys of 40 story-sharing app users, showcasing variance in patterns of use, developmental state, and literacy identity stances. Often, adolescents and users of particular services are presented as monolithic. In contrast, this study demonstrated significant differences within the participating group of adolescent story-sharing app users. Younger adolescents and primarily mobile device users tended to employ story-sharing platforms for purposes akin to social networking, while older adolescents and primarily laptop users put these sites to work as places to draft, polish, and publish their prose. Such variance in patterns of use, ways of conceptualizing use, and identity stances taken up during use serves as a reminder to treat individuals within groups as pluralistic and their practices as multiple.

Study 3 analyzed narratives embedded into users' reasonings about story-sharing apps, their affordances, and reasons for engaging with them. Analyses found that participating users considered their production of stories on these sites as being simultaneously for themselves, for others, and within the confines of specific literacy ecologies. Often, these ecologies relied on the power of networked publics and ranking algorithms. Although the participating youth and out-of-school literacy scholars narrate extracurricular literacies as self-sponsored, it is valuable to investigate ways in which various companies, platforms, ecologies, and environments – in and out of school – serve as powerful sponsors of lived literacy practices. In contrast, this study describes ways in which spaces in the digital extracurriculum can be highly structured and mediated. Far from being gatekeeper-free and unconstrained, literacies in spaces like this call upon companies and

corporations as literacy sponsors that invited certain types of investment and participation and prohibited others. Participants demonstrated criticality, generic awareness, and reflexivity when contextualizing literacy practices in school and out. By participating in different kinds of literacy and learning environments, youth grew cognizant that different spaces take up different tools, rules, and ways with words, providing resonance with theories of design by New London Group and powerful metaliteracy by Hull & Zacher (2004). In these theories, the focus is shifted from individual skills to recognizing ways in which different environments invite and require different types of investment, participation, and ways with words. Moreover, analyses of learning and literacy ecologies could be performed by students – in the classroom or out.

Together, these studies make strides toward in-depth, nuanced, and power-laden conceptualizing of flows of literacy and attendant identities nestled within digital cultures. Without celebrating or vilifying the work youth are doing in the digital extracurriculum, it is important to pay attention to how literacy environments are structured. It is clear that recent fears about adolescent practices – from a generation ruined by smartphones to the death of book culture – are inflated. Claims about sociotechnical revolutions are, too. Issues facing adolescent literacy are at once millennial and perennial: young people, as always, are seeking voice, connection, and a place in the world. Literacy is powerful and infused with power relations. Yet, the trade routes of literacy continue to shift, evolve, and change hands. And it is possible that with the rise of digital media, these routes are more visible and amenable to research and intervention.

Contributions

These studies contribute to literacy and media studies by chronicling work related to learning, literacy, and identity that happens in a new communicative genre under the umbrella term

of story-sharing apps. The content analysis, survey results, and interviews showed that story-sharing apps played a role in participating youth's identity and literacy development.

The rise of digital cultures has helped to intensify and make visible the move from binary definitions of readers, writers, and audiences to participation in networked publics (Jenkins, 2006; Laquintano, 2016; Marwick & boyd, 2011). Just as cafes and town squares served as meeting points for townsfolk, digital spaces serve as “publics”: simultaneously places for meeting people and for likeminded crowds. Historically, the swell of networked technologies came coupled with discourses of participation, revolution, and the redistribution of intellectual labor and goods. Yet, research has found continuities as well as ruptures in patterns of societal organization in these “new times” (Hargittai & Walejko, 2008; Laquintano, 2016; Warschauer, 2011). The digital age has changed the topography of participation but also strengthened unequal distributions of power in society.

In cultural and literacy studies, theorists have long posited the immense power of institutions to shape access, flow, and structure of literacy practices throughout the history of the word. Institutions, such as schools, churches, and governments served as sponsors of literacy (Brandt, 2001). Within digital culture research, the focus shifted toward highlighting seemingly independent learning and literacy practices, framing such practices as self-sustaining, self-sponsored, and self-initiated (Barron, 2006; Brandt, 2001; Moje, 2008, Yi & Hirvela, 2010). The work presented in this dissertation aims to reframe and resituate some of these claims by drawing attention to the power of platforms, corporations, websites, infrastructures, and algorithms to serve as new sponsors of literacy. These studies corroborate Laquintano's (2016) claim that analytics and algorithms mediate literacy practices and recursively shape literate activities. It is incumbent for literacy researchers to analyze sites of digital culture as intermediaries of reading, writing, communicating, and socializing.

Studies contained in this dissertation highlight the potential of ‘affordances’ as a conceptual resource in the analysis of social interaction involving technology. The analysis of affordances in

concert with uses positions the study between avowed poles of determinism and constructivism (Huchby, 2003), since the list of affordances is related to observed uses of these platforms. Findings underscore the importance of studying users' differences, narratives, and patterns of use alongside of technological affordances in order to explore meanings and applications of said affordances. In line with sociocultural views of technologies and techniques, these studies emphasize human diversity, agency, and ingenuity with their tools. For example, if one were to study the affordances of Wattpad without consulting the users, it would be easy to claim that story-sharing platforms uphold the ideal of the solitary author. Yet, interviews and forum observations showed that although Wattpad allotted a single account for an individual email address, many users would create accounts in order to collaborate and share the passwords via messaging systems. Thus, users innovated upon site affordances to layer several models of authorship.

Moreover, in line with the sociocultural view of literacy, participants brought meanings to their social practices and texts that broadened the framework of literacies as disaggregated skills. Instructive here is the literacy narrative of 18 year-old Ayush. He is currently a college student in the Midwestern United States, but he grew up in a town in India, where Malayam was the language of home and English was the language of school. In his interview, Ayush explained that he associated English with compulsory testing. However, when he ventured into the world of story-sharing sites online and started reading, writing, and making connections about manga, he expanded his view of the purposes and uses of English. His official curriculum afforded him the possibility to engage in a digital extracurriculum that fostered his investment and engagement in learning English. Ayush's story stands as testament to the power and consequential nature of learning experiences that leverage personal passions and affinities.

Implications

The research presented here has implications for future research and practice.

Future research should continue to study affordances alongside uses and narratives of participation. Studying affordances in concert with uses and narratives provides a more nuanced view of the specific tool or environment. Moreover, eliciting narratives from actual users provides insights into their motivation and investment in using said technology. Such research strategies move the inquiry away from essentialism in assuming monolithic consistency in groups of people, patterns of use, or identity stances. With the age-related differences found in Study 2, it becomes important to track use through time in adolescence. Variance in how the young people understood their literate identity stances underscores the need for cognitive interviews and a close exploration of the meanings youth bring to these sites. Future research studies could track individuals through a significant amount of time or conduct multisited ethnographies that consider how repertoires of practice and narratives of the self develop across different spaces, including the official curriculum and the digital extracurriculum.

Story-sharing platforms included multiple paths to legitimate participation, as shown by the variety of offered identity stances. In these sites, some participants saw themselves as primarily readers, writers, friends, fans, or graphic designers. Many considered themselves a mix of those categories. The presence of differential routes to participation and success imparted positive literacy experiences to many of the interviewed users, even if they did not view themselves as successful authors on these sites.

In order to craft their manuscripts, youth employed popular culture references, images, music, memes, and trailers. To do this, they used the tools of networked more knowledgeable others available to them, including siblings, search engines, beta readers, mobile phones, gif-makers, and spellcheck. In mixing print literacies and new literacies, these participants called upon the most

compelling discursive modalities of their generation (Lunsford, 2006). These discursive modalities—rather than being ends in themselves—served intermediary roles in achieving the goals of the authors.

In terms of practice, young authors in this study produced narratives of deep engagement that comport with current findings in the design of literacy spaces, including the availability of meaningful feedback, choice of content, and authentic audience participation. In writing to more than a singular teacher, youth online grapple with the needs of multiple networked publics and develop their generic awareness and metaliteracy skills. Specifically, young people interviewed demonstrated a keen sensibility when it came to judging rhetorical contexts. They explained the differences between writing online and writing for school, narrating the literacy infrastructure of different kinds of contexts. In explicating schooled literacies, youth emphasized the importance of testing skills, structured composition (the 5 paragraph essay), and strict genre conventions. With respect to online writing, they drew attention to ranking algorithms, empty comments, and the emergence of popularity contests. This kind of analysis of affordances and constraints of various spaces could be used in a literacy classroom. Further studies should investigate whether participation in various different kinds of reading and writing environments fosters an awareness of how those environments are built. The investigation of architectures of participation invoked in different environments could instill civic, political, and critical consciousness that young people could apply to sites from classes to clubs to social media.

The infusion of popular culture and personal interests into reading and writing tasks on story-sharing sites proved motivational and consequential for the young people studied here. Home interests and funds of knowledge can serve as resources for learning inside the classroom. However, a prominent theme that runs throughout these studies is one of choice. Participating youth felt empowered when they could choose the subject of their next story, their avatar, or the club they

joined. Similarly, bridges between the curriculum and the extracurriculum could be built successfully but need to remain optional and tied to students' personal choices.

In trying on different hats and compositional strategies, participating youth may develop agency, voice, and discursive capabilities that they can put to use in the service of their goals. Learning the norms, rules, and tools of different literacy environments will help young people in shift their strategies in moving across various spaces and to gain access, challenge, and transform different spaces. These are the skills that exemplify the idea that different rhetorical situations call for different tools, techniques, and ways with words. These are the skills that will help young people develop cosmopolitan identity stances that foreground the humanity in others very different from themselves and are essential to building more just and inclusive futures. Such cosmopolitizing practices also call for a cosmopolitizing pedagogy that provides the tools of analysis in and of various literate environments. These are the skills that require further sustained inquiry.

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APPENDIX A:

List of Codes Generated for Interview Analysis

Activities
Activism
Chatting
Checking notifications
Collaborating
Exploring
Fanning
Giving and getting feedback
Graphic design
Helping
Joining clubs
Making music
Opportunities for practice and fluency
Playing games
Publishing
Reading
Socializing
Writing
Affordances
Multiple devices
Primacy of mobile
Content
Representation
Serialization
Talk about genre
Discourse
Discourse of good writing
Discourse of school
Discourse of/about development
Motivation
Audience
Choice
Family Support
Lack of Family Support
Improvement
Inspiration

Recognition
Privacy
Secrecy
Affect
Affinity
Challenges
Community
Diversity
Writerly community
Confidence
Leadership roles
Lowered barriers
Creativity/imagination
Freedom
Criticism
Metrics
Passion
Addiction
Personal interest
Sense of accomplishment
Sharing
Writing for self
Totals

APPENDIX B:

IRB-approved Assent Form

University of California, Irvine Assent Study Information Sheet for Participants

Writing Media: A Case Study of Literacy Sponsorship, Practice, and Identity in a Story-Sharing App

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- You are being asked to participate in a research study to explore learning practices undertaken by youth in online contexts.
- You are eligible to participate in this study if you are between the ages of 15 and 25.
- The research procedures involve an online survey and an interview – to take place via phone, Skype, or internet chat – which will take up to an hour of your time.
- A possible risks associated with the study is a potential breach of confidentiality. We are working to minimize this risk by de-identifying all interview materials. To further minimize this risk, you may also choose to provide an email address that does not identify you by name.
- There are no direct benefits from participation in the study. However, this study may explain how youth learn to read, communicate, and produce content online.
- As a thank you for participation, you will be entered in a raffle to win one of five \$20 Amazon giftcards for your participation in this study. That means that you will have one-in-ten chance of winning. Winning is not guaranteed. You do not have to participate in the study to be eligible to participate in the raffle.
- All research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially on a password-protected computer.
- The research team, authorized UCI personnel and regulatory entities may have access to your study records to protect your safety and welfare. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed by these entities without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the researchers listed at the top of this form.

- Please contact UCI's Office of Research by phone, (949) 824-6662, by e-mail at IRB@research.uci.edu or at 5171 California Avenue, Suite 150, Irvine, CA 92697 if you are unable to reach the researchers listed at the top of the form and have general questions; have concerns or complaints about the research; have questions about your rights as a research subject; or have general comments or suggestions.
- Participation in this study is voluntary. There is no cost to you for participating. You may choose to skip a question or a study procedure. You may refuse to participate or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately.

APPENDIX C:

Survey Instrument

University of California, Irvine Background Survey Questions

Writing Media: A Case Study of Literacy Sponsorship, Practice, and Identity in a Story-Sharing App

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Username

Email address

Age [numerical response]

Are you currently in school? [yes/no]

If so, grade level? [numerical response]

How would you describe the grades you received on your last report card? [matrix]

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other: _____
- Rather not say

Ethnicity

- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- White or Caucasian
- Mixed race
- Rather not say
- Other: _____

Highest education completed by father

- Some high school
- High school diploma/GED
- Some college
- 2-year college (Associate's degree)
- 4-year college (Bachelor's degree)
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD, MBA)

Highest education completed by mother

- Some high school
- High school diploma/GED
- Some college
- 2-year college (Associate's degree)
- 4-year college (Bachelor's degree)
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (JD, MD, MBA)

Household income level

What language do you speak at home?

What language do you speak at school?

What language do you speak with friends?

What technologies and tools are available in your household? [drop down menu]

Describe the rules around these technologies and tools [text box]

Wattpad experiences:

How long have you been a Wattpad member? [drop down menu]

Less than a month

1 month to 1 year

1-2 years

3-5 years

More than 5 years

How many works have you published? [numerical response]

How did you discover Wattpad? [drop down menu]

From a friend

From a family member

Online search

Article

App store

Other: _____

What genres do you write in? [drop down menu]

Name your favorite activities.

Name your favorite subjects in school.

Name your favorite activities outside of school.

Name your favorite Internet websites or activities.

Choose from list:

I use Wattpad:

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently

I publish stories:

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently

I comment on other people's stories:

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently

I participate in the forums on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently

I connect with my friends on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I read stories on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I draft stories on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I "like" other people's creations on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I "follow" people on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I chat with other authors using Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I read stories on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I get help on my writing on Wattpad

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I help others with their writing on Wattpad.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I use Wattpad to upload pictures.

Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently

I use Wattpad to get feedback on pictures.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently
 I participate in challenges on Wattpad.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often.....Frequently
 I create challenges on Wattpad.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently
 I participate in the Watty awards.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently
 I create bookcovers for Wattpad.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently
 I create video trailers for Wattpad.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently
 I access Wattpad using a computer.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently
 I access Wattpad using a mobile device.
 Never.....Rarely.....Sometimes..... Often..... Frequently

In connection to the site, I consider myself: [check all that apply]

- A novice writer
- An expert writer
- A reader
- A graphic designer
- An editor
- A critic
- A friend

Thank you for participating!!

APPENDIX D:

Semistructured Interview Protocol

University of California, Irvine Sample Interview Questions for Writers

Writing Media: A Case Study of Literacy Sponsorship, Practice, and Identity in a Story-Sharing App

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How do you get into doing Wattpad? (Probe: invitations to participate, supportive peers or family members, priming events)

- What inspires you to participate in this writing community?
- What do you like about Wattpad? (Probe: Interests, social recognition, priming events)
- What don't you like about it?
- Do you submit work to beta readers? If so, what motivates you to do so?
- Likewise, if not, why?
- Do you participate in other writing communities beyond Wattpad, either online or offline?
- How does the writing process differ on Wattpad compared to other communities/spaces, including the classroom?
- Does the writing you do in one space inform the writing you do in another space?
- What kinds of advice from fans/beta readers to you find most helpful?
- What kinds of advice from fans/beta readers to you find least helpful?

- Are there particular kinds of advice that you resist?
- When you create your profile, what information is important to share/not share?]
- Why did you choose the avatar you did?
- What do your parents and friends think about your writing/reading interest? (Probe: Parental concerns, caring adults, family rules, parental expectations, academic results)
- Do you participate in other school activities? (Probe: Identity, peer support, interests)
- What keeps you going in contributing to this writing community? [Probe: Shared purpose, recontextualization, mediational artifacts, community rules]
- In what ways has the work you have done on Wattpad influenced the writing and creating you do outside of school?
- Do you think being a **writer** helps you become a better student? [Probe Academic relevance]
- How, when, and where do you write?
- For whom do you write?
- What have you learned about writing in that place? What have you learned about yourself as a writer/creator there?
- How did you learn these things about reading and writing?
- What kinds of reading, writing and creating are important for you?
- How did these come to be important for you?
- How does one become a better writer?

Appendix E: Descriptions of Study Participants

Under 15 years old: *N* = 14

Pseudonym	Age	# of works	# of followers	Novice writer	Emergent Writer	Expert writer	Reader	Graphic designer	Editor	Critic	Friend	Fan
Participants not identifying as “writers”: <i>N</i> = 1												
Connie	14	8	687					✓	✓		✓	
Participants identifying as “novice writers”: <i>N</i> = 7												
Kaleesha	13	6	10	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Lauren	13			✓								
Jabari	13			✓			✓				✓	✓
Stella	15	5	360	✓			✓				✓	
Rosemary	15	5	36	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
Sandra	13			✓				✓			✓	✓
Daphne	15	19	510	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Average</i>		8.75	229									
Participants identifying as “emergent writers”: <i>N</i> = 4												
Alicia	14	5	372		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Anna	15	0	0		✓		✓					
Hannah	15	17	79		✓							
Khan	11				✓		✓				✓	✓
<i>Average</i>		7.33	147.33									

Pseudonym	Age	# of works	# of followers	Novice writer	Emergent Writer	Expert writer	Reader	Graphic designer	Editor	Critic	Friend	Fan
Participants identifying as “expert writers”: N = 2												
Tammy	15				✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Caramel	14	3	151		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
<i>Average</i>		3	151									

Over 15 years old: N = 25

Pseudonym	Age	# of works	# of followers	Novice writer	Emergent Writer	Expert writer	Reader	Graphic designer	Editor	Critic	Friend	Fan
Participants not identifying as “writers”: N = 1												
Charlene	18						✓				✓	
Participants identifying as “novice writers”: N = 21												
Megha	16	7	264	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	
Rhea	16	1	130	✓			✓				✓	✓
Connor	16	11	595	✓			✓	✓			✓	
Elena	16	4	215	✓				✓			✓	✓
Emma	16	4	143	✓				✓			✓	✓
Zahra	17	5	62	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ley	17	1	223	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Christine	17	1	135	✓			✓				✓	✓
Mindy	17	2	211	✓								

Pseudonym	Age	# of works	# of followers	Novice writer	Emergent Writer	Expert writer	Reader	Graphic designer	Editor	Critic	Friend	Fan
Masha	21	5	708	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
Chris	21	2	50	✓			✓		✓		-	✓
Rahma	21	14	359	✓			✓					✓
Jade	26	14	58000	✓				✓			✓	✓
Olivia	17	1	58	✓				✓			✓	✓
Min	18	1	36	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
Angel	18	26	6000	✓			✓					
Faith	18	6	283	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Priya	19	4	54	✓			✓				✓	✓
Charlotte	19	3	46	✓				✓			✓	✓
Akshata	19	6	786	✓				✓			✓	✓
Bri	20	3	42	✓								✓
<i>Average</i>		5.76	3257.14									
Participants identifying as “emergent writers”: N = 2												
Larissa	18	6	595		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Morgan	17	1	215		✓		✓					
<i>Average</i>		3.5	143									
Participants identifying as “expert writers”: N = 1												
Jenn	20	20	223			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓